

INTRODUCTION

Dear Fellow Lasallians,

Welcome to this introduction to your Lasallian Heritage, the Living Tradition, which links you to the first school of John Baptist de La Salle in Rheims in 1679 and so, today, with all those persons throughout the world whose educational mission is inspired by the same vision. In the following pages, you are invited to discover something more about your Lasallian Heritage. This is not primarily a history, but a connecting of various historical threads through a central theme which may be stated thus: *What does the Lasallian Heritage show us about generations of educators, inspired by the educational movement launched by De La Salle and his Institute, in trying always to find a response to the needs of young people, especially the poor, who do not have access to education.*

The story of the first 150 years of this movement is initially entwined with the social, political and religious history of France, but the very success of the Institute's mission of Christian education of the poor has subsequently made it become a world-wide movement to an extent which its Founder could never have envisaged. This *mission*, carried almost exclusively by the Brothers for the first 200 years, is now a "shared mission" in which many others, in various ways, choose to participate.

Most of you who read the pages which follow and so lay claim to your heritage come from countries and use languages which De La Salle and his first Brothers never knew, because you share this heritage with some 65,000 others who carry out their educational mission in more than 80 different countries. Since most of you who will read these lines are not members of the Institute, we have thought it most important to share with you a number of Institute documents of recent years which are part of our common heritage and which have determined the directions which have led us to recognize the grace of Shared Mission. You will find, therefore, frequent mention of the *Declaration: The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World of Today* (1967), the decisions of the General Chapters of 1966-7, 1976, 1986 and 1993 and, above all, abundant citation from the Brothers' *Rule* of 1987, as well as from a number of other documents which were addressed originally only to the Brothers. It is a measure of our confidence in you and in the important role that you are called to play in the future of the Lasallian Mission of Christian education that we share these more recent "family" documents with you.

The hope of all those who cooperated in producing this Heritage booklet for you, is that you may find inspiration and a sense of common purpose in your particular contribution to the ministry of teaching as it is embodied in the Lasallian Heritage. May you be strengthened by the knowledge that you do not work alone but that you are bound across many nations and languages by the common vision, practices and traditions of the Lasallian Heritage.

*Brother John Johnston and the members of the General Council
April 30, 1997, 346th anniversary of the birth of John Baptist de La Salle*