



REPORT OF THE BROTHER SUPERIOR

46th General Chapter

4 May 2022

“Your inmost being must be renewed, and you must put on the new man” (Eph. 4:23-24).

Introduction

We gather as the body of the society with the responsibility to procure God’s glory through our association for the educational service of the POOR. That is what these three weeks are about. Seeking guidance from the Holy Spirit, we ask, at this moment in our history as an Institute, what does it mean to procure God’s glory? For that is what we have consecrated ourselves.

This is our definitive, deepest, and greatest motivation, the ultimate reason and meaning behind all we do: the glory of the Father, which Jesus sought at every moment of his life.... Beyond all our own preferences and interests, our knowledge and motivations, we evangelize for the great glory of the [God] who loves us.¹

This is our joy, to announce the Good News of salvation to the poor and the young.

The Joy of Our Mission

In 2014, inspired by Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Joy of the Gospel, the General Council chose as our theme, “Living Together our Joyful Mission” as our inspiration for leadership and service. Despite young people’s loss of faith in the Church and institutional religion, the increasing global violence and polarization in our world, and the intolerance for the “other,” the immigrant in our midst, we believed then and now, that our vocation is to joyfully procure God’s glory through the ministry of education. We wrote:

We Lasallians, regardless of our age, are filled with hope and joy for the mission. We rejoice as the mission expands through the ever-widening circle of Lasallians. We celebrate new educational initiatives and ministries reaching out to the poor.²

¹ Pope Francis. *Evangelii Gaudium*, Apostolic Exhortation, 2013, no. 267.

² General Council. Circular 470: Toward the Year 2021, Lasallian Prayer.

It is from this fundamental inspiration that we are sent, as stated in *The Rule*, as “ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ.... Brothers who have consecrated their lives to God to bring the Gospel to the world of education”.³

During these three weeks, we will concern ourselves with many practical but important issues. While addressing the HOW to live our consecration and accomplish our mission, we must not lose sight of the WHY, why the Spirit called forth into existence this Lasallian charism to procure God’s glory. We, Brothers and Lasallian Partners, are the inheritors of the charism given to Saint La Salle and the first Brothers.

Being a gift of the Spirit, the charism always exceeds our expectations and our precautions. It makes us go where we did not expect to go. It makes us look in directions that we did not anticipate. It imposes itself by the fruits it bears.⁴

May our hearts be open to the unexpected and to whatever pathway the Spirit is inviting us.

Two Priorities towards New Paths to Transformed Lives

The Brothers of the General Council and I proposed two priorities for consideration by the General Chapter: *Leadership and Governance* and *Association for Mission*. We arrived at these two priorities from our lived experience, our attention to your reports, listening to your concerns, and visiting the Districts and Regions. In our visits, we had occasion to observe examples of the benefits derived from good leadership and governance structures, as well as effective formation programs for all those associated for the mission.

We also observed the many Brothers effectively exercising their threefold role today as defined in our Rule; our role as witness, as service and as communion. We are grateful for the many Brothers who demonstrate their love for children and young people by their witness to the Gospel. Consecrated men who set aside time for prayer and meditation to deepen the commitment to Jesus’ project for the Reign of God; a commitment publicly expressed when each Brother pronounced first vows. Each one of us can recall how enflamed our hearts were for the vocation we were embracing. I am mindful of the words one Foundress addressed to her Sisters, “Be careful daughter, don’t let the fire that I have enkindled in your heart, to serve me so fervently, ever die out.”⁵ That fire still burns brightly in the lives of many Brothers across the Institute.

³ cf. *The Rule*, article 15.

⁴Schnieder, Jean-Louis FSC. *The Lasallian Charism*, *Lasallian Studies*, No. 13, p 235.

⁵ St. Joan of Lestonnac. Quoted in *Give Us this Day*, 2 February 2021.

What gives me hope for this Chapter and our future is the convergence of the General Council's two priorities with the proposals and recommendations coming from Phase one of AIMEL III and the International Strategic Committee (ISC). The first of the nine proposals from AIMEL states:

To assure the existence of a Model of Governance and a Model of Financial Sustainability that responds to and supports the style of Lasallian Association and that guarantees the vitality and continuity of the Lasallian Educational Mission.

Among the ISC recommendations:

The Center is the central governing body of the Institute working through Committees, Councils, Regions, and Districts in the conduct of the Institute's affairs. It is not necessarily a function, committee or a service located in Rome but a collection of "centers of excellence" that may be located wherever the expertise resides.

You will learn more about the outcomes from these two groups during the marketplace phase of the Chapter.

The Path to Renewal

The theme of this Chapter is Building new Paths to Transform Lives. During 1966 and 1967, the 39th General Chapter and the authors of the **Declaration of the Brother in the Modern World Today** began to envision our desired future. Each successive Chapter has moved us closer to the realization of the vision where the poor are at the center of the educational mission that is now shared among Brothers and Partners. "... [T]he needs of the poor is the source of renewal, just as it was the principal source of the foundation".⁶

It has been, and continues to be, a long journey. For at least three decades, attentive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, we have tried to discover the best structures and governance models for a mission shared with women and men of different faiths and cultures. We have both adapted existing structures and created new models at the District and Regional levels. We boldly launched *Mission 100+* at the 42nd General Chapter and the *Beyond the Border* initiative at the 45th General Chapter. We are partnering with other congregations in South Sudan and with the Marist Brothers in Fratelli projects.

⁶Sauvage, Michel. The Fragile Hope of a Witness, Lasallian Studies, No. 18, 2014, p. 489.

The *Mission 100+* and *Beyond the Border* initiatives are examples of efforts undertaken in the spirit of the 39th General Chapter's and the Declaration's call for renewal to bring our charism closer to the educational ministry in service of, and with, the poor. We recognize, as did the authors of the Declaration and Capitulants to the 39th General Chapter that "the vitality of an institute becomes evident and is strengthened by establishing new enterprises.... Such initiatives ought to respond to the real needs of time and place...or otherwise be established in favor of the most disadvantaged."⁷ Furthermore, "[p]riority should be given to service in those areas where the shortage of apostolic workers and educators is most strongly felt".⁸

It is important to emphasize the mutuality of this desire for greater mission presence with the poor. Presence among the poor is as much for the Brother deepening his consecration to God as it is for the poor's well-being and dignity. The Declaration of the Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today is very clear on this point:

It is urgent that every Brother make his own the decision of Saint John Baptist de La Salle to go to the poor "with the heart of a poor person."⁹

An authentic service of the poor in the apostolate of education will contribute greatly to integrate at a deeper level the personal life of each Brother, helping him to overcome more easily the difficulties encountered by those who have made Jesus Christ the foundation of their entire life.¹⁰

De La Salle's own personal conversion is the inspiration for these convictions. The world of the artisans and the poor in De La Salle's day was:

A world where mastery of their destiny was escaping entirely from [them], a world which was heading towards ruin, loss of meaning, division; a world losing itself in a fateful repetition of the same gaps, the same errors, the same impossibilities....¹¹

When we read De La Salle's Meditations for the Time of Retreat,

One is struck by the strength of how he was affected by this discovery of the reality of the world of the poor, in his soul, his heart all his being... how much he was touched in the depths of his being by the despair which filled this world

⁷ The Declaration: The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today. The 39th General Chapter, 1967, 49.5.

⁸ Ibid. 49.6

⁹ Ibid. 34.2

¹⁰ Ibid. 34.3

¹¹ Schneider, Jean-Louis, FSC. The Lasallian Charism, Lasallian Studies, No. 13, p. 240.

and enclosed it, almost in an institutional manner, in failure, while dehumanizing it.¹²

Does this world still exist for many of today's poor and working class? Has this not been one more manifestation of the pandemic?

For our Founder the poor are the "sacraments" of Jesus Christ. Jesus came into our world as a poor man. That is why the poor are "our" spiritual "teachers."¹³

Pope Francis too reminds us of the primacy of the poor for the realization of the Reign of God:

We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them, and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them.¹⁴

This dream and hope for the renewal of our mission among the poor and working classes is as valid today as it was 60 years ago. But is it only one dimension for the realization of our continuing renewal, and not necessarily the most challenging.

Spiritual Renewal

Frequently, in my communications with you, I recalled the crises De La Salle experienced in 1690-1691. In his biography of De La Salle, Canon Blain succinctly describes the crises:

This was the sad situation of the pious Founder at the end of 1690: after so many sacrifices, after so many difficulties and labors, after so many crosses and persecutions, after so many apparent successes, he found himself in almost the same state as he had been ten years before. He had few Brothers; his work had progressed hardly at all; he was afraid it would be destroyed.¹⁵

De La Salle realized it was not enough to professionally prepare his teachers. He had to create men of the Spirit. The Lasallian project would only be successful if it was built on a firm spiritual foundation. After the crisis of 1691, he would dedicate the rest of his life creating men firmly attuned to the Holy Spirit.

¹² Ibid. p. 241.

¹³ Sauvage, Michel & Campos, Miguel. *Announcing the Gospel to the Poor*. (English translation) 1981, p. 107.

¹⁴ Pope Francis. *Evangelii Gaudium*, Apostolic Exhortation, 2013, no. 198.

¹⁵ Quoted in *Announcing the Gospel to the Poor*, English translation, p. 146.

Brothers, it is the same today. From the time of the Declaration of the Brother in the Modern World Today, and every General Chapter that followed, we too are called to be men of the Spirit:

The adapted renewal of the Institute will become a reality to the extent that each Brother, each community, and all the various councils and chapters give themselves to the work of spiritual renewal. “Even the best adaptation to the needs of our times will fail to produce their effect unless they are motivated by a spiritual renewal” (PC 2e). Accordingly, each Brother is invited to renew himself spiritually.¹⁶

The Declaration elaborated further on the imperative of our spiritual renewal.

Renewal does not happen without an awareness of being loved by God and a conviction that the Brother’s vocation is a call to love. This indispensable spiritual renewal cannot occur, however, without forcefully taking into consideration what constitutes the life of the world and of the Church: the signs of the times are at the heart of our will to renew.¹⁷

In light of the pandemic and the incessant proclamations of a “new normal,” what are the signs of the times today crying for a response from us?

There is no doubt we have made good progress in our renewal. We have been responding to our changing reality with the good decisions relative to shared mission, Lasallian association and service to the poor. The Institute, Districts and Regions provide excellent initial and continuing formation programs. We have witnessed and accompanied thousands of new Lasallian vocations; women and men embracing the Lasallian charism is a sign of the times. One reason we speak of new models of governance and leadership is with these Lasallian vocations in mind. The creation of mission councils and assemblies called for by previous Chapters, where Partners and Brothers are taking responsibility for the mission, are steps in the direction of new models.

I believe this Chapter can leave as its legacy, our greater commitment to these three elements I just mentioned, shared mission, Lasallian association and service to the poor. These are the pathways to the personal and institutional conversion past Chapters have been calling us. To do so, the time has come to take prophetic risks and fully embrace

¹⁶ The Declaration: The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today. The 39th General Chapter, 1967, 3.1.

¹⁷ Sauvage, M. The Fragile Hope of a Witness, Lasallian Studies, No. 18, 2014, p. 521.

them across the global Lasallian Family with the accompanying formation and the identification of leadership at every level.

When the General Council identified its two priorities, it was to highlight that we must be even more intentional in ensuring our models empower shared governance. In a number of Districts, it is happening. That it is firmly established and guaranteed at the regional and Institute levels should be a priority for the next seven years. We don't expect the Chapter to offer a definitive governance model in these three weeks, but we do hope a clear direction will be offered for developing a model before the next General Chapter.

Regarding Association for mission, it encompasses not only the mission we share with our Partners and their formation for the mission, but also initiating and nurturing new forms of community life, communities of Brothers and Partners, communities of Partners, communities of Brothers.

Furthermore, by proposing our two priorities, we are not ignoring other important aspects of our lives as Brothers or for the mission – such as our fraternal life in community, Brother vocations and quality formation programs. Capitulants before us wrestled with these elements and left us rich reflections and guidelines for faithfully and fully living our “yes” to God.

Lessons of the Pandemic

The pandemic impacted the work force and how we work, it has impacted educational institutions and how we educate, it has impacted the healthcare industry and how we minister to the sick, and it has impacted the emotional lives of children and young people entrusted to our care. Our world has changed. What meaning does a changed world have for us?

We have been attentive to learning the lessons of the pandemic and exploring what might come in a post-pandemic society. Those initial learnings and explorations were published in, *Reimagining our Life as Brothers* (2020), *Lasallian Mission Moving Forward Plan* (2020), and the study of *Some Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic* (2021). Yet, even before the pandemic, many realized that in the constant call for the renewal of the Institute, more was needed than simply improving what we were already doing or refining existing systems.¹⁸ Now is the time for this Chapter and AIMEL III to apply the lessons learned.

¹⁸Cf. Pope Francis. *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship*, Encyclical Letter, 2020, p. 3.

The Fidelity and Wisdom of our Senior Brothers

Others too perceive the moment is opportune. In my last pastoral letter I quoted a Lasallian Partner's appreciation for the wisdom of our senior Brothers. In response, several senior brothers wrote to me convinced it is time to realize the dreams of past Chapters in a more complete manner. That is, to put the poor and the working classes at the center of our evangelizing mission. A 91 year-old Brother, for example, who participated in two General Chapters, wrote a reflection for his District at the beginning of Lent. In it, he referenced the passages from Matthew and Luke's gospels that speak of Jesus at the beginning of his public ministry. He wrote:

Both Matthew (4: 1-11) and Luke (4: 1-13) speak of Jesus' days in the desert to focus on his mission to announce the Good News, a new covenant for building another pathway to reach our living, loving God. So, too, will it be for us over the next forty days but not without dying to old paths, only to live again resurrected with new ones better suited to realize the vision and dreams of our founding Brothers.

Toward this end the 46th Chapter will be composed of delegates from among our principal Brothers and Partners who through discussion, prayer and discernment will hand on to us decisions for our acceptance. Therefore, it is all the more necessary over the next forty Lenten days for us to pray, listen to those inklings of faith shared by the Holy Spirit to prepare ourselves to receive these directives in order to envision our own pathways within our Region.

He concluded his reflection with these words:

Senior Brothers have lived through many Chapters since Vatican II. Each has been a step advancing our God-given privilege to reach out, to catechize and to teach the poor. Yet, as important as these past Chapters have been, the next Chapter may be the most significant given the times in which we live. New pathways are imperative.¹⁹

Similarly, other senior Brothers spoke of a cycle ending in the life of the Institute, and a new one on the horizon. They suggest we are on the threshold of a transformation as we re-imagine who we are and for whom we are at this moment in our lives as followers of Jesus.

The Path to Transformation

¹⁹ Coogan, Colman FSC. Lenten Reflection (District of Eastern North America) 2022.

We are still very close to Easter Sunday, the transformation of the earthly Jesus to the resurrected and transformed Christ. Transformation is one element of the theme of AIMEL III. In his 2006 Easter Vigil homily, Pope Benedict XVI said the resurrection “ushered in a new dimension of being, a new dimension of life, in which, in a transformed way, matter too was integrated and through which a new world emerges... It is clear this event is not just some miracle from the past.... It is a qualitative leap in the history of ‘evolution’ and of life in general to a new future, toward a new world which, starting from Christ, already continuously permeates this world of ours, transforms it and draws it to itself.”²⁰

Perhaps not on the same scale, but I do believe we are called to take a qualitative leap of faith, breaking the bonds of structures that may be holding us back from the dreams of the renewal Chapter of 1966-67 and the Declaration. It will not be a completely blind leap as we have been preparing ourselves for decades. Many of you in this room are ready to take that leap. I know you are. Brothers, *Mission 100+* and *Beyond the Borders* are examples of putting our feet in the water of service with the poor. It is time for the Institute take the proverbial plunge, that leap of faith with our entire body, the body of the society.

In our document, *Re-imagining our Lives as Brothers* we spoke of transformation and the growth opportunities the pandemic is bringing us.

Growth comes when we grieve what we have lost but do not succumb to a kind of paralyzing regret. Instead we hear a new call from the Spirit, a call in the voices and lives of the poor to whose suffering is only deepened by the crisis. We are presented with an opportunity to question our own way of living, our own economic privilege, our own use of resources. Creative and life-giving energy is unleashed when we accept the grace in learning what the virus has exposed, namely, that the “normal” was marked by inequities and injustices.²¹

We further said:

Growth comes when we open ourselves to the possibility that some of what we were doing pre-virus are things we should no longer be doing, and that the old ... must give way to the new. We grow when we discover in every moment, every stage, and every setback an opportunity. Creative and life-giving energy

²⁰Delio, Ilia. *The Emergent Christ*, pp. 75-76.

²¹ Brothers of the Christian Schools. *Reimagining Our Life as Brothers*, 2020, p. 7.

is unleashed when we accept the grace of our calling as men who are consecrated for others.²²

Was this not the lesson learned by De La Salle in 1690-1691?

I am sure that each of you can point to new and creative initiatives in your own Districts in the last decades. However, I ask you: have we been bold enough? Do we have the boldness and creativity of John Baptist de La Salle? His boldness to leave Reims and the guarantee of security offered by the Archbishop; his boldness to give the greater portion of his patrimony away in that severe winter of 1684 rather than to ensure the sustainability of the Brothers and the first schools; his boldness to rely on Divine Providence and to pledge fidelity to the fledgling work with Gabriel Dolin and Nicolas Vuyart.

I believe we are now ready to take a leap of faith similar to the leap taken by John Baptist de La Salle when he and the first Brothers set out on a new path that transformed their lives and the lives of generations of children and young people. AIMEL III and the 46th General Chapter are moments of grace offered to us as we boldly strive to discover the next steps on our pathway to the future.

However, the boldness and creativity necessary today is much more than the creation of a dynamic strategic plan. We are called to be bold like Jesus who came to set the world on fire and who has entrusted us to keep the fire burning in the hearts of our communities and educational centers.

In the last two years there has been much conversation around a “new normal” for our world and our Church, for organizations, businesses and education. This Chapter and AIMEL III must give guidance to the Institute and the Global Lasallian Family to the form and shape for our “new normal,” so as to procure the Glory of God.

Conclusion

Those who sat in this hall before us paved the pathway we traverse today. Those who sat in these seats erected the signposts to guide our path. To us is given the opportunity to transform the pathway into a boulevard accommodating the thousands of Lasallian vocations the Holy Spirit sends us to accomplish God’s will for the children and youth deprived of a quality education. This is our moment not to stand on the balcony while life passes below, to use Pope’s Francis’ image, but to be the protagonists of the “new normal.”

²²Ibid. p. 8.

Together we are called to remain imaginative and generative. The very qualities that have sustained us through our history are the qualities that will sustain us today: our simplicity of life, solidarity with the poor, and trust in the loving presence of God. The unity and continuity of this sacred charism and mission which God has entrusted us is in our hands.²³

To do so, three phrases have been suggested to help us in transitioning to a new normal: self-awareness, solidarity, and self-sacrifice.

- Self-awareness to realize that change might have to come from within. We are stewards of the Institute Patrimony. Our responsibilities must be eventually passed on to the next generation, with the understanding that the mission is larger than our existing responsibilities and has a longer time span.
- Solidarity and support in seeing initiatives through to their successful outcomes. We need to act together in word and deed for the sake of the continuity of the Lasallian charism and support each other beyond our existing responsibilities to fulfill the vision of St John Baptist de La Salle.
- Self-sacrifice to give up something, personal or otherwise, to achieve the common good so as to be of greater service to our mission and the Church as a global Lasallian Family.²⁴

How prescient our Founder was in leaving us the invocation, *Live Jesus in our hearts. Forever!* In these weeks, whatever we begin, whatever we promise to undertake, whatever new path we choose to set out on, “we must begin with our hearts. It is where hope is born”²⁵ and where courage is found. The head can hold us back since it is too easy to rationalize why we should not boldly take a leap of faith. That is why we must listen to our hearts; that’s where Jesus is and he will lead the way.

So we pray:

... We ask you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
who guide all things in our lives as Partners and Brothers,
to grant us

²³Brothersofthe Christian Schools. *ReimaginingOurLife as Brothers*, 2020, p. 14.

²⁴ Report of the International Strategy Committee.

²⁵ O’Leary, Daniel. “Beginning with our Hearts,” *The Tablet*, 7 January 2017.

joy in thanksgiving,
boldness in truth,
and strength in decisions...
with your grace,
we will have the strength and courage
to move to the peripheries
and release our creative energies....

Brother Robert Schieler, FSC