

PASTORAL LETTER TO THE BROTHERS

**Consecrated by God the Trinity,
as a community of Brothers,
to make visible his gratuitous
and supportive love**

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For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that he may grant you, in accord with the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner self, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you may be rooted and grounded in love (Ephesians 3: 14 - 17).

Brothers:

At the conclusion of the 44th General Chapter, my final words were to quote our first formula of perpetual vows made by the Founder and the first 12 Brothers in 1694, in which they expressed clearly that for them, and I think for us, the most important and the final objective of their lives was to seek God's glory, the glory of the Triune God who consecrated them and to Whom they consecrated themselves; in order to do this they promised and vowed to unite themselves and to remain together in society... to keep, together and by association, gratuitous schools and, for the same purpose, they added vows of obedience and stability.

One of the ideas that struck me personally during our last General Chapter was precisely that of the centrality of the mystery of the Trinity in our lives and in our mission. As was expressed by the authors of the pre-Chapter document *Being Brothers Today*, that community gathered together in assembly, agreed that the Trinity was the beginning, the source, the center, and the goal of their being together and of their sav-

ing mission in favor of young people, especially the poor.

In his meditation for the Feast of Trinity Sunday, the Founder invited us *to pay very special honor, and dedicate yourselves entirely, to the most Holy Trinity, to contribute as far as you will be able to extend its glory over all the earth. For this purpose enter into the spirit of your Institute and stir up in yourselves the zeal that God wishes you to have in its fullness, so that you can give your pupils some understanding of this sacred mystery* (Meditation 46.3). As the pre-Chapter document cited above asserts, this sentence explicitly brings to mind the rite of association for the Brothers, their consecration together to keep gratuitous schools. At the same time, it points to an obligation: to reveal this mystery to those who have been entrusted to us: *They, too, were consecrated to the Most Holy Trinity in baptism, just as you were* (Meditation 46.3).

Our association for mission as Brothers in community should be enlightened by this double purpose, expressed so well at the beginning of our Institute and which today we can summarize in those words of the saving plan of Jesus: *To bring glad tidings to the poor* (Luke 4: 18), which in Lasallian terms we can identify with the finality of the Institute, as our Founder expressed it: *to give a Christian education to children of artisans and the poor* (Rule of 1718, Chapter 1).

The 44th General Chapter reminded us of the centrality of our fourth vow as the unifying element of our entire consecration to the Trinity, which is the ultimate purpose and the foundation of the vows we profess. *The missionary communion that characterizes the Trinitarian life is the source of*

the fraternal ministry which characterizes the life of the Brothers. By our consecration to the glory of God, we Brothers are a constant reminder within the Lasallian Family of the love of God which unites us, and of his special interest for "the children of artisans and the poor" (Horizon 1.2.2, Associated for the Educational Service of the Poor).

It is for that reason that our communities of Brothers throughout the Lasallian world should be an icon of Trinitarian life in the world and Church today, as the Founder proposed to us, when he told us that within our communities there should appear *the essential union which exists between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Meditation 39.3).*

We are called to be prayerful witnesses and prophets, attentive to the poor, the small, and the abandoned, and to the compassionate action of the Father who cares for them. Prayerful witnesses and prophets united to Jesus, consecrated for their disciples up to the point of giving our lives for them. Prayerful witnesses and prophets in an apostolic community, sent and moved by the Spirit who propels us to share our faith, aware that *"in community life, the power of the Holy Spirit at work in one individual passes at the same time to all. Here not only does each enjoy his own gift, but makes it abound by sharing it with others; and each one enjoys the fruits of the other's gift as if they were his own"* (Saint Basil quoted in *Vita Consecrata*, 42).

We are called, therefore, to live our personal and community lives in a Trinitarian mode: Most Holy Trinity, *I consecrate myself, we consecrate ourselves to you in order to*

procure your glory. The glory of the Father, who in Jesus is revealed as being kind and compassionate. The glory of the Son, who is revealed in the faces of the poor, the hungry, the imprisoned... (cf. Matthew 25) and who invites us to continue his mission and build the Kingdom. The glory of the Spirit, who gives us glimpses of himself in those who are different from us, which opens us to dialogue and respect. In a word, the most important thing for us is to commit ourselves to seeking the living God, seeking his will, his Kingdom, recognizing his call, discerning his wishes, committing ourselves to his work which becomes our work. Aware, also, that the greater glory of God is the fullness of life for each person.

This original dimension of our vocation as Brothers has not lost its relevance; on the contrary, as Archbishop Bruno Forte tells us: *In a world in which the strongest demand seems to be the search for meaning, that is to say, of the profound significance of a personal or collective undertaking, that gives humankind the courage to exist, the homeland of the Trinity is presented as the Good News, as the goal of our journey that sheds light on the road, the company of our present time that gives strength as we make the pilgrimage, the memory of our origin that makes us feel rooted and based on love (Trinity as History).*

In light of the Trinity, we are called to be mystics and humble servants of the Kingdom. *Oh my God, the Trinity I adore, help me to forget myself completely, to set myself in you, in stillness and in peace as if my soul were already in eternity; so that nothing may disturb my peace, nor make me depart from you, immutable, but may each minute carry me further*

into the depth of your Mystery. Calm my soul. Make it your heaven, your beloved dwelling place, the place of your rest. May I never leave you there alone, but may I always be fully there, totally awake in my faith, in adoration, unreservedly devoted to your creative action (Blessed Isabel of the Trinity). Creative action that we ought to continue by means of our ministry. It is about losing ourselves in God in order to meet him again in the heart of human needs where he manifests himself to us as absence and yearning. This is our mysticism of *open eyes and burning hearts*.

Discovering the Trinity in the World Today

Albert Nolan, a Dominican priest from South Africa, tells us in his latest book, *Jesus Today*, that *to live in the present moment does not mean withdrawing from the private present of each person. God is present here and now not only in my private life but also in the lives of all persons throughout the universe. The present moment that we need to be aware of in silence and solitude is the present moment of the world today. We read the signs of our times in order to live in the here and now of our universe that is unfolding, which is the only place where we can encounter God.*

In the first two *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, our Founder gives us a wonderful example of how he learned to discover the face of God and his call to put the means of salvation within reach of the young by means of the disastrous situation of children who were living in seventeenth century France. *Consider that it is a practice only too common for the working class and the poor to allow their children to live*

on their own, roaming all over like vagabonds as long as they are not able to put them to some work; these parents have no concern to send their children to school because their poverty does not allow them to pay teachers, or else, obliged to look for work outside their homes, they have to abandon their children to themselves (Meditation 194.1).

It is to these children that we are guided with a double mission: to enlighten these children by *unveiling for them the glory of God (Meditation 193.1)* and to *announce to these children the Gospel of his Son (Meditation 193.3)*. To the glory of the Father and to the Gospel of the Son we can add, as the Founder tells us in another of his Meditations, the gifts that the Spirit has given to us: *Pray, therefore, the Spirit of God to make known to you the gifts that God has given you, as Saint Paul says, so that you may announce them to those whom you are commissioned to instruct, not with discourses that use human wisdom, but with that which the Spirit of God inspires in his ministers (Meditation 189.1).*

Like our Founder, we are called to be attentive to the signs of our times and to respond creatively to the needs of the children and the young today, and to make them aware of the face of God.

Last July in Bogota, during a presentation he made at the General Chapter of his order, Dominican Gustavo Gutiérrez invited his brothers to read the Scriptures more as *memory* than as *history*. In doing so, he based himself in the thought of Saint Augustine, who defined memory as *the past made present*. He tells us that if we recall a previous act

we do so through the validity it has in the present time; memory is God's today. *Memory in the Bible goes well beyond a conceptual idea, it aims to result in a behavior, in a practice designed to transform reality. To recall is to keep in mind, to attend to someone or something. One remembers in order to act, without this memory loses its meaning, it is limited to being an exercise in mental gymnastics.*

Memory questions commitment, reflection, strength, and creativity. *In our time we find ourselves facing particularly challenging and uncertain signs. Therefore, these signs invite us to discernment that allows us to get to the heart of the matter, without getting tangled up in what is of secondary importance or changing, avoiding the trees that hide the forest. Discernment calls us to situate ourselves in front of what is coming, based on the current situation.* It seems to me that we can read this distinction as a call to live out the writings of the Founder as *prophetic memory* that commits us to the here and now based on our lived experience. In the same way that in the Eucharist *cultic* memory is inseparable from the memory *of service*, as we can see in Saint John who sets the washing of the feet in place of the Institution, our updating of the Founder should lead us to a unified spirituality in which we cannot separate the double commandment of love, nor the spirit of faith from the spirit of zeal.

To live within prophetic memory, then, means to be attentive to our reality and to its calls. Personally, I think the following are particularly important:

- *To recover the meaning of the Incarnation:* The world today tends to place importance on that which is im-

manent. Might this not be a call to look deeply into the mystery of the Incarnation, at this God made flesh, at a God who is committed to human reality, who is present in the concerns, challenges, and searching of our contemporaries, particularly those of the young?

- *To give primacy to persons:* A call to live the relationship of You to you as Jesus did in the Gospel when he went to meet each person based on their own concrete historical situation without losing the context, and to see life from God's point of view. In facing each person, our question can be none other than that of Jesus: *What do you want me to do for you?* (Mark 10: 51)... *Today salvation has come to this house* (Luke 19: 9).
- *To share values:* Not to have a negative attitude. To know how to discover the values of our world, such as ecological awareness which has as a background a deep religious underpinning: *God saw how good it was* (Genesis 1: 21), *The heavens proclaim the glory of God...* (Psalm 19: 2). Solidarity clearly made manifest in our volunteer programs and other forms of service, that in turn has a strong Gospel foundation. The thirst for communion and community...that makes us recall the community of Jesus with his apostles and the first Christian community in the Acts of the Apostles.
- *To offer meaningful horizons:* What can we give as Brothers? Encounters with Jesus were always salvific, freeing, curing...A salvation that comes from a loving God, in love with humankind, from a loving God who can only love, who desires our happiness, who suffers in the flesh of the hungry, the poor, the defenseless, the victims of indifference, war, terrorism...

- *To commit ourselves to that which is "human"*: This involves taking the Incarnation seriously. Christ not only took on human flesh but he became a slave...It is here where his face is revealed, in the other side of history, in victims, in the crucified, in new types of slavery...
- *To run the risk of adapting to a new climate*: In facing the cultural climatic change that we experience today, it is not so much about creating a Christian socio-cultural greenhouse, but maintaining the Gospel identity, creating microclimates that are open to the environment and not preserves for species that are in danger of extinction (cf. *Jóvenes e Iglesia*, Fundación Santa María, PPC, Madrid, 2006).

On September 8, 2000, 189 nations adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration which was signed by 147 heads of state. In doing so, they affirmed their *collective responsibility to respect and defend the principles of human dignity, equality, and equity on the world level and their duty to respect all inhabitants of the planet, especially the most vulnerable and, in particular, children who belong to the future* (see www.un.org/millenniumgoals for more information). During our 44th General Chapter, Ms. Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, invited us to collaborate in putting these objectives into practice. I will list them here:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.
2. Achieve universal primary education.
3. Promote gender equality and empower women.
4. Reduce child mortality.
5. Improve maternal health.

6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases.
7. Ensure environmental sustainability.
8. Develop a global partnership for development.

To discover the face of the Trinity is to work so that each human person lives with dignity. We can ask ourselves: As Brothers, what can we do so that these objectives are realized by 2015? On August 17, 2007, the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace announced that the Holy See was in favor of the UN announcement for a renewed effort on the part of the international community to achieve these objectives of the Millennium Development Goals and this was seen as a greater spirit of international solidarity. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, for his part, said that *the Millennium Goals belong to all of us. We need to feel that we are part of the initiative. In the next seven and one-half years each new day will be a new opportunity to help millions of persons throughout the world.*

I think that it is worth the trouble to recall what the 2006 International Assembly had to say to us, which the General Chapter wanted to make its own: *This Assembly wishes to remind all Lasallians that the vitality of our mission depends on how we respond today, associated together, to the needs of the poor. We value the efforts that we Lasallians are making to free the poor from the different types of poverty and we ask that you consider service of the poor and the promotion of justice as the heart and the cause of the strengthening of the Lasallian mission in the world.*

Consecrated to the Holy Trinity, our challenge is to live in community “together and by association” for the mission.

That is how our last General Chapter expressed the first challenge of our community life. As I said in my first words after the election, the topic that awakened the most interest among the capitulants was that of fraternal life in community. We felt an urgent need to renew our community life, to make it more Gospel-centered, to unite our strengths and gifts for the service of the mission.

Together and by association we need to help one another fuel the fire of the great passions that should drive our lives as Brothers: the primacy of God, enthusiasm for the Kingdom, the humanizing aspect, a deep, unified spirituality, the Gospel quality of our relationships, the prophetic force of our mission, our loyalty to the charism, our association for the educational and evangelizing service of the poor, our communion with the Church, our dialogue with the world.

A community that implies living intensely our interior lives on the personal level. The growth of the interior man was also one of the priorities of our Chapter. We know that one of the major concerns of the Founder was that those first teachers live *in a way that conforms to the spirit of the Institute*, in other words, according to the Gospel.

This is why the Founder repeatedly invites us not to stay on the surface of things, but to go *to the innermost part of the soul* (*Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer 1*) in order

to live, moved by the Spirit. We are to do this in such a way that, through our fidelity to divine grace and movement, we also can touch the heart of the children and young people we teach. For the Founder, this is the miracle that we are called on to perform each day. *You can perform several miracles in regard to both yourselves and your work: in your own regard, by an entire fidelity to grace, not letting any movement of grace go by without corresponding with it; in regard to your work, by touching the hearts of the wayward children entrusted to your care, by making them docile and faithful to the maxims of the holy Gospel... (Meditation 180.3).*

The community should be for the Brother the theological place of the encounter with God and, therefore, the Founder states clearly: *Since we should not be here except to bring one another to God, we should especially strive to be united in God, and to have but one and the same heart, and one and the same mind (Meditation 113.2).*

The community is mission, and it ought to be mission. It is the manifestation of the possibility of living like Brothers in a divided world. Communities of senior Brothers, with their quiet and fraternal witness continue to fulfill a very important mission in favor of humankind that is seeking points of reference.

Can we not apply to these communities and to all our communities what Paul VI affirmed for all authentically Christian communities? These are his words: *Above all the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness. Take a Christian or a handful of Christians who, in the midst of their own community, show*

their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good. Let us suppose that, in addition, they radiate in an altogether simple and unaffected way their faith in values that go beyond current values, and their hope in something that is not seen and that one would not dare to imagine. Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 21).

Ministers of God and Dispensers of His Mysteries (Meditations for the Time of Retreat 193 and 194):

The first two *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* of our Founder invite us to contemplate God's saving plan, the plan of God the Trinity, which is revealed as love in Jesus, in favor of poor children and young people who are deprived of education. We came into being, as a congregation and as a mission, to place the means of salvation within their reach. The Founder's words are forceful: *God wills not only that all come to the knowledge of truth, but also that all be saved. He cannot truly desire this without providing the means for it and, therefore, without giving children the teachers who will assist them in the fulfillment of his plan (Meditation 193.3).*

Therefore, the Founder defines our community in Pauline terms, as a community of *Ministers of God and dispensers of his mysteries (Meditation 193.1)*. The experience of God as

Savior in our own lives and his universal plan of salvation, are the reason for the existence of our vocation, its origin and goal. Furthermore, we are and we ought to be his sacraments for the young people entrusted to us: *Exhort them, then, as if God were exhorting them through you, for you have been destined to cultivate these young plants, by announcing to them the truths of the Gospel, and to procure for them the means of salvation appropriate to their development (Meditation 193.3).*

This is a free gift that God has given to us, and since we received it freely, we should give it freely, by generous and disinterested commitment, with only one objective: the glory of God. The glory of God that the Founder saw as something very concrete and down to earth: the possibility of children being useful in society and able to work. *God has had the goodness to remedy so great a misfortune by the establishment of the Christian Schools, where the teaching is offered free of charge and entirely for the glory of God, where the children are kept all day, learn to read, to write, and their religion, and are always kept busy, so that when their parents want them to go to work, they are prepared for employment (Meditation 194.1).*

In a word, it is about integrating gratuitous love with love that is effective and supportive. It is about living our community mission *with open eyes and burning hearts*, allowing ourselves to be guided by faith and zeal, the characteristics of our spirit. All of this is based on a mystical realism that allows us to have a loving contemplation of God, the God of Jesus Christ who acts in human history and who invites us to continue his saving presence.

Our involvement in the historical process in which we live, with its lights and shadows, naturally carries with it our concern for making our actions effective and, in this sense, we can speak about an effective and transforming love, but at the same time, Scripture presents the encounter with God to us as a result of his creative initiative of gratitude. Saint Paul comes to state that all is grace. We are moving here in the area of gratuitous love.

The Spirit with its gifts will allow us to live this vital, necessary synthesis between effectiveness and gratuity. A subjective intention is not enough, what is needed is to look for paths of transformation; but without gratuitous love the fight for justice will remain crippled. The Peruvian writer, Juan Gonzalo Rose, expresses this need for synthesis in poetry:

*I ask myself now:
Why have I loved only
the unexpected roses,
the tides of June,
the moons over the sea?
Why ought I to have loved
the rose and justice,
the sea and justice,
justice and light?*

Jesus, in the parable on the final judgment (Matthew 25), presents a gratuitous type of love to us which becomes a story where effectiveness springs forth like a requirement of the Lord's gratuitous love, and contemplation like the invigorating element of historical action.

Our Founder, in the first two Meditations for the Time of Retreat, invites us to look at our own story and see the current reality of God's gratuitous salvation, inviting us to develop an awareness of the poor, since we ought to give freely because we have received freely. But at the same time, this is about an effective love that helps children and young people become aware of their dignity and to find an appropriate place in society, inspired by Gospel values. *Thank God, then, who has had the goodness to employ you to procure such an important advantage for children. Be faithful and exact to do this without any payment, so that you can say with Saint Paul, The source of my consolation is to announce the Gospel free of charge, without having it cost anything to those who hear me (Meditation 194.1).*

The gratuitousness of our love that we profess by vow should lead us, in the words of the Founder, to prefer the poorer children and young people, the most difficult ones, the most problematic, those who need more help. *You are under the obligation to instruct the children of the poor. You should, consequently, cultivate a very special tenderness for them and procure their spiritual welfare as far as you will be able, considering them as members of Jesus Christ and his well-beloved. Faith, which should animate you, should make you honor Jesus Christ in their persons, and make you prefer them to the wealthiest children on earth because they are the living images of Jesus Christ our divine Master (Meditation 80.3).*

This is what Jesus did and it is what the Church invites us to do. *If the preferential option for the marginalized and*

the oppressed, for the little ones and all those considered the "least" in society made up the life and mission of Jesus (Luke 4:18), it should also make up the mission of his followers because the mission belongs to the heart of the Gospel and it is a dimension of the Kingdom of God (cf. Vita Consecrata, 82).

Brother José Cervantes, from the District of North Mexico, a former General Councillor, in an enlightening article in a magazine for educational communities, in the issue of May-June 2007, invites us to take a step beyond the ideal which many times we have expressed when we use the term *educational community*, which in fact goes beyond the mass, the group, the team, and which is defined in this way: *the set of persons who have as their objective the education of all, starting from a relationship motivated by love whose quality is measured by objectives of effectiveness, for which standards of admission and performance are kept, which necessarily exclude those who do not meet those objectives.* In contrast, Brother José proposes to us the term *inclusive education*, which – as the Regional Office of UNESCO for Latin America and the Caribbean, headquartered in Santiago, Chile, tells us – *consists of making effective for all children, young people, and adults the rights of education, participation and equal opportunity, paying special attention to those who live in vulnerable situations or who suffer any type of discrimination.* Consequently, an inclusive educational community is one which is guided by these criteria.

Personally, it seems to me that this inclusive educational community responds better to Gospel values, and the vi-

sion of the Founder as expressed in the Meditations for the Time of Retreat, than the educational community copied from business models which we sometimes use.

Gratuitous love and supportive and effective love are an invitation to learn how to integrate in our lives as religious educators the two dimensions that allow for moving things forward within a dialectic tension. *In the Old Testament, these two attitudes are incarnated in the figures of the king and the prophet, both anointed by the Spirit of God. The king must deal with real situations and he is obliged to adjust his attitudes and decisions to that which is immediately possible or doable and he must accept certain commitments. The prophet, on the other hand, is intransigent in his proclamation of the demands of justice and truth, without worrying too much about the immediate consequences or whether this is doable or not. He says what he must say, he cries against mediocrity no matter how inevitable* (J.M. Tillard, *Religiosos, un Camino de Evangelio*, as quoted by Aquilino Bocos, *Vida Religiosa*, book 2, volume 102, 2007).

At the conclusion of Meditation 194, the Founder invites us also to make another synthesis, an indispensable one in transmitting the faith, of what he calls the practical truths of Jesus Christ, the maxims of the Gospel, and speculative truths. *It is true that there are a number of doctrines which are absolutely necessary for us to know in order to be saved. But what would it serve to know them, if we did not take the trouble to practice the good to which we are bound? Faith, Saint James says, without good works is dead.*

Anticipating the Kingdom of God: Our Lasallian Icons

The Letter to the Hebrews invites us to be aware of the *great cloud of witnesses that surround us* (Hebrews 12:1), for the purpose of encouraging ourselves in our fight against evil, with eyes set on Jesus who begins and consummates our faith. I am convinced that the goal proposed to us by the Founder in the first two Meditations for the Time of Retreat, of our being *Ministers of God and dispensers of his mysteries*, is not just a beautiful theory or a utopian ideal, but a wonderful reality that has to do with the many who have gone before us, with the retired Brothers with their witness of fidelity, with many middle-aged Brothers who carry the burden of the schools, with the younger Brothers who are beginning their Lasallian journey. Certainly also it has to do with the many lay persons who share our spirit and our mission.

These are our living icons, who like the icons of the Oriental Church, do not simply reproduce the beauty of joyful or sorrowful characteristics, admiring them and being moved by them, but they attract us to what is deepest because they are marked by the vertigo of mystery. These icons permit us *to not lose heart* (Hebrews 12:3).

What Brother Benito Arbués, former Superior General of the Marist Brothers and a good friend of mine, says to us about occasional indispensable experiences to achieve a conversion of the heart, we can apply also to intense moments of contemplation of our icons. *Intellectual formation alone does not change people. Conversion of the heart still needs*

to have contact with life, that is to say, sufficiently long experiences of immersion in Gospel realities of the margins, contact with the poor, approaching the Gospel seriously, and having solid responses as regards evangelization.

Brothers, I would like to share with you three Lasallian icons that have had a deep impact on me this year.

• ***Our Community in Khartoum, Sudan***

In February I was fortunate enough to visit this community which was founded three years ago by the District of the Middle East. As I said during my visit there, Sudan for me was a theological place. The District of the Middle East, in spite of the limited number of Brothers and the enormous needs of the countries which comprise it, in an act of great faith and wanting to respond to the needs of a tormented country, opened this community which serves the children of refugees who came from the south. Two Brothers work in the Saint Augustine School of the archdiocese and two others respond to the needs of students from the small parish schools (very poor schools made of adobe) and, above all, they respond to the needs of the teachers by accompanying them and animating the catechists who live a deep and moving faith. Several times they been expelled from places and have had to begin again.

There are catechists who are true witnesses of faith, and there also are young native volunteers who sacrifice their free days to collaborate with the Brothers in different centers which train and attend to children. There were also vol-

unteers who came from other countries of the District during the summer. In one of the centers, a catechist told me that the Brothers were true pastors for him, since the priest was a bit distant and he also told me that the most important thing for him was that the children not only learn doctrine, but also that they be helped to live their faith. All of this, as well as the suffering and the poverty of the people, deeply touched my heart.

The main problem is a mentality of "temporariness," because the majority of the people displaced after the peace accord want to return to the south and they are not rooting themselves in the north. As you surely already know, the Institute has accepted being the coordinator of the educational component of the project of the two Unions of Superiors General, which will open an inter-congregational center for teacher training and health formation in the southern part of the country which, after the war, is recovering little by little. Sudan is an icon for us of what it means to have *eyes open and burning hearts*.

• ***Our Return to Cambodia***

Like my visit to Sudan, my visit in March to Vietnam and Cambodia was a time of grace and great satisfaction, as I was able to experience firsthand how the Brothers carried out their apostolate and the excellent religious spirit of the communities there. The Vietnamese Brothers are also a very special icon for the Institute. In spite of their difficulties, they continue the Lasallian mission with great creativity and dedication. There have a great concern for serving

poor youth, as can be seen in their recent foundations: a school for street children, a center for drug addicts, a foundation in Cambodia. Each Brother feels important and valued as an individual; this feeling is also prevalent among the Aspirants: each one is encouraged to develop his personal talents.

In Cambodia we have three young and dynamic Vietnamese Brothers. The situation is not an easy one, because Vietnam is not looked upon kindly by the Cambodian public due to historical reasons. The Brothers are aware of this reality. On the other hand, the very small number of Christians are in the main Vietnamese, but the Bishops do not want Christianity to be identified with Vietnam and they insist that the Brothers learn the Khmer language and that they work with Cambodian children and young people. Nevertheless, they have entrusted one of the Brothers with the supervision of 22 small schools for Vietnamese. In Batdambang, where we had a school (1906), the Jesuit bishop emphasizes the importance of the communities being international. The Church turns over to the government the schools that are built and then the Church has the possibility of helping in teacher training and in educating children. The Brothers are thinking about having a school for poor Cambodian children. It seems to me that this icon should be for all of us an occasion to remember what Saint Paul tells us: *What counts for anything is faith working through love* (Galatians 5: 6).

• ***The Young Whom No One Heard When They Cried***

During my stay in Memphis, Tennessee in July, I had the

opportunity to meet a group of young Lasallian volunteers. One of them wrote me a letter afterwards in which he shared what this experience meant for him and what it means now as he is going to continue for another year. Daniel was a student of the Brothers at Christian Brothers High School (CBHS) and at Christian Brothers University (CBU). For one year he served as a volunteer at La Salle in Albany, which is a center for young people who have been in trouble with the law.

Starting from the three Lasallian values of faith, community, and service, this young man tells us how his life was enriched on all levels and he shares his appreciation for the Brothers. After reading this letter, I had and I am sure that you will have the same feeling, that being a Brother is worth it and that our vocation is a marvellous gift that we have freely received from God for the service of the young. I will quote quite a bit of this letter because it seems to me to be a Lasallian icon that is worth keeping in mind and because I believe that Daniel, like so many other young people, is one of *those witnesses who help us to not grow weary or lose heart* (Hebrews 12: 3).

First of all, Daniel shares his experience of faith with us. *Coming into the program, my faith was something that I wanted to work on and grow. Living and praying with the community has definitely given me ample time to reflect on my beliefs and develop them in a personal manner. In addition, working with the boys of La Salle has provided me with a unique opportunity to have faith. Because of the traits of the boys I work with, I do not often get to see the results of my work*

immediately or at all. I work under the belief that my effort is making a difference in their lives, even though I don't always see it. Because of the support of the volunteer staff, my fellow volunteers, my community and my own prayer life, I know I am doing God's work and following his call for me.

In terms of community life, Daniel writes: *In my experiences this has been one of the most enjoyable and meaningful elements. From the first day I entered the LV program I began to learn about the large, worldwide Lasallian community. Throughout the year I have visited with and met Lasallians from around the country and felt the larger feeling of community. In addition to providing me much joy, the communities from CBU and La Salle School in Albany have supported me in my work and helped to keep me focused. I enjoy socializing and learning with them both. The Brothers are amazing people who inspire me by their genuine selflessness that they live everyday. They welcome the volunteers into the Lasallian family and treat us as partners in the Lasallian mission.*

Finally, after expressing the fear that he had as he began to work with these troubled youth, he speaks to us of the service he renders them. *After a year of working with them, I can say my perception has changed. In our programs, we put them in positions to serve others, challenge them and work as a team. Many times in these circumstances our boys are able to excel in ways they never have before. I have found that the boys at La Salle are at the core of St. La Salle's teachings and at the heart of the Christian Brothers' mission. I was given a quote by one of my community members that describes them very well. These are the boys "whom no one heard when they cried." They are*

the outcasts whom most of society and sometimes even their parents do not want to work with and would rather discard. This is a large reason for my returning to serve for a second year at La Salle. As an LV, I feel called to give to these boys what God gave to me and in serving, I find that I still receive so much (Daniel Salvaggio). I believe, Brothers, that these words need no additional comment.

Conclusion: With Open Eyes and Burning Hearts

Consecrated by God the Trinity as a community of Brothers to make visible his gratuitous and supportive love, we should live our vocation *with open eyes and burning hearts*. Our major concern ought to be our ability to be able to continue today living the ideal that was stressed by the Founder in the first two Meditations for the Time of Retreat, to be *ministers of God and dispensers of his mysteries for the young*.

A Lasallian song that was very popular in Spain a few years ago went like this: *The kids in the school have stolen my heart*. Surely, by vocation we are called to love them and to serve them, and for that reason, the question that should disturb us is "What more can we do for them?"

Once again poets with their intuition lead us to the truth and I am going to take some thoughts from the Uruguayan poet, Mario Benedetti, who may be able to give us some guidelines for action to respond to the description that he makes of young people today:

*What is there left for young people
to try in this world of patience and repugnance?
Just graffiti? Rock music? Skepticism?
They can also try not saying Amen,
not letting love kill them,
recovering their speaking and utopia,
being young people who are unhurried
and who have a memory,
placing themselves in a story which is theirs,
not becoming premature old people.*

*What is there left for young people
to try in this world of routine and ruin?
Cocaine? Beer? Tough gangs?
They can still try breathing, opening their eyes,
discovering the roots of horror,
inventing peace...
They still can argue with God...stretch out helping hands,
open the doors
between their own hearts and that of their neighbor;
above all, they can still make the future...*

At the 36th annual National Week for Institutes of Consecrated Life conference held in Madrid in April of this year, Father Miguel Ángel Orcasitas, former Superior General of the Augustinians, applied to religious life a comparison taken from then President of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel, who, basing himself on the spires of the cathedral in Prague and why they came into being, said: *One explanation is that there were periods in history in which the available materials were not the best; in which humanity found out that*

there were mysteries that they would never understand, and that people could only contemplate in humble amazement, and perhaps project that amazement in structures whose spires pointed upward... To begin to solve some of the gravest problems in the world, we, too, should lift our gaze upward, while we bow our heads in humility.

Are we not also called to be those cathedral spires for young people and for our world today – those spires that are reminders of the human and Christian values that support existence and that allow us to be ministers of God and dispensers of his mysteries?

Are we not also called, as communities of Brothers, to be schools of fraternity and spirituality, places of reference for an ardent passion for God and for humanity?

Might this not be an invitation for a renewed religious life more in harmony with the Gospel?

I will conclude with a description of the something new that is springing forth (Isaiah 43:19) in religious life, which we want to be more Gospel-centered and which challenges our future:

- *Those in religious life are older but they spread wisdom and they have not lost the dynamism nor the freshness of a child.*
- *Their features are less European, but their skin is now multi-colored and their experiences are varied.*
- *They have eyes that are less recollected but more open to life, to human needs.*

- *They now enjoy less prominence and social leadership, but their features are more simple, they are more approachable and more merciful.*
- *Religious life has gone from a situation of privilege to being really "one among many," more in harmony with Jesus in the Gospel.*
- *The members do not "flee from the world," but they look upon it with love and they listen attentively to its groaning and needs.*
- *They have lost the demeanor and the image of "escaping the world" but they manifest an incarnational lifestyle and they try to reflect more intensely the loving and compassionate face of God.*
- *There are features in religious life that may be true signs of hope and life at a crucial time in history (María José Arana, RSCJ, 36th annual National Week for Institutes of Consecrated Life, Madrid, 2007).*

Can our communities of Brothers adapt to this new face that religious life is sketching and the Spirit is designing?

Fraternally in De La Salle,



Brother Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría
Superior General

POSTSCRIPT

We celebrated Brother John Johnston's passing on October 11th and on October 18th the Mass for Christian Burial was celebrated in Memphis with a very moving and fraternal ceremony. By this time the Pastoral Letter had already been written, but I think it is a duty to add some words that Brother John had prepared as a type of postscript and these words were used in the homily on the day of his funeral. It is a commentary on the thought of his friend, another great Superior General, Jesuit Father Pedro Arrupe. In fact, Brother John had these words visible in his bedroom in a place of honor. Father Arrupe had written them during the time of his own painful infirmity which eventually took his life: *I feel, more than ever, that I am in God's hands. This is what I had wanted my entire life, since I was a boy. This is the only thing I want now, but there is one difference: today all the initiative comes from the Lord. I assure all of you that knowing and feeling that I am completely in His hands is a profound experience.*

I invite you, Brothers, to add to the Lasallian icons that anticipate the Kingdom of God and are found at the end of my letter, this new icon, that invites us powerfully to make visible in our lives the gratuitous and supportive love of God the Trinity, in whose hands we are.

“Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?”

Jn 18:1

Brother John Johnston, FSC

Three years ago, I had the privilege of spending four weeks with young Brothers of the Lwanga District: a workshop with student Brothers and a retreat with the novices.

The novices' retreat took place in a beautiful center several hours from Nairobi. The feature that most impressed me about the center was the outdoor, life-sized *Way of the Cross*. This *Way of the Cross*, work of an outstanding African artist, includes not only the traditional stations, but also an additional eleven or twelve, most of them representing scenes in the life of Jesus.

One of the stations in particular moved me profoundly, so much so that I returned to it every afternoon of the retreat. The station commemorates Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before he died. Jesus is on his knees, holding an oversized cup, the cup that represents for him the will of God in his regard, the cup the Father is asking him to drink.

This station touched me so intensely that I made a study of all the passages I could find in the Bible that employ the symbolism of the *cup*. I made a list of pertinent passages and placed it in a ceramic chalice. For the last few years, that chalice has had a prominent place in my bedroom.

All four evangelists make use of the powerful symbol of drinking the cup. Mark recounts Jesus' reply to James and John when they asked to sit at his right side. *You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I shall drink?*

Drinking the cup: a metaphor for what being a disciple of Jesus is all about.

Jesus is the *WAY*: he tells us in words and shows us in action what it means to be truly human. Nowhere is that message more poignant than Jesus' experience in Gethsemane.

Mark says Jesus begins to feel *terror* and *anguish*. We have to take these words at face value: *terror* and *anguish*. Jesus is like us. He is *terrified* at the thought of what is going to happen to him. No phony superhero here! *My soul is sorrowful to the point of death*, he says to Peter, James, and John. In his *anguish*, he throws himself to the ground and prays that, if possible, the threatening hour pass him by.

Abba, Father, for you everything is possible. Take this cup away from me. But let it be as you, not I, would have it. My Father, if this cup cannot pass by, but I must drink it, your will be done.

Drinking the cup leads Jesus to the cross. His terror and anguish does not leave him. He shouts, *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* We know, however, that Jesus moves beyond that feeling of abandonment and cries out YES to

what his Father is permitting to happen to him. We know because after his death, the veil of the Sanctuary is torn in two from top to bottom. What is more, the centurion, standing in front of him and seeing how he dies, exclaims, *In truth, this man was Son of God.*

To be a disciple of Jesus is to live with arms outstretched, in an attitude of YES to whatever God wills. It is to stand before the Father as Jesus did and to cry out,

My Father, if this cup cannot pass by, but I must drink it, your will be done.

