



Brothers of
the Christian
Schools

Pastoral Letter 2020



I believe
in the
Holy
Spirit,
the Lord,
the Giver
of Life

La  Salle



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the Christian
Schools**

Pastoral Letter 2020

Brothers of the Christian Schools
Communications and Technology Service
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ROME, ITALY

FRATRES SCHOLARVM CHRISTIANARVM

THE GENERALATE

BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life

PASTORAL LETTER TO THE BROTHERS

Brother Robert Schieler, FSC
Brother Superior

December 25, 2020

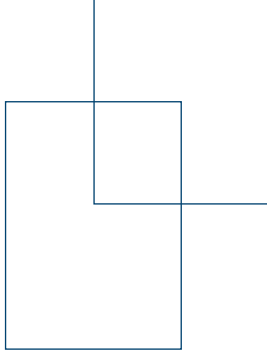


I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life

Governments, the Church and the media repeatedly insist that our organizations and our lives will be, and indeed must be, different after the pandemic; they point to a “new normal” that is on the horizon.

Due to the wisdom of those who have gone before us, the Institute has been living a “new normal” that was ignited by the Holy Spirit and inaugurated by the decisions of the 39th General Chapter (1966-67) and the publication of *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration*.

Our response to the pandemic must move us beyond what was then a “new normal”. The purpose of this letter is to recall the decisions that made us who we are today and to encourage us to live the present moment “as a time of profound revitalization. This revitalization must be based on a critical reading of the (a) Gospel and (b) living memory of the origins of the Institute, as a credible response in the Church and the world in the 21st century.”¹

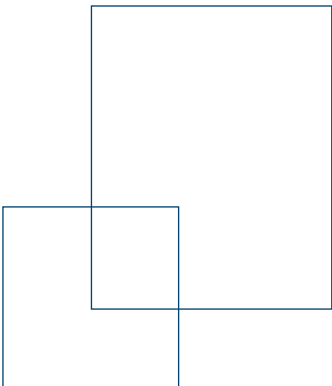


I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life who guides us as we strive to procure the glory of God through our fraternal witness, our apostolic ministry of education and our commitment to improve the lives of those who are poor.

I believe the postponement of the international assemblies and the General Chapter can be a grace-filled moment for the Institute and the Lasallian Family to reflect more deeply on the new paths that the Spirit is setting out before us.

I believe each Brother and Partner is invited to be a joyful and effective minister of the Spirit.

I believe in the faith, zeal, creativity and audacity of each Brother and Partner to actively collaborate with the Holy Spirit in the realization of the Reign of God. With this in mind, I address the following letter to you.



¹ *The Documents of the 45th General Chapter*, proposition 2.

Dear Brother,

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT,
THE LORD, THE GIVER OF LIFE

The pandemic and the still-to-be-determined “new normal”² are dominating my prayers, dreams and conversations. I am beginning to see that “The pain, uncertainty and fear, and the realization of our own limitations brought on by the pandemic have only made it all the more urgent that we rethink our styles of life, our relationships, the organization of our societies and, above all, the meaning of our existence”³.



Describe to your community some of the events of the past year and how they have influenced your prayers, dreams and conversations.

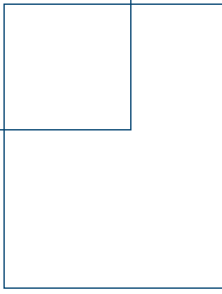
Describe the role played by the Holy Spirit, your family and friends, the Brothers and the poor as you wonder about the meaning of your existence and your life as a Brother of the Christian Schools.

“I believe in the Holy Spirit says that I believe in the mission of the Spirit in our contemporary world, in the leadership of the Church, in humanity, in the cosmos, and – why not? – in my institute.”⁴ The almost imperceptible whisperings of the Spirit

² A **new normal** is a state to which an economy, society, etc. settles following a crisis, when this differs from the situation that prevailed prior to the start of the crisis. (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia)

³ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*. Vatican City, 2020, No. 33.

⁴ García Paredes, José Cristo Rey. *Otra Comunidad Es Posible*. Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid, 2018. P. 122.



have awakened me to see that a “new normal” will further the well-being of humanity and of our common home only insofar as it is rooted in Jesus’ intention that we cooperate with him in freeing the oppressed and giving sight to the blind. The Spirit also has

reminded me that the Institute is consistently and persistently inviting you and me to deepen our relationship with Jesus Christ, to create new and effective responses to the emerging needs of the People of God, and to strengthen our fraternal witness.

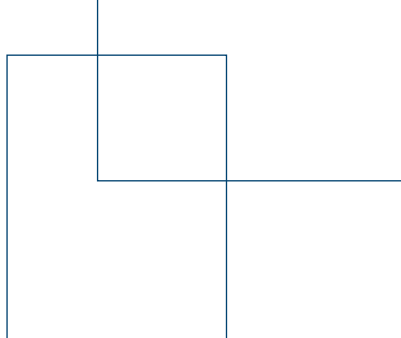


With your Brothers, list 2 or 3 emerging needs of the People of God that have surfaced because of the pandemic. Identify one of these needs to which you and your community can offer a practical response. List 2 or 3 concrete actions designed to help you and your community strengthen your fraternal witness and make it more attractive to young men in search of leading a significantly meaningful life. Choose one of these actions for implementation by your community.

Evolving post-pandemic realities are challenging us to close the gap between how we consistently and persistently describe ourselves in *The Rule* and other official documents so that our fraternal witness and apostolic action will infuse our responses to the “new normal” and the creation of new paradigms for the Institute with hope and joy.

I pray that our individual and communal response to the health crisis will be Spirit-driven and bring our fraternal life and shared apostolic mission closer to Jesus’ project for the Reign of God. Our credible witness to sisterhood and brotherhood, effective

strategies of human and Christian formation, mission governance structures incorporating the co-responsible participation of Partners and comprehensive formation programs for Brothers and Partners will help all of us to experience the Holy Spirit as the Lord, the giver of life.



The suffering and death caused by COVID-19 has brought to the surface many societal inequalities. “The virus has lain bare what people who have been oppressed or marginalized have long known – the injustice and unsustainability of the old order.”⁵ The status quo is not acceptable to us because by our baptism we are ministers of the Giver of Life and co-creators of the new order where all human beings are treated with dignity and no one is treated as global trash or discarded junk.



Identify a person in your immediate circle of relationships who is treated, or feels treated as, trash or junk. In what way might you personally alleviate their anxiety and feelings of worthlessness?

When assessing needs and developing effective strategies, we often depend on reliable data. Data, however, “has never changed a mind, a heart, or a policy position. Rather, what has made a difference...are the stories of real people and an alternative vision. Storytelling is the most powerful tool to engage compassion and make change.”⁶

⁵ Brueggemann, Walter. *Virus as a Summons to Faith*. Eugene, Oregon. 2020, p. ix.

⁶ Campbell, Simone, SSS. *Hunger for Hope: Prophetic Communities, Contemplation, and the Common Good*. Orbis Books, 2020, p. 41-42.

We can energize our efforts to establish a new way– the Reign of God- by sharing one another’s stories, including our Lasallian story. A few years ago, I had an experience of the power of storytelling. When the last Brother at Collège Saint-Marc in Alexandria, Egypt departed, the Partners came together and asked themselves, “What does it mean to be a Lasallian school without the presence of Brothers?” In light of their new reality, they decided to reimagine their Lasallian story. They reflected on *Associated for the Lasallian Mission...an act of Hope* (Circular 461). Over the course of the academic year, they met on twenty-two occasions and developed a new Lasallian narrative for their educational community.



Share with your community a significant Lasallian story from your personal experience. Together identify elements of the story that point to the active involvement of the Holy Spirit.

I believe that the long-ago decisions of the 39th General Chapter (1966-67), a significant Lasallian story in its own right, set the stage for the teachers at Saint-Marc. *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration* triggered what at the time was a “new normal” for the Institute:

To achieve the adaptation and renewal asked for by the Council, it seems important that the Brothers be ready to heed and to discern the challenges that the Holy Spirit addresses to them through the mediation of their fellow humans. Since they have chosen to work for the salvation that comes from Christ, they should let themselves be led by the Spirit of God. Sometimes the Spirit stirs up in the Brothers the desire for renewal; sometimes the Spirit inspires the contemporary Church to insist on certain aspects of their teaching ministry;

sometimes the Spirit communicates in a mysterious fashion through the events that take place in the world and through the aspirations of the world's peoples.⁷

Five decades later, the Holy Spirit continues to renew the hearts of the faithful and the face of the Institute and challenges us to live our own “new normal”. The Declaration's call is as urgent today as it was then:

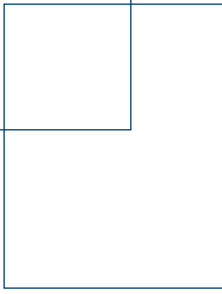
The world has more need than ever, even at the very center of human and temporal existence, for the witness given by those who are consecrated and who know and love God as a living reality. More than ever, this is the world in which an international Institute ought to live in order to serve and to educate all its many peoples.⁸

A brief historical review of events and publications can refresh our memories of the constant and persistent action of the Holy Spirit and hopefully inspire us to move beyond what was then the emergence of “new normals”. *The Rule* (1987) expressed the Institute's engagement with new realities. It described the purpose of the Institute as offering a *human* and Christian education in recognition of the universality of the mission and our presence in the heart of the world's major cultures with their religious diversity. *The Rule* also described shared mission, thereby acknowledging the contributions of thousands of women and men to the vitality of the Lasallian educational enterprise.

The 42nd General Chapter (1993) was enriched by the participation of Lasallian Partners. These women and men, representing the diversity of the Institute and its ministries, brought their experience to the Chapter and inspired the Capitulants to write:

⁷ *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration*. Rome, 1967, 8.2.

⁸ *Ibid.* 11.4.



In our lives, there are special, powerful moments when the past takes on a new meaning, the events of the present have a stronger impact and the future is faced with renewed determination. We would like to share with you a conviction we reached as a result of our

interaction, namely, that God is calling each one according to his or her own vocation, to accomplish together the mission confided to St. John Baptist de La Salle and to the Institute he founded.⁹

Partners also participated in the 43rd General Chapter (2000). The theme of the Chapter was “*Associated for the educational service of the poor as the Lasallian response to the challenges of the 21st century*”. While recognizing that “life is more dynamic than any definition or constraint,” the Brothers and Partners said:

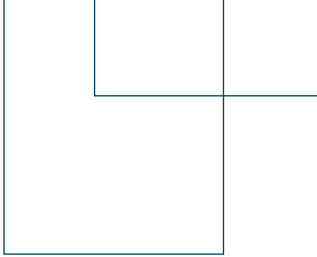
The development of the Lasallian Mission requires the Institute to allow itself to be stimulated by the dynamism apparent among partners and associates, and to encourage and support collaboration among themselves and with the Brothers, so that all can deepen their own understanding of association, in the light of the observations made, the Lasallian charism and the present theology of the Church.¹⁰

In the Chapter’s closing message addressed to Brothers, Friends, Partners and Associates in the Lasallian mission, the Capitulants declared:

New situations ask for new structures. The formation of a “Standing Committee of Brothers and Partners for the Lasallian Mission,” the convocation of an “Inter-

⁹ *The Documents of the 42nd General Chapter*, Chapter Message, 1993, p. 13.

¹⁰ *The Documents of the 43rd General Chapter*, 2000, p. 3.



national General Assembly” of Brothers and Associates – each having voice and vote – prior to the 44th General Chapter, the promotion of new forms of collaboration and association among Brothers and Partners, the evaluation of all existing Lasallian works and the creation of new initiatives, and the clear and strong re-commitment of the Institute and Lasallian mission on behalf of “the most fragile and vulnerable members of our societies” are only a few of the bold initiatives which will sustain the momentum which helps the Lasallian Family be an even more effective instrument of God and of the Church today.¹¹

The scaffolding for building the “new normal” was now firmly in place: Lasallian formation programs, new governance structures and collaboration in the promotion of all Lasallian vocations. Some Districts even welcomed mixed communities of Brothers, Partners and volunteers. This evolution in the life of the Institute was described by the General Council in *The Lasallian Mission of Human and Christian Education: A Shared Mission* (1997).

While mission and association for mission commanded much of the Institute’s attention, our consecrated life as Brothers was in the forefront. *Being Brothers Today: Open Eyes, Burning Hearts*¹² was the focus of the 44th General Chapter (2007):

The necessity for authentic interior life and community life challenges us in today’s world to be men of faith and prayer, living our Brotherhood in the simplicity of the Gospel. We hear personally and in community the

¹¹ *The Documents of the 43rd General Chapter*, 2000, p. 81.

¹² The Chapter’s theme built upon the preparatory document, *Being Brothers Today*.

Gospel call to follow Jesus in his life and mission as a fraternal sign of hope in the world.¹³

The Chapter also returned the vow of association to its primacy. We do well to recall the heroic vow of 1691. In the midst of crisis, a disgraced canon and a group of uncouth men put their trust in Providence and committed themselves to launch a community dedicated to the education of the sons of the artisans and poor. The vow was:

A key turning point in our history...made in the face of crisis. It was a bold and radical act of hope that continues to breathe life into our association. The root of this hope, shared and sealed in the community alliance of three Brothers, was sustained by the creative fidelity and stability in their hearts. It serves as an impetus to re-imagine our lives and renew our minds and hearts and commit to new action....¹⁴

In the succeeding years, focus on our consecrated life was a leitmotiv in pastoral letters and in *They Will Call Themselves Brothers* (Circular 466), *The Rule* (2015) and *The Mission and Identity of the Religious Brother in the Church Today* (Vatican, 2015). Each of these publications reminds us:

Attentive to the call of the Founder who invites them to be interior men, the Brothers have a responsibility to live a deep spiritual life, pay special attention to their personal prayer and to finding opportunities for silence....¹⁵

Finally, the 45th General Chapter (2014) mandated the publication of several documents that codified our “new normal”. *Lasallian Formation for Mission: The Pilgrim’s Handbook* integrates the formation of Lasallian Partners and Brothers.

¹³ *The Documents of the 44th General Chapter*, 2007, Introduction, p. 5.

¹⁴ The General Council. *Re-imagining our Life as Brothers*, 2020, p. 4.

¹⁵ *The Rule*, The Brothers of the Christian Schools, Rome, 2015, 65.1.

From Hope to Commitment: Understanding Lasallian Vocations (Circular 475) promotes and celebrates all vocations. The *Declaration on the Lasallian Educational Mission: Challenges, Convictions and Hope* describes today's mission.

To recapitulate, some elements of the “new normal” that were evolving at the end of the last century include: Lasallian formation for our Partners; new governance models at all levels of the Institute; new Institute-sponsored ministries in service of the poor (Mission 100+ and Beyond Borders); mixed communities of Brothers, Partners and volunteers; the plurality of Lasallian vocations; and, the re-appropriation of our vow of association.

Brother, the above-mentioned documents are either conduits of impulses born of the Spirit that move us towards a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ and our sisters and brothers, or they are dead letters. The documents either inspire us to be brightly burning lamps or we remain like lamps hidden under a bushel basket. The messages conveyed by the publications can open us to the Giver of Life who comes into our lives, communities and ministries to captivate, disturb, comfort and upset. Amid the disruptions caused by COVID-19, are we able to detect the whispering of the Holy Spirit that compel us to action?

We should revel in the discomfort of the current moment to generate a ‘new paradigm,’ not a ‘new normal’. Feeling unsettled, destabilized and alone can help us empathize with individuals who have faced systematic exclusions long-ignored by society even before the rise of COVID-19 — thus stimulating urgent action to improve their condition. For these communities, things have never been ‘normal’.¹⁶

¹⁶ Asonye, Chime. *World Economic Forum COVID Action Platform*, 5 June 2020.



Describe to your community a particular decision of a District Chapter or a specific challenge encountered through an official Institute publication that points to the influence of the Holy Spirit and how this has enhanced your life in community and your effectiveness in ministry.

I believe we have an opportunity to move beyond our “new normal” that began in the Institute over 50 years ago. The Spirit is impelling us to generate new paradigms for: responding to the unmet educational needs of those who are poor; increasing co-responsibility for the mission with empowered Partners; imagining new governance structures; and, most importantly, reigniting in each of our hearts an ardent zeal to be relevant and joyful ministers of God and ambassadors of Jesus Christ.

“Business as usual” was not acceptable to Jesus or John Baptist de La Salle and it is not acceptable to the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Because the Gospel is our first and principal rule, and because in the Gospel the poor are in the spotlight we are consistently and persistently called to upset the usual way of doing things. We are called to subvert unjust socioeconomic systems that oppress people and to form young people, especially poor young people, in such a way that they commit to build a world where every person can live life to the fullest. Former Superior General Brother Álvaro often voiced his belief “that the poor are the creators of the future. Be aware that they are the true agents of change, the source of dynamism for everyone.” He encouraged us to “love them fully, collaborate with them in changing the structures of history”.¹⁷

¹⁷ Rodríguez Echevería, Álvaro, FSC. *Associated With The God Of The Poor*, 2003, p. 28.

Today there are more than 250 million children and young people deprived of an opportunity for an education.¹⁸ We Brothers of the Christian Schools must be available to collectively respond to the educational aspirations of those who are poor; after all, we “are associated to conduct together and by association, schools for the service of the poor (*The Rule*, 25).

The Lord, the giver of life, has blessed many of our educational communities with a competent and dedicated corps of Partners who admirably ensure the vitality of our mission of human and Christian education. You, Brother, and the Brothers who have gone before us, made this possible. Now, I believe that the Holy Spirit, through the havoc wrought by the pandemic, is calling us to fully entrust some of these ministries to our Partners, and for Brothers to collectively go – either at home or abroad – to announce the Good News to the poor and to proclaim to all “that in the faces of the impoverished and vulnerable we find God’s saving power”.

Our tradition is rooted in the preferential service for the poor, the excluded, those considered irrelevant, that is to say those children and young people for whom their vulnerable condition is an obstacle to the building up of their dreams for the future and to their having a dignified and meaningful life. Today our commitment is to identify the new forms of poverty – which are always to be found at the frontiers of dehumanization, in a lack of opportunity and in marginalization – and to serve those who suffer from these poverties.¹⁹

¹⁸ United Nations. *Policy Brief: Education During COVID – 19 and Beyond*, August 2020.

¹⁹ *Declaration on the Lasallian Educational Mission*, Generalate, Rome, 2020, pp. 117-118.



Dream for a while about where you could go to encounter the saving power of God in the faces of impoverished and vulnerable people. The place could be close to home or far way. Perhaps you could share this dream with your community.

We are able to sustain and indeed increase our preferential service to the poor due to the presence, dedication and hard work of our Partners, many of whom are women. For many years, the exercise of co-responsibility for the mission by our Partners has been through structures created by and for the Brothers. In many instances, ultimate decision-making authority for issues related to association and the mission is reserved to the Brothers. I believe that it is imperative to “put new wine into new wine skins”:

The structure of animation and government of the Institute at all levels needs to continue the process of empowering Lasallians by engaging them in decision-making and leadership regarding the Mission.... In this context, what is the role of the Lasallian Family in the General Chapter? What is the role of the General Chapter in the Lasallian Family?²⁰



With your community, reflect on the role of Partners in the educational communities of your District. Describe the participation of Partners in mission-related decision making.

²⁰ *The Report of the Brother Superior to the 46th General Chapter* (Draft), Rome 2020.

I believe in the Holy Spirit. Without assistance from the Lord, the giver of life, the burdens imposed by the pandemic, the deafening cries of the poor, and the new paradigms needed to ensure the vitality of both our fraternal life and the mission would be overwhelming and unbearable. God's mission is our work and the Holy Spirit leads us to fulfill our duties:

“For John Baptist de La Salle, the Christian education of the poor is the work of God and must be carried out by men led by the Holy Spirit. He invited the Brothers to unify their life: “Make no distinction between the affairs proper to your state and those of your salvation and perfection.” (The Rule, 63)

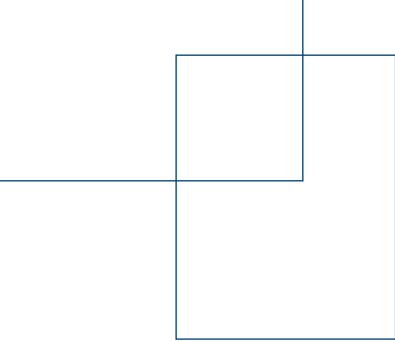
Brother, we are on a life-long journey towards full cooperation with Jesus Christ in bringing the good news to the afflicted, proclaiming liberty to captives, giving sight to the blind, and freeing the oppressed. A full and rich life of prayer, participation in programs of continuing formation, and the willing acceptance of new assignments prepare and enable us to generously respond to the successive calls of the Spirit.

The vow of stability keeps us on our long, circuitous and often surprising or inconvenient journey. The vow is a promise to persevere both in the Institute and in the mission; it is a vow to be aware of the difficulties that are inevitable in a life of self-giving and to be ready to respond joyfully and creatively to the successive calls of the Holy Spirit.²¹ Creative and life-giving energy is unleashed when we accept the grace of our calling as men who are consecrated for others.²²

Growth comes when we open ourselves to the possibility that some of what we were doing before the pandemic are things we should no longer be doing, and that the old way must give way

²¹ *The Rule*, article 32.1.

²² The General Council. *Reimagining our Life as Brothers*, Generalate, 2020, p. 8.



to the new. We grow when we discover in every stage of our lives and every unexpected setback an opportunity to redouble our efforts to witness to fraternity.

I believe that the setbacks caused by the pandemic are providing us an opportunity to collectively discern the direction offered by the Holy Spirit and to create new paradigms designed to close the gap between the ideals expressed in our publications and our lived reality. By this letter, I am inviting you to join your Brothers in discerning the best way for us, Brothers of the Christian Schools, to procure the glory of God by fulfilling “together and by association” our apostolic ministry of education (*The Rule*, 2).

Accompanied and fortified by the Lord, the giver of life, and inspired by those who have gone before us, we do have access to the creativity and resourcefulness necessary to be prophets of a spiritual and pedagogical vision that can contribute to the transformation of the lives of those who live in the margins. Our Lasallian story recounts that:

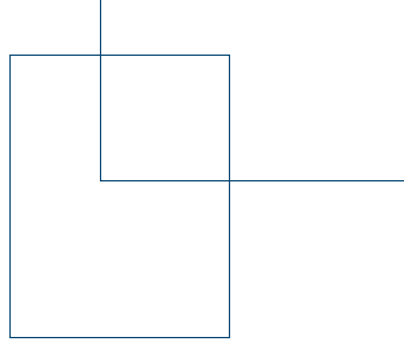
Brothers have been displaced and persecuted, even killed, during civil and international wars; they have been suppressed as a religious community; educational works and property have been shuttered and nationalized.... When we look back at these stories, indeed when we look at today’s stories, we are struck by the marks of creativity and resourcefulness.²³

²³ The General Council. *Reimagining our Life as Brothers*, Generalate, 2020, p. 2.



**Brother, I invite you to
pause and in
contemplative silence
spend some time with these
words:**

**“Forget the former things;
do not dwell on the past.
See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up;
do you not perceive it?
I am making a way
in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland.”
(Isaiah 43: 18-19)**



Isaiah was writing about a time of exile and captivity for the Hebrew people. He recalls the Exodus and God’s promise of liberation. The Exodus experience is recalled not nostalgically, but rather as a reminder of faith and hope during difficult experiences of suffering that eventually led to a realization of the promised liberation. What happened before can happen again if the people can perceive the newness around them.²⁴

The Hebrews’ exile experience can be described as their dangerous memory. The theologian Johann Baptist Metz defined dangerous memory as the narrative of the victims of history. By retelling their story, they live in hope that a future outcome can be redemptive. For Metz, the dangerous memory of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection offers new life and new creation for all. Through Jesus, God shares with all his desire that everyone be well: “I have come so that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). However, the dangerous memory of the paschal mystery gives birth to hope only if God’s promise is realized in the practice of the community.

²⁴ cf. Mesters, Carlos, O. Carm. *Prophecy in the Bible, in Religious Life: Prophecy in the Cultures Today*. Union of Superiors General, no. 69, pp. 7-27.

In order to be relevant and credible witnesses to the paschal mystery and to realize God's promise, our communities and ministries must constantly adapt to new situations:

Dedicated to the apostolic ministry of education, the community realizes that its mission constantly needs to be discovered at the different stages of life and as it comes into contact with new situations. Accordingly, it takes part in the reappraisal of both its aims and methods, with a view to coming closer to the spirit of the Gospel and to re-examining the pastoral value of its activity. (*The Rule*, 54)

We share in community the anxiety, despair and destruction caused by COVID-19. Undoubtedly during these long days and months, many of us have told stories that hint at ways to go forward. I encourage you to continue sharing stories and creative insights with your community:

It is in community that courage is born and change is imagined.... We need an imagination that can look at the anguish and chaos with fresh eyes and new imagination. The old ways are not working. Something new needs to emerge. How can we “hunger and thirst” for justice sufficiently to create new ideas new ways forward....²⁵

It is my expectation that stories shared in community will awaken our creative imaginations and inform the upcoming International Young Brothers' Assembly, the Young Lasallians' Symposium, the International Lasallian Mission Assembly and the 46th General Chapter.

²⁵ Campbell, Simone, SSS. *Hunger for Hope: Prophetic Communities, Contemplation, and the Common Good*. Orbis Books, 2020, p. 46.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord of conversion, transformation, interdependence and refoundation for each one of us and the Institute.²⁶ A look at the history of the Institute or any of the Districts brings to mind our constant striving for conversion, our search for new ways forward and own “dangerous memory”:

... the memory that all Lasallians share with an endless capacity to disturb complacency on what we do professionally and to give birth to new life; a memory by which experiences of the past break into the very center of our lives, giving birth to new insights about our present; a memory of the past which in certain ways announce the future.²⁷

It is challenging to appreciate new insights while in the midst of the storm. Right now, battered by the pandemic, the future is not clear. In times such as these, we call to mind De La Salle’s constant refrain to the first Brothers: “Trust in God’s Divine Providence, God will provide”. His trust in Divine Providence enabled De La Salle to go forward in faith even as the way remained obscure.

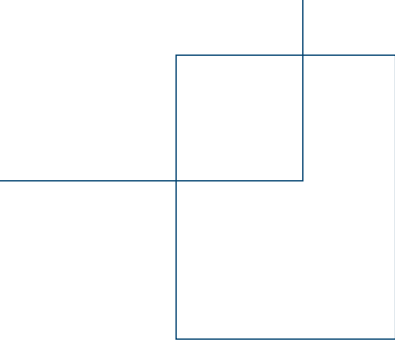


Pause for a few minutes with these words from Isaiah:

**I will lead the blind on their journey;
By paths unknown I will guide them.
I will turn darkness into light before them,
And make crooked ways straight. (Isaiah 42:15-16)**

²⁶ Terms employed by General Chapters to promote the renewal of the Institute.

²⁷ Campos, Miguel, FSC. cf. *La Salle University Seminar Series*, Philadelphia.



You and I, of course, are anxious and we want to know where we should go and how to get there. I urge you to keep in mind that “The new creation does not come easily, but only in a painful struggle that is both anguish and hope; it comes at a huge cost, the cost of

acknowledging that the old creation has failed and is dysfunctional, the awareness that new creation requires disciplined, intentional reception”.²⁸

Brother, the Spirit of the Lord is upon us and under the banner of faith and zeal we are ready to courageously go forward with new paradigms to meet the challenges that lie ahead. I invite you to join me in wholeheartedly praying: I believe in the Holy Spirit! Together let us open our dreams, prayers and conversations to the calming – and disturbing – influence of the Font of Life and Fire of Love.

We are accompanied by the Lord, the giver of life. We can, therefore, renew and refresh our fraternal life. With our Partners we can implement new ways to bring the Good News to those who are poor so that they, too, may proclaim: *my eyes have seen your salvation*.

I conclude my letter to you with words that I hope resonate in your heart:

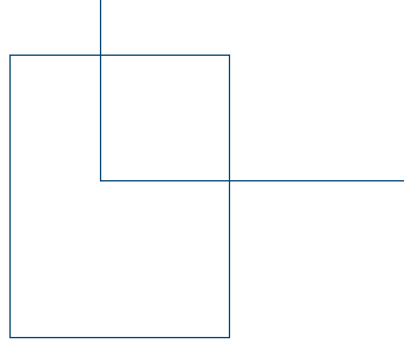
I still feel totally in love with God. The drawing – a feeling like desire – is very strong and gives me not only a sense of joy and peace but a feeling of being led. My experience is that you get nudged here and nudged there and feel amazed at what’s going on. Because it’s not really you: God is using you for whatever.²⁹

²⁸ Brueggemann, Walter, *Virus as a Summons to Faith*. Eugene, Oregon, 2020, p. 65.

²⁹ Sister Imelda Poole, told to Blanche Girouard, *The Tablet*, 5 September 2020, p.14.

Let us pray:

God who cannot be bound
Flow into our hearts and
minds
Wear down our resistance
to your love
And refresh us
with the spirit of
your compassion.
Today, as we commit ourselves
Once more to your work
We ask you to show us how to hold
The needs of your world
At the heart of our lives
And to celebrate your many gifts
with joy.
May your power transform our lives
May your Spirit set us free
And may the blessing of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
Be with us all now and for ever.
Amen.³⁰



As a final note, Brother, I hope that a glance at some additional publications, resources and a few significant events from the past year will enable you to detect the constant and persistent movement of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Institute.

The Institute's evolving response to the pandemic brings to mind Pope Francis' homily for Pentecost 2013. Contemplating "the outpouring of the Holy Spirit sent by the risen Christ upon his Church" the Holy Father asks us if we are "open to 'God's

³⁰ Linda Jones, CAFOD. In *The Tablet*, 30 May 2020, p.18.

surprises'? Or are we closed and fearful before the newness of the Holy Spirit? Do we have the courage to strike out along the new paths which God's newness sets before us, or do we resist, barricaded in transient structures which have lost their capacity for openness to what is new?"

In 2014, the Brothers of the General Council and I, echoing the Holy Father's words, wrote:

As Lasallian educators we cannot sit idly and remain on the sidelines. There is an urgent need to find new roadmaps that encourage creativity and innovation in the pursuit of the common good. The common good we are pursuing is an inclusive and sustainable growth and development in economic, political, social and spiritual spheres.³¹

COVID-19 has pushed all of us from the sidelines and thrust us onto the playing field: we are all in this together. Like you, the Brothers of the General Council, the Secretariats and Services at the Center of the Institute and I are committed to striking out along new paths in search of new roadmaps that encourage concrete and practical actions in favor of the common good. To facilitate attentiveness to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and God's surprises, the Institute provides us with an assortment of resources.

#LaSalleCOVID19 (April 2019) is an initiative coordinated by the Secretariat for Solidarity and Development to raise awareness of and money for struggling ministries. To date, US\$11 million have been donated to assist more than 70,000 people and fund 226 Lasallian initiatives that are providing food, personal protective equipment and tuition assistance.

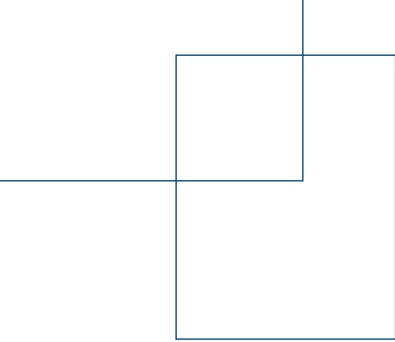
³¹ General Council. *Towards the Year 2021: Living together our joyful Mission* (Circular 470), 2015, p. 11.

The *Lasallian Mission Moving Forward Plan* is the fruit of collaboration between the General Council, the Visitors, and the Secretariats and Services. Informed by input from the Visitors, the plan highlights 7 areas for consideration by local leadership teams and their respective District and Mission Councils as they chart the way forward. The Service of Documentation and Study on Global Mission (SEDOS), a forum open to Institutes of Consecrated Life, chose the plan for presentation at its annual assembly.

Reimagining our Life as Brothers provides a pathway to reimagine our life and renew our hearts and minds as we joyfully move forward with creative and life-giving responses to the pandemic. We can invite our Partners and Associates to join our reflection and together read the signs of the times and discern the will of God.

A variety of documents inspired by the 45th General Chapter and enriched by the input of hundreds of Brothers and Partners were crafted by the International Council for Association and the Lasallian Educational Mission (CIAMEL) to offer guidance to Brothers and Partners regarding association for mission:

- *From Hope to Commitment: Understanding Lasallian Vocations;*
- *Declaration on the Lasallian Educational Mission: Challenges, Convictions and Hopes;*
- *Identity Criteria for the Vitality of Lasallian Educational Ministries;*
- *and, from the Secretariat for Formation, also with ample consultation, Lasallian Formation for Mission: The Pilgrim's Handbook.*



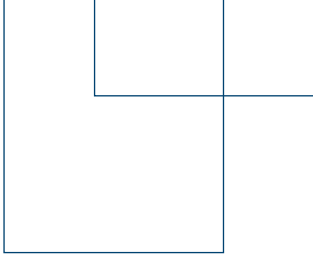
The Church, too, indicates new paths, in this case for education. The Global Compact on Education, an initiative of Pope Francis and the Congregation for Catholic Education was launched on 15 October 2020. The Secretariat for Mission and Association was involved

in the yearlong preparation. The Compact hopes to generate processes that overcome fragmentation and conflict. Pope Francis intends the process to be grounded in a network of humane and open relationships, ensuring that everyone has access to quality education consonant with the dignity of the human person and our common vocation to fraternity.

In Proche-Orient and RELAN concrete actions and programs that enhance the common good and contribute to social and spiritual growth are in evidence.

Our Brothers, Partners and students in Lebanon and the entire District of Proche-Orient are joyful and hardworking witnesses to faith, hope and charity in the wake of the devastating explosion in Beirut. From the Center of the Institute, the Secretariat for Solidarity and Development organized a fundraising campaign and invited the Lasallian Family to assist with the repair of Lasallian institutions, especially Collège du Sacré-Coeur, so that the Brothers and Partners can continue to witness to the risen Christ through the apostolic ministry of education.

My pastoral visit to RELAN, another fertile field for epiphanies of the Holy Spirit, was interrupted by health crisis and I unfortunately could not complete the activities that had been planned for the Districts of San Francisco New Orleans and Midwest. I was fortunate, however, to participate with hundreds of Lasallian educators in the annual Huether Conference as well as in the International Congress of Former Lasallian Students.



The Region has an impressive variety of ministries and formation programs. Brothers and Partners are effective ambassadors of Jesus Christ in social service ministries for young people and families, schools, universities, and retreat centers. Resources and formation programs for Brothers and Partners include: the Lasallian Resource Center (San Francisco New Orleans); an online formation for mission program (Midwest); and, activities related to the rights of children, racial justice, migration/immigration and the environment (DENA). The Region continues to sponsor the Buttimer Institute, the John Johnston Leadership Institute and the Lasallian Social Justice Institute. The Beyond Borders initiatives El Otro Lado (Texas and Arizona) and OKI-NI-SOO-KA-WA at De La Salle Blackfeet (Montana) respond to local educational needs and provide immersion experiences for Brothers, Young Lasallian and Partners.

Regarding evangelization and catechetics: the District of Francophone Canada conducts two centers dedicated to human, spiritual and Christian formation; in the Midwest the Springtide Research Institute for Religion and Young People, sponsored by Saint Mary's Press, is generating candid conversations on how new generations experience and express community, identity and meaning; in San Francisco New Orleans, the Office for Evangelization and Catechesis has been established to support an integrated approach to the spiritual formation of young people; and, in DENA, the annual Brother Luke Salm Workshop.

In RELAN as in all the Regions, I am inspired by and grateful for the fraternal concern of the Visitors for each Brother, whether in the early, middle or senior years of his life. Through virtual participation in regional meetings of Visitors, I am aware and appreciative of the fraternal style of pastoral leadership exercised by the Visitors, Delegates, and Presidents.

I am ever mindful of Brothers, members of the Lasallian Family, relatives and friends who have died as a result of the virus. I remember in a special way the 11 Brothers we lost in the District of Francophone Canada.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bro. Robert".

Brother Robert Schieler, FSC
Brother Superior

Christmas 2020

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