

THE MISSION TODAY: URGENT NEEDS AND HOPE

I THE EDUCATIONAL SERVICE OF THE POOR

OBSERVATIONS

1. From its foundation, the Institute has defined itself as being called by God to the educational service of the poor. During the last thirty years this need has been regularly recalled.

(Circular 403 of 1976; 1978 Letter of Brother Superior General; 1981 Inter-Capitular meeting; 1986 General Chapter; Circular 435 (42nd General Chapter); Declaration Nos. 28-2, 30-3, 32-1, 34-4).



In the past as now, the Institute has always concerned itself and continues to concern itself with the educational service of the poor. (Intercom #112)

We need to remember, however,

that the question of the educational service of the poor is closely tied to social, cultural and economic contexts, which vary greatly from country to country where the Institute is present.

Despite this, a certain feeling of dissatisfaction exists among some Brothers, in particular among younger Brothers. The Institute is

not perceived sufficiently clearly as being dedicated to the educational service of the poor. A discrepancy exists between what we profess and what we do. This concern has manifested itself in the central theme of the present Chapter.

2. What are the causes of this discrepancy ?

- The need to continue with what we have inherited from the recent past, which has bequeathed establishments to us which, with time, may have forgotten, and made the

Brothers forget, the original purpose of their foundation.

- This has made it difficult to reconcile involvement with the poor and the necessary financial management of establishments, above all in countries which do not receive any government assistance. Moreover, the Institute must respond to requests from local Churches and ensure a presence, as for example, in the area of university education.

- The fact that, while the educational service of the poor calls for a constant conversion of heart and of lifestyle, the Brothers' lifestyle has become increasingly middle class, and this has moved them away from the living standards of the poor.

- The option for the poor involves Lasallian Associates who choose to adopt it. It is the responsibility of the Brothers to make them aware of this option, while respecting their right to adopt different lifestyles.

GUIDELINES

We are aware that our educational service of the poor cannot presume to solve all the problems of pov-

erty in the world, but only specifically those which are related to education.

We wish to follow, as a group, the path which leads to the poor, acknowledging that God calls us to bring creative and generous responses to the world of the poor to-day, through fidelity to our founding charism.

We acknowledge the associative dimension of the Institute in which Brothers and Partners are involved together in initiatives and programmes to achieve the purpose of the Institute.

1. It is necessary to promote, over the next seven years, the evolution of our educational establishments, so that they may be genuinely dedicated to the service of the poor. Each of them will have to respond to the need for evolution in a different way, but we think that the following appear to be the characteristics which will allow us to identify a work as Lasallian in respect to the educational service of the poor .

- adopting an educational programme on justice and solidar-

ity which will give a specific direction to the activities undertaken, to the experiences proposed to the young people, and to the kind of relationships that are built up;

- thinking of ways (facilities, and pedagogical strategies) to make these centres accessible and effective for young people in difficulty;
- creating ways so that poor youth and their families feel welcome and at ease in our institutions.

2. Personal conversion and a profound experience of God on the part of Lasallians (Brothers and Partners) should be the motive force behind the process of drawing closer to the world of the poor in order to allow ourselves “to be evangelized by them “. This openness to the evangelization by the poor implies bringing about gradually, as an Institute and with Associates, a change in the “social standing” of communities and establishments, so as to come closer to the poor and share their condition.

3. The educational service of the poor presupposes a process of awareness-training and specific

formation. Consequently, a process has to be set in motion to raise the awareness of Brothers and Associates, and to train them. This process should concentrate on the factors which engender different kinds of poverty, and bring to light the root causes. To help in this process, the Centre of the Institute should adopt a clear position in this matter and communicates it to the Brothers, to the Lasallian world and, further afield, to the Church and society as a whole.



4. The Institute does not presume that it alone has an effective educational approach and strategy to deal with present forms of poverty. This why it considers it important to maintain relations and collaborate with other organizations and other agencies (political, social, and religious) that work to resolve urgent problems regarding the

poor at the local, regional, and international level. Within the Institute, in order to respond to the urgent situations of poverty among the young, subsidiarity, interdependence and authority at the Centre of the Institute need to act in harmony.

Recommendation 6

As a way of encouraging personal and community conversion, each District sets up a structure which will enable Brothers and communities to examine to what extent they live as persons of modest means, and have contact with such persons (living standard, kinds of relationships, access to communities and schools, involvement in social and educational activities). It evaluates also how the concern for the educational service of the poor influences the way it administers its goods.

Recommendation 7

Each District will draw up a plan to offer formation, and increase awareness of new forms of poverty affecting young people, especially in its own country. This plan will involve the participation of young people, parents, Partners and

Brothers. This plan should include also direct experience of working with and for the poor. After 3 years, an evaluation will be made at the District level, and the results will be published at an Institute level.

Recommendation 8

The General Chapter urges those in positions of responsibility at all levels of the Institute to strengthen relations and collaboration with organizations which defend the poor and especially the rights of children, and which promote their education.

Proposition 12

In order to increase the educational service of the poor, the General Chapter asks Visitors of Districts and Sub-Districts, Delegates and Presidents of Delegations, and their Councils, to evaluate the degree to which the institutions of the District, Sub-District or Delegation contribute to the educational service of the poor. The analysis of this evaluation should lead to a plan of action, drawn up with the participation of Lasallian Associates, within three years at the

most. The evaluation and the plan of action will be the object of a report, which will be studied at a later date at a meeting between Visitors, Delegates, Presidents and the Brother Superior General and his Council.

II EVANGELIZATION

“God is so good that having created us, he wishes all of us to come to the knowledge of the truth...

and you are the ones whom God has chosen to help in this work by announcing to these children the Good News and the truths that are contained in it” (Meditation 193).

OBSERVATIONS

Some young people have difficulty in accepting the Good News that we announce. Their environment is characterized by a secularised “global youth culture”, which is based upon questionable commercial and economic values, and which prevents long-term relationships and stable commitments. If true dialogue is to take place, we must know more about these

young people, and use language and forms of expression they understand.

While we are prepared to see what is good in other cultures, we must, nevertheless, seek to introduce the values of the Good News into the social environment of young people, so that family life is strengthened, and both the socially and economically disadvantaged, such as the illiterate or the homeless, and those experiencing new forms of poverty, such as those lacking affection, faith or meaning, are liberated.

Teaching is becoming more difficult every day. Parents also have to face the challenge posed by the great diversity and complexity of life today. The admirable commitment of numerous men and women, Brothers and Partners, old and young, working together in the Lasallian mission on behalf of the young and the poor, is increasingly an urgent need. Furthermore, we are glad to see that more women are now involved in the Lasallian mission, and are playing a more significant part in it.

The good example given by credible, authentic, and coherent witnesses is the best means of sharing the Good News. This example is most effective when given by a team or by a community of persons, such as a community of Brothers, Sisters, Catechists or a community of lay persons. Besides the implicit proclamation of the Good News, we must also make this proclamation explicit by such means as public expressions of faith, the catechesis and pastoral care of young people, and the vocations ministry.



For Lasallian establishments to be the living expression of the Good News, they must be places for dialogue in truth, freedom, and hope. In this way, the Brothers and Lasallian Partners can enter into the culture of the young to announce the Good News, and feel

the need themselves for continual conversion. Among Lasallian institutions, the school is an ideal place for an inter-religious and ecumenical dialogue which will bear witness to the values of all forms of faith. Lasallians working in universities have the opportunity to contribute to our mission, in a special way, by their commitment to research in the field of the faith development of young people, whatever their religion, and by the training and accompaniment of those persons entrusted with the difficult task of sharing the Good News in an increasingly secularized and multi-religious context.

The Lasallian charism is already a source of inspiration in the context of multi-cultural and multi-religious societies. Young people from all cultures and religious traditions have the right and freedom to benefit from, and to live according to the Lasallian charism.

For many young people, there is a widening gap between themselves and the institutional Church. The Lasallian school becomes the

place where they experience the message of the Good News in a way that touches their hearts, their needs, and their concerns.

The sharing of the Good News is more credible and more authentic when the young and their educators are in solidarity with the poor in the pursuit of justice. In this context young people are able to perceive the vocational call to commit themselves to the Lasallian mission, including as a Brother of the Christian Schools.

Many experiences around the world suggest that a good formula for faith development is one that integrates religious education, service, and community. To neglect any one of these three defeats the aim of the whole process.

Recommendation 9

That each Lasallian, each Lasallian group and each Lasallian programme of renewal or formation adopt the following guiding principles:

- *FAITH sharing (this makes possible inter-religious and ecumenical dialogue),*
- *SERVICE of the poor through*

education,

- *COMMUNITY building.*

Proposition 13

That each Region, District, Sub-District, and Delegation, urged on by the person responsible for the sector, establish, either independently or jointly with other sectors, a commission to provide reflection, leadership and coordination for organisations which, in our institutions, work with and for young people. This commission, having in view the faith development and apostolic commitment of young people, will be responsible for:

- **directing and coordinating structures responsible for the pastoral ministry of youth,**
- **creating and running Lasallian youth groups,**
- **providing initial and continuing formation for those accompanying youth groups.**

During the course of the year 2003, this commission will report to Brother Superior General and provide an evaluation regarding what it has accomplished.

III URGENT EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

INTRODUCTION

The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, like many other people and organisations, is clearly and patently aware of the urgent need that children, young people and adults have for education, at the beginning of this new century. Faithful to the original inspiration



of St. John Baptist de La Salle, it has spoken of this on numerous occasions in recent years, and particularly in the following documents, which are the fruit of the first-hand experience of Lasallians, and of consultation with international organisations which work

resolutely to promote education:-

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- *Circular 435 of the General Chapter of 1993, pp 18 - 29;*
 - *the letter of the Superior General of January 1999;*
 - *the Report on the 5 colloquia, June 1999;*
 - *the Report of Brother Superior to the 43rd General Chapter, p 19, 95.*
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Given this educational need, the Commission proposes to strengthen the commitment of the Institute, for the next seven years, in the following four areas where the need is particularly urgent:

- the rights of the child,
- educational renewal
- the explicit proclamation of the Gospel, where this possible
- Lasallian presence in multi-religious societies.

Lasallian centres of higher education should bring their own specific strengths to bear on these urgent issues through their programmes of research and professional training.

1. THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

OBSERVATIONS

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) is an internationally ratified agreement to oppose the exploitation of children and young people. Although the Convention was recommended by the 42nd. General Chapter (Circular 435, p.23, 2.1), and again in the Pastoral Letter of the Superior for 1999, its contents are little known and understood by Brothers and Partners.

Cultural norms are not always consistent with the articles of the Convention. Children often are not sufficiently aware of their rights under the Convention.

GUIDELINES

1. Brothers and Partners need to be more aware of the contents of the Convention.
2. The implementation of the Convention has to be adapted to local conditions.



3. The Lasallian educational mission should concentrate on children whose rights are not protected.
4. The response of the Brothers and Partners to the demands of the Convention must be inspired by Gospel values.

Proposition 14

In order that the rights of the child be considered as a major focus of concern for the Lasallian mission of education during the next seven years, each District, Sub-District and Delegation should include this question in its plan of action. It will appoint at least one Brother or Partner who will help it:

- to cooperate with local organisations which work for the promotion of the rights of the child
- to detect local violations of the rights of children;
- to alert local authorities when children's rights are violated;
- to ensure that its schools and universities teach and observe the rights of the child;
- to maintain contact with the secretariat for the educational mission.

This project will be evaluated periodically.

2. EDUCATIONAL RENEWAL

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Chapter acknowledges and values highly the educational work of the 68,000 Brothers, teachers and educators who, together and throughout the Institute, are an educative influence by being present among their pupils and students "from morning till night". It urges them to continue exercising their ministry with great dynamism. It addresses this encouragement, especially, to those who face great difficulties at the present

time, in particular in their attempts to introduce educational renewal.

Recommendations 10

That Districts and Regions organise continuing formation programmes for Brothers and Lasallian Associates and partners, which will enable them to respond positively to the rapid, profound and worldwide changes that affect modern society.

Recommendation 11

That during the intercapitular period, all Lasallian establishments stress in their educational programmes the following characteristics which should identify them clearly as being ours:

- the sense of community and fraternity as a response to individualism and loss of identity;
- the fight against poverty and situations of injustice;
- education for justice and peace, tolerance and solidarity;
- formation of persons who are both just and free.

Brother Visitor and his Council will require every Lasallian establishment to draw up concrete plans for providing opportunities for

first-hand experience inspired by these characteristics, and they will evaluate the organisation of these schemes and their results.

Recommendation 12

In order to give a concrete response to the educational needs of the poor, over the next 7 years, the Institute, at its various levels, should undertake new projects in the field of literacy in rural and urban areas (primary schools, evening courses, correspondence courses, radio broadcast courses). The initiative could be taken by Brothers and/or Lasallian Associates and partners. It could also be an apostolate for Lasallian Volunteers.

Proposition 15

That, in the course of the next 2 years, the Institute Secretariat for the Educational Mission, using current means of communication, establish a network of Brothers and Lasallian Partners; that this network be in contact with competent centres within the Institute, and with organisations outside.

The purpose of this network will be to share information, ideas

and research, particularly in the following areas:

- the rights of the child;**
- the means for developing educational communities which are fraternal and rooted in the Gospel;**
- experiences and projects to promote justice and peace, the service of the poor and literacy;**
- pedagogical innovation, schemes for educating and evangelising .**

The secretariat for the educational mission will take the appropriate means to ensure the effective communication of this information and research to Lasallian educators.

The Commission suggests the following approach:

Regarding the priority concerns mentioned above, the secretariat for the educational mission could call on particularly competent Brothers and Partners and other experts. It would establish working teams with members spread around the Lasallian world, dealing with assigned priority concerns.

These persons would agree to form themselves into a kind of

“temporary association” to work on the chosen priority concern, and would meet from time to time at the invitation of the secretariat, and at its expense. Obviously, these persons would set up their own network of experts locally, making use of the possibilities offered by non-Lasallian organisations. This approach would make it possible to practice Lasallian association in a new and flexible way.

3. EXPLICIT PROCLAMATION OF THE FAITH

REFERENCES

Rule 12, 15, 15a, 15b, 15c;

Declaration 38, 40, 52;

Pastoral Letter of Brother Superior, January 1997;

Report of the Brother Superior General to the 43rd General Chapter, p. 19, prop. 32;

OBSERVATIONS

1. The explicit proclamation of the Good News poses problems in all continents:

- either because of the multi-religious context,
- or because of dechristianisation,

secularisation and unbelief.

2. When young people are forced to listen to the explicit proclamation of the Good News, they tend to respond negatively, feeling that they are not being respected.

3. The explicit proclamation of the Good News takes place during religion lessons, as part of the school timetable, and during extracurricular pastoral activities.



4. There are many resources available throughout the Institute, but they are not often shared with others. On the other hand, we are aware of the constant effort that has to be made to adapt the language of these materials to that of today's young people.

5. The explicit proclamation of the Good News is undertaken in par-

ticular by partners working with the Brothers. Despite difficulties, their dedication is remarkable, demonstrated by their request for information and for the provision of catechetical training.

GUIDELINES

1. The Chapter calls on the Brothers and Partners to renew their commitment to the catechetical mission and their specific formation in this domain.

2. Since acceptance of faith is a free act, the explicit proclamation of the Good News should be proposed to all. In this way constructive dialogue can be established.

3. Given the new forms of communication, Brothers and Partners ought to be creative in proclaiming the Good News. In this connection, it is important

- to gain access to the world of young people and their culture, which includes Gospel values;
- be open-minded regarding other youth movements not organised by Lasallians.

Proposition 16

That, before the end of 2001, every Regional Coordinator, in coordination with those responsible for Districts, Sub-Districts and Delegations, establish a Commission for the stimulation and education of faith, whose task will be:

- to study ways and means of adapting our language and our methods of educating in the faith to the culture of young people in the 21st century;

- to share information about existing projects as well as available resources so as to help and encourage Brothers and partners involved in faith education;

- to find ways of including in school programmes and/or in pastoral programmes social activities to help the poor;

- to offer practical suggestions regarding the training and guidance of Brothers and partners involved in faith education.

Periodically, and at least every three years, this commission will evaluate its work with the Regional Coordinator and the Visitors.

4. LASALLIAN PRESENCE IN MULTI-RELIGIOUS SOCIETIES

REFERENCES:

Report of the Br. Superior General to the 43rd. General Chapter, pp 92-95;

The Lasallian Mission of Human and Christian Education: A Shared Mission Institute Bulletin Nos, 243 and 245;

Circular 435, Reflections on the Missionary Policy of the Institute;

“Dialogue and Proclamation, Reflections and Guidelines Regarding Inter-Faith Dialogue” (Rome, May 19th. 1991).

OBSERVATIONS

1. The Lasallian Mission is already being pursued in multi-cultural and multi-religious societies.

2. In these societies, Brothers and Partners experience a wide range of reactions to their presence, ranging from intolerance to indifference on the one hand, to respect often, on the other.

3. The work of the Institute in this multi-religious context is not well known in other parts of the Institute.



GUIDELINES

The presence of the Institute in multi-religious societies calls for inter-faith dialogue on four levels:

a. Life: Brothers, Partners and young people build up friendly relations with others and nurture a fraternity which transcends religious differences.

b. School: A place where the child is the focus of concern, whatever his religious beliefs. It is a place where human and religious education is given, and the educational service of the poor is a priority.

c. Service: Despite their religious differences, Brothers, partners and young people show solidarity in

the service of the poor.

d. Institution: There is inter-faith dialogue at national and international gatherings.

Recommendation 13

That the Superior General and his Council include among their priorities the promotion of the Lasallian Mission in multi-religious societies by:

- encouraging the exchange of information about current situations, about the guidelines and initiatives of the Brothers and Partners working in those societies and, in particular, information about those related to the educational service of the poor.
- ensuring the representation of the Institute at international inter-faith meetings and events.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|---|
| The Mission Today: Urgency and Hope | 1 |
| I The Educational Service of the Poor | 1 |
| II Evangelization | 5 |
| III Urgent Educational Needs | 8 |

