



o. Introduction

o.1 Thousands of Stories of Brothers Today

We Brothers live very diverse stories in the world today. A young Brother who is completing his initial formation is sent to his first community where he works in a poor area of his country. A Brother at age 35 who somehow lost the passion for consecrated life rediscovers new fire in an educational project that serves immigrant children. A middle-aged Brother lives his role with burning passion as director of a ministry that works with children, young people, teachers, and catechists. A senior Brother continues his ministry in an educational project to support young volunteers and young Brothers. Thousands of stories. Stories of Brothers in community, in today's world, who live passionately the mystery of knowing that they have been called by the Father, and who walk with Jesus to make him present to children and young people who have been abandoned, faithfully following the incessant inspiration of the Spirit who consecrates them in the Church.

But in the Institute other stories are lived that are very different. Stories of young Brothers who are discouraged and who are withering away in communities that are apathetic and without passion. Middle-aged Brothers who, tired and overworked, are motivated only by a vague awareness of professionalism. Senior Brothers who feel alone and betrayed. Brothers who leave the Institute discouraged or who are impassioned by a person or by another vision and place in the world or in the Church. Brothers who question themselves about the lack of new candidates for the community, or the growing increase of lay vocations, about the slow and irreversible ageing of a community which in other times had an important role in the nation or in the city where

it was established, about a source which seems to have dried up.

In summary, others of us live stories that are very ambiguous: stories that run the gamut between *death* and *life*, stories that are overwhelmed by doubt and perplexity, but sometimes, too, stories of striking passion in favor of suffering men and women.

Why are our stories so diverse? Which are the variables that determine that one story may be a story of hope while another one becomes a story of despair or ambiguity?

In this working document we seek to reflect on our identity by telling our personal stories. the way they are unfolding, the way we want them to become in the future. What do we mean when we call ourselves Brothers?

o.2 Involved together in a process of Reflection

Brother Superior General and his Council wanted to create a process by which all Brothers, insofar as it is possible, could participate and interact with one another in a common reflection about what we understand by "*Being Brothers Today*".

In naming the committee to design and carry out this process, care was taken to look for five Brothers from different continents, and it was their task to begin a process of reflection that would be as interactive as possible, as requested by recommendations 37 and 38 of the 43rd General Chapter of 2000. A process that, from where Brothers are living now, would draw up a motivating and inspiring text. For its part, this text would

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not have an end in itself. We did not want to write a new Declaration in the style of the *Declaration* from the Chapter of 1966 - 1967. Neither was it our intention to search for definitions to determine new propositions and recommendations about our identity about which the next, the 44th General Chapter, will have to speak and legislate.

0.3 Towards the General Chapter: A Witness and a Sentinel

What we did want is that the text be like a *witness* that would speak the various forms in which the Brothers express their experience of being Brothers in the Church and in today's world. It would be like a *sentinel* that keeps vigil in the dark for the purpose of identifying the new language that is emerging among ourselves, new accents, new places where the Spirit is leading us in our history. We wanted to find new light and inspiration in the sources of the Gospel, as well as in Biblical and contemporary images which could better open our daily lives to the tran-

scendent mystery of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. At the same time we wanted to recall those foundational images, in the journey of association made by De La Salle with his first Brothers, associated to live together and to proclaim the Gospel to the poor.

Furthermore, in light of the most recent theology of consecrated life in the Church and of shared mission with lay persons in light of Vatican II, as well as the centrality of the vow of association, we hoped to let Brothers today have their say. In this way, identifying together the Biblical and Lasallian images that are bursting with living energy in our world and in the Church today, we would be able to give a reason for our hope.

We would try, therefore, to identify the shadows and the lights, the doubts and the new clues, the areas of our personal, community, Church, and professional lives that could demand study at the 44th General Chapter.

Our work, then, would conclude with the Chapter. Our text simply would reflect the process of reflection, searching, and sharing like a *witness* or a *cloud of witnesses*. It would point to the Chapter like a *sentinel*, to proclaim places where we believe the Spirit is leading us in this new millennium, and nothing more.

0.4 The Parts of this Document

With this perspective in mind, the committee proposed, first of all, to consult Brothers from each Lasallian Region, grouped as follows: Asia and the Pacific Rim, Africa and Madagascar, Europe and the Middle East, North America and Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean. Their contributions make up the second part of this text: our present reality, the reality of being a Brother as we live it in the Church in the world of today. In the third part, we direct our attention to our common roots, toward that which impassioned De La Salle along with his first associates, for the purpose of identifying what it was they understood about what it meant to be a Brother at the time of our foundation. Finally, in the fourth part, the most interactive part of all since it is this part that will be developed with the contributions of many Brothers, we contrast the aspirations that we live in the present with the central values of our Gospel origins. This final section, therefore, will recommend a communal discernment process to be used by all the Brothers with a view of identifying our common horizon in the third millennium. Those three parts will be preceded by a first part which deals with the context in which our theological reflection starts.

