



Dear Brothers,

In my first words as Superior to the 43rd General Chapter, I shared three certainties that encouraged me: the certainty that *"the Lord guides and conducts history with wisdom and love,"* the certainty that *"his presence is always close, and is recognized above all in poor children and young people,"* and the certainty that *"we have been called to participate in God's work."* Along with these certainties that have encouraged me in my ministry with all of you, there is also the conviction that I have expressed since that time: *"Being a Brother is our greatest secret, our greatest strength, and our greatest treasure."*

Document 3, *"Being Brothers Today,"* which I am pleased to present to you, is one of the texts that we are writing with a view to the preparation of the 44th General Chapter in 2007. It is not only a text, but a process that invites us to look deeply at our certainties and our convictions about the mystery of being Brothers in the Church in the world today.

We make this document available to all the Brothers in the hope that it might serve to spark significant and sustained dialogue about what is most important in our being Brothers.

A Very Different Context from that in which Emerged the Declaration (1966 - 1967)

There is no doubt that the *Declaration on the Brother in the World Today* constitutes one of the most important documents from the 39th General Chapter. That document also emerged from an interactive process that occurred between the two Chapter sessions and especially during the second session. As it dealt with some problems relating to the vows, formation, the life of prayer or community life, it was noted that it lacked something like a *spinal column* that gave backbone to the tasks of the Chapter so that they could be structured and unified.

Among other issues, the Brothers back then wanted to clarify some points which to them seemed to be fundamental:

- what should be understood today by schools and by the poor,
- what apostolic tasks ought the Brother to assume,
- what was the meaning of religious consecration,
- what was the relationship between the Brother's apostolate and his employ,
- how to proclaim Jesus Christ to a heterogenous audience,
- how to respond precisely to the calls of people in developing countries

BEING BROTHERS TODAY

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Brothers of the Christian Schools – Via Aurelia, 476 – 00165 ROME, Italy

A Very Different Context Forty Years Later for the 44th General Chapter (2007)

Forty years later, we find ourselves in an Institute where many Brothers have lived courageously, sometimes painfully, this life journey of renewal that was proposed then. But we also find ourselves with a new generation that never experienced the previous situation, nor did they experience the changes introduced by that Chapter. Changes which in turn led us through subsequent General Chapters until reaching a new place which was recognized with great excitement by the Chapter of 2000.

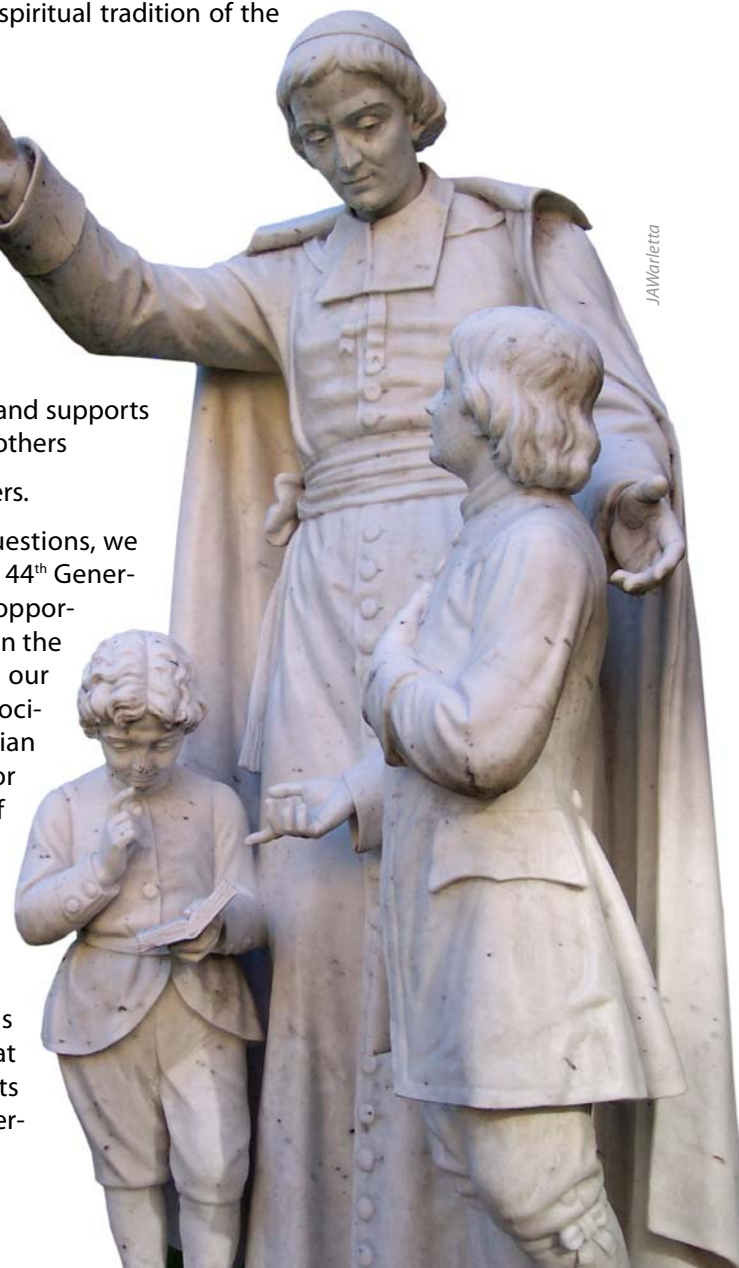
It is from this new place that we Brothers, all of us, those from yesterday and those from today, are called to think about what we understand by Being Brothers Today, starting from new questions and new realities that have emerged in this last forty years. In fact, the questions have changed and today, among other things, we have to clarify some fundamental new points. Among others, we have to study the following:

- Educational pressing needs in today's world and how to respond to them
- The importance of the meaning of our Brothers' community, as our first association
- The way to integrate today in our lives the constitutive elements of our vocation: Consecration to God, Community, and the Educational and Evangelizing Service to young people, especially the poor and those who are at risk
- The growing number of committed laity who participate in the educational mission and who are enthusiastic about the living spiritual tradition of the Institute with which they identify
- Associates who are already identified as such and those who are seeking news ways to be associated for mission
- The creation of new structures for decision-making by Brothers and laity in the area of mission
- Pastoral ministry of vocations, the little visibility of the Brother's vocation in some local churches
- The importance of a community life that facilitates and supports an ongoing process of conversion among all the Brothers
- Support structures and mentoring for young Brothers.

In this context and with these and with other new questions, we are not seeking to define a new *spinal column* for our 44th General Chapter. But we do want the Brothers to have the opportunity, by means of an interactive process, to reflect on the mystery of our vocation and on the new role that our community, in terms of its being our first form of association, should have at the heart of the great Lasallian association for the educational service of the poor which we share with thousands and thousands of men and women on every continent.

Looking Toward the 44th General Chapter, what can this document contribute?

It is important to highlight what is different about this document in relation to the other documents that point to the General Chapter. In contrast to the reports that will reach the Chapter, such as those from the Inter-



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national Assembly, the *ad hoc* Committee on the Rule, from the Intercapitular Meeting, and from the report of the Superior and his Council, this document is intended to be a “*working tool*,” a text that is a witness and a sentinel which urges all Brothers to ask themselves about what it is that is most profound in their lives as Brothers.

The Brothers who worked on drawing up this document tried to respect the wishes of the 43rd General Chapter, facilitating an interactive process prior to the next Chapter. In fact, this first draft was preceded by an interactive process that allowed the participation of a relatively small number of Brothers from every continent. The draft of those voices from five continents had no other purpose than that of causing an even broader interaction. First of all, among the Brothers in each District, Sub-District, or Delegation who will participate in the short session of CIL in 2006. Those Brothers will, in turn, prepare instruments for more interaction in all the Districts, Sub-Districts, and Delegations, so that before May 2007, all Brothers will have been able to read, react to, and enrich this text based on those meetings, to be integrated into the Capitular process.

This initial text that we propose today, therefore, is only the beginning of the telling of a story that will include the life story of all the Brothers. It is not a declaration of principles, nor does it represent a definition of the constitutive elements of our identity.

The Purpose of this Text

Since we are not seeking a new Declaration, this text ought not to be understood as a legislative text that will need to be studied with a view to legislate about our life. It is intended to be an inspiring and Gospel-based text that may stimulate a rich dialogue among the Brothers.

Just as the five Brothers who drew up this document entered into profound dialogue among themselves and with Brothers from the different Lasallian Regions, the Brothers who will participate in the 2006 CIL session are invited to participate in that dialogue of faith, sharing their experience as Brothers, critically analyzing and confirming what the text has to say about being Brother in each continent.

During retreats, on days of recollection, during days of prayer, and at community or District meetings, the Brothers will be able to share what it is they experience as Brothers today, not only to enrich the descriptions of the five continental voices, but so that in prayer, in light of contemporary Biblical icons that guide and organize our being Brothers today, they might encounter the source, ever new and refreshing, of the Gospel and of the life journey of our origins. That return to the sources of the Gospel and of the Founder, should not only increase our conviction that the Spirit is made manifest in a very special way in the past, but that today also that same Spirit is leading us to new places we want to embrace with deep faith, passionate about God, the poor, and about young people.

The interactive process, then, is above all a process of community discernment that may help us to recognize where it is that the Spirit is leading us today.

In the past we have been accustomed to legislative types of Assemblies. Perhaps within the Institute we have less experience in the implementation of processes that involve community discernment. This is a privileged time in our history to open ourselves to the “*inspiration and movement*” of the Spirit, as Saint John Baptist de La Salle often said.

Toward the 44th General Chapter: the Relationship Between This Working Document and the General Chapter

First of all, this community discernment, both critical and Gospel-based, ought to lead all of us not only to an awareness of the new promise and demands of our “*Being Brothers Today*,” but also to see more clearly those factors that in our lives as Brothers give us more hope, those obstructions that we have to overcome, and the decisions that we should face for the purpose of permitting a reconfiguration of not only our personal lives as Brothers, but of our lives with our Brothers in community, and finally, of the community life of the Brothers in relation to the great Lasallian association.

This text, enriched in that way, could be the object of a deeper study at the General Chapter, including, of



course, notes and observations of the Capitulants that may emerge from the personal and community contributions, in the implementation of the interactive process throughout the Institute.

I ask the Lord that we might have the courage, the boldness, and the holiness that the Founder and the first Brothers had to face together the risks of the future with the certainty that it is the Lord who conducts history with wisdom and love, and who is present in our midst, associating us with his Work.

In the hope that this open and dynamic working document, will accompany this interactive process of community discernment, and eventually culminate in the 44th General Chapter, I am

Yours in our Lord,

*Brother Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría
Superior General.*