

The International Commission on Association: Convictions and Challenges

Gery Short

The topic of association in and among the Brothers and their lay partners and members of other religious congregations has received much attention in the International Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and the Lasallian world recently. The theme of the 43rd General Chapter of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Rome, spring 2000, was “Associated for the Educational Service of the Poor.” Of the six commissions organized around this theme, two dealt specifically with the concept and the experience of association; a third, on governance, focused much of its attention on the formulation of decision-making structures that include Brothers and their lay colleagues, associates, and partners.

Purpose

In spite of their special attention to the topic of association, the Chapter delegates recognized that time was too limited to do justice to this dynamic topic. The discussion required far more collaboration with their partners than was available to them during the Chapter.

Hence the Superior and General Council formed the International Commission on Association, whose primary task is to continue in a more studied, extensive and collaborative manner the work begun by the 43rd General Chapter on the topic of association. (A description of the work of the Commission follows as Appendix 1.)

Convictions and Challenges

The Commission has met annually since the spring of 2001. Each meeting, lasting one week, has resulted in a new level of understanding of association in the Lasallian world and an evolution in thinking.

The convictions and challenges I present here are personal; they arise from conversations, presentations, observations from my Commission work these past four years, and interactions with Lasallian educators, Brothers, and Partners internationally, regionally, and, most extensively, in the District of San Francisco. I believe that many Commission members would concur with most of these convictions and challenges; however, the Commission has not yet published anything. I take personal responsibility for these thoughts.

Conviction No. 1—Embracing Association in Our Midst

During the 2003–2004 school year, I facilitated conversations on the topic of association among the dedicated teachers and administrators in the District of San Francisco. This type of discussion is part of the Commission’s plan for discovering expressions and experiences of association among individuals and groups throughout the international Institute.

During a recent discussion in Portland, Oregon, among educators from two Lasallian schools, I was struck once again by the sincere

expressions of the association that these Lasallian educators have experienced and expressed. They described how association exists in the support individuals receive from fellow teachers and administrators, their dedication and passion to the mission, the founding of a new school to serve economically marginalized students, the support by an established school of this new school, and the deep appreciation and satisfaction of being a part of this community and the Lasallian mission.

I left the Portland discussion convinced that these experiences are heartfelt, realistic expressions of association, lived in Portland in two schools, between two schools, and within the larger Lasallian mission of the District, the Region, and the international Lasallian community.

I also realized that we might be guilty of searching for association as if it were something beyond our present experience, something that we must “add” to what we already are doing well in many places across the international Institute, certainly in the District. Perhaps we ought to focus more on what is happening in our midst, what already exists, embracing what is rather than looking for something out there.

In the Emmaus story (Luke 24:13–35), meeting the risen Jesus causes the disciples to discover the Messiah in their midst, “our hearts burning within us.” The two disciples leave Jerusalem following the death of Jesus, consumed with sadness and confusion over the loss of the one they believe is the Messiah. They encounter a stranger on the road who seems completely oblivious to recent events. As they tell him the tragic story, he begins to teach them—about Jesus, about the fulfillment of the Scriptures, about the meaning of Jesus’ crucifixion. His teachings touch a chord in the two disciples and fill them with hope, excitement, and passion—a “burning in their hearts.” Later in the evening, while sharing a meal, they realize that the stranger is the Risen Jesus. He was in their midst the entire time, but they didn’t know it because they were looking elsewhere—out there—for a savior whom, in fact, they were experiencing right here.

Similarly, the people in Portland describe how they discover association in their daily experience of ministering to the young people entrusted to their care. For them, association is not out there in some yet-to-be-created group or activity; association is already present in their midst in the ministry of education that fills their hearts with hope, passion, and the presence of God—a most powerful and life-giving heartburn indeed.

Julie Michaels, principal of Totino–Grace High School (Fridley, MN) in an impressive keynote presentation during the summer 2003 Midwest District Congress on Mission, outlined her convictions and her commitment to the Lasallian mission, her dedication to this mission as a leader. She posed some challenges to the assembly delegates by introducing herself as an unintentional partner. Some were struck by the seeming awkwardness of this statement. How much more intentional could she be, especially as she purposely integrates the challenge of balancing her family life and her role as a mother with leading student service trips, leading the faculty as principal and spiritual leader? Clearly she is a living example of an associate. Perhaps the definitions and assumptions we communicate about association define what we mean by intentional community members. As a parent, Julie’s primary community must be her spouse and children, but shouldn’t people recognize her commitment and dedication to the Lasallian educational mission and community as a valid expression of association and intentionality?

I know that for some readers, this discussion of association is confusing and distracting. Part of the confusion arises because some people do not accept what is. Based on my experiences in Portland and at Julie’s presentation, I see the need to examine our expressions, our categories, and our assumptions so that, like the Apostles, we can recognize and celebrate the presence of association in our midst.

Conviction No. 2—New Identity and Movement

- Dynamic and led by the Holy Spirit
- Not a replication of old structures

In preparation for the Commission's first meeting in Rome in spring 2001, I read the advance materials on the purpose of the Commission and the General Chapter statements that led to the Commission's formation. I must admit my concern going into this meeting. The 43rd General Chapter states:

The original vow of the service of the poor, which associated the Founder with twelve Brothers in 1694, is the source of Lasallian associations of lay persons and religious who wish to be part of the Lasallian mission. This is where new forms of association for the mission have their origin.

(*Circular 447*, 43rd General Chapter, October 1, 2000, 3)

By referring to the vow of 1694 as the source of new forms of association, the Chapter seemed to imply that association must include vows and a type of intentional community reflective of the Brothers' life.

Since 1985, I have been responsible for the formation of Lasallian educators in the District of San Francisco. During the past five years, I have listened to conversations among participants in the Lasallian Leadership Institute, from this District and others, on the topic of formal and informal association. Many of these laypeople share a deep sense of their commitment and vocation as Lasallian educators and meet the General Chapter's definition of associates. These conversations taught me that the great majority are not interested in vows or living in an intentional community.

I arrived at the first Commission meeting perplexed, taking seriously the writings of the 43rd General Chapter and my experience with these most committed, talented Lasallian edu-

cators. At the Commission's first session, Brother Miguel Campos, General Councilor and Commission member, presented his historical and spiritual perspective on the topic of association and the Institute. He helped resolve what I had perceived as an inherent conflict. Brother Miguel referred to Brother John Johnston's Pastoral Letter of 2000, "Living Today Our Founding Story":

We need to link ourselves to the founding story but not be bound by it; we need to allow the power of our founding story and De La Salle's interpretation of it to form, challenge and inspire us.

(John Johnston, FSC, *Pastoral Letter 2000*, "Living Today Our Founding Story," p. 19)

Brother Miguel suggested that instead of focusing on structures, we ought to focus on how De La Salle and the early Brothers responded to the needs of the young people they met. They broke with the existing institutional models and traditions by forming a community of educators, Brothers, to teach young people in the situations they faced.

Two days later, the Commission members went to Assisi for a day of reflection and prayer. I reflected on how De La Salle, like Saint Francis, started a movement. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, this movement was dynamic, responsive to the needs of the time, and reflecting a new, exciting way of living the Gospel. Both movements were unique; they required a new way of envisioning Church and reflected the deepest convictions and spirituality of these two great saints.

I am convinced that we must link ourselves to the founding story but not be bound by it. We must ask, "Where is the Holy Spirit leading us?" The situation we face today requires us, like De La Salle and the early Brothers, to create a new model, to be open to discerning how best to respond to the needs of our time and to the presence of the Holy Spirit, revealed in the urgings of Lasallian educators and this movement today. During its recent

meeting, the Commission began using the expression *refoundation* to describe this reality. Like De La Salle and the early Brothers, we must not restrict ourselves to an easy replication of old structures; we must be inspired by the Holy Spirit with the courage to create a new model of Church.

We don't want to propose to our lay partners a form of association that is in reality a *watered-down* version of the Brother's life. Such a proposal is paternalistic and a subtle form of *clericalism* in that its underlying assumption is a spirituality that is both lay and Lasallian is not feasible.

(John Johnston, FSC,
Pastoral Letter 2000, 61)

We need to welcome enthusiastically those who wish to become Lasallian Associates and help them create new and original ways of living the Lasallian charism. They themselves, however, must be the protagonists in this search.

(John Johnston, FSC,
Pastoral Letter 2000, 62)

Conviction No. 3—International Diversity

During the last two Commission meetings (2003 and 2004), the members presented the situation of shared mission and association in various sectors and regions of the world. The extraordinary diversity quickly became obvious. Certain external and internal environmental factors influence this diversity.

External Environment

The Institute includes countries such as the Republic of the Philippines, the only Asian country that is predominantly Catholic. The District of the Philippines has been able to create a vibrant, responsive Lasallian culture across a vast archipelago because of the basic homogeneity of Catholic culture on the main islands. This is in sharp contrast to the situation of the Brothers

and Lasallian educators in other Asian countries, such as Malaysia, where Christianity is a small minority and most Lasallian educators are of other faith traditions.

Economically, the differences between sectors in the southern and the northern hemisphere are substantial. The economic resources in the USA/Toronto Region support formation programs and activities for Lasallian educators that are unavailable in areas with limited economic resources.

Culturally and politically, the lack of government support or, in some cases, outright hostility toward the Brothers and the Lasallian mission affects the development of association. In Vietnam and, until recently, in Central Europe, little discussion of association is possible where the Brothers are not allowed to be involved with schools. Association takes on a different shape and challenge in France, where the state supports Lasallian and other certified independent schools.

Internal Environment

First, the ability of the Brothers to lead a sector is affected by age. For example, a contrast exists between an aging District of Brothers in northern Europe and the relative youth of Brothers in countries such as Sri Lanka and India and across Latin America. Second, the conversation about association is greatly influenced in a Region or a sector by the Brothers' willingness to share authority. The mentality continues in some areas of the world that laypeople work *for*, rather than *with*, the Brothers.

These internal and external factors, more obvious on an international level, can also be true within a sector or a Region of the Institute. This diversity requires everyone to be attentive to the unique situations across the Institute and not impose the same model of association throughout the worldwide Institute. The diversity also reinforces the 43rd General Chapter's recommendation encouraging experimentation with association.

Conviction No. 4—Elements of Association

Given the local and international diversity, I propose four elements that characterize the expression of association as we find it in our living the Lasallian mission.

A. Mission Focus on Serving Poor People

Association requires a clear focus on mission, as the Rule states: “to give a human and Christian education to the young, especially the poor” (article 3). What we are *associating for* must be the advancement of the Lasallian mission. Lasallian spirituality is an apostolic spirituality; ministry is an integral element. Association in the Lasallian world cannot end with a prayer group or a social club; it must be apostolic.

B. Solidarity with Other Lasallian Educators

People who are associated feel connected and bound together beyond the local situation, more widely to a District or Region, and also internationally. They must feel and know they are part of something much larger than their locality.

C. Spirituality Based on Faith

Faith inspires and directs those who are associated, whether by Catholic, Christian, or other religious and faith traditions.

D. A Progressive Vocational Journey

Some lay consultants at the 43rd General Chapter were uncomfortable with the distinction between partner and associate that some Brother capitulants were making. I had two concerns: one, the potential divisiveness that might occur by naming some lay colleagues as associates and others as partners. Following the Chapter, many others across the Institute expressed this same concern. My second worry about catego-

rizing people comes from my experience of witnessing the evolution of personal vocations and commitments beyond what I or others might have predicted.

Hospitality, invitation, inclusiveness, and being brother and sister with students and with one another as educators are basic characteristics of Lasallian education. In coordinating formation programs for the District of San Francisco, I have cherished these values. I continue to be amazed by the positive response of individuals to the invitations extended for formation and leadership.

As people of faith, we are all part of a progressive, evolving, vocational journey. We enter this journey and deepen our commitments through many avenues: meeting the poor, developing relationships with certain individuals or groups of people, as a result of formation opportunities and experiences. I deeply believe that as we discuss association with our lay partners, we must be careful not to compartmentalize or name people in such a way that we interfere with the Holy Spirit in a person’s life and in the life of the Institute. At some point in the journey, a person’s decisions and actions will reveal those who have journeyed farther than others along the road.

When we discuss association, I encourage us to avoid distinguishing one group of lay partners from another. We might inadvertently interfere in someone’s natural, vocational journey. De La Salle’s own story, God acting slowly but surely in his life, illustrates the journey. I concur with Brother John Johnston’s Pastoral Letter 2000:

Rather than focus on who are ‘in’ and who are ‘out,’ we should encourage everyone to become active participants in the task of creating schools that are authentically Lasallian. We should never stop inviting, perhaps more indirectly than directly, all members of the educative community to participate wholeheartedly in the Lasallian tradition.

(Pastoral Letter 2000, p. 51)

Conviction No. 5—Variety of Valid Expressions

By focusing on the essential elements of a Lasallian vocation, I recognize a variety of valid expressions of association. Following are some examples:

- Brothers live their life in community, clearly the most vivid expression of association.
- Signum Fidei is a group of lay partners who commit themselves formally to one another for the sake of Lasallian education.
- Formation groups that participate in an extended formation experience of weeks or months often come to see the members in association with one another.
- Live-in communities of Brothers and laymen and laywomen, often including volunteers, focus on a specific apostolate.
- Networks, such as the Association of San Miguel Schools, are an excellent example of Lasallian educators who associate to advance the education of poor students in the United States of America. These educators in schools from across the country that serve poor children ages 10 to 13, who might “fall between the cracks” and discontinue their education, meet regularly and support one another. They feel a close bond in sharing experiences and best practices through their common bond as Lasallian educators.
- An apostolate associates people in professional work who are fully invested in its mission and see themselves as part of a much larger Lasallian association and mission.

I have experienced and witnessed one form of association among those serving on a District, regional, or international task force. Personally, I have a familial sense of closeness and camaraderie with many Lasallian educators, from a variety of these different situations

and relationships, who share a common mission and history.

Although many people have not expressed a formal commitment, such as Signum Fidei or by living in community, they demonstrate their association with one another in a variety of ways. Brother Antonio Botana calls them *de facto* associates in the Lasallian world. These groups and individuals have not expressed their association with one another formally, but they are *in fact living* in association through their actions and their life. He includes “the associates who are presently working in Lasallian ministries or who even take part in the animation and administration of the District. This is a fairly numerous group” (Report to the Visitors, May 2004, page 4).

Conviction No. 6—Formation

Brother Antonio Botana sums up my conviction on the importance of formation, especially at this point in the history of the Institute:

At times of transition, it is more important to facilitate motivation and formation of persons than to organize structures which “give the impression” that everything is going well.

(Antonio Botana, FSC, “Lasallian Association: The Ongoing Story”, *MEL Bulletin 2*, March 2003, 11)

Both the 42nd and the 43rd General Chapter emphasized the importance of formation of Brothers and their lay colleagues to advance association and shared mission.

During the Midwest District’s August 2003 Congress on Mission, the 200 participants, about an equal number of Brothers and lay colleagues, identified formation as the most important direction for the District for the near future.

The District of San Francisco has invested in formation programs for the past twenty-five years and as a result is well positioned to respond to the challenges of the twenty-first century. The

investment in formation has helped develop this culture of association across the District during a time when fewer Brothers have been available.

Challenges

1. The Role and Influence of the Brothers

In spring 2002, the International Commission on Association studied the responses to a global survey of *associates*. One question concerned the most valuable and important formative experience. The most important and significant formative experience for the respondents is a relationship with a particular Brother or a Brothers' community. The first challenge, with the dwindling number of Brothers in the north and the younger age of Brothers in the south, is to identify who can provide this formative experience for so many people, especially those new to the Lasallian mission.

The issue of association raises a number of canonical issues. The Brothers hold the essential link to the institutional Church. How can the Brothers continue to serve as this link and also promote the association with laypeople, especially with regard to governance?

Over the past forty years, the Brothers have been prophetic in their declarations and courageous in their response to the urgings of the Spirit by welcoming and recognizing the critical role of their brothers and sisters (married, ordained, single, and vowed) for the mission. However, some Brothers seem reluctant or hesitant to share authority, especially with their lay partners or associates. In some areas of the world, especially in "younger sectors", the young brothers might feel ambivalent or threatened by the growing Lasallian movement and resist efforts toward shared decision making and authority. Some laypeople are overly deferential to the Brothers and reinforce this "clerical mentality." Finding ways to move beyond these hesitations among some Brothers and lay associates who are dependent upon the Brothers is an important challenge.

2. Integrating Life Commitments

As the discussion of association advances, we must acknowledge, validate, and embrace the life commitments of partners and associates. As deeply and personally committed as I am to this mission, my first responsibility is to my family, my spouse and children. If I ignore or diminish this responsibility, I undermine my vocation. Any expression of association must provide for and recognize these life commitments. Often I feel that we might inadvertently give the impression that putting our family and spouse in front of our responsibility to a school or our professional role limits our commitment. We need to celebrate these commitments and find a way to integrate these life choices (what the Church calls "states of life") into the discussion of association.

3. Structures and Language

Any new model will require new structures, perhaps new language. The 43rd General Chapter opened the door to develop new structures for mission, including mission councils and assemblies for decision making related to the promotion of the mission. We must continue to monitor the development of these structures to assure their effectiveness.

Some people believe that the words "associate" and "association" are too connected to the Brothers' life, history, and vocation and that we need a new word or words to dispel the confusion. At its recent meeting, in April 2004, the Commission addressed the question of language, especially the term *association*. In spite of the historical complications that exist, many Commission members agreed that the word *association* must continue in use. The historical expression and the power of its meaning are too important to the Institute and to the Lasallian movement. Many Commission members recommended that we "re-invent or redefine association" rather than replace it with something less meaningful. The term *association*, so fundamental to the Institute and to the Lasallian

movement, must be carried into any “refoundation.”

Commission members expressed discomfort with the categories provided by the General Chapter and with other categorization taking place in various parts of the Institute. For example, the Lwanga District in Africa has added “collaborators” to the categories of partners and associates to distinguish people who are even less committed. Several commission members are much more comfortable with the ideas in Brother John Johnston’s article, “Lasallian Association for Mission: 1679–2007; A Personal Reflection on an Ongoing Story” (included in this present collection). Referring to the work of the Preparatory Commission of the 43rd General Chapter in selecting the theme “Associated for the Educational Service of the Poor,” Brother John writes:

Associated has to be interpreted to mean all persons participating in Lasallian mission in serious but diverse ways and depths. Since at that time the Brothers constituted only 4 per cent of those in Lasallian mission, it would have made no sense to think of the Brothers only as “associated.” Nor could the word refer only to those belonging to groups or associations, or limited to those called associates. “Association” has to be understood as an umbrella expression.

(“Associated for the Educational Service of the Poor,” John Johnston, FSC, p. 3)

4. Formation and Providing Opportunities

The Institute must continue to emphasize the development of effective formation programs and resources. These programs must reflect the needs and the circumstances of the participants. For example, in the USA/Toronto Region, a popular program has been the three-week summer program over three years, the Buttimer Institute. To create a schedule more “family friendly” to laypeople, partners, and associates, the Region designed the Lasallian Leadership

Institute, which requires only one week during the summer and two weekends during the school year over three years. These types of adaptations need to be considered in the development of new formation experiences. Simply adopting the Brothers’ program model and schedule might be too disruptive to families.

Many Lasallian educators are looking for more than what present programs and structures provide; specifically, they want to share more deeply in the life and spirituality. We must create more formation opportunities to support individuals and groups, along with the structures to satisfy these hungers and requests.

Brother Antonio Botana, in his presentation to the Visitors at their May 2004 meeting in Rome, acknowledges the link between formation and association:

Lasallian formation ought to be followed by the sharing of responsibility for the mission in the same way that entrusting responsibilities follows after initial and ongoing formation, which will permit the fulfillment of the charge. . . . Districts and Regions that have the most complete formation programs are also the ones that possess better structures for participation.

In some Districts, in spite of having some sufficiently prepared laypeople, important responsibilities just have not been entrusted to them, for the dominant criterion prevails that as long as there are Brothers able to fulfill these functions, they should not be given to laypeople. It is a paternalism that is opposed to the basic principle of Lasallian association.

(Antonio Botana, FSC, Report to the Visitors, May 2004, 2–3)

Providing more meaningful leadership opportunities is a critical step in the continuation and further deepening that follows formation experience and leads to a more profound and ongoing commitment to the mission.

5. The Mission

Keeping the mission in front of us during this discussion of association is critical. The only reason for this conversation is the mission. De La Salle and the Brothers have recognized over the years that through association, the mission becomes more stable and effective. Our challenge is to make association the critical means to this end. Over the last five to ten years, Districts in the USA/Toronto Region have founded many new schools and works to serve poor students. One reason is the number of laypeople who have stepped up and taken responsibility for the mission alongside the Brothers. A new sense of association will ultimately free Brothers and laypeople to participate in the mission, especially to poor children who deserve this education.



Gery Short is Director of the Office of Education for the District of San Francisco (Napa, CA) and has been associated with the Lasallian mission since 1978. He lives in Sonoma, CA, with his wife Rosanne and their three children, Nora (19), Megan (16), and Joseph (13). Gery is presently serving his second three-year term on the International Commission for Association.

Appendix 1: The International Commission on Association

Why the Commission and the topic of association? Why all the attention?

“Association” for the mission as a fundamental character of the Brothers’ vocation and of the Lasallian mission has been a consistent element in the Brothers’ vow formula from 1691 to the present. Much has been written on the primacy and essential character of association for the Institute. (See the bibliography: Michel Sauvage, FSC; 2003 Pastoral Letter of Alvaro Rodríguez Echeverría, FSC, articles by John Johnston, FSC, and Luke Salm, FSC in this present collection.)

In light of the history of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, many Lasallian educators today recognize that “together and by association,” working in solidarity and communion with one another, is as central to the Brothers’ vocation and to the Lasallian mission as the educational service of poor students.

Factors that influence the discussion on association

The following factors explain why the discussion of association has become so popular today.

1. The Second Vatican Council recognized and made legitimate the role of the laity in the Church (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 39). The situation today follows from almost forty years of the promotion of the laity and the growing experience of the “priesthood of all baptized” (no. 10).

2. The enhanced role of the laity in the Church at large following Vatican II has had specific repercussions among religious congregations.

The new phenomena being experienced in these days is that some members of the laity are asking to participate in the charismatic ideals of Institutes. This has given

rise to interesting initiatives and new institutional forms of association. . . . Whereas at times in the recent past, collaboration came about as a means of supplementing the decline of consecrated persons necessary to carry out activities, now it is growing out of the need to share responsibility not only in the carrying out of the Institute’s works but especially in the hope of sharing specific aspects and moments of spirituality and mission of the Institute.

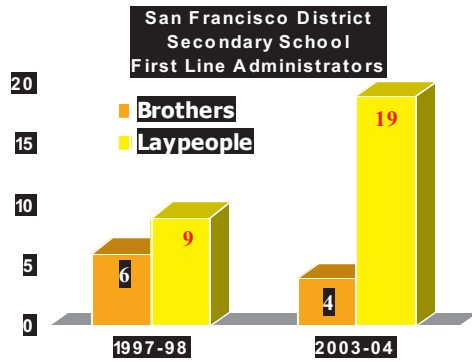
(Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life, Rome: Congregation of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, May 19, 2002, no. 31)

3. The demographic profile of Lasallian educators has changed since the mid-1960s, especially with the aging of the Brothers in Europe and North America. In the late 1950s, over 78 per cent of Lasallian educators worldwide were Brothers; in 2004 approximately 3 per cent of Lasallian educators internationally are Brothers.

4. The collaborative and fraternal relationship of the Brothers and the Institute with their students and among educators led to a spirit of association, which would have been more difficult to attain in a clerical institute.

5. The increased involvement of laity in leadership positions in the Lasallian educational ministry over the last five to ten years is indicated by the shifting leadership roles in schools in two Districts in the USA/Toronto Region. (See graph on the following page.)

6. The success and popularity of the Region’s and the Districts’ formation programs for Brothers and the growing number of formation opportunities, such as the Buttimer Institute, the Lasallian Leadership Institute, District programs, and networking have engendered commitment,



interest, enthusiasm, and competence among lay partners.

7. The Brothers have shown openness and courage by involving laypeople in decision-making positions, such as consultants in their Chapters, other leadership roles, and by adopting more inclusive decision-making structures at District and international levels, such as Mission Councils and Mission Assemblies.

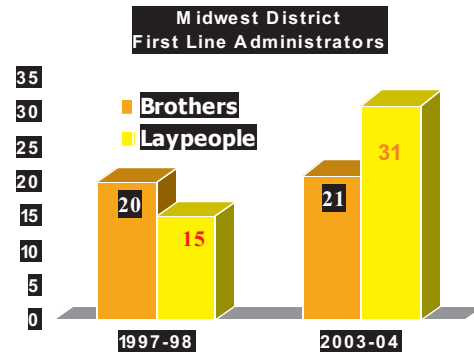
8. The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools has renewed the Lasallian charism to serve poor students and has dedicated the Brothers and their partners to address their growing needs. The Brothers' Rule rings as true today as ever: "The need for this Institute is very great" (*Rule*, article 141). Rather than turn in on itself, the Institute has opened structures and initiated support programs to expand its ability to serve more poor students in the world.

Work of the Commission on Association

This question is presented to the Commission: How do we address the fundamental, constitutive element of association in light of the present situation in the Institute? The General Chapter gave specific questions and topics to the Commission.

Underlying Assumption: Partners and Associates

To name and distinguish more clearly the commitment of some lay colleagues from others,



the 43rd General Chapter proposed a distinction between some who are called "partners" and others who are more committed and are called "associates." The Chapter distinguished the groups as follows:

- A partner is someone who is involved but has no deep commitment. "They collaborate with conviction for the time they are with us" (*43rd General Chapter*, 4).
- An associate has a much deeper sense of the Lasallian vocation, a long record of collaboration with the Brothers, and is recognized as such. The Chapter listed the characteristics of an associate (*43rd General Chapter*, 4).

Based on these definitions, the Chapter asked the Commission to investigate a number of questions:

1. What are the precise definition and criteria for associates?
 - Are the General Chapter's criteria for association adequate?
 - What are the critical elements of association?
 - What are the characteristics of a Lasallian vocation, or call to mission, in light of the Lasallian charism?
2. Public expression
 - To be an associate, is a public expression of association necessary?

3. Formation

- How do we help someone grow, awaken to this vocation, and foster a greater commitment to the mission?
- What are the best conditions to awaken and deepen this vocation so that the spirit of association fosters greater commitment to the educational service of poor students?

4. Validation

- Who confers meaning on or validates an associate?
- How are these vocations discerned and named as Lasallian?
- How does a partner become an associate?
- How are groups recognized as associates?

5. What is the role of the Brothers?

The Commission's Five-Year Plan

From these questions the Commission developed a five-year plan of action, including the following items:

1. Research the meaning and centrality of the vow of association (historically) as a key to understanding the identity of the Brother and the identity of the associate.

The Commission named a research team to assist with this work and to consider the implications of the historical research for the Institute today.

2. Assess and strengthen organizational structures and create new programs.

a. Identify the most effective current formation programs and develop new formation networks.

b. Identify new and emerging forms of association, such as:

- USA: Sponsored schools and the San Miguel Network
- France: Consortium of Lasallian Schools (*Tutelle*, trusteeship)
- Philippines: Signum Fidei and supervised schools

3. Identify the current experiences of individuals and groups.

The Commission surveyed over 800 lay colleagues worldwide, with questions such as:

- Do you feel associated?
- Do you want to be part of a group (informal or formal)?
- If so, what do you want from this group?
- Is a public expression of association important to you?
- What are your most valuable formation experiences?

Based on the individual surveys, the Commission asked each sector of the Institute to obtain responses to similar questions from reflection groups in 2004.

4. Promote regional and international assemblies.

In preparation for the 44th General Chapter in 2007, the International Commission on Mission and the Commission on Association are jointly designing two major assemblies to synthesize the developments around mission and association and to offer directions for consideration by the Chapter delegates.

The research and the reflections of various individuals and groups, as well as the general work of the Association Commission, will help the organizers to plan the Regional Assemblies, in 2005, and the International Assembly, in 2006. (The USA/Toronto Regional Assembly will take place in November 2005; the International Assembly, in October 2006.)

International Commission on Association**Original Members, 2001–2003**

(* indicates those who served one three-year term)

Br. Antonio Botana, Spain, Commission Chair

Br. Miguel Campos, Baltimore,
General Councilor

Br. Victor Franco, Philippines,
General Councilor

Br. Andre Jacq, France*

Br. Lorenzo Kipper, North Mexico*
(named Secretary General in 2003)

Ms. Eveline Geoffroy, France

Ms. Maria Loza, Porto Alegre*

Mr. Luis Raymond, Antillas
(Dominican Republic)

Mr. Gery Short, San Francisco

Mr. Eric Amaladas, Penang

Mr. Dominic Kithendu, Lwanga (Kenya)

Ms. Carmelita Quebengco, Philippines

New members, 2004-2006

Br. Steffano Agostini, Italy

Br. Carlos Gomez, Secretary, RELAL (Colombia)

Mr. Ernesto Vallejo Espinoza, Peru

Scheduled Meetings

Annually in spring, 2001–2006

International Assembly, October 2006