



"This work of God is also ours"

**BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS
45TH GENERAL CHAPTER**

More than 100 Brothers gathered in Rome from Easter Sunday to Pentecost Sunday for their 45th General Chapter. The delegates, from thirty-two countries on the five continents, experienced great fraternity and unity in diversity. As their Rule states, the General Chapter is "the ultimate expression of communion that exists among all the Brothers and it perpetuates among them the living fidelity to the special charism of the Institute." It is held every seven years and this year it was a "paperless" Chapter.

The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is an institute composed of religious Brothers. Its origins date from 1682. Its primary mission is that of educational service and evangelization, with special attention paid to the needy. The 4,485 Brothers along with 86,651 other teachers today educate 938,690 students in 83 countries.

The Chapter's central motto, "**This work of God is also ours,**" was inspired by a letter sent to Saint John Baptist de La Salle by the first Brothers exactly 300 years ago. In April 1714 those Brothers ordered their Founder to return to Paris from Parmenie, the name of a small hill near Lyons where he had confined himself. They did this in virtue of the vows of association and obedience that he had made along with them. They also asked him to take up again the governance of the nascent Society of the Christian Schools because that Work of God was also "theirs."

John Baptist de La Salle did return and he said, "Here I am. What do you want of me?" This event was recalled during the General Chapter as a kind of icon to discern God's will together and as a call to revitalize the vocation itself and to renew the commitment to the educational and evangelical mission that the Church has entrusted to the Institute.

With a duration of seven weeks, this was one of the longest Chapters on record, due to the fact that the customary work of a General Chapter of assessment and planning for the future was augmented by the work of revising the Rule and Constitutions of the Institute. The last revision of that document was in 1987.

In his opening address, Brother Álvaro Rodríguez, the outgoing Superior General, invited the capitulants to live this moment with hope and to discern the presence of God in daily life. As in the origins of the Institute there are three criteria that should guide this discernment: the greater glory of God, the good of the Church, and that of the children and young people who, thanks to the Lasallian schools, find a response for their educational needs and a Gospel journey for their lives.

The main topics that were included during the Chapter focused on the educational mission; the formation and accompaniment of Brothers and their lay colleagues; the Brother's vocation; Association between Brothers and those with whom they share spirituality, charism, and mission; stewardship of material and human resources for the mission; government and, finally, the life of the Brother in the 21st century.

With regard to the educational mission the General Chapter took into account the

propositions from the Second International Assembly for the Lasallian Mission. Said Assembly was made up of two-thirds laity and one-third Brothers. Each Province also held its own Mission Assembly and each Province has a Mission Council also made up of Brothers and laity. The purpose of these structures is to make real the concept of shared mission between all Lasallians on all levels. In the past 14 years steps have also been taken to recognize communities and lay persons as being associated with the mission of the Institute.

The 45th General Chapter thought it a priority to empower a pastoral ministry of vocations program that would, in turn, favor the creation of a culture of vocations and accompaniment. The revised Rule states that the Brothers look upon the pastoral ministry of all vocations in the Church and in the Lasallian Family as an integral part of their ministry and their personal and community responsibility. They believe that their vocation is of great necessity for society and for the Church and they are happy to promote it.

In the area of formation there was a great impetus for the training of formation personnel, Brothers or lay persons, on all levels and for all involved in the Lasallian mission. So that this wish does not simply stay on paper, good formation programs, particularly at the local level, will be offered and human and material resources will be optimized.

Brother Robert Schieler, a native of the city of Philadelphia, USA, was elected Superior General and Brother Jorge Gallardo de Alba, a Mexican, is the new Vicar General. Brothers Ricardo Laguda (Philippines), Pierre Ouattara (Burkina Faso), Paulo Petry (Brazil), Timothy Coldwell (USA), and Aidan Kilty (Ireland) are the new General Councillors with special responsibility for the five Regions into which the Institute is divided. In recent years the Regional experience of governance has been very positive and this, in turn, has facilitated greater closeness to the local reality. The new Superior will appoint other Councillors for those areas that will need priority attention in the coming years.

Father Robert Prevost (O.S.A) led the opening retreat with true spiritual wisdom and Father Adolfo Nicolás, a former Lasallian student and Superior General of the Jesuits, guided the discernment process for the election of the new government. Also involved in the Chapter event were Cardinal João Braz de Aviz, the Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Archbishop José Rodríguez Carballo, Secretary of the same Congregation. Archbishop Angelo Vincenzo Zani, Secretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education and Archbishop Jean-Louis Bruguès, O.P., also a former Lasallian student and the previous secretary of the same Congregation presided at Eucharistic liturgies.

The final weeks of the Chapter were devoted to the revision of the Rule and Constitutions of the Institute. Over the course of the past seven years a group of Brothers had prepared a draft based on the discussions held by Brothers worldwide. The multiplicity of social, religious, and cultural contexts in which religious life is being lived today has not impeded the unity of hearts and wills in this difficult work of revision. The new text will continue to inspire the life and the mission of the Brothers and it will open paths of evangelization and holiness just as previous texts have done.

The 45th General Chapter concluded on Pentecost Sunday, June 8, after many days of intense work, during which the delegates fraternally lived the joyful experience of their ecclesial identity as Brothers. During that time they planned their life and mission for the future – a

future that continues to be marked by a passion for teaching the children and young people that God has entrusted to them all over the world.

The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools continues reading the signs of life with eyes of faith and it continues to be open to the paths of fraternity and mission that the Holy Spirit will inspire for the coming years. It is the Institute's intent to strengthen existing works and to open new ones in border places where education and evangelization are greatly needed. The presence of the Institute in the inter-congregational project of South Sudan, in the words of the new Superior General, will continue to be a priority.

Recalling the letter of 1714 mentioned above, the Brothers of the Christian Schools, "together and by association," with all those who today share the Lasallian mission, affirm that the Work of God, begun by Saint John Baptist de La Salle, is the Institute's work today – a work of great necessity in a world in which 57 million children do not have access to schools.

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