

PARC VISITORS' CONFERENCE

7 August 2019

CLOSING REMARKS

(Slide 1) We declare that as Brothers we are men of hope. Together we journey along the path that leads us to become poor in spirit and be converted to God, our true treasure. In this way we make association possible for ourselves; as men of hope we become available to our Partners, to the calls of the Church and we stand in solidarity and closeness with the poor. (Rule, 40)

Dear Brothers,

As we come to the end of this conference I share a final, brief reflection with you. It is based on article 40 from our Rule and has four points: the new life of the Spirit, Brothers as men of Hope, Lasallian Association and looking towards the 46th General Chapter.

New Life in the Spirit

(Slide 2) Luke's account of Pentecost describes the culminating experience of the apostles' transformation. Their old selves had died. The Holy Spirit infused them with new life. In his meditation for Pentecost Sunday De La Salle aptly describes this transformation achieved by the paschal mystery. He tells his first Brothers and us that the apostles all fled after seeing Christ die on the cross. They had gone into hiding, afraid of death. They remained in seclusion but applied themselves to prayer from the Ascension until the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came to bring them a new law of grace and love. They then came together, St. La Salle continues, encouraged each other, and even in their suffering, considered themselves blessed, rejoicing in the new life of the Spirit.

For some decades now the Church and the Institute have been living into this new life of the Spirit. Our General Chapters and Institute circulars have described this new life we are living. Our responsibility as leaders is to accompany our Brothers and Lasallian Partners to welcome and embrace the new life. To do so requires a change of heart. *(Click)* In the words of Saint La Salle: the change which must be wrought in our case is an internal one. We must be completely transformed by the light and fullness of grace, and by the possession of God's Holy Spirit. (Med. 152.2) Only devoting times for prayer and meditation can this change be realized. Here is where we need to encourage our brothers. There is a lack of commitment to this dimension of our consecration in a number of our communities across the Institute.

Men of Hope (slide 3)

Our Rule declares we are men of hope. The young men entering our houses of formation, our young Brothers and the fidelity of our senior Brothers who have lived their vocation in unimaginable changes in the Institute, church and world fill us with hope. Our many middle-aged Brothers who are exercising leadership in local ministries and Brothers daily engaged in a particular ministry, connecting with children and young people, inspiring our Partners. They too fill us with hope.

Saint La Salle embodied this sense of hope and is our inspiration. In his final years as a senior member of the community, de La Salle remained imaginative, energized, life-giving and generative. He did not dwell on loss; but rather, he focused on life. (Click) His earthly journey – based on his reading of Scripture and the needs of his time – launched a movement that is always being re-born. As the Brothers gathered around the bed of the dying Founder, the spirit of fraternity strengthened their commitment to the education of youth, converted the event into a moment that looked forward; committed to developing the new society to meet the needs of children and young people, helping them grow in the faith and preparing them to succeed in society.

(Slide 4) We continue to live this commitment today. The vitality of the global Lasallian mission is without doubt. Great things are happening across the Institute. During the just concluded Regional Mission Assembly and our conversations these three days together, examples of this vitality have been acknowledged. Share this good news with your Brothers and Partners. For all this, we are grateful.

(Slide 5) “Hope requires imagination about alternatives, a firm belief that things ought to be different. The difference between imagination and hope is that hope is open to God’s imagination, but it is our own active imagination that prepares the way...” It is your responsibility and mine to discern with our Brothers and Partners what this preparation requires.

(Slide 6) Lasallian Association

Brothers, since the renewal Chapter of 1966-67, we have journeyed through two generations of change and commitment. **Concerned about our survival and even more about the continuation of the mission, we steadfastly and consistently maintain a sense of purpose: our Lasallian association for mission. This sense of purpose inspires us to remain a vital force in our world and Church.**

(Slide 7) Thirty years ago, former General Councilor Brother Patrice Marey reflecting on the life of the new Spirit we are living wrote:

We need to try to understand the times in which we are living and agree to judge it in terms of duration. The growing role of the laity is written in terms of duration. It began well before the Council; it is generalized in the Church and has never presented itself as opposed to priests or religious.... The coming of many Lasallians...is going to allow our works to continue in a way which we had never imagined. It is up to us to grasp this passing grace.... We are living in a favorable time, a day of salvation.

Brothers, our Rule has reminds us that the discovery of the Lasallian vocation for our Partners is part of the new life the Spirit is remaking: (Slide 8)

In the growth of association with men and women who walk side-by-side with them and identify themselves today as the sons and daughters of John Baptist de La Salle, [the Brothers] see a sign of the times which **fills them with hope**. (Rule 157.2)

Yes, the promotion of the lay vocation is a sign of the times and a call of the Church for us today. More recently, during the Papal audience last May 15, Pope Francis issued another call to us, to be creators of a “culture of resurrection”. He encouraged us saying: “do not tire of going in search of those who find themselves in the modern "tombs" of bewilderment, degradation, discomfort and poverty, **to offer hope for a new life.**” He assured us that these efforts will nourish our projects and actions.

Advancing toward the 46th General Chapter (Slide 9)

We are advancing toward the 46th General Chapter. I use the word “advancing” deliberately. It is active. It is a decision not to sit back and allow history to happen to us but discern how we might direct our future. To do so we need to see; we need to be attentive; we need to encounter and be in dialogue with others, imagining scenarios for a desired future.

(Slide 10) In the parable of the loaves and fishes from Luke’s gospel, when Jesus’ disciples were unable to imagine how to provide for the five thousand, Jesus said, ‘give them some food yourselves.’ They replied, ‘five loaves and two fish are all that we have, unless we ourselves go and buy food for all these people.’ Seeing what they could not see, Jesus blessed the five loaves and two fish, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. They all ate and were satisfied (LK 9: 10-17). Jesus challenged the disciples to move beyond a preoccupation with what they were lacking to the awareness of what they had.

He was also challenging them to see with the eyes of faith. What is it that we may not see at the present moment? What are the needs of the Institute today that we should keep our eyes and hearts open for?

In this regard it is important that your delegates to AIMEL 2020 are well-prepared. (Slide 11) Please follow-up the initial work accomplished at the Regional Mission Assembly. (Click) Find other occasions for your delegates to deepen their reflection and convictions for the global Lasallian mission today. At the same time (Click) I encourage your District and Mission Councils to share their hopes for the 46th General Chapter and what needs our utmost attention. The General Council has been engaged in such reflection for the past two years. (Slide 12) It is our position that the Chapter not be organized around familiar commissions on every aspect of our lives. Commissions generate propositions that the Superior and Council are mandated to implement. We hope the Chapter will focus on two or three issues. Presently we are considering two that we may recommend to the preparatory commission and include in our Report to the Chapter: (Slide 13) Leadership and Governance and Lasallian Association. This is based on our experience visiting the Regions, the pastoral visits, the input from Visitors at the 2018 Intercapitular Meeting and from the feedback from the annual District reports.

CONCLUSION

Lastly, I encourage your efforts and programs to promote the vitality of our life together in community. If we are to continue to joyfully announce the Good News of Jesus Christ and enthusiastically contribute to the rebirth of the Institute we must start at the community level. : (Slide 14) “For each Brother the community is the privileged place for being evangelized, to develop as a person, and discern educational needs.” (Rule, 45.1)

The necessary community structures that contribute to this vitality and facilitate our Christian transformation are: the Community Annual Plan, the personal interview and the Visitor’s annual canonical visit. Each of these areas must be among your highest priorities. Thank you for your faithfulness to this responsibility.

end (Slide 15)

Lee, Bernard, SM. The Beating of Great Wings. Twenty-third Publications, Mystic, CT, 2004, p. 6.
The General Council, The Lasallian Mission of Human and Christian Education: A Shared Mission. p. 35

Reflection from Monthly Prayer booklet GIVE US THIS DAY