

**WHAT IS THE INSTITUTE DOING TODAY
WORLDWIDE IN EDUCATION?**

**Assembly on Mission / District of San Francisco
July 30, 2002
Brother Claude Reinhardt, FSC, General Coucilor**

Dear Lasallian Friends,
Dear Brothers,

First of all I should like to say how happy Brother William Mann and myself are to be here at this Assembly. When we received the invitation, we accepted it immediately and with great enthusiasm, because this assembly is very important for you in the District of San Francisco, but also for us. From faraway Rome, we follow with great satisfaction the measures taken by Districts to implement the propositions of the 43rd General Chapter regarding the joint participation of Brothers and lay persons in the new reflection and decision-making structures. The Assembly we are attending with you is a good illustration of what can be done. We congratulate all of you who planned and wanted this Assembly, and we congratulate the preparatory committee. We take this opportunity also to thank Brother Visitor David Brennan and Auxiliary Visitor Brother Stanislaus Campbell for inviting us.

Our presence here is a sign of the interest the Institute has in your District. It is a sign also of the international dimension of our Institute. It is important for this dimension to be borne in mind during our deliberations and meetings. In an age of instant communication, isolation would be a contradiction in terms. We should say at this point how fortunate it is that several persons from your District, both Brothers and lay persons, have participated, or continue to participate actively in commissions and services at Institute level. We can mention Gery Short, in the international commission called "Associated for the educational service of the poor"; Brother Donald Johanson, resident in Rome and part of our communication service team; and Brother Michael Meister who is a member of a research group on association. This year we had Brother Charles Hilken in our House in Rome, and before the General Chapter, Brother Ronald Gallagher was the Secretary General of the Institute.

Brother Stanislaus suggested I should speak about what the Institute is doing today worldwide in the educational field, and to suggest some avenues to explore in the future. In preparing this text, I worked with Brother Nicolas Capelle, our Secretary for the Educational mission, who is in a unique position to observe and reflect. We have based the text on the most recent documents, the work of our Standing Committee for the Lasallian Educational Mission, and on our own observation in various countries. We felt that we could not simply give you statistics: they give figures that are correct at a given moment, but there is much they do not say. They do not speak of changes and the reasons for them; they do not speak of motives. And yet, if we wish to understand the present and prepare the future of the Lasallian mission, it is on these changes and on our capacity to be creative and to commit ourselves that we should reflect.

I. What is the Institute doing today?

As you know, the Institute is represented in 83 countries and, faithful to its tradition, works with some 900,000 young people. In this work, it has the positive support of some 77,000 lay colleagues. By tradition, the Institute pursues its apostolate in the educational field by running establishments at all levels, and by evangelising both in and out of the academic context.

Although the above is a brief but fair description of the work of the Institute today, it does not say everything: it does not communicate the dynamic force which characterises this educational institution today.

The Lasallian Institute is not an organisation which excels at making declarations and projecting its future. Rather, its tradition is to be close to young people, and this makes it very sensitive to the imperceptible changes which affect their lives from day to day, and which reveal little by little new educational needs.

When we look at the transformation of Lasallian establishments, we see that, as a rule, this has come about, not as the result of sudden and clearly announced changes, but rather of adaptation in small things, and transformation undertaken step by step: in their daily contact with young people, teachers are sensitive to what young people say, and their ideas are brought to the attention of discussion groups and decision-making bodies.

This process works in such a way that it is only after a certain time - when we consider the point we have reached and the way we have reached it - that we see clearly the significant changes that have given the establishment and its work a new look. The same thing happens in our international Institute.

That is why I should like to concentrate on 3 aspects of the work of Lasallians today, which respond to the needs of the time and which deserve to be highlighted and known.

1. The service of young adults

What is very striking is how, more or less everywhere, centres are being set up in towns and in rural areas for young working adults: they come in the evening, after a day's work, to learn all kinds of skills and sometimes to follow courses leading to professional qualifications.

All the educational establishments in the Province of North Mexico, for example, are adopting a clear policy in this matter, and are making their facilities and teachers available for this purpose. All Lasallian establishments provide evening classes which go on till 11 o'clock at night. Similar schemes are run in many countries.

What is remarkable also is the very determined effort made over the last few years in this connection by universities and higher education establishments, in particular in the 12 countries of South and Central America. There is a desire there to offer a high quality service to people who, in the course of a few years, have gained access to higher education, and wish to take their place in the affairs of their country.

There is a twofold concern behind this new development:

- The first is how to make the area close to the university profit from the latter's concentration of expertise, in a way that the university can become the promoter of profound changes useful for society as a whole.
- The second is how to honour the Lasallian obligation to offer, as a priority, an educational service to the poor.

In this connection there are some marvellous achievements which really make you think. For example, there is the social work organised by the University of Manila to help a group of 2,000 rice growers, 200 small shop-owners in poor districts, and dozens of nurses in rural areas. Apart from receiving help to set things up, these people are

offered regular training in aspects of organisation and management, courses in social awareness, and, as a group, help with assuming responsibility for its future. As far as nursing is concerned I also want to mention the inner-city health clinics sponsored by La Salle University 's nursing programs in Philadelphia.

Doing this, a Lasallian university fulfils completely its role of social transformation. It is also a LOOK-OUT at the service of groups that risk being crushed from one moment to the next by the social or economic machine.

2. LOOK-OUT

The role of look-out is the second present-day characteristic of the Institute. More or less everywhere, we can see the Institute's overall concern for communities at risk, for whom education is an opportunity and the first step towards construction or reconstruction.

In this connection, the examples that come to mind are the following:

- Brother James and his teams in the South of India for the last 25 years: 70 villages reorganised, 2,000 wells dug, 1,600 family homes built by the local people, work for women, schools.
- Brother Sebastian in the Madurai area, and formation for 10,000 women organised into small associations.
- 5 French Brothers and 30 lay persons who have created a network of 36 mobile classrooms (in vans adapted for the purpose), teaching 5,000 Gypsy children as they travel around the country. They have found a successful teaching approach, and ways of working.
- The teachers of Radio/TV San Gabriel in Bolivia, serving 2 million Aymara Indians on the high plateaux.
- Centres for street children in Abidjan, and Byumba (Rwanda) run by Spanish Districts.
- San Miguel schools (USA) you already know about.
- 3 centres for seriously mentally handicapped persons at Alexandria and Cairo (Egypt), 3 centres for mentally handicapped children in Poland.
- "Le Baluchon" reception centres for travellers, drug addicts in Quebec.
- Courses on responsible paternity-maternity in the Cameroons.
- Associations to help young pregnant women (Australia, France).
- A free telephone service covering the whole of Australia for young people with problems (30,000 calls a week), supported by a finely adjusted technology.
- Many other small projects such as those in Porto Alegre, Barcelona, Manila, in the suburbs of big cities, in the Bronx, Manchester, Ho Chi Minh City.

All these schemes reveal the constant desire of Brothers and Lasallians to remain faithful to those who have most need of their educational services - educational services which are directed to the person as a whole, which take the person as the starting point, and whose principal concern is his/her personal and social construction. It is an approach inspired by the Gospel and the heart of God. It is not the approach of a social worker, nor is its aim to make persons conform to a new model of citizenship.

Elsewhere this look-out role regarding mistreated people leads naturally to research for teaching tools, which is something very much in line with the Lasallian temperament.

I offer a few examples of what I mean.

- In Spain, France, Latin America: cognitive methodology for the Gypsies: the invention of a reading and counting method.
- For the Pygmies of the Cameroons: a learning method based on gestures.
- For the peasant children of Upper Egypt: a reading method
- And everywhere, publication of books, booklets. At the present moment, Districts are sending us lists of what they have produced in the way of educational and pastoral care materials in the last 10 years. The result is impressive. For example, the District of Argentina has sent us a closely printed list 52 pages long.

And, of course, the traditional concern for the training of teachers continues to be pursued mostly in training colleges. One example among others is Guatemala, which has a unique service for the training of Maya teachers (9,000 teachers trained). The Ministry of Education inspector regarding all literacy problems in the country is a Brother.

Moreover, I feel that this concern is growing stronger in certain regions in which teacher training is not considered sufficiently important by the State. The example that comes to mind especially is that of Africa, but also that of Latin America. Certain District teams offer methodological support for teachers in schools of the public and private sector. This is the case in Colombia, for example.

3. The proposition of FAITH in a new inter-cultural and inter-religious context

The accessibility of Lasallian schools to everybody, and population movements which are a characteristic of the times, have obliged those in charge of educational centres and pastoral care teams to reflect on the values they should propose, and on how they can proclaim the Christian faith in a way that takes more into account the values and counter-values offered by society everywhere and shared by younger generations.

This is not an easy task, but it has been undertaken with great determination and energy throughout the Institute. I shall mention three initiatives which show how serious this task is:

- In Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, France: dialogue with Islam.
- In Asian countries, Lasallian congresses are taking place to see how to take more into account the religious dimension of people, affected, like everything else, by a levelling worldwide culture; but also how to make people discover the way of Jesus in the midst of all the innumerable ways to be found in Asia.
- The work of Brother Flavio Pajer in Italy, who has just completed writing religious knowledge textbooks for use in State schools in Italy. Between 300,000 and 500,000 copies are published of each textbook. In addition, he trains some 3,000 teachers of religion. In the Old Continent, the task facing us today is to make religion acceptable as a part of general knowledge, so as to make people

understand that the religious dimension of the human person is a constitutive element of human nature.

As you have noticed so far, I have given examples of action taken in different countries. Indeed, tremendous efforts have been made all over the Lasallian world for the education of the young and the poor.

I could have selected additional examples in your own District, but you already know them well. I shall mention some of them only, which were mentioned yesterday:

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- this very Assembly that involves members of the broader Lasallian Family.

I was very much impressed when I read of the *Vision Wall* you created in 1999 and the Document entitled *A Response to the context for Action / Action Plan*.

In the two documents I discovered the profound consistency there is between what the Institute is trying to do worldwide and what you are actually doing here, with energy and with this ability of yours to bring together competent and talented people, men and women with educational and financial expertise, men and women of faith!

What you have achieved in the past four years is excellent! I am convinced that this Assembly can and actually will pave the way for what Brother Visitor called in one of his letters "new and greater miracles" in education.

II. Some aims for the future

Here also there is so much to say, but I should like to concentrate on 3 aims, which are aims the Institute has set itself, but which are also the aims of education today.

These aims were adopted by the General Chapter of 2000, but this was so because the 130 capitulants had already recognised them in the worldwide educational scene around them.

1. Re-think our ideas about education

In the past 40 years, the Institute has made a considerable effort to understand better the thinking behind our foundation and the meaning of all that the Founder did in the pedagogical, pastoral and spiritual field. We are clearly benefiting today from all this work, which is not yet completed.

However, we cannot simply stop there. We need to understand the effects today of all the changes which affect worldwide society, and which affect the very foundations of the fact that we exist. We see philosophical, anthropological and social axioms (or what we thought were axioms) being questioned by new ways of thinking and acting. I am thinking in particular of ideas to do with time, space, relations between men and women, new forms of parenting, the role of women, the impact on decision-making bodies of civil society, the huge imbalance in society that we all know about, population movements, the hidden international threats of organized crime and terrorist organisations. These are all things that oblige us to rethink our educational practice, taking into account these new parameters, discerning what is a denial of human beings and opposes the construction of society, but also what brings new life and freedom for the construction of a society that is more just and practises solidarity: for God is always at work in this world, the world that we have today. This is what we believe.

The Institute has undertaken to reflect seriously on these questions in all Districts.

In 1994, the Institute decided to hold 5 colloquia to study 5 crucially important topics affecting education. The topics were the following: families, globalisation, megapolises, the new information communication technologies, and the communication of Faith. 400 Lasallians took part in these colloquia and produced a text whose conclusions highlight six powerful trends affecting education today, and affecting the way we feel, think and act. (Cf. Institute Bulletin N°245).

In this same connection, and taking the question a step further, the Secretariat for the Lasallian Educational Mission of the Institute has asked for a series of educational forums to be held between 2002 and 2005 in the Districts and Regions of the Institute. Their purpose is very clear.

Taking as our starting point our own reality and the beliefs which inspire us as Christian educators and as living heirs of a founder, we are asked to answer 3 questions:

In our society,

- What influences young people as they grow up as persons?
- What influences young people as they develop a social conscience?
- What influences young people as they develop their spiritual life?

What is involved here is stating more clearly our Christian view of the human person and our view of education as a preparation for interior life and the acceptance of the Good News. In a world in which landmarks are disappearing and institutions are being muzzled by the intellectual terrorism of social convention and of the media, it is useful for us to restate, for our own benefit and for that of others, what constitutes Christian education at the present time.

You will probably be asked to contribute to the work on educational anthropology.

I note here that the continent of Central and South America as a whole and the Caribbean region have already launched a process of reflection called PERLA. PERLA is the Regional Educational Project of Latin America. It seeks to adapt the Lasallian educational programme so that it takes into account the new situation and the new factors at work in the region. This is very encouraging.

2nd aim

2. Action to promote the Rights of Children and Young People

You know how insistent the last General Chapter was on this point, and that your USA Region made it the object of an Institute campaign in the year 2001-2002.

This question, however, calls for long-term action and a long-term commitment on our part.

Each country and region has to find a way of acting, which fits in best with its social and cultural context, so that things change lastingly for children and young people, especially for girls and young women who are discriminated against in many places, and in the minds of many people in the two hemispheres.

I should like to draw attention to two points:

- a) The Rights of Children today imply also, and as a priority, **support for parents**. We know that the majority of parents wish their children well. Often, however, they are crushed by the difficulties of life, and feel powerless to cope because of the disappearance of social and religious points of reference. Their own life is adrift and they are often completely disorientated (problems with partners, precariousness of commitments, lonely individual choices regarding the unborn child, blurring of traditional roles,...).

I think that our educational establishments ought to create support facilities for parents and for those who look for solutions for the fundamental difficulties of life. Several Districts have created "schools" for parents. These could exist in all our schools. (Cf. Institute Bulletin N°245)

In addition, we need to make a greater effort to promote responsible maternity/paternity among the students of our schools. Students are at an age when they discuss things, and often they are looking for ideas which are different from the conventional views of the media and of friends, who also are looking for answers to the same questions.

This point should be considered as being closely linked with the Rights of Children. What is involved, in fact, is supporting the primary educators of children and young people, and training the parents of tomorrow. This is clearly less exotic than the defence of children who live far away, and more difficult too, because we have to face up to the way people think, which we know only too well (and in which we share), and who sometimes refuse to face the frightening question: what constitutes the human person, his/her dignity, his/her freedom ? Does society have the last word, with its thinking based on the narrow basis of easily-given consent ?

- b) The Rights of Children campaign has obliged us to come into line with national and international organisations in all countries, which are working and have been working in this field for years. That is a good thing. It is an opportunity for us to come into contact with other ways of analysing and seeing the situation, and to work with other people. Our educational tradition is very strong and sometimes it is sufficient for us. I think, however, that through this campaign we shall pay more

attention to other worthwhile educational approaches, and that this will inevitably lead to discussion.

This is a stroke of good fortune for us because we can learn something. It is a stroke of good fortune also because perhaps we shall be able to share our approach and our expertise with others. It is for these two reasons, in fact, that we are strengthening our links with two International Catholic Organizations for children and education (BICE and OIEC) which enable us to work with UNESCO commissions.

I cannot encourage you enough to join regional, national and international organisations in the name of our educational tradition and expertise.

3. Commit ourselves to the “Dakar 2000” resolution: Education for all (Education Pour Tous: EPT)

This Dakar resolution concerns us very much. It reflects the decisions taken by the General Chapter of 2000 (cf. Circ. 447, p.29, recommendation 12).

As you know, in this field there is constant need to think of new and usually low-cost schemes adapted to the people we wish to serve.

For example, these can be simple school-support structures, based on a district, offering a fraternal presence for young people and adults thirsting for knowledge, and needing it in order to survive. There are simple structures of this kind here in California (the Leo Center), at Lyons (France), Hué (Vietnam), New Zealand, Douala (Cameroons), for migrants and displaced persons.

But there are entire regions in Africa which are forgotten by governments and the interests of the powerful, and in which children and women are literally abandoned to their ignorance; lives without a future, denied..

Sometimes, however, there is a reaction: villages scattered over a wide area get themselves organised and together build a small classroom, 30 metres square, in a village. 70 or 80 children squeeze into this classroom, bleary-eyed but happy that someone is taking an interest in them. And then, an unemployed teacher, hired for 20 Dollars, begins to teach them the rudiments of reading, writing, counting. This can be the first step in restoring human dignity. People do not realise enough what an incomparable present the village is giving to its children, what an inestimable benefit it is to know how to read and write.

I think the Lasallian Institute must find effective ways of encouraging people to help Africa, and of ensuring that villages themselves create their own structures.

This exists already in several African countries: in the Cameroons in the region of Talba, in Dapaong in North Togo, for example. In this latter country, a Brother is in charge of 79 schools, many of which were set up by the villages themselves.

Obviously, this effort must be accompanied by teacher-training. I think that the Institute in Africa is becoming aware once more of the need to re-invest in primary school teaching which, despite progress, remains still inadequate for the needs of sub-Saharan Africa.

CONCLUSION

To end, I should like to share an idea with you that comes from a French university professor who specialises in education. On observing our Lasallian educational approach, she noted that, as a group, we had a great capacity for creation and adaptation and, at the same time, great continuity. As an outside observer of our mission, she analysed the descriptions of the most recent pedagogical innovations, and she made the following remark: unlike what sociologists sometimes believe, pedagogical innovations are not produced by the social environment. It is not even an essential factor. These innovations, this capacity to give new educational responses are possible because the “agents” responsible have shared roots, a shared way of seeing things, the same view of the human person, and the conviction that each young person is a unique individual. If we wish to comment on these observations, we can turn to the thinking and writing of the Founder, the Conduct of Schools, and all our successive educational plans, beginning with 300 years ago and ending with the most recent plans of our Districts and establishments. This will show us how much we have inherited.

Several months ago, Secretary of Education Brother Nicolas Capelle made an astonishing observation: visiting the Leo Centre at Oakland, he was struck by the very close resemblance between what he saw and the centre he himself had run in Lyons, France. And yet, we are not in an age in which a single and unvarying model of classroom procedure, learnt in the same pedagogy class, is repeated over and over again. In these two educational establishments, in the year 2000, in two countries separated by language, certain cultural characteristics, educational laws, and the Atlantic Ocean, the methods used, the type of relationship with young people and families, even the way the rooms were set out, were all identical.

In our most adventurous undertakings, as in our more “classical” establishments, we are the heirs of a rich educational history. Before we actually knew the texts and the theory, our predecessors, our elders and our professional mentors communicated to us, almost without our being aware of it, practices, educational attitudes, a way of considering young people and, I hope, a boundless enthusiasm for our profession.

As heirs, we are today the agents of the Lasallian educational plan. We have a common and a personal responsibility for its accomplishment and development.

Your Assembly here is a sign of your hope and your determination to build together the future of the Lasallian Mission in the District of San Francisco. This future will depend on you and on the people you succeed in calling to work with you, the future educators you will train. Communicate your boundless enthusiasm and call upon young people to set out on the adventure of Christian education, inspired by the living Lasallian tradition, as lay men and women, as consecrated persons, and in the case of some, as Brothers of the Christian Schools.

Have a good Assembly on Mission!

Thank you. Brother Claude Reinhardt, General Councilor

(Addendum follows below.)

Addendum to Assembly Presentation – Brother Claude Reinhardt, FSC

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