

43rd General Chapter: The Charism Alive Today

OUR HISTORY CONTINUES TO GROW AND DEEPEN AS DE LA SALLE'S HERITAGE IS CARRIED INTO THE FUTURE.

Every seven years, Christian Brothers from around the world come together in Rome for meetings called General Chapters. Here they reflect on the Institute's Lasallian heritage, plan for the future, and elect new leadership. The 43rd General Chapter convened in May 2000, with the theme, Associated in Service of the Poor Through Education as the Lasallian Response to the Challenges of the 21st Century. It included 128 Brothers and 23 Partner Consultants.

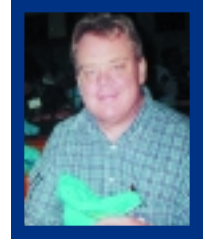
Brother David Brennan and Brother Stanislaus Campbell, Visitor and Auxiliary Visitor of the District of San Francisco attended as elected delegates. They were joined by Partner Consultants, Gery Short, Director of Lasallian School Programs for the District, and Sister Theresa Claire Nguyen from San Jose, who represented the Lasallian Sisters of Viet Nam. Gery was the only returning Partner from the 1993 Chapter, which marked the first time Brothers invited their Lasallian colleagues to come to Rome for a General Chapter. Partner Consultants were appointed by the Superior General.



The 43rd General Chapter opened on May 1; during the first week only Brothers were in attendance. Partner Consultants joined for weeks two and three and participated on commissions charged to address a number of issues. Each commission made a report to the assembly setting forth general observations and making specific recommendations. Partner Consultants had both voice and vote in the work of the commissions and in the assembly's discussion and approval of their reports. In weeks four and five the Brothers worked alone to finalize the work of the commissions and brought

forth some commission recommendations that were voted on as formal propositions. The Brothers also established new commissions and dealt with matters specifically related to the Brothers' life and work.

The General Chapter elected new leadership for a seven-year term, and Brother Alvaro Rodriguez Echeverría of Costa Rica was elected as the Superior General. Brother William Mann of the Long Island-New England District was elected Vicar General, and five General Council members were also chosen: Brother Juan Pablo Martin Dueñas of Spain, Brother Claude Reinhardt of France, Brother Yemanu Jehar of Eritrea, Brother Marc Hofer of Switzerland, and Brother Miguel Campos of Cuba.



Brother delegates and consultants, representing 87 countries, at work in the Assembly Hall during the 43rd General Chapter.

Chapter included the signing of the book of the Acts of the Chapter, an address by the new Superior General, and the performance of a musical composition written especially for the occasion by Professor Martin Rokeach of Saint Mary's College of California.

Interview

Shortly after returning from Rome to California, Brother Stanislaus Campbell and Gery Short shared some thoughts about the Chapter

Signs of Faith: Could you talk about your feelings about the general atmosphere of the Chapter?

Brother Stan: There was a very good spirit to the gathering, friendly and collegial. There was

On June 9, the members of the Chapter attended a papal audience, where Brother Alvaro spoke about the work of the Chapter and Pope John Paul II addressed the gathering and extended his "affectionate apostolic blessing." The final session of the

great communication across the language barriers, and many meetings that brought together people from different regions. There was very little political maneuvering, and we got to know one another and laid some foundations for future cooperation.

Gery: To me it felt like a Chapter of transition, facing the changes taking place across the international Institute. With the aging of the Brothers in some Districts, new life in others, the growing role of lay Partners, and the tremendous educational needs of poor children throughout the world, this is a time of transition. The Chapter seemed to reflect an understanding of the challenges we face, and the sense of fraternity among the Brothers and Partner Consultants was inspirational.

Signs of Faith: Were there any particularly emblematic or striking moments?

Brother Stan: Some of us were very moved by the story from a Brother from Rwanda. What a tale of woe. When we talk about the education of the poor, we sometimes forget that the reality is that in some places the only kind of education is education of the poor. The cry from those areas is for help – people, advice, money, and training. There was a question on a poster in the display set up by the Brothers from Africa: “Who will train us?” That question came up in various forms many times in the Chapter hall.

Gery: It was remarkable to sit side by side with a Brother from Sri Lanka, a Partner from Ireland, a Brother from Singapore, and a Brother from Eritrea. It was very

special for me to connect with people from some very troubled parts of the world and to appreciate the difficult environments in which they carry out the Lasallian mission. Looking back since the last Chapter, the striking trend is that the largest numbers of new Brothers are coming from the

share their needs and concerns regarding vocations, and this plan was approved.

Signs of Faith: What other key issues were addressed?

Gery: Well, one very large question for the Institute is how to involve Lasallian Partners, how to



Partner Consultants in the main chapel at the Motherhouse in Rome. In the back is the reliquary holding relics of St. John Baptist de La Salle.

Southern hemisphere, whereas some regions in the Northern hemisphere are not replacing their populations of Brothers.

Signs of Faith: How did the Chapter address the question of vocations?

Brother Stan: On this question the younger Brothers at the Chapter – men in their thirties and forties, who were there in unprecedented numbers – made their presence felt. They wanted to have a major proposition on vocations emerge from this Chapter. So they put together a proposition for regions to get together and

integrate them into the governance of the Institute and the Districts. There are canonical limitations, of course, and at the Chapter, Partners could not formally vote on propositions brought forth by commissions, nor could we vote in the election of the Superior, the Vicar, and the Council. This issue of Partner participation was one of the key issues considered by the Government Commission.

Brother Stan: The Government Commission was not as bold as we had hoped it might be. We had expected that it would suggest some major changes in the structure of our governance and in

the inclusion of Partners. It was somewhat disappointing that more was not done. But in such a huge body with diverse situations and mentalities, perhaps it's not so surprising. Yet, I would say that the major thing that came out of the Chapter was a new initiative called the Standing Committee of Brothers and Partners for the Lasallian Mission. This Committee is charged with assembling Brothers and Partners to discuss and make decisions about our mission. It will not have the absolutely final say, but its creation is a big step toward

a new structure in the Institute.

Gery: Having participated in the San Francisco District Chapter and two General Chapters, I experienced the limitations on Partners as awkward. The Chapter adopted a plan for an international general assembly of Brothers and Partners to meet prior to the next General Chapter – a new structure that looks promising. Also promising was the election of a Superior General and Vicar General and Council who are strong leaders and forward-looking. The legislation

coming out of this Chapter all points in a good direction. But without a good leadership team to implement it, legislation alone cannot do much.

Brother Stan: Yes, that seems to me to be the other major achievement of this Chapter, the election of young and capable men, all of them new to the Institute administration except the Superior General, who had been Vicar General, and Brother Marc Hofer, who was already on the General Council.

Signs of Faith: Could you comment about how the District of San Francisco contributed to the Chapter?

Gery: Our District contributed very impressively: Brother Donald Johanson was press secretary, Brother Ron Gallagher was secretary general and both Brother David and Brother Stan had leadership roles. I also think that the scenario planning sessions developed with Global Business Network, as well as video presentations produced with our District's sponsorship were very valuable. Further, two of 23 Partner Consultants were from the San Francisco District and another lived and worked within our geographical area. The choir from Sacred Heart Cathedral Preparatory in San Francisco also performed at the Chapter.

Brother Stan: I do think the District made an important contribution in bringing forward certain key questions. For instance, my greatest concern going into the Chapter was about the identity of the Brother. There are basic questions and urgent questions to consider: What makes the Brother distinct? What is his role and identity? What is the point of being



Pope John Paul II enters the Hall of Pope Clement VIII on June 9, 2000 for an audience with the participants in the 43rd General Chapter.

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My experience of the Chapter made it very clear to me that the Holy spirit is alive in the Institute, and that we who are committed to its mission should listen to that Spirit and respond courageously, much as John Baptist de La Salle responded in his own life.

a Brother? The Chapter takes place in too short a time in which to deal with such questions. A commission needed to be established to carry on after the Chapter. We helped to move forward the proposition that approved the establishment of such an ongoing commission.

Gery: Because our District is blessed with people and resources, we have a concomitant responsibility. It was my sense that the San Francisco District is on the

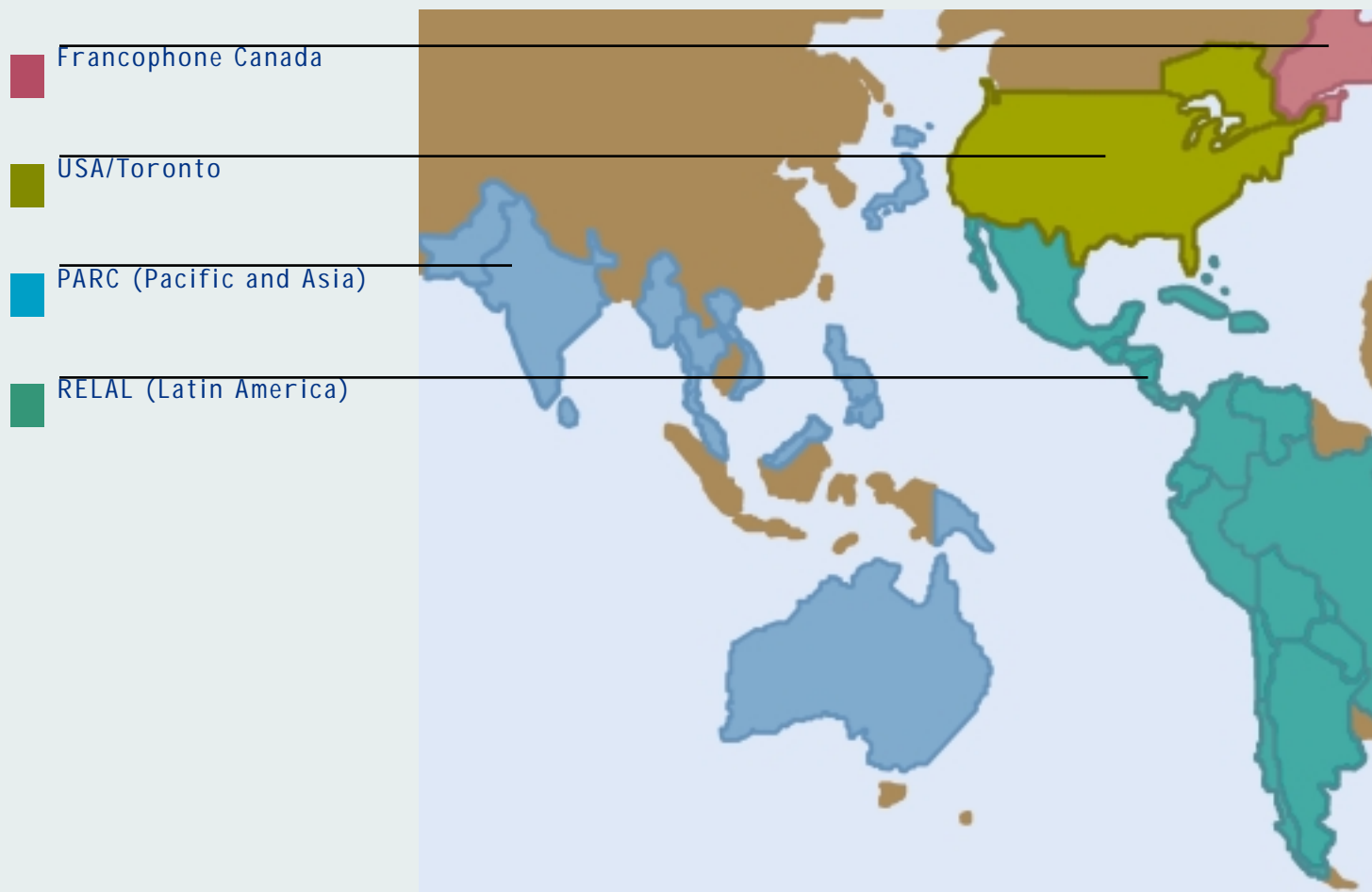
cutting edge and many of the initiatives agreed upon at the Chapter are already in process here: giving priority to formation, focusing on vocations, developing the meaning of “association” with the Brothers, extending and evaluating our service of the poor.

The General Chapter made a clear and strong recommitment on behalf of what were called “the most fragile and vulnerable members of our societies.” Clearly the service of the poor continues to be

a fundamental priority of the Institute, and one of the propositions approved at this Chapter is that every institution or work within the Institute should evaluate what it is doing on behalf of the poor.

Brother Stan: Right. The Chapter has called for each District to come up with an action plan for the service of the poor. We have

The Lasallian Educational Mission



one already in operation. We don't need to start from scratch on that.

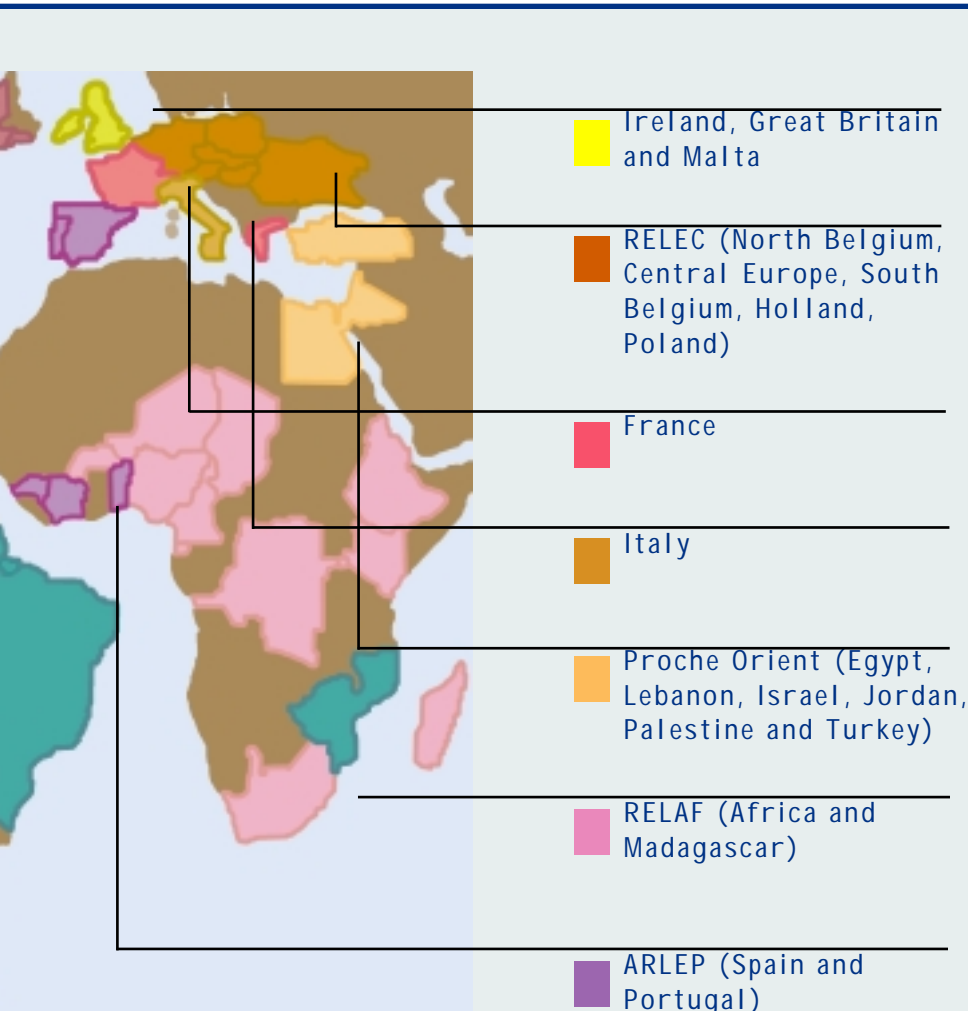
Signs of Faith: Did you get a sense of what other Districts are doing?

Gery: I was quite inspired to see how much some Districts are doing. In the District of the Philippines, for example, with only about forty Brothers, they touch seventy thousand students. It's amazing! And there is a group of Lasallian teachers from the Philippines, all lay people, heading to Indonesia to start a school there – because it's needed. Another example is in the Midwest District in the United States, which is opening up three new San Miguel schools in the coming year.

Signs of Faith: What single phrase might sum up for you what you took away from this Chapter?

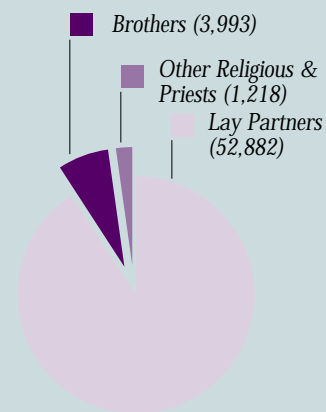
Brother Stan: I was struck by the word a Spanish Brother used in discussing the Institute. He said we need a "re-foundation." And I think he is right. From the point of view of re-foundation, this General Chapter may not have done enough. But given where people are, I think we did some of the things that are necessary to move us forward toward re-foundation, which may come about gradually rather than suddenly.

Gery: For me, the phrase might be "Holy Spirit." My experience of the Chapter made it very clear to me that the Holy Spirit is alive in the Institute, and that we who are committed to its mission should listen to that Spirit and respond courageously, much as John Baptist de La Salle responded in his own life. The General Chapter has set a direction for us. Our challenge now is to respond faithfully. 🙏



The Shared Mission Profile of Participants

1994



1999

