

Together and by Association: Essential to the Institute?

Michel Sauvage, FSC²

Translated by John Guasconi, FSC³

Introduction

At the end of a conference which I gave to the Capitulants of the 41st General Chapter on April 12, 1986,⁴ I was asked the following question:

"Together and by association" is a very Lasallian expression and a powerful reality in De La Salle's life. Should it be classified among the vital principles of the Institute? Or are we simply dealing with a means that could be modified or even abandoned depending on circumstances?

The question has struck me as basic for a long time now. Therefore, I thought it useful to express some reflections on this matter. I would have liked to do so immediately after my talk; but occupied with other pressing matters, I did not have the time available to undertake this work.

I will present these reflections in two parts:

1. Unquestionably, association is key to the Institute. In a sense, the Institute is an Association.
2. Yet, it is necessary to define those elements essential to Association.

The Institute Is an Association

Association is so basic that one can say, in a sense, that the Institute is nothing but the result of the association of its members. The act of men who unite themselves in order to form the Society of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

The Vow of June 6, 1694

It goes back to our beginnings, to the Vow of June 6, 1694, when twelve Brothers, with John Baptist de La Salle, promise and vow "to unite themselves and to live in Society" together ... "in order to keep [conduct] together and by association gratuitous schools."

This is not the first time that vows are pronounced in the young Lasallian Community, but it is the first Vow Formula which comes to us from a source other than Jean-Baptiste Blain.⁵ It is here that the term "Society" appears in order to designate the group of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.⁶

From the Vow Formula used since that time, we have kept *the four-part structure* until today: a) invocation to the Trinity and expression of the total consecration to God in order to procure his

glory; b) expression of the finality [purpose] and the content of association [begins with the phrase “and for this purpose...”]; c) statement of vows taken [beginning with the phrase “wherefore...”]; and d) confirmation and signature [“In testimony thereof...”].

The Institute is that association itself which is constituted thanks to the freely chosen adherence of persons who, in faith, respond by the consecration of their lives to a call from the living God:

- bringing together these persons by the dynamism of a finality [purpose] and a project which are inseparably “mystical” and “historical.”
- involving them in the substance of commitments which bear on the concrete details and style of their mission and of their entire existence.

The Act of Election of June 7, 1694

Let us note that the day after the Vow of June 6, 1694, the wording of the act of election of the Superior of the Society highlights, with insistence and strong emphasis, the central importance of association for the collective identity of this group:

- “after having *associated* ourselves with M. John Baptist de La Salle, priest, to conduct together and by association gratuitous schools by the vows which we made yesterday,”
- “let us recognize that *as a consequence of our vows and of the association* which we have contracted by them, we have chosen as Superior Monsieur John Baptist de La Salle ... ”
- “our intention being that after him, in the future and forever, there would be no one, neither received among us, nor chosen as Superior, who would be a priest or who would have received Holy Orders, and that we shall not have *nor shall we admit any Superior* who is not associated or who has not taken vows as we have, and like all those who will be associated to us hereafter.”

Already M. de La Salle is “Superior” not only because he was the “Founder” but, formally at least, by virtue of the free choice of the “associated members.”

The commitment of association was an expression of the realization of the Brothers’ group identity. The act of election reaffirms this consciousness of identity and makes explicit one of its fundamental aspects (the lay character of the Institute) and draws out vigorous consequences in regard to the autonomous will of the very young Society.

The Vow of November 21, 1691 and the Letter of April 1, 1714

To show the “essential” character of association, from the beginnings of the Institute, it seems to me still useful to recall two facts which are in some way “symmetrical” in the history of the foundation.

The “Heroic” Vow of November 21, 1691

At a moment of crisis, when the group of John Baptist de La Salle’s companions was becoming extremely weak and when its very ability to survive was in question, the Founder sought to ward off this menace of death by an act of hope that would create hope anew. This act of hope expressed itself, already, by a vow of association, which has as its aim “the establishment of the Society.” One already finds here *a structure in four parts*: a) *Most Holy Trinity ... we consecrate ourselves entirely to you to procure ... the establishment of the Society of the Christian Schools*; b) *and, for this reason, we ... vow association and unity in order to procure and maintain said foundation*; c) *with this intent, we promise ...*; d) *in testimony thereof ... we have signed*

The Letter of the Brothers to M. de La Salle, Dated April 1, 1714

Another crisis, when the Institute seems again to be threatened by death, the Founder had distanced himself from Paris and seemed to have abandoned his duty as Superior. The life-giving strength of association pushes a certain number of Brothers to hold an “Assembly.” They decide to call their Founder back. By a Letter which constitutes an “official act,” they plead with M. de La Salle, even order him to take up again “the overall government of (their) Society.” This unusual step is based on their “association” (even if the vow involved is that of obedience to the body of the Institute).⁷

In 1691, De La Salle reacts to a “deadly” crisis by effectively initiating the association which he planned; it will “take shape” in the Vow of 1694. By means of the Heroic Vow, De La Salle “gives birth to” association.

In 1714, association responds to the “deadly” crisis by re-expressing itself; it “takes shape again” in the Assembly of Brothers and in the Letter to the Founder. Association “re-creates” De La Salle’s vocation.

Association Is Essential to the Institute

But, what is of intrinsic importance to association? I do not claim to bring a definitive answer to this question, but I will attempt to clarify it or rather to draw attention to its complexity.

Certain arguments – implicit or somewhat explicit – by means of a simple deduction seem to go from the formula “together and by association” or “to conduct together and by association” to a “norm” which would govern the way we live our mission and carry out our apostolic work.

This “norm” was stated as follows. The Brothers should normally be involved in the same work together, preferably a school. Different solutions could be tolerated or even accepted, but as exceptions to the rule. Since association is essential to the Institute, it is normally essential that association be expressed by the correlation “community-educational work.” *Together and by association, therefore, a community of Brothers is “usually” attached to a common work [school].*

But can one reason in such a way? Isn’t it giving in to a kind of Lasallian “fundamentalism”?

In order truly to be aware of what is “essential to the association” of the Institute – and concretely in order to discern the choices to be made in the concrete situations at hand – should we not take four other terms into consideration? [Cf. Diagram 1]

In our time, discernment of what is essential to association and the ways it is being realized should take into account:

- naturally, the Vow Formula considered in and of itself (VF); it has become a norm;
- reference should be made to the founding experience which the Vow Formula expressed and strengthened (FE);
- it should also take into account the *present conditions*, the factual data of the Brother’s life and communities (PC); and
- it should also keep in mind the “calls” [re-founding situations] which today, just like at the time of our foundation, invite our association to promote a necessary re-foundation (RS).⁸

The Text of the Vow Formula

There will be three comments in this regard concerning association.

What factors do we have to clarify about the meaning of “together and by association”?

From the Vow Formula itself, I recall: a) I promise and vow to unite myself and to live in Society with the Brothers; b) to conduct together and by association gratuitous schools; c) wherever they may be; d) even *if* I should be obliged to do it; e) by begging and living on bread alone; f) and *in* order to do it in the said Society at which I might be employed; g) either by the Body of the Society; h) or by the Superiors who are responsible for its direction; *i*) it is for this reason that I promise and vow obedience; j) to the Body of the Society; k) as well as to the Superiors; l) which vow of association; m) as well as of stability in the said Society and of obedience; and n) I promise to keep faithfully all my life.

Such is the formula repeated thirteen times on June 6, 1694. The formulas of vows pronounced between 1695 and 1705 and collected in the Vow Record⁹ and several other forms prior to 1725, which are to be found in the Archives of the Institute,¹⁰ present slight variants. The most significant for our discussion is that which one finds in fragments for about twenty of the formulas concerning a) and b).

- a) promise and vow to unite myself and live in Society with the Brothers *who have associated themselves* together; and
- b) to conduct by association gratuitous schools.

Fragments d) and e) are found in all the formulas until June 7, 1705. They disappear from the formulas of first vows and renewal of vows of 1716 and 1717. Already it is no longer a question of “to beg or to live on bread alone” in the formula.¹¹

§From the “Explications des Voeux,” Brother Maurice-Auguste points out “two texts, one published and the other handwritten, treating *ex-professo* the obligations attached to the vows pronounced by the Brothers of the Christian Schools before August 15, 1725.” The printed text is that of the *Collection*. The textual commentary could be a little after the vow ceremony of June 6, 1694. The handwritten text is on the back of the formula of Brother Irénée’s perpetual vows (September 29, 1719).

Brother Maurice-Auguste compares closely these two explications and also compares them to the explication which will be seen in the *Rule* after 1726 (i.e., after the *Bull of Approbation*). From his study, I would hold to the following conclusions with regard to association.¹²

- The exposition of the *Collection* in regard to association is very brief.
- “The vows obligate four things: a) to conduct schools by association, with those who have associated themselves in the Society and who will associate themselves in the future, wherever one may be sent, or to do whatever else one may be employed at by his Superiors”; b) stability; c) asking for alms; and d) obedience.
- The exposition of Brother Irénée speaks first of a vow “to conduct by association gratuitous schools” and then of two distinct commitments, one of association and the other of teaching children gratuitously.¹³
- The explication in the *Rule* of 1726 highlights only the vow “of teaching children gratuitously and conducting schools by association.”

Brother Maurice-Auguste draws attention to the “very close connection (which tied them together) between the two rather distinct terms of our act of profession ... the vow of association, to be sure, but in order to conduct gratuitous schools.”¹⁴

§What about the totality of Lasallian texts? According to the *Lasallian Vocabulary*, the term association and *associates* (in the sense of which I’m speaking here) are found only in the context of the Vow Formula or in the expository remarks of the *Collection*. In none of his spiritual writings does John Baptist de La Salle use this vocabulary. One can practically say the same thing of the adverb *ensemble* [together]. Its usage is definitely more frequent than that of the two preceding terms; but wherever it is used in the spiritual writings,¹⁵ it never captures the real sense of the expression “together and by association.”¹⁶

According to the Vow Formula, the vow of association is first of all a vow of the “Society,” rather than a vow of the “Community.”

I use the two terms with a precise meaning. The “Society” is the Institute as a whole; the “Community” is a small unit of 2, 3, 4, or more Brothers attached to the same house.

§The vow of association is first and foremost and Institute vow. It is shown in the Vow Formula as follows.

- The simple fact that the “vow-takers” who “associate themselves” on June 6, 1694 belong to different communities. Subsequently, new vow-takers unite themselves to the “Society.”

- The use of the plural “to conduct together and by association gratuitous schools.”¹⁷
- The unattached stance in terms of place – “wherever”; and even in regard to tasks, which could be non-scholastic “in order to do in said Society whatever I shall be employed at.”
- The definitive stance regarding the extent of the vow of obedience: it obliges with regard to the *Body of the Society* and the “Superiors.” In the strict sense, the last word is used in the Institute only to designate the Superior General. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the explanations of the vows all specify that the vow of obedience obliges in regard to “particular Directors” “chosen by the Brother Superior.”

§The vow of association is definitely not without bearing in regard to the “Community.” Since for the particular Brother, it is locally that the matter of the vow of association is concretized [conduct schools gratuitously]; and even association gathers together Brothers in order to “conduct together” gratuitous schools.

§Nevertheless, the fact remains in and of itself, the vow of association does not deal directly with the fact of Brothers working together in the same school. It engages each one with the members of the Institute as a whole. It is lived as well by Brothers not engaged in schools: naturally, the “serving” Brothers, but also a “Brother destined to visit the houses of our said Society,” a “Director of Novices.”¹⁸

In the same way, refer to the remarks of Brother Maurice-Auguste in regard to the vow of “stability” which he likens to Benedictine stability, but understood in the “Maurist”¹⁹ sense: the obligation of stability points up the fact that the monk belongs not to the monastery but to the Order.²⁰

According to the Vow Formula, the vow of association is above all the vow of a project or plan, of a finality/goal [purpose], of a “reason for being.”

§Naturally, it bears on a “way of being [behavior],” an “association,” a Society. No doubt about it. We’re dealing with a Society formed to conduct schools together. As we have seen, it is applicable to *each* school “of the Brothers” and to the Institute as a whole precisely because of the mobility of its members, accepting to go “wherever” they may be sent.

§But the comment of Brother Maurice-Auguste in regard to the “very close link” between the “vow of association” and the “commitment to teach gratuitously” must be treated fully. “Vow of association, definitely, but in order to conduct gratuitous schools.”

Association was not “vowed” simply in order “to conduct schools” together. The Society was not born nor does it define itself by “teaching” guaranteed in the same school by a team of “Brothers.” What motivated the action of John Baptist de La Salle and his companions, what determined them to establish, maintain, and defend their “association” was above all the act of truly promoting gratuitous education.

§It is for that reason that they make the *vow of association*. From the time of the *Bull of Approbation*, the formula no longer used the term “vow” in regard to association:

I promise to unite myself to live in Society with the Brothers of the Christian Schools who are associated to conduct together and by association, gratuitous schools ... for this reason, I promise and vow: poverty, chastity, obedience, stability, and teaching gratuitously ... which vows of poverty....

No longer is the “vow of association” spoken of. The re-emphasis of association as a matter of vow is a relatively recent development.²¹ Refer to the proposed vow formula in the *Proposed Rule* presently being studied: “for this reason I promise and vow chastity, poverty, obedience, *association for the educational service of the poor*, and stability in the Institute.”²²

Already in the “Explication of the Vows” given before 1725, the place given to gratuity is greater than that given to association. Besides, in his commentary, Brother Maurice-Auguste has headings only for the vows of obedience, stability, and teaching gratuitously.²³ Refer also to the connection he makes between the vows of the Brothers before the *Bull* and monastic profession: stability, obedience, type of life; this last being “of living in Society in order to conduct gratuitous schools.”²⁴

One will find in the thesis of Brother Maurice-Auguste a more complete treatment of this question with an analysis of the difference of emphasis between 1694 and 1717. Even when at the beginning the emphasis is placed on association, there is no question of ambiguity: “the schools that we have committed ourselves to conduct, determined to beg and live on bread alone in order not to abandon them, can only be these gratuitous schools, the very reason for the new association.”²⁵

And this leads us to speak of the link between the Vow Formula and the Founding Experience.

The Founding Experience of Association

The Vow Formula in 1694 sets forth an experience already lived for more than ten years in Paris, Rheims, and its environs. This experience is that of “founding” the Institute. De La Salle sensed very soon the necessity of bringing together teachers into a pedagogical and evangelical community. He progressively accepted that for him God’s work would be to surrender himself entirely to this foundation. In 1682, De La Salle decided for it in a radical way. He returned wholeheartedly to this decision again by the vow of November 21, 1691.

It is very true that the association of the Brothers as a “project” and as a progressive realization became “the powerful reality in the Founder’s life.” The Vow of 1694 re-launches the project and re-enforces its realization. At the time of the crises of 1710, one can measure the strength and the depth of this “word-action” which the Vow Formula represents.

But, what is this association? It seems to me one can tie together the elements or essential characteristics of association in three basic statements.

- It is an association which manifests itself *by* conducting schools together.
- It is an association *of* Brothers.
- It is an association *for* the evangelization of abandoned youth.

An association which manifests itself “by” conducting schools together

This implies a certain number of concrete elements which it seems to me important to take note of, recalling how they have been considered over time as essential elements in the Institute.

§“To conduct together” works for a well-defined type of school.

a) John Baptist de La Salle was open to all types of different calls: the training school center for rural teachers, night schools, Sunday schools, the Saint Yon boarding school, a reform school, a military academy. However, it is the “*petites écoles*”²⁶ that were the principal theater of the Brothers’ activities. Numerically the largest, these schools defined the identity of the Society.

This situation made it easy for the Brother to be “interchangeable.” They gave the same “basic” education; they ensured it in all subject areas. Movement from one class to another did not upset the professional framework or plan. Transfer from one city to another did not require too great an effort of re-adaptation.²⁷

This “large-scale” way of looking at things will characterize the Institute for a long time, with local adaptations as necessary. In France, when I entered the congregation, the Brothers’ schools were mainly “primary” – some of them having an advanced primary section. There were boarding schools,²⁸ and the Brothers had created modern secondary education. It is not a question of minimizing the openness and creativity of the Institute, it is simply one of recalling that the Brothers were widely employed in primary education. This evidently favored “association” and gave the group a consciousness of common identity which allowed for, by and large, a group “training.”

Certain consequences arose from this communal mentality. It happened that the Brothers looked upon their confreres employed in different types of establishments²⁹ with a certain “distance.” Was not one of the more painful aspects of the Latin Question in the USA³⁰ the inability of certain French mindsets to accept another relatively open organization and their inability to understand that it was answering a real “need” in another context?

b) It is, then, these primary schools that are gratuitous.

One knows how uncompromising De La Salle and his followers were in establishing, maintaining, and defending effective gratuity. One has only to remember the battles which they had to endure in order to remain faithful to gratuity. We know the precise texts which, in a very short time, focused the Brother’s attention on the minute details of the requirements and effective practice of gratuity. We have in our very beings the main thrusts of the spiritual teaching of our Founder.

Gratuity remained a characteristic of the Brothers' schools during the 18th century. After the French Revolution, at the time of the restoration of the Institute, the Brothers had their hearts set on maintaining the practice. Throughout the 19th century, they often had to do battle to defend it in opposition to the communes who employed them. When it was necessary to give in here and there, they had recourse to the Holy See and obtained "indults." However, they could continue to take the vow of teaching gratuitously because this agreed with the consciousness of the association's identity, and also because, by and large, it was a practice demanded by necessity.

As a novice, as a young Brother, I was brought up in this awareness of identity, even if the real practice of total gratuity had become an exception.³¹ Gratuity in the school was impossible because of the economic conditions of Catholic institutions. Gratuity remained on the horizon of our common aspirations. It remained the standard procedure for very concrete details.³²

The practice of gratuity was expressed by the level of real poverty of the Brothers and their communities. The absence of an individual salary and the very low salary paid the community facilitated gratuity and the extremely low school fees charged. Moreover, and this is not without its importance, on the economic level association was lived "at the source" because it was the community and not the individuals who received the wages.

§"To conduct together" schools aims at a "pastoral objective." In these gratuitous primary schools, each Brother exercised a responsibility that can be described as "pastoral" without violating the spirit and even the letter of a Lasallian reading of this founding experience.

a) In effect, on the one hand, the Brother is in "his" class "from morning until night." He is, therefore, responsible for the same group of children for an extended period of time. He teaches them every subject. He is concerned about getting to know the students individually as "persons." The children are not simply "students," the learners of this or that subject matter.

The Brother also attempts to better understand them by trying to learn about their social environment, their family background, etc.³³

Already, in this sense, the "association" of a group of Brothers in order "to conduct schools" does not indicate the absorption of each teacher into a uniform, functional anonymity. Yes, the Brothers are easily interchangeable; but in the accomplishment of a precise task, they establish a coherent personal relationship with each individual student in the class.

b) In other respects, and this is equally essential, each Brother in his class is the "shepherd/pastor" in the sense that he is not only the teacher of basic secular subjects but he is also the "catechist." This dimension of his activity is qualitatively important, since the Brother set aside 4½ hours each week for teaching Christian doctrine. The Institute will hold very strongly to these 4½ hours, a norm approved by the *Bull of Approbation*. In my experience, I have always known the rigorous practice of such an horarium, or at least heard explicit reference to such a practice which the Brothers tended to approximate.

Besides, the catechetical dimension and the activity of the Brother were qualitatively fundamental and all absorbing. Fundamental, because, in the order of finality, it was a priority.

No child would be admitted into the school unless he took religious instruction. Every “teaching” Brother was first a catechist. We have the Lasallian texts which underline this absolute priority. On occasion, it even happened that the secular work of the Brothers tended to be devalued in order to better highlight, it was thought, their primary responsibility in the area of religious education. Religious education was all absorbing in the accomplishment of the Brother’s ministry because it was not only a matter of communicating knowledge but also of raising children in a Christian way of life, of “teaching them how to live well” according to the prescriptions of the *Rule* often taken up and commented on in Lasallian spiritual writings. Therefore, one can say that the preoccupation of Christian education was within all the educational activity of the Brother. It constituted the motive of the teacher’s entire relationship with “the students who were confided to his care.”

All of that is in the Lasallian language which by using the Gospel terms, or even without using it, presents ministry to the Brothers as the actualization for these young people of the saving presence of Jesus Christ, the “Good Shepherd.” The Brothers are associated “to conduct schools together.” But this “association” is that of “shepherds,” first and above all shepherds solicitous of being for the students confided to them “ministers of Jesus Christ,” “dispensers of his mysteries,” charged with “announcing” the Good News of the Gospel to them.

The fundamental experience of an association “of” Brothers

Here again the association manifests itself in a truly lively way. It is exclusive. It implies a pedagogical sharing. It is exercised within a fraternal “communion” of men committed by the same consecration.

§An association uniquely for “conducting” schools: What I mean to say is that there is a complete identification between the educational team and the “religious” community. It is the Brothers and only the Brothers who conduct the school. For a long time, there were no lay teachers; and the actual association of the Brothers could have very well proved that the running of the school was dependent on them. It was without a doubt even clearer as hardly any external power intervened in areas of academic program, schedule, etc. Reading the *Rule* and *The Conduct of Schools* one has the impression that the Brothers are the “one and only masters.”

The awareness of an identity and of a real ability “to conduct schools together” left its mark deeply on the Brothers’ mindset. Even when it became necessary to accept the collaboration of “lay teachers,” they still continued for a long time to consider them and to treat them as “additions” rather than as real partners of the association. One would only have to study the Institute’s official thinking in regard to the place of lay teachers in our schools in order to realize this.³⁴

The Brothers’ “hold” on the school was all the more stronger as the link between religious community and educational team expressed itself organizationally in the school by the fundamental identification of the religious superior and director of the school. Even in the exercise of his professional tasks, the Brother was dependent on the Director to whom he owed “obedience.” The role of the Director was most important in order for the association of the Brothers to truly exert itself in the total running of the school.

For a long time, this unity identified the behavior and mindset of the Brothers; and I knew confreres who underwent a real crisis of conscience the day a lay teacher was placed in a position of authority in the school where they taught. I can still hear a Brother saying to me in regard to this: “I didn’t vow obedience to lay people.”

Association in the Institute was practiced concretely on the level of each school. The Brothers were placed [assigned] by the religious superior, and their movement was hardly hindered by factors not dependent on the internal life of the Institute. The Brother Director was named by the major Superior; and, normally, the duration of his “professional” mandate was conditioned by the *Rule* which limited the duration of his obedience as religious superior. The major Superior exercised his authority, his control (or his assistance), in the professional area. The canonical visit, for example, implied the visit of the Brother Visitor to all the classes (including those of lay teachers when there were any).³⁵

We will touch elsewhere upon the community of pedagogical sharing.

§An association which implies pedagogical sharing: In a way, one of the reasons for the precocious start of the “community” of teachers under the promotion of the Founder was the realization by De La Salle of the risks which threatened the success of the schools in Rheims, i.e. the independence or the “disordered-ness” of the teachers.

a) By uniting them, he wanted to standardize even more their approaches, their attitudes, their educational and teaching objectives. He arrived at this quite quickly. This unifying of plans, behaviors, and efforts – the continuity which it would facilitate in the academic progress of the students – would allow for the success and the reputation of “the Brothers’ schools.”

b) This unification would in addition ease the association’s functioning in the framework of the Institute, in that the teaching practices of the “Brothers” would be characterized by common traits.

c) The pedagogical sharing is, therefore, that of a certain “consensus”; and the newcomers were usually initiated into a particular style and a certain number of teaching “strategies,” even treating of details.³⁶

One should not, however, mistake “association for the purpose of conducting schools” and “pedagogical uniformity” simply as a repetitive trend or as a routine at all costs. Certainly, the danger of pedagogical conformity has been very real in the Institute; and it may have even happened that pedagogical creativity was not sufficiently promoted by association. *The Conduct of Schools*, just as well as more than one section of the *Rule*, was able to be translated into restrictive norms.

But one cannot forget that *The Conduct of Schools* was a result of the “structure” of the Brothers’ pedagogical sharing, which produced permanent adaptation and innovation. One would only have to remember all that the Brothers have been able to invent for the renewal of schools and

the creation of new school forms over the course of time. Thanks to this sharing, association (of the Institute) showed itself fruitful.³⁷

This sharing in association constituted the pedagogical emergence of a Community in the consecrated life.

§An association which is lived out within a fraternal “communion” of men committed by the same consecration: I have already pointed out the essential connection in the founding experience between the pedagogical team and the religious brotherhood. It is the community of “associated” Brothers who “conduct the school,” and it is the Institute which conducts the gratuitous schools. Concisely, it is necessary to stress its being constituted by men who are brought together by the same total consecration to God which gives strength to the association to conduct schools. The reciprocity should not be lost sight of. The power of the association to conduct schools can often strengthen the bonds of fraternal community, embody the consecrated life, and consolidate fidelity to religious commitment.

a) The association takes on new strength owing to the “mystical” dimension which nourishes and drives it. A mystical dimension because of the consciousness of a vocation, of a call from God shared by the Brothers. A mystical dimension of a religious “profession” integrating apostolic reality right up to its concretization in a common educational “work.” A mystical dimension nourished by community “practices” (prayer, formation, spiritual reading, retreats). A mystical dimension which the Lasallian spiritual writings translate and uphold, drafted for the specific intention of the Brothers and which, constantly, invite them to discover the evangelical meaning of their task at the same time that it calls them to engage themselves with a new burst of enthusiasm.

b) Specifically, the “fraternal” spirit which animates community life translates itself into a specific style of educational relationships. From the moment when the companions of M. de La Salle decided to call themselves “Brothers” of the Christian Schools instead of “Teaching Masters” of the Christian Schools, they understood that the name change had a double meaning. On the one hand, it evoked community life in the image of the first Christians; and on the other hand, it reflected the style of educational relationships they would have with the students.

c) This is not the place to insist upon it, but it would be necessary also to observe to what point the association’s exercise in the running of schools “conducted” by the same team of Brothers – and also the common experience shared by a large number of the Society’s members – was able to contribute to concretizing the spirit of the consecration, to strengthening the bonds of fraternity, and to consolidating their fidelity.

One surmises that we are not here dealing with raising up an idyllic catalogue of the “origins” of the Institute but rather of presenting the different aspects, the varied dimensions, and the numerous implications of “association” in order to “conduct gratuitous schools.” It can be seen that association leaves its impression on all that one could call the “lifestyle” of the Brothers as well as of the Institute. Most of the elements registered can be considered as “essential.” In effect, the attachment of the Institute to each of them has often been interpreted in such a way that they have been judged very essential.

In reality, that which is essential is not that each one of them be taken separately. It is rather the entirety, the whole which they form, the dynamic totality in which each of them is noted, the vital coherence which renders them indispensable to identity and to mission. It is necessary to go even further and to state that it is more than the “lifestyle” of the Brother (the Institute) but the very “reason for being Brother” which is at the root of association.

An association “for” the evangelization of abandoned youth

I will not develop this point at length. It seems to me that I have already done so in the conference given to the Capitulants.³⁸ I limit myself to three observations which could be developed at some further date.

§It was the desire to respond to an urgent need of abandoned youth “far from salvation” which provoked the birth of association.

a) It was the experience of the Founder himself. He was created for this mission by his consciousness of the distress of a good many young people and by his realization of the urgent need to “provide them the means of salvation” by establishing a “Society” of “God’s ministers” at their service.

b) It was the experience of the Community’s birth, when young people desirous of following Jesus Christ and of fulfilling a most useful ministerial function for the Church came to replace the first followers of De La Salle, who had been put off by the Gospel attitudes that they had not integrated into themselves by becoming school teachers.

c) It was the consciousness that the ecclesial environment of the Community quickly realized and which brought forth numerous calls and a relatively rapid growth of the Community, tending to become a “Society.”

§It was the consciousness of answering an urgent need of that youth which sustained the association, especially in numerous moments of crisis.

a) This was true for the Founder. From the moment he observed that his “vocation” was to set up this Community, he involved himself totally in the project. His action was inseparably one of “structuring” and “animating” the association of the Society. “The establishment and the conduct of the Community were for him God’s work.”

One could also link with this fundamental project of establishing and supporting the association:

- his preoccupation with discerning vocations, the initial formation of the Brothers, their upkeep, and their spiritual nourishment.
- his effort to enlighten the communal development/direction of the Brothers by nurturing their “spirit of faith, of zeal, of community” by means of his spiritual writings.

- his vigorous reactions when it was a matter of defending the practice and originality of association: from the *Memorandum on the Habit* to the differences [disagreements] that put him in opposition to one bishop or another, all the while fighting for gratuity.
- the texts which at the time of crises fixed the reaffirmation of his decisive option and the new impetus of his initiatives as Founder.³⁹

b) This was true for the Institute. I recalled above how certain striking “acts” of association marked the foundation of the Institute. By reason of the will of John Baptist de La Salle, the Brothers took into their own hands their own way of life and even their “destinies.” This appears at the time of the Vow of 1694 and of the Act of Election which followed, as well as when the Archbishop of Paris wished to impose an ecclesiastical Superior on the Community. It was also true at the decisive moment when a group of Brothers, who had assembled on their own in 1714, called the Founder back at a critical point for the Society’s survival.

§What is essential in the “lifestyle” of association is vitally dependent on its “reason for being.” There is, above all, this dynamic “bond” which is essential to association.

a) Why schools? Because, in context, they appear as a structure, which is both ecclesial and human, so that “these” young people may have access to the salvation of Jesus Christ.

It is with this end in view that the Brothers associate in order to conduct schools. It’s from that objective that they will always have their hearts set on:

- promoting and defending the gratuity of schools;
- transforming the school in order to adapt it to the reality of the young, the culture, and the community, and to prepare them for life;
- making the school a catechetical place where the Gospel is proclaimed.

Such perspectives are at the root of association for it is only together that the Brothers can arrive at changing something in this situation.

b) Why a total consecration to God? Because one can recognize his call, his presence, his action in the history of discovering this need of “salvation.” Also because the educational service of these young people is a practical way of rendering glory to God, because one is engaged in an evangelical undertaking, and because it is necessary to be “coherent” with the mission.

These perspectives are at the root of association understood and lived increasingly as requiring *a communion in faith and a spirit of zeal*.

c) Finally, why association? In order to constitute in the Church a new body of men completely consecrated to God in order to allow “abandoned” youth a means of access to the promises of God in Jesus Christ.

Taking into Account Present Reality, the “Givens” of the Life

I promise to unite myself and to live in Society with the Brothers of the Christian Schools who are associated to conduct, together and by association, schools for the poor.⁴⁰

We continue today to use the same Vow Formula as was used at the beginning of the Institute. But can we say that these same terms indicate similar realities?

Without being able to take into account all the various forms of the Brother’s “ministry” throughout the Institute today, I see two patterns in which the ministry is fulfilled. I would observe right away that these two patterns are not only actually lived but also are explicitly provided for in our present legislative texts.

- On the one hand, and without doubt still very prevalent, a place where Brothers are grouped in the same community “to conduct together” one school.
- On the other hand, in quite a few situations, where Brothers exercise their ministry outside the community to which they belong and not attached to one school situation.

Communities of Brothers who conduct the same school together

That is to say, notably, that they are responsible for its direction and orientation. They exercise their teaching roles there. They are responsible for catechesis and Christian animation in the school. And, furthermore, that they are particularly attentive to students who are disadvantaged or in difficulty.

§Unquestionably, one can often find in these situations that association remains a dynamic factor of positive influence. A “Lasallian” standard is present, a specific style of education, a certain “particular character” of the school remains possible and often effective.

On the other hand, the Brothers belonging to an Institute often still contribute more vigor, openness, and self-reliance to association.

Finally, the Lasallian charism itself can be very alive and either strengthen or boost association, notably by extending it beyond the strict limits of the Institute. The renewed interest of many lay teachers in several countries for the deepening of Lasallian inspiration in pedagogy or in spirituality is, without a doubt, significant and promising of renewal.

§But at the same time, one has to be conscious of the many and considerable differences between the situation here and now and what association was like at the very beginning of the Institute.

a) Differences in regard to the types of schools:

- in how many cases is not the group of Brothers a small minority compared to the number of lay teachers involved?
- in how many cases within the same school are not the Brothers spread out because of the size or the complexity of the work “conducted” by the Institute?

- in how many cases is it not difficult for a teaching Brother to live out the “pastoral” dimension of his work in so far as teaching students certain specialized subjects takes precedence over a prolonged relationship with the same students with whom he is in contact?
- in how many cases do the Brothers who “conduct” the school truly have the possibility of conducting catechetical activities, of making catechesis their primary goal?
- in how many cases is it possible for the school in its organizational structure to be truly at the service of “abandoned” youth?

b) Differences as to the “control” that the Brother’s community or the Institute can exercise in the running of a school. One can continue to use the expression “to conduct schools” but with substantive differences:

- in a world where schools are largely structured and controlled by the state.
- in a teaching profession so subject to various structures such as diplomas, curriculum, programs, etc. that one almost functions within the framework of civil service. The mobility of the Brothers vis-à-vis the association of the Institute is very relative. The “Brother Directors” freedom of choice in regard to lay staff is far from that which would be desired.
- in a system with curricula and cooperative ventures so organized from outside the school that the margin of creativity and of initiatives exercised by those immediately responsible for a school have become very tightly restricted.
- in a range of schools that are more diversified than in the past, as to the levels of study, types of young people, specializations....

Brothers who exercise their ministry outside the community to which they belong and not necessarily “conducting the same school”

I am here only looking at cases – the most frequent – where there are Brothers working as evangelizers living in community and consecrating themselves to other educational ministries:

- Brothers engaged full time in the campus ministries of public schools.
- Brothers engaged either full or part time as moderators (accompanying ministers) of apostolic movements (e.g., Catholic Action, Young Workers Movement, etc.).
- Brothers who dedicate themselves especially to ministries caring for disadvantaged youth (e.g., vagrants, delinquents, parolees, handicapped, substance abusers, etc.).
- Brother engaged in ministries involved with adults (e.g., catechumenate, catechesis, theology, catechist formation, diocesan directors of Catholic education, etc.).

§It often seems quite clear that what led these Brothers to these ministries, what sustains them there, is the consciousness of living out in their ministry the essential dimensions of association in the Institute.

a) First of all, personal pastoral responsibility, so important to the foundational experience and recognized in the spiritual teaching of the Founder.⁴¹

b) The “important” consideration given to catechetical goals and works.⁴²

c) The priority of educational service of the poor.⁴³ Many “re-conversions” of Brothers have been brought about by a very strong, conscientious recovery of this “finality” [purpose] of the Institute.

d) The ecclesial character lived in the exercise of ministry.

§Even if the Brother is “alone” (as Brother) in the practical exercise of these very “Lasallian” ministries, the dynamism and concrete reality of association is and can be very strong.

a) Daily, by means of community sharing, these Brothers who very often work with persons other than Brothers truly associate the other Brothers to ministries that are not exercised in isolation but only separately from the community.

There even exist communities where all the members are engaged in different ministries and where they find themselves as the only Brothers, but where the consciousness of association remains strong thanks to the sharing that occurs.

b) In the second place, one must also take into account the fact that association can unite and strengthen such Brothers thanks to meetings between them (catechetical exchanges, meetings of Brothers engaged in similar works, etc.).

c) And then, even more so, in numerous instances these Brothers are conscious of being faithful to the call of association, a call which has spoken to them by means of recent General Chapters.... We must emphasize this point.

Taking into Account Situations Calling on Us Today (ST)

My point of departure here will directly be “the Institute.” It has been a very strong “caller.” Existentially, concrete situations are often determining factors for the Brothers. But the Institute itself, by its basic “calls,” invites us to be attentive to these real situations.

I see the calls of the Institute under two headings: a) the call to renewal in the exercise of mission; and b) the call to renewal in the living out of community life.

I can be very concise by alluding especially to the *Declaration*. Its “contents” is to be found in our actual *Rule and Constitutions*. Coming from the 39th General Chapter, it was taken up again by the 40th General Chapter.

The Institute's call to renewal of mission

The *Declaration* invites us to this renewal of mission, notably in the following ways:

- educational service of the poor: “This is made clear by the sense of unity among all in the world today, by the appeals that have been made by the Second Vatican Council and recent popes, by the fact of our religious vocation which dedicates us in a special manner to the imitation of Christ, and by fidelity to the specific intentions of our Founder.”⁴⁴
- catechesis: “The Brothers are catechists by vocation; this is their ‘principal function.’”⁴⁵ “The General Chapter calls upon the Brothers in a very special way to undertake the evangelization and catechesis of those among the young who are most neglected, especially adolescents.”⁴⁶
- school renewal: “Today the Institute is committed to make its contribution to the rebirth of the Christian school, to help create such a school capable of preparing students for the twenty-first century. All are invited to participate actively in this movement, committing themselves with confidence and courage to the new directions necessary to answer the needs of youth today.”⁴⁷

It must be added that when treating the question of “laity-priesthood in the Institute,” the 40th General Chapter asked the Brothers to involve themselves actively in research for the purpose of determining, creating, focusing on the forms of ministry in the Church: a) by participating in present-day reflection and relying on the specific mission of the Brother; and b) by pastoral and educational action, united with other evangelizing forces at work in their milieu.”

According to the General Chapter, this renewal of mission carries the following implications.

a) A more resolved listening, a greater attention paid to the concrete situations in which the Brothers live. The Institute can give some clear and unambiguous directives. It is doing so. But the concrete realization of such must be done on the local level.⁴⁸

b) It is, therefore, “each District, each community, and ultimately each Brother” who must be an active participant in this renewal. Association, here, is first of all the Institute’s dynamism to be translated concretely according to the diversity of situations.

c) Renewal demands an “examination of works.”

d) Its realization will involve a diversity of concrete ministries. The 1966-1967 General Chapter was very aware of this end result. It favorably accepted and even desired it. It refused to draw up an exhaustive list of “possible” ministries for the Brothers. It gave “criteria” for choice of ministry.⁴⁹ It foresaw very clearly some situations where Brothers “exercise their teaching activity in schools which are not directed by the Institute,”⁵⁰ situations where the Brothers “bring their collaboration to diocesan and regional catechetical schools,”⁵¹ and situations where Brothers exercise “non-school” educational activities.⁵²

This renewal of mission is inseparable from community renewal.

The Institute's call to community renewal

One need only compare Chapter 3 of the 1946 *Rule* and Chapter 3 of the *Rule* of 1966-1967 and of 1976 to see the differences of perspectives. Without making this comparison, I limit myself to pointing out some characteristics either in regard to the local community or to the Community of the Institute. In concluding, I will point out a *sine qua non* of this entire renewal.

Concerning renewal of the local community, it will be presented under three aspects. First, the local community, to be sure, remains a community of living reality, of actions lived together. But it is above all a community of sharing: goods, prayers, exchanges. It is a community of interpersonal relationships based on openness, welcome, the will to “build” community on a daily basis. Second, the local community must remain a unit having its very own features, autonomy, “sense of privacy.” But it is also an open community integrated in the life of the city and local Church, a welcoming community. Third, the local community can be a community of “tasks.” It can be a community animating a “work,” for example, a school. This does not have necessarily to be the case. On the other hand, whether or not it animates a common work, whether or not it “conducts” a school, the local community is one that has a “plan” – and the community plan admits as an essential element the sharing of a common *mission*. This mission is one that is constantly being discerned.⁵³

With such perspectives of renewal, the concrete forms of local community can be very different. The importance that the 40th General Chapter of 1976 gave to the Community Annual Program springs from this recognition of pluralism.

Concerning renewal of the Institute Community, the Institute's association, on every level, is called to support local association. Three words seem to summarize this support. First, the Institute's association is a source of *inspiration* for the Brothers and the local communities by recalling the founding dynamics and re-actualizing them by opening us to the needs of the world and of the Church. Second, the Institute's association places the Brothers into effective *communion* with each other leading them to gather together and share their experiences, to discover unceasingly more and more that the same inspiration can be translated into different activities and that the diversity of works must be questioned by that same inspiration. Third, the Institute's association intervenes in order to *discern* the choices made and question the practice effected by those choices.

It is necessary to insist that renewal of forms of ministry and of community life presupposes a “spiritual” renewal on which the last two General Chapters have insisted. Renewal of *faith*, ... of *zeal*, ... of prayer, ... of spiritual sharing, ... of formation. I only mention this because it is evidently fundamental. Above all, our association is of a “mystical” nature.

Conclusion

In diagram form [cf. Diagram 2], allow me to summarize what seem to be the main aspects of the points made. By reading down the left column of Diagram 2, one is invited to recall how *association* has been presented, in this document, as being: a) constituted *for* a purpose [*because of the needs of* “abandoned youth”]; b) constituted, first of all, at the level of the Institute [the

Society]; c) concretized in local communities; and d) constituted, concretized, and lived by the commitment of persons called by God to be consecrated to Him. When reading across the columns horizontally from left to right, one is reminded how the theme of *association* has developed and evolves in the interplay of the vow formula of the Brothers (VF), the founding experience of De La Salle and his early companions (FE), present situations (PS), re-founding situations (RS), and situations today (ST); and this summary correlates well with the schema presented earlier in the document [cf. Diagram 1].

Endnotes

1. This text, which is more or less in outline form, was presented in Rome during the SIEL program (Session Internationale d'Études Lasalliennes) of 1988-1989. Brother John Guasconi, who was a participant in this program, was assisted in translating the text by Brother Leonard Marsh.

2. Brother Michel Sauvage (1923-2001) did his theological studies at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas (the Angelicum) in Rome and did his doctoral thesis in Lille (*Catéchèse et Laïcité*, 1963). He was a professor at the Lateran Pontifical University in Rome (Jesus Magister) and was a theologian for his brother, Bishop Jean Sauvage, at Vatican Council II. From 1966 to 1976, he was Assistant Superior General for Formation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. He served, after the death of Brother Maurice-Auguste Hermans (1911-1987), as the second director of the office of Lasallian Studies in the Generalate in Rome (1987-1991).

3. Brother John Guasconi has a Bachelor of Arts from The Catholic University of America and a Master of Arts from Ecole Francaise of Middlebury College. Brother John is fluent in four languages and served as the Director General of the Motherhouse for the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Rome, Italy.

4. The conference being referenced as having been delivered by Brother Michel at the 41st General Chapter was entitled "Lasallian Spirituality: Our Heritage" [subsequently published and now readily available in *Spirituality in the Time of John Baptist de La Salle*, edited by Robert Berger (Lasallian Publications, 1999), pages 263-293].

5. Canon Jean-Baptiste Blain (1675-1751) is the principal biographer of John Baptist de La Salle (1733).

6. Maurice-Auguste, *Cahiers Lasalliens* #2, pages 37-42.

7. Cf. *Cahiers Lasalliens* #2, pages 67-68.

8. The abbreviations used in this listing correlate with those to be found in Diagram 1 and Diagram 2 of this document.

9. *Cahiers Lasalliens* #3: *Livret des Voeux*, pages 12-19.
10. *Cahiers Lasalliens* #3, pages 19-23.
11. *Cahiers Lasalliens* #2, page 44.
12. *Cahiers Lasalliens* #2, pages 61-76.
13. “Which rather contradicts the vow formula,” notes Brother Maurice-Auguste in *Cahiers Lasalliens* #2, page 70.
14. *Cahiers Lasalliens* 2, page 70.
15. *Letters; Meditations for Sundays, Feast Days, and Retreat; Collection; and Rules and Constitutions*.
16. I was not able to consult Brother Maurice-Auguste’s *Vocabulaire Lasallien* (1984) on the word “Society.”
17. Les écoles gratuites.
18. Cf. “Act of June 19, 1718,” *Cahiers Lasalliens* #3, pages 21-22.
19. The Congregation of Saint Maur was a famous congregation of French Benedictines. Founded in 1621, the Maurists were known for their high level of scholarship.
20. *Cahiers Lasalliens* #2, page 51.
21. Cf. *Circular 406* (December 21, 1977), pages 126-127.
22. Page 39. Between the 40th General Chapter of 1976 and the 41st General Chapter of 1986, there were two proposed revisions of the *Rule* published Institute-wide for consideration and study. As the 41st General Chapter opened, there was consequently a draft proposed and in the hands of the Brother Capitulants for their study and approval.
23. Table of Contents.
24. *Cahiers Lasalliens* #11, pages 191-192.
25. *Cahiers Lasalliens* #11, pages 191-192.
26. Elementary level grammar schools.
27. Nevertheless, the Founder is conscious that it is better for teachers from southern France to teach the children of that part of the country; and the schools of cities noted for the maritime activities of their inhabitants, such as Calais and Boulogne, adapted their programs to the youth who attended them.

28. At least, one per District.

29. Boarding schools, secondary schools.

30. Cf. To better understand this reference please see *The Christian Brothers in the United States, 1848-1948: A Century of Catholic Education* by Angelus Gabriel Cashin (New York, 1948), pages 478-484; and “The Latin Question: A Conflict in Catholic Higher Education between Jesuits and Christian Brothers in Late Nineteenth-Century America” by Ronald Eugene Isetti in *The Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 76, No. 3 (July 1990), pages 526-548.

31. For only several students in a school.

32. Gifts from children or from their families.

33. *The Conduct of Schools*.

34. Cf. Reports of General Chapters and *Circular Letters of the Superior Generals*.

35. The Brother Visitor is the term used by the Brothers of the Christian Schools for the pastoral and administrative leader of a District. Many other religious congregations prefer to use the terms Provincial and Province. The Brother Visitor makes a “canonical visit” of each local community and ministry/school.

36. For example, the use of the “clapper.”

37. One has only to think of the quality of so many school manuals produced as a result of “teachers’ meetings.” This term, as has been shown by more than one study of Brother Yves Poutet, corresponded to a reality.

38. As noted earlier, this conference was subsequently published and is now readily available as “Lasallian Spirituality: Our Heritage” in *Spirituality in the Time of John Baptist de La Salle*, edited by Robert Berger (Lasallian Publications, 1999), pages 263-293.

39. For example, the four point program at the time of the 1691 crisis.

40. *Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* (1987), #25.

41. See quite a few pages back in the italicized section entitled “*An association which manifests itself ‘by’ conducting schools together*” point (a) of the sub-division entitled “§’To conduct together’ schools aims at a pastoral objective.”

42. See quite a few pages back in the italicized section entitled “*An association which manifests itself ‘by’ conducting schools together*” point (b) of the sub-division entitled “§’To conduct together’ schools aims at a pastoral objective.”

43. See a few pages back in the italicized section entitled “*An association ‘for’ the evangelization of abandoned youth.*”

44. *Declaration* #28.1.

45. *Declaration* #38.1.

46. *Declaration* #38.3.

47. *Declaration* #44.5.

48. Refer, for example, to *Declaration* #28.3 concerning service of the poor.

49. *Declaration* #52.

50. *Declaration* #50.

51. *Declaration* #38.3.

52. *Declaration* #54.4; 52.

53. *Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* (1987), #3g.