

Signum Fidei Association



Style of Life

“Ad Experimentum until the next assembly.”

2007

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Rome, November 26th 2006

It is with great pleasure that I accept the invitation to write an introduction to the final text of the “Style of Life” which was approved during the last Signum Fidei Assembly.

Collected here today is the fruit of the careful work of the representatives of the Association from the different Regions of the Institute in which it has been established. But above all, it brings together the lived experience of all those who, with an admirable Lasallian spirit and by means of a concrete apostolic mission, and over a period of more than 30 years have wished to associate themselves with our charism and make our mission their own.

As I said to you during your Assembly in July, we find ourselves today at the crossroads of a path in which three factors appear which are influencing the way we look at things:

- An ecclesiology of communion and of the rediscovery of the role of the lay person
- A new awareness of the potential of the charism
- The drop in vocations and the ageing of the Brothers which make it difficult to keep our works going.

Although normally experiences of shared mission and association have arisen, very often, as a result of this last factor, deep down it is the least important. What is important, above all, is living an ecclesiology of communion, rediscovering the role of the laity in the Church and promoting the charism.

I see this confirmed with the birth of the Signum Fidei Movement, since, in 1976 when it was made concrete by means of the first official consecration in front of the members of the General Chapter, the third factor was far from having the dimensions which it has nowadays in certain Regions of the Institute. Signum Fidei was born thanks to a new ecclesiological vision and thanks to the ever new vitality of the Lasallian charism and in this sense it can be a model for the new movements and forms which are developing nowadays around our charism

Our last General Chapter pointed out to us some features which need to be present in the Association as characteristics of reference:

- A vocation inspired by the charism of Saint John Baptist de La Salle and his values
- A life of faith which discovers God in everyday life, understood in the light of Scripture and, for persons of other religions, in the light of their own sacred texts

- A community experience of some form or other suited to the identity of its members
- A mission of some duration which associates persons with the educational service of the poor
- An openness of mind which makes it possible to see beyond the individual and his immediate environment.

The characteristics which the 43rd General Chapter pointed out as being the distinctive marks of every authentic Lasallian association must be present in the Signum Fidei Fraternity, which from its very beginnings has wished to take shape by means of three profoundly Lasallian elements: faith, ardent zeal and fraternity or community.

If as Signum Fidei we have heard the call of God (vocation) to live in accordance with the charism of Saint John Baptist de La Salle and his values; if our faith life leads us to discover God in our everyday life as illumined by the Word of God; if we are living a community experience inspired by a spirituality of communion which makes us feel that we are brothers and sisters to one another with hearts always open to the needs of the world; if we feel united in a mission which associates us in the service of the poor; if we are disposed towards living all this for a significant period of time and with the wish that it be for all our lives; if we feel we are part of a universal family which opens up dimensions which go beyond our little world and our personal interests....

Then, yes, we can turn into reality what the 42nd General Chapter said: *'The Signum Fidei Fraternity constitutes for the Districts a path of spirituality very suitable for lay persons - especially educators - who inspire their lives with Saint John Baptist de La Salle'*. And this the last General Chapter endorsed by recognizing its organic relation with the Institute.



Br. Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría
Superior General

Dear Brothers and Signum Fidei,

It is no exaggeration to say that the First International Signum Fidei Assembly held in Rome from March 20 – April 1, 2006 was a historic event in the life of the Association. After thirty years of existence, this was the first time that Signum Fidei members convened at an international level to discuss the nature of their association and their desired future. After the founding of Signum Fidei in 1976, the only other international meeting took place in 1993 when about ten Brother-Animators met in Rome. But there were no Signum Fidei present.

The time seemed ripe, then, to finally bring together the Signum Fidei members themselves to reflect on the road traveled thus far and to chart directions for the future. Br. Alvaro, Superior General, and the General Council gladly gave their approval for this International Assembly and set aside a budget to cover most of the expenses for the 25 delegates who were expected to attend.

To prepare for this International Assembly each national group was asked to hold a local Assembly. These were followed by continent-wide Assemblies in Latin America, Europe, Asia and the Near East. Unfortunately geographical and financial circumstances prevented us from having an African continental Assembly, while language and paucity of numbers made a North American Assembly inadvisable. However, representatives from the USA attended the Asian continental meeting.

The Assembly in Europe set in motion the idea that the Style of Life needed to be updated. It soon became clear that this would become the main agenda for the International Assembly since a thorough study of the Style of Life would necessarily touch all the central issues facing the Signum Fidei.

A Preparatory Commission made up of Mr. Ernesto Vallejo Espinoza (Peru), Simeón Martin Reiner (Spain) Erica Stellini (Italy), and Br. Victor Franco met in Rome for three days to plan the International Assembly. Ernesto had helped to organize the Latin American Assembly, Erica had attended the European Assembly, and Simeón had just finished participating in the C.I.L. program in Rome for Lasallian Family formators.

Twenty Signum Fidei and five Brothers representing the estimated 1,000 SF members found in 29 countries around the world were eventually chosen or appointed to attend the First International Signum Fidei Assembly. Representation was based primarily on the number of consecrated members in a country. Br. Superior General appointed the five Brothers.

Unfortunately the representative from Madagascar was unable to attend due to visa problems. After the Assembly had convened, it voted to replace him with Mrs. Erica Stellini, who had been part of the Preparatory Commission.

The pages that follow bear witness to the two weeks of intensive work undertaken by the delegates. Given the fact that this was the first Assembly of its kind, the delegates agreed that this revised Style of Life would be accepted “ad experimentum”. Nonetheless, what you now hold in your hands is the official edition of the Style of Life which is meant to guide the Signum Fidei in the coming years until the next International Assembly.

May our Blessed Mother and St. La Salle intercede for us as we try to live the words and the spirit of our Style of Life with joyful fidelity.

In Jesus, the Sign of our Faith,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Br. Victor Franco, F.S.C." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Br. Victor Franco, F.S.C.
SF International Animator

STYLE OF LIFE

CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

1. “Signum Fidei Fraternity” is the official name used in this Style of Life document approved by the First International Assembly. This name is affirmed with the understanding that the term “fraternity” may not be appropriate in all countries and a more appropriate noun may be substituted in the translations.
2. In the 1970s lay people who were working in the Lasallian world of education asked the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools for permission to commit themselves to educational activity, sharing with the Brothers the spirit which is proper to them.

The Institute saw in this request a sign of the times and offered the possibility of beginning a life experience as a lay Lasallian, with a particular style, and this experience was called the "Signum Fidei." Brothers Paulus Adams and Manuel Olivé were the promoters of this new experience throughout the Lasallian world.

3. The seed that was sown in Rome in 1976 has grown under the inspirations of the Holy Spirit and it now extends throughout various world regions and cultures where Lasallian influence is present. As of 2006 there are Signum Fidei in 29 countries.
4. The 43rd General Chapter recognized Signum Fidei as an “intentional group” in organic relation with and associated with the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (Circular 447, pp. 5-6).
5. Signum Fidei, being an open and Christian association, welcomes all baptized Christians who wish to devote themselves to the religious education of youth and work to extend the kingdom of God by helping children, especially the poor and vulnerable.
6. Since the Signum Fidei association is a way of living the Lasallian charism and Lasallian spirituality within the Church, its members need to follow a formation process in order to achieve full participation in the "Style of Life."
7. Signum Fidei association associates its roots with the spirituality of St John Baptist de La Salle. The vocation is centered on the Lasallian core values: Faith, Zeal for service, and communion in mission. They pray for and promote Lasallian vocations. The members strive to be a Sign of Faith.
8. Each person who is connected to the Institute and lives the Lasallian charism and spirituality can belong to the Signum Fidei association.

CHAPTER II – THE SIGNUM FIDEI VOCATION

9. The Signum Fidei vocation is a gift of God to the Church. It is rooted in the baptismal call to

holiness. It is nourished by Lasallian Spirituality.

10. The Signum Fidei member is a lay Lasallian who has discerned a call from God to live out the fullness of his/her baptismal consecration in the world, preferably in the field of education, thus participating in the mission of the Church. Nevertheless the Signum Fidei association accepts religious and priests who wish to enrich their own charism with that of St. John Baptist de La Salle in order to commit themselves to the Lasallian educational mission.
11. The Signum Fidei member associates with other members of the association in order to live a specific style of life. Together they live out a communal style of life that reflects the Lasallian “together and by association” way of being present in the world.
12. Inspired by the Gospel journey of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, Signum Fidei members strive to be witnesses of Jesus the Savior in their family, professional, work, social and church environments.
13. The members of the association try to integrate the various elements that give meaning to their life: following Jesus, the Lasallian charism, membership in a community, and the mission.
14. The witness of their lives as Signum Fidei members, the example given by the members of the association, and the educational service of the poor are the main factors that attract new members to the association.
15. Through their response to God’s call, the lifestyle they have chosen, their spirituality, and their personal characteristics, the members of the association constitute an important part of the Lasallian association for mission. Their consecration to God and their unique style of life serve as an example for other groups that belong to the Lasallian Family.

CHAPTER III – SPIRIT OF THE SIGNUM FIDEI

16. The spirit of the association is the same as that which Saint John Baptist de La Salle bequeathed to the Brothers’ Institute: a spirit of faith, zeal and community. The members of the association live it in a way appropriate to their situation as lay persons.
17. Guided by the spirit of faith, every member of the Signum Fidei association:
 - a. considers existential human realities as the environment into which God and the community send him;
 - b. recognizes the image of Jesus in each person;
 - c. recognizes events as signs sent by God himself;
 - d. carries out the service of Christian education to which the Lord inspires
 - e. aims at being a living presence of Jesus in the world, in response to the guidance of the Holy Spirit;
 - f. nourishes himself each day with the Word of God, shares it in his everyday life and considers it as the center of his life;
 - g. gives dynamism to the witness he bears and brings a heightened awareness to the present moment he is living by frequently recalling the presence of God, in accord with

the Lasallian tradition .

18. Faith enables each member to live the love of the Father in Jesus Christ, who died and rose again, a love that is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.
19. The Spirit of Faith of each Signum Fidei member blossoms into an ardent zeal through the witness of each one's life and apostolate. The Signum Fidei member prepares and leads those confided to them by God to welcome Jesus-Christ as Savior.
20. "Ardent zeal" leads the Signum Fidei member to live professional, family and ecclesial commitments simply and devotedly, with a spirit of gratitude, always seeking to serve the poor and those far removed from salvation.
21. The Signum Fidei member acts out of conviction, in a spirit of self-denial, and without any self-interest.

CHAPTER IV - THE SIGNUM FIDEI AND THE FAMILY

22. The Signum Fidei members recognize a specific vocation in the Lord's call to be families. Therefore, they want to be witnesses of God's Trinitarian relationship and for that reason they take the Holy Family as their model and they try to transform family ties into bonds of respect and love.
23. Signum Fidei members are part of a family which is their first community. They try to imbue their families with the Presence of God.
24. Spouses look upon life and each other as gifts from God. Based on mutual giving, they accept the ups and downs of family life as a way to respond generously to God's will.
25. Parents participate in the Father's creative work in their children, the fruits of their mutual love. Spouses share joyfully the inherent responsibilities that come with parenthood.
26. Parents bring up their children in the faith. As responsible persons, they accompany them throughout their growing years. They are always at their side, with their arms open. They respect the freedom of each member of the family and lead by example.
27. Signum Fidei members, with all the constraints of life and living, endeavour to provide a life of dignity for family members in a bond of love. They place all their trust in Divine Providence.

CHAPTER V - THE MISSION OF THE SIGNUM FIDEI FRATERNITY

28. The Signum Fidei association, faithful to the Lasallian charism that inspires and energizes it, wants to proclaim the Good News of Jesus to the world, as a type of human development, especially to the poor and vulnerable. This is their fundamental option.

29. Members of the Signum Fidei association share the richness of their Christian life in their Personal and Community Programs, mainly through the apostolic tasks that they carry out.
30. They look upon their given tasks as constitutive elements of their Christian and Lasallian vocation, which they carry out responsibly and with commitment, viewing these as contributing to their sanctification.
31. Signum Fidei members are available for all initiatives to which they may be called, whether by the community or by other bodies, taking into account their own reality and possibilities.
32. In all their actions, professional or pastoral, Signum Fidei participates as members who are sent by their community. They share experiences and programs with the community, evaluating them together.
33. Signum Fidei members carry out their activities preferably in the areas of Christian education, catechesis, pastoral ministry and missionary activities. They pay special attention to the poor and vulnerable by promoting their Christian and human development.
34. As far as possible, Signum Fidei members carry out their educational activities in shared mission with the Brothers, other Associates and partners, and with apostolates of the fraternity within Lasallian educational institutions. They may also carry out their apostolate within other school settings or informal educational activities if for different reasons they do not have direct links with a Brothers' community. The Institute recognizes all of these apostolates, always animated by the Lasallian charism.

CHAPTER VI - THE SIGNUM FIDEI COMMUNITY

35. Signum Fidei members live their vocation in community with other members. Community life encourages in them a sense of belonging, a joyful interchange of experiences, faith, outreach, accompaniment and assessment of their apostolic mission.
36. The Signum Fidei Community is a welcoming and open community, because it integrates the Signum Fidei identity with members' family, work, social and church identities as a point of joyful encounter, uniting its life and mission in this reality.
37. Meetings are held on a regular basis, agreed upon by the community, preferably at two-week intervals. Where it is possible, members are provided with the meeting agenda beforehand. Four constitutive parts of meetings should be: Scripture, prayer, formation, and community building. Members look for opportunities to enjoy the presence of the Lord through dialogue, reflection, and prayer.
38. Signum Fidei members draw up or revise their written Community Project annually, including the personal projects of each of its members that are accessible to all.
39. If members, for varying reasons, can be part of the community for only a determined period of time, steps are taken to ensure that they still have contact with their original community or with

a reference community.

40. Signum Fidei members, who cannot participate in the community for reasons of health or age, will be provided the means to continue their vocation, especially their apostolate of prayer and offering because they recognize in this great apostolate the value of prayer and of sacrifice offered out of love.
41. Signum Fidei members share their experiences with other Lasallian communities. They personally contribute to the enrichment of the groups: meetings, retreats, and/or congresses related to the Lasallian Family.

CHAPTER VII – LIFE OF PRAYER

42. The Holy Spirit, present in the depths of each Signum Fidei member, helps them to live their love of God and neighbor with total generosity.
43. Signum Fidei members should have a deep love for prayer and consider it the first and principal activity of the day. The experience of God and daily, trusting prayer that springs from the heart nourish their lives and encompass all their daily activities.
44. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life for the Signum Fidei. Members follow Him in the footsteps of Saint John Baptist de La Salle and they commit themselves, as a consequence, to daily reading of and meditation on Sacred Scripture.
45. The Catholic Signum Fidei members look upon the Eucharist as the center of their Christian life and they share in it whenever possible. Visits to the Blessed Sacrament strengthen the communication with Jesus and nourish the spirit of the Catholic Signum Fidei member. Other Christians worship regularly according to their faith traditions.
46. The Catholic Signum Fidei member looks upon the Virgin Mary as their Queen and Mother, and venerate her with filial devotion, offering her special homage every day. Her total “Yes” to God inspires the Signum Fidei member’s complete surrender to God.
47. Signum Fidei members view the world in which they live with the light of faith, and treat and value all persons as God's children and as their brothers and sisters. They give preferential attention to those who are neediest. This is the foundation of their prayer.
48. They frequently and humbly examine their actions, recognize their limitations and continually seek reconciliation with God and with their neighbors. Catholic Signum Fidei members receive the sacrament of reconciliation in faith.
49. For the Signum Fidei, Saint John Baptist de La Salle is father, teacher, and model. They share in his charism. They discover in his example and in his writings what it means to remain faithful to God's will.
50. The members strengthen their Christian lives through adequate spiritual direction,

participating in yearly retreats, community meetings, the mission of the association and a life of prayer. They remember in prayer the Signum Fidei who have gone before them.

51. In order to ensure and strengthen the bonds of communion at the heart of their association, the Signum Fidei members faithfully recite the Signum Fidei prayer everyday if it is possible.

CHAPTER VIII - FORMATION

INITIAL FORMATION:

52. The period of initial formation normally lasts for two years. The local community and its Animator, may determine exceptions to this practice.
53. Candidates who feel themselves called to the association are expected to possess affective balance, the capacity to share and to live in an open community, an attitude of service, and an inclination towards religious and spiritual values.
54. The specific contents for initial formation are established by each community in accord with its own circumstances, following a serious and systematic plan which should cover these topics at least:
 - a. The systematic study of the Word of God
 - b. In-depth study of prayer
 - c. Christian anthropology
 - d. Theology of the Sacraments
 - e. The life journey and the spirituality of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.
 - f. The Signum Fidei Style of Life
 - g. Lasallian pedagogy
 - h. Institute documents on Association and Mission.
55. Each aspirant will have a personal interview or correspond in writing with the Animator on a regular basis. Aspirants share their expectations with the local community and together with its members discern the formation program appropriate for them.

ONGOING FORMATION:

56. Signum Fidei members have the responsibility of continually forming themselves, through a process of accompaniment, in regards to their growth as Christians and their professional and pastoral activities. Formation needs to be adapted to the cultural level of each person, and to the available means and circumstances of the different places.
57. Ongoing formation builds on and further develops the topics taken up during the period of initial formation, including further study of:

- a. Documents of the Church and the Institute
 - b. Christology
 - c. Social doctrine of the Church
 - d. The Christian view of social problems
 - e. Study of the Founder's works
 - f. Association for mission.
 - g. The liturgical year
58. The community makes the necessary means of formation available to its members.

CHAPTER IX – THE SIGNUM FIDEI CONSECRATION

59. The act of consecration marks the beginning of a new life that is consecrated to the service of God for the building up of the Church according to the charism of De La Salle. Signum Fidei members do not pronounce religious vows. Rather, theirs is a personal consecration, made in public, by which they reaffirm their baptismal vows and commit themselves to live out the demands of the Gospel.
60. When the community and the aspirant together determine that the process of initial formation has been satisfactory and sufficient, the aspirant, with the consent of the Animator, requests authorization from the Visitor to make the Signum Fidei Consecration.
61. The consecration is normally made for a period of one year.
62. The first consecration is received by the Brother Visitor or his delegate in the presence of the, the Community Coordinator, and the members of the Fraternity. This is recorded in the "Registry of Consecrations." The Brother Visitor or his delegate signs the registry, as do the others involved.
63. Once the time and the place for the ceremony are determined, the ceremony is carried out in a simple, meaningful manner for the edification of those present. Effort is made to have as many La Salle Brothers, Signum Fidei members, family members and friends in attendance. The act of consecration usually takes place during the Offertory of the Mass.
64. The consecration formula is as follows:

Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, your loving presence and before your infinite love, conscious of my baptismal consecration which I now renew and make public in my life through this act, I, _____, consecrate myself entirely to you to procure your glory as far as I shall be able and as you will require of me.

I unite myself with the members of the "Signum Fidei" association in order to live a style of life that is founded on the person of Jesus Christ, associated for the mission, and participating in the charism of St. John Baptist de La Salle in favor of the education of the poor. I hereby specify my commitment in this concrete apostolic activity:

To accomplish this, I want to work, whether individually or with a group, using all the means at my disposal while relying on your help and following the example of the Virgin Mary.

I unite myself to the Fraternity for a period of one year.

In testimony thereof I have signed in (place) on (day) of (month) 20().

CHAPTER X – RELATIONS WITH THE FSC INSTITUTE

65. During the 43rd General Chapter the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools recognized the Signum Fidei as associates for the mission.
66. From within its secular identity, the Signum Fidei association shares with the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools the spirituality which the Church has confided to the said Institute.
67. The Signum Fidei association functions within the framework of a District.
68. The Brother Visitor appoints an Animator for the local community, a Brother or a member of Signum Fidei, who guarantees the bonds with the District.
69. The Signum Fidei association takes its inspiration from the charism of John Baptist de La Salle and does not look for any kind of privilege.
70. The Brother Visitor and his Councils look for ways by which the members of Signum Fidei can participate more closely in the life of the District.
71. The Signum Fidei association maintains a regular contact with the Br. Visitor and his Councils and provides them with detailed information and updates on projects and realities.
72. The Signum Fidei members ask the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools to support them through its Districts, its works and its projects. The District respects the autonomy, the government, the Style of Life and the activities specific to the association.

CHAPTER XI – PROPAGATION OF THE SIGNUM FIDEI

73. The Style of Life of the Signum Fidei association is a path of faith rooted in Lasallian spirituality, appropriate for every lay Christian. The Signum Fidei association should exercise an apostolate in the field of education.
74. The Signum Fidei members show a special zeal for pastoral ministry and the promotion of vocations. They promote and pray for different religious and Lasallian vocations with a view to gaining more radical commitments to the Lord. The apostolate of prayer is more particularly appropriate for sick and elderly Signum Fidei members.

75. The Signum Fidei association is:
- a) a gift from God received and welcomed by each member in the service of all;
 - b) a gift for the family of each of its members;
 - c) a gift for the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools;
 - d) a gift for the Lasallian Family;
 - e) a gift for our world especially for the young.
76. The Signum Fidei association becomes a veritable sign of faith and a light in the world by each member's testimony and fidelity in living fully the Style of Life.
77. Since the Signum Fidei commitment to the Lasallian mission and the spirituality that underlies their Style of Life are particularly suited to educators, the members make a special effort to invite teachers, workers, school administrators, staff members, etc. to explore the possibility of joining the local Signum Fidei community.
78. The Signum Fidei Community opens itself to the world of the young between the ages of 15 and 25 with a program and a Style of Life appropriate to their age. The consecration will be private and endorsed by the local community.

STATUTES

CHAPTER XII - GOVERNMENT

The government of the SF Fraternity has four (4) levels, corresponding to the levels of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools:

79. **AT THE LOCAL LEVEL:**

- a) consists of the SF community as a unit. Each is run by a coordinator, a vice coordinator, a secretary, a treasurer and a spiritual animator. The local level government responsibilities can be adapted to fulfill the needs of the local situation.
- b) The coordinator is chosen by the members, without any call for candidates, on the basis of the result of a vote involving four names, at most, of consecrated members. The term is for a period of two years, renewable twice consecutively at most. Beyond that, a new term can be given provided that it is preceded by a break of two years. Other election rules not anticipated and other offices needed are regulated by an internal set of rules of order drawn up by each community before their first election. The local community proposes their choice for spiritual animator to be approved by their District's Br. Visitor in agreement with the community of Brothers with whom they are linked.

80. **AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL:**

a) consists of a group of SF Communities. Each is made up of the Coordinators and Secretaries from the Local Communities and their Spiritual Animators. It is run by a District Coordinator. The coordinators and the Spiritual Animators make up the SF District Council.

b). The Coordinator of the SF District is chosen by the Coordinators, Secretaries and Spiritual Animators of the SF local communities without any call for candidates and on the basis of the result of a vote involving three names at most and serves for a period of four years renewable once. The newly elected District Coordinator chooses a team to ensure the other services. The Spiritual Animator for the District Council is proposed for the approval of the District's Br. Visitor.

81. AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL:

a) consists of an ensemble of SF Districts grouped by country or by groups of countries. Each SF Regional Council is made up of the Coordinators and Secretaries of the SF Districts and their Spiritual Animators. It is run by the Regional Coordinator. The Coordinators and the Advisors make up the SF Regional Council. The Advisor for the Regional Board is named by the Regional Brother.

b) The coordinator of the SF Region is chosen by the coordinators, secretaries, and spiritual animators of the SF Districts without any call for candidates and on the basis of the result of a vote involving three names at most and serves for a period of four years renewable once. The newly elected Regional Coordinator chooses a team that ensures the other services.

82. AT THE WORLD LEVEL:

a) This is the ensemble formed by the Districts. The World Council is made up of the Coordinators and Secretaries of the SF Regions and their Advisors. It is run by a World Coordinator. The Coordinators and their Advisors make up the SF World Council whose seat is at the Mother House of the Brothers in Rome.

b). The World coordinator is chosen by the coordinators and secretaries of the Regions and their Advisors without any call for candidates and on the basis of the result of a vote involving three names at most and serves for a period of four years renewable once. The coordinator chooses a team with a view to ensuring the other services. The Advisor for the World Council is named by the Br. Superior General.

83. Every coordinator is guarantor of the Style of Life both inside and outside the group which he/she represents. He/she takes care especially to strengthen the spirit of communion and dialogue by maintaining, in particular, constant links with persons, as well as with all the members of the Lasallian Family and of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. The coordinator convokes, moderates, and leads meetings, facilitates the agenda and the decision-making process. Common work is distributed among all the members.

84. The councils at each level are the final authority for those levels, with the world council being the ultimate authority for the SF World Community. Each Council will convoke its assembly within the six months preceding the end of the mandate of its members on an agenda which it

will have established. Before the start of deliberations it will communicate its report on its past activities and its recommendations for the four years to come. The World Council will convoke its assembly at least a year before the holding of General Chapters.

CHAPTER XII: FINANCES

85. Each component at each level is autonomous in its economic and financial management. Each needs to situate all its administrative and legal acts in conformity with the laws of the country or countries. It studies how to finance all its activities and how to find the financial resources necessary for its functioning. It financially supports its representatives in diverse activities of formation, assemblies or meetings. Each level seeks to create solidarity funds intended to help persons in need, with priority given to members of Signum Fidei and the Lasallian Family.



PRIMERA ASAMBLEA INTERNACIONAL

FIRST INTERNATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PREMIÈRE ASSEMBLÉE INTERNATIONALE

SIGNUM FIDEI

"Contruyendo Nuestro Futuro" - "Building Our Future" - "En Construisant Notre Avenir"

**Première Assemblée Internationale Signum Fidei
Primera Asamblea Internacional Signum Fidei
First Signum Fidei International Assembly**

Gilberto Cieza de Leon (Perú)

Rosa Elía Mendoza (Mexico)

Rita González (Nicaragua)

Rosmery Jordan Camacho (Bolivia)

Margarita Luque Espinoza de los Monteros.(Ecuador)

Ernesto Vallejo Espinoza (Perú)

Luis Wong (Panamá)

Susan Estanislao (Philippines)

L.A. Fernandez (Malaysia)

Myra Patambang (Philippines)

Julie Bajada (Malta)

Mary Hoff (USA)

Simeon Martin Reiner (España)

Antoine Mdawar (Liban)

Nermine Edward Hakim (Egypte)

George Naber (Holy Land)

Paolo Ripa de Meana (Italia)

Marie-Louise Everard (Belgique)*

Robert Carlier (Belgique)**

(Handwritten signatures in blue ink on lined paper)



PRIMERA ASAMBLEA INTERNACIONAL

FIRST INTERNATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PREMIÈRE ASSEMBLÉE INTERNATIONALE

SIGNUM FIDEI

"Contruyendo Nuestro Futuro" - "Building Our Future" - "En Construisant Notre Avenir"

Adelaida Angué Mba (Guinea Ecuatorial)

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(*1ere semaine) (**2eme semaine)

19 mars – 01 avril 2006

19 marzo – 01 abril 2006

March 19 – April 01, 2006

GLOSSARY

Advisor or Animator	The Brother or experienced Signum Fidei member who serves a local SF community or a larger SF unit as spiritual guide and assists it in all aspects of its development.
Apostolate	Please see ‘ministry’
Association	In the Lasallian context this term refers to the way the theology of communion found at the heart of our Lasallian heritage and spirituality is lived out today by Lasallians who are deeply committed to the mission of providing a human and Christian education to youth, especially the poor.
Brother Visitor	See “District”
Catholic	A member of the Roman Catholic Church
Christian	Baptized persons who believe in the Triune God revealed by Jesus Christ
Charism	In the Lasallian context, this refers to the gift from God that the Church has received through the person of St. John Baptist de La Salle and the founding Brothers to offer a human and Christian education to the young, especially the poor. This educational mission is characterized by three essential components: the spirit of faith, the spirit of zeal (service) and a spirit of community.
Community	For the Signum Fidei members this term signifies the local group that comes together regularly for prayer, formation, mission, and community building. The Signum Fidei is an “open community,” meaning that the members share bonds of union and communion without living together under the same roof. (See “Association” and “Fraternity Signum Fidei”).
Community Project	A plan of action designed by and for the local community, or by and for a group of communities in order to exercise a common ministry in a spirit of association, and to help all members grow as Christians and Lasallians.
District	The Brothers’ Institute is organized into geographical entities called “Districts”. Each District is made up of several Brothers’ communities and is headed by a “Brother Visitor,” sometimes also called “Brother Provincial”.
Formation	The educational process that assists candidates in learning more about their faith and the Lasallian heritage.
Fraternity	From the very beginning, the word “fraternity” has been used in the Spanish-speaking and French-speaking parts of the world to describe the bonds of union and the spirit of community that unite the Signum Fidei members. The word is also used to describe all those who belong to the Signum Fidei Association.
Institute	The congregation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, also known as the De La Salle Brothers
Lasallian	This term describes a characteristic way of being present in the world and of carrying out an educational ministry inspired by the charism and spirit of St. John Baptist de La Salle.
Lasallian Family	All people, groups, and movements that find their inspiration in the educational approach and spirituality of St. John Baptist de La Salle
Lifestyle	The way people live according to their vocation as married, religious or single persons.

Ministry	In the Lasallian world this term refers to a specific educational service carried out in the name of the Church for the building up of the Body of Christ under the inspiration of the charism of St. John Baptist de La Salle.” (see “Apostolate”)
Mission	To give a human and Christian education to young people, especially in schools, with the focus on service of the poor as a priority, in order to evangelize and catechize, to promote peace and justice, accomplished together as a shared mission. (42 nd General Chapter of the Brothers of the Christian Schools)
Personal project	A specific apostolic individual endeavour pursued by each member of the community in addition to their community project. It is written down, recorded and kept on file with the group’s coordinator
Region	A territorial division of the Institute made up of several Districts grouped together because of historical background, common language, or geographical location.
Signum Fidei Consecration	The formal public commitment that Signum Fidei members pronounce after the usual period of preparation. Through this act, the Signum Fidei members declare their desire to live their baptismal consecration as fully as possible in communion with other Signum Fidei members and to carry out a specific apostolic project in conformity with the rules established in the Style of Life. This consecration constitutes them as full members of the Signum Fidei Association.

First International Assembly of Signum Fidei 2006 Participants



Left to right:

Back Row: *Br. Victor Franco, Luis Wong, Antoine Medawar, George Naber, Robert Carlier, Mary Hoff, Br. Juan Pablo Martin Duenas*

Second Row: *Br. Sami Hatem, L.A. Fernandez, Adelaida Anque Mba, Br. Antonio J. Servando, Rosa Elia Mendoza, Br. Rafael Martinez, Br. Jose Morales*

Third Row: *Gilberto Cieza de Leon, Nermine Edward Hakim, Rita Gonzales, Julie Bajada, Erica Stellini, Br. Gian Pietro Salvai, Paolo Ripa de Meana, Simeon Martin Reiner*

Front Row: *Ernesto Vallejo Espinoza, Rosemary Jordan Camancho, Br. Alvaro Rodriguez Echererria, Br. Miguel Campos, Margarita del Pilar Luque Espinoza de los Monteros, Susan Estanislao, Br. Manuel Olive, Myra Patambang*

Not Pictured: *Marie-Louise Everard*

MESSAGE TO THE MEMBERS OF SIGNUM FIDEI

In 1994, when I was Vicar General and I was asked for some words of introduction for the "Style of Life" that had been rewritten with the help of members of Signum Fidei from throughout the world, I said that *life is a dynamic reality that is always open to the unexpected action of God, to the movement of the Spirit, and to the unique, unprecedented, and unrepeatable life journey of each person. Journeying is one of the most impassioned human and spiritual adventures.*

I believe that those words at the beginning of your International Assembly take on new force and renewed impetus since in these past 12 years we have lived an incredible adventure, one that has opened as never before the Lasallian mission and charism to the laity. I have to recognize that the Signum Fidei movement has represented a foretaste of the wonderful reality that we Brothers and lay associates are building today for the service of the poor and as a response to the needs of the young in a shared mission.

This implies for us our being open to a new form of Institute in which the Lasallian Charism is not a heritage reserved for the Brothers, but that it is shared with all those with whom we accomplish our mission very closely and especially with those who, in a special way, want to live associated with us as they make their own the Lasallian charism and spirituality.

Today we can look at the Institute in two ways. In a pessimistic way, we can yearn for a past which no longer exists and which paralyzes us and, in another way, one which is more hopeful, we can build a new reality as we face the future, a reality in which we broaden our association for the educational service of the poor with all those who make the Lasallian charism their own. It is about a true rebirth or refoundation.

The Founder, in his Memoir on the Habit, after defining what community and those who make it up are, adds: *The members of this community also devote themselves to train teachers for rural schools in a house apart from that of the community, which we call a seminary. Those who are trained there stay only for a few years until they are completely trained in piety and in that which concerns their work* (4). Piety and work we would call today spirituality and mission. I like to think that this was the first form of association with lay persons and a complementary way of embracing our charism. The three essential elements are present: Spirituality, Mission, and Community, since the Founder speaks about them in the plural: *Those who are trained there...*

It is curious, perhaps it would be better to say providential, to see how the path taken by the Church and Religious Life in recent years has led everyone to embrace a spirituality of communion and to open the potential of our charism to others. In our case, besides, this experience is reinforced by our vow of Association which today we are called to extend, not necessarily as a vow but always as an approach, to all those who want to make their own the charism of De La Salle in their own state of life.

Our last General Chapter expressed it in these words: *It has been noted that, in most parts of the world, large organizations such as NGOs, especially those which promote education and the rights of children, are linked to numerous associations. For its part, the Church is trying to promote a broader concept of the Kingdom of God, one in which each person becomes aware – both through his own and other traditions, history, culture and hopes – that he or she is a son or daughter of the same Creator, a*

member of the same family, called to take part with others in building up a Kingdom of God in which all will see themselves as sons or daughters of God.

1. The Paths of the Spirit

Today we find ourselves at the crossroads where three factors appear which influence the way we look at things:

- An ecclesiology of communion and the rediscovery of the role of the laity.
- A new awareness of the potential of the charism.
- A decrease in the number of vocations and ageing, both of which make it difficult to sustain works.

Even though in the normal course of events experiences in shared mission and association have often come about because of the last criterion, deep down this is really the least important of the three. What this is all about really is embracing an ecclesiology of communion, rediscovering the role of the laity, and promoting the charism.

I see all of this confirmed with the birth of the Signum Fidei Movement back in 1976 when it was established through the first official consecration made before the members of the General Chapter, when the third factor was far from having the scope that it has today in certain Regions of the Institute. Signum Fidei was born thanks to a new ecclesiological vision and thanks to the ever-new vitality of the Lasallian charism and in this sense it can be a paradigm for the new forms and movements that today are being carried out around our charism.

An Ecclesiology of Communion and the Rediscovery of the Role of the Laity

Forty years ago the Declaration invited us to give the laity the place that is rightfully theirs within Lasallian schools: *For this reason the Brothers are happy to collaborate with lay teachers, who bring to the teaching community a contribution that comes from their knowledge of the world, their experience in family life, civic affairs, and labor organizations. The Brothers act in such a way as to guarantee that the lay teachers are involved in the whole life of the school: with the catechesis, apostolic movements, extra-curricular activities, as well as in administration and matters of policy* (46.3). This timid expression *perhaps* (in the Spanish text) we know today is a fact in many Districts.

Today the Church invites us to start from an ecclesiology of communion as we can see in the most recent Church document on Consecrated Life: *Whereas at times in the recent past, collaboration came about as a means of supplementing the decline of consecrated persons necessary to carry out activities, now it is growing out of the need to share responsibility not only in the carrying out of the Institute's works but especially in the hope of sharing specific aspects and moments of the spirituality and mission of the Institute.* And, reminding us of the aid and nourishment that the laity give to religious, it concludes: *Communion and mutuality in the Church are never one-way streets (Starting Afresh from Christ, number 31).*

A New Awareness of the Potential of the Charism

The charism is a gift of the Spirit to the Church and, therefore, we cannot minimize it to the life

of the Brothers. In reality, it is not about us as religious who share a charism that belongs to us and that now is adapted to a lay reality. The charism precedes its incarnation in lay or religious circles. We are all called, consecrated and lay alike, to *drink from the same well* and to embrace the same charism starting from our own specific vocation (cf. Antonio Maria Sicari, *Gli antichi carismi nella chiesa. Per una nuova collocazione*, Jaca Book, Milano, 2002).

2. The Road Traveled

Our last General Chapter reminded us of the steps we have taken, going from Chapter to Chapter over the course of the past 40 years. From recognizing the lay ministry in the Lasallian school in the 1967 Declaration, to the degrees of belonging and the first experience of lay association with the birth of the Signum Fidei in 1976. From the theme of the Lasallian Family in 1987 to that of Shared Mission in 1993. Beginning in 2000, we speak of associating ourselves for the educational service of the poor and about responding to the needs of the young as the major Lasallian challenge as we face the 21st century.

Some may think that so much change in our language and in our policies could mean a lack of consistency or a type of instability, responding to the style of the present moment. Personally, I do not think that this is the case. Rather, it seems to me to be about an experience similar to that lived by Saint John Baptist de La Salle, who experienced how God was leading him from commitment to commitment, gently and wisely to take the necessary steps to ensure the Christian education of the poor and the young. Associating ourselves today is a guarantee of the future.

I am personally convinced that the theme of Shared Mission, inspired by our 42nd General Chapter, was a key in discovering, seven years later, that we ought to associate ourselves as Brothers and lay persons in order to keep schools going in service of the young, especially the poor.

It seems to me that the theme of Association was at the very heart of our last General Chapter. It would be vain of me to try to present all the richness of our Chapter assembly. I would be happy to highlight some points that I personally believe to be very important.

The Chapter did not want to give the last word in order to allow freedom for making new discoveries and realizations. If, as the Brothers' Rule says, the mission is always to be discovered, we can also say that association must be built each day. If there needs to be freedom for making discoveries, it is also fundamental that there needs to be freedom in the personal decision to choose association. Association can never be a result of imposition, nor can it be, basically, a kind of trampoline to achieve posts of prestige.

The Chapter highlighted for us some items that should be present in association as characteristics of reference. Allow me to comment briefly on each of them:

- *A vocation inspired by the charism of Saint John Baptist de La Salle and his values.* It is about being aware, as the Founder expresses it in his Meditations for Time of Retreat, that we are cooperators with and ambassadors of Christ and his Church, guardian angels for our students...It is about embracing the wonderful profession of teacher as a call from God in order to build his Kingdom by means of Christian education and it is about being inspired in Lasallian values or embracing our Christian life in its diverse forms, inspired by these values.

- *A life of faith which discovers God in everyday life understood in the light of Scripture and, for persons of other religions, in the light of their own sacred texts.* This is about discovering, in events and in persons, especially the poor, and enlightened by the Word of God, God's saving plan, just as the Founder was always attentive to and deeply moved by reality in the light of faith. This experience can be embraced from one's respective creed, other Lasallians committed with us in building a world that is more human, starting from education.
- *A community experience of some form or other suited to the identity of its members.* Lasallians do not make a journey alone. A special characteristic is the community, working in groups, the common project. It is not about copying the Brother's religious community, but about embracing a community of reference that accompanies, helps in one's growth and commitment, without diminishing any other reference communities on the family, social, or political levels. Every Lasallian is called to feel as if he or she is a brother or a sister without borders, always willing to lend a hand and to overcome any difference.
- *A mission of some duration which associates persons with the educational service of the poor.* The purpose of our association is the educational service of the poor, and, based on them, other young people. It does not matter where we carry out our mission, we need to have a serious concern and clear preference for those who need us most. This purpose ought to make us creative and should lead us to make the more fortunate young people aware of the shortages of others, not only on the level of statistics, but by concrete experiences that will permit them to know reality better. Association is not like a flower that is in bloom for one day. It assumes, as the Chapter tells us, a certain duration that is not specified but which, I think, could vary according to different cases.
- *An openness of mind which makes it possible to see beyond the individual and his immediate environment.* An associate feel himself a part of an international Institute and he does not identify solely with the local ministry in which he works. He has a sense of District, Region, Institute. He is open to new possibilities and to new adventures.

3. Signum Fidei, Open to the Inspiration of the Spirit

The characteristics that the General Chapter highlights as distinctive for all Lasallian association should be present in the Signum Fidei fraternity which, from its origins, has wanted to shape itself by three deeply Lasallian elements: faith, ardent zeal, and fraternity. **Faith** that moves us to keep alive always the passion and love for Christ, having as the generating nucleus of our lives the Gospel, lived and embraced in light of Lasallian spirituality. An **ardent zeal**, that opens us to the needs of our brothers and sisters. Here, also, it is about passion. Passion for humanity, especially that part of humanity that suffers and that is searching for meaning in their lives. **Fraternity**, that should lead us to strengthen a spirituality of communion, to establish reference communities of faith, to set up bonds of union with the Institute through the District and with other groups that are developing within the Lasallian Family.

If, as members of Signum Fidei, we have felt God's call (vocation) to live in accord with the charism of Saint John Baptist de La Salle and his values; if our life of faith leads us to discover God in reality in the light of God's Word; if we embrace a community experience inspired by a spirituality of communion that makes us feel that we are brothers and sisters with a heart which is always open to the needs of the world; if we feel ourselves united to a mission that associates us in service of the poor; if we are willing to embrace this for a significant period of time and with the desire that it be for a lifetime; if we feel part of a universal family that opens us to areas that go beyond our small world and our personal interests...Then yes, we can make real what the 42nd General Chapter said: *The Signum Fidei Fraternity constitutes for Districts a way of spirituality which is very much adapted to lay persons – especially to teachers – who find inspiration for their lives in Saint John Baptist de La Salle.* The last General Chapter backed this up, recognizing its organic relationship with the Institute.

Signum Fidei has opened a very important path so that may lay persons can participate in and embrace the Lasallian charism. Nevertheless, it is not the only path. Today, other forms of association are being born and we need to be open to the wind of the Spirit that blows, but, as the Gospel says, we do not know from where it comes nor where it goes. As a family united in the same spirit we ought to rejoice in those new shoots with their new blood and their creativity, as a family rejoices in new children, although sometimes this results in the brothers and sisters being jealous of the new arrivals. We should not only rejoice but also be aware of how to enrich ourselves and take advantage of the new roads that today are opening so that we are not trapped by the past and unable to adapt ourselves to new situations and to open ourselves to the new signs of the times and to new places.

It seems to me that this Assembly has a very important role to play in all of this, and to do that, it will be indispensable to revise, with a lot of freedom and openness, the Style of Life with a posture of discernment and to respond better to the contributions that our two last General Chapters have made in the theme of Association. Because you are a form of Lasallian association, as are we Brothers, but your future is in your hands and not in ours. In large measure, that future will depend on what you decide here. I am sure that the presentations by Brother Antonio Botana, Secretary for Lasallian Associates, will help you to achieve that task.

I ask that the Spirit of Wisdom enlighten you during these days. Wisdom is not erudition, but it is knowing how to understand and embrace life, knowing how to analyze things, situations, and experiences with the eyes of God. As Scripture tells us about Wisdom: *She is readily perceived by those who love her, and found by those who seek her. She hastens to make herself known in anticipation of men's desire.* **TO LOVE, TO SEEK, AND TO DESIRE** is a comprehensive program for your Assembly and, I hope, for the future as well. (cf. Wisdom 6: 12 - 19)

TO LOVE the Father and to help men and women today quench their thirst for the infinite and to love with the same love as the Father, a merciful love, in solidarity with Jesus, who reveals to us the key for judgment: what you did in favor of the victims of history, with whom he himself identifies (Matthew 25: 31- 46). An affective and effective solidarity, one that is partial, because even though you love everyone, you take the side of the weakest ones. In all of this, the Father's name is in play, his saving plan. As followers of Jesus, we cannot be indifferent to a situation that is opposed to the Father's will, to the cause of Jesus, to the fate of our brothers and sisters. We cannot accept a history in which there is no justice. The Father's plan is one of life, and life in abundance.

TO SEEK new paths, new responses to the needs of today, to the new forms of poverty. What the world expects of us is above all that we be **seekers of God**, that we offer people guidelines for their own searching. Guides, humble and without pretense, aware of one's own inconsistencies, but able to accompany our contemporaries, especially our young, on their journey of faith, taking on their weakness, their doubt, and their frailty. We should offer to young people and to the world, especially the poor, hearts that are available to hear them, understand them, and set them again on the journey.

TO DESIRE to respond to the problems of today, being very sensitive to the reality we face today: *from inculturation to ecology; from interreligious dialogue to women's issues; from peace to human rights; from biotechnology to global communication; from the shift, in the southern hemisphere, from Christianity to religious fundamentalism; from recovering marginalized cultures to new technology born out of the practical; from the esthetics of life to the cult of violence* (Bruno Secondin). To desire to be sacraments of the tenderness of God that knows no borders, of the resurrection of Jesus, the pledge of our victory; of the God of Life who will have the last word over the idols of death. May the Spirit of Wisdom be with you all!

Brother Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría
Superior General

The Emerging Phenomenon of Association in the Lasallian World and the Signum Fidei

Br. Antonio Botana
Secretary for Lasallian Associates

1. “Associated for the mission”: our deepest root.

The Lasallian world is today experimenting with what we might call an “associative effervescence”, even if this is not general for all places and Districts. The recently issued Institute Bulletin (Nº250) gives us diverse examples of this emerging life, a life which resists being catalogued or translated into plans or projects.

This present phenomenon of the association of lay persons around a charism which until recently was considered as belonging to religious is not exclusive to the Lasallian world for we find it nowadays all over the ecclesial world and around many religious congregations. Of course, we have to stress that in the Lasallian world *associated* has a special flavor, its own emotive charge, or more exactly, represents the Lasallian charism itself.

Associated for the mission is the most decisive experience in the Lasallian story, the experience which is in the deepest root of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and sustains their own identity. It is necessary to refer to it to be able to understand what we mean to say today by “association” in the context of the Lasallian Family. The General Chapter of 2000 underlined in this way the importance of the historic moment in which this experience took shape:

“The original vow for the service of the poor, which associated the Founder with twelve Brothers in 1694, is the source of Lasallian associations of lay persons and religious who wish to be part of the Lasallian mission. This is where new forms of association for the mission have their origin.” (Circ.447 p.3)

The “association”, in the sense in which the 43rd General Chapter employed this word, is not a concrete institution or group. It is a dynamism, a process of communion for the mission, which gives rise to concrete groups or communities and, finally, institutions. One of these groups, the first historically, is the Institute of the Brothers.

The Brothers are today committed to recovering “association” as the central axis of our identity as Brothers, of our own consecrated life, as it was from 1694 onwards. Thanks to it we are a brotherhood for the education mission. We are also revising our Rule so that it can express suitably, but with strength, this central axis, and what today constitutes our ‘fourth vow’, is becoming the first and the most distinctive of our consecration.

This awareness of the meaning and importance of the vow of association in the consecration and identity of the Brother began to occur around 1966-67, with the 39th General Chapter, at the same time that, in a parallel manner, another awareness was beginning in the Institute of the Brothers: that lay persons could also participate in the Lasallian charism up to the point of associating with the Institute of the FSC for the Lasallian mission.

The General Chapter of 2000 was the summit of this double progress: at the same time as association with lay persons was being openly proposed, the Brothers were being invited to

contemplate their own identity from the perspective of the vow of association. And the event of 1694, when Saint John Baptist de La Salle and twelve Brothers consecrated themselves by means of the vow of association for the educational service of the poor, was being pointed out as the axis on which the whole Lasallian story turned, including the new chapter which was beginning to be written.

2. The dynamism of the Spirit in the new chapter of the story

We are not inventing the story. We are living it because we form part of it. Or rather: the Spirit is leading us and making us live this adventure. The Spirit gave to the Church in the person of St. John Baptist de La Salle, this charism which today we call “Lasallian”. And it is the Spirit who is today re-founding this same charism in calling the Brothers to recover association as the axis of their identity, in calling lay persons to become associated on the basis of the Lasallian charism for the education mission to the poor, and on leading the SF Fraternity along this road of communion for the mission which is Lasallian association.

“Let yourselves be moved by the Spirit”, is the invitation that John Baptist de La Salle repeats to us and which today has a very concrete meaning for all those who wish to live the Lasallian charism in depth, as a Brother or as a lay person: let us recover it if we have lost it, or let us show association for the educational service of the poor in a decisive way as the central axis of our Lasallian identity.

The movement of the Spirit is evident today in the Lasallian world, as a strong wind which rouses, renews and invites to a new life. We notice it in the ‘lines of force’ which are pushing persons in this direction, and are tending to reach all the participants in the Lasallian world with more or less intensity:

- The first one is a way of living in solidarity and in fraternity. It is a community dynamic that drives the development of educational communities, inspires Christian communities with the Lasallian charism, and generates new communities that gather together Brothers and lay persons, in a new framework of Church communion, in service of the Lasallian mission.
- Community monitoring of the calls of the poor and, based on them, of children and young people. It is a dynamic which brings about the assessment of all Lasallian works so that they might be effective in their service of the poor, and all Lasallian associates are involved in this evaluation.
- Participation in solidarity with the responsibility for the mission. Throughout the Lasallian world there is underway a renewal in structures of leadership and new ones are being created in which responsibility for the mission is shared between Brothers and other associates: Mission Councils, District, Regional, and International Assemblies...
- Availability to serve in the Lasallian mission wherever we are required, based on one's own possibilities and life options. This availability, which in other times seemed to be reserved for the Brothers, is today more and more shared by lay Lasallians, especially by associates. One proof of this is the growing number of young volunteers who offer one year or more of their life to work gratuitously in works devoted especially to the poor; also there are adult educators who offer their services to the Brother Visitor to be sent

where they might be needed most within the District, sometimes even moving to a new location with their own families.

- The acceptance of John Baptist de La Salle as a teacher of life, and not just as a symbol that unites us or as an object of devotion. Brothers and other associates feel united about the Founder in order to learn from his Gospel life journey and to be inspired by his spirituality from his writings.

3. New vocations, new forms of association.

This current produced by the Spirit is not reduced to an external way of acting. To many of those who are immersed in this current the Lasallian charism also arrives as a personalized gift, in proportion as the Spirit wishes, along with other gifts, and also in the proportion that each one wishes to take it on. That is how the various Lasallian vocations arise. This explains why, within the project and the Lasallian Family, there is such a variety of personal situations among the corresponding groups. Some have just discovered the process and have barely entered into it: they will need time and also mentorship so that they can advance and get into it from the perspective of their own originality. Others have already been part of the group, they have chosen their own options based on their personal gifts and from their own understanding of and response to God's call. Each option is valid provided that it is integrated into the overall group and that it is open to the complementarity of other options.

Among those who in fact share the Lasallian Mission, *"there are Partners who have a long record of collaborating in the Lasallian Mission, and who feel a call to deepen the charism, spirituality and Lasallian communion in which they wish to participate"* (43rd General Chapter, Circular 447, page 4). Among those who are already living the experience of association, some feel called to formalize their commitment to association with the Brothers and with other Lasallian associates.

Each Lasallian, person or group, can live deeply the Lasallian charism and the project promoted by it, without the need to associate oneself *formally*. Those who do this formally, whether they are a Brother, Sister, lay person, or priest, offer themselves as a guarantor so that the Lasallian charism can be recognized, transmitted, and continued. Their offering does not separate them from the rest; it simply makes them signs among the rest of the Lasallians. It is important that we continue to see formal commitments of association as a gift from God for the entire Lasallian Family.

Earlier I referred to the 'lines of force which are at work in the interior of the Lasallian body. Now I wish to refer to the associative forms which the dynamism is producing, and more concretely, the new Lasallian communities. The sign of community is, probably, the best identifier of a Lasallian project: living community as a response to the Mission of educating the poor, children and young persons.

The Lasallian community in its multiple forms whether at local level – the small community - or at District or Regional level – the community of communities – is the place where communion is learnt, it is the place where association is lived and learnt, since this is in the Lasallian sense, association: communion for the mission.

1. Many and varied are the **Christian communities** united in the charism of De La Salle with the Institute, some with explicit links of association, such as the SF Fraternities;

others without this formal link but in communion with the District.

Their community structure takes on various forms; in some cases it may be the moments of encounter either in a weekly or a bi-weekly. There are also cases of Christian and Lasallian communities living in common under the same roof, with a daily rhythm of community prayer and a high level of communication and the sharing of goods, all of which is motivated by the Lasallian mission of education.

Oftentimes these faith-based communities are formed within the existing educational communities, or rather side by side with a particular Lasallian educational work, and they offer their cooperation in various ways. But as frequently happens the Lasallian charism causes them to find new needs and provides them with the initiatives to invent new responses and begin new works of education.

2. There are also Lasallian Communities formed with the adherents of different religions. It is the mission that unites them, the desire to give a response to the needs of the poor, and that finds them laboring together in the Work of the Lord. Many elements of Lasallian spirituality help them to find meaning to what they are living, even though each one may add the perspective of his or her own faith. For all of them John Baptist de La Salle is a teacher of life and spirituality. This kind of pluri-confessional community for the mission is an example that the Spirit and his presence in our midst are at work through the Lasallian charism, even beyond the limits of the Institutional Church.
3. The Lasallian Volunteers: This movement may be described as an experience of temporal association in which the volunteers gratuitously place themselves at the service of the Lasallian mission of education for the duration of one year or more. The richness of the experience comes from being lived and accompanied in community while receiving the lights of Lasallian spirituality.
4. Among all these communities we could pick out for their innovation those in which we find, living together, with **a life in common** under the same roof, Brothers, Lay Educators (married or single) and Volunteers. Usually these communities take shape in order to give a response to the felt needs of the Lasallian mission of education. At times they are joined to a particular school, such as in the case of the San Miguel Schools in the United States. Other times it may mean a community “of insertion”, that is, situated in a social milieu of especial necessity, either in an urban barrio or in a rural area, in order to feel from within the needs related to education and provide effective and global answers

4. The new Lasallian District

At the global level, all this Lasallian associative movement finds its co-ordination in the District, or rather, in the new Lasallian District which is being born. The District is the place of recognition of the new forms of Lasallian life, the “frame of reference”, as it was called by the General Chapter of 2000, where the structures of the new Lasallian associative reality take shape. The traditional District is that of the Brothers, where it is they who take the initiative, direct, co-ordinate, animate, recognize the new

associates, interpret the Lasallian charism, decide which are the needs which to which we must give a response and the form that response should take. The structures for running this kind of District are, basically, those that correspond to a "Religious Province", thought up for the Brothers, although some lay persons (normally chosen by the Brothers) are allowed to have a presence in some of them but without having an equal say or a vote. Now begins the step from the District of the Brothers and their collaborators to the District of Lasallian Associates, or more precisely, of the Lasallian Family, where the associates (religious and lay) are the guarantee of fidelity and stability. The base unit of the new District is the community (not the works), and the District is configured as a community of Lasallian communities. In this it is not different from the traditional District. The difference is in the fact that the communities are beginning to be much more diversified, in the composition of their members and in the rhythm and type of community life. There are communities of Brothers, communities of lay persons, communities of Brothers and lay persons and in some Districts there are already communities of Sisters.... And among the communities of lay persons, some have life in common under the same roof while others limit their community meetings to once or twice a week...The diversity will be a challenge but also a great richness and a great contribution to the mission.

The new District, that of Lasallian Associates, cannot be established based on traditional District structures which have been more or less broadened or adapted so that lay persons can fit in; because if that were the case, the "patches of the new cloth" would pull away from the "old cloth" until it would rip it and make it unusable. New structures are needed to assure the participation of lay persons in the exercise of the mission, both in the area of decision-making as in the carrying out of the mission. New structures of communion are needed, above all, that respect the diverse Lasallian identities, promote their diversity, and encourage complimentary roles.

In many Districts the Council for the Mission has begun to function. In it the various groups of associates and collaborators who make up the District are represented and they take on functions of discernment and of orientation for the Visitor which are later taken into account by the District Council of the Brothers. Also many Districts have begun to set up the Assembly of "Associated for the Mission", which facilitates the interchange of experiences on association and the mission, and above all will be an effective means for a growth in co-responsibility and solidarity between all the Lasallian Associates.

The role of the Brother Visitor is also changing. In the traditional District he was the sole authority. In the new District of Associates his authority is more collegial. He preserves his role as a religious authority ("Major Superior," in the language of Canon Law) with respect to the Brothers and he continues to be for them their immediate reference to the mission (they are "sent" by him, both to play a concrete role and to be part of a community). These roles of the Brother Visitor do not apply in the same way to the rest of the associates that make up the new Lasallian District. Surely he plays a leadership role for the District overall, but that leadership must be shared, according to various cases, with leaders and animators from other Lasallian groups who make up the District.

5. The Assembly "Associated for the Mission"

At international level the Assembly "Associated for the Lasallian Education Mission" is being organized in two phases, regional and international. It is the fruit of a proposal from the last General Chapter, which recommended:

1. to look for and propose responses to the new needs of the Lasallian mission;

2. to share the experiences of association, analyze and evaluate the starting up of the process of association for the mission;
3. to present lines of action to the next General Chapter with regard to the two previous realities.

I believe that the most important thing about this Assembly is that, for the first time at world level, representatives of all the Lasallian groups and institutions are going to meet, with voice and vote, to discern the present together in the light of our charism, and to point out lines of action to give responses which will allow us to advance towards the future. This implies a qualitative leap in the interdependence and solidarity of the Lasallian groups, in co-responsibility with regard to the Lasallian charism and in the increase of awareness that, together, we can give better responses to the mission.

6. The place of Signum Fidei in the new context of Lasallian Association

Where does the SF Fraternity stand in all this associative movement of the Lasallian world? The first answer, immediate and simple, is: within. That the Fraternity does not fall into the temptation, as a group and in each of its members in particular, to position itself in front of this movement, like a group of spectators from an alien reality, or worse still, like someone who feels threatened with being displaced by others who have invaded his own house.

The SF Fraternity forms part - and ought to consciously form part - of this single movement produced by the Holy Spirit to re-found the Lasallian charism in the Church of the 21st Century. This single movement of re-foundation affects the Brothers, the other Lasallian religious institutions founded during the 20th century, the SF Fraternity as the first secular group organized in the post-Conciliar period, and the new forms of Lasallian Association which are arising.

Let us then ask ourselves: How should the SF Fraternity position itself in the interior of this Lasallian associative movement?

- 1) As it is: a particular form of living the Lasallian charism within secular identity. Better or worse than other present-day Lasallian forms? This is a perfectly useless question. The one thing we can say is that we are dealing with a valid and recognized form, where, whoever feels called to live the Lasallian charism as a lay person, can find the means suitable for living it deeply. As regards quality, this will be found in concretely in persons. Across the Lasallian world we found excellent examples of Lasallian communities of lay persons whose quality of community life is much above that of many communities of Brothers, and probably above that of some SF Fraternities...

The same could be said of examples of Lasallian lay persons or groups dedicated with generosity to the poor, from whom many Brothers and certainly some SF need to learn. But we could also say that in the Institute of the Brothers and in the SF Fraternity, there are communities, Brothers and lay persons who are examples of community life and of dedication to the poor..... and in all these cases we are speaking of the quality and the generosity of the persons and not of the validity of the institution, whether it be the Institute of the Brothers or the SF Fraternity or any other Lasallian institution.

Without needing to compare itself to others, the SF Fraternity is recognized a valid path for living Lasallian association, and has to make an effort to set up communities which can be for their members living experiences of communion for the mission and signs that invite others to join together in the same experience.

- 2) With a history that the Fraternity cannot and should not put to one side. They are 30 years of history. With its bright moments and dark moments the history forms part of our reality, allows us to understand it and influences enormously the way in which we are seen from outside. The SF has the merit of having been a pioneer in the field of Lasallian Association - although without having given it that name in the beginning – with the establishment of a secular path for living the Lasallian charism with all the dimensions which it ought to include: mission, community, consecration, spirituality.

This merit brings with it a disadvantage: that of having to venture without knowing the certain path, without points of reference already tried out, or with points of reference which belong to another era or to another type of different life such as that of the Brother.

Furthermore, the Institute of the Brothers which the Fraternity encountered in those early times was having the same experience. It had no models to offer for this new path. An attempt was made to save the situation by means of the Brothers Advisers who would accompany the new SF in various places. Luckily, in some cases, this advising united good will with wisdom and creativity. In others, the good will found itself somewhat lame by relying on models which were out of date or which were on the margin of Lasallian identity.

But we also meet excellent fruits in this initial stage among which I would point out:

- the educational works for the poor and the very poor, which the Fraternity supports in Peru and other parts of the world;
- the close relationship with the Brothers and the committed involvement in the District mission, in various Districts;
- the notable growth and expansion which the Fraternity has had in these decades, in spite of the lack of a central leadership; this is an indication that it has something special to offer to the Lasallian Family.

7. For a “pro-active” incorporation

The Fraternity now has the aim of integrating itself in this new Lasallian ecosystem which is being created, in harmony with the ecclesial ecosystem called “Church-communion”. It is already being done: a worthwhile sign is the inclusion of a representative of the Fraternity in the International Commission of Associates. My invitation is to reinforce this integration. And it must be done by taking on as one’s own the central axis around which our ecosystem turns: we associate for the educational mission to the poor. We associate, we consecrate ourselves in an alliance with three targets: God, the other associates, children and the young poor. The other associates are, for you, in a first circle, the companions of the Fraternity. In a second concentric circle are the Brothers and the other Lasallian associates.

From this central axis the Fraternity ought to assert itself in its specific identity, which is not found by looking for what separates, the “exclusive” (this does not exist), but rather the significant, what the Fraternity emphasizes, even if it is common to many others. It seems clear that the SF Fraternity wishes to be a secular community of faith, committed to education. In it the dimension of fraternity stands out, even placed as a flag in its name; its members associate through local fraternities which, in their turn, are united in the District fraternity and, finally, in the world fraternity. What stands out is the dimension of faith, which pervades the community, family life, the mission, and is expressed in the consecration which is explicitly referred to as the Baptism. What also stands out is the apostolic commitment to education, especially of the most abandoned. These emphases, as they are strongly significant, constitute the richness, the ‘dowry’ which the Fraternity brings to Lasallian Association.

I said earlier: ‘to assert itself in the specific identity of the Fraternity’. This cannot be done without formation and relationship. Formation is an absolute priority. Without it, there will only be forms, maybe very pious, but empty of content. And with formation, comes the relationship with the other Lasallians, the creation of links with the Brothers and other associates, participation in District and local meetings with other Lasallian groups. Some of the SF fraternities that you represent are already a good example of this priority given to formation and relationships.

Finally, your incorporation into what I have called the new Lasallian ecosystem has to be *pro-active*, moving forward to be positive and creative elements in the group, pushing the new association and the new Lasallian District. Before forms of association we need to generate the associative dynamism through which the Spirit is communicated. The Fraternity needs to convert itself into a generator of those ‘lines of force’ to which I referred in the first part of my talk. Above all, we need to transmit fraternity, faith and active preoccupation with children and young people who are remote from salvation.

In this form, in this Work of God which is Lasallian education, the SF Fraternity will be an efficacious instrument alongside the other efficacious instruments which make up the new Lasallian Association.

Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, your loving presence and before your infinite love, conscious of my baptismal consecration which I now renew and make public in my life through this act, I, _____, consecrate myself entirely to you to procure your glory as far as I shall be able and as you will require of me.

I unite myself with the members of the "Signum Fidei" association in order to live a style of life that is founded on the person of Jesus Christ, associated for the mission, and participating in the charism of St. John Baptist de La Salle in favor of the education of the poor.

I hereby specify my commitment in this concrete apostolic activity:

To accomplish this, I want to work, whether individually or with a group, using all the means at my disposal while relying on your help and following the example of the Virgin Mary.

I unite myself to the Fraternity for a period of one year.

In testimony thereof I have signed in (place) on (day) of (month) 20().

Notes

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"SIGNUM FIDEI" PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, in your loving Providence
You have chosen me to be a Sign of FAITH
in the midst of this world
so full of confusion and uncertainty.*

*Kindle in me and in all members of Signum Fidei
a deep spirit of FAITH and
generosity in my apostolic commitment
which, through the example of St. John Baptist de La Salle,
will inspire others to consecrate their life
in order to bring the Gospel to the educational world.*

*Bless the work of our brothers and sisters
wherever they may be,
so that, together, inspired by enthusiasm for your
Spirit of Love,
we shall become more and more the salt of the earth
and light of the world,
especially among the poor and
among those furthest from the salvation you offer.*

*Receive into your embrace our brothers and sisters
who have gone before us with the sign of FAITH and
who now sleep in your peace.*

*I ask you this through Our Lord Jesus Christ,
your beloved Son. Amen.*