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CHALLENGES FACING

THE BROTHERS' COMMUNITY:

END AND SPIRIT

OF THE INSTITUTE – MISSION

These few thoughts on the challenges facing the Brothers' community which are contained in the Rule were put together by the Colegio del Carmen community in Caxias do Sul in Brazil. Through lack of space, we have omitted the introduction and the conclusion of their contribution. References to the Rule are limited to chapters 1 and 2. (Extract from issue No. 100 of Comunicação, pp. 12-18, September 1988).

Foundation

Three sources are sufficient to throw light on the "challenge" facing Brothers within the school in which they work and in which they are called upon to be "witnesses": St. Paul's first Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 12, the Letter of our Superior General, Brother John Johnston, and the talks he gave us during his visit to our District. In those talks he explained and reaffirmed in ringing tones what he had written in his Pastoral Letter, "The Destiny of the Institute: our responsibility".

In the light of the authoritative teaching of St. Paul on the mystical body, we can see clearly the role of the Brothers' community within the educational community of the school, and this latter's role in the universal Church, the mystical body of Christ in all its fullness. At this stage, one is looking beyond the individual, a primary cell in the Church, and beyond the family, the domestic Church.

A religious community also is a "small Church" which is a part of that slightly larger Church, the educational community of the school.

The Apostle Paul teaches that there is a diversity of spiritual gifts, ministries and works, but it is God who works through all of these. To each one the Spirit is given in some particular way. He speaks of preaching with wisdom, preaching instruction, the gift of miracles, prophecy, the discernment of spirits, the gift of tongues, and the gift of interpreting tongues. All these gifts the Spirit distributes as he chooses. And then he takes the body with all its different parts as an analogy. Each part has to remain as it is and not want to be some other part. Nor should it feel less important by being what it is. He concludes by saying that what is essential is charity, and he develops this idea in later chapters.

In his **Pastoral Letter**, Brother Superior John Johnston promises a circular letter for the end of 1988 intended for lay teachers and members of the Lasallian Family with a view to explaining clearly the intentions of the Institute with regard to the "present and future of our educational ministry" (p. 30).

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Via Aurelia, 476 – 00165 ROMA, Italia

The **Rule**, for its part, states: "The Brothers gladly associate lay persons with them in their educational mission" (17); and "The Brothers' community is ever mindful that its apostolic activity takes place within an educational community in which all the functions, including positions of responsibility, are shared" (17a); and "the Brothers foster a spirit of collaboration and mutual enrichment among all the members of the educational community" (17b); and "The Brothers' community makes known to the rest of the educational community the essential elements of the Lasallian tradition" (17c).

Brother Superior also points out that the Rule lays great stress on the links between the Brothers and the lay people that are associated with them. He refers to the extraordinary changes that are going on in the Institute in the context of the evolution of the role of the laity in the Church. The Institute has accepted that from now onwards our schools should no longer be "Brothers' schools", run by Brothers' communities helped by lay teachers, parents and pupils. Instead, these schools will be "Lasallian schools", run by Lasallian educational faith communities, within which the Brothers' community exercises its apostolic activity. He says also: "What these radical changes mean is that Brothers now have a different role, and those who work with them also have a different role. I am really heartened by the rapid and even enthusiastic evolution, which can be seen taking place in many parts of the Institute, in the way in which the idea of a "shared mission" is being implemented".

In his **talk** to the Brother Directors and lay heads of schools, Brother Superior spoke also of the following changes in models: "From the *triangular or pyramidal model*, with the Brothers at the apex, we have moved on to a *circular model*, in which the Brothers are one of the elements in the circle. This implies a change in the roles of Brothers and lay people".

And so, the *challenge for the Brothers' community*, which is a part of the educational community, is to be true *witnesses to the presence of God*, to the possibility of creating true brotherhood between people and nations, to their consecration to God, and to their commitment to the apostolic ministry of evangelisation through education.

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This is what the community sought to state more specifically by identifying the challenges contained in the Rule. It was a long process, and yet our list of quotations is not an exhaustive one. There are many others in the Rule which are also challenging. It was gratifying for us to discover the extent to which there was agreement between our Rule on the one hand, and Church documents and those of the Bishops Conference of Brazil, including recent ones, on the other. Here, then, are the challenges contained in those articles of the Rule we examined:

Art. 1 & 11. The *challenge* of continuing to make a practical response to human and spiritual **neglect**, and to the needs of especially poor pupils. As the number of Brothers diminishes, there appears the new challenge of becoming associated with lay people who need to be trained so as to be able to commit themselves fully to Christian instruction and education.

Art. 2. The *challenge* of **fidelity** to the call of the Holy Spirit and to the charism of the Founder, by living one's consecration to God in such a way as to pursue one's apostolic ministry of Christian education and evangelisation in association with others.

Art. 3 & 11. The *challenge* of remaining exclusively **lay religious** and as such fulfilling a ministry entrusted by the

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Church. As consecrated religious, accepting the challenge to ensure the constant **renewal** of the school, considered to be a **privileged instrument**, making it accessible to the poor, and proclaiming it to all who come as a sign of the Kingdom, of God and a means of salvation.

In these modern times with their various "cultures", the challenge of opening the school to other forms of teaching and education adapted to the needs of the time and place; of creating, renewing, diversifying types of work according to the present spirit and to the most urgent needs.

Art. 4. The **challenge** of **Lasallian identity** and fidelity to the original inspiration (to be found in the Founder and the history of the Institute). Once known and assimilated, these two elements should lead to conversion and to the sharing of their riches with the educational community.

Art. 5, 6, 7, 8, 12. The **challenge** of **acquiring and living according to the spirit of faith and of zeal**, this Institute spirit without which we would be dead members or not true members. The spirit which is characteristic of the Brothers' community must be acquired, nourished, studied, meditated about and shared. Daily prayer which is implied in all this should transform one's life.

Art. 9 & 10. The **challenge** of **brotherhood** which goes beyond being simply called "Brother", but which must be translated into perceptible feelings, specific attitudes, concrete proofs... of Christian brotherhood.

Art. 12. The **challenge** of uniting one's efforts with those of others to promote **cultural progress** and to **proclaim the Word of God**, and to provide within the educational community an education which respects the individual, makes possible an openness to grace, and predisposes him to accept the gift of faith.

Art. 13. The **challenge** to **found schools** and to take part in the running of educational communities inspired by De La Salle, and of establishments for young people, adapted to the times in which they live, trying to prepare them to take their place in society, and combining an excellent human education with the explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ.

Where necessary, also providing adult education.

The **challenge** of considering one's **profession** as a **ministry**, offering brotherly guidance to enable others to discover, appreciate and assimilate human and Gospel values.

Art. 13a. The **challenge** of **respecting conscience** and integrating culture and faith.

Art. 13b. The **challenge** of making pupils and auxiliary staff **undertake their own education** by taking an active part in the educational community.

Art. 13 & 13d. The **challenge** of promoting a **critical attitude** vis-a-vis contemporary society with its mass media and technological resources. This implies giving teachers a chance to follow courses.

Art. 14. The **challenge** of promoting **Justice and human dignity**, especially in the more developed and well-off sections of society.

Art. 15. The **challenge** for the Brothers' community to **let itself be evangelised** by those whom it serves, considering the work of evangelisation and catechesis as its principal work.

Art. 15a. The **challenge** of **promoting an organisational framework and general atmosphere** that is favourable to integral catechesis which consists in encouraging a frequent turning to God, finding time to pray, and bearing visible witness to a faith community made up of convinced Christians whose hearts are filled with the Spirit who teaches all truth.

Art. 15b. The **challenge** of **sharing in the pastoral work of the local Church**, either personally or through the intermediary of catechists and lay volunteers.

Art. 16. The **challenge** of an apostolate pursued **"together and by association"** by members who are approved, sent and supported by a community with which they must remain closely associated.

Art. 16a. The **challenge** of **maintaining apostolic works** which are in accordance with the aims of the Institute, and of submitting them to the discernment of the community in union with the Superiors and the District.

Art. 16b. The **challenge** of **making oneself known as a Brother**, especially if one is working outside the community.

Art. 17, 17a, 17b, 17c, 17d. The **challenge** of **promoting the development of Christian lay people** associated with the educational community, and of collaborating in the training of Christian teachers, so that they may become more and more competent, and commit themselves more to the Church and education.

Pastoral work takes place nowadays within the educational community and tasks and responsibilities are shared. It is important therefore to encourage the cooperation and self-improvement of the members of the educational community – the young people, parents, priests, former pupils, friends... One needs therefore to pass on the Lasallian message and to offer the possibility of sharing its spirituality by helping to set up faith communities.

The **challenge** of **collaborating** with organisations with similar aims.

Art. 18. The **challenge** of making the effort to know, respect and assimilate the **positive values** of the culture and tradition of the place in which the Brothers are working.

Art. 18a. The **challenge** of **becoming part of the local Church**, of adopting the **language and lifestyle** of the area in which the Brothers work.

Art. 19. The **challenge** of **sharing in the missionary work of the Church**. This is the only way in which the school will achieve maturity in the Church. This supposes even the availability to accept missionary work "ad gentes".

Art. 19a. The **challenge** of **volunteering to be sent** to areas of chronic need, in response to the missionary call of the Church.

Art. 19b. The **challenge** of being concerned about **fostering vocations**.

Art. 20. The **challenge** of **living one's life of faith as a gift** to the ministry of Christian education.

Art. 21. The **challenge** of putting one's **time, gifts and energy generously at the disposal** of those whom the Lord entrusts to the Brothers, who are spurred on by the zeal and attitude of Christ the Servant. This challenge involves an effort to improve constantly one's competence, the quality of one's relationships, the witness of one's life and the vigour of one's faith.

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In a word, the Brothers' community will bear **witness** within the educational community that it is one of its true **members** when the entire life of each of the Brothers is transfigured by the presence of the Lord who called them and continues to call them, who consecrates them, sends them and saves them.

**The Colegio del Carmen Community,
Caixas do Sul, District of Porto Alegre.**