



**Brothers of
the Christian
Schools**



Joyfully I Behold Your Enduring Hope

PASTORAL LETTER TO THE BROTHERS
2021



La  **Salle**



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the Christian
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Pastoral Letter 2021

Brothers of the Christian Schools

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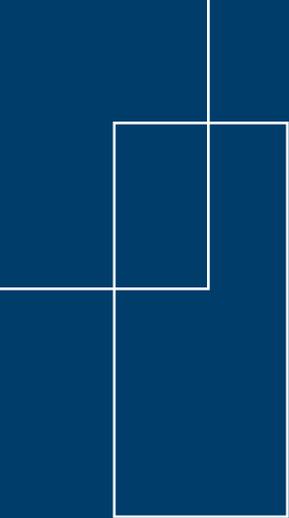
BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

Joyfully I Behold Your Enduring Hope

PASTORAL LETTER TO THE BROTHERS

Brother Robert Schieler, FSC
Superior General

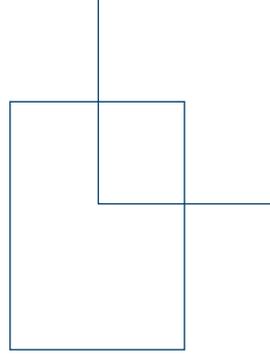
December 25, 2021



Joyfully I Behold Your Enduring Hope

We give thanks to God always for all of you, remembering you in our prayers, unceasingly calling to mind your work of faith and labor of love and endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father, knowing, brothers and sisters loved by God, how you were chosen.

(1 Thess. 1: 2-4)



The necessity for authentic Interior Life and Community Life challenges us, in today's world, to be men of faith and prayer, living our Brotherhood in the simplicity of the Gospel. We hear personally and in community the Gospel call to follow Jesus in his life and mission as a fraternal sign of hope in the world.¹

¹ Circular 455, *The Documents of the 44th General Chapter*, FSC Generalate, September 15, 2007, p. 5.

Dear Brothers,

Paul's words to the Thessalonians express well my gratitude and that of the Brothers of the General Council to you for your prayers, fraternal support and accompaniment during our mandate. With you, we rejoice in our vocation as Brothers of the Christian Schools. Now, as we recall the past seven years and look ahead to the 46th General Chapter, we share with you our conviction that our personal, communal and Institute-wide renewal is guided by the Holy Spirit and carried out by men of hope.

Former Brother Superior Álvaro, acknowledging our fragility, our demographics and our challenges encouraged us to keep hope alive. As Brothers, he said, we are called to be men of hope, "A hope that is born of faith certainly, but which has its roots also in the enormous ability that our Institute has had to begin again after times of crisis."²

Brothers, this pastoral letter is primarily concerned with the virtue of hope and how it inspires what the Brothers of the General Council and I perceive as priorities for the 46th General Chapter. My focus is hope because:

Although we live in an era of considerable technological and scientific achievements, it may also be an age of diminished hope, or perhaps more accurately, misdirected hope, because it is tempting to replace the theological virtue of hope with flimsy substitutes that cannot possibly give us what our souls ultimately need. We also live in an era marked by violence which leads to a barrage of images sent worldwide that show citizens fighting police, children in Syria bloodied by war, ref-

² Rodríguez Echeverría, Brother Álvaro. *Associated Together to Seek God, Follow Jesus Christ and Work for his Kingdom*, Pastoral Letter, 2005, FSC Generalate, p. 56.

ugee children washed up on a beach in Greece. This can threaten hope. But perhaps what threatens hope even more today are not these tragedies and calamities but the soft and subtle despair we settle into when we slip into ways of living that rob us of the exalted good God wants for us.³

Our fragility, the pandemic, climate change, and the growing number of our sisters and brothers deprived of life's basic necessities are among the factors that can lead to despair. However, as Brother Álvaro reminds us: "Our hope is not founded on our knowledge, power, merits, abilities or holiness. Our hope is founded only on the living God, the friend of life who wants all to be saved and who loathes nothing he has made" (cf. Wisdom 11: 24-26; 1 Timothy 2:4)⁴. Brothers, we are consecrated to the living God and we have vowed to collaborate with Jesus Christ in building the Reign of God through the apostolic ministry of human and Christian education.

Since we have promised to be co-workers with Jesus Christ, we take to heart Pope Francis' admonition not sit on the sidelines or stand on a balcony as life passes by below, but rather to roll up our sleeves and do the Lord's bidding. The Brothers of the General Council and I are witnesses to your dedication to both our fraternal life and our mission. Many of you spend long hours laboring in the vineyard and are making a significant difference in the lives of so many children and young people, especially those who are poor. Particularly during this time of pandemic, you are accompanying your students, your Partners, and your Brothers by alleviating their sense of isolation and loneliness.

To continue to do the Lord's bidding, we need to converse with God; we need to dedicate time for prayer. Prayer is our primary source of renewal. We cannot permit the demands of minis-

³ Wadell, Paul J. "Hope: The forgotten virtue of our time", America Magazine, November 7, 2016, p. 1.

⁴ Rodríguez Echeverría, Brother Álvaro. *Consecrated by God the Trinity as a Community of Brothers Who Are Rejuvenated in the Hope of the Kingdom*, Pastoral Letter, 2012, FSC Generalate, p. 14.

try to overwhelm us to the point of neglecting daily conversation with God: “we must avoid slipping into ways of living that rob us of the exalted good God wants for us”. After all, although it is true that we do not make any distinction between our salvation and the salvation of those entrusted to our care, it is through prayer that we are nourished and fortified to be efficacious ministers of God and ambassadors of Jesus Christ.

To be men of Christian hope we must be men of prayer. Prayer allows us to be attentive to the whisperings of the Spirit that enrich our discernment and lead us to choose the best way to respond to the concrete necessities of the People of God. When we share the fruits of our prayer, we refresh, invigorate and encourage one another in the constant renewal of our fraternal life and our witness to Christian hope.

Brothers, we face together in faith the difficulties and the particular challenges that the Institute encounters. Saint John Baptist de La Salle is our model of fidelity in adversity and in the power of new beginnings⁵. Today’s challenges, like those encountered in the past, call for us to be men of faith, hope, and love who constantly search for creative responses to the need to revitalize both our fraternal life and our apostolic ministry.



“The one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life”⁶. A Brother filled with Christian hope not only lives differently but makes a difference in the lives of others. I challenge you, Brothers, to live differently. We are inspired by our faith in Jesus Christ, we are motivated by love and

We declare that as Brothers we are men of hope. Together we journey along the path that leads us to become poor in spirit and be converted to God, our true treasure. In this way we make association possible for ourselves;

⁵ Cf. The Rule, 155.

⁶ Pope Benedict XVI. *Spe Salvi*, Encyclical Letter, Librerian Editrice Vaticana, November 30, 2007, no. 2.

as men of hope we become available to our Partners, to the calls of the Church and we stand in solidarity and closeness with the poor. (Rule, 40)

A General Chapter is a pause in the life of the Institute where we “frequent the future”. “To frequent the future is to frequent the horizon of expectation and to frequent that which is to come in history”.⁷ In other words, Chapters are hope-filled moments for us. In this regard, I believe that the Delegates to the 46th General Chapter should direct their vision more to the horizon than to the immediate future. To the best of their ability and guided by the Holy Spirit, I hope that the Delegates will anticipate the needs of the next generation both of the Brothers for our fraternal life and of Partners and Brothers for our shared mission.

My pastoral letter of 2020 briefly summarized the hope-filled decisions of the last four General Chapters. In response to the letter, a Brother captured my sentiments and shared with me the following:

In analyzing this historical continuum, I believe that we are ending a cycle, and that a new natural cycle is being born; a cycle that was surely germinating in all that had been going on for some years now. I don’t know what this new cycle will be . . . however, I wonder if you are not pointing out some paths that will give a new face to our Institute:

- A path of “empowered” and autonomous lay people who will continue, according to their state of life, the educational work created by the Brothers; and will develop it according to their own genius.
- A path where we Brothers are more mobile, moving to riskier terrain with vulnerable populations; innovators and pioneers less concerned about their comfort, rooted in their relationship with Jesus and bringing education to those on the peripheries of society.

⁷ Source unknown.

Two aspects of hope expressed by these past Chapters are priority for the education of the poor and working classes and the promotion of Lasallian Association among the Brothers and the thousands of women and men inspired by the charism entrusted to John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers. Today, the growth of association, women and men walking side-by-side with the Brothers, is a sign of the times that fills us with hope.⁸

As Regions and Districts, we are called to ensure that all of our educational communities are committed to helping the poor and combatting the causes of poverty. We must have effective strategies, which can include cooperation with other Sisters and Brothers, to develop the community dimension of our educational works and encourage the shared mission to open up more to service with the poor.⁹

I believe that previous Chapters have indicated new paths and invited us to set our sights on the horizon. I also believe that the growth of Lasallian Association is the Holy Spirit's way of inviting others to share the Lasallian charism and expand our mission of human and Christian education. I further believe that by fully embracing these paths we will inspire young men, especially those who live on the peripheries, to become Brothers of the Christian Schools.

The Delegates to the 46th General Chapter must determine the governance and leadership models needed to sustain the vitality and viability of our fraternal life, our shared mission, and Lasallian Association. The shifting demographics among the Brothers and the overwhelming number of Partners engaged in our educational communities impel us to create new ways to organize and govern the mission.

It is important that the Delegates acknowledge that the current structures – mission councils and assemblies – for involving Partners in the governance of the mission are based on dynamics proper to a religious order. A reflection on the lived

⁸ Cf. The Rule, 157

⁹ Ibid, 29.1.

experience of Partners and Brothers with the current models can direct us to more appropriate structures for conducting the mission today.

Formation programs for all those involved in the mission must be of sufficient duration to permit internalization of the charism. The programs must have strong biblical foundations, be rooted in Jesus Christ's project for the Reign of God, and be attentive to the experience of John Baptist de La Salle.

Brothers, it is important that Lasallian Association for the educational service with the poor and the appropriate governance and leadership models for both our fraternal life as Brothers and the Lasallian mission that we share with our Partners receive considerable attention by the Delegates to the Chapter. Furthermore, my hope for the General Chapter is that we have the courage to "die" a paschal mystery kind of death. The courage to die to self, the courage to die to what has been, no matter how beautiful it was. My hope is that we have the courage to see reality from the perspective of the marginalized so that God's desire that everyone lives life to the fullest burns brightly on the faces of those without hope:



We need to be on fire again, for our hope is no longer an easy hope. We live in a culture of despair within which Pentecost can no longer be taken for granted. Hence, we must take upon ourselves the burden of the times and refuse to make the Holy Spirit a piece of private property but a spirit that matters.¹⁰

What is the source of our hope? In fact, it has multiple sources. The young men entering our houses of formation, our young Brothers and the fidelity of our senior Brothers are experiences of Pentecost for us. Our middle-aged Brothers who exercise leadership in local ministries and our Brothers engaged in bringing the Good News to children and young people are building the Reign of God, inspiring our Partners and reigniting

¹⁰ Leddy, Mary Jo.

in all of us an ardent zeal to procure the glory of God. We are on fire with the Holy Spirit and witnesses to hope!

John Baptist de La Salle embodied this sense of hope. He continues to be our inspiration. In his final years, he remained imaginative, energized, life-giving and generative. He did not dwell on loss; but rather, he focused on life. Fortified with this hope and trusting in God's Divine Providence, his earthly journey launched a Spirit-driven movement that is always being re-born. As the Brothers gathered around the bed of the dying Founder, their spirit of fraternity strengthened their commitment to Jesus Christ and their dedication to the education of the sons of the artisans and the poor.



We like to think of our Founders...as being ahead of their time.... The fact is that they are radically [in their roots] people of their time, immersed in their time, responsive to their time. Often their time is the beginning of a new time. ... [T]hey intuit that the world which the Spirit is remaking is, even now, already breaking into the present.¹¹

We, like de La Salle and the first Brothers, must be immersed in our time and be responsive to its needs. We have to learn from past experiences, reflect on the present and



Embrace the “new” as something exciting; something that is being born. Assume that it is a call from the Spirit to leave behind our old ways and to accept with joy whatever awaits us. See it as a challenge to our normal way of living. Have an open heart. Expand our brother/sisterhood to welcome other ways of doing the usual; other ways of “functioning” that until now were unknown.¹²

¹¹ Lee, Bernard. SM. *The Beating of Great Wings*. Twenty-Third Publications, Mystic, CT, 2004, p. 5.

¹² *Stories of Hope . . . Associated for Our Lasallian Mission*. Institute Bulletin no. 254, FSC Generalate, p. 40.

Ultimately, the poor are our source of hope because it was to the poor that Jesus first announced the Reign of God. Following his baptism in the Jordan, Jesus went to the villages in Galilee and



There was fire in his heart. He needed to proclaim to those poor people the news that was burning inside him: God was coming now to liberate his people from so much suffering and oppression. He knew what he wanted to do: he would “bring fire to the earth” by proclaiming the irruption of the reign of God.¹³

At baptism we were commissioned to light a fire in the hearts of all whom we encounter. Our religious consecration fills us with an ardent zeal to touch hearts with Christian hope and to have the attitude of Jesus so as to generously put our time, our talents, our energy and our suffering at the service of those God has entrusted to us.¹⁴

We touch hearts with hope because “Hope is our capacity to predispose events to take a certain turn, by preparing for it or by recognizing tendencies favorable to it.”¹⁵ We pray that the Holy Spirit will touch the Delegates’ hearts with hope so that they “...can look beyond personal convenience, the petty securities and compensations which limit our horizon, and ... open ...up to grand ideals that make life more beautiful and worthwhile”.¹⁶

We pray that the Delegates will embrace the following sentiments expressed by one of our Partners and



“...appreciate the wisdom of the senior Brothers who have a great perspective on the future. They know how to scan the horizon to

¹³ Pagola, José A. *Jesus. An Historical Approximation*. Convivium Press: Miami, 2015, p. 95.

¹⁴ Cf. The Rule, 21.

¹⁵ Robinson, Marilynne. *What are We Doing Here? Essays*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux: New York, 2018, p. 234.

¹⁶ Pope Francis. *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship*. Encyclical Letter, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020, no. 55.

see the changing signs of the times and the new needs arising from them. They have developed a kind of precious, creative fidelity that calls me to grow. This is not the time to retreat back to the trenches; we have to go forward and continue to be light, inspiration, and hope. We have to get others involved, spread enthusiasm, and help others to discover La Salle. Let us be witnesses wherever we go ... Partners and Brothers together. Let us rediscover our energies and commitment to serve others. Let us be lighted lamps and let us inspire others to join us. I am nothing but the hopeful fruit of the planter. Let us sow in hope. Let us renew the earth and do so enthusiastically. Let us recover the joy of the one who hopes for a good harvest and waits patiently for it. There are lands that lie fallow for many years but the new fruit is worth the wait.¹⁷

What a beautiful description of hope and of the faith that our Partners and students have in us!

Brothers, “Ours is a time ‘that invites us once again’ to a faith-filled act of HOPE in our collective future!”(Circular 461).

We are called to ensure the witness of our fraternal life. Together with our Partners, we are called to ensure the vitality of our shared mission “by creating or developing organizational, formation and research structures, in which each one can deepen their understanding of their own vocation and of the Lasallian mission”¹⁸.

We thank God for our Lasallian Partners who make up nearly 99% of the teachers, staff and administrators in our 1,100 educational communities. We express our appreciation to them for their invaluable contributions to the Lasallian mission and

¹⁷ *Stories of Hope . . . Associated for Our Lasallian Mission*. Institute Bulletin no. 254, FSC Generalate, pp. 84-85.

¹⁸ Cf. The Rule, 19.2

we ensure that each District establishes not only comprehensive formation programs but also participative structures where responsibility for the mission lies with Partners as well as Brothers.¹⁹ Our efforts are bearing fruit for the vitality and viability of the mission. In this regard, the 45th General Chapter called for a series of documents to facilitate the internalization of the charism. The International Council for Association and the Lasallian Educational Mission (CIAMEL) was assiduous in bringing these documents to birth. These documents are excellent resources for all Lasallians.

I quoted the prophet Habakkuk in my first pastoral letter to you: “the vision still has time, that it presses on to fulfillment, and will not disappoint; if it delays, wait for it, it will surely come, it will not be late. The vision is not late”. I am convinced that the vision already has arrived even though we do not always recognize it or fully embrace it. Brothers, let us be men burning with hope, let us embrace the vision we have already received from the Gospel, The Rule and past General Chapters. We are called to be people who with the Holy Spirit unleash the creativity necessary to meet the needs of the Church, the world and our Institute just as John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers did at the foundation of the Institute.²⁰

It is my sincere hope that the Delegates to the 46th General Chapter will make courageous decisions to renew the face of the Institute and be signs for all of us that “the future belongs to those who give the next generation reason for hope”.²¹

Reflecting on the events of this year, I can see that despite being overshadowed by the pandemic, we have experienced many opportunities *to call to mind your work of faith and labor of love and endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ:*

¹⁹ Ibid, 19.

²⁰ Cf. Pastoral Letter, 2014, p. 27.

²¹ Raukura, Kane. *Walking Daily with John Baptist de La Salle*, October 27, 2021.

- The year dedicated to Saint Joseph, Patron of the Institute, reminded us that he is our model: Joseph, the man of confidence and faith in God; Joseph, the just and humble man; with Mary he raised and educated Jesus.

In his biography of the Founder, Canon Blain explains de La Salle's devotion to Saint Joseph:



What struck him most in the admirable life of the holy spouse of the Mother of God was his great docility to the action of Divine Providence, his submission to the most vexing commands, his prompt obedience to the voice of the Lord, his hidden life, his angelic chastity and, finally, his tenderness and love for Jesus and Mary.

- The 330th anniversary of the heroic vow recalled the concrete actions that secured the future of the nascent Institute. The hope and trust that John Baptist de La Salle, Nicolas Vuyart and Gabriel Drolin had in Divine Providence continue to inspire us.
- The new *Beyond the Borders* community in Molenbeek, Belgium, a dream of the 45th General Chapter, has been realized. *Beyond the Borders* initiatives now exist in all five Regions of the Institute. In addition to the Fratelli Project with the Marist Brothers in Lebanon, they are signs of hope.
- Pope Francis instituted the ministry of the catechist. Of course, this ministry is not news for us since it has been our “principal function” since the foundation of the Institute.²²



The Institute has boasted of several great catechists in certain periods of its history; it has exercised a notable leadership in catechetical reflection in the Church and has established some out-

²² The Rule, 17.

*standing institutions for the formation of catechists but, at the same time, it has undergone periods in which its principal function has been forgotten.*²³

- The Lasallian Research and Resources Service, in collaboration with the International Association of La Salle Universities, published a COVID research study. The results indicate how more than 900 Lasallian schools responded to the pandemic and they provide a unique global overview of the pandemic's impact on Lasallian education and the impressive resiliency and innovative responses of administrators, teachers, parents and students.
- The postponement of the General Chapter, and the re-imagining of the 3rd International Mission Assembly (AIMEL III), the 2nd International Young Brothers Assembly, and the 4th International Symposium of Young Lasallians have shown us the resourcefulness and creativity of each of the respective preparatory commissions.

Once again, Brothers, personally and on behalf of the Brothers of the General Council, I thank you for yours prayers, fraternal support and accompaniment. I conclude this letter with an interpretation of Paul's words to the people of Thessalonica that expresses my heartfelt appreciation of each and every one of you as I joyfully recall your enduring hope:



Our hearts are stirred in memory of all of you who struggle to live a Christian life. With the tenderness of a loving mother and father we have nurtured you with truth. Your faithful reception to the Word of God fills us with a joyful gratitude. With jubilation we behold your abiding and constant hope. Your faith in the midst of trials is astounding. Truly you have understood that the words given to you are filled with

²³ Navarro, José María Pérez, *The Teaching of the Catechism in Lasallian History*, MEL Bulletin 17, FSC Generalate, 2005, p. 7.

the power of the Holy Spirit. You have received these words with joy and shared them with enthusiasm.

If you remember nothing else of the Good News that has been proclaimed to you, remember this: You are dear – dear to God and to the ones who have given you these words of life. You are our glory and our joy. We sing praises before God because of you. The Word of God has been entrusted to you and you have proved yourselves worthy of that trust. Continue to live anointed with the Word of God. Never forget how dear you are.²⁴

Fraternally,

Brother Robert Schieler, FSC
Superior General

²⁴ Widerkehr, Sr. Macrina. *Abide. Give Us This Day*, Liturgical Press: Collegeville, MN, August 23, 2021.



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