

## 46<sup>th</sup> General Chapter

### WELCOME REMARKS

Brother Robert Schieler, FSC

1 May – May 22, 2022

Dear Brothers, Sisters and Lasallian Partners:

We gather at a time when our world is hurting, dark clouds hover above our common home. The pandemic, and now war, are wreaking havoc with our world. Young people feel lost and many are without hope. It is a time not unlike times past, when nations and people lost their way and sought security from false gods. Nor is it a time unlike that of our Founder and the first Brothers; the endless wars of Louis XIV, famine, wars of religion, financial crises. It is, as Saint Pope Paul VI wrote, a “world where people are searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, to receive good news from evangelizers who are not dejected or discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ, and who are willing to risk their lives so that the Kingdom may be proclaimed and the Church established in the midst of the world”<sup>1</sup>. This is the vocation we have embraced.

My Brothers and Sisters, you who witness the joy of Christ in your lives, I welcome you to the 46<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Thank you for generously responding to the call to discern together the future already unfolding before us. Together and by association our charism calls us to embrace a liberating future for those impatient and anxious for an opportunity to live with dignity. This is our joy, our joy for the mission God has entrusted to us.

As capitulants, we have been called here by our Brothers. It is an awesome responsibility they entrust to us. Above all, we gather as a community of faith to share our experience of God with one another. We do so as we listen to God’s word in personal and community prayer, in reading the signs of the times and in the discernment of the will of God.<sup>2</sup> In this way, the will of the Holy Spirit for this Chapter may be accomplished.

What responsibilities does a General Chapter have for the whole body of the Institute? Article 112 of the Rule states:

The Chapter is qualified to undertake...a periodic evaluation of the life of the Institute, to provide for its continuing adaptation and renewal, and to set out the main guidelines for future action. In addition, the Chapter elects the Brother Superior General and the Brother General Councilors.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Apostolic Exhortation, no. 80, 1975.

<sup>2</sup> The Rule. Brothers of the Christian Schools, Article 46.

But we should also keep in mind the opening paragraph of that article, for it offers a more inspirational purpose beyond the juridical one for our coming together:

Constituted to represent [or be an image of] the whole Institute, the General Chapter has been since the days of the Founder the ultimate expression of the communion that exists among all the Brothers. It perpetuates among them the living fidelity to the special charism of the Institute.

Today we share that communion and charism with tens of thousands of laywomen and men, religious sisters and members of the clergy. We are truly blessed with thousands of Lasallian vocations!

As we begin our Chapter, it is good to recall articles 154 and 155 from our Rule. “The life and development of the Institute depend above all on the mystery and the power of grace. But by the gift of freedom, the Lord wanted to put the destiny of the Institute into the hands of the Brothers...” (154). Our responsibility, therefore, is to “recognize, analyze, and face together in faith the difficulties and the particular challenges”(155) the Institute, our Church and our world face today.

By contemplating the history of salvation being enacted in our life and that of the Institute, we experience the grace of the paschal mystery. By meditating on the Gospel journey of the Saint La Salle, we find a model of fidelity in adversity and the power of new beginnings<sup>3</sup>

If we are to experience the grace of the paschal mystery, what are we called to leave behind, to let go of, allowing the good already accomplished to rise like incense as a blessing before the Lord? A General Chapter is a moment for new beginnings. In the next three weeks, what new beginnings will we bring to birth?

We just invoked the Holy Spirit to come into our midst. Are we ready for whatever may be asked of us? Which Holy Spirit are we invoking, the one who brought creation out of chaos? Or the one who unleashed holy chaos at Pentecost? While the Spirit that whispered as a gentle breeze to Elijah may be a more comforting preference, remember, it was the wind, earthquake and fire that got his attention. And when that gentle breeze revealed God’s voice to Elijah, it was as if Elijah was being challenged. For God asked, “Why are you here”?<sup>4</sup> A good question for our own reflection.

Brothers, this Chapter is just three weeks in length, not the five, six or seven weeks of previous Chapters. What needed to be said was said at those Chapters. What needed to be written was written at those Chapters. As recently as the last General Chapter, we revised our Rule and called for a series of significant documents articulating our present reality where we share responsibility for the mission with those thousands of dedicated and committed lay women and men. Those documents and the Revised Rule are rich resources for our life and mission today.

We all want our mission to flourish; we spend countless hours, days and weeks, planning strategically to keep the mission vital and viable. Do we spend too much time doing so? Are we so focused on doing

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<sup>3</sup> The Rule. Brothers of the Christian Schools, Article 155.

<sup>4</sup> (cf. Mary Stommes, Give Us This Day, June, 2014, p. 150).

the mission, we give ourselves insufficient time to know the mission that God wills for us in this fourth Lasallian century? Let us discern, and focus our attention, on what is most essential for the vitality of the Institute and its mission today. This should be our task during these three weeks.

#### BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

Brothers and Partners, I invite all of us to enter into this Chapter with a similar experience to that of the Capitulants from an earlier Chapter; an experience they shared with the Institute upon that Chapter's completion:

Coming here we felt, as many of you did, that at this critical time in our history the Chapter had to provide us with a focus and a clear direction. At the same time we wondered how the Chapter would be able to do that, or indeed, if it could. Even during the Chapter, at times, differences of culture, language, experiences, hopes and points of view created perplexity and tensions. Now that we look back over our experience of these past weeks, we rejoice that the Chapter has succeeded in bringing us together in our love for our Institute and its mission. We achieved a remarkable union of minds and hearts on substantial matters. This Chapter suggests that the Institute, in its international richness and diversity, is a living parable of the possibility of transforming a world that "still retains the hope of being set free" (Rom 8:20).

May it be so for us during these weeks.

#### CONCLUSION

In his book *Let Us Dream, A Path to a Better Future*, Pope Francis, reflecting on the pandemic, suggests two words that can make a better future possible, words equally applicable to this General Chapter: "decenter" and "transcend."<sup>5</sup>

The one who decenters, says Pope Francis, can transcend, that is, to go out of oneself, to see beyond one's local ministry and District, opening oneself to a new horizon. This is important advice for we who are members of one global Lasallian Family. As Capitulants, we represent more than our respective Districts and Delegations. We are members of one Institute. We have incredible power for good when we take full advantage of our international network.

I began these brief remarks quoting the words of Saint Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. We are evangelizers by vocation, Let this chapter be a time of birth and re-birth for Lasallian communities, communities of Brothers, communities of Partners and Brothers, communities of Lasallian partners, that evangelize one another so as to go forth joyfully announcing the Good News to sisters and brothers hungering for hope and possibility.

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<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis. *Let Us Dream, A Better To a Better Future*, p. 135.