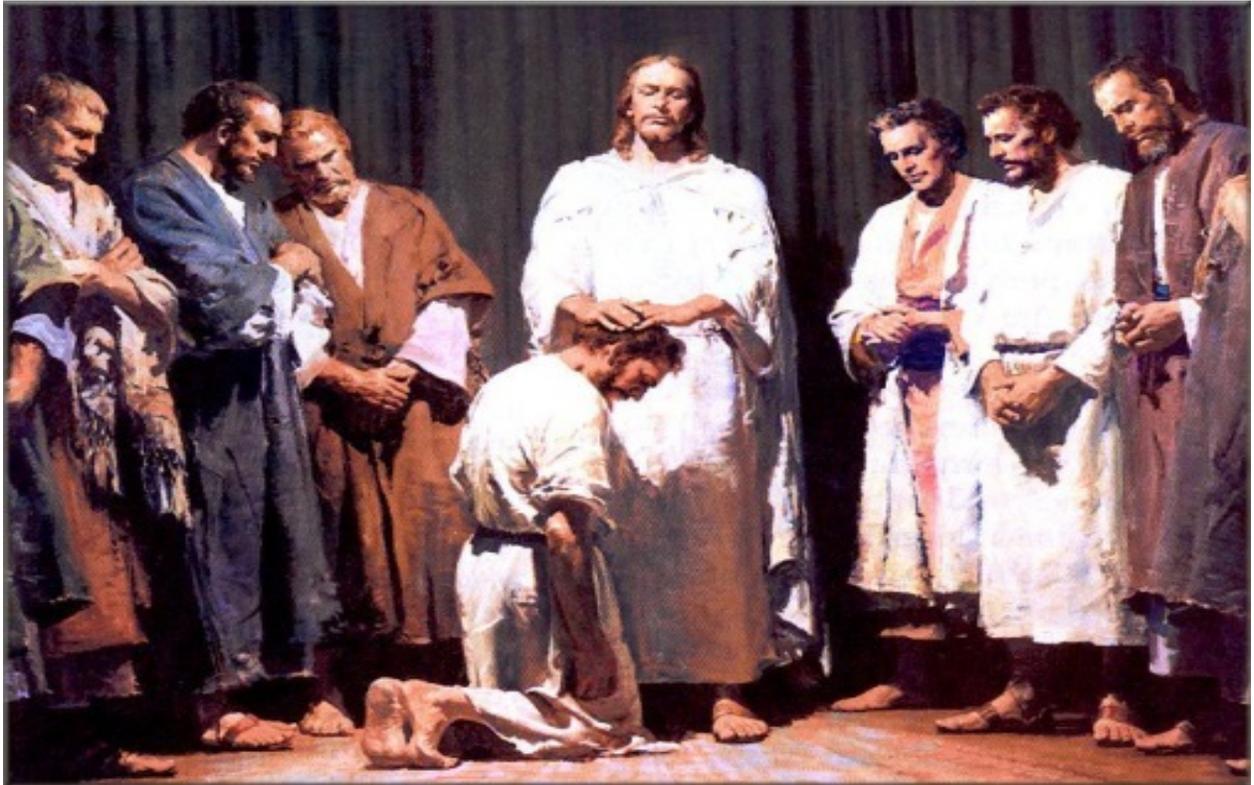


Reflection on Identity & Mission



A Guide for the District

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INTRODUCTION

The new document of the *Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church* offers an aspirational text to reflect, pray and action in our daily lives. We believe this document is a significant opportunity for Brothers to come together to share and to be united in our common identity and mission. The document has been a long time in the making with the Second Vatican Council in 1965 calling Religious Congregations around the world to revisit their original story, charism and founding identity. The need to more clearly define the identity and mission of the Brothers culminated in the *1967 Declaration*, outlining that the Brother gives "explicit expression to his baptismal consecration by committing himself, through the profession of public vows received by the Church, to an Institute that is exclusively lay". The *Declaration* was a pioneering document that called Brothers to renew the spirit of the Institute in reading "the signs of the times" and reawakening the original inspiration of the founder, St John Baptist de La Salle.

More recently, *Circular 461. (2010)* called for renewed emphasis being placed on the association between Brothers and lay people in shared mission for understanding the Lasallian charism and identity. This challenge continues to call forth a more defining picture of who the Brother is today in a rapidly changing world. This new document of the identity and mission of the Brother explains that Brothers have often been widely misunderstood in the Church thus leading to stereotypes and misconceptions about their role and identity. Further, the document points out those religious Brothers have taken a "second place in male religious life, in favour of priestly functions". The new document thus provides a timely reminder to reclaim the importance of the Religious Brother in the Church as a sign of hope and as "a mystery of communion for mission". It is an invitation to rediscover and to represent to a new generation of young people, the Religious Brother in the world today.

In the new document, the *Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church*, a significant reference is made to our founder in highlighting that seventeenth century founders gave expression to the "lay character" of

consecrated life. This document celebrates the grace that St John Baptist de La Salle and others have been as "instruments of the Spirit" in addressing the "social needs" of their time and introducing the Church to "these new founding charisms". There is ample joy given in reflecting on this document in light of the purpose of the Institute in providing "a human and Christian education to the young, especially the poor, according to the ministry which the Church has entrusted to it". (*The Brothers' Rule No, 3*).

A major theme arising from the new document concerns the Brothers as prophets of our time. We are encouraged to be prophets in the areas of "hospitality"; in searching for the meaning of life"; and in the promotion of equality and justice and the protection of life". The Brothers are also called to be new prophets in the "wise use of new technologies" that benefits the disadvantaged and promotes evangelization". It is envisioned that Brothers be teachers of *life and hope*, willing to be companions on the journey" for all whom they encounter. Pope Francis, in his recent letter to religious, invited us to respond with *passion* in "waking up the world" and following the last words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew to "Go into the entire world":

"A whole world awaits us: *men and women who have lost all hope, families in difficulty, abandoned children, young people without a future, the elderly, sick and abandoned, those who are rich in the world's goods but impoverished within, men and women looking for a purpose in life, thirsting for the divine...*(p.7).

Our Superior General, Brother Robert Schieler, encourages us to continue to minister to the "peripheries" the poor and to those on the margins. He also reminds us in the recent revision of The Rule that it is important to "strengthen the contemplative dimension of our life with a passion for God and for humanity". It is with this sense of hope that we continue to search for the best ways to witness and minister in our schools and communities today with both a spirit of faith and zeal.

The identity and mission of the Brother continues to be developed, shaped, challenged and celebrated across the Institute and the Church. We believe

that this new published document together with the accompanied resource, will assist in promoting the vocation of the Brother' to young people; to help define the role of the Brothers today; to share our collective wisdom, story and spirituality with our Lasallian partners and the wider Church; and to continue to deepen the cross-cultural dimension of our District.

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ANZPPNG

November 2016.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to thank Br. David Hawke (The Visitor – ANZPPNG) for his approval, Br. Gerard Rummery FSC for his insightful suggestions on this work, and other Brothers around the District for their encouragement and support.

We thank Br Quentin O'Halloran FSC for proof reading the text.



HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE?

This resource document is the combination of insightful thoughts taken from different resources as mentioned in the reference list. You are encouraged to use it as a source for prayerful dialogue with your communities and for retreats. It is also planned that this resource be a personal reflection reference in deepening an understanding of the identity and mission of the Brother today.

This document is divided into four parts: **Community Discussion I, II, III, and IV**. The first three parts of the document are based on the summary of the *Identity and Mission of the Brother in the Church: Congregations for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life*. In the general picture of religious life, the Religious today are challenged to recognize themselves in a common call to unite with the Church as part of it. Therefore, the Church document is directed to all lay religious, both male and female in the Catholic Church to be aware of their identity and call. *And more importantly, it is directed to all the religious priests, diocesan priests, bishops and all those who wish to appreciate the vocation of the lay religious in the Church (Identity and Mission, p.6).*

Suggested Steps for Reading:

Each section has some reflection quotes at its end taken from the original document for us to deepen our understanding of the identity and mission of a Brother.

The last part of this resource document is more based on the Lasallian way of understanding the identity and mission of a Brother. It provides 7 possible Lasallian dimensions to look through as well as reflection questions under each dimension.

Some guiding questions to help community sharing:

1. What resonates with you in reading this section?
2. What inspires you or what challenges you?
3. Choose a phrase or word that you would like to share with the community.

Community Discussion: Part I

THE RELIGIOUS BROTHER IN THE CHURCH – COMMUNION

“I have chosen you as a covenant of the people” (Is 42:6)

Who is a Brother? In the tradition of Christianity, a consecrated lay man in the church who lives the Gospel is called a Brother. Jesus says, *“And you are all brothers” (Mt – 12:8)*. This title of a Brother focuses on the common dignity and fundamental equality of all believers. They are called upon to shape a universal brotherhood in Christ.

Putting a Force in the Covenant: God made a covenant between man and himself for the salvation of humanity. In this communion, a religious Brother finds the meaning of his vocation inspired by Jesus as a servant, friend and a brother. He lives the call by his consecration to God in fraternal life in community and in mission.

In Communion with the People of God: In the Church today, people have equal dignity received by baptism with a common vocation, and sharing the responsibility for the mission of evangelization. Each one according to his vocation participates in his own unique way to make the world better. A Religious Brother finds prayer and fraternal community life as the pillars of his charism and mission. Therefore, the dimension of communion is associated with the Brother touching the hearts and transforming the lives of people especially the least privileged, abandoned, and marginalized ones in the society.

A Living Memorial for the Church’s Awareness: The first ministry that the Brother develops in the Church today is to be a minister of the Gospel by being a role model to the people entrusted to his care, and to share with them the Gospel values.

Discovering the Common Treasure:

As religious today we are becoming more conscious of our common treasure in the Church. This treasure gives us the sense of equality, common dignity, and common rights and duties in the mission of Christ. We develop this common treasure by consecrating our lives in the



whole church. A Brother is rooted in the sacramental life which he receives from the risen Lord and is guided by the Holy Spirit. He affirms himself as the property of the people of God which can also be called the community of the believers. He stands with community in all its joys and needs especially with its members who are weaker and more vulnerable.

The Brother model authentic brotherhood with the other members of the Congregation rooted in mutual understanding and relationships. He makes sure that their common hopes and dreams are promoted within their congregational charism.

Also, he does not forget about fraternal life in the community which helps shape the strength of their relationships both within and outside the community.

The Acts of the Apostles in the early church demonstrated brotherhood as the source of strength for the mission relying on one another in the community and in the force of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Brothers are called to be the brothers of Christ and brothers to one another in mutual love and work together in the church; in the same service of what is good.

Key Quotes for Reflection:

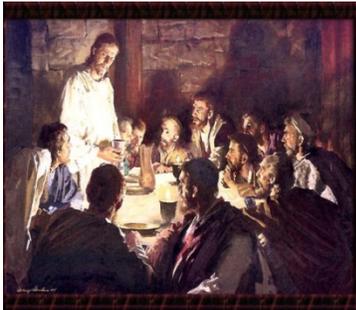
1. *The Brothers commit themselves to "universal love" and to be "available to build brotherhood and serve all in charity, especially the poorest" (p.24).*
2. *Religious Life is a witness "a sign, an openness to God, people, the Gospel" and represents "a radical path" in living the Gospel (p.10-11).*
3. *The Brothers are called to encounter God in "the Word, the sacraments, the liturgy and in prayer; in their "daily tasks", and in their work and through technology" (p.26).*
4. *Religious Brothers "integrate the official prayer of the Church with the dimension of service" (p.26).*
5. *The stories of the Acts of the Apostles give witness to the identity and mission for brotherhood guided and inspired by the "Holy Spirit" (p.15)*

Community Discussion: Part II

The Identity of the Religious Brother

Memory of the Love of Christ: "Same thing you must do..." (Jn 13:14 – 15)

In the Light of the Four Gospels:



Our understanding of the Religious Brother gets deeper as we go through the four Gospels. The three Synoptic Gospels give us the icon of Jesus breaking and sharing his Body and Blood with his disciples; while requiring of them *"Do this in memory of me"* (Lk 22:29). On the other hand, the Gospel of John gives us the icon of Jesus tying a towel around his waist, washing the feet of his disciples requiring of them *"I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you"* (Jn 13: 14 – 15). Therefore, both icons give us the command of brotherly love and an example in understanding the meaning of the Eucharist.

In the Light of the Vows:

A religious consecration is a unique expression and witness in the life of the Church. This offering of oneself is made public and received by the Church through the profession of vows. To affirm his offering to God, a Religious Brother remains chaste, lives poverty, and practises obedience to God and his superiors keeping Jesus as his role model. He lives chastity to become a promoter of communion through the testimony of his brotherhood. He lives poverty as a precious pearl of the kingdom of God to build brotherhood and to serve all in charity, especially the poorest. The vow of poverty develops a sense of openness in the Brother and makes him aware of his Brothers' needs. He lives obedience in the search of God's will in brotherhood.



The vows thus express the commitment of the Brother in living the mystery of God to which he is assigned, together and by association, with his Brothers.

Key Quotes for Reflection:

1. *The Brothers are aware of "all creation" and live in the "presence of God" and accept that whatever affects the human person is part of "God's saving plan". (p.20).*
2. *Brothers offer themselves as guides in the search for God, aware of their own inconsistencies, but able to accompany their contemporaries on their faith journey. (p.21)*
3. *Like Mary, the Religious Brother is invited to live intensely the spirituality of the Word, to have this experience of being at home around Jesus, listening to his message (p.15).*
4. *The Brother will need to be contemplative, to be able to find him in the people and in daily events in the light of the Word. This enlightenment allows the Brother to interpret daily life with the heart of God and to live every moment as a time of grace and salvation. (p.18).*

Community Discussion: Part III

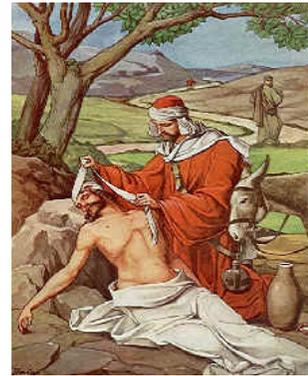
Being Brothers Today: A Story of Grace

“Remain in Love” (Jn 15:9)

A Brother’s life is recognized as the face of the covenant in communion with God and the community of the believers. His consecrated life is a story of grace in the Church and for the world especially for the poorest and the less privileged.

Who is My Brother?

The parable of the Good Samaritan reminds us of our relationships in Christ with the people around us. It is very important for one to reflect upon the question: *“To whom do I become brother?”* This story of the Good Samaritan along with other biblical stories and parables remind a Religious Brother that ***‘humanity has no religion’***. He is called to build up a world where everyone has the opportunity to live fully and to love abundantly.



In Initial Formation:

In his initial formation, a Brother learns to become aware of the experience of being a servant and it’s very deep in meaning in the Church. A Brother lives a life of a servant, keeping in mind that God is both the master and a servant. He serves God through humanity as a faithful servant and is ready to listen and bear hardships for his sake.

In Lifelong Formation:

Today, the Brothers live their vocation in different ways: some may live it complaining while others live it with joy, loyalty, love, peace, and hope for the future. An ongoing formation is an encouragement for one to keep going and live in the present moment. Thus, the goal of lifelong formation is to

provide the skills and human development for living the consecrated life in the world and in the Church today; as well as to provide a criteria that guides the presence of Brothers in the missionary field.

A Brother as a Teacher of Life and Hope:

Many orders of Religious Brothers carry out their mission in the exercise of secular professions such as education and health. As the Brothers grow older, their retirement from the job might lead to religious retirement. But there is no retirement in the evangelising mission. One simply can participate in the mission in different ways. One important way relates to supporting the common mission in prayer and sacrifice. Another way is through small services depending on the health of a person and to be witness to the good of all. In that way, the Brother contributes to the community of service that becomes the prophetic sign of faith, hope and love that society so yearns for today.

Key quotes for reflection:

1. *The Brother has "lifelong formation" and "is committed to lifelong learning" (p.42-43). The Brothers are both "students and teachers" (p.11).*
2. *The Brother works and witnesses to the Gospel in the "secular world" in view of "secular realities" (p.13).*
3. *"There is no retirement in the evangelizing mission; one simply participates in the mission in different ways" (p.43).*

Community Discussion: Part IV

A Lasallian Hope: The Brother's Identity Today

We believe that the following dimensions in the Lasallian context outline the defining identity aspects of the Brother today within a cross-cultural context.

The questions under each dimension invite further reflection and consideration in the wider narrative of the constitutive elements of the Brother.

The dimensions proposed derive primarily from the pastoral letters of Brother Superiors Generals, The Rule, the 1967 Declaration of the Brothers Today and Pope Francis' letter to all Religious in the year of the Consecrated Life.

Teaching Dimension

Our Rule invites us to believe firmly in what St John Baptist de La Salle envisioned of the early Brothers as being, *"ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ"* and that *"the Brothers consecrate their life to God to bring the Gospel to the world of education"* (Brothers' Rule No. 15).



It is God who has called you, who has destined you for this work, and who has sent you to work in his vineyard. (The Brothers' Rule No. 201.1).

Brother Superior General in his most recent pastoral letter urges us to integrate new global technologies with Gospel truths: *"Facebook alone has more than 1.3 billion followers. Thus, the platform for learning, socialization and, more specifically, evangelization has expanded the physical to the virtual and this reality beckons all Lasallians to consider how increasingly accessible information and communication technologies can best serve our mission of evangelization and education"* (Br .Robert Schieler: 2015, p.9).

Reflection Questions:

- a) What is my main focus as a teaching Brother?
- b) What inspires me as a teaching Brother?
- c) What is my biggest challenge or fear in the classroom?
- d) Do I have the sufficient professional development to carry out my mission as a teaching Brother?
- e) Do I know my learners, my students by name in the classroom?
- f) Do I get out in the school yard each day to be with the students?
- g) Do I wear my religious robe to school each day as a distinctive part of A Brothers' identity?
- h) Can I look back on my teaching with a sense of joy and peace?
- i) How do I stay in contact with former graduates and families associated with the schools?
- j) Are we burning with fire to teach our students the mysteries of the Kingdom of God?

Brothers Without Borders



Our Superior General, Brother Robert, invites us to understand the "new poverties" of our age,

The Gospel Adventure calls us to go to our sisters and brothers living on the peripheries and to penetrate these new poverties... (Br. Robert Schieler: 2015, p.10).

Reflection Questions:

- a) What does it mean to be a "Brother without borders"?
- b) What do I bring to the country as a Brother without borders?
- c) What do I learn and hope to become as a Brother without borders?
- d) How does an international community of Brothers express its identity?
- e) What am I doing to promote vocations in the country in which I am working?
- f) How am I networking with other religious in my area to promote and support the Church?
- g) How do I support the growth of the Lasallian mission in the country I am working in?

Community Dimension

Our mission is diverse in the works and schools we are associated with yet united together in communities across our Institute. *The community values each Brother and supports him as he seeks to respond to the will of God (Brothers' Rule No.46.1). The is for the Brothers their home. There they live together. They experience anew each day the friendship, the esteem, the trust and the respect they have for one another. They share their sufferings and their joys and allow themselves to be questioned by others.*



They pay special attention to the young Brothers. They enjoy sharing their meals, their moments of leisure, and the various services made necessary by life in common. By this active presence and their sensitivity to one another, the Brothers ensure the cohesion of the community (Brothers' Rule No. 49).

Community life cannot be maintained without self-denial. The Brothers accept and love one another in their differences as well as in their similarities. They try to be friendly to everyone and a burden to none. In their conversation they stress what is positive and avoid anything that could cause pain (Brothers' Rule No. 49.1).

Pope Francis' letter to religious, (2015), states three essential reminders about community life: *"Don't be closed in on yourselves, don't be stifled by petty squabbles, don't remain a hostage to your own problems (Letter to Consecrated Life – 2015, p.7)."Have the courage to be present in the midst of conflict and tension, as a credible sign of the presence of the Spirit who inspires in human hearts a passion for all to be one (cf. Jn 17:21)(Letter to Consecrated Life – 2015, p.4).*

"Where there are religious, there is joy" (Letter to Consecrated Life – 2015, p.5).

Reflection Questions:

- a) Am I ready to accept and challenge a Brother who needs attention and support in my community?
- b) Am I willing to listen, share, and learn from other Brothers in my community?
- c) Am I aware of my reactions to others, my personality in the community?
- d) How do I model my life as a Brother to others?
- e) How do I welcome visitors and offer hospitality to them in my community?
- f) Do I have enough trust and confidence in the young Brothers?
- g) How do I look at and care for the elderly Brothers in the community?
- h) Do I have proper accompaniment from the Brothers in my community?
- i) Am I aware of any addictions or compulsions in behaviour in my community?
- j) How much time do I spend using social media, technology, watching TV?
- k) How do I manage stress and my emotional wellbeing as a Brother each day?

Liturgical Dimension

The document, *Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church*, gives clear expression to Brothers being an inseparable part of the Church-Communion. In Rule 74, "the Brothers recognize that the Eucharist, a communion with Jesus Christ and his paschal mystery, is the principal source of their sanctification, the growth of their union, and the vitality of their ministry". We are encouraged to enter into the liturgical and Eucharistic celebrations of our Church and to offer our participation as active members the Church wherever possible.



Reflection Questions:

- a) How often do I participate in the Eucharist?
- b) How do I participate in the liturgical seasons of the Church?
- c) Do I have an active and visible role in my Parish community?
- d) Do the other members of the Parish know that I am a Brother?
- e) How am I improving and updating my knowledge of catechesis each year?
- f) Do I contribute to the *liturgical mysteries and celebrations* of the Church's feasts and solemnities?

Contemplative Dimension

You need a fullness of the Spirit of God in our state, for you should live and be guided only according to the spirit of God who can give you this disposition. (The Brothers' Rule No.43.2).



"Live in the light of the loving relationship of the three Divine Persons (cf. 1 Jn 4:8), the model for all interpersonal relationships." (Letter to Consecrated Life – 2015, p.4).

"Like everyone else, we have our troubles, our dark nights of the soul, our disappointments" (Letter to Consecrated Life – 2015, p.5).

"You will find ways to create "alternate spaces", where the Gospel approach of self-giving, fraternity, embracing differences..."(Letter to Consecrated Life – 2015, p.6).

Reflection Questions:

- a) What is my image of God? How has it changed over time with age and experience?
- b) How comfortable am I coming before God in offering my hopes and challenges?
- c) How much time and attention do I give to personal prayer?
- d) Do I value silence and simple attention as part of my prayer routine?
- e) Do I read the Gospels each day and enter into them using mantras and Lectio Divina techniques?
- f) How much time do I give to spiritual reading each day? Do I share these insights with other members of my community?
- g) How often do I meditate on De La Salle's life story, his meditations for time of retreat and other writings?
- h) How often do I read and pray using the Rule?

- i) Do we take time out to *contemplate with the "eyes of faith"* the experiences we have each day?

Cultural Dimension

The Brothers seek to understand the deep aspirations of those they work with. Sensitive to social and religious contexts, they discern the most appropriate ways of announcing the Good News. (Brothers' Rule No. 14). The Lasallian mission, at both the national and international level, is expanding in secularized, pluri-religious and multi-cultural contexts. In these contexts, the Brothers strive to enter into a respectful dialogue with the persons they are called to serve. This attitude presupposes openness and a willingness to listen, to learn, to witness to Gospel values and, as far as possible, to announce the Word of God. (The Brothers' Rule No. 14.1).

Pope Francis: He urges us to consider..."engaging new members in new geographic and cultural contexts, and giving rise to new ways of exercising the charism, new initiatives and expressions of apostolic charity" (p.2).



"We need to ask ourselves about the way we relate to persons from different cultures, as our communities become increasingly international. How can we enable each member to say freely what he or she thinks, to be accepted with his or her particular gifts, and to become fully co- responsible?" (p.7).

"There is strength in numbers. There are benefits from a strong international network." (Br. Robert Schieler: 2015, p.19).

"Some of our initiatives are prophetic; two examples are our presence in the South Sudan and the Fratelli Project. Another example of moving in the right direction is the formation of our Partners and being associated with them in the mission. The call to be Brothers without borders and the creation of new communities on the peripheries are other examples. We are doing many

amazing things; however, because we do not always effectively network, much of the good we do remains unknown to most of the Lasallian Family and the larger educational world. We need to better link and strengthen our international networks. More importantly, we must develop stronger networks so as to more effectively advocate for those who have no voice.” (Br. Robert Schieler: 2015, p.30).

Reflection Questions:

- a) What does it mean to be a part of a multicultural District?
- b) What sacrifices do I need to make to understand better my multicultural community?
- c) What can I do to promote the multicultural identity within our District today?
- d) How do I respond and witness to my Catholic faith while working with students from multi-faith backgrounds?
- e) How aware am I of our multicultural realities in our schools, communities and across the District?
- f) How do I support the national Brothers in their education ministry?
- g) How can I attract young people from different cultures to join the Brothers?
- h) Do I have an understanding of the cultural heritage and stories of the countries within our District?
- i) How are we adapting our formation programs to meet the cultural and the age-related needs of new candidates?

- j) Are we engaged in promoting *the diversity of our District* as a great gift of hope, joy and inclusion?

Ecological Dimension



Pope Francis calls us to an ecological conversion in our lives each day. As Brothers and educators, how can we continue to witness to the importance of creation and justice? In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis considers the following: "the teachings of the Gospel have direct consequences for our way of thinking, feeling and living. More than in ideas or concepts as such, I am interested in how such a spirituality can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world." The Brothers are gifted to witness to these truths in our schools and communities.

Reflection Questions:

- a) How am I called to care for God's creation?
- b) How can we encourage in our schools the significant issues affecting our global world?
- c) How can I promote Catholic social teachings with an emphasis on the dignity of the human person, the protection of the earth - our common home?
- d) How am I a responsible steward in my community in promoting a sustainable environment?

e) Do I conserve energy, save water and recycle in my community?

f) Have I read and prayed with Pope Francis and his new encyclical, *Laudato Si* in promoting ecological justice?

g) Are we being *instruments of our creation* knowing we are part of an ecological movement of the creative spirit?

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