



## En route towards 2021

It's Friday already, and here is a summary of the activities in the past few days.

Wednesday, we were in groups by Region to look at the priorities for the next three years, i.e. until the General Chapter of 2021. Among RELAN Visitors, we agreed that they would be: formation and accompaniment for all, accessibility for the poor, and sustainability of our works.

For our District, to be more specific, I believe we have to develop association, and this is specially where the accompaniment should be. And even if it did not come out as a Regional priority, I believe that we must increase the number of Young Lasallians and, again, give them formation and accompany them. This will not blossom overnight.

Administratively speaking, it's urgent to imagine what our District structures will be of in eight or ten years from now. I think this is especially true in our District, which has very high average age, probably the highest of the whole Institute. I conclude on this topic by saying that, just before, we had discussed in language groups on a draft Formation Guide (or Guide for Formation), which has been found to be quite well done and which covers the formation of all, Brothers and Partners, and adapted for all ages as well. Even if our group, like others, was made up of Brothers from quite different backgrounds (three were from Italy, two from Poland, one from Belgium-South, one from Middle East and me), we liked the idea that, among other things, formation is presented as a journey or pilgrimage, in the English version, which is a very nice picture too.

Thursday, was a somewhat more laborious discussion, done mostly in plenary session, initially on a project called "Criteria for Lasallian Identity and Vitality" (which was easy to discuss), then on a draft of the Declaration, with the intention, surely, to capture the intuition which allowed to write this remarkable text in the process of the 1966 Chapter. This theme was a little less easy, because the situation has changed so much, in all respects, since the first statement. Several comments were made and noted, and we have to trust the editors.

I would like to point out that, when was the time to resume our activities after the morning break, we had 20 American university Lasallian students, almost as

many boys as girls, participating in a cultural immersion program for almost a semester here in Rome and who are staying in block C of the Generalate (the former C.I.L. building), which became, like block B, a hotel (Casa per Ferie room). From RELAN, students are from Christian Brothers University, Memphis, Tennessee; Lewis University, Romeoville, Illinois; Manhattan College, Riverdale, New York; and Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, Winona, Minnesota; and, by the way, Brother Bill Mann, former Vicar General, is the president of Saint Mary's. Five or six of the students were chosen in advance to briefly to introduce themselves and say something about their experience. One student spoke in Italian since he is from an Italian family in New York, and Italian is the language spoken at home. They returned immediately to their activities to prepare to leave for Assisi in the afternoon. Dominic Colonna from Lewis University is their teacher and the person in charge of the program.

At 12:30 p.m., before the meal, served as usual at 1:00 p.m., the official picture was taken in the outside steps as always. It was still a good time to relax and the dressing code, as you will probably see, were very diverse. They noticed mine, but I didn't think I would cause such a commotion ... So, all in all, we had some fun!

In the afternoon, there was a long discussion about the project Beyond the Borders. Brother Jorge Gallardo de Alba, the Vicar General, was responsible for the activity. At the request of General Chapter of 2014, each Region developed at least one project involving several Districts, dedicated to the service of the poor or the marginalized. RELAN chose two existing projects and revitalized them by adding new participants, including Lasallian Volunteers, and by the developments made possible by the arrival of new forces. Here they are!

It is, firstly, De La Salle Blackfeet School, located on an Indian reservation in Browning, Montana, in a beautiful, but financially poor place, at the foot of the U.S. Rockies, a few kilometres from the Canadian border. The second is El Otro Lado (Spanish for "the other side"), which aims to increase awareness in young people about the problem of the illegal crossing of the border, with all the misery and dangers that come with it, and what leads people to do this. This experience takes place in Arizona, on the border with Mexico, in connection with three Lasallian ministries: San Miguel High School, Tucson, Arizona; Cathedral High School, El Paso, Texas; and Centro La Salle, Tijuana, Mexico. We also talked about two projects that have been supported by the Institute to meet pressing educational needs in countries faced with massive immigration arrivals. It is the Fratelli project, in Beirut, supported jointly with the Marist Brothers, and a project in South Sudan, in an extremely dangerous area.

Today (Friday) is Market Place (market square). We encourage Districts to write on the windows of the corridor leading from the main entrance to the chapel "job offers," as in a public square. We see that the needs are big, very big, and that it involves admirable works, everywhere in the world (Bolivia, Myanmar, Madagascar, Guiana, Haiti, Philippines, etc.), When looking at all this, Brother Visitor of France said to me: "my poor old man, there is no one to send, no one." And he knows very well that we share the same reality. We still hope that some works will find volunteers, the only salary, as wrote one of the "advertisers" wrote, being "the glory of God..."

What more to say, finally? Because I've been a bit long already... Well, everything has an end, it will end Saturday at noon with the closing ceremony, some participants are leaving even today (Friday) and many will leave as soon as Saturday afternoon. As for me, I leave the Generalate at 6:15 a.m. Sunday at the same time as the three Brothers of the Midwest District, using public transportation that takes us right in front of the Generalate and leads us directly, for 6 euros, to Fiumicino airport. I'll be in Montreal by Sunday at 6:00 p.m. on a KLM flight after transiting through Amsterdam.

Thank God for these successful days of assessment, planning, reflection and prayer. We don't know the future, but we can see bits of it slightly come, and from what I saw and heard convinces me that this Institute, even if it seems to be declining here, or go well elsewhere, is still "of a very great necessity."

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