



Brothers of
the Christian
Schools



Our
heart
is in the
peripheries

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LASALLIAN REFLECTION No. 10
Our heart is in the peripheries

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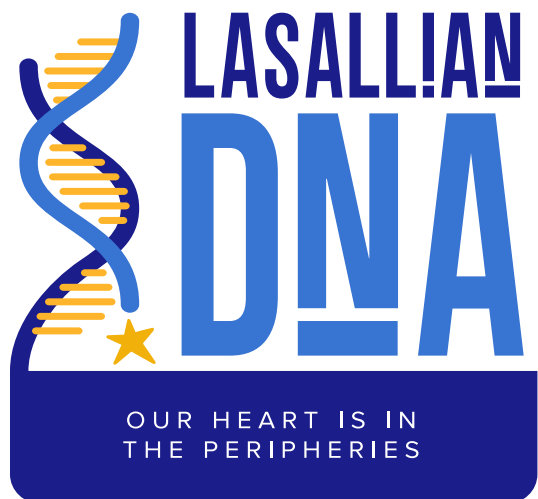
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* Original text written in Spanish.







Our **heart** is in the *peripheries*

A few months ago a Lasallian Reflection was published that included this question, *“Where is your focus?”*.¹ That reflection recommended that we delve deeper into the meaning of “our focus” in the spirit of *The Leavening Project*,² enriched with a profound biblical reflection which illustrates and deepens the need to focus and the kind of gaze which these times demand of us.

In this reflective saga, we propose to focus on the heart and from there to recognise that the present times and the realities the Institute is living today invite us to dwell in the peripheries.

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- 1 Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (2023). *Lasallian Reflection 9. Where is your focus?* Rome: Generalate. Available at: https://www.lasalle.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/ENG_RL9_2023.pdf
 - 2 Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (2022). *The Leavening Project. Growing together in the Lasallian dream.* Rome: Generalate. Available at: <https://www.lasalle.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/ENG-LEVADURA.pdf>

The Little Prince,³ who has inspired so many generations, expresses it with the simple depth of a fox who tells him: “what is essential is invisible to the eye, it can only be seen with the heart”. So let us try to look with our eyes and contemplate with our heart.

LOOKING TOWARDS THE MARGINS

When we speak of the peripheries, we could fall into the temptation of graphical representations and only surface those remote places where resources and human efforts are not meeting the need for health, work, education, leisure, public services, transport, etc., and even imagine remote places that are often far from being able to meet their basic needs.

Indeed these are peripheries, some of them quite extreme; but there are other situations that provoke new peripheries within these same conglomerations, which are no less dramatic. For example, those caused by the violence of war, drug trafficking, human trafficking and the profound inequality in the distribution of goods. It is enough to think of the cities in many parts of the world that witness the painful scene of children, adolescents and young people living on the streets, often made quite invisible, as an accepted reality.

Peripheries are also those human situations of migrants, in small boats, in cargo trucks and on trains, who on the way lose rights, identity, and all kinds of assurances. Today, migrants all over the world are permanently on the move, cheated with false promises, used as merchandise, risking everything for a small glimmer of hope amid the signs of death that hover around them.

3 Written by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900-1944), *The Little Prince* (*Le Petit Prince*) was first published in 1943 and is one of the most widely read and translated French narratives in the world.



Peripheries are also the situations experienced by indigenous peoples who are neglected by the governments of modern countries, with land allocations that have nothing to do with providing for the possible livelihoods of entire populations, and are often forced to transfer to cities, where they find themselves deprived of all means of survival.

However, these are not the only peripheries if we dare to recognise that

whatever places the “other” beyond the reach of our gaze marginalises them and turns them into strangers.

The same happens when we focus on differences: the “other” frightens us when, even if we do not want to, we feel threatened by their presence or are simply unwilling to walk for a moment in their shoes.

In this sense, the peripheries can be right around us. Jesus in the Gospel reveals to us in the parable of the Samaritan the attitude of the one who behaves as a true neighbour: he is the one who leaves his path, goes to meet the one who has fallen, looks out for the life of the other, provides the means to assist him in his unfortunate situation, and takes care of him. This is the meaning of Pope Francis’ invitation to live as a Church in service to the poor, a Church that goes forth.

“Where is your brother? Where is your sister?” (cf. Gen 4:9) are the heart-breaking questions that bring us face to face with our own reality and the true situation of our heart when confronted by the peripheries, just as Jesus brought to the reality of those who asked him,

“And who is my neighbour?”
(Lk 10:29).



AN INSPIRATION FROM THE 46TH GENERAL CHAPTER

This is the world situation that the 46th General Chapter⁴ perceives and which seems to challenge us like John Baptist de La Salle and his first companions. Deeply moved by the distress of the children of the poor,⁵ those pioneers set out on a long journey to encounter these painful peripheries. They encountered God, who gave fruitfulness to the work they started. These passionate men not only provided a creative response to meet the needs of those children and young people, but they captured the essential core: the need to create a sign of fraternity that would restore their dignity, treating them as brothers and calling themselves “Brothers”, as the biographers beautifully describe: “they shall be called Brothers”.⁶

In the audience he granted us during the Chapter, Pope Francis told us: the challenges of the world today are fundamentally educational

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4 The 46th General Chapter of the Brothers of the Christian Schools was held in Rome (Italy) at the Generalate from 1-22 May 2022. Circular 478, published on 21 November 2022, compiles the documents emanating from the Chapter and is available at <https://www.lasalle.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/ENG-CIRCOLARE.pdf>

5 Cf. Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1.

6 *Common Rules of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, 1,1.



challenges.⁷ And, therefore, for us, it becomes a necessity to respond to the calls of this moment of humanity. It is why we are in the world, this is our task, this is our mission.

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- 7** The audience with Pope Francis took place in the Consistory Hall on 21 May 2022. The Pope's address to the participants of the 46th General Chapter of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is available at <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2022/may/documents/20220521-fratelli-scuole-cristiane.html>

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It is an invitation to look at our past with gratitude, to live our present with passion, and above all to look to the future, the future of humanity, with hope.⁸ Without performances, nor idyllic romanticism, nor elusive spiritualisms; but moved by faith, because the ‘Spirit of Faith and Zeal’⁹ makes us develop the spiritual intelligence to discover God immersed, incarnated, in the world, and who wills all be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth;¹⁰ and does not let us languish, because of the ‘ardent zeal’ in the effort to draw close the Kingdom of God in the peripheries.

UNDERSTANDING THE PERIPHERIES TODAY

In this way, the General Council called on everyone to embark on a journey with *The Leavening Project*, recognising what is already underway, what we have already achieved, because we do not start from scratch, but we continue to chart the course from where we find ourselves after 350 years.

The Leavening Project urges us to leave our comfort zones and move towards the peripheries. We will achieve this by taking on three elements that focus our attention, pave the way, and lead the heart to the margins: justice, peace, and integral ecology.

These are certainly not new concepts in our tradition; perhaps the ecological reference provides us with new cues and insight to understand that evangelisation itself and the paths we are following involve political decisions, knowledge of the underlying

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⁸ Cf. Pope Francis (2014). *Apostolic Letter to all Consecrated People on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*. Available at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_lettera-ap_20141121_lettera-consacрати.html

⁹ Cf. *Common Rules of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, Chapter II. On the Spirit of this Institute*.

¹⁰ Cf. Saint John Baptist de La Salle. *Meditations for the Days of Retreat*, 193.



social and economic models, and to acknowledge that education cannot be neutral.

The *Declaration on the Lasallian Educational Mission* makes this clear:

Lasallian education has an inalienable social dimension because it has its roots in the Gospel and ‘the promotion of human dignity, solidarity with human beings and integral and sustainable development’. When opting for humanisation and social justice as inspiration, the educational result is essential. Neutrality is not possible (DLEM, 3.5.2a).¹¹

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11 Brothers of the Christian Schools (2020). *Declaration on the Lasallian Educational Mission*. Rome, Generalate, pp. 76-77. Available at: https://www.lasalle.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/La_Declaración_ENG_26_10_2020_web-1.pdf

Pope Francis has often reiterated: “I love school because it educates us in the true, the good and the beautiful. All three go together. Education cannot be neutral”.¹² Indeed, the *Global Compact on Education* is another demonstration of the power of education as a driver of inclusion, political commitment and the need for new economic models for justice to be achieved.

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12 Pope Francis (2014). *Address to students and teachers from schools across Italy*. St. Peter's Square, 10 May 2014. Available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/may/documents/papa-francesco_20140510_mondo-della-scuola.html

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What are paths we can take? How can we begin to dwell in the peripheries?

Justice, peace and integral ecology are brought forward to us as references and inspiration for this path: they allow us to glimpse the margins where we will anchor our tents. In fact, they are the paths that lead us to understand, touch, transform, and allow ourselves to be questioned. Justice, peace, and integral ecology move us towards the peripheries which are geographical, existential, social, political, educational, racial, gender-based and, not infrequently, there are peripheries in which these elements are concentrated and amalgamated, generating realities that break the soul and cry out for justice and concrete responses, among them, ours: a Lasallian one.

It is in this context that we can understand the fraternal and pressing call of the General Chapter to “Integral Ecological Conversion”¹³ on the “Pathway of Radical Availability to God”¹⁴ with “Prophetic Audacity”.¹⁵

★ **Commitment to justice** requires a critical look at our educational projects in order to be honest about the implicit models that inspire them. Do they comprise a proposal for economic models that make us aware of the unsustainable concentration of wealth

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13 “Integral ecological conversion” is the fourth Pathway of Transformation defined by the General Chapter. Cf. Brothers of the Christian Schools (2022). *Circular 478. Documents of the 46th General Chapter*. Rome: Generalate, pp. 31-34.

14 “The Pathway of Radical Availability to God” is the second Pathway of Transformation taken up by the General Chapter. Ibid. Circular 478, pp. 26-27.

15 “Prophetic Audacity” is one of the essential Lasallian values which, according to the General Chapter, “move us and bring us to action”. Ibid. Circular 478, p. 13.

in the world and in many of our countries? Are our universities and their research a seedbed for ideas and proposals that make tangible the inclusion of and the transition to other models anchored in equity, sustainability and respect for Creation? Do we participate together with others in movements that defend the rights of those who are marginalised?

★ **Building peace** is not just a matter of anti-war mantras and activism, which are certainly necessary and desirable. We must go beyond that. Is our heart close to educational processes that will break with poor education for the poor? Are we playing our part in proposing and implementing literacy models in many of the countries where we are present that include children in the world of possibilities? Is the Institute a spearhead in the inclusion of girls in quality education and in the world of opportunities?

Essentially, we want to opt for an education that allows us to dream and does not put us to sleep, that empowers and does not tame, that allows us to grow in freedom and at the same time in respect for life and differences. An education, as Pope Francis says, that is capable of communicating

a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature. Otherwise, the paradigm of consumerism will continue to advance (LS, 215).¹⁶

★ As framed by the General Chapter, advancing in the realisation of the dream and the urgency of a sustainable world as it relates to **integral ecology**, through our educational mission, is another path that leads us to the peripheries. That is why it called us to an awareness from the perspective of “leaving our comfort

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16 Cf. Pope Francis (2015). *Encyclical Letter Laudato si' on Care for our Common Home*. Available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html



zones”¹⁷ in order to “embrace a broad understanding that leads to overcoming the limits of the socio-economic and political systems and to address the human roots of the ecological crisis”¹⁸ and of poverty.

The Lasallian world today reflects a reality where the focus tends toward the formal education of children and young people in high quality institutions which are not necessarily ‘peripheral’ neither because of the populations they serve nor because of the innovation of their offerings. While it is possible that this generates discontent and questioning, it can also generate

searches that can direct our gaze towards other horizons and to begin to travel new paths which are incarnated in the peripheries of our realities.

These realities explain why the Chapter calls for an awareness of the global educational crisis, for our commitment to the hope and joy of the Gospel, and for “a more prophetic Institute that makes decisions in a way that is congruent with its inspirational documents”.¹⁹

Our history is rich in examples of Brothers, Lasallians, and Districts that have journeyed these paths and have committed their hearts and the heart of the mission to justice, the inclusion of the poorest, and the building of peace: authentic inhabitants of the peripheries. There are wonderful examples of commitment to native and indigenous

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¹⁷ *Op. cit.* Circular 478, p. 24.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* Circular 478, p. 32.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* Circular 478, p. 16.

peoples, in rural education, in the literacy processes of children and adults, in the apostolate with stateless people, in the use of radio to reach rural communities that could only be reached by the airwaves. The list of creative responses is long and our history is rich in examples.

There are communities on the peripheries of many countries that are centres that radiate hope; there are communities that have opened their doors and their hearts to migrants and are the face of mercy that touches hearts in the midst of the drama of uprooting and dispossession. There are communities in geographical peripheries offering the merciful face of God and being witnesses of Jesus Christ through their evangelizing processes. There are vibrant Lasallian communities in marginalised neighbourhoods walking with ordinary people in the restoration of their rights and offering spaces and programmes for educational inclusion.

There are Lasallian universities that desired to focus on the peripheries and have created real programmes for inclusion, and directed their research towards solving the real problems faced by the poor and marginalised: the misery of the bindings of the megalopolises, of poor quality education, the need for inclusion of the deaf, and the problems in rural areas and those caused by violence.



Where is your *heart*?

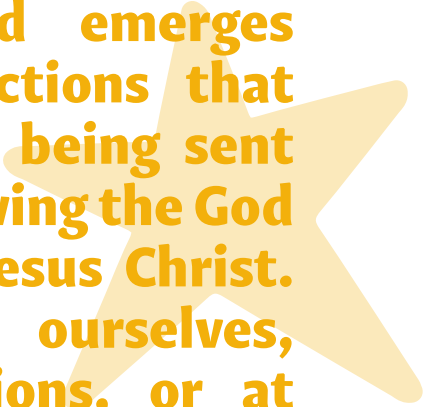


WHERE IS YOUR HEART?

The Gospel tells us that it is to be found “where our treasure is” (cf. Mt 6:21). While there are responses taking place, we could always find more ways out of our comfort zones and more space for creativity and risk. There is no doubt that the good God will always bless all projects that serve the preferred ones of the Kingdom: the poor, the marginalised, the excluded, those without access to education, the illiterate, the victims of violence, those persecuted for the cause of justice, and those for whom poor educational processes deprive them access to opportunities.

In any case, it will only be possible if we set our heart in the margins and the choices we make follow a path of sincere faith, openness to searching, and are touched by God.

Our presence on the peripheries is to be Gospel witnesses, of Jesus Christ incarnate, and emerges from the deep convictions that come from a sense of being sent forth as apostles following the God of life made flesh in Jesus Christ. It implies decentring ourselves, making radical decisions, or at least decisions that are consistent with the discourses we proclaim.





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There are places in the world where these issues are noticeably present and the cries of the poor are easily audible. We cannot become complacent because of the knowledge that some – fortunately quite a few – have made the margins and the peripheries their home and the place of their apostolate.

Will the peripheries always be with us? This is how the book of Deuteronomy in the Old Testament puts it: “The land will never lack for needy persons; that is why I command you: ‘Open your hand freely to your poor and to your needy kin in your land’”. (Deut 15:11)

The movement to which we are invited is to put our hearts there, in the peripheries, where we will find our treasure.



In this way, the journey we are invited to join will be for us the place from which to discern the meaning of our presence in the world as persons, as human beings, as Christians and as Lasallians.

To discern from the peripheries is to have placed there the memory of our humble origin: a small group of men who, inspired by God, allowed themselves to be deeply moved and offered all they had; the 'rest' was placed by the Providence of God.

To have our heart in the peripheries is to discern our educational and pastoral projects, opting for God's preferred ones.

From there, find the courage to generate new responses, shake off those things that bind so we are freed from prescribed constructs, and overcome prejudices so we can give the educational responses needed by so many children, adolescents and young people who day after day are on a pilgrim's journey in the peripheries.

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Where is your focus?



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