



THE MENNAISIAN FAMILY

DOCUMENT OF REFERENCE

Rome
April 2009
Brothers of Christian Instruction

THE MENNAISIAN FAMILY

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Text adopted by the Superior General in council
on Thursday April 2, 2009, at Kisubi (Uganda).

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1

INTRODUCTION

THE RAISON D'ÊTRE OF THE DOCUMENT

1. This document is an answer to a specific call from the Church so that we may faithfully live what is asked of us. The official Church documents ask us to live our mission in the new context of the shared mission. *“These new experiences of communion and cooperation should be encouraged for various reasons. They can in fact give rise to the spread of a fruitful spirituality beyond the confines of the Institute, which will then be in a position to ensure the continuity in the Church of the services typical of the Institute. Another positive consequence will be to facilitate more intense cooperation between consecrated persons and the laity in view of the Institute's mission.”*¹

¹ *Vita Consecrata*, n° 55

2. The shared mission seeks to discover new means of communion between Brothers and the Laity, thus continuing to actualise in the Church and in history the Mennaisian charism through keeping alive the spirituality and the mission inspired by the Spirit to John Mary de la Mennais. The same Spirit awakens in Brothers and lay people a wish for communion so that we may actualise God's design to save children and young people, especially the most needy, through Christian education.

3. The document *Starting Afresh from Christ* states: "*The experience of communion among consecrated persons results in an even greater openness to all other members of the Church... The fact that the charisms of founders and foundresses, having been born of the Spirit for the good of all, must once again be placed at the centre of the Church, open to communion and participation by all the People of God, is being increasingly discovered.*"²

The present document, therefore, wishes to seek creative and faithful means of answering that call of the Spirit and of the Church. The 2006 General Chapter has stated: "*Today, one cannot understand the mission save as a shared mission.*"

This document, therefore, seeks ways for Brothers and lay persons to implement this affirmation of the Chapter.

A FOUNDING EVENT

4. This document is the outcome of a lengthy process. After the Chapter of 2006, the General Council organised a vast survey among Brothers and lay people in countries where the Congregation is present. A letter of the Superior General to lay persons and Brothers accompanied the survey.

² *Starting Afresh from Christ*, n° 31

5. . This survey revealed that a large number of Brothers and of lay persons were convinced that the Church is calling us today and that we should forge ahead with confidence and willingness to answer that call.

The General Council then went ahead with a first draft of a “document of reference for the shared mission”.

The document was circulated among a large number of Brothers and lay persons who studied it closely. Proposals from all countries surveyed made it possible to improve the first draft.

An international Mennaisian gathering, held in Ploërmel in August 2008, brought together some 80 Mennaisians, Brothers and lay persons from the five continents.

6. The assembly of Mennaisians was a founding event. The five-day session of deliberations, the pilgrimage to Mennaisian sites and the last day celebration have, under the promptings of the Spirit, pledged both Brothers and lay persons attending the session to a journey full of promise for the future.

From that time onwards, it became obvious that we would speak in terms of a family, the Mennaisian Family. The Mennaisian family brings together Mennaisians who have heard the call to follow Christ, either as Brothers or as lay persons, in keeping with the charism given by the Spirit and transmitted by John Mary de la Mennais.

One of the participants expressed that call as follows:

Do you hear the call?

It is from Me; do not turn a deaf ear to it.

It is a spring; will you let it run, like living water, offering it to others?

You are the sower; the seeds are life: I shall give the increase. Go!

2

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

7. It is through seeking ways open to us by the Spirit in the Church, through Church documents, especially synodal documents, that theological foundations can be established. We wish to walk the same road through which the Spirit led the Church to the shared mission. Thus, we discover a twofold call of the Spirit to the Church:

- a call to ecclesial communion as full manifestation of Christ, as the unique way of living the mission in the Church today and as the necessary road, in a mutual relationship, to discover our own identity.
- a call to discover the identity of each vocation.

8. The invitation of the Spirit to live the shared mission originates in the coming together of this twofold call. This shows us that Christian existence cannot be lived in isolation, in well-circumscribed and separate states of life. The theology of communion demands from us mutual acknowledgement, not only to recognise other styles of life, but also to discover the true identity of our particular gift.

A CALL TO COMMUNION

a) All are called to holiness.

9. . This is the vocation common to all Christians.

“Therefore, the chosen People of God is one: ‘One Lord, one faith, one baptism’ (Eph. 4, 5), sharing a common dignity as members from their regeneration in Christ, having the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection; possessing in common one salvation, one hope and one undivided charity.”³

This common vocation is the source of the dignity of all vocations. *“We come to a full sense of the dignity of the lay faithful if we consider the prime and fundamental vocation that the Father assigns to each of them in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit: the vocation to holiness, that is, the perfection of charity... It is ever more urgent that today all Christians take up again the way of gospel renewal, welcoming in a spirit of generosity the invitation expressed by the apostle Peter ‘to be holy in all conduct’ (1 Pt 1:15).”⁴*

10. The source of this ecclesial communion is the communion of the Trinity and constitutes the true mystery of the Church. *“Again we turn to the words of Jesus: ‘I am the true vine and my Father is the vinedresser... Abide in me and I in you’” (Jn 15: 1, 4).*

These simple words reveal the mystery of communion that serves as the unifying bond between the Lord and his disciples, between Christ and the baptized: a living and life-giving communion through which Christians no longer belong to themselves but are the Lord's very own, as the branches are one with the vine.

The communion of Christians with Jesus has, as its model and source, the Trinity, that is the unity of the Son with the Father in the gift of the Holy

³ *Lumen Gentium*, n° 32

⁴ *Christifideles laici*, n° 16

Spirit. United to the Son in the Spirit's bond of love, Christians are united to the Father.

Jesus continues: *"I am the vine, you are the branches"* (Jn 15: 5). The communion that Christians experience in Christ gives rise to the communion which they experience with one another since all are branches of a single vine, namely, Christ. This fraternal communion is the wonderful reflection and participation in the mystery of the intimate life of the love of God as Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus prays for the accomplishment of this communion: *"That they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me"* (Jn 17: 21).

Such communion is the very mystery of the Church, as the Second Vatican Council reminds us.⁵

b) A communion of charisms, of vocations and of states in life.

11. *"Ecclesial communion is more precisely likened to an 'organic' communion, analogous to that of a living and functioning body. In fact, at one and the same time it is characterized by a diversity and a complementarity of vocations and states in life, of ministries, of charisms and responsibilities."*⁶

This common vocation is lived in keeping with the different charisms and states in life. *"In Church Communion the states of life by being ordered one to the other are thus bound together among themselves. They all share in a deeply basic meaning: that of being the manner of living out the commonly shared Christian dignity and the universal call to holiness in the perfection of love. They are different yet complementary, in the sense that each of them has a basic and unmistakable character which sets each apart, while at the same time each of them is seen in relation to the other and placed at each other's service... Thus in the diversity of the states of life and the variety of*

⁵ *Christifideles laici*, n° 18

⁶ *Ibid.*, n° 20

vocations this same, unique mystery of the Church reveals and experiences anew the infinite richness of the mystery of Jesus Christ.”⁷

We are thus led to share one concrete facet of the figure of Christ, to give flesh to the charismatic word which has been entrusted to us. *“Conciliar ecclesiology has shed light on the complementarity of the different vocations in the Church which are called to be, together in every situation and place, witnesses of the Risen Lord. Encounter and collaboration among religious men, religious women, and lay faithful are seen as an example of ecclesial communion and, at the same time, they strengthen apostolic energies for the evangelization of the world... Collaboration and exchange of gifts become more intense when groups of lay persons share, by vocation and in the way proper to them, in the heart of the same spiritual family, in the charism and mission of the institute. In this way, fruitful relationships, based on bonds of mature co-responsibility and supported by regularly scheduled programmes of formation in the spirituality of the institute will be established. Naturally, very close collaboration should be worked out with respect for the reciprocal vocations and different styles of life proper to religious and to lay persons.”⁸*

12. It is this twofold call of the Spirit for identity and communion which forms, in a dynamic way, the foundation of the shared mission. This is the conclusion reached by *Vita Consecrata*: *“This Synod, coming after the ones dedicated to the lay faithful and to priests, completes the treatment of the distinctive features of the states of life willed by the Lord Jesus for his Church. Whereas the Second Vatican Council emphasized the profound reality of ecclesial communion, in which all gifts converge for the building up of the Body of Christ and for the Church's mission in the world, in recent years there has been felt the need to clarify the specific identity of the various states of life, their vocation and their particular mission in the Church. Communion in the Church is not uniformity, but a gift of the Spirit who is present in the variety of charisms and states of life.”⁹*

⁷ *Ibid.*, n° 55

⁸ *Fraternal Life in Community*, n° 70

⁹ *Vita Consecrata*, n° 4

CALL TO IDENTITY

a) *Identity of the lay vocation*

13. According to *Lumen Gentium*, the vocation of lay people is the quest of the Kingdom of God through the management of temporal concerns. “*But the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven. In this way they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity.*”¹⁰

14. Lay persons are called upon to live their mission as a Church mission which is also Christ’s mission. “*The lay apostolate, however, is a participation in the salvific mission of the Church itself. Through their baptism and confirmation all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself. Moreover, by the sacraments, especially holy Eucharist, that charity toward God and man which is the soul of the apostolate is communicated and nourished... Thus every layman, in virtue of the very gifts bestowed upon him, is at the same time a witness and a living instrument of the mission of the Church itself ‘according to the measure of Christ’s bestowal’.*”¹¹

15. Lay persons are called upon to manifest themselves, to walk out of anonymity and cease to be faceless Christians. “*The Church’s rich variety is manifested still further from within each state of life. Thus within the lay state diverse ‘vocations’ are given, that is, there are different paths in the*

¹⁰ *Lumen Gentium*, n° 31

¹¹ *Ibid.*, n° 33

spiritual life and the apostolate which are taken by individual members of the lay faithful. In the field of a 'commonly shared' lay vocation 'special' lay vocations flourish."¹²

16. Lay persons must share the wealth of their charisms and ministries with other vocations in the Church. "*Church communion then is a gift, a great gift of the Holy Spirit, to be gratefully accepted by the lay faithful, and at the same time to be lived with a deep sense of responsibility. This is concretely realized through their participation in the life and mission of the Church, to whose service the lay faithful put their varied and complementary ministries and charisms.*"

A member of the lay faithful "*can never remain in isolation from the community, but must live in a continual interaction with others, with a lively sense of fellowship, rejoicing in an equal dignity and common commitment to bring to fruition the immense treasure that each has inherited. The Spirit of the Lord gives a vast variety of charisms, inviting people to assume different ministries and forms of service and reminding them, as he reminds all people in their relationship in the Church, that what distinguishes persons is not an increase in dignity, but a special and complementary capacity for service..*"¹³

b) *Call to the religious identity with reference to the charism.*

17. . Vatican Council II has called upon the religious to go back to their origins and to rediscover their true identity. In *Instrumentum laboris*, this call resounds with force: "*Every institute must be concerned with deepening, assimilating and manifesting the essential core which characterises their christological and evangelical inspiration, in communion with other vocations in the Church.*"¹⁴

Each congregation is called upon to discover its own identity in the broad spectrum of religious life. "*It is therefore necessary to promote an institute's*

¹² *Christifideles laici*, n° 56

¹³ *Ibid.*, n° 20

¹⁴ *Instrumentum laboris*, n° 46

charismatic identity, especially to avoid a kind of genericism, which is a true threat to the vitality of a religious community."¹⁵

18. Discovering and living one's charismatic identity is an essential condition in order to live the shared mission. *"In order to achieve such an objective, however, it is necessary to have: religious communities with a clear charismatic identity, assimilated and lived, capable of transmitting them to others and disposed to share them; religious communities with an intense spirituality and missionary enthusiasm for communicating the same spirit and the same evangelising thrust; religious communities who know how to animate and encourage lay people to share the charism of their institute, according to their secular character and according to their different style of life, inviting them to discover new ways of making the same charism and mission operative. In this way, a religious community becomes a centre radiating outwardly, a spiritual force, a centre of animation, of fraternity creating fraternity, and of communion and ecclesial collaboration, where the different contributions of each help build up the Body of Christ, which is the Church."*¹⁶

¹⁵ *Fraternal Life in Community*, n° 46

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, n° 70

3

MENNAISIAN ITINERARY

GENERAL CHAPTER OF 1982

19. This was the first Chapter where the subject of *associate members* was raised. There is no mention of it in the document of the Chapter as two major questions were discussed, namely, the priesthood in the Congregation and the new Rule of Life, which monopolised people's attention. But, as we shall see, the Chapter of 1988 affirms that the 1982 Chapter broached the subject. .

GENERAL CHAPTER OF 1988

20. This is the first Chapter which addresses the idea of the shared mission in a systematic way.

In schema 402 which deals with "Our heritage", it is said with reference to our spirituality: "*to share it eventually with the laity*".

But schema 403 is entitled: "*The associate members*". It contains the following proposal: "*The Congregation of the Brothers of Christian Instruction accepts to associate other persons who so wish, to participate in its mission, to share in its spiritual life, and even to share some moments of its community life. Associates are in no way bound by canonical ties to the Congregation of the Brothers of Christian Instruction. They commit*

themselves in accordance with norms which will be defined by the general and particular regulations of the Congregation.

21. To implement this proposal, the Chapter lays out a series of general and particular rules which can be summed up as follows:

“The Mennaisian family may invite, at different levels, men and women who wish to deepen their Christian life in accordance with the style and the spirituality of our Congregation but in keeping with their state in life.”

“They bind themselves to the Congregation through a personal commitment in accordance with statutes approved by the Provincial council.”

“The Congregation accompanies and supports lay associates in their spiritual and apostolic commitment. It offers associates the necessary formation to know and deepen the Brothers’ spirit and it invites associates to meetings with communities.”

“Both the Congregation and associates are autonomous and independent professionally, financially and civilly.”

The particular regulations stipulate:

“The rules and the statutes should specify:

- *the forms of presentation, admission and formation.*
- *the nature and frequency of meetings between associates and communities.*
- *the places of apostolic commitment, according to pledge, age and health.”*

GENERAL CHAPTER OF 1994

22. Among the four priorities defined by the Chapter, the fourth one reads as follows: *“Our mission in schools: a shared mission.”*

The third paragraph states: *“Intensify efforts underway to share our charism with all members of the educational community and in all places of work.”*

To shed greater light on the subject, part of Cardinal Solano’s speech to the Chapter is quoted:

“Associate to your apostolate the teachers who work with you, your students, the families and other Christians who share your concerns as educators and evangelizers. With you, lay educators discover in your living tradition the spirit which allows them to share your educational endeavours. They are the first witnesses to the actualization of the charism which the founders have entrusted to you and to which they can participate by living up to the demands of their vocation as baptised Christians in the context of your apostolate.”

Among the objectives is the following: *“Intensify efforts underway to share our charism with all members of the educational community.”*

In schools, the following is recommended: *“Assess our relationships with lay persons; share posts of responsibility with them.”*

At the level of the Province: *“Associate lay persons to our spirituality and to our activities, especially through developing the experience of associate members.”*

GENERAL CHAPTER OF 2000

23. One of the documents of the Chapter is entitled “A Shared Mission”.

In the introduction one can read: *“The charism of the Congregation is alive thanks to the commitment, alongside Brothers, of young people and adults aware of the importance of their vitality for today’s world.”* When we accept to work and live together in fidelity to the charism, we notice a mutual enrichment and a reaffirmation of the identity of each vocation.

On the way, we find a few reservations on the part of Brothers and lay persons alike. *“The need is felt to define clearly what the shared mission is.”*

24. The orientation taken by the Chapter is the following one:

“Mennaisian Brothers and lay persons are invited to pursue their efforts with boldness, to set out on the journey with confidence, to live the shared mission together in the Church Communion, family of God.”

The orientation is then applied at various levels:

- The educational Mennaisian charism

In this paragraph, one can read: *“At the level of the Congregation and of each Province, a flexible frame of reference should be addressed to communities of Brothers and of lay persons to foster living out the shared mission; specify the various forms which the shared mission can take, taking into consideration different levels of commitment.”*

- Communities and Mennaisian teams

“Invite communities to integrate the shared mission in their community projects:

Propose community meetings between Brothers and lay persons.

Renew vocation pastoral care.

Communication, information.

Provide the means to share experiences among Provinces and sectors.”

- At the level of the Congregation and at the instigation of the General Council, *propose the establishment of the international Mennaisian network.*

GENERAL CHAPTER OF 2006

25. The second part of the Chapter’s report is entitled: *“At the service of the shared mission: deepening the Mennaisian educational shared mission between Brothers and lay persons.”*

One of the convictions reads as follows: *“In Church Communion, mission is a shared mission. The shared mission is the road to hope and to fecundity for the Congregation.”*

26. The second paragraph of the Chapter’s document mentions three main orientations:

- **The Mission:** *“The Brothers and the lay persons who share the Mennaisian charism live the educational mission as a source of personal sanctification and as fulfilment of their vocation.”*
- **The shared Mission:** *“Brothers commit themselves to the shared mission as a way to achieve communion. They realise that discerning*

and living the shared mission in everyday situations requires a change of heart...”

*“Communities are opened to the shared mission for sessions of formation, for sharing peak moments of community living and prayer life with lay people, especially with **the associates**.”*

*“**Associates** are men and women who follow a vocational orientation which allows them to live their Christian life in line with the Mennaisian spirituality and mission. The commitment which they make is public, stable and, in the absence of a recognised association of lay Mennaisians, that commitment is endorsed by the Congregation.”*

“Brothers and lay people commit themselves to presenting all vocations in a positive light, with special emphasis on the vocation to the brotherhood.”

- **Shared Mission and formation:** *“The shared mission can express itself in a variety of ways compatible with personal itineraries and local circumstances. Communities incorporate in the community projects joint sessions of formation with lay people who share our charism.”*

“The General Council will work out a framework of reference for the implementation of the shared mission.”

27. It is this Chapter which introduces an article on the shared mission in the Directory. The number reads as follows: *“The shared mission is a call of the Spirit addressed to the Brothers and to the laity to live in communion with the Mennaisian charism. In the context of the shared mission, the Brother is called to be a witness to the primacy of God, a prophetic sign of fraternity and a living memory of the charism. With lay persons, the community discerns the mission, shares and deepens the spirituality and the sense of the mission, involves itself in experiences of communion and of collaboration while respecting the demands proper to different states in life.”*

4

WAYS FOR LAY PEOPLE TO COMMIT THEMSELVES TO THE MENNAISIAN FAMILY

THE MENNAISIAN FAMILY

28. The Mennaisian Family consists of a large community whose solidarity and fraternity are deeply rooted in the charism of foundation of the Congregation of the Brothers of Christian Instruction (*Mennaisian educational Mission, Mennaisian Spirituality, Communion*).

A lay person may collaborate in an educational venture inspired by the Mennaisian charism, participate in the Mennaisian family or belong to the Mennaisian family.

As far as Brothers are concerned, they are members of the family by the very fact of their belonging to the Congregation.

It is the responsibility of the Brothers' Congregation to guarantee the authenticity of the charism (Cf. Canon 303).

WAYS FOR LAY PERSONS TO COMMIT THEMSELVES TO THE MENNAISIAN FAMILY

29. Here, we can distinguish three main ways in which lay persons may commit themselves to the Mennaisian family: through collaboration in a Mennaisian educational undertaking, participation in the Mennaisian family, belonging to the Mennaisian family.

I. Collaboration in a Mennaisian educational endeavour

30. Any person (educator, parent, past pupil, etc.) who plays a part in one way or another in the Mennaisian educational mission and who provides a positive and stimulating outlook, contributes effectively to the educational endeavour.

Through this collaboration, lay persons and Brothers seek to develop the quality, simplicity and cordiality of human relations. In the context of the Mennaisian educational endeavour, they also attempt to gain a deeper awareness of the meaning and of the mission of educators.

II. Participation in the Mennaisian Family

a. From educational mission to spirituality

31. Participation in the educational mission requires on the part of a person, through a deliberate decision, commitment to what binds that person to the Congregation. On the part of the Congregation, this presupposes a willingness to call lay persons to take on responsibilities within the specific mission of the Congregation.

32. This form of participation entails that :

- The members of the educational community who have chosen that option seek to know, love and embody the values of the Mennaisian education, and carry over in their work the main criteria of the Mennaisian school. They seek to live in conformity with the Gospel in the light of the Mennaisian spirituality which they strive to make their own.
- Those who participate in the Mennaisian mission in outside-of-school domains will, in the implementation of that mission, express and embody the fundamental principles consequent upon their participation in the Mennaisian Family.

b. From spirituality to educational mission

33. Lay persons who find in the dimensions of the Mennaisian spirituality, a source of nourishment for their faith and for their baptismal commitments, participate in the Mennaisian family.

They share with a community of Brothers and/or among themselves times of prayer and of formation which enable them to embody the Mennaisian gospel figure in their daily lives.

They also seek to put into practice dimensions of the Mennaisian pedagogy through their educational and pastoral commitments with children, youth or adults. These commitments are worked out in keeping with the orientations of the Province.

III. Belonging to the Mennaisian Family

34. Belonging to the Mennaisian family corresponds to a vocational option. It is the answer to a call to share not only the mission but also the Mennaisian charism in its different dimensions of mission, spirituality and with a form of community commitment.

It is a course of action, undertaken in the Church, which involves a person's relationship to God and to others in the dynamics of one's baptism. As such, it can be said to be an answer to a personal call.

a) Belonging to the Mennaisian Family presupposes:

35. **A vocation** to follow Christ after the example of the founder, John Mary de la Mennais, in the married state or as lay celibates. A vocational discernment must take place in accordance with an established course of action in the Provinces and in keeping with guidelines set by the General Council.

A life of faith which sees God in everything, in the light of the Word of God read in the Church.

A mission engaged in the service of Christian education of children and youth, especially the poor, and which implies commitment over a period of time.

An experience of community living in a variety of forms and in keeping with one's identity. (*“Community living experience” or “community” does not mean persons living under the same roof but persons who develop mutually agreed upon fraternal links*). This community living may take different forms as defined by the Provinces according to guidelines established by the General Council.

Openness which broadens horizons beyond personal concerns and local ecclesial realities.

b) Belonging to the Mennaisian Family can take the form of the following community experiences:

36. **Mennaisian communities.** These communities consist of a community of Brothers and of some lay people who have a common undertaking and who periodically share prayer, mission, training and other community activities.

Mennaisian fraternities. These are communities of lay persons for whom a community of Brothers, or a group of communities, or a Province, serves as reference.

Other forms of communities. Other forms of “communities” can come into being. However, they must receive the approval of the Provincial in

Council who will come to a decision in keeping with the guidelines set by the General Council.

37. These different community experiences imply such practices as:

- Praying with a community on a regular basis, sharing recollections (days of revision of life, of formation and of prayer) and retreats with a community of Brothers and with the Province.
- Taking an active part in some Mennaisian celebrations (local or provincial).
- Participating periodically, for example once a month, in community meetings with Brothers.
- Taking part in the Mennaisian mission of the community in keeping with one's aptitudes and in accordance with a concrete educational endeavour, giving special attention to the poor.
- Fostering the spirituality of communion between Brothers and lay persons.

c) Belonging to the Mennaisian Family implies specific bonds

38. These specific bonds are defined by the Provinces and Vice-Provinces in keeping with the guidelines established by the General Council.

- **Community bonds**

39. Following a process of formation, of discernment and of accompaniment, these community bonds unite to the Mennaisian family lay persons who have chosen to live in keeping with the charism and who are already enjoying relationships with Brothers as defined by the above-mentioned guidelines (n° 35-37).

- **Institutional bonds**

- **Associate members**

40. Among lay persons, some of them commit themselves publicly and in a stable way. They are the "associate members" (Cf. General Chapter of 2006).

○ **Association of lay people**

41. Lay persons who enjoy a relationship with the Congregation by belonging to the Mennaisian family, and who so wish, may form a Mennaisian association of lay persons.
42. An international federation could then bring together the Mennaisian associations of lay persons.

SOME REFERENCE POINTS FOR INSTITUTIONAL LINKS

43. Three salient points for living the Mennaisian family lifestyle

- Everyone exercises the role and function that belongs to him/her. There is reciprocal recognition of everyone's place, everyone living their own vocation and exercising their own responsibility.
- The objective is the building of fraternal relationships where there are no hierarchical structures between persons and groups or among fraternities born out of the evangelical experience of the Founder. All groups or fraternities are "sister" communities, including the Congregation.
- In this set-up, the Congregation is historically the first and has lived, for a number of years now, a broad spiritual maternity vis-à-vis the persons and groups or fraternities of the Mennaisian family. The Congregation has also been energized by these persons' and groups' inspiration. In the eyes of the Church, the Congregation is, for the time being, the guarantor of the Mennaisian character of persons or fraternities affiliated to it in some way. At present, and for the coming years, the Congregation has to live some kind of transition from maternity to fraternity, and for the laity, a transition from filiation to fraternity. These stages of growth call for evaluation, from time to time, to take stock, to fine-tune our bearings, or more precisely, to discover together the avenues that the Lord is opening for us. There is no ready-made paradigm showing how a family should function. It is up to each one to

discover one's way which will be characterized by the "Mennaisian Gospel image".

44. For the institutional tie of " individual persons ":

Individual persons who wish to establish institutional ties with the Congregation are called "Associate Members ". They are recognised as such by the Provincial Superior, in accordance with the terms determined by the Superior General, with the consent of his Council.

"The associate members are men and women who have followed a vocational itinerary by which they live the Christian life according to the Mennaisian spirituality and the Mennaisian mission. This commitment is public, stable and, in the absence of a recognised association of the Laity, accepted by the Congregation. This commitment is made after a period of formation and of discernment...." (General Chapter 2006)

45. Where the institutional bonds of "groups", "fraternities" or "associations" of lay persons are concerned, two situations arise:

- In the first case, the fraternity or the association of lay persons wishes to establish bonds with the Congregation:
 - In this case, the persons are associated with the Congregation by an act of association agreed to by the superiors of the Congregation. If a group wishes to establish formal links with the Congregation, it must be recognised as a duly constituted group by the General Chapter.
 - It can be recognised and constituted by a decree of the Superior General. Such recognition is provisional and must be submitted to the next General Chapter.
- In the second case, the fraternity or the association wishes to continue living the spirit of the Congregation without institutional bonds:
 - The group can become an association of the faithful according to civil or ecclesial law.

5

FORMATION HANDBOOK

COLLABORATION AND PARTICIPATION

POSSIBLE MEANS OF FORMATION

46. Participation implies formation. This formation aims at giving meaning to forms of participation. It is not theoretical in nature; it involves concrete forms of commitment and aims at making people responsible for the undertaking in which they participate.

- The objectives of formation:
 - Discover the Founders and the history of the congregation;
 - Build up the Mennaisian education community around the educational project;
 - Gain a deeper awareness of the Mennaisian spirituality and live by it;
 - Commit lay people and Brothers to the mission.
- The methods of formation: The specific methods of formation are established by the Provinces and the Vice-Provinces.

BELONGING TO THE MENNAISIAN FAMILY

OBJECTIVES OF FORMATION

47. In the *Ratio Institutionis* of the Congregation (N° 4), the following is said concerning Brothers: “The primary objective of the formation process is the promotion of a Brother’s growth in union with Christ and configuration to him, through a course of action which allows him to gradually identify with the attitudes of Christ towards his Father, in keeping with the Mennaisian charism which is its distinctive feature, in a process of personalization.”

48. Following an identical process, the Layperson who wishes to belong to the Mennaisian Family, seeks a deepening of one’s own Christian identity lived after the example of John Mary de la Mennais and in keeping with the Mennaisian charism.

DIMENSIONS OF FORMATION

49. The human dimension

Ensure the sustained integration of a person’s qualities of intelligence, of affectivity and of experience in that person’s harmonious growth.

- Review one’s life in the light of the word and experience of John Mary de la Mennais and of Gabriel Deshayes.
- Review one’s personal history as a history of salvation.
- Initiate oneself to revision of life (*Lectio Vitae*).

50. The Christian dimension

Respond to the gift of vocation through willingness to constant and faithful growth.

- Discern personal and community callings at the heart of the universal call to holiness.
- Find nourishment in the Word of God and the sacraments.
- Initiate oneself to the *Lectio Divina* and to personal prayer.

51. The Mennaisian dimension

Adopt a mindset of constant renewal, well aware that faithfulness to the charism demands from all an attitude of creative fidelity.

- Discover the dimensions of Mennaisian spirituality and live by it.
- Integrate the Mennaisian educational principles so that they inform the mission.
- Share a form of community-living focused on Christ.

METHODOLOGY OF FORMATION

Two important criteria

52. The methodology must make evident that the whole process is considered in the framework of the Mennaisian family. This implies the joint presence of Brothers and lay persons in its organisation and participation.

53. The methodology used is that of workshops which do not simply offer intellectual formation, but which involve the whole person and his/her personal transformation. The workshop methodology:

- seeks to integrate the diverse dimensions of the person based on experience,
- unites theory and practice,
- maintains the process over an extended period,
- promotes the dynamics of life,
- helps to discern these dynamics.

54. The workshop methodology combines the following elements:

Following the choice of a central theme which integrates mission, spirituality and communion, the methodology used consists of:

- in-depth community study of themes at regular intervals (for instance, one a month).
- relevant personal study of these themes.

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- practical personal exercises to put into practice what has been studied personally and in groups to which each participant belongs within the framework of one's mission.
- group sharing which makes possible assessment of personal and community progress.

EACH PROVINCE, IN KEEPING WITH THE GENERAL COUNCIL'S ORIENTATIONS, IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ORGANIZING THIS FORMATION.

APPENDIX

FOLLOW-UP REPORTS OF CHAPTERS AND SUPERIORS GENERAL CIRCULARS AND CONFERENCES.

1. General Chapter of 1988

55. The theme of the shared mission was introduced in the 1982 Chapter. *“The General Chapter of 1982 supports the experience of associate members and the General Conference of 1985 has reaffirmed the pertinence of the opening proposed by the General Chapter.”*

56. The Chapter of 1988 also states that experiences are underway a bit everywhere. It is the repeated wish of the Chapter to offer to the whole Congregation a message which indicates that these experiences are indeed calls from the Lord and that they are a special grace of wisdom and of strength in order to associate lay persons to the Congregation.

The eventual introduction of an appropriate article in the Constitutions is already mentioned. *“Over the centuries, the Spirit has inspired religious Orders and Congregations to integrate lay people to their mission and has inspired lay persons to live their Christian commitment in keeping with the spirit of a Congregation or of a holy Founder.”*

The Chapter then states the Congregation’s response to this call. After having acknowledged the participation of lay people in our educational mission, the Chapter says: *“We must take this one step further and acknowledge the participation of the laity in the Mennaisian spirituality, for the latter is in no way and exclusively the Congregation’s property. Lay people have every right to live their spirituality and their Mennaisian commitment in keeping with the Mennaisian charism, not merely as consumers but as participants in the growth, the development and the expansion of our spirituality. The advent of lay persons is an indication that*

the Mennaisian branch is full of vitality and that the Mennaisian spirituality acquires a new sensitivity.”

2. General Chapter of 1994

57. There appears the twofold message sent by the Chapter: *“To all who share with us the same educational undertaking.”* In this message, one can read the following: *“Through action and dialogue, we share the wealth of the same educational and pedagogical tradition. We share the same concerns with all who experience poverty. We believe that we can act together to make Jesus Christ better known and loved.”*

58. The other message is addressed *“to our associate members”*. Among other things, one can read: *“We have acknowledged the evolution of the new reality of this association of lay persons with us. We have studied the request of associate members from the St. Francis Xavier Province who ask that provisions be made in the Rule of Life concerning this type of association to our spirituality and mission... This experience is in its infancy in our Congregation, and though we wish the experience to carry on, the Chapter cannot take a stance at his stage.”*

3. General Chapter of 2000

59. Brother José Antonio Obeso, Superior General, writes: *“Share the charism. Without any doubt, the shared Mission, as it appears in the fourth orientation, has been one of the most dynamic proposals of the Chapter. We are embarking on a charismatic journey and we must give thanks to God for allowing us to live one of the most promising orientations for creative fidelity to the charism.”*

He then goes on to talk about the current state of things: *“The itinerary pursued in various sectors of the Congregations is not expressed through full but dotted lines to show differences in implementation. Sectors of the Congregation proceed at different rates.”*

60. In another paragraph, he alludes to the new fecundity of the charism: *“If at first this appeared as a strategy to ensure the prolonged existence of our*

undertakings, we have discovered that the Spirit's designs far surpass the narrowness of our views."

Brother Obeso also writes: *"The shared mission forces us to clarify the identity of our charism and compels us to creative fidelity towards that charism... This fecundity is but in its infancy stages."*

61. The Superior General asks the question: *"What is the Brothers' mission?"* His answer: *"The Brothers must learn to share their charism. Doing so will change a number of things in our personal and community living. It is not a matter of replacing the Brothers, but of sharing the same gift."*

Another sub-title enunciates this principle: *"From a unique responsibility to co-responsibility with lay people."*

62. The last paragraph of the presentation speaks of the method to be followed. He then indicates the stages:

- Personal *transformation in order to share the charism.*
- *Form ourselves in order to become formators.*
- *Start where lay people have reached in their faith development.*

The Chapter addressed a message – a collaborative endeavour – to Brothers and lay persons. The message ends with this invitation: *"We invite you, Brothers and lay persons, members of the large 'Mennaisian family' of the world, to continue responding with joy and fervour to the call to live the shared mission."*

4. Circular of Brother José Antonio Obeso, 2001

63. In 2001, Brother José Antonio Obeso, SG, wrote a circular on the shared Mission. This lengthy document recapitulates the major themes concerning the shared Mission: the theological foundations, the shared Mission and communion bonds, the stages of a road to communion, proposals for an association – organisation, formation, Brothers' role in the shared mission, the Mennaisian family.

Concerning the Mennaisian family, the document states: *"Those who were formerly called sympathisers, those who are committed to the mission,*

volunteers and associate members who partake in various ways in the shared Mission, together with the Sisters of Providence, all form but one family.” And a bit further: *“To feel part of the Mennaisian family is to set out to live the shared mission. The Chapter establishes that perspective and invites us to forge ahead along the following lines:*

- *information*
- *creation of new links and relationships*
- *reinforcement of the dynamism*
- *openness to the international dimension*
- *organisational structures”*

64. Where *structures of the association* are concerned, this word of caution: *“One of the usual temptations is to create structures without the necessary foundations to justify them. We would wish to avoid this downside. And yet structures are required. Initiatives come to nought if they do not bear fruit in other places and in some form or other.”*

5. The European Congress on the Shared Mission, Bilbao, October 2004

65. Brother José Antonio Obeso, SG, addressed the participants at length on the shared Mission. In his presentation to the Congress, Brother José Antonio Obeso stated:

“The future of the mission in our different establishments resides in the life derived from the shared mission without which the Mennaisian school will progressively lose its capacity of transformation which characterises it, even if the establishments continue as academic institutions. The first phase of the shared Mission was born more from above than from below in the Congregation, as a result of which it has not been well accepted and has difficulty taking root.”

66. The Superior then presented an itinerary of formation for the shared Mission. *“To form Brothers and lay people together is a way forward open to all and implies:*

- *developing a plan of formation which comprises contents, experiences and goals;*
- *seeking methods that foster spiritual growth in Mennaisian practices;*
- *deepening an understanding of each vocation through better communication so that daily living becomes a school of formation;*
- *integrating, through experience and by way of an on-going process, the traditional values of our establishments: live, think, communicate, celebrate.”*

67. Brother Jose Antonio Obeso then went on to speak about the experiences that are essential to the integration of the Mennaisian charism by answering the question: What does sharing the charism mean?

“Sharing the charism is a process that comprises several stages. The progression makes it possible to inculcate values from an early age through life experiences and progressively live in a community of adult lay persons. In fact, the process parallels that of the life of faith which leads to Christian living.”

The essential elements of that experience are the following ones:

- *The experience of God: a personal relationship with God, that is, building up one’s life with reference to a God who speaks to us in history and requires an answer through commitment.*
- *The experience of an open and close-knit Christian community: these communities know that they are part of a broader community.*
- *The experience of a Gospel-based commitment: for lay people, the preferred milieus for their vocation to flourish are the family and the place of work. This is where they are called upon to witness. Special importance should be given to evangelising the youth, families, the poor and the little ones.*
- *The experience of the Mennaisian spiritual charismatic treasure. The Mennaisian spirituality forges strong links with the Church and rejects all forms of ghetto mentality. We share the charism as a treasure given by the Spirit to the whole Church through a complementarity of gifts and of vocations.*

68. Brother Obeso also indicated the criteria to become lay associates.

- *To feel called by God to live one's vocation in a lay state of life;*
- *To wish to live the Mennaisian spirituality as a means of developing the mystique of one's life;*
- *To commit oneself to a Mennaisian inspired mission in accordance with a lay person's availability;*
- *To experience community living with other lay persons;*
- *To show openness to the universal Church through the parochial community or other community endeavours;*
- *To accept a form of stability over a period of time;*
- *To make a public commitment as an 'associate' and to be known as such in the educational community;*
- *To have the agreement of the major superior. With time, the association itself will give that consent.*

69. The Superior's presentation then broaches the theme of vocational pastoral care in the context of the shared mission. The following are some of the factors which should be taken into consideration:

- *To feel a shared responsibility, both Brothers and lay persons, where vocational pastoral care is concerned;*
- *To make vocations part of the pastoral care programmes and activities in schools; speak positively of vocations to the consecrated life and to the lay Christian life of faith;*
- *To promote the concept of shared mission among the youth through youth and vocation pastoral care programmes and through participation to youth rallies.*
- *To promote vocations of lay missionaries and to new lay ministries in order to foster co-responsibility in the unique mission of the Church;*
- *To accompany Christian families who so wish – they are the mainstay for formation and the transmission of Christian faith as well as for answering the call to one's vocation;*
- *To underscore the importance to be missionaries in Europe where religious indifference and ignorance prevail among the youth who quest for meaning in their life;*

- *To propose vocations as missionaries in third world countries and in poverty-ridden parts of the western world, as well as experiences which seek to alleviate such poverty.*

6. General Chapter of 2006

70. In his message to the Brothers on the occasion of the Chapter, Brother Yannick writes: *“We will move closer to lay people. We will propose to them to walk with us the road to Emmaus which is a road of hope. And no matter whom we meet on that road, we will tell them that they can share with us the treasure of the gift of the Spirit embodied in the Mennaisian charism... We are responsible, with them, to make it bear fruit. We will attempt to forge ahead with them, with wisdom and discernment, indeed, but equally with faith and audacity.”*

7. Bro. Yannick’s Circular to the Brothers and Lay Persons.

71. In response to the General Chapter’s wish to forge ahead on the road of the shared mission, Brother Yannick, in 2007, addressed a letter to Brothers and lay persons to encourage them, to clarify some questions and to make some proposals.

“This letter is written in the spirit of the orientations given by the previous Chapters which invited us to greater communion among Brothers to begin with and, subsequently, between Brothers and lay persons at the service of Christian education of youth.”

Brother Yannick then speaks of the shared Mission as a Church movement given rise to by the Spirit and, by the same token, as a road to hope.

“The whole church is involved and very many congregations show much interest. Moving in that direction is not to be on the wrong track. And from the Brothers’ perspective, we do not turn toward lay people because we need their help to ‘maintain’ our establishments. We journey together, driven by the breath of the Spirit. It is a journey of hope.”

72. The novel feature of the letter resides in the fact that for the first time the expression **“Gospel family”** is used.

“Very many congregations already use the term ‘family’ to express the bonds that unite religious and lay persons with the charism of an Institute. It is not the only possible word; we can settle the issue once people have had a chance to express themselves. In this letter, I shall use that expression for ease of reference.”¹⁷

This, it seems to me, means that those who wish to be conformed to the ‘Gospel figure’ with which the founder felt invested – that particular facet of Jesus which determines to a large extent what may be called the charism of foundation – belong to the same Gospel family.”

73. It is not the letter’s intention to limit itself to the narrow notion of the shared mission, but at the same time, it attempts to clarify and specify that theme.

“As far as we are concerned, therefore, those who share with the Brothers the educational mission with children and young people and who feel – more or less clearly – that they wish to be with them the way Jesus was, who believe in the active presence of his love and in the power of his saving grace, who rejoice at belonging to this Mennaisian “current” inspired by our founders – these persons are members of the Mennaisian family. Without wishing to overstate the issue, it seems to me important to grasp how the expression “Gospel figure” sheds the required light on what we, Brothers and lay Mennaisians, wish to live together.”

“The shared Mission is not a social organisation; it is a body inspired by the Spirit. One must never forget what follows:

- *Pray for greater openness to the love of Christ.*
- *Find nourishment in the words of the Founder.*
- *Come together, for there is strength in numbers.”*

¹⁷ I rely on a very interesting study by Laurent Boisvert on the relationship between Charism, spirituality, mission, religious and lay persons: *Le Charisme, un visage évangélique à incarner et à manifester*, Bellarmin, 2005.

“We embark on a journey of hope with joy and enthusiasm. Let it be our goal to forge ahead with all our heart in a spirit of unity and of peace, of mutual support and of discernment.”

8. The Survey on the Shared Mission in 2007

74. Brother Yannick, SG, in his letter to the major superiors on the proposed survey intended for Brothers and lay people, stated its objective: *“The purpose of the survey is twofold: to become better acquainted with people’s life experiences in diverse situations and cultures and to allow lay persons and Brothers to express their expectations and questions as well as their hopes and projects.”*

“Thus, we wish

- *to discover Brothers’ and lay people’s motivations as regards living the shared mission;*
- *to get a better understanding of what they mean by shared mission;*
- *to determine the importance of the founder and of his spirituality in their life;*
- *to know how lay persons organise themselves (meetings, frequency...) to live the shared mission;*
- *to know what their expectations are as regards the future of the shared mission. ”*

9. International Mennaisian Assembly - August 2008.

75. When launching this international Mennaisian gathering, Brother Yannick, SG, stressed its importance: *“We have gathered here to carry the question concerning the shared mission to the level of the whole Congregation. We should therefore share the concerns of all. We are conscious of the importance of our collective endeavour which should reflect such attitudes as the following:*

Show openness to what is lived across the Congregation. Attempt to understand how the seed has been sown, how it is growing and to see how it bears fruit.

Journey with others on the way, for we carry the treasure in clay vessels and we must accompany those who embark on these new paths. These young shoots need to be tended to by trustworthy companions whose only concern is to do the will of God.

Give to those who wish to embark on this journey the means to go forward with confidence, through personal and community formation. This is one of our responsibilities, and perhaps the most demanding.

Build together, Brothers and lay people, a construction inspired by the Spirit. To build together presupposes that people know each other and that they share a common goal. And in our case, this presupposes, above all, being grafted on the same tree and drinking from the same spring which is the charism of the Founder.

To build together also requires that we leave behind fear, that we open doors and if need be, that we create structures that will allow all to forge ahead more freely and faithfully listen to the promptings of the Spirit.”

Brother Yannick concluded his introductory remarks with these words of John Mary de la Mennais in order to emphasize the necessary communion which should inform the deliberations: “*When I speak of charity I do not mean only love of God and love of neighbour in general. I mean that we must be so united that there reign among us such perfect agreement that may be applied to us in their fullness the words of St Paul: but one body and one spirit*” (John Mary de la Mennais).

