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Style of Life

A
Handbook
for
Signum Fidei

STYLE OF LIFE
“SIGNUM FIDEI” ASSOCIATION
EDUCATION MISSION SECRETARIAT
FSC Generalate - Rome 1994

FOREWORD

Dear Signum Fidei member:

You have in your hands a new version of “Style of life. “ You should not be surprised with this new version since the worldwide Association has participated in the revision. Life is a dynamic reality always open to God’s surprises, to humankind’s creativity, to the movement of the Spirit, and to one’s unique and completely new journey. The life journey is one of the most exciting human and spiritual adventures.

First and foremost, the experience of dealing with life, a vocation, a call, or of being a Signum Fidei member, does not involve so much theory or rules as it has to do with centering on the person of Jesus and on Gospel values. For us, Jesus is the revelation of the Father who wants all his sons and daughters to find salvation and to be happy. Jesus came into the world so that “they may have life, and have it more abundantly” (John 10: 10). Jesus shows us the way. Like Him, we should always be attuned to reality, willing to be touched by it and ready to transform it in accordance with God’s plan, our witness, and our commitment. We are called to follow Jesus and continue His work as witnesses of his unearned love.

As disciples of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, we know also that we should find inspiration in reading the Gospel as he did. The 42nd General Chapter reminded us:

“The SIGNUM FIDEI GROUPS constitute for the Districts a form of spirituality well suited to the laity - especially educators – which finds its source of inspiration in St. John Baptist de La Salle” (Circular 435, p. 47). Lasallian spirituality moves between THE

WORD OF GOD and REALITY. The contemplative attitude of our Founder was always attentive to reality, shaped by the concrete situation of poor young people in their own situations; but at the same time, always open to God's plan of salvation for all as spelled out in God's Word. We could say that these are the two coordinates of his style of life which, at the same time, should be translated into a double spirit: active faith combined with an ardent zeal.

But this adventure cannot be lived in isolation since there is a communal aspect which forms part of the Lasallian spirit. For a Lasallian, sharing faith and ministry should always be dynamic elements of the lifestyle. Community must be the privileged place of encounter with God and the best support structure for following Jesus and His apostolic work. Together Lasallians can assure themselves of the best formulation which, today more than ever in a complex world, is seen as indispensable.

Prayer, whether personal, community, or apostolic, is the motivating force which permits everything to be seen with the eyes of God. Your mission is not just any mission but, in Lasallian terms, it deals with "touching hearts" and how can one succeed in this without the power of the spirit? You are called to be people of prayer as well as teachers of prayer.

Therefore, for members of Signum Fidei, all this culminates in consecration. Already consecrated in Baptism, this surrender is offered to the Holy Trinity which makes God the Absolute of their lives, the reason for their very existence. They are committed to procure the glory of God above all else by means of the comprehensive education of youth, especially the poor.

May Mary, the ever-faithful Virgin, accompany you and permit you to live each day as a Sign of Faith for today's world.

*Fraternally in De La Salle,
Brother Alvaro Rodriguez Echeverria,
FSC Vicar General*

I - INTRODUCTION

01. During the 70's in numerous places where Lasallian work was being done, lay people, hoping to be more committed to their Christian life, asked the Superiors of the De La Salle congregation whether it would be possible to create closer links, not only with the work of the Brothers, but also with their special spirit.

The Superiors, seeing in this request a sign of the times inspired by the Holy Spirit, offered the possibility of beginning a Lasallian life experience, with an appropriate life style, called, "Signum Fidei Association."

02. The seed planted in Rome in 1976 has grown under the influence of the Holy Spirit and now includes different regions and cultures of the world as a sign of the universal love of God for all humankind.

11 - THE SIGNUM FIDEI VOCATION:

03. A member of the Signum Fidei Association is an adult lay Christian with a special call from God. He or she wants to be more than ordinary in living out what the Baptismal consecration means and in being a personalized symbol of God's love in the setting of education, especially among the poor and outcasts.

The Signum Fidei member is free to answer this call and to join other Signum Fidei members, who use the life of St. John Baptist de La Salle ("his journey"), as their method of living according to what is found in the Gospel.

04. Signum Fidei members are very aware that they belong to the Church, which is God's people, and they attempt to be witnesses to Our Lord in their family, their work, and among other people. Through their apostolic work,

they try as often as possible to make their commitment to Jesus Christ quite clear to others.

05. There is first an introductory training period, after which Signum Fidei members decide to continue, by making a public commitment called, “the Signum Fidei Consecration.” This is the real beginning of membership in Signum Fidei.
06. Signum Fidei members live out their vocation and their commitment to the Church through ordinary personal and group contacts whenever possible.
07. The witness of a Signum Fidei member and the example of the community as a “Style of Life” are the first signs by which a new member may feel called to the Association.
08. All Signum Fidei members are strengthened by integrating the essential elements of their vocation in their lives: the working out of their baptismal commitment by means of their consecration, their apostolic commitment to education, and their personal witness as a member of a faith community.

III - THE SPIRIT OF SIGNUM FIDEI:

09. The spirit of the Signum Fidei Association is the same as that which the Brothers inherited from St. John Baptist de La Salle, namely the spirit of faith, best shown by enthusiastic zeal, which makes the Signum Fidei member unstinting in the human and Christian education of children, young people and adults.
10. The spirit of Faith makes Signum Fidei members consider family, work, and society within the context of God’s presence and as places where God wants them to be. They follow the custom of all Lasallians and recall

God's presence from time to time, and this strengthens their faith.

11. They see Jesus Christ in everyone, above all in children and young people, especially if they are poor.
12. They see God's will in faith in the happenings of everyday life, and they generously respond to God's call.
13. Signum Fidei members strengthen their faith by often reading Holy Scripture, which inspires their life's work, and they share ideas on it with the members of their family, other Signum Fidei members, the Brothers, and groups that they lead.
14. Signum Fidei members' faith is put into practice by an enthusiastic Zeal which makes them do everything they can to save children, young people, and adults. The way they live and do apostolic work prepares the people God gives them to look after to accept Jesus Christ as Savior.
15. They consider all their educational work as an apostolate, so their profession is transformed into a Gospel ministry. Their commitment to the apostolate is imbued with feelings of gratuitousness and service; just as Our Lord, who did not come to be served, but to serve. In this way they are glad freely to give what has been given freely to them.

IV - MISSION OF SIGNUM FIDEI:

16. The Signum Fidei Association remains true to the inspiration of its Lasallian charism and offers the Good News of Jesus Christ in the world, within the educational setting. Therefore, the main objectives of the Signum Fidei apostolate are the desire for human

progress, especially among the poor and the outcast, and the evangelization of the present-day culture.

17. Each member of Signum Fidei makes an apostolic commitment to education, either in the school or non-school setting, and this commitment becomes part of his or her Personal Program
18. In their work for children and youth, all Signum Fidei members take special interest in the following:
 - their formation in the human virtues of truth, loyalty, self-discipline, acting together, self-improvement;
 - developing their intelligence, encouraging a critical spirit, making themselves responsible for their own lives, helping them to take up their civic responsibilities and to be a positive influence in their surroundings.
 - improving their ability to love, to give of themselves for others, especially for the poor and for those with any kind of disadvantage, and for marginalized youth.
19. When they work with adults, they encourage a sense of responsibility in work, keeping promises, respect for human rights. They do what they can to foster family life that is authentically Christian. They assist in making the common good an objective and in insuring peace and social justice.
20. Signum Fidei members, always glad to be available to help others, show their desire to be witnesses to Jesus Christ in this way. Whenever possible, they proclaim Jesus Christ, especially in catechesis, retreats,

conferences, youth group meetings, adult faith communities, in spiritual counseling and in mass media.

21. Signum Fidei members share their apostolic experiences, and they evaluate them in periodic community meetings within a simple and mutually enriching atmosphere.
22. As far as possible, Signum Fidei members perform their educational work as a “shared mission,” with the Brothers or in Lasallian educational institutions. They can follow their profession in other schools or in non-school settings, but they always keep the Lasallian charism in mind.
23. Signum Fidei members become involved in Associations and Educational Organizations, in relation with the local Church, so that Gospel values might be integrated in these organizations.

V - THE SIGNUM FIDEI COMMUNITY OF FAITH:

24. All Signum Fidei members feel the need to live their vocation in union with other members. Life in community gives them a sense of togetherness, where they can exchange ideas on their faith and on their plans, where they can assess their apostolic and educational mission.
25. Every Signum Fidei community is open and welcoming. Ideals and hopes are shared there, the need of members, their families, and surroundings are taken care of. It is an open community because Signum Fidei life is balanced with family, work, and one’s surroundings. The community is a meeting place for people who want to share their faith.
26. At regular intervals, every two weeks if possible, they meet for prayer, for achieving personal progress through accompaniment, for improving and assessing

educational and apostolic programs. At the beginning of each year, they draw up their Community Program, taking into consideration the above points as well as aspects of their Personal Program.

27. They appoint a Community Coordinator from the group, who calls and chairs meetings, sees that the agenda is followed, and insures that decisions are made. In a family spirit, they assign jobs and responsibilities so that everyone's talents are used.
28. Places for meetings are determined in the Community Program and can be various homes in rotation, Brothers' community houses or somewhere else arranged by the school or district. The aim should be to choose a place convenient for each member.
29. The number of members should be based on the possibility of everyone's taking part in meetings, on taking everyone and each family into consideration, on having each one and the whole group "accompanied." When the group becomes too large, it can be divided into two, with each group being autonomous and yet interdependent.
30. If a member happens to be alone for various reasons, for a certain amount of time, means are taken to help him or her link up with a community and, if possible, to live out the faith commitment with a Lasallian or another Church community.
31. Signum Fidei members gladly link up with other Lasallian communities of Brothers or of lay people, and they are glad to make their personal contribution to groups, meetings, retreats or congresses connected with the "Lasallian family."

VI - LIFE OF PRAYER:

32. Signum Fidei members live according to the faith, which they realize is not always easy, due to difficult circumstances, including sub-human conditions of tension and poverty which are prevalent in today's society. Also, living the faith is made difficult because of values contrary to the Gospel imposed by a society which has become overly secularized.

The Signum Fidei Association educates its members in the faith, and helps them to bear the crosses which each day's hardships bring, so that the members are able to follow Our Lord more resolutely and generously.

33. Signum Fidei members recognize God as Father and act as the children of God by praying daily. They combine prayer with their apostolic lives and include the latter in their prayers.
34. They remember God's presence and try to integrate their daily duties with their personal improvement in holiness.
35. For Signum Fidei members, Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, whom they follow and commit themselves to just as St. John Baptist de La Salle did; by daily reading and meditation on Holy Scripture, they try to bring this witness to their families.
36. Signum Fidei members are always attentive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit who urges them to search for holiness in a willing obedience to God's will. This is made especially clear in prayer, in daily events, and in the guidance of the Church.

37. Signum Fidei members consider the Eucharist as the privileged place of encounter with the Lord and with their brothers and sisters, and they participate in it as often as possible.
38. They frequently participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation and receive constructive criticism from others which results in values formation in order to become more and more like the Lord.
39. The Most Blessed Virgin Mary has a special place in the spiritual lives of the members since she is a model of faith and of obedience to the Spirit; moreover, she is our Mother who guides and protects us.
40. Signum Fidei members pray to St. John Baptist de La Salle as their spiritual Father. They try to imitate him in his love for the Church and the poor, and, like him; they seek to do God's will.
41. In order to strengthen their apostolic commitment and to receive help in their daily difficulties, it is recommended that members have occasional meetings with a spiritual director.
42. Signum Fidei members make a commitment to participate in an annual retreat in order to deepen their vocation, strengthen their unconditional commitment to Jesus Christ, evaluate their Personal Program as well as their participation in the Community Program.

VII — FORMATION:

43. Since the Signum Fidei Association is a way of living in the Church according to Lasallian charism and spirituality, its members need to follow a formation process in order to fully live the "Style of Life."

INITIAL FORMATION:

44. If a sufficient number of aspirants are found in any one place or in nearby places, they can begin their early training or “initial formation” together as one group, under the direction of an Advisor appointed by the Brother Visitor. Nevertheless, it is advisable to have contact with an already established Community in order to exchange ideas and share apostolic experiences and prayer.
45. When aspirants are not numerous enough, they can begin their formation in an already established community which will receive them and organize there formation program.
46. Initial formation should last a minimum of one year.
47. Candidates for the Association should have a well-balanced personality, an ability to share and to live in an open community, a willingness to be of service, and sensitivity to spiritual and religious values.
48. Each District decides on the content of initial formation, and works out a serious and systematic plan, which should have at least the following elements:
 - A Christian view of men and women
 - The study of Christ and of the Church
 - The Theology of the Sacrament of Christian Initiation
 - The Gospel Journey of St. John Baptist de La Salle
 - Lasallian Spirituality
 - The “Vademecum” and the “Style of Life” of the Signum Fidei Association
 - Lasallian methods of teaching

49. Every aspirant, from time to time, has a personal interview with the Advisor, and a time to share his or her expectations and evaluations of the formation process with the Community or some of its members.

CONTINUING FORMATION:

50. Continuing formation presents to Signum Fidei members, the challenge of explaining “the reasons for their hope to those who ask about it.” It is adapted to the cultural needs of each person and to the circumstances of each place.
51. Aspects of Continuing Formation which should receive special attention are the following:
- Courses in Theology, Holy Scripture, and Lasallian spirituality
 - Study of the documents of the local and universal Church
 - The liturgical year
 - Problems of contemporary society and the Social Doctrine of the Church
 - Matters relating to the evangelization and catechesis of young people and adults
 - Lasallian methods of teaching

VII - THE SIGNUM FIDEI CONSECRATION:

52. When initial formation is over and when both the Advisor and the Aspirant judge that it has been satisfactory, the Aspirant asks the Brother Visitor in writing to be allowed to make the **first** “Signum Fidei Consecration.”
53. When the Brother Visitor has heard the assessment of the Advisor and of the Community which received the Aspirant, he responds to the consecration request in writing and, if affirmative, the date and place of the ceremony are decided on.

54. The formula of consecration for the Signum Fidei member is as follows:

Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with profound respect before your infinite and adorable Majesty, I consecrate myself entirely to You to procure your glory as far as I shall be able and as You will require of me.

Therefore, fully aware of the commitment I made at Baptism and which has taught me to recognize throughout my life the sign of your continuous and merciful love, I unite myself with the other members of the "Signum Fidei" Association, in order to further, uphold, and defend the integral education of young persons and adults, especially of those who have strayed from the way of Salvation. I want the education I offer to be based on the person of Jesus Christ and the spirit of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.

I wish to make my commitment specific by accomplishing the following definite apostolic program:

With this in mind, I intend to work sometimes by myself, at other times with colleagues, using every means in my power to achieve the program, including your help and the example of the Virgin Mary. I commit myself to making the Gospel and its Law of love the principal rule of my whole life. Therefore, I accept the "Style of Life" of the "Signum Fidei" Association, and I promise to follow it for one year.

As a sign of faith and in acceptance of the above, I affix my signature:

Date

55. The Signum Fidei Consecration is made for a period of one year. Its renewal must have the authorization of the Advisor of the Community, after personal requests in writing by each member of the Signum Fidei Community. The Advisor authorizes the renewal in writing for each one and then he informs the Brother Visitor.
56. For both the **first** Consecration of Signum Fidei and for successive renewals, a record concerning the event is kept in a book called, "Register of Consecrations." Those involved sign the record, as does the Brother Visitor or his designate.
57. Since they make their "Signum Fidei Consecration" in public, they intend the Gospel to be the basis of their lives while they pursue ordinary tasks, especially when they are with families, or acting in a professional or social capacity, especially in areas concerned with education.

IX - RELATIONS WITH THE FSC INSTITUTE:

58. The Signum Fidei Association is the result of a new understanding which the Institute of the Brothers has received in past decades concerning their founder, St. John Baptist de La Salle. The Signum Fidei Communities occur and grow within an FSC District atmosphere. It is within that atmosphere that they share the spirituality and mission of the Institute.
59. Signum Fidei members are an integral part of the Lasallian Family of a District and it is within a District that they show their specific identity. They are not to be confused with the Brothers, nor do they wish to be compared with them. They have special ties to a District and with a District they enjoy periods of exchange and dialogue.

60. Brother Visitor and his council appoint the Signum Fidei Brother Advisor for the District, they include Signum Fidei within the District Plan and formation programs, and they help with its assimilation into District educational and pastoral work, as far as possible.

X - SPREAD OF THE SIGNUM FIDEI ASSOCIATION:

61. The vocation of the Signum Fidei member, which involves a specific call to holiness and a generous response through consecration, is seen in its specific “Style of Life.
62. The “Style of Life” of the Signum Fidei member is a way deeply rooted in Lasallian Spirituality, particularly suitable to lay Christians who want to have a source of inspiration which fits their expectations of the Christian life.
63. The members of Signum Fidei exhibit a special zeal for the pastoral ministry of Vocations, conscious that “the harvest is great but the workers are few.” They pray for and promote radical commitments to the Lord especially for evangelization in and through education. They pay particular attention to the vocation of the various ways of following Jesus through the charism of St. John Baptist de La Salle.
64. Recognizing that God gave to St. John Baptist de La Salle two gifts among others which particularly concern them:
 - the gift of the Lasallian Family
 - the gift of the Shared Mission

Signum Fidei members allow themselves to be led by the Spirit, they journey in association with a living and apostolic community and they show a ready and public witness to an alternative way of living in today’s world.

65. The Signum Fidei Association is heir to the charism of St. John Baptist de La Salle and rejects any form of privilege. On the contrary, imitating the Founder, it aims at being, through each of its members, a witness to a simple form of life, available and free for the Kingdom of God.
66. The Signum Fidei Association is a gift of God:
- a gift received willingly by each member in order to serve others;
 - a gift for the family of each member;
 - a gift for the Institute of the Brothers;
 - a gift for our world, especially the young.

Since it is a gift, it does not weigh heavily on others, it does not distort the truth, nor is it a source of division. But, on the contrary, it nourishes, sheds light on events and gives life.

This is the way it lives, this is the gift it offers society. In this way the Signum Fidei Association aims at being a SIGN OF FAITH.