

BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

A FRATERNITY ON THE PATH
TO RECOGNITION,
THE FRUIT OF HISTORY

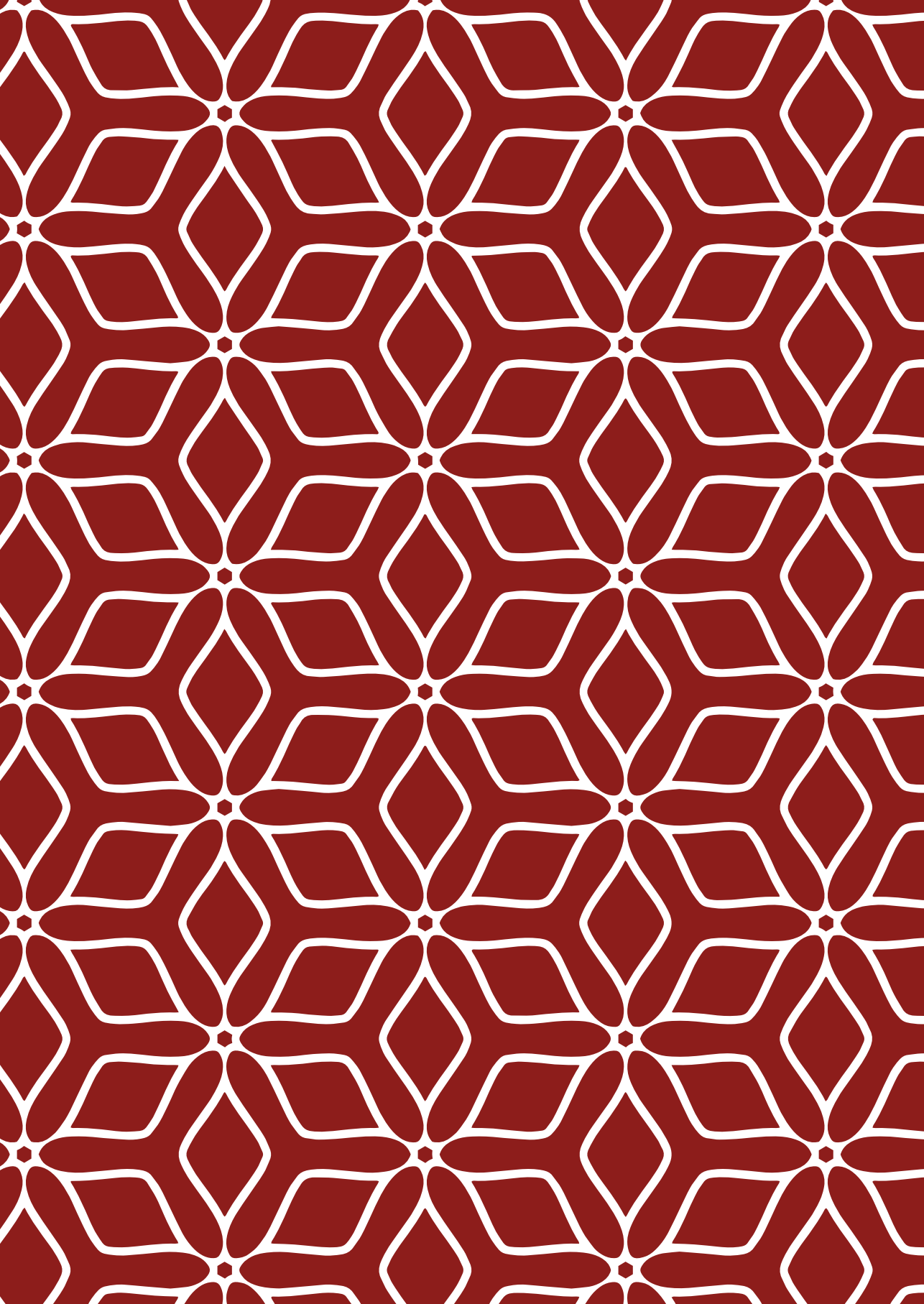
THE EXPERIENCE OF THE DISTRICT OF FRANCE

AUTHOR
COLETTE ALLIX

La  Salle

MEL BULLETINS

62



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COLETTE ALLIX

November 2024



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MEL BULLETIN No. 62

Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools

A Fraternity on the Path to Recognition, the Fruit of History -
The experience of the District of France

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PRESENTATION

When I met Colette, I was very impressed, especially by her liveliness and her enthusiasm, but also by a kind of temperance or reserve. She was contagious and, at the same time, she seemed not to want to invade. Proposing, not imposing.

I had gone to Paris to talk to her about the Fraternities. Our District, at that time, was once again looking for ways to revitalise the processes of Association for the educational service of the poor between Lay Partners and Brothers and we thought we could see in this model a mirror and a guide.

Years later, Colette provides us with this systematic and meticulous reflection on the historical development of forms of Association for the mission in France. It is not an object of study that she looks at externally or dispassionately. Her life and this process are interwoven in a fruitful dialogue.

She helps us to offer keys for reading the context and guides us along the path from the 1970s to the present day. It has not been a linear route. It represents a serious and committed search, trying, erring and getting it right.

We hope that the reading of this Bulletin will awaken creativity, enliven searches, open questions and remedy mistrust. That is our prayer for each of you, kind readers.

Br. Santiago Rodríguez Mancini

Director of the Office of Lasallian Heritage and Research



Colette Allix

has been involved in the Lasallian network in France for over 30 years. As a Physics and Chemistry teacher sequentially in the lycées of Issy les Moulineaux and Sarcelles, she discovered the Lasallian project there and began to get involved in the mission. From there, thanks to the support of her family, she was then able to respond to various calls from the Brother Visitor as headmistress of a school in Agen, delegate for the West

of France and, since 2019, delegate for the La Salle Educational Fraternity in France (Association). She had the good fortune to take part in the first steps of La Salle Educational Fraternity by being involved in the reflection team from 2010. A member of CIAMEL for 8 years, Colette has been touched by the fruitfulness of the Lasallian Mission in all the cultures of the world. She has recently become a member of the Commission on Association of RELEM.

INTRODUCTION

This year’s celebration of the tercentenary of the Letters Patent, granted by King Louis XV on 28 September 1724, and of the Papal Bull of Approbation of the Institute of the Brothers of 26 January 1725, signed by Pope Benedict XIII, is an opportunity to reflect on the continuity of the mission in the current French context.

Today, lay people are very much involved and form the majority in terms of numbers in steering the network, drawing up strategies for the mission and researching ways of gaining recognition for the Church service in which we participate: it’s always a question of “saving souls” to put it in canonical terms.

After a few elements of background, we will review the journey of Association lived since 1978, we will present the way in which Lasallian Association is lived in the Fraternité Éducative La Salle (La Salle Educational Fraternity) and the challenges that we must address in order to ensure its future, always following in the footsteps of Saint John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers whose writings, in France, we have the good fortune to read and understand in their original language.

1. SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON FRANCE

These three elements of the contemporary French context are the fruit of a turbulent history between the Church and the French Republic, particularly on the subject of education.

1.1 French-style secularity

Officially, secularity is defined as follows in France:

Secularity guarantees freedom of conscience. From this, it flows the freedom to manifest one's beliefs or convictions within the limits of respect for public order. Secularity implies the neutrality of the State and imposes the equality of all before the law without distinction of religion or belief.

Secularity guarantees believers and non-believers the same right to freedom of expression of their beliefs or convictions. It guarantees the right to have or not to have a religion, to change or no longer have one. It guarantees freedom of worship and freedom of religion, but also freedom from religion: no one can be forced to follow religious dogmas or prescriptions.

Secularity implies the separation of the State and religious organisations. The political order is founded solely on the sovereignty of the people, and the State - which neither recognises nor salutes any religion - does not regulate the internal workings of religious organisations. This separation means that the State, local authorities and public services are neutral, but not their users. The secular Republic thus requires that all citizens have equal access to the administration and public services, regardless of their convictions or beliefs.

Secularity is not one opinion among many, but the freedom to hold one. It is not a belief but the principle that authorises all beliefs, subject to respect for public order.¹

¹ <https://www.info.gouv.fr/organisation/laicitegouvfr/qu-est-ce-que-la-laicite> consulted in October 2024

It is therefore a secularity that allows freedom but is also a separation, and which has ended up relegating religion and faith to the private domain. As a result, it is culturally difficult for French people to publicly express their religious convictions, even though this is in no way forbidden. Today, politically, we can even sometimes find ourselves in a climate of opposition because of a misunderstanding of the above definition.

Another consequence is that the State has become incapable of talking about religion. With the increasing presence of non-Christian religions that have culturally arrived from other contexts, tensions regularly arise in the public arena, making religious practices even more private.

And yet, Catholic education associated with the State has a public service mission!

1.2 The contract of association with the State

The contract was established by the Debré Law of 31 December 1959², article 1 of which, now repealed, stated:

In accordance with the principles set out in the Constitution, the State shall ensure that children and young people in public educational institutions have the opportunity to receive an education in accordance with their aptitudes, with equal respect for all beliefs.

The State proclaims and respects the freedom of education and guarantees its exercise to private institutions that have been duly opened.

It takes all necessary steps to ensure that students in state education have freedom of worship and religious instruction.

² <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000000693420> consulted in October 2024

In private institutions which have signed one of the contracts provided for below, teaching under contract is subject to State control. The institution, while retaining its own character, must provide this education with total respect for freedom of conscience. All children, regardless of origin, opinion or belief, have access to it.

Over the years, the State has strengthened its control, school heads no longer choose their teachers and our institutions are subject to the same evaluations³, including for the strictly private part, as public institutions. This evaluation raises questions for us about the supervisory visits that we regularly make to meet an educational community around the Lasallian project: what will ultimately be recognised by the educational community: the Ministry's evaluation or the support of the Lasallian network?

Today the contract reads as follows:⁴

- [Article L442-1](#) In private institutions that have signed one of the contracts provided for in [articles L. 442-5](#) and [L. 442-12](#), teaching under contract is subject to State control. The institution, while retaining its own character, must provide this education with full respect for freedom of conscience. All children, regardless of origin, opinion or beliefs, have access to it.
- [Article L442-5](#) (...) In the classes covered by the contract, teaching is provided in accordance with the rules and syllabuses of public education. In agreement with the school management, teaching shall be entrusted either to public school teachers or to teachers under contract to the State. The latter, in their capacity as public servants, are not, in respect of the duties for which they are employed and remunerated by the State, bound by a contract of employment to the establishment in which the teaching is entrusted to them, within the framework of

³ <https://enseignement-catholique.fr/evaluer-les-etablissements-pour-les-eleves/> consulted in October 2024

⁴ https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/section_lc/LEGITEXT000006071191/LEGISCTA000006151353/#LEGISCTA000006151353 consulted in October 2024

the organisation decided by the head of the establishment, respecting the specific character of the establishment and the freedom of conscience of the teachers.

Most teachers do not join Catholic education out of religious conviction, but because they are looking for a supposedly more peaceful school environment than the state education system near their home, because they will be appointed in their region, because they have a distorted image of Catholic education as elitist and focused on teaching.

It's up to us to help them discover the richness of the project, which is not without its difficulties at times, with some teachers even trying to assert the obligation of secularism for our schools.

On the other hand, we have freedom of recruitment for everything outside school education.

1.3 Dechristianisation

The survey “Trajectories and origins of INSEE”⁵, known as TEO 2, based on data from 2019-2020, published in April 2023, compares the results obtained with the same survey carried out in 2007-2008.

The number of French people aged 18 to 59 with no religion rose from 45% to 53%, while Catholicism plummeted from 45% to 29%. There were two increases in religious affiliation: 2.5 to 9% Evangelicals and 8 to 11% Muslims.

An Ifop-Fiducial (French Institute of Public Opinion) survey published on 7 April 2023 shows that the 18-24 age group is the least religious, with only 36% declaring themselves to be Christians. Finally, 3% of them are regular practising Christians and 9% are more or less regular.

5 French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies

Then, Catholicism is no longer a common cultural heritage in France for the younger generations.

However, Catholic education provides schooling for around 20% of young people, but only 10% of families choose Catholic education out of Christian conviction. In general, they come to us because they sense a school environment that welcomes everyone, listens, supports, encourages and opens up. And, of course, we see the Gospel put into practice. Our schools are a place of proclamation, of first contact, and very often of encounter with Jesus. In a way, we are the peripheries of the Church.

We therefore need to think about how to proclaim Jesus Christ to the adults in our schools, as well as to young people and families.

2. A JOURNEY SINCE 1978

2.1 La Salle Association (ALS): the beginnings

In 1978, a group of lay directors created an association whose aim was to remain faithful, Brothers and lay people together, to the charism of Saint John Baptist de La Salle: this was the La Salle Association. Only volunteer directors belonged to it, but all the Brother Visitors were members. Moreover, at the time, the vast majority of directors were Brothers.

The Brothers began to share the mission, which remained under their control.

2.2 The 1980s: Keeping the institutions? Development of the ALS (La Salle Association) and creation of the French Lasallian Centre

In the 1980s, the Brothers became aware of the evolution of their age pyramid and asked themselves whether or not they should keep all the schools. At the time, when a community closed, the school automatically passed to the diocese.

In 1986 the Regional Assembly of the Brothers (made up of representatives of the 8 Districts in France, the union of the Districts would be made in 1991), in Lorient, examined this challenge. Committed lay people, not all of them directors, were listened to. The debate between the Brothers was lively, but the assembly decided to keep all the schools.

So that the mission could be carried out consciously by everyone, the Brothers asked all the directors (Brothers and lay people) to join the La Salle Association. The statutes of the La Salle Association changed to give more room to lay people: the Board of Directors and the Executive Committee were made up of equal numbers (the Brother Visitor, a member by right, 8 Brothers, 8 lay people) and the President of the La Salle Association was always a lay director.

The La Salle Association then assumed institutional responsibility for the network: appointment of school heads, leadership, training, representation to the bishops (lay trustees are employed by the La Salle Association, the first being appointed in 1998).

The Brother Visitor remains the Trustee authority.

The French Lasallian Centre was launched in 1986 to give all the lay people involved the means to understand and live the mission. In 2024, the 37th cohort will begin its two-year course, with around a hundred people a year joining the French Lasallian Centre in the 1st year.

2.3 The 1990s: Lasallian teams and Local Lasallian Animation Councils

2.3.1 Lasallian teams

Quite quickly, the French Lasallian Centre alumni wanted to be able to continue to deepen their understanding of the charism and mission by putting projects into practice. In response to this need, two groups set to work: a group of lay people and a group of Brothers.

In 1991, after meeting each other, they sent a note to the District Council asking them to launch Lasallian Teams: recognised groups, with a leader, Brother or lay person, mandated by the Brother Visitor, by constituting them in local areas. The aim was to give a soul to the educational communities.

The note specified: *In this launching of Lasallian Teams, the role of the Brothers is both indispensable (for the launch) and delicate (to help lay people take their place; to guarantee Lasallian inspiration).* The District Council responded favourably, and the La Salle Association Board of Directors also supported the proposal. Lasallian Teams were therefore launched with the support of a dedicated national team.

These teams are in close contact with the local communities of Brothers, of which there are still many. The Lasallian Team must participate in the continuity of the Lasallian spirit in the institutions and bring its specific touch to the educational quality of the institution.

The teams took off: a national gathering was held in July 2001 in Reims, and in some areas regional gatherings of teams take place every year. They are developing by opening up to the Lasallian Family.

However, as time went by:

- A degree of fatigue is noticeable in some areas,
- Some Brothers' communities close, which distances the teams from the closeness that was established at the beginning,
- They are always centred on one institution,
- Prayer is often absent, and the subjects of faith and spirituality are rarely discussed, sometimes even reluctantly,
- And above all, as school heads change, not all of whom had attended the French Lasallian Centre prior to their appointment, some become "guardians of the Lasallian temple", or even counter-powers to the management teams.

These teams had prepared the ground very well for what was to come, but the model was beginning to wear thin. What's more, the Brothers were beginning to take real note of the fact that their numbers were dwindling and that it was therefore difficult to be present everywhere.

2.3.2 Local Councils for Lasallian Animation

During this period, from 1998 onwards, the Local Councils for Lasallian Animation were set up in each delegation (the area of action of a Brother Auxiliary Visitor or a Lay Trustee Delegate). In fact, insofar as the La Salle Association remained composed solely of heads of schools and academic directors, it was necessary to

institute another body where other people involved in the Lasallian project could have their say and participate in the development and realisation of animation projects more widely than in their establishment.

The Local Councils for Lasallian Animation are intended to bring the reflection and activities proposed within the national framework of the Lasallian network closer to local realities. Their composition reflects the various professions in the schools and each school is represented.

The Local Councils for Lasallian Animation are places where representatives of the various components of the Lasallian network can meet, share and mutually recognise each other; places where the educational, pastoral and pedagogical realities experienced locally can be expressed; places where joint delegation projects can be drawn up in response to common concerns and needs identified together (delegation days; exchanges between schools; young people's meetings; retreats for teachers, educators, service staff, etc.).

Even today, each of the 8 delegations has its own Local Council for Lasallian Animation, which is often very dynamic and the first place where people are involved in the Lasallian mission outside their own establishment.

2.3.3 Third order and Associates

These proposals remained confidential, with no more than twenty or so recognised associates. The principle was personal association: one person associated with a community. Very few knew of its existence and, paradoxically, the main people responsible for the mission in the network were not part of it.

These two paths seemed far removed from the jobs and daily lives of lay people who wanted to get involved. They were conceived from the point of view of the Brothers and not from the point of view of the needs of lay people. What's more, the spiritual matter, because of our cultural approach to secularity, is complex in France.

The success of the Lasallian Teams and the Local Councils for Lasallian Animation is due in part to their direct relationship with our professions, our educational communities and the mission, but without entering into the private spiritual domain.

All these stages: the La Salle Association, the French Lasallian Centre, Lasallian Teams and the first Assembly of the Lasallian Educational Mission (AMEL) in 2006 were steered, inspired and decided by the Brothers, who wanted to share the mission with lay people, to whom they gradually gave room. This provided fertile ground for fresh thinking, encouraged by the General Council's Circular 461 of September 2010: *Associated for mission, an Act of Hope*.

**3. 2010: LA SALLE
EDUCATIONAL
FRATERNITY:
FROM SHARED MISSION
TO ASSOCIATION**

3.1 Initial question

Faced with the lack of spiritual and Christian references in the Lasallian institutions which were to participate in this work of human and Christian education, faced with the evolution of the Lasallian Teams and taking note of the demographic reality: 63 Brothers under 60 years of age for 120 schools, but also of the number of lay people involved which had not stopped growing, in preparation for the Chapter of 2010, the Brother Visitor challenged the heads of institutions at the General Assembly of the La Salle Association, as well as the Local Councils for Lasallian Animation and the communities of Brothers with the following questions: *Do you really believe that today, in our country, it is necessary to preserve the Lasallian mission for young people, especially the poor? Under what conditions? What difference do you make between “preserving the Lasallian mission” and “preserving the Lasallian network”? What consequences do you draw from this? What do you have to say about the Church recognising the role of lay people in Lasallian Association?*

As the unanimous response was that the mission should first of all be made permanent, a team was set up by the Brother Visitor to reflect on a proposal to be presented at the AMEL in July 2010, which was held before the Chapter.

For the first time, it was an assembly made up of a majority of lay people, in the diversity of professions, who were going to innovate for the Association. In this way, we moved from sharing, decided and organised by the Brothers after listening to the laypeople, to carrying the work together, and thus to Association: the voice of each has the same weight.

3.2 Launch

As a result, at the AMEL meeting in July 2010, after group work and debate, the following proposal was voted unanimously and approved by the subsequent Chapter:

The creation, within the District of France, of the La Salle Educational Fraternity, in order to update the Lasallian charism, to promote the Lasallian educational mission and to ensure its continuity in order to respond to the current educational needs of children and young people, especially the disadvantaged.

Following the Chapter, a working group was called together by the Brother Visitor to draft a text explaining, promoting the understanding and the commitment of all Lasallians to this new way of living together, Brothers and Lay Lasallians. This will be the Inspirational Text.⁶

It was introduced to the 600 people present in November 2011 in Beauvais, the founding assembly from which each participant was sent out to form local fraternities, life units of La Salle Educational Fraternity.

These local fraternities are inter-institutional. Today there are around fifty of them, with around 1,000 members who meet 5 or 6 times a year to share a missionary reflection, a time of prayer and a time of conviviality.

While conviviality was very important at the beginning (we had to get to know each other!), today there is more time for reflection and prayer.

For most of the members, these meetings had become essential to give meaning to their work, and the time had come to take a further step: to make an official commitment to La Salle Educational Fraternity.

3.3 Call for official commitment and response from members of local fraternities

The AMEL of July 2014 asked *to propose a process of formal commitment to the La Salle Educational Fraternity, for members of local fraternities with reference to article 2.1.2 of the inspirational text (orientation 2).*

⁶ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/15CpY-PlxQuXoSHY1lOo3mTZ19AOR61u1/view>, October 2024

The participants at the national meeting of fraternities held in Reims in October 2015, the members of the mission team (fraternity animation team) and the Trusteeship Council wanted the commitment process to be proposed in Spring 2016⁷. At the Reims assembly, the commitment text was drafted, then validated by the Trusteeship Council and the District Council.

This is why, on 19 March 2016, Brother Visitor Jean-Paul Aleth sent a letter to all the local fraternities in which he wrote:

...I call upon all those who wish to do so to pronounce together the same “word” of commitment to express our common will to continue “together and by association” the Lasallian educational adventure. This “promise”, which will bind us to one another in the Church, will mark the true act of birth of a Fraternity, a stable body of educators, Brothers and lay people, a body which will guarantee the continuity of the charism.

While the local fraternities are open to all, whatever their personal journey or convictions, the commitment to La Salle Educational Fraternity is in the name of their baptism. The commitment is explicitly anchored in the Church.

Between March and July 2016, 167 people signed up, including 14 Brothers. Since that call, 348 people have made a commitment, 98 of whom have not renewed their commitment due to age or death. Of these, 57 are or have been head teachers.

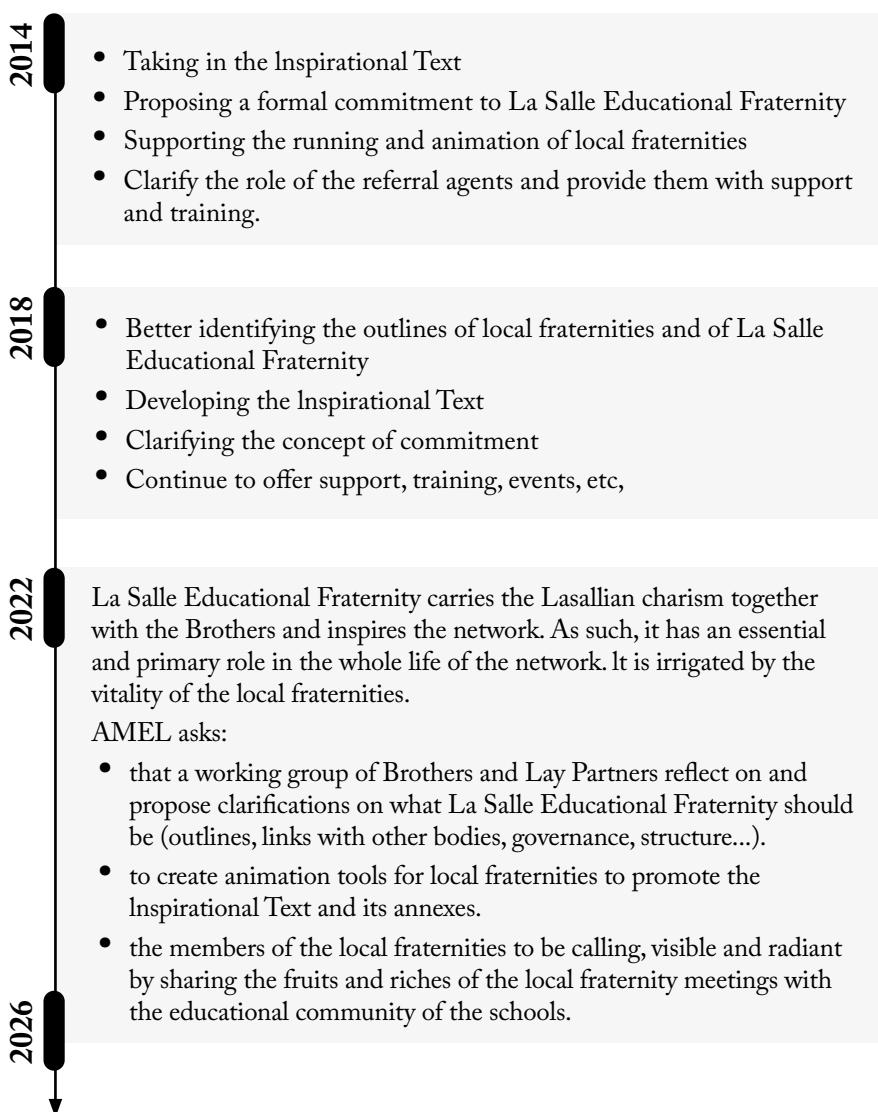
Since 2021, the number of committed members has outnumbered the number of Brothers in France, not to mention the thousand or so members of the local fraternities in which everyone is on the journey. Today, people re-commit for two years.

La Salle Educational Fraternity is therefore today the place where Association for the mission is lived out, Brothers and lay people together, carried out by lay people with Brothers, anchored in the

⁷ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/10wwnXNmh-IvXYNM1pf2NqVv6MCaUpSYS/view?usp=sharing>, October 2024

concrete and practical terrain of the Lasallian mission, in which the institutional dimension and the spiritual dimension of our mission are inextricably linked.

However, it is still very young, barely 13 years old, and there are many challenges ahead for the network and the Church. Each AMEL reminds us of this:



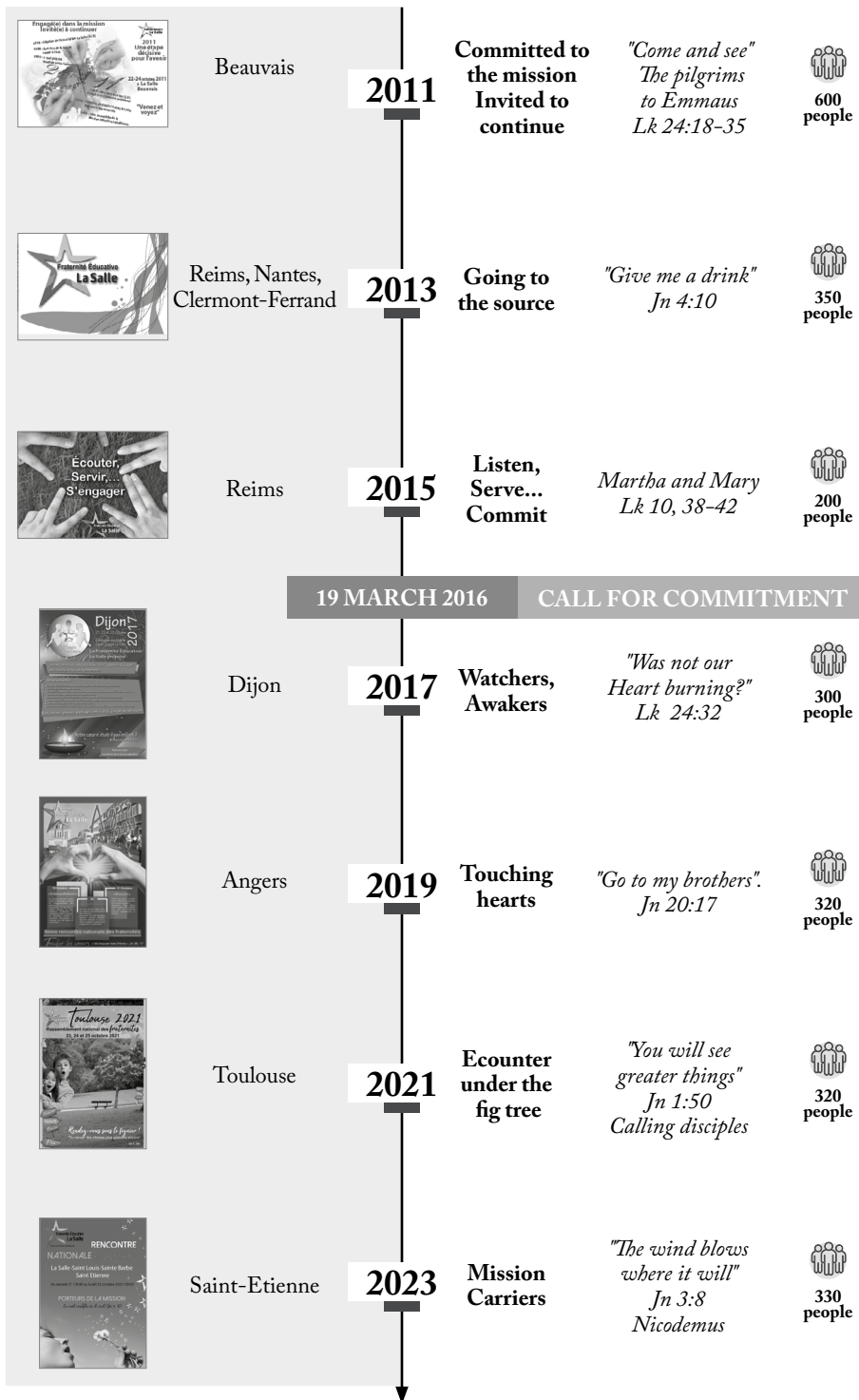
At the same time, in 2015 the La Salle Association merged with La Salle Foundation, which became not only the legal and financial body and the real estate support for the network and La Salle Educational Fraternity, but also the support for the Canonical Foundation.

3.4 Support for members

Over the years, a Council of Fraternities has been set up. One of its main lines of action is to bring out a common awareness among the members of the fraternities, particularly the committed ones, an awareness of carrying the mission together, even of being its guarantor, a mission which goes beyond the boundaries of the establishment, the country, time and space, to form the La Salle Educational Fraternity.

The national fraternity meetings, held every two years, last three days and bring together at least 300 people. Each theme is a step in deepening the charism beyond our daily environment.

Evaluations show that participants come away recharged, with renewed energy to call on new members to join them, and a certain number asking to make a commitment. At each of these meetings, around a hundred people re-commit for the next two years. Those who are unable to attend sign up again at other times during the year.



In 2025 we will be looking at the transmission of the charism and our responsibility: “Being a prophet of Hope” will be the theme.

In addition to these key meetings, the local fraternities in each delegation invite people to an Inter-fraternity meeting one Saturday during the year. For those who can't spare three days or who can't travel far, this is an opportunity to reflect on the mission in a broader way. Since last year, we've had a theme, which each delegation implements with its own creativity, in order to reflect in communion throughout the network.

In addition, times of both formation in the charism for the mission and personal renewal are proposed: one day, two days, completed by a proposal on Lasallian spirituality specifically for those involved from 2025 onwards. Indeed, our challenge is that the members of the fraternities should know the treasure that has been entrusted to us so that, in turn, they can pass it on and help it to grow.

Finally, tools for reflection and for leading fraternity meetings are offered, as well as a newsletter to deepen our commitment, now online.⁸

Little by little, through these times of reflection on the founding texts, in particular the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, the texts of Brothers who have gone before us, or the current texts of the Institute, through times of prayer in common, the members of the fraternities are gaining confidence in themselves to dare to speak out about what was, in the minds of the laity, reserved for the Brothers.

We are building a community, not a residential community, but a community nonetheless, at the service of the mission, firmly based on the pillars of faith-fraternity-service.

However, there are many challenges. Some of these are detailed below.

8 <https://www.fraterniteducative.lasallefrance.org/accueil>

3.5 Challenges

3.5.1 Stability

The stability of the members in the local fraternities on the one hand, and in the La Salle Educational Fraternity on the other, is a key element to be taken seriously in the long term. If we look back to the founding times of the Institute, it was the stability of the Brothers' communities that gave confidence and enabled the schools to last.

Lay people today have to find their own ways of ensuring continuity in their commitment, taking into account their family life, the first place of their personal commitment, especially for those who are married. We need to be clear about what this requires, and call for discernment so as not to discourage those who, little by little, are committing themselves as best they can with their obligations.

Of course, the Brothers present in La Salle Educational Fraternity ensure stability by their vows. But what if one day, temporarily, they are no longer there?

3.5.2 Rooted in the institutions

The fraternities must have a Christian influence in the schools and therefore be the core of the Christian communities, which are often very small in our schools; they are not called upon to innovate or take charge of projects on their own. And so, being the soul, the leaven, of the educational communities, they will give meaning to what is being lived, they will set in motion colleagues who are perhaps far removed from the Christian life and, with other members of the Lasallian Family, they will give rise to projects for the young people and adults of our schools, thus unfolding the institutional dimension of the La Salle Educational Fraternity.

This is achieved first and foremost through the witness of a fraternal life, a certain style of relationship and a way of looking at young people and colleagues, all of which is supported by the Lasallian tradition that has been reread and updated.

If there is no impact in the schools, La Salle Educational Fraternity misses its goal because it is a Fraternity for the mission.

3.5.3 Being watchful and available for the mission

Little by little, a common awareness and desire to participate actively in the mission is emerging, particularly among those involved who, in their public commitments, say they express their wish to:

- Support the mission through personal and community prayer
- Bring the Lasallian Educational Project to life in its three dimensions: faith, fraternity and service
- Update the Lasallian Educational Project in response to the current educational needs of children and young people, with priority given to the most vulnerable
- Contribute in implementing the guidelines of the Assembly of the Lasallian Educational Mission (AMEL)

More and more of these people are asking to be consulted, to think about future directions, to simply be taken into account, without any career in mind: they are delighted to carry out their daily work as educators, teachers, secretaries, accountants, cooks, etc. with young people.

The question that arises today is what place should be given to members who have been involved for some time. Finally, what value do we give to their renewed commitment, some of whom have been involved for 8 years?

3.5.4 For the Church: what recognition?

This was a big question at the beginning. Some people even wondered whether a Church structure that might suit us already existed. But when we were invited to the fraternity gathering in Reims in 2015, Father Jean-Yves Pecqueux, C.M.J., who was Deputy

Secretary General of the French Bishops' Conference at the time, told us to "first live what you have to live, bear fruit, that's what will be recognised".

We then took up the question again from another angle, and, rereading Circular 461, we chose to look more closely at the following definition: *the term "Association" should not be understood in a legal or canonical sense. It represents the link that unites all those committed to the Lasallian Mission, i.e. those who see themselves responsible for it and who contribute to its vitality* (p.41). The Institute is our place because: *There is a value in being cautious in seeking canonical status for Lasallian intentional groups. Lasallians have an enduring, rich and fruitful experience of association. And as long as there is a Superior General in Rome, and the Brothers and Lay Lasallians remain together, looking for new canonical models would not best serve current needs.* (p.45)

However, today, what is happening in France is known to the Institute and is cited as a life experience of the Lasallian Association in many texts. Recognition for us comes first and foremost from the Institute.

In addition, on 20 December 2017, the La Salle Foundation was canonically erected by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. In the preamble we read:

In addition, taking into account the place of lay people in the works and the desire of an ever-increasing number of them to deepen their commitment within the educational community, in accordance with the charism of the Institute, the Brothers of the Christian Schools have wished to strengthen their links with those lay people who wish to do so.

Those who respond to this call as brothers in Jesus Christ thus demonstrate their fraternity through a greater missionary commitment within the educational community.

As articles 17, 17a, 17b, 17c and 17d of their Constitutions invite them to do, but taking into account the specific characteristics of Christian education in France, the Brothers

of the Christian Schools have offered to associate these lay people more closely with their educational mission, by encouraging collaboration and mutual enrichment and by proposing a greater sharing of spirituality.

The establishment of the Canonical Foundation is in line with the approach taken by the Brothers of the Christian Schools at their District Chapter in July 2010, which aims to involve lay people in their mission, through

“The creation, within the District of France, of the La Salle Educational Fraternity in order to update the Lasallian charism, to promote the Lasallian educational mission and to ensure its continuity in order to respond to the needs of children and young people, especially the underprivileged”.

Since then, feeling recognised both by the Institute and through the Canonical Foundation, we have concentrated on the formation and renewal of the members of the fraternities to form the body of the La Salle Educational Fraternity in order to leave the future open to mission.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Today, the animation, formation, leadership and accompaniment of the mission are carried out almost exclusively by committed lay people, but always “together and by association” with the Brothers who walk with us, and under the authority of the Brother Visitor. In 2018, in order to make further progress, the District Chapter asked that the Brother Visitor’s adjunct (not provided for in the Rule, but a long-standing practice in France) be a lay person. This new experience will be evaluated by the next District Chapter.

We are fully in line with the long history of the Institute, whose mission is stable but whose structures evolve regularly: some disappear, others are born. La Salle Educational Fraternity is one of the young sprouts. To continue along the path, we must have the confidence of the Brothers and of the Church. This trust is built up and maintained by the quality of each person’s commitment, by community life, whether residential or not, and by prayer.

Wouldn’t this be our original contribution to deepening our understanding of the People of God, a people of the baptised on the move, and of synodality in its characteristics of unity, diversity, complementarity, reciprocity and communion?

Saint John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers lived first of all listening to the Spirit, following Christ, to work for their salvation by saving the young people entrusted to them. This was recognised by the Letters Patent of 1724 and the Bull of Approbation of the Institute of 1725.

It's up to us to rise to the challenge today, in a context where Christians are in the minority, in a virtual world where concrete human relationships are disappearing, and in a society where the state, fortunately, has taken educational needs into its own hands.

We believe that Saint John Baptist de La Salle can inspire us, we believe that the Gospel is our foundation, we believe that we can contribute something so that Christian education can be offered to all and thus be a sign in Catholic education in France of welcoming all by *providing free education to the poor* in accordance with the Bull of 1725.

Colette Allix
November 2024

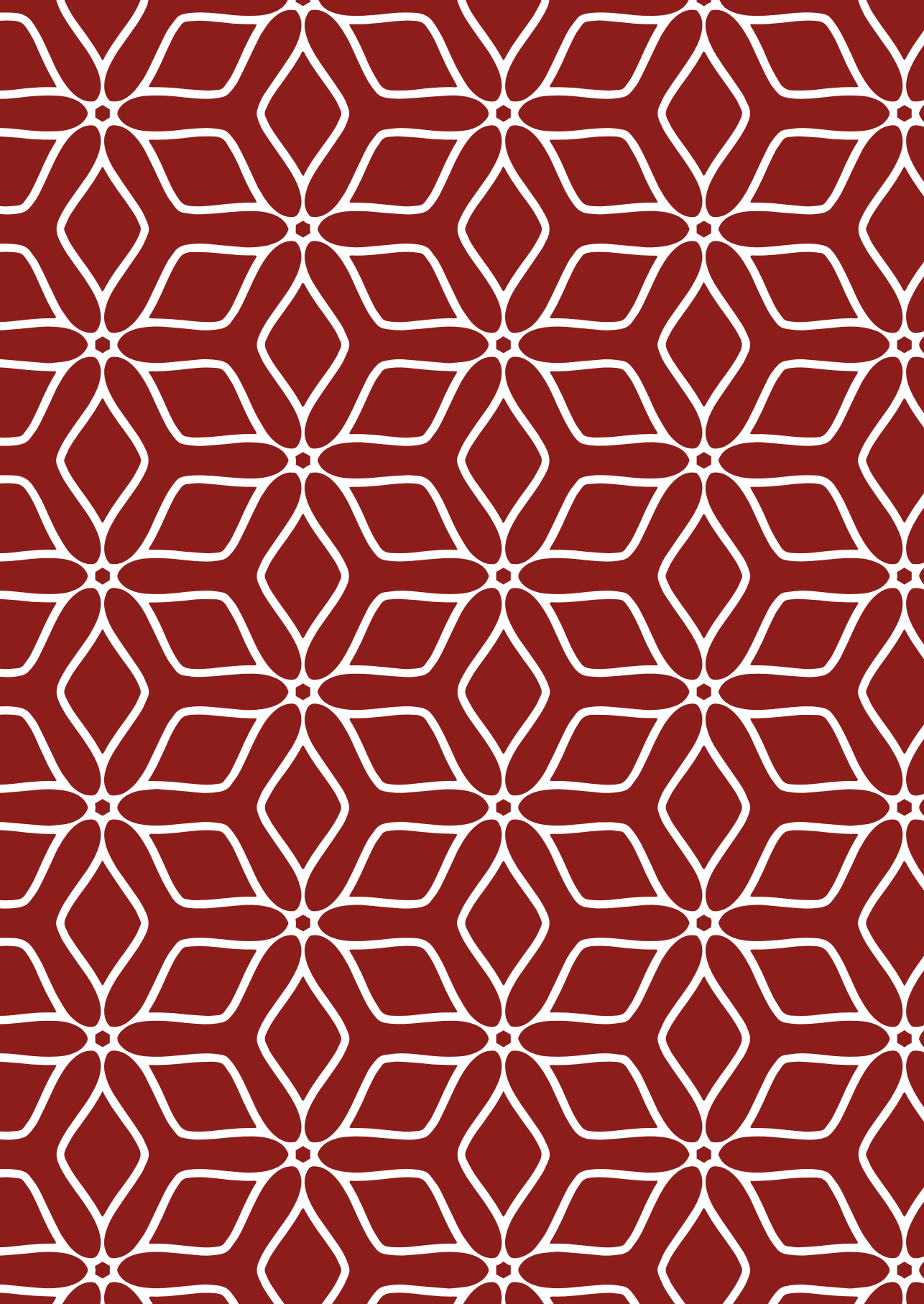
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