



# BROTHER THOMAS JOHNSON, FSC: A BROTHER'S BROTHER

BY BROTHER FRANCIS CARR, FSC

It isn't easy to get a unanimous opinion about someone when you ask people to comment, but 13 out of 13 people who worked with Brother Thomas Johnson, FSC, during his seven years in Rome as Vicar General of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools described him as “a Brother who never put ‘business’ ahead of the ‘person’” and “who always found time for you.”

## A BROTHER'S BROTHER – THAT'S A TERM THAT CAME UP IN MOST OF THE COMMENTS.

I have known Brother Tom for more than 25 years. For six years, I was his Auxiliary Visitor in the Midwest District when he was Visitor. I always found myself more creative and more competent when we worked together. He brought out the best in me and made sensible decisions that considered others' opinions and ideas. He considered us to be “servant-leaders.”

Brother Tom loved teaching, but answered the call to be an administrator – first as an assistant principal at De La Salle Institute in Chicago in the 1970s and 80s,

then as Visitor of the Chicago District, where he led the merging of three Districts into today's Midwest District. After leading the Midwest District as Visitor from 1995-2001, he served as Regional Coordinator at Christian Brothers Conference from 2002-2007.

In 2007, he was elected Vicar General. In that role, Brother Tom prepared and coordinated the month-long meetings of the General Council. One of the Councilors noted how well Brother Tom consulted with all of them as he prepared for the meetings. He patiently listened, gave each Brother the freedom to express himself, and led the Council to achieve its goals in a peaceable, efficient manner. That's truly a gift and a sign of an excellent administrator.

*(Far Left) Brother Tom attends the canonization of Kateri Tekakwitha in 2012 with Brother Bernard Knezich, FSC (deceased). Courtesy Brother Tom Johnson, FSC*

*Brother Álvaro and Brother Tom shake hands at the General Chapter. Courtesy Brother Alexander González, FSC*



*(Left) Brother Tom addresses capitulants at the General Chapter. Courtesy Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, Communications Service*

Brother José Antolínez, FSC, Secretary General, worked closely with Brother Tom and wrote that he is “a Brother who believes in every person, and that makes it very easy to work with him.”

Brother Tom’s service as Vicar General included work with the Secretariat for Lasallian Family and Association, which involved the Young Lasallian movement. With Brother Charles Kitson, FSC, Montse Nieto and Joseph Gilson, he helped enhance the presence of the Lasallian family and the involvement of young people in the mission. One result was Circular 461, “Associated for the Lasallian Mission... an act of HOPE.”

Gilson, International Coordinator for Young Lasallians, considered Brother Tom to be a model for the Lasallian family to invite, accompany and challenge future generations of Lasallians.

Brother Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría, FSC, Superior General while Brother Tom was Vicar, reminded us that through Brother Tom’s involvement with the Secretariat for Lasallian Family and Association, “he has given a strong impulse to this important dimension of our mission today that opens our hearts to a future of hope.”

Brother Tom also accompanied Lasallian Partners at the Generalate and worked with Bethlehem University in the Holy Land. Those in Rome knew many assignments required his attention, but Brother Tom was always willing to set aside what he was doing to help others.

**“BROTHER TOM IS A BROTHER’S BROTHER, A BROTHER WHO LEADS BY EXAMPLE AND EXERCISES THAT LEADERSHIP WITH COMPASSION AND WISE COUNSEL,” WROTE BROTHER ROBERT SCHIELER, FSC, SUPERIOR GENERAL, WHO SERVED AS A GENERAL COUNCILOR WHILE BROTHER TOM WAS VICAR GENERAL. “A TRUE COMMUNITY MAN WHO QUIETLY, UNSELFISHLY GOES ABOUT DOING COMMUNITY CHORES AND SERVICE SO IMPORTANT FOR THE FRATERNAL LIFE OF THE COMMUNITY.”**

*Brother Tom stands with Brother Pubudu Rajapakse, FSC, from Sri Lanka at an evening social during the International Mission Assembly in May 2013 where the delegate from India welcomed each person with the traditional blessing and red kumkuma.*

*Courtesy Brother James Joost, FSC*

It sounds like Brother Tom didn’t make time to relax, but he did. While in Rome, he was always ready to try out the latest burger place or hit the movie theater to keep up with Hollywood’s latest releases. Brother Tom now has more time for the latest films and can trade testing burger places for hot dog stands in Chicago. After seven years in Rome, he’s now back in the Midwest District on a sabbatical year.

Brother Jorge Gallardo de Alba, FSC, a General Councilor until his election to be Brother Tom’s successor as Vicar General, expressed concern about Brother Tom’s return to Chicago: “Going back home to adjust to the extremes of Chicago’s weather will not be easy, but you will do it well. Just as you do everything.”

Yes, Brother Tom does everything well, always with others in mind, always with professionalism, always with self-confidence and humility. But fear not; he loves Chicago too much to let the weather wear him down. He’s happy to be home!

We thank you, Brother Tom, for your generosity, your effectiveness, your friendship, your brotherhood. May God be with you as you move on from Institute leadership. ●

*Brother Francis Carr, FSC, is director for mission at Saint Mary’s Press in Winona, Minnesota.*

