

THE PIOUS SCHOOLS

The Order, the Fraternity and the people whom the Lord calls to be sons and daughters of Calasanz.

*“In these four centuries the Pious Schools have remained in a permanent attitude of **openness to reality and of "going forth"**: from Rome to the small Italian towns where their educational service was urgently **requested**; From Italy to European countries, where the Church wanted to **solidly educate children in the Catholic faith**; and later to other continents, to **serve the Church and the world** in the field of education. They have always exercised their ministry in school, but have been able to **incarnate their charisma** also in several other areas. And, at the same time, they have been able to **respond** to the requests of the Church, assuming pastoral services wherever necessary. Finally, in response to the wishes of Vatican II, which called for a more active participation of the laity in the life of the Church, they have opened the way for the **Piarist Fraternities**, inviting men and women of good will to **share their charism and their mission**, fostering a rich **variety of vocations**¹”*

*“I entrust **all** of you, the Order, the Calasanctian Family and the Piarist Fraternities to the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose name the Order of the Pious Schools bears. Mary, who was the first teacher of Jesus, is your model and protection to **continue carrying out your mission, accompanying the little ones towards the Kingdom of God**²”*

I-INTRODUCTION

We all celebrate with joy that Pope Francis cited twice the Piarist Fraternities on the occasion of the Calasanctian Jubilee Year. But the risk of that joy is to stay only with the fact of the double quotation, although this is very important. For the first time in our history, a Pope speaks of Piarist Fraternities. But I think we need to deepen the context of the quotations, because it is essential to understand the new Piarist moment in which we are.

¹ FRANCIS. Message to the Pious Schools on the occasion of the Calasanctian Jubilee Year. November 27, 2016.

² FRANCIS. Message to the Pious Schools on the occasion of the Calasanctian Jubilee Year. November 27, 2016.

1. In what context does the Pope quote the Fraternities? As a significant example of the ongoing attitude of "going forth" of the Pious Schools.
2. With what data does the Pope enrich that "going forth"? Openness to reality/ response to educational needs/ the challenge of the education in faith / the Incarnation of the Charism/ the service to the Church and the world, etc.
3. What specifically does the Pope emphasize of the contribution of the Fraternities? Two essential things: sharing the charism and mission and the rich diversity of vocations.
4. The Papal message is addressed to Fr. General. The occasion of the message is the 400th anniversary of the constitution of the Pious Schools as a Religious Congregation. But the farewell is plural: to *all*. This "all" is very important.
5. Finally, what is the Pope's prayer for "all of us"? That we continue to carry on our mission by bringing the little ones to the Kingdom of God. That is the protection that the Pope asks for to Mary: that we continue to work.

I think that these underlines of the Pope are more than sufficient for us all to understand, with compromised clarity, this new Piarist moment in which we are living. Francis called it "*new Pentecost*." And Pentecost has to do, we know, with the welcome of the Spirit, communion, centrality of Christ and sending in mission. That's Pentecost.

I will try to delve into some of these elements, trying to respond to what I have been asked: "*Let Fr. General present the importance of the Fraternity*." Let's go.

II- BASIC ASPECTS THAT WE MUST HAVE CLEAR AND ON WHICH WE HAVE TO BUILD AND KEEP WALKING.

Sometimes I think we need to insist that we must know better our own reality and our own decisions. Not only do we need to read and know our own documents and decisions, but we also need three more things: *to deepen their content*, to carry forward *their socialization* and to *discern about the challenges* that arise.

In this first moment I wish only to remember what we have clear and underline its wingspan, opportunity and challenging richness.

1- We have a "Directory of Participation".

We have always had a "Directory of the Laity", since the General chapter of 1997 approved the document "The Laity in the Pious Schools", a decisive text in the history of our Order. But those Directories were approved *"ad experimentum"*. All we lived was – officially- an 'experience'. Rich, passionate, sincerely lived by many people who have compromised their lives in the Pious Schools, but it was still provisional, without the definitive canonical endorsement by the Order's highest authority: the General Chapter.

Well, the 47th General Chapter canonically approved the new Directory of Participation in the Pious Schools. In this way, the various options, modalities, vocations, ministries, structures and projects are officially validated and are proposed to the whole of the Pious Schools for their reception and development, always for the good of the Piarist mission.

We have to do a clear and responsible job to make this Directory known. And to deepen its content, to apply it to our reality and to turn it into a source of life. This is the meaning of a "Directory."

This Directory defines with precision the reality of the Piarist Fraternity, emphasizing its nature and its objectives³.

- *Nature: People who, after a process of formation, of personal and communitarian discernment and the corresponding acceptance by the Order, live the Calasanctian charism (spirituality, mission and fraternal life), participating in the Fraternity of the Pious Schools.*
- *Objectives:*
 - *To grow and to mature in faith in a Piarist Fraternity, as a place of insertion in the Church.*
 - *To live and to incarnate secularly, from the baptismal consecration, the charismatic gift of the Pious Schools, as well as the intuitions of Calasanz.*
 - *To share with the Demarcation and with the Order the spirituality, life and Piarist mission, being a visible face of the Piarist presence.*

2- The Fraternity of Pious Schools is a fully adult Piarist reality.

In the midst of the Pious Schools there are already twelve Piarist Demarcational Fraternities that constitute the General Fraternity, and in them they share the faith and the Piarist charism more than nine hundred people in some eighty small communities. The General Chapter approved the identity of the Fraternity and incorporated into our Rules⁴ three very important aspects: the **definition** of the

³ 47th GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE PIOUS SCHOOLS. Year 2015. "Participation Directory". Point 65.

⁴ COMMON RULES OF THE PIOUS SCHOOLS, n. 228.

Piarist Fraternity, the commitment to **promote it and to place it well** in the life of the demarcation, and the possibility that the **Piarist religious may be part of it**.

1st The Order will promote the birth and consolidation of Piarist Fraternities. The Fraternity of the Pious Schools is the group of faithful Christians associated in small communities to live the Piarist charism (spirituality, mission and life), each according to his/her secular, religious or priestly vocation. The Fraternity is therefore an association of faithful integrated in the Piarist charism, which has been recognized as such by the Order of the Pious Schools.

2nd The religious Piarist, always with the permission of the respective Major Superiors, may be part of the Piarist Fraternities.

3rd The Demarcations, and the Order, will establish with the Piarist Fraternities the necessary institutional relations to favor the dynamism of the charismatic integration and to promote, jointly, the development of the Piarist charism and mission.

No doubt they are important steps because they contribute to consolidate what we already lived, but it is good to keep in mind that these decisions are demanding, both for the Order and for the Fraternity. We're just starting the way.

III- WE HAVE SOME PARTICULARLY MEANINGFUL REALITIES THAT ORIENT VERY WELL THE WAY WE ARE WALKING ON.

On this "minimum basis", collected in our legislation (Directory and Common Rules), **we have advanced significantly in several points**. I want to emphasize them not with the desire of completeness or with the simple- though necessary- goal that they may be known, but with the clear intention that they be received as *calls to advance*.

1- There is the General Fraternity of the Pious Schools

*It is constituted the **General Fraternity of the Pious Schools**, to which all the existing Piarist Fraternities belong and that thus have been recognized by the respective Major Superiors and to which will be able to integrate all that in the future will be created in the Order. In this way, within the Pious Schools, a **new community reality is born, of charismatic integration, whose scope of reference is the whole of the Order**. All Fraternities will continue to have their own demarcational and local entity, but from this moment on, they shall also live their general reference, with the whole of the Order⁵.*

⁵ GENERAL CONGREGATION. Constitution of the General Fraternity of the Pious Schools. Letter of June 12, 2011.

The birth and development of the General Fraternity decisively marks the future of the Pious Schools. Its Council was already present in the last General Chapter, and a General Chapter of the Order will be incomprehensible without the presence of the Fraternity. This fact, and many others that are given, express the new reality. We thank God!

2- We endow ourselves with a new Piarist "organizational reality" (although it is much more than that): the model of Piarist Presence.

The concept of "*Piarist Presence*" is advancing among us, and we have incorporated it into our Rules. We are talking already about "*projects and teams of Piarist presence*", as well as "*Piarist Christian Communities*". It is a very rich concept, but we still have to work to clarify and promote it. The Piarist Presence is the set of Piarist realities (of life and mission) that exist in a certain reality (local or demarcacional). For example: the community or religious communities, the community or communities of the Fraternity, the school, the parish, the works of Non-Formal Education, the temple, the educational and pastoral dynamisms that exist in a city... constitute a Local Piarist Presence that asks and needs to be understood, organized and energized. In this model finds a good location the Piarist Fraternity, and the same can be said of the religious community itself.

Similarly, we can speak of the Piarist Provincial Presence (thinking about the area of the Demarcation), and even General (contemplating the whole Piarist reality). Little by little we will have to take steps to clarify this proposal and make possible the fruits that we expect, both in life and in mission. The General Congregation has constituted a General Team for the impulse of the model of Piarist Presence, convinced of the importance of this institutional option.

*"Piarist presence is the group of Community and Apostolic institutions (and the relational platforms established in their environment) that constitute and shape the concrete Piarist reality of a local, demarcacional or general place. We will equip our Piarist presence with the appropriate projects and teams for their growth and consolidation."*⁶

*"We will strive to strengthen our presence in each locality by shaping the Piarist Christian Community in which the religious, the members of the Piarist Fraternities and all the people who are part of the whole of the Piarist Presence can meet to share their faith and grow in their identity"*⁷.

⁶ GENERAL CONGREGATION. Constitution of the General Fraternity of the Pious Schools. Letter of June 12, 2011.

⁷ COMMON RULES OF THE PIOUS SCHOOLS, n. 103

3- A new Piarist vocation is consolidated: "The lay Piarist"

The vocation of the lay piarist (charismatic and juridical integration), endowed with its own statute, approved by the General Congregation in 2001, has been created in the bosom of a demarcation for years. We can say that the 47th General Chapter already gives the "majority of age" to the vocation of the lay piarist. As you know, their names already begin to be known to us because they appear in the calendar of the Order.

We are faced with a vocation that must be very cared for and valued, recognized in people of clear vocational career and of a consistent formation, accepted finally by the major superiors taking into account the opinion of the Council of the Fraternity. We thank God for the gift of the Piarist vocational plurality, and of his infinite kindness we hope that we can all understand that there is only one way to live the Piarist vocation (religious or secular) we have received: intensely, in fullness, from the honest pursuit of authenticity. Only in this way will our vocational plurality be fruitful and result in the good of children and young people, especially of the poor.

4- We promote the Piarist ministries, also entrusted to lay people.

The 47th General Chapter recognized three Piarist ministries entrusted to the laity: the *Ministry of Pastoral* (understood as participation in the Pastoral Ministry of the priest, as the Church understands); the *Ministry of Christian Education* and the *Ministry of Care to the Poor for Social Transformation*. Each one of them explains their characteristics and purposes, always according to the mission. It is important that we value these ministries in their proper measure, taking care of them, commending them properly to the ideal and prepared people, and living them within the Piarist Christian Communities. It is also important that we understand and name them the way they were defined by the Chapter. We must walk in communion always, and especially in these options whose meaning is precisely this: to serve the community.

5- We have a shared network between some Demarcations and Fraternities that is configured as a Piarist subject proper of the dynamisms of Shared Mission and Charismatic and Legal Integration: ITAKA-PIARISTS.

The Order and the Fraternity constitute, in some demarcations, an institutional platform of Shared Mission and Charismatic Integration through the network "Itaka-Piarists". The Piarist Fraternities and the Demarcations are called to share the mission from the dynamisms and structures that they discover and establish, according to the different situations. In this sense, little by little, a "network of shared Institutional Mission" (Itaka-Piarist) is being developed in which various demarcations and fraternities participate. Its life and development are still unequal in the various places, as it is logical, but in its bosom we work hard to promote our mission and ensure its growth and sustainability.

IV- WE HAVE RAISED IMPORTANT CHALLENGES AND OPTIONS CAPABLE OF DYNAMIZING THEM.

A- SOME COMMON CHALLENGES

Certainly, there are quite a lot of them. But I prefer to highlight only three, those that I see more in the background and needing a serious and concrete deepening. They have to do with what we are, what we do and what we are building together in the Pious Schools that we are living.

1- To develop and to live in fullness the identity of the Order and that of the Fraternity. TO BE

The Order of the Pious Schools and the Piarist Fraternity are different realities that opt for communion. But this can only be done from clear identities and from full experience. We need a Piarist Order to live intensely the consecration and prophecy, to grow and walk from the dynamisms and structures that are its own, and to take care of its significance and its capacity of life and mission. Likewise, we need a Piarist Fraternity that grows in the development of its own identity, clearly exposed in its documents, and that seeks a clear experience of the Christian vocation enriched from the Calasanctian charism so that, in its bosom, Religious and Lay People can share the gift of vocation received. We will not advance without aspiring to the full vocation, without working for it and without supplicating it intensely in the prayer.

2- To share the missionary Challenge. TO DO

The mission is the sense of the Pious Schools; it is the reason for the life of Calasanz. Essentially, Mission is been sent. The Order and the Fraternity are sent to the children, to the young people, first of all to the poorest. This mission sending can and must be shared. It is already so in many places of the Order, and we have rich and fruitful experiences of this "sending in shared mission". We even have Piarist presences that were born so, in a joint way. I think we need to push this challenge and renew this conviction. The abundance of the harvest demands answers of communion and audacity.

The Order and the Fraternity are intensely sharing the mission, from multiple perspectives. It would be complex to enumerate all; it is enough to emphasize that this dynamic is not only unstoppable, but, by its very nature, tends to grow (Piarist Ministries; numerous people of the Fraternity working in the Piarist mission, as professionals or as volunteers; common bodies of reflection, planning, management and direction; ITAKA-Piarists Network; Co-responsible collaboration in Pastoral on Vocations and Initial Training; "especially missionary" sending to other countries and demarcations; works of shared ownership, etc.

3- Set up a clear and fruitful Piarist subject. TO BUILD

When we talk about “the Piarist”, we don't talk only about the Order. This is clear among us. But this new Piarist subject that we are configuring, formed by the Order, the Fraternities and so many people who share the mission that we have received from God through Calasanz, needs to be well thought out and structured, in its various dynamics, to make it fruitful. If it is confusing, if the various identities are not well respected, it will not work. No one knows how to put a blurred piece in a puzzle. In this sense I want to highlight the path we are travelling between the General Council of the Fraternity and the General Congregation, which these days has a new opportunity for common reflection.

B- DYNAMIZATION OPTIONS

I raise some important options for the MMSS, the Demarcational Congregations, the Fraternity Councils and the people who assume leadership roles in this process. They are options for everyone, but some of us have a special responsibility in their development. They part of the reality that I observe in the whole of the Pious Schools.

- 1) **To work for the fraternity to grow in Piarist identity and delve into it.** The Fraternities are very diverse, and one of the keys of this diversity is the work done to have a growing Piarist identity. I'm talking about training; of clarity in their membership and references; of the growing approach to the Fraternity's own model, which tends to be demanding and clear; of the process of adulthood of the Fraternities and of the assumption of this adulthood on the part of the religious; of the care of the people so that their lifestyle and that of the communities respond to what is expected of the children of Calasanz; of the "raise the level" challenge, etc.
- 2) **Place the Fraternity properly in the whole of the Demarcation.** The Fraternity cannot be outside the real life of the Demarcation or the concerns of the Piarists. In a special way, I believe that we must take care of the dialogue between the Demarcational Congregations and the Councils of the Fraternity and, at the local level, the proper participation of the Fraternity in the reality of each Piarist presence and the teams that lead it. Obviously, it helps a lot in all this that the Fraternity is truly a Piarist subject, serious and coherent, and that the demarcation works with clarity in the dynamisms of the participation.
- 3) I would like to highlight **the institutional dialogue of the Fraternity with the Demarcational Congregation.** We must define it, orient it and specify it. It is clear that they should not talk about everything, but they do have issues of which they can and should speak. In a special way, I emphasize: the growth of the Fraternity in all its dimensions; the Piarist Pastoral on Vocations; the

collaboration in the formation of the religious and the laity: the consolidation of the Piarist presences; Piarist Ministries, etc.

- 4) **To orient and to stimulate the proper and growing participation of the religious in the life of the Fraternity, and the one of the Fraternity in the life of the religious.** I highlight some aspects:
- a) To encourage the religious to participate in the Fraternity, as brothers, not as counselors or as "rectors". For the Fraternity community, the presence of the religious is an extraordinary richness, and for the religious, a beautiful "school of Fraternity", of which we are so needy.
 - b) To promote community sharing between religious and laity in a manner appropriate to the various circumstances and processes, including the accompaniment of shared communities wherever they exist or are desirable.
 - c) To organize training sessions for religious and lay people on topics of common interest, and in which we can enrich each other with the different points of view.
- 5) **To invite the Fraternity to participate in missionary sending to other countries, to set up new Piarist presences and to carry out new foundations.**
- a) This is one of the most interesting and fruitful topics that we have raised. Many Piarist presences are decisively shared with the Fraternity. In some, only the Fraternity is present and we have raised the challenge of seeing how one can fully sustain a presence in which there is no religious community. We must not simplify this matter; it would be tantamount to saying that it doesn't matter if there are religious or not. The Piarist presence is not the same with or without religious community. But neither is it the same with Fraternity community or without it.
 - b) We have the possibility that the Fraternity decisively strengthen some incipient foundations of the Order. The recent example of Peru and – hopefully- that of Mozambique, prove it.
6. **To accompany the real life of the religious communities and those of the Fraternity, so that the information and concern for all the Piarist realities circulate.**
- a) We have to recognize that in not a few communities (of both institutions) there is not much knowledge of the real Piarist life and of the whole of the Order. We would have to see how to favor this topic, especially with visits, meetings, provincial days, etc.
7. **To orient from this perspective the Canonical Visits of the Major Superiors,** including the Canonical Visit of Fr. General. We can't design these visits without considering the Fraternity.

8. **The Provincial Congregations and the Fraternity Councils must work especially with "their people" in the most important priorities of the Fraternity** and of the Province, respectively. As an example, but highlighting their importance, I quote two:
- a) The role of the Fraternity in promoting Pastoral on Vocations to the Piarist Religious Life, assuming this challenge as a priority for the Fraternity and reflecting on how they can collaborate.
 - b) The role of the Province for the Fraternity to become more consistent and more Piarist.

V-DREAMS ON OUR FUTURE

- 1) **The construction of a valuable Piarist future goes through three dynamisms:**
- a) In the first place, it depends on God's favor. We are men and women of faith, who know that the development of THE life and the mission of the sons and daughters of Calasanz depend on the love of God. That is why we must plead with him insistently in prayer. The Order and the Fraternity must grow in this dimension praying and celebrating our faith.
 - b) Secondly, it depends on the authenticity with which we live our vocation, each that one that he has received from the Father. Only people and communities who consistently live their vocation and give a humble and coherent testimony deserve the blessing of God in the form of life and mission. Let's work to be better, brothers.
 - c) And, thirdly, that we have clear the objectives, the keys of life and the decisions we make; that we make the good decision in all this, and that we are coherent in its impulse and development. This indeed depends mostly on us.
- 2) That said, I want to highlight some "**dreams and Piarist challenges**" that I would like to share in this meeting.
- a) For a Pious Schools "going forth". We are promoting this dynamism in the Order. Among all the aspects that we can work on in this project, we are promoting two in these first steps: the multicultural and the missionary.
 - b) To renew the "Culture of the Order", advancing in accompanying dynamics, of a greater capacity to take care of what makes us grow and allows us to serve better. This was the work of the last Council of Major Superiors, and in the short term we want to make some public proposals.
 - c) To continue accompanying the process of consolidation and expansion of the Pious Schools, as simultaneous and complementary dynamisms. I want to say that all Provinces are making decisions in both directions, and that the Order is growing in new countries and presences.

- d) To train well-prepared people on really meaningful issues for our mission. I highlight areas such as the right to education, pastoral theology, leadership training, etc.
- e) To advance in the the project culture: living and working from projects. We got a big road ahead of us.
- f) To make significant strides in the challenge of "especially the poor". That our decisions always take into account the priority of Calasanz (and of the Gospel).
- g) To grow in "mentality of Order". We could talk about "mentality of Pious Schools", winning in Communion, in co-responsible collaboration, in availability for the mission, in prayer for each other, etc.
- h) H. The centrality of Jesus Christ in the life of the communities and of the people. This centrality must be expressed in concrete dynamisms. We have to think about it, because it's very challenging.

VI- WE KEEP WRITING THE BOOK OF ACTS

We invite everyone to welcome the immense gift we are receiving, fruit of the love of God, of the strength of the spirit and richness of the charism of Calasanz. Let us ask God, our Father, to bless all the life that arises in the Order and all the people and communities who wish to participate, according to their vocation, in the dream of Calasanz”⁸.

The Book of Acts of the Apostles is not finished. In reading it, we contemplate with deep joy the efforts made by the first Christians to set up their communities, to orient the evangelization, to agree on the priorities, to carry forward the construction of the Church for the Kingdom.

Let's read and pray with the struggles of Paul for the Mission, of Peter for communion, of Barnabas for the daily progress of the task undertaken, of so many people, many, who are quoted in a simple and precious way, highlighting their humble and generous role in the Evangelization.

We, in all humility, must continue to write this book. Everything we do and live goes in the same dynamic. It is very important to place ourselves in it and to dream. It is probable that many years later, the Piarists of the future will read how the Piarist Fraternity was born, be thrilled by reading the Chronicles of the foundation of Mozambique or even read the minutes of this meeting. I hope they will understand, when reading it, what it means to build the Pious Schools. And

⁸ 47th General Chapter of the Pious Schools. Directory of "Participation in the Pious Schools", foreword of the General Congregation.

hopefully we, when we live it, may enjoy giving our lives for this dream: to make the Pious Schools of Saint Joseph Calasanz possible.

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