



CASA GENERALIZIA DEI
PADRI SCOLOPI

THE FRATERNITY OF PIOUS SCHOOLS

II General Fraternity Assembly

"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 of the Piarist Fraternities, inviting men and women of good will to share their charism and mission, fostering a rich plurality of vocations." (Pope Francis, Message to the Pious Schools on the Calasanctian Jubilee Year).

I-INTRODUCTION

The General Council of the Fraternity has asked me to make an "initial presentation" for this second assembly of the General Fraternity. I am grateful for this possibility, which I welcome as a further - and valuable - sign of the shared journey between the Order and the Fraternity of the Pious Schools. I do it with great pleasure, although I must admit that I have not had much time to prepare it. However, I have done it with pleasure, joy and commitment, because I am convinced that this Assembly will be a very important step in the development of something very dear and valuable in the Pious Schools: the growth of charismatic integration in the Pious Schools.

Throughout this assembly, given the program we have, there will be an opportunity to deepen our understanding of the reality of the Fraternity, the road we have traveled and the challenges for the future. I am going to try to offer you "Father General's point of view", the view - from Rome - of someone who has been present from the beginning in the life of the Fraternity and who contemplates, from a privileged observatory, the process of the whole of the Pious Schools.

Therefore, I will try to say something of the **context** in which we live and walk, something of what we have been able to **learn** in these years of life of the Fraternity, some **paths** that I believe are opening and that we can travel, and some final **proposals**, only three.

I wanted to recall the reference that Pope Francis made to the Fraternity in his Message to the Order on the Calasanctian Jubilee Year. I think it is a treasure of the Fraternity, the first time that a Pope refers directly to the life and mission of the Fraternity of the Pious Schools. It is good to remember it and meditate on it from time to time.

II-THREE BASIC CONVICTIONS

I would like to begin by sharing with all of you three basic convictions that are deeply rooted in me, and which I see being incarnated little by little in the body of the Pious Schools. They are simple, but clear. They are part of a brief document that I prepared at the time at the request of the Fraternity of Mexico, but that I would like to recall at this time for the whole Fraternity. They are the following:

1. The Fraternity of the Pious Schools is a **GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT** to the Church, to the Order and to the Calasancian Mission. Therefore, if it is a gift of the Spirit, it must live as such and assume that it is called to be a sign of something new and must be based on the event of the first Pentecost. The event of Pentecost was so for these reasons: Christ was the center of the community, the apostles were aware that they needed that Spirit, and they felt called and sent to announce Jesus to build the Community and the Kingdom. We cannot say, "we are a gift of the Spirit" without feeling committed to change, to grow, to be missioned and to give ourselves. Self-complacency, talking about ourselves, being satisfied with what we are or saying that anything goes have never been among the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
2. **TO BE BROTHERS AND SISTERS** is a new vocation in the Church and in the Pious Schools. In addition, like every vocation, it must be well thought out, lived out in a demanding way, significantly incarnated, enthusiastically promoted, humbly assumed, believingly implored, fraternally shared, missionally understood and coherently cared for. A vocation is a vocation; it is a call from God that asks, by its very nature, to be consolidated. It is neither a meeting nor an activity nor just a way of life. A vocation is not for the one, who receives it, nor for his/her group, but for the Kingdom.
3. The Piarist Fraternity is a form of **PARTICIPATION** in the Pious Schools. That is to say, to PARTICIPATE. Participation" consists in "being part of", in being a "participant", in being "part of the project". Therefore, there is no PARTICIPATION without a structure that promotes it, without a project that energizes it, without a mentality that facilitates it, without a team that makes it visible and without a day-to-day life that contrasts it. For this reason, the Fraternity assumes as one of its essential challenges the development of the model of SCHOOL PRESENCE, both at the local and provincial levels. The time will come - we have a long way to go - when we will also be able to do it at the general level.

III-SOME CONTEXTUAL KEYS

I am going to refer very simply to three types of contexts: the social, the ecclesial and the Piarist context.

A-OUR WORLD

This Assembly is being held online because we live in a pandemic situation, a context that profoundly marks our life and our journey. We cannot ignore that we are living in a time of pain and unrest, and that this is decisive for us. In this context, the Pious Schools (the Order and the Fraternity) must feel called to give a response that enlightens, that helps, and that provokes commitment for a better world.

Little by little, a new awareness is emerging among us that "**nothing will ever be the same**" and that we will have to think about things in a new way. There is still a certain mentality that "with the vaccine, everything will go back to the way it was". And this will not be so, nor do we want it to be so, and we must work to find new parameters of life and mission from which to live and by which to educate. As Piarists, we are challenged by the statement that "*we cannot go back to living as if nothing has happened*". Challenges such as ecology, care of the planet, global citizenship in which to educate our students, welcoming immigrants, interculturality, etc., appear as

opportunities for renewal of life and Piarist responses. We are only beginning to consider all this, overcoming short-termism or the mentality that "soon we will be able to continue living as we did". The pandemic has not caused the change; it has simply accelerated the awareness that "we have to change". This question is on the table of the Pious Schools, and we will have to develop it little by little. Our aspiration cannot be as short-sighted as "going back to the old". Let us not lose our way: we want a different world, also different from the one before the pandemic.

We have four centuries of history, and we have gone through many difficult times and moments. We have always come out ahead, convinced that the dream of Calasanz is essential for our children and young people.

I would just like to contribute two small references of our history that personally help me to live this process in which we are involved, one about the options of Calasanz and the second about the process of consolidation of the Pious Schools, with one of the foundations of Florence.

First of all, we cannot forget that Calasanz already fought against the plague, and that his Pious Schools were born *in times of pandemic*. Already the first General Chapter of the Order, planned for April 1631, had to be postponed because the plague did not cease. In the midst of the pandemic, Calasanz engendered the Pious Schools for the good of children and young people. We must not forget that no virus can stop or weaken the charisma and the mission.

If we look at the process of our foundation in Florence, we see that "because of the *plague, which invaded the city, the schools were closed from September 1630 to November 1631. The Piarists lavished their services to the plague-stricken with such generosity that it earned them the esteem of the people and fame for their schools. After a visit of the grand duke's delegates to the schools in 1632, license was obtained to be able to call as many religious as necessary, instead of the six allowed at first.*"¹

I am glad that we can say that the Pious Schools, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, have founded in Guatemala.

B-OUR CHURCH

A General Assembly of the Fraternity cannot fail to contemplate and keep well in mind the accents that the Christian Community as a whole is living and receiving as calls to conversion.

I believe that the Church today is going through long processes, which are still in an incipient moment, but which are called to provoke profound transformations. I believe that a key of the Fraternity (and of the Order) is to try to welcome these challenges and to turn them into "provocations of change and fidelity". I would like to cite just a few dynamics that I think we need to think about and welcome. I would like to refer especially to four of them: Synodality, Fratelli Tutti, the Global Compact on Education and No to clericalism. It is not my intention to develop them (this is not the moment), but I think it is good to say something about what they can provoke in us.

1. **Synodality** invites us to develop the dynamisms of participation and discernment, in order to seek together the will of God. It is a strong and demanding support to our key of PARTICIPATION, and helps us to situate it in a more accurate way: it is a dynamism of shared discernment. We are moving forward little by little.
2. **Fratelli Tutti** opens us to collaboration with everyone. It is a challenge for a Fraternity to know that the gift of fraternity must be universal, and that a Fraternity is there to make it possible that the dynamisms that configure

¹ DICCIONARIO ENCICLÓPEDICO ESCOLAPIO (DENES), Tomo I. "Florencia, Colegio Santa María dei Ricci").

it as such are also those that inspire its action and mission. A "Piarist" reading of the Fratelli Tutti would be very good.

3. The **Global Compact on Education** is something that concerns us directly and reminds us of our *raison d'être*. I highlight just one of the keys to Francis' proposal: those of us who believe in education as the only way to change the world have the obligation to set ourselves up as credible and referential instances of the challenge we have taken on.
4. **No to clericalism.** It is a topic that would give much to say, but I just want to say something very simple. It is important to understand that the sin of clericalism is two-way. It is not exclusively a problem of the "clergy"; it is also a problem of the layman or laywoman who does not assume his or her condition and who is accustomed to a profile of scarce co-responsibility. I think it is good to remember, for example, that the great advantage of Consecrated Life lies in the fact that the key is in the consecration, not in the position -temporary- that a person assumes. In the same way that the great advantage of the Church -and therefore of the Order and the Fraternity- consists in the fact that the essential thing is Baptism, not the service that people assume by vocation or choice. To deepen in all that means the generation of 'organized' co-responsibility will help us a lot.

C-PIOUS SCHOOLS

The Order is on the threshold of its 48th General Chapter while the Fraternity celebrates its second assembly. The Council elected from here will participate in that Chapter, just as the General Congregation has been invited to this assembly. As I said in the introduction, **PARTICIPATION** is an essential key to the life of the Order. I would like to recall that we have a Directory that regulates and directs the various ways of participating in the Pious Schools, and that it would be very good that the Fraternity grows in its commitment to make known these modalities and to invite others to live them. That is to be a Piarist subject.

Along with this challenge, I would like to refer to others that we have set as an Order and that will directly affect the Fraternity. I am going to highlight three: the Pious Schools 'going forth', the integral sustainability of the Pious Schools and the care of the centrality of the Lord Jesus in our life and mission.

1. I will begin with this third option, because it is clear that it is not just one option among others, but the key that explains everything we are and do. We have decided to rethink what it means that **Christ is the center of everything**, what it means that we feel called to an increasingly authentic, mystical, prophetic and balanced living of our vocation as followers of Jesus. I think that this challenge must also be thought about by the Fraternity - and I am glad that the draft of the six-year project alludes to this - and I also believe that the Fraternity and the Order can help each other in this exciting task.
2. The dynamism "**GOING FORTH**" is in full process of development in the Order. I think that the Fraternity should also feel called to enter into this dynamism and turn it into concrete options. The first discernment of the Order has underlined two priorities: *interculturality* and *missionary availability*. These two options do not exhaust by far the meaning of "being a community going forth". I believe that we need to continue to reflect as an Order and as a Fraternity, and to discern other aspects in which we may feel called or challenged.
3. The **integral sustainability of the Pious Schools** is another of the strong themes that we will talk about in our General Chapter, and it is one of the keys in which the Fraternity is more involved. When we speak of sustainability we tend to think of the economy, but what we are talking about is something much deeper, not

only of the material means. We are talking about charismatic sustainability, of teams, of people, of leadership, of Pious Schools increasingly capable of carrying out their life and mission where we are and where we feel called to be. That is why we use the adjective "integral".

There are more "keys of Piarist context" that should be addressed, but this is not the time to do it. Nevertheless, it is good to keep in mind that the "palpitations" of the Piarist soul, in the Order and in the Fraternity, are always significant and it is necessary to know how to listen to them.

IV-SOME LESSONS LEARNED ALONG THE WAY

The Fraternity has been on the road for more than twenty-five years in the bosom of the Church and the Pious Schools. It is good to look back and try to highlight some of the lessons we have learned along the way. They are small - or not so small - pieces of information that point us in the right direction. Everything lived, except in the case of the unconscious, reflects intentionality, and transmits direction. I am going to highlight some interesting data that we can all observe "from a bird's eye view", without much need for deepening. From all of them we can deduce lines for the future.

1. **The Fraternity has grown a lot.** All beginnings are simple, but today, 25 years later, we are talking about more than a thousand people and a presence in 60 different places and in 11 Demarcations of the Order, exactly half of them. The "little girl" is growing. The challenge is to grow as God commands, that is, not only in number, but also in "wisdom, maturity and grace, before God and people²". That is growth. Growth is always the fruit of God's favor. However, it is also the result of people's efforts. We have worked. Let us continue to do so.
2. **We have experienced processes of vocational clarification.** That is a good thing. The clarity of what it means to be "fraternal" is growing, and the awareness that it is a demanding vocation is becoming ever stronger. Perhaps we have lost people we should not have lost, but it is also true that people who should have left us have certainly left us. I believe that what we have experienced raises the question of how we accompany, how we call, what formation we offer. There is still much to learn.
3. From the beginning, we have had **missionary awareness and availability.** This is a very interesting fact about the Fraternity, which I believe - I can affirm - belongs to its genetic code. The Fraternity, like the Order, is missionary. It is good to work this aspect in all the fraternities - as well as in the Demarcations - always taking care of the availability for sending in mission in other places of the Order.
4. **The Fraternity is increasingly present in the life of the Pious Schools.** In an occasional way, in events, in a frequent way, in processes, and in an organized way, in various teams at the service of the life and mission of the Order. Today it is becoming more and more real that we cannot understand the Order without taking into account the Fraternity. That is good. It helps us all. This presence and linkage is expressed in a particularly significant way in the Itaka-Escolapios shared mission network.
5. The **development of the Itaka-Escolapios network**, of which several Fraternities and Provinces are part and which is gradually becoming a valuable instrument for the development of the Piarist Life and Mission, is also one of the most interesting learnings that the Fraternity and the Order are having. Elements such as co-responsibility, the institutional shared mission, the Piarist communion, the growth of the integral sustainability

² Lk 2:52

of the Piarist project, etc. emerge with strength. The Piarist Fraternity and the Order are progressively aware that the Shared Mission and Charism need structures that make them not only possible, but also real and growing. This is where the commitment to the Itaka-Escolapios network is situated.

6. It is very interesting to observe how **the ministry is growing in the Fraternity**. What began in the beginning with the pastoral ministry, has grown along the lines of the two Piarist ministries, that of Christian education and that of attention to the poor for social transformation. Moreover, little by little the question emerges if we could promote some other ministry or if we would have to develop important nuances in the ones we already have. That is to say, we have a ministerial Fraternity. We thank God.
7. Francis tells us in his Jubilee Year message that the Fraternity is a sign that we are fostering "**a rich plurality of vocations**". It is good that we approach this fact with caution, because perhaps we have developed this "plurality" too little. I think that, although we have taken interesting steps (the general vocation to the Fraternity; some fraternity members who have discovered within the Fraternity their religious vocation, ministries, lay Piarists, etc.), we are still at the beginning of this journey. It will be good to think about it, because I feel that there are novelties awaiting us.

V-SOME OPEN ROADS WE CAN FOLLOW

I think that it is good to set ourselves some challenges, some options that can help the Fraternity grow in authenticity and identity. I am sure that in these days, many ideas and suggestions will appear, and that the new General Council, as well as the Provincial Councils, will take good note of them in order to turn them into lines of progress. I would like to propose a few small suggestions for these 'Lines to go forward', hoping that they can help the project of the next six-year period. They will be very simple.

1. The first can be called "**learning to grow**". One does not grow by decree, nor by the passage of time, but by a process of growth, of progressive transformation, little by little. I like how this is stated in the Constitutions of the Order, in number 6. It is a text written by Calasanz, in the prologue of his Constitutions. It says, "*In a humble attitude we should expect from Almighty God, who has called us as laborers to this most fertile harvest, the necessary means to transform us into authentic cooperators of the truth*". I think that this is one of the most important tasks of the new Council: to detect the common aspects that the Fraternity must consider, but also those particular to each one of them. It is not up to me to define them, but I will try to propose some things.
2. The second path has to do with the **adequate location of the Fraternity at the various levels of the life of the Pious Schools**. At this moment, I think that the central ones are the local and provincial levels. If we want to do things well, I think that this should be a six-year period in which the teams of local and provincial presence, in which the Fraternity is inserted, should be well consolidated in order to be able to move forward in a realistic way. I think that at some point we will be ready to do the same at the general level, from a more homogeneously established Fraternity.
3. There is an important challenge for everyone, for the Order and for the Fraternity, which we call "**growing fidelity**". This must be the process of growth that the Fraternity feels called to live. The statute of the Fraternity marks various aspects proper to the lifestyle of individuals and communities. Among them, a more careful formation, the economic sharing, the participation in the Eucharist of the Piarist Christian community, the organizational aspects, the accompaniment of the persons, the processes of the definitive option, etc. Little by little, in growing fidelity.



4. **Basic synodality**, that is, the life of the small community. When we think of synodality, we tend to think of teams, assemblies, etc. And sometimes we forget that the basic synodality lies in the real community, in its weekly meeting, in the communication we have, in the care of the brothers, in the exercise of discernment, in the importance of the day to day. Let us never forget this. The daily life of the community to which we belong.
5. One of the challenges I see in the Fraternity is that it has not yet achieved a **structure for accompanying the Fraternities that is sufficiently effective**. Normally, for various reasons, the General Council is quite limited in being able to do this service. Perhaps we need to think about what structural steps we need to take. Let us think that there are already more than a thousand people in the General Fraternity, and this is beginning to be a quite numerous, plural and diversified group. It is important to think about its organic articulation.
6. To increase the conviction of the co-responsibility of the Fraternity in the most significant dynamisms of the **construction of the Piarist Christian community**. I refer especially to aspects such as these:
 - a. Growing clarity that the Fraternity is one of the channels of the Calasanz Movement and, therefore, must keep in mind its character of reference.
 - b. The commitment to ministries.
 - c. Communion with the central commitments of the Order regarding evangelization. Among them, the pastoral of processes, the Continuous Prayer, etc.
7. I do not want to fail to point out the role that the Fraternity can play in the development of the **vocational approaches of the Order** regarding the religious and priestly vocation. The Order is pointing out strongly on the promotion of the vocation to the Fraternity and to the Order; the Fraternity must bet in the same direction and in fruitful communion of approaches. This option is central to the dynamic of building Pious Schools in which we are all committed.
8. I referred above to the **missionary challenge**. I think that it is necessary to consider how to develop the missionary character of the Fraternity. Mission is the meaning of the Pious Schools, it is the reason for the life of Calasanz. Essentially, Mission is Sending. The Order and the Fraternity are sent to the children, to the youth, above all to the poorest. This sending in mission 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 in this way, in a joint way. I believe that we must promote this challenge and renew this conviction. The abundance of the harvest demands responses of communion and audacity. 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 the challenge of seeing how to sustain integrally a presence in which there is no religious community. We should not simplify this matter; it would be equivalent to saying that it does not 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 or without the Fraternity community. We have the possibility that the Fraternity strengthens decisively some incipient foundations of the Order. The recent example of Peru and the even more recent example of Guatemala show us this reality.

There would be many more topics that we can consider, but I believe that these that I propose already sufficiently indicate the direction: to **take care of the authenticity of the Fraternity and to walk in growing Piarist communion, developing both lines with formative, structural and apostolic options**.

VI- THREE CONCRETE PROPOSALS

I conclude my reflection with three concrete proposals that could be considered within the Fraternity and the Order. One of them is addressed to the Order, the second to the Fraternity and the third to both.

A-FOR THE ORDER.

To propose the presence of the Fraternity of the Pious Schools in all the Demarcations, developing the provisions of number 228 of our Rules.

- 1. The Order will promote the birth and consolidation of Piarist Fraternities. The Fraternity of the Pious Schools is the group of Christian faithful associated in small communities to live the Piarist charism (spirituality, mission and life), each according to his lay, religious or priestly vocation. The Fraternity is, therefore, an association of the faithful integrated in the Piarist charism, which has been recognized as such by the Order of the Pious Schools.*
- 2. The Piarist religious, always with the permission of the respective Major Superiors, may form part of the Piarist Fraternities.*
- 3. The Demarcations, and the Order, will establish with the Piarist Fraternities the necessary institutional relationships to favor the dynamism of the charismatic integration and to promote, jointly, the development of the charism and the Piarist mission.*

As it is logical, the situations are diverse, but I believe that a full six-year period gives time for each Demarcation to establish the appropriate objectives and paths, in coordination with the Fraternity Council.

B-FOR THE FRATERNITY.

To make a firm commitment to advance in the Piarist identity of all the Fraternities, and in the growing communion with the institutional document of the Fraternity.

I believe that it is necessary to work so that the Fraternity grows in Piarist identity and deepens it. In addition, the surest way is to deepen in the keys of the institutional document that inspires all the Fraternities. It is clear that the Fraternities are diverse, and should remain so, but it is good that they grow in identity according to the common framework. I am speaking of formation; of clarity in their belonging 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 the assumption of this adulthood on the part of the religious; of the care of the persons so that their lifestyle and that of the communities respond to what is expected of the sons of Calasanz; of the challenge of "raising the level", etc.

C-FOR ALL THE PIOUS SCHOOLS

To seek ways to share common dreams that can inspire the life of the Order, the Fraternity and the Pious Schools as a whole. Here are some examples of such dreams:

- 1) 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. Let us think of more keys from the Fraternity. And let us think about how to help each other along the way.

- 2) To continue accompanying the process of consolidation and expansion of the Pious Schools, as simultaneous and complementary dynamics.
- 3) To form well-prepared people in topics that are truly significant for our mission. I highlight areas such as the right to education, pastoral theology, management training, etc.
- 4) To advance in the culture of projects: living and working from projects. We have a long road ahead of us.
- 5) To take significant steps in the challenge of "above all to the poor". May our decisions always take into account the priority of Calasanz (and of the Gospel).
- 6) To grow in "Pious School mentality", gaining in communion, in co-responsible collaboration, in availability for the mission, in prayer for one another, etc.
- 7) To have Jesus Christ has the center of the life of communities and individuals. This centrality must be expressed in concrete dynamisms. We need to reflect on this, because it is very challenging.

VII-CONCLUSION

We are on the way. Let us go forward little by little, seeking to walk in common, giving time to all to make their process of growth, accompanying each other. I think that this assembly and the next General Chapter are two good opportunities to take steps in the right direction, the one that determines the Directory of Participation: "*The Fraternity is called to share with the Demarcation and with the Order the Piarist spirituality, life and mission, being the visible face of the Piarist presence*³".

Pedro Aguado

Rome, March 3, 2021

³ Congregación General. Directorio "La participación en las Escuelas Pías". Ed. Calasancias 55, punto 65.b.c.