



DISCOVERIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE COMING SIX-YEAR PERIOD

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A FIRST, QUICK GLANCE

Today, we celebrate 20 years of the constitution of the Itaka-Escolapios Foundation, following almost 16 years of the previous Itaka Association. These years have been exciting, with continuous discoveries, hundreds of miracles where we have seen how God is acting through the Piarist world, thousands of people walking together along the paths that Calasanz has shown us, with unforgettable personal and joint experiences. Let's now highlight some of the discoveries that we have made along the way, and some of the challenges we will be having over the coming years.

In December, we sent out a simple survey to get to know the evaluation of Itaka-Escolapios from the point of view of the Congregations, the Advisory Councils, and the Teams. It offered us an interesting, more "scientific" point of view. The highest ratings out of the 16 items raised were: that Itaka-Piarist helps in the Piarist mission (6.5 out of 7), the overall assessment (6.4), that it helps in the organization and management of the Province (6.1), that it helps in the Piarist identity (6.1), and that it is getting better and better each day (6.0).

This high global evaluation and help towards the mission comes as no surprise. But, the contribution towards organization and management - and to helping the Piarist identity to grow - is significant! We are discovering this, and other characteristics of Itaka-Escolapios.

On the other hand, the most negative data concerns the knowledge of Itaka-Escolapios among the participants' families (3.7), the participants themselves in our Network projects (4.1), among the religious persons (4.7), and even among those in charge of the shared projects (4.8).

This poses a challenge for the future, because what is unknown can hardly be appreciated and loved, it cannot awaken co-responsibility or leadership, and it cannot call upon others.

This poses an initial challenge that we must address in the coming years.

1. To make progress in terms of the information and presentation of who we are and what we do.

It is necessary to keep moving forward in making ourselves known in who we are and what we do in order to go further in the mission, in the call for more volunteers and collaborating partners, in the ability to generate resources of all kinds, in the Piarist image of our entity, in the call to unite to the Piarist world, in our personal growth as Piarists. Fr. General reminded us that the Piarist mission is to work for children and young people, but, above all, it is to create Pious Schools, to create a well-known, missionary and sustainable Piarist entity and community to call upon others, and for this we have to develop our identity, to inform about who we are and what we do, and to call forth.

It is a challenge for all of us, especially for the Order and the Fraternity, who are the heart and driving-force of Itaka-Escolapios, and it is also a road to walk with those in charge of the projects and work taken on, with the professionals and volunteers who undertake them, with those who participate in the actions carried out, with the families; with nearby entities, and with the environment.

At our last Advisory Council, we described Itaka-Escolapios like a Swiss Army Knife or a smart phone, full of possibilities if we get to know them and make the best use of them. In the coming years, it will be important to take greater advantage of the resources we have within our Network.

It is a challenge for those in charge of the Network and for the various Itaka-Escolapios teams to establish with greater strength this training, the information of what is being done, the communication in order to develop our identity, our capacity to call upon others, and our Piarist mission.

It is also a task for professionals, volunteers, partners, children, and young people, and those who participate, because it is a way for them to get to know us, to value us, and to get more involved every day.

It is necessary to make ourselves known in the ecclesial, civil, public, and private bodies, in the media, in the surroundings, because that provides strength for the mission, encouragement for those who make it possible, resources for sustainability, and greater significance in the Piarist presence.

For this objective of making ourselves better known, it is necessary to take certain options, to take specific steps... because we have to make ourselves feel more and more prominent and co-responsible. It is here we find our second challenge.

2. To be more prominent, because we are all Itaka-Escolapios

If one does not know, one cannot feel part of it. This co-responsibility cannot be achieved with words and training alone. It is necessary to make some choices, to take steps. Some of them we are already taking.

Over the last few years we have become *more international*. We have become present in more countries and locations. We are seeing increased diversity and cross-culturality in all of the Network's teams. We are bringing together people from the four continents in this encounter, and something similar is happening within the various Network teams. This, while complicating communication, broadens the number of prominent players, and gives us a more global, more complementary, more universal, more scholastic, and better-networked vision.

Periodically, the various general teams (where there are *about one hundred people*) meet to create a common mentality, to coordinate actions, and to share the mission. We are made up of religious and non-religious people, men and women (we must take steps here), of different ages, from different Demarcations and Fraternities... and we are creating joint campaigns to raise awareness and education in values, to gather resources, training programs in many areas, to collaborate in volunteer work, to communicate, to call upon new people, to share materials and experiences... and all of this opens us up to a greater Piarist and Catholic mentality.

Information has also been getting better through various meetings (lately, almost all online), with presence in online, in various publications, with participation on social media... and this is bearing interesting fruits in terms of the people who approach us, institutions that collaborate, and the feeling that what we are doing is valued and useful.

Itaka-Escolapios is not a fixed entity with no possibilities for change; rather, it is in constant growth, reinventing itself every day, discovering new paths... and this can only be done by all of us, with the contributions of each one of us, complementing our different visions and needs. *We need everyone* at Itaka-Escolapios, and together we are making it better and ever newer.

We are also advancing in the mindset that *we all help each other* (the Order and the Fraternity, the different countries and projects, etc.), and that it is not just a matter of some countries helping others with money and sending people: we must overcome patronage and victimization, so that we can feel that we are family who are building a better humanity together. It would do no harm to remember the parable of St. Paul with the organs of the body, and to stop feeling greater or lesser, and to unite ourselves in building, together and for all the Pious Schools, a Piarist mission that collaborates in the creation of a better world. Shared solidarity campaigns are a good example... and a path along which we must walk from all places, growing in what we contribute to the Network,

coming up with new ways to contribute to the common good, overcoming the old mentality that “we come first”.

We all contribute and can share much more: we can contribute money, the means to obtain international aid, people willing to spend a few years in the service of other presences, specific knowledge in various fields, life experiences that raise everyone’s awareness, information that leads to an increased consciousness of the world, the ability to translate documents, welcoming or sending volunteers that transform people and are a magnificent help to the mission, training, ways to be more human, and better siblings...

We must highlight and value the ***financial contribution made by some Provinces and Fraternities*** (and note that they are not the ones with the most resources), who share a good part of their members’ salaries with the Network. And, little by little, others are joining in... It is an admirable gesture, and an extremely valuable resource, especially in these hard times of health, economic, and social crisis, and perhaps also of lack of solidarity.

To take this step of prominence and co-responsibility, we must discover we are Itaka-Escolapios, that it is not an external entity that it is formed by each one of us and each one of the Provinces and Fraternities that participate; that we are an international network where we are all needed, that all the projects and presences are "ours", that we are an active part of the living Pious Schools, that Calasanz and the call of so many children and young people summon us to a universal fraternity that unites us above any difference, and helps us to be better Piarists among Piarists with such great differences.

All this brings a development and a third challenge.

3. To accept new things and to have discernment as a key to participation in the spiritual gift.

Itaka-Escolapios is a complex reality, which simultaneously addresses various elements (a Piarist entity of the Order and the Fraternity, where each one defines what is shared, in an international network, uniting apparently different projects that are mutually enriching, with clear criteria expressed in the Programmatic Charter and the Strategic Plans, with a management that seeks the efficiency and transparency of professionals and volunteers). It is not easy to understand the various functions, the horizons it opens, the questions it raises, the numerous projects it carries out, the new approaches that arise... Itaka-Escolapios is more than an institutionally shared mission platform. It is also to share life, to dream together, to complement each other in our differences, to be a sign of an international fraternity that unites us, to learn to be always on the move, to be

in constant outreach, to favor the Spirit who speaks in many different languages, to always find new paths.

During the 2nd Assembly of the General Fraternity that we have just held, we raised something of this new Itaka-Escolapios development, of its importance for the Fraternity to be mature, of the choice so far of the Fraternity of not having its own projects, of the value it holds for building bridges between the Order and the Fraternity.

In the survey with which we began this presentation, this sentence appeared in the comments: "I perceive Itaka-Escolapios as something parallel to the Order and to my Province." It reminds me of a phrase I have heard several times: "Why do we need Itaka-Escolapios if we already have the Order?" It is interesting to delve into these comments because they show that something new is being born, perhaps something that is uncomfortable, and that we have to situate well.

It is worth remembering that the Order is the ensemble of the religious persons, of its community life, of its own entity, of the projects that it takes on as a Congregation... This is good, it is necessary. If, however, in the Piarist world, we only have the Order, then the Piarist laity will always be in a secondary, dependent place. Or, perhaps, they will be trying to enter and sometimes force an entity that belongs to the religious, both historically, canonically, and in reality, praise God. Because it is good and necessary for the Order to maintain its identity, its sphere of life and mission, its own organization.

The issue is that, when the Fraternity grows in its identity of charismatic integration, when it has a greater entity, how can it develop? Only as an association of the faithful recognized by the Order? Can it have its own entity? Is this advisable? Itaka-Escolapios seeks to respond to this challenge, feeling good as a new shared entity between the Order and the Fraternity, renouncing an independent entity that may distance it from its origin (the Order), collaborating in the Piarist life and mission with shared projects, some of them belonging to the Provinces and others that are born from this platform, solving practical operational issues by holding this entity (running its own accounts, having a voice, being institutionally co-responsible).

And so Itaka-Escolapios is born to promote the Piarist mission jointly between the Order and the Fraternity. It is also a way to walk together, to share more of our lives. At the Fraternity Assembly, we said how there are elements that unite the two Piarist subjects (the Order from the very start, and the Fraternity in its beginnings): the religious persons in the Fraternity, non-religious Piarists in the Order, consignments, joint communities, Piarist ministries, meetings... and also Itaka-Escolapios. It is not a new subject, but a tool to walk together, to collaborate mutually.

We spoke a moment ago about Itaka-Escolapios as a Swiss Army Knife, like a smart phone, of which we take advantage of a few of the possibilities it offers us, and that we do not always sharpen or update to better respond every day.

Today, we have discovered that we must continue to promote the whole range of possibilities and that, in the coming years, we must prioritize the key of participation, in order to give more life to the Order, the Fraternity, and the mission. In previous stages, we have been placed too many times, to our regret, in the category of money-raising “foundations”, when we felt we were very different. In this new stage, we have to place ourselves in the field of participation: participation in the Piarist mission, in the Piarist presences, in the shared plans for the future, in the Piarist strategies, in the overall growth (of the Order, of the Fraternity, and of all other ways of Piarist being).

We believe that this will open a new horizon in Itaka-Escolapios and also in the Pious Schools. It will enable a stronger and better Order, as well as a Fraternity that is more aware of the vocation to which it is being called. It will offer new actions in the mission, as they have already been outlined for some years: new shared foundations with the sending of religious and non-religious persons, joint communities where religious and non-religious persons live together and fully develop their specific vocations, Piarist ministries that multiply the Piarist possibilities, Piarist presences entrusted jointly to the Fraternity, and much more, because Itaka-Escolapios lives up to its name of finding new paths.

The fruits of these years of Itaka-Escolapios are numerous. We have a brief report of the places where we are present and the road we have traveled in the documentation. It is good to be familiar with this in order to be aware of the many steps we have taken, to resume our journey with renewed strength, and to continue to be open to the calls we are discovering for the future. The better our Network is situated in the “organizational chart” of the Province and also in the life of the Fraternity, the sooner the fruits will soon be seen.

Increasingly positioning ourselves in the key of participation leads us to the next challenge.

4. To work for the growth of the Order and of the Fraternity

We wish to prioritize the growth of the Piarist subject for the next six years in the Strategic Plan, because it is the agent of the Piarist mission and the source of our educational and pastoral work. The more and better Piarists we are, the greater our missionary action, the greater the Piarist contribution to society and to the Church.

Perhaps the greatest discovery, which has always been present and is now much clearer, is that the main mission is the call to be a Piarist. The world, the Church, the Pious Schools, and the Piarist mission needs Piarists. It is a key task to create the educational and pastoral conditions, with significant and meaningful experiences and specific actions, so that a religious vocation may be born. Its accompaniment at all stages is, too. The

specific vocational ministry and the training of religious persons is the main Piarist mission, and, therefore, it is also the mission of Itaka-Escolapios

In the Piarist subject, we want to work for the growth of the Order, in all senses. In numbers, because the harvest is great, in preparation, in identity, in the keys to the life of the Order, and in all that we can collaborate. It will be necessary to develop the value of Piarist religious and priestly life, in the promotion of vocational and formative culture in all areas, in specific vocational pastoral initiatives, in educational activities, in life experiences, and in the model of Piarist presence.

The educational and pastoral action in all our projects, the Calasanz Movement, the promotion of volunteer work, the training of educators and pastoral agents, awareness raising and other Piarist actions must be oriented from a vocational culture so that each person may find their place in the world, the vocation to which the Lord calls them, the path where they will be happier, and will further contribute to the world. In all these processes, the call to the Fraternity and to the other ways of being Piarist cannot be absent. Promoting the birth and growth of the Fraternity is a Piarist priority and, therefore, also a mission of Itaka-Escolapios.

As long as the Order and the Fraternity are strong and work together, it will be easier to call upon others, to accompany, to form and to give consistency to other elements of the Piarist subject: the Piarist Christian Community and the teams of presence with their project, the teams of shared mission, the very diverse collaborators (educators, professionals, volunteers, benefactors, etc.), the participants in the Piarist projects, as well as the more daring steps of non-religious Piarists, assignments to other presences and countries, personal and community entrustments, Piarist ministries, joint communities, the consolidation of Itaka-Escolapios, etc.

Our priority towards the strengthening of the Piarist subject has the mission at its core. Herein lies another challenge for the coming years.

5. To increase the number of areas, projects and amount of ongoing work shared across our Network.

The ultimate goal is always the mission: to create a better world, to collaborate in bringing about the Kingdom of God. Our Piarist style leads us to do this through transforming Christian education, with a preference for the most needy, and for children and young people.

We are working on it, and we want to continue improving our results, efficiency, and capacity to transform people and environments. The global situation of this health crisis

and the other difficulties it entails requires us to operate more and more efficiently in terms of the use of resources and the improvement of results.

And, especially, we seek to advance in clarity in the way we share our mission within the Network. We wish for everyone to feel comfortable, both the Order and Province as well as the Fraternity and those who participate in other ways. We must move forward in the sharing of criteria, operation, co-responsibility, and results.

We believe that we have come a long way and are taking many steps forward. Now, we want to progress with more clarity in our approaches, placing the principles of the Programmatic Charter at the basis of our being and doing, with more joint teams and accompaniment.

This means moving forward in the mission that we are already sharing and also in the promotion of the Piarist subject, of religious and non-religious persons, of the vocational and formative culture of all the keys of life of the Order, in its training in the key of the shared mission, and in the importance of the Fraternity.

Everything that is transforming educational work, pastoral work, and social actions will be our mission as the Itaka-Escolapios Network, and, even more so if we do it together as the Order and the Fraternity in Itaka-Escolapios.

We are ready and willing to move forward, finding and walking new paths.

Open dialogue