We offer a material intended for reflection in our communities, in the Order and in the Piarist Fraternities. It is not a material for a celebration, but for formation. We invite everyone to reflect on and to pray for the missionary spirit in the Pious Schools.

The material is long, because we wanted to respect the full text of some of the valuable testimonies of our missionary brethren. Each community is free to organize this material as it seems most appropriate to them. God bless our missionary work.
INTRODUCTION.

On April 2, we commemorate the decision of Calasanz to send the eight first Piarist missionaries to the land of Moravia. Nikolsburg was the first Piarist foundation outside of Italy, and in memory of this foundation, promoted in 1631 by Saint Joseph Calasanz, we celebrate each year the “Piarist Missions’ Day”.

In this Calasanctian Jubilee Year, let us ask the Lord for the gift of the growth of missionary spirit in the whole of the Pious Schools.

Our missionary Piarist option, as our General Chapters put it, must be understood in a double sense: on the one hand, Demarcations must go ahead, developing their own reality in the countries where we are already present, always with the intention that our educational charism continue to serve children and youth, with the help of new platforms of mission; and on the other hand, the Order must embrace the call to increase its missionary spirit in new countries or in those in which we have been for a long time but which are still a priority missionary need, like Japan. Not only can we not forget the mission “ad gentes”, but we must be aware that Calasanz always believed in it and the Church continues to call us with strength to be missionaries in those contexts in which faith in Jesus needs to be announced for the first time.

It is good for us to read a significant text of Our Holy Father, in a letter that he wrote to Cardinal Dietrichstein, of Nikolsburg. As we all know, in the time of Calasanz “the missionary” was understood, among other things, as a work of evangelizing to “convert the heretics” of some European countries. Calasanz says: “The letter which, I believe, Your Eminence has written to the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide seems the work of the Holy Spirit, because in the mind of some superiors a certain aversion to our Institute has infiltrated, and it has been heard that sending our people to foreign countries is not well seen by all because we are so few in number and we do not have subjects prepared like other Religions. I will yield before most sane reason and words, but as cooperators of the divine will and power, provided we be not introducing us in such functions by ourselves, I expect that God will give us the necessary forces. I am willing more than ever to continue the enterprise started, and I am sure that the furious impetuses of hell, which fears to suffer great loss because the presence of our poor family in those and other countries, shall not prevail to overwhelm us. Be sure Your Eminence that I will not stop doing what I can to serve you, pleading [to take into account] that we grow slowly, as happens with natural plants; if subjects of the country appeared, it would be easier and much faster, finding great difficulty because of the remoteness of the trip and the difference in language. However, we will not fall behind; conversely, I hope to send more people soon, among whom I would very much like to be myself, so that I could personally show my affection at the service of Your Eminence, and for the good of your subjects. May God grant you a long and

1 Pope Francis, “Evangelii Gaudium” n. 20: “We all are called to this missionary going forth”.

AÑO JUBILAR CALASANCIÓ · 3
happy life and revering you, I humbly commend me to your favor”²

In another letter to the same Cardinal Dietrichstein, of Nikolsburg, Calasanz writes thus: “Eminence, give encouragement and heat with your high authority to those imperfect workers so that they can, with their example, carry forward the work and also call many others to work in this new vineyard”.

This remains our challenge today, in this moment of new expansion: to live fully our vocation to be able to summon others to live it. Calasanz has perfect consciousness that we will go forward only if, with the example of a vocation lived intensely and authentically, others feel called to give their life to the Piarist mission. The relationship between mission, example of life and vocational call is clear in our Holy Founder. May this relationship enlighten and orient our prayer on this day, April 2, 2017, Day of the Piarist Missions in the Calasanctian Jubilee Year.

Reflection on the missionary character of the Pious Schools.

Anyone with a cursory knowledge of the history of the Pious schools, might think that the “missionary vocation” of the Order woke up in the middle of the 20th century, with our foundations in Japan and Senegal, in these “lands of mission”. Nothing is farther from the truth. The Pious Schools are missionary from the time and by the will of Calasanz.

Let us go back to that time. In 1622, Pope Gregorio XV founded the Congregation of Propaganda Fide with the mission of spreading Catholicism and the regulation of Ecclesiastical affairs in non-Catholic countries. The first missionary martyr was Saint Fidel of Sigmaringen, murdered in the canton of Grisons, Switzerland, that same year 1622, for preaching the Catholic faith. At the request of Cardinal Francis Dietrichstein, Calasanz sent a group of missionaries to Nikolsburg in 1631. And in a letter from the cardinal to Calasanz, dated March 3, 1633, he explains the reason for the importance of the Piarist presence in his city: because when the adults are converted to the Catholic faith, sometimes they leave it, because they have not it well rooted, while “those who from tender years are watered with the dew of the true religion, as adults will be as an aged oak, motionless to shocks of any storm of diabolical attacks”. Piarists invented a new type of mission, completely new in the history of the Church: evangelization ad gentes through the school. Dietrichstein wanted the Piarists in his territories to convert heretics, and it was the same motivation Count De Magnis had when he invited them to Straznice, or Countess Pállfy when she brought them to Prievidza. When Piarists reached this city, today in Slovakia, there were very few Catholics; 23 years later there were no Protestants: all had been converted to Catholicism by the work of the Piarists. When Colonel Collalto “manu militare” introduced the Piarists in Brezno (today Slovakia), there was not a single Catholic in the city, and he brought them precisely there so that they would be devoted to convert to Catholicism the population, with the help, inter alia, of the school. And there they worked, and suffered, a lot.

But in Germania (today Czech Republic) Piarists were dedicated not only to the school: there were some especially gifted and with such a vocation that they devoted virtually all of their time to the mission: the pastors of the towns invited them, and with the help of talks and confessions, they achieved many conversions of adults. Each year they used to send reports to Propaganda Fide on the number of converts: sometimes hundreds, sometimes thousands.

When the King of Poland invited the Piarist for the first time, in 1640, it was not to open a school in Warsaw (as they did afterwards), but to go to a region of the Northwest, Pomerania, which he had just inherited, and which was Lutheran, in order to work there for the conversion of heretics. And it was there that Fr. Casani went, but because of the climate, or the language, or diseases... he failed in his mission,
the only time in his life, and he returned to Straznice. In 1642, pushed by the 30 Years War, the Piarists were looking for refuge in Poland, and on this occasion the King offered them the school in the capital, but at the same time Prince Lubomirski offered on his own another foundation: Podolinec, in Szepes County, which belonged to Hungary (today Slovakia) but was temporarily administered by Poland. And he sent them out there to convert the heretics of the County, who composed of the population. And it was there that we lost in our missionary Fr. Francis Hanák, our own martyr, in the incident of Olas.

When difficult moments reached the Pious Schools, in times of Pietrasanta and Cherubini, and Pope Innocent X decided to reduce the Pious Schools, multiple letters of King Ladislaw, the Emperor of Austria, the nobility and the episcopate of those lands, and even Propaganda Fide, were sent to the Pope in favor of the Piarists, and they interceded for them not because the children would lose their school, but because the missionary task of conversion of heretics would be interrupted, for great joy of the enemies of the true faith.

All this may sound us a little strange today, but to understand it in its proper sense, we have to move to the time of Calasanz. We must remember that at the end of the Crown of Twelve Stars, he asked to say a Salve “for the conversion of heretics”. The mission concept has evolved a lot until today: today we pray that Salve “for the evangelization of peoples”. Today the mission is more a matter of presence and witness than that of conversions. And we have changed the word “heretics” for “separated brethren”.

Slowly, Central Europe was finding its religious balance after the wars of religion, and the activity of the Piarists was focusing purely on the school. But our schools were always open to all denominations: when in 1904 Fr. General Mistrangelo and Fr. Tomas Wiñas visited our school in Prague, they realized that the majority of the students were Jewish. The missionary dream is evolving, without dying at all. Some more recent Piarists were missionaries in the modern sense: Fr. Federico Cao, of Sardinia, was appointed Apostolic Vicar of a region of the current Myanmar in 1830, sent as a missionary by Propaganda Fide. Fr. Pompilio Vasca was a missionary of desire: he wrote from Campi Salentina several letters to Fr. General Mistrangelo between 1901 and 1906 begging him to send him as a missionary to Africa.

Today the Order has rediscovered its missionary character (proper not only to every religious institution, but to every follower of Jesus), and tries to live it according to the spirit of our time. But we are not experiencing anything new: we are simply recovering the intuition of the first generations of Piarists, and adapting it to the day of today and of tomorrow.

Fr. José Pascual Burgués, Historian of the Order.
We listen to the testimony of some of our brothers and sisters.

We present a small selection of “missionary testimonials” by some Piarists (religious and laity). We have received more, but it is impossible to publish them all. We hope that their reading will help us to understand what we live in this present time of the Pious Schools.

More than 50 years ago the Pious Schools sent me to this land of the Far East, Japan. If we now feel that it is a different country, then it was something never seen or heard of. The study of the Japanese I began immediately and soon I got used to remembering that what I had learned the previous day was part of the lesson of the day that was beginning. The first impressions of the everyday life were arriving daily on my inside. Everything was different, but one thing was common among us Piarists: our mission had been provoked by fidelity to a raw and rough obedience of the Pious Schools, but it eventually brought joy and satisfaction, and although we were alone and away, we felt we were followers of the one who had founded the first schools 400 years before at the service of poor children, of Joseph of Calasanz.

With the growth and expansion of the Order in Asia, we feel closer to the rest, and contact with others at international meetings of formation makes me feel a big and active Pious School. Big, I say, because it is opening up to other Nations, and it is active because it makes us think that our ministry is at the service of the needs of the Church, and one among them is the education of children and young people. This is the great horizon that the missionary experience has opened to my eyes: serving and supporting also in the shortage of Ministers in the local churches. This is an aspect that the Pious Schools must take into account in the formation of the new young Piarist.

Fr. Andrés Domeño

I have already been for four years in Indonesia. We were two when we came from Madrid and now we are already 32 in the two communities of Indonesia, beside the other 20 (Indonesians and Timorese) who are in formation in the Philippines and 5 who are in Spain. I believe that the Lord has gone ahead, providing us the way. Maybe He had more interest than we have in our presence in these lands. I think that seeing so many poor children and youth, mostly from the island of Timor, with a disastrous state of education, God the Father and Calasanz are pulling the strings so that we Piarists try to give an answer.
I have come here sent by the Order, as expression and part of this family, not in my personal capacity or because I feel a special missionary vocation: my missionary vocation was born the day when Fr. General asked me about my willingness to come to start this mission. I still think that Piarist mission is everywhere, and I do not feel now more a missionary than before, when I worked in Spain.

I have tried to love Indonesians, to understand them and to become one with them, taking into account their culture and mentality, learning their language, striving to put aside my way of thinking to open me to another way of understanding life, the time, priorities... For me, it has been a key to choose to trust in people, the candidates, the new challenges, despite not understanding many times how things were running (an adventure!).

I felt very welcomed by the local people and enriched by their simplicity, humanity, generosity, humility, joy, sense of community, spirituality, respect... values that they live and spread.

I was surprised by the attraction that our charism awakes in young people. Our pastoral on vocation consists mainly in opening our door and welcoming those who by their own initiative call to sign up, and start with them a path of discernment and formation. A few months after my arrival, when I didn’t even understand the language and was alone at home, three young people came to me to ask about our vocation and to sign up. Understanding the situation and seeing how to react, cost me a good time. “Just like” when I worked in the pastoral for vocations in Spain. I began to realize that Jesus was inviting us as an Order to “cast the nets to the right” (look at the map of the world and you will see where this area of Asia is; “timur” means also “East”).

I’m happy and grateful for what I have lived in these four years. Living now in community with Indonesian youth who want to live the Piarist vocation, is a great gift for me. Seeing their enthusiasm, generosity and faith, my vocation is rejuvenated. We face the challenge of forming well these first Piarist Indonesian and East Timorese generations: they are those who will carry forward here the Piarist mission. I believe that the Father is really blessing us.

Fr. Víctor Gil

I am a Piarist missionary in the new foundation of Kinshasa. I have already been here for two years, enjoying this unique experience of being a missionary.

My strongest discovery in relation to the Piarist vocation is that the charism of Ca-
lasanz precedes the missionaries in the mission. You cannot explain otherwise the attraction, love to Calasanz and to the Pious Schools that I find in children, youth and adults in this land. Not knowing us before, kids come to our house, have a space there to play, to rest and to study; not knowing yet the Pious Schools, many young people commit their lives, their only life, to be Piarists; without knowing much what it is all about, many adults engage as Piarist laity.

The charism is not owned by the Order. We have a responsibility to share with everyone the gift that God made in the Church with the person of Saint Joseph Calasanz.

My reflection on the missionary challenge in the Pious Schools takes root in the n. 1 of our Constitutions. The Pious Schools today need the same “lucky daring”, the same “unique patience” of Calasanz to open new paths, to make what Calasanz would make. The real challenge is not in the means, the real challenge lies in the heart and in the soul. The Pious Schools need people who want to really give their life, no excuses.

I am impressed by the experience of the street children of Kinshasa who have become the project Saint Dorothy. It all started with our desire to understand the complex phenomena of “child sorcerers” in Kinshasa. We asked a girl to go to the street with a recorder to make two simple questions to the children: your name and your dream. The result surprised us; we realized that every child had a name, a current reality made of pain, but within these ashes there was a fire, a hope, a dream. There was only one thing missing: someone to build a bridge between the reality of these children and their dreams. We realized that this someone was us. We started in a simple way sharing with them the scarce resources of the community that was being born with the children, offering them a dish of rice a week. Other Piarists learned of the adventure and joined their efforts; a Piarist pledged to give his pocket money to these children and we went from one dish of rice every week to a lunch four times each week; Fr Pierre Diatta supported modestly, Fr. General during a visit to Congo bought them sandals... Instead of the sad faces of the beginning we saw appearing beautiful, full of life faces. Calasanz is giving life to these children.

I would like to invite all the Piarists to live the mission as something intimately rooted in our being. We all are missionaries by vocation and some of us are asked to leave their land, to abandon acquaintances, relatives and friends to go to other lands. Let’s not forget ever to pray, support, demonstrate our affection and closeness to those who on behalf of the Order open new paths.

Fr. Jean de Dieu Tagne

I think it was in 1972 when the then Fr. General, Laureano Suárez, invited to volun-
teer to work where required. I was very happy and active in our school in Logroño. But I replied to the invitation offering me to go anywhere where my presence was needed. I do not regret having made this offer. What ensued has been 30 years in Argentina, 11 in the India and now 2 in the Philippines.

I don’t feel that my story has been especially commendable. I have not done anything special but working in our houses, studying, teaching and carrying out the responsibilities that have been entrusted to me at different times. Nothing memorable as to write a book or record it in golden letters. Any Piarist can do the same. Perhaps something remembered for a while and then forgotten with the passage of time.

But if volunteering to leave my country and go to other places has not been important for history, it has been very important for me. Humanly speaking, it has opened my horizons and has taught me to value people, customs and traditions. Also, to be critical in some respects. Precisely because the horizon became broader.

Spiritually, going forth has been an engine that has made me to be in a constant inner dynamism, not to be content with spiritual routine. It has made me value the work we do in our schools and houses of formation. It makes me be demanding, even now, and not to rest lazily in the past.

Reviewing my personal story something that I had already almost completely forgotten comes to me. Although leaving for other countries became a reality when I already was a priest, illusions, dreams, fantasies or call them as you will, come from well before. During my training as a seminarian, I often thought of working in other countries, including, I remember, my collaboration with some little magazine that some seminarians of Peru made.

And from this personal experience I think it is important that our aspirants, novices and juniors dream and look for something that involves going forth, becoming unstable, restless... We must be dreamers, but with our feet well positioned on the ground and dream big. With our feet well positioned on the ground.

And then let God with his goodness and Providence guide and move us wherever we are needed. Not where we like it or where we want, but where we are needed.

A balance wisely handled by the Lord among the rooting (our feet on the ground) and uprooting (availability to where we are needed).

Fr. Antonio Marco

This invitation to share my experience as a “Piarist missionary” is an opportunity to make a break, look back and see the path. In that way, there have been several
“landmarks, milestones”\(^3\) that helped me: the experience of others that have taken the step to be missionaries, prayer, community and the persons to whom that mission is directed.

Certainly, when there are people who you love and who give important steps toward a greater commitment and involvement, the question is inevitable: and me, why not? Here I could list quite a few people who gave that step: Piarists, men and women companions of group and of community, and friends. Their decision made me think about for what reasons they were able to say yes to a risky proposition: they changed their life project, said goodbye to their securities (material and affective) and embarked on an adventure into the unknown. What power does overcome fears, uncertainties and insecurities?

When one day I got my proposal I was lucky not to receive it alone. The first support was to make this discernment in couple. Second was the security of knowing that we were sent by others, by the Fraternity and the Order. Knowing that we were not alone in the decision (whether yes or no) is a great gift (a “poisoned gift”, as Andreu Trilla would say). Not only that, but also being chosen by many people who rely on us to carry the Piarist mission of evangelizing by educating elsewhere, made us feel loved, accompanied, confident and grateful. The community that sends is a great support. Just like the community that welcomes. We were lucky, in Venezuela and in Vitoria, to deeply enjoy the community with which we lived. We were accompanied in prayer, in the doubts and the certainties that work, the mission generate. Shared and then contrasted decisions are more accurate than those that we can do alone. Sharing in community life, prayer and mission is a great experience of personal growth, because it involves renouncing, putting yourself in the place of the other person, recognizing the miseries and the wealth of each and every one, grieving with the losses and disappointments; and being pleased with the progress and community and personal discoveries. Learning how to live in community is the first course that we must study as missionaries. Because we know that we don’t do the mission alone. And because we are aware that we must help putting all our potential at the service of the mission, of the common project, in order to be more significant and meaningful, more effective, more cooperators of the Truth.

Another milestone that has helped me (us) in this missionary way has been prayer, the relationship with God. This relationship has been enriched because it has drunk from many sources: daily community prayer, Eucharist, prayer with the children, in meetings, in the reading of the Gospel, with theological study... Living in a community with religious Piarists brings the good habits of daily prayer and weekly routines; then when they are missing, we live them as losses. We had been for three years in Venezuela, in the community of Lomas where we shared every day the Morning Prayer. When we returned to Bilbao we felt we needed that routine, and we ended

\(^3\) Landmarks, milestones, are signs put by others who have made the way and indicate the direction we need to follow to get to the top.
up buying a booklet of Morning Prayer to pray as a couple. But including in our life as a couple this acquired habit, was not as easy as we thought. It is possible that we didn’t look for the encounter with God with the same intensity that when we were (are) in “land of mission”. Because when your affective supports, your assurances and certainties are not near, when you have a big responsibility in front of you, I at least, at times, have been overwhelmed by the insecurity of not doing well, of not fulfilling expectations, of not responding well to what the mission was asking of me (us), and I’ve come to feel alone, very lonely. It is in those moments when God’s presence is most evident, it is then when I have better sensed his company and I have felt understood in his gaze and protected by his embrace and his word. In those moments, an in-depth look at the cross of Jesus is a painful and liberating experience. Much more if this look is accompanied by the closeness of the people to whom our mission is directed and the community that loves us and accompanies us. That double (triple) look is what during these years has given me strength to start each day the mission with renewed enthusiasm.

And finally, the people to whom our mission is directed. There where God makes himself present, in the losses and in the small-big miracles that the fruits of our mission and the Spirit are giving. Children, young people, families, teachers and monitors in Venezuela and in Vitoria have also helped me to straighten my way in the mission. Because they have been a mirror of my attitudes and intentions (not always clear) that I was showing. And over time, I’ve realized that I’ve grown in patience, humility, austerity and in mercy. Although obviously I still need much, very much, to move forward. I think that the image that the Order provides for this Jubilee Year reflects very well the attitude with which I am most identified today and also the reference to strive every day for hearing in my heart what children want to tell me, trying to see through their eyes the reality and to understand what God wants to transmit me (us) through their words.

I think that the missionary challenge of the Pious Schools is out there: to educate, to evangelize and to transform through the eyes of children that we accompany. But, in addition, we should share more those sights, project together in community, in the Fraternity and in the Order. Because the shared projects make the dreams true, give them continuity and stability. And to make that possible what is needed is a deep and rich community life where we can meet and help each other to develop our full potential in the service of that common dream.

Eva Rodriguez, Piarist Laywoman with definitive option, Emmaus Province.

I am Fr. Fernando Negro, Piarist for 43 years, and priest for 35. I start defining myself as “a happy Piarist”, since it is in the Pious Schools where I found and find the absolute sense of my life, connected with the dream that God has had, has, and will have for my existence.
Briefly I tell you that I come from a large family of 11 brothers, of which three are Piarist religious priests; I am the youngest of the trio, although in the total family list I am seventh.

In the context of the PIARIST MISSIONS DAY, and of the CALASANCTIAN JUBILEE YEAR, I share with simplicity some aspects of my Piarist mission experience. I will start by thanking the One who called me and counted on me for something so beautiful, as are the mission and the expansion of the Piarist Order. Just because He wanted to and I deemed well to do it so. That’s all!

In 1987 Christmas Day, we left with destination to Cameroon, three half lost Piarists, to establish the roots of the Pious Schools in a new and until then unknown place. It was a hard but passionate and creative starting. We had within us the missionary passion and the desire to share with young people the beauty of vocation. I was 32 years old and 6 of priesthood, I had been working in Zaragoza and Brooklyn, NY (1986-1987).

Today, Cameroon is a thriving Piarist reality, as the tree of mustard that is growing and which offers its branches so the birds make their nests.

After 16 “Cameroonian” years I returned to Spain, to Madrid, to be Master of novices; three of those novices are priests today, two of them are Piarists religious. After a year, my superiors sent me to India, where I was for three and a half years, mainly dedicated to the formation, in our Juniorate of Bangalore, in the State of Karnataka, in the South of India.

Since May 2008, I am here in the United States, where I have helped in training, as well as in the ministry of our presence in New York; I did studies of spirituality and spiritual direction with the Jesuits at Fordham University, and now I serve on the grazing of this province of the USA and Puerto Rico, which was born in June of 2011.

Therefore, I have lived on four continents, in 30 years of missionary life. I am used to the internationality of our communities and to the enculturation of our Piarist life and Ministry; I have experienced disease, I have learned the challenge of newness, expanding the awnings of my heart’s tent, and I especially I’ve enjoyed - and I enjoy - the passion of our Piarist, simple, generous, daring and challenging lifestyle.

I believe that the challenge of the Piarist missionary expansion will not end, because it is not something purely “circumstantial”. On the contrary, it must be something permanent, as it is part of our founding DNA, since 400 years ago, when Saint Joseph Calasanz founded the Pious Schools in the Rome of the Renaissance.

Therefore we cannot afford mediocrity or the attitude of someone who says to himself: “now, it’s already enough”. There are always new horizons to new realities, to new contexts of poverty, at the service of children and youth.
A Piarist should think, for example, of the fact that 1 out of every 3 children living outside their country, are refugees. If there are 31 million children living outside their country, so in the world, about 11 million are refugees. We ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten us and guide us so that, as he did with our Holy Founder, Saint Joseph Calasanz, we put to work the creativity of the educational charity, of which Saint JoU Paul II spoke to us. Let us read the signs of our time, as our good Pope Francis urges us.

Although sometimes the Piarist missionary feels the vertigo of the uprooting, his passion for Christ and from Christ assures him that He will never leave him. I remember that a year after my arrival to Cameroon, I began teaching full-time in our elementary school of Futru-Nkwen, Bamenda. I had 82 students in my class, one of them is today a Piarist, the Master of novices in Cameroon. Simple Christians, some priests, criticized me, because they did not understand that “the priestly dignity” was not diminished with that work among children.

There was an uproar of criticism in the air, up to as our good Shepherd, Father Paul Verdzekov (he disliked pompous titles), Archbishop of Bamenda, came to our house in his old Volkswagen, to make sure that we were well focused, and that he had brought us to his diocese, precisely to do what we were doing. One day he told me: “Fernando, go on, you Piarists are doing a quiet revolution. Thank you very much.”

The Piarist missionary, connected with the love of Christ and for Christ, feels and lives the mission as a way of holiness. Holiness that spreads due to the Holy Spirit. For example, I remember what happened in Bangalore, when I went to baptize a child to a parish. At the end of the ceremony, an adult Hindu, called Manikam, came to greet me, at the door of the Church. He told me: “Father, during the celebration, I have felt the voice of Jesus who asked me when I was going to be baptized”. I spontaneously said that I should baptize him. Then we went to the home of the parents of the girl and he introduced me to his spouse and her daughter. Manikam explained to me how his house was filled with idols and amulets, as he was a convinced Hindu, but he wanted to become Christian. I invited him to contact a priest in the State of Tamil Nadu, where he lives. I urged him that, once prepared, he could call me, to proceed with the baptism.

When three months were lacking for my final departure of India, Manikam called me and told me that he was ready and he wanted me to baptize him, before my departure. As a result, we had a beautiful ceremony, very intimate, in a parish run by a Salesian friend priest in Bangalore. That day Manikam received Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, and the blessing of his marriage, since his spouse was already Catholic.

Proselytism is prohibited in India. Therefore, to avoid problems, he wrote a beautiful letter that he gave to the police, in which he said: “I, Manikam, freely, without
being forced or constrained by external or internal reasons, for the love that I have to Jesus Christ, I wish to follow him with all my heart and embrace him through baptism.” A beauty. By the way, Manikam adopted that day the Christian name of MARK, because of its grammatical proximity to Manikam.

I don’t want to extend me more, but I am writing to you who read these lines, to tell you that no one can be missionary if he has not stuck the dagger of a passion of love for Jesus Christ. The Piarist missionary knows very well that he is going to give his life, even to lose it, guided by the trust that it is worthwhile, that it makes sense diminishing so that He increases in the Church and in the world.

It is a beauty to see how the Piarist charism is taking universal size, is rooted and develops, there where there is a child or young person not being educated or evangelized. And this is a universal call to all Piarists for help, as the motto of the next Synod on youth says, to form them in faith, helping them to discover the sense of life, following in the footsteps of the Beloved.

I end with the huge challenge that Pope Francis left us recorded in the Letter that, dated November 27, 2016, he directed to the Pious Schools: “Christian education, especially among the poorest and where the Good News has little space or marginally touches life, is a privileged means for evangelization. In an educative charism as yours is perceived enormous potential, much of which is even undiscovered.”

Fr. Fernando Negro

I remember that while I was at home during Holidays, one of the times when I was speaking with my mother about various topics, she said to me: “What I most appreciate in life, the good that I most value is faith. It is the greatest thing that I have had and I have”. That moment and those words were strongly engraved in me. She had a deep religiosity and a sincere piety. The devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was one of its pillars. This confession of my mother, which has done me a huge good, has led me to remember many times the words of Jesus in the Gospel: “I praise you, Lord of heaven and Earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to the small ones.” (Mt 11, 25)

I think that this faith she had is also present in my deepest roots. Through my life with its ups and downs I think modestly that I can say with Paul: “I even consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him.” (Phil. 3, 8-9) Who has discovered Jesus Christ in his life, cannot fail to announce him to others. And
this having trust not so much in oneself but in the saving power of grace and of the gift of the Holy Spirit who acts in the hearts.

Going back over my life, I see myself somehow reflected in what was also the experience of the Apostles who accompanied Jesus: following him, they left everything, unconditionally, but soon they showed little Evangelical attitudes; they were fighting with each other for power, not just to understand the words and signs of Jesus, but kept on following him. It was a process of learning and purification. Especially critical were the moments of the cross and the resurrection. The coming of the Holy Spirit strengthened their hearts, opened their minds and so they began the task of announcing to the people the Good News of the Gospel.

I know and I have studied our faith, what it means and what it asks from us, but there are things that I have discovered only through life. There is a deepening in faith and in the encounter with the Lord, and this process lasts a lifetime. Within my personal process, I understand in an increasingly more vital way the attitude of the Saints who were urged by the preaching of the Gospel and put it into practice with passion. They were aware of the great deficiency posed for people, for his brothers, by the unknowing of the salvation that is given to us in Jesus, the love and the mercy of God that are revealed in his life, in his acts and words. Faith is reached by announcing, you must communicate it. And for that we, his disciples, are responsible

I would like to reflect some thoughts that I would highlight on my Ministry in a few brief points:

» My pastoral experiences have made me enter more thoroughly in the words of Paul: **Not he who plants or he who waters, but God is the one who gives growth.** I trust less myself, and give more value to the intercession: that of Jesus himself (as we confess in the penitential rite of the Mass), the intercession of others, and mine, that I join to that of the Church.

» At the same time having lived and visited different countries has taught me the importance, first, of loving those whom I approach and with whom I live; second, to be attentive to their life, to what they convey with gestures and words, to enter into dialogue with them, to see their deeper wishes and needs, and to find the best way to make present for them the life of Jesus and to give them a message of hope.

» And next to it, the experience of having been and being evangelized by so many people and believers whom I met along the way and with many of whom I have shared and I share my faith. How many times their faith has sustained me, has given me strength and courage.

» St. Paul writes in his letters that in the same way that Peter was called to evangelize Jews, he was called to proclaim the Gospel to the gentiles.
For my part, I can say that I felt called to announce the Good News to the children and young people, especially the poor, and to do so following the charism of Calasanz, through the paths that the Order has shown me and asked me to follow. At this time, in a task more internal than external, helping the birth and growth of the Pious Schools in Asia and wherever the Lord leads me. Accompanying my brothers and sharing with them the desire and effort to live thoroughly the Piarist charism, as faithful disciples of Jesus and witnessing the Gospel with my life, offering a message of hope to children and young people.

I deeply thank the Lord for the love that He shows me daily, the gift of the vocation to which He has called me. I ask him forgiveness for my faults and the poorness of my following, and I hope his grace to keep being a disciple and a witness of the Gospel until the end.

Fr. Miguel Artola

Being a missionary was one of those dreams that were born in my imagination in religious classes when they spoke about Piarists who had devoted their life to children in places as far away as Brazil, Bolivia, Venezuela... I remember the first Caminhada which we held in Pamplona and I’ll never forget the first images that they showed us of Brazil on the premises of Mikel Gurea and our monitor showed us slides in the reality of the favelas, faces of children, who I felt were like me.

So every year, Caminhada after Caminhada, I was thrilled every time with that day, preparations, the solidarity month activities, and places we knew in the campaigns and, already in Bidean, seeing that some monitors decided to go to Brazil and Bolivia for long periods to give their life. There, a dream was growing within me, with great intensity. And it was because of the example, seeing others giving their life, that others told me that there are places in the world where reality should be transformed. And being a little older, life, experience, and the episodes that I have lived, were for me the occasions of becoming more sensitive to the world and to understand, little by little, that God was calling me to give my life to transform it. Yes, it was a dream. A very Piarist dream, that is why I decided to live it in that way, in Calasanz’ style.

I think that all goes together, discovering Jesus, feeling loved by God, seeing that He is calling me through the world. That is my vocation, translated into educating boys and girls in the place where I may have the chance to live.

So now, at Anzaldo, I would not define myself as a missionary, just for being away from home. But I would say that I am a missionary, since I said yes, to live in response to what God asks of me. I’ve known many examples for me, in the Piarist life.
of Pamplona, in the Fraternity of Lurberri, where many people live their missionary dream in their own reality.

Connecting with the beginning, my Piarist dream was born thanks to the Piarist identity that was forging in my way of being, which has helped me discover my great treasure, which is my faith. This Piarist identity is very original, is capable of reaching young people, bringing them closer to Jesus and discovering the world. So I have lived it, and I am very grateful.

That is why I am encouraging all Piarists, religious and lay people, to keep betting on the Calasanz Movement, the accompaniment of the youth. We Piarists are in many parts of the world. My dream is now transformed, it has evolved. I dream of more people, who continue to maintain this missionary work in the world. In their places, discovering that they can give life and multiply it. And who dream of other places in the world where reality also needs to be transformed. I think that we have a challenge, and that challenge is to know how to prepare the way for those coming after us, for those who come loaded with dreams, we must know how to guide them, teach them and of course rely on that novelty they bring, the changes which may arise, will be the living flame of the Piarist mission. We should know how to convene, accompany, encourage and provide space for future generations.

Every day I am in constant personal transformation. Discovering more about the world, people, the ability to express more love toward others, to evolve within me to open myself to the this world that is ours, of all. Approaching Calasanz’ look when I approach the children of Anzaldo, I look at them and I see reality and future.

Idoia Gil, Piarist Fraternity de Lurberri, Anzaldo (Bolivia)

I am a missionary? Perhaps, but probably just as any other “baptized” - I think - that takes seriously his Christian vocation and as any other “consecrated” to God for the “salvation of the world”.

I have never believed that I was in Africa because I had, or have, a “missionary” vocation. “Missionary” as those who are enthusiasts of the “first evangelization”, the salvation of souls, in the places where Jesus and the Gospel are not yet known, or little known.

Certainly, when I was in the Juniorate and received the news of my province the Foundation in Senegal was starting, I was very interested, and I felt even questioned. And so when Father Provincial came, asking for volunteers, I did not hesitate to give my name. Even having the certainty that I would not be chosen, because I was among the weakest in studies in the Juniorate.
But I did not volunteer to “save souls”. This option I had already taken it when I decided to follow Jesus to “evangelize educating”. I think that, apart from a little the wish of going on an adventure, I wanted mostly to be amid “poor children”. Very much in the style of Calasanz. Because, where better than in a poor ambience to welcome and live with poor children!

Of course, in Barcelona, there were poor. In addition, our elder brothers in the neighborhood of “Mina” were much admired by all of us. But at that time we lived intensely the “post Council” time, in the wake of Vatican II and we heard the insistent, even enthusiastic, call of the Church to “go to the boundaries” to testify and bring everywhere the way of understanding life and to commit ourselves to a happier world for everyone. “The boundaries” were there also in Barcelona, but the spirit of adventure was without a doubt in me.

Is it a missionary vocation? Perhaps, but my desire at that time was to make me as useful as possible to the neediest children in the Pious Schools and in the way of the Pious Schools, wherever obedience would send me. And, again, I didn’t believe to have many possibilities to realize one day that dream of youth.

But it didn’t take long for Father Provincial to call me. Father Antonio Sala was organizing an agricultural training centre in M’Lomp and he had to send a technical graduate to lead it. Agriculture, title, language... I do not remember that felt panicked in front of so many challenges. But... I was lucky having time to prepare for the work that I would be sent to do! I always gave thanks to the Lord, of course; and this because, although the technical training received was not very adapted to the agricultural environment of Senegal, I had time for orienting myself for the “mission”, for the “Piarist work”, which was waiting for me.

And this work was especially among the young people of the villages of Ouassouye Department in the South of Senegal, to encourage them to learn and to commit themselves together to develop agriculture in order to find the resources to improve their living conditions, avoiding their emigration...

And then I discovered, because I felt it so strongly, the last part of the sentence with which Calasanz defines our charism: “for life”. In other words: educating, training, giving his own life to children and youth... “for life”, so that they can manage in life, so that they may become able to improve living conditions, that of their own life and that of their environment...

Yes, the work that the community had entrusted me was Piarist one hundred percent. Was it also a missionary one? As all the Piarists, dedicated and committed one hundred percent to the work entrusted to me by the community, I gave testimony of my great love for the people with whom we shared life, especially to the young people with whom I shared the joys and sorrows of rural life, abandoned to itself... And bearing witness of love should definitely be a missionary and evangelizing action!
I lived this experience in community and thanks to the community. Initially there we were five of us. When I arrived, all the other had already been there for a few years in that place, and from them I learned the meaning of dedicating myself personally without reservation to the humanitarian, educational, pastoral work... There were five of us, and each had his own responsibility in the community work: two parishes, the agricultural development centre, the school, the outdoor schools, chapels... Yes, I learned to forget myself, to collaborate with the brothers, to share with them the joys and pains of our Piarist life. This was easy because of the fact that everyone participated more or less in the ‘sector’ of the other. Catechesis and the movements of children and young people was my participation in the Mission of M’Lomp; Antoine was responsible for the training in the maintenance of the motor pumps in the Center; others were at school and came to give courses of geography or mathematics; I was a Professor of physical education and especially of ‘Moral’ at school... And every Sunday we were available to accompany the Christian communities of the villages.

And we learned together to be among the people in a very natural way! As learning the language was also natural, the sick emergency transport service, community help to many people who came to seek support in the night... Yes, I was, with my brothers and without realizing it, experiencing the “compassion” with which Calasanz looked and felt people around him in Rome. Was he there, on an evangelization mission, was he a missionary?

Any Piarist community should be, I would say that by vocation, well integrated in the society of its living environment, and should participate in its joys and sorrows, participate in its social and religious progress. But, nevertheless, it should not put aside its domestic life, from where each one should draw strength and enthusiasm for the entrusted pastoral educational work. For this reason, after some years of life, divided into two groups, we set up our residence in Oussouye. From there, each, usually motorized, was going to his daily work.

Common prayer; sharing in the table in which the life and work of each were the topics of our conversations; programming meetings and weekly revision; retreats; moments of relaxation... All this would give strength and efficiency to our common Piarist task. Because if something or someone must carry the adjective of “missionary”, it must be the community.

Another great concern also appeared a little later: the reception of vocations. It was unthinkable to keep for us alone the great gift of the Piarist vocation that we received. And, in addition, in the place where the community had been established, there were so many needs in the field of our charismatic activity!

We began the novitiate a little hidden from the Bishop, since his brethren in the episcopate of Senegal had decided not to give permission to the clerical Congregations for recruiting vocations for themselves; first, they had to think of vocations...
for the native clergy. But in our parishes we had already given more than one dozen, and seminaries were full of our young people from us. And, you see, I became, in addition to my assigned tasks, master of novices, while another more appropriate was preparing. And yes, the novices did learn with me and with the groups of young people from the Centre to grow vegetables.

I think that it was our love, a double love, that launched us “courageously” - because the ecclesial environment was hostile, and we were very few - to create a native Pious Schools and as developed as possible: love for people, children and youth, for our environment, and our great love for the Pious Schools, of which we had received everything and who taught us to give everything. They are still the Pious Schools, who are missionaries!

During these 40 years in Africa, have I learned anything? And, perhaps, do I still now feel as a missionary?

Am I a missionary because I am in Africa, or because I was sent to Africa? Sometimes I stop to think: and what if the superiors had considered my weakness as a student, and I had been sent simply to Catalonia, would I have lived so fully and so happily my Piarist vocation? Surely, I dare say.

In Catalonia, I spent only two years, before starting the preparation in Agronomy; a year at St. Papoul, in the Centre of children “collected” by the State, and another in Olot, in the school. From these experiences, I remember only one thing, that neither there had I time “for myself”. In case of need, even the ball got me out of my room to join children and even young people in the team of the town or city.

You are not a Piarist for yourself. I understood from my novitiate, that I should be for others, to promote their “educating evangelization”, and this above all with my presence, my support, my sympathy and my affection externally manifested or not. And I know that this is feasible everywhere, wherever the community, obedience as they used to say before, sends you. Yes, in Catalonia surely I would also have been fulfilled as a Piarist.

By this I mean that, if it is in Africa where I am “missionary”, I think that I could also have been it in Catalonia and elsewhere where the Pious Schools had wanted to send me.

Have I also learned the importance of “availability”, the availability for the Order? When I look back, I see that the time “of peasant educator”, my happy first stage in these lands, it was long but also the door for others no less happy, in which I have also been fully realized as Piarist: founder and pastor in Sokone (initiator of projects for youth), long years of responsibility of the demarcation, and now in Abidjan Ivory Coast, working on the strengthening of the presence of the Pious Schools of our African area.
In fact, I have come to understand that I am not a Piarist for myself, I am for the Pious Schools, so that they may be more, and as well as possible, present everywhere, in the service of children and young people of the world. The work of Calasanz, our work, is always actual and necessary. For this reason my availability is always required. Yes, generosity, commitment and availability go together.

No doubt, they are totally missionary attitudes. Calasanz would say that all of us, our work and activity, must be “for the glory of God the benefit of others”. A missionary attitude, isn’t it?

Perhaps something more, something that I have learned and am learning still, and above all on the doorstep of retirement, is the importance of always having the spirit of courage and confidence.

When I look back I realize that courage in my professional and pastoral responsibilities has never failed me. However, I must admit that “sometimes” I have not had much such courage when I was learning to become responsible of the demarcation (here we are always in the process of learning). How many doubts when I had to take some decisions with respect to the vision of “going forth”, to enable our institution to radiate more in the places of our presences and elsewhere!

We can certainly say that we were for many years with few adults in number, while the works were many, and demanding in presence, and the houses of formation to follow them correctly. But despite everything, I say now: we could do something more? I have the feeling that I had not enough courage when we could have given more responsibility to the young brothers. Lack of courage because surely there was in me a certain lack of confidence in their capability and commitment.

I should have had more in mind the fact that each of us lives the vocation in a special way and it is very common to consider the behavior and reactions of others in relation to your own beliefs, abilities and gifts received from the Spirit. This is also in our brothers. And the missionary spirit, if we are missionaries, should lead us to assume the differences and to trust others.

This attitude, totally Calasanctian, should help us to be vigilant and available with courage to the community calls, usually expressed by means of the superior, who aims to make present the Pious Schools everywhere, where the need for “evangelization-education” is felt. That’s a good missionary impulse!

Can I define myself as a missionary? Let us say simply that, despite my large gaps and flaws, I’ve tried, and try, to be a “Piarist” entirely: to think, to pray, to reflect and to act as a Piarist. As simple as that.

Fr. Josep Artigas
PRAYER

Lord Jesus, contemplating the crowds you felt pity of them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, grant us to experience the same feelings you had and that, in doing so, we renew with joy and confidence our missionary commitment and vocation. Grant us the precious gift of being called, day in day out, by the urgency of the mission.

Grant us that our Pious Schools respond, generously, to the hopes of children and young people, especially those most in need. Make us sensitive to the calls of the Church, who needs apostles to proclaim Jesus and accompany the faith of so many people that seek and expect. Give us your strength, so that, from our educational charism, we can always help the evangelizing task of the Christian community.

We pray especially for our brothers who work in more difficult conditions or very far from their places of origin, giving their life for the growth of the Pious Schools. Always accompany them and bless them in their life and vocation.

May our Order, the Piarist Fraternities and all people related to us, always be fraternal spaces for listening your Word and your urgent missionary invitation.

May the intercession of Saint Joseph Calasanz, in union with the protection of Our Lady, Mother of the Church, obtain us the grace of perseverance in faith and in every good work, in holiness and purity of heart, and in the apostolic zeal of giving testimony of Jesus to the ends of the Earth.

AMEN.
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