



Para Pater yang bermain dengan anak-anak “Fathers who play with children”

LETTER TO OUR
 BRETHREN
 JUNE 2017

April 10 marked the four years of the arrival of the first Piarist in Indonesia, where they founded our first presence in the town of Atambua, on the island of Timor. Over the past four years we have progressed, little by little, in the beautiful challenge of starting Piarist Life and Mission in this extraordinary Asian country whose motto clearly reflects its own reality: ‘United in diversity’.

In the context of visits planned for this Jubilee Year, in which I want to be present in all places of recent establishing in order to accompany the foundational processes, I visited Indonesia in the days prior to Easter of this 2017. I am going to narrate what I experienced on this trip, to help you understand what we are living there. Because, dear brothers, something is happening in Indonesia. Something that has to do with Calasanz...

The first thing that catches your attention when you visit Indonesia is the difference of the contexts in which our two communities are. Atambua is a small town on the island of Timor, rural environment, close to the border with East Timor, with Catholic majority. We have our House of vocational reception (currently with ten applicants accompanied by three priests) and our first ministerial commitments through non-formal education. Yogyakarta, where we have the Juniorate and the pre-novitiate is a great university city, on the developed island of Java, with Muslim-majority. Seven juniors and nine prenovices, along with two religious priests live in this house. Visiting the two houses you perceive clearly something of what Indonesia is.

As in all the visits, I did my work: talking to the religious, talking one by one with all the juniors, prenovices, and applicants, having several community meetings, greeting the diocesan bishop, sharing with the laity working with us, knowing something of the

ecclesial and social reality that we are inserted in, etc. The activities are always similar, but the experiences are always original and characteristic of each place. Of this, of what I have lived in Indonesia, is what I want to talk about. I want to explain it to you so that you can understand my claim that “something is happening in Indonesia”. I’ll write this letter highlighting some specific experiences and providing two small conclusions.

I start saying that I really like how people call the Piarists in Atambua: “fathers who play with children”. The way how Piarists act has deeply attracted the attention of the people who know us. The image of the priest who plays with children, that is with them, someone who welcomes lovingly the young, not marking distance with young people in the community, conveying that we are all brothers and we treat each other as such, produced in people a pleasant surprise and a sense of joy. The claim that “these fathers are different” is something that people feel and perceive. And, I must admit, it is something that gives me a deep joy. It is good to underline it and to know it, never to feel the best, but to be what Calasanz wanted us to be.

In Atambua we have started our ministry through Non Formal Education, from a platform that we call “Learning with Calasanz”. There are five areas that are offered to more than 100 children and adolescents that meet every day in the “tents” (they are not classrooms yet) in which they enjoy learning: bahasa and English / help in the study / values education / art and corporal expression / continuous prayer (for Catholics). The coincidence made my visit coincide with the closing of the trimester, with a great party. All children prepared something for their parents and for others, expressing what they had learnt during the past three months. In addition to fun, it was very deep and meaningful. I found out – among other things – that I have to learn to dance...

I want to highlight some things that made me think much of this “Learning with Calasanz”. The first thing is something one of the prenovices of Yogyakarta told me, explaining his vocation. This boy did not know us at all, but his little sister was going to the activities of the Piarists every day, and came home happy, telling all that she had done. And the boy, seeing the joy in the eyes of her little sister, concluded: “I have to go to know these fathers”. He went, he knew us, and stayed. Today day he is doing University studies typical of the pre-novitiate. You may think that this is a simple story, but it makes me think something that is always present in the history of the Order: the way in which we give life invites others to do the same. So it is and so will always be. In the same way, if we do not give it to others, they will not feel called.

There is a second aspect that I would like to highlight. This Non Formal School, which operates in the afternoons, is led entirely by our applicants. Of course, those who coordinate it are adults religious, but those who carry forward all the workshops are the Piarist young aspirants. They live a dense formation process, taking classes in the mornings and carrying out ministerial activity in the afternoon. The ministerial aspect is present in full, since the beginning, in the vocational and formative process of young people. And that is something that I’d like to highlight. The aspirants, accompanied by the fathers, are those who carry out our mission. Without them there would not be this “Learning with Calasanz”, which is what it is due to them, to their enthusiasm, dedication and generosity. And to their youth creativity. When I see them enjoying the kids I am strengthened in something that I have deep inside me: the strength of Calasanz’ charism, which is able to change the heart of a young man from the moment he starts to live it. Congratulations!

There are many ways of bringing forward the Piarist pastoral on vocations. But there is one that always has to be present, and in Indonesia I see it with special clarity. It is what we might call

the pastoral of “come and see”¹. I say that it is something that must be always present because it is clear that the youth of today have a special sensitivity to perceive if what Piarist life is what they dream of living. And when this occurs, the decision about one’s vocation comes. Each of the young people told me his vocation history, his process of discernment. In some cases, from the challenge of overcoming family difficulties; in others, from the clarity of the desire to be an educator, in many of them, through the help of a friend who is already a novice or a junior, etc. But everyone, absolutely everyone, from the experience of having met us and having felt welcomed and called. I think that some of this is what we call “vocation culture”. In our vocation process the affectionate and attentive welcoming of each boy with vocation have been a key, and will always be.

Thinking about the journey covered during these four years, I think that it is good to emphasize some dynamics that are being good and that help us in our foundational process in Indonesia:

1. Firstly, the selfless and generous service of the Vice-province of Japan and Philippines, within which many young Indonesian and East Timorese Piarists have been and are being formed.
2. Secondly, the importance of the proximity of the mother Province (in this case, Bethany). The frequent visits of the Provincial and the Provincial Assistants, the proximity of the Piarist Fraternity, the attention in training matters of the Province, the commitment to the sustainability of our foundation in Indonesia, are all decisive for the progressive consolidation of this recent Piarist foundation.
3. We already have two communities. Yogyakarta is the “newborn”, but now works regularly at the service of the formation of the juniors and prenovices. The two houses are our property, fruit of the collaboration between the Province and the General Congregation.
4. At present, our Indonesian applicants begin in Atambua as aspirants, make the pre-novitiate in Yogyakarta and the novitiate in Cebu. For the Juniorate, there are three options provided for: Manila, Yogyakarta and Madrid. But we also have young people coming from East Timor. They make their aspirancy and pre-novitiate in Manila, their novitiate in Cebu, and the Juniorate in Manila or in Madrid. We are already thinking to open a house in East Timor, but let’s leave it for later.
5. I offer you the “numbers” of our reality today. Obviously, these numbers vary each year, but their reading can help you to better understand the way that we are following. This is our current reality: 4 not Indonesian priests (two from the Philippines, one Colombian and one Spanish); 3 Indonesian priests (one works in Indonesia, one in Spain and the third in the Philippines); 9 Indonesian juniors and 1 from East Timor; 10 Indonesian novices and one from East Timor; 12 Indonesian prenovices and 3 from East Timor; 11 Indonesian postulants-aspirants and 10 from East Timor. It is a promising reality with which God blesses the missionary courage of the Order. We pray for all of them, because behind each figure, there are concrete people desiring to give their life for the Pious Schools.
6. From the first moment we wanted that in our presence in Indonesia, our ministry should be visible. In addition to the “Learning with Calasanz” we are already finishing the construction of the first Piarist “Asrama” (boarding house), intended to accommodate some

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1.- Jn 1, 39.

100 boys of Atambua and the area, middle school and high school students. This boarding house, built by the Province, has also received significant aid from many places in the Order through the solidarity campaign organized by Itaka-Escolapios. Its construction is the result of the efforts of all. And its goals, something very Piarist: to help boys to finish middle school and high school, which is usually not very frequent; in this way, they can manage to build a life project; they receive a good Christian formation; they receive authentic training in values and, as peculiarity of our Asrama, these boys will be involved in the cause of Education. This Asrama will begin to operate, with the favor of God, in this Calasanzian Jubilee Year.

I lived another significant experience knowing the laity working with us both in Atambua and Yogyakarta. Once again I could see the love (this is the best word I've found) with which they help us and take care of us. Without them it would have not been possible for us to stay as we are. They are concrete persons, with specific stories, who have discovered Calasanz and who feel deeply identified with our charism. We have not called them, we have not invited them; they have come, they offer their time, their love, their possibilities, their car, their professional capacity... I really like the phrase with which they introduced them to me: "they are people who help us so much". We should introduce this definition in our Directory of Participation, without a doubt. It is Calasanz who summons, by new and unsuspected mechanisms. Calasanzian Jubilee!

Of course, the next challenges for the future appear already with some clarity. All foundations have their stages, and in developing our presence in Indonesia and East Timor we see already new steps and goals. For example, the translation of our main documents to Indonesian, so that what the "Skolapios" (this is our official name in the country) are will be available to all; the work for progressive economic self-sustainability; the need for more support of Piarists to the development of the mission, the progressive linkage of the Piarist Fraternity; the need to articulate the relationship between the two Piarist communities that we have in the country, separated by 2,500 kilometers of distance, etc.

I'd like to highlight two of these challenges, which are already on the agenda of the Province and of the General Congregation:

1. The need to create two environments sufficiently differentiated in the House of formation of Yogyakarta, to serve properly the process of the prenovices and the juniors. This implies, necessarily, trainers and housing.
2. The importance of founding in East Timor. It is clear that our next foundation must be in East Timor, to clearly develop the vocation and formative process of the youth of the country, as well as our implementation. The Piarist presence in East Timor is a priority of our Order.

I could continue to share experiences, but I fear to overwhelm the space of these fraternal letters. I just want to end with two simple points that could be synthesized in two words: CALASANZ and THANKS.

CALASANZ is present in Indonesia. It is through the life of the communities, the efforts of the brothers engaged in building our Piarist presence (thanks Victor, José Mario, Marcelino, Jude and Martin), the commitment of our young people to their vocation and their enthusiasm for our mission. Is it by means of the laity that they have discovered it as the axis of their vocation

and horizon of their faith, through the hopes of the local Church (which is already making its proposals and expressing its hopes on us) and, above all, in the day to day in which we live our vocation, with passion and intensity, which is the only way to do it.

THANKS to God, our Father, for all the blessings He pours out on this new Piarist presence. We know that God blesses the missionary daring, the unique patience to give steps towards the Kingdom, children's education, the call of the vocation, selfless service, the acceptance of invitations to the mission. Much remains to be done and there are many things that we can and must improve. But for the journey already covered, thank you, Lord!

Receive a fraternal embrace

Pedro Aguado
Father General