THE DAY OF SOLICITUDE FOR THE POOR CHILD, TREASURE OF THE ORDER
In the framework of the Piarist Jubilee on the occasion of the 400 anniversary of the founding of the Pious Schools as religious congregation, July 8 has been declared as a Day of Solicitude for the Poor Child, Treasure of the Order, and of the renewal of our ministry of attention to the poor for the sake of transformation. On this day, our intention is to renew our Piarist ministry of attention to the poor for social transformation.

We present a brief article to reflect on this essential dimension of the Piarist charism; a proposal for praying with educators and finally, a collection of texts of Calasanz on education of poor children.
On March 17, 1646 came to San Pantaleo M. Joseph Palamolla, Secretary of the cardinal vicar Ginetti, and in front of the community gathered in the domestic oratory he read an Apostolic Brief by which the Pope ordered the reduction of the Order of the Pious Schools. A decree condemning a so beneficial work for the poor to practical extinction.

We do not enter in the concrete reasons why the Decree was issued; but we do enter into the attitude Calasanz had facing so bleak news. He was aware that it was an unfair decree: *Herewith, I warn Your Rev. that, even if they write you that our religion will be destroyed, you should not give credit to such news, because we hope that the blessed Christ and his blessed Mother will be on our side and disrupt all the machinations of adversaries.* (EP 4344).

The same afternoon in which the decree was read, he writes a letter to several communities in which he communicates the fatal decision of the Pope and encourages the religious to go ahead with the mission: *Do not stop continuing with joy the Institute and to be united and in peace, hoping that God will remedy everything.* (EP 4342).

The Pious Schools were born and had been held in time thanks to Divine Providence, and he was convinced that God would not abandon the poor who were educated in their classrooms.

In his old age, Calasanz is destroyed humanely but very hopeful because he had the certainty that God will restore the Pious Schools: *I cannot understand that an Institute as useful and required across Europe and praised even by the heretics, can human malice destroy it so easily, and while I have breath, I will hope of seeing it revived in its pristine state.* (EP 4341)

God did not grant him the grace to see the Order restored; but many of the religious, especially the group of Central Europe, worked with great diligence to restore it after a period of purification that lasted a few more years.
When the saint wrote in the Constitutions that poverty will be the strongest defence of our Congregation (CC 137), he was convinced deeply of the truth this sentence meant. Actually, the service that the Pious Schools were doing to the poor was the best guarantee of their survival. How should an Institute disappear which the Church had solemnly approved a few years before (1622) and had done so much good for the education of the poor?

Many religious left the Pious Schools but not a single school had been closed, a clear proof of how useful they were in many places because they educated the children of the common people. If schools were closed, where could children be educated...? There was no way to replace the social function that the Pious Schools were exercising.

23 years later the Church re-established the Order to its previous state. Love to poverty and poor children had been the best guarantee of survival.

In his first years in Rome, Calasanz came into direct contact with a highly unequal and unjust social reality. At this time, Calasanz suffers a personal conversion that leads him to become increasingly involved in the work with the poor taking responsibility for a school that existed already at the Santa Dorotea Parish, where letters were taught to poor children. This was the founding origin of the Pious Schools: the sacristy of a parish in the District of Trastevere, where the poorest children were cared for gratuitously.

As the school was free, it was massively attended by the poor children of Rome. In November 1597, when some members of the society of Christian Doctrine had promised their cooperation, the first popular free public school was born there (Ludwig Von Pastor).

In many of his letters, Calasanz mentions poor children, who are those who have their basic needs (dress, house, food, family) uncovered; children who cannot fend for themselves, those who are orphaned and living from begging, who are on the street idle and given to vices, who do not have money to pay for a teacher and finally, those who have no fear of God.

The children with whom Calasanz deals are the innocent victims of an unfair social structure creating many homeless, sick, and above all, poor feeding families. There were many underemployed families, on the threshold of poverty, which transmitted the poverty and social exclusion to their children in a cycle of permanent deprivation.
In this context of structural poverty, children who were less than fifteen years old had some very specific risk factors: infant mortality, insufficient food – adults who worked had preference in getting food –, frequent abandonment, child labour and the inability to attend school.

Calasanz did not intend to establish a charity institution where care for poor children was offered. There were others who were responsible for this. He wanted something else; i.e., a school that would help the poor out of the dynamic of exclusion promoting them socially with a good education in piety and letters.

In a memorial that he writes in 1626, a fervent defence of the rights of the poor for quality education appears: *It is typical of the Institute of the Pious Schools to teach the boys and particularly to the poor; many of them because of poverty and neglect of parents do not go to school, nor learn office or exercise any, but they are lost and idle and so easily delivered to different games, particularly to the cards, and it is necessary that, when they have no money to play, they steal in their own home first, and then where they can, or else they find money in other terrible ways.*

After four centuries, and despite the social progress, there are still deep divisions of class and children do not have the same educational opportunities. The Piarists are called to integrate within our schools social difference that already exists, preferably choosing the poorest, *whom under no circumstances we will despise* (CC 4), according to what the founder reminds us of in the Constitutions.

To old poverty new ones have joined today. The document of the Holy See, published in 1997, when speaking of the new poverties that the Catholic school must address reminds us: “*To these new poor the Catholic school turns in a spirit of love. Spurred on by the aim of offering to all, and especially to the poor and marginalized, the opportunity of an education, of training for a job, of human and Christian formation, it can and must find in the context of the old and new forms of poverty that original synthesis of ardor and fervent dedication which is a manifestation of Christ’s love for the poor, the humble, the masses seeking for truth*” (The Catholic School on the threshold of the third millennium No. 15)

Calasanz writes that the religious *who has no spirit to teach the poor, does not have the vocation of our Institute* (EP 1319). Poverty manifested in patience and humility, in treatment and, above all, in the generosity with which he performs the ministry. The Calasanctian teacher cannot be an employee who is not interested in the sheep. He offers his personal qualities and offers his time and even his goods to the poor. With large claims and specific needs, with an excessive attachment to goods and worldly comforts, this mission would be impossible.
Only the spirit of poverty that does not expect favors or human pay, provides the educator of the freedom and the independence from the influence of any institution, the ideologies and the affects of the families. The Calasanctian educator is independent and free, immune to the corruption of the world.

The Pious Schools will maintain their charismatic vitality to the extent they will maintain a resolute “option for poor children”. The Holy Spirit, who has kept the Order for 400 years, will open new paths for the children to find a place where to sanctify themselves and be great in heaven, but also to promote themselves and enoble themselves and their homeland. (Memorial to Cardinal Tonti No. 14)
Prayer with educators

Setting: In an atmosphere of stillness, preferably in the Chapel, we put an image that will help to fix the time of prayer. It may be an image of Jesus or Calasanz welcoming a child or a good photograph of poor children. Images of children with background music or a proper song could also be displayed.

We read the following song produced in Spanish by Kairoi group.

You little child, pure in heart, you have the eyes open to a world of dream.

I understand that you want and ask only love, to live in freedom, to grow up in peace, without oppression.

I’m your friend, come, I want to talk to the heart, we will build life, fear-free...

Take my hands, my time and occupation, I want to be your brother; I’m on your side...

You, my little friend who cry or laugh, reason of my being and living, serving God.

I will be with you, the school will become a home. We can learn to share our friendship.

With you I’m happy, you accept me as I am, brother who transmits the richness that is within you.

I discover the goodness, gift of the Lord, you give yourself to the poor and to children without love.

Once focused attention on the issue, we read two texts that refer to the relationship of Jesus to children.
Matthew 18, 1-4.
In that hour the disciples came to Jesus, saying, Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And he took a little child, and put him in the middle of them, And said, Truly, I say to you, If you do not have a change of heart and become like little children, you will not go into the kingdom of heaven. Whoever, then, will make himself as low as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 19, 13-15.
Then some people took little children to him, so that he might put his hands on them in blessing: and the disciples said sharp words to them. But Jesus said, Let the little ones come to me, and do not keep them away: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And he put his hands on them, and went away.

Later, we have a short time for reflection and then share our answers to the following questions:

• Which characteristics of children does Jesus refer to and propose as an example for his disciples?
• What do you think the concept was that people had of children at the time of Jesus?
• What aspect of my life must be transformed by the Lord so that I will look like the children of the Gospel?
• How can we bless the poor children of our environment?

Also, someone could do a meditation, or the priest a short exhortation responding to the questions raised.

The sentence of Calasanz is written on a cardboard and placed in a clearly visible place.

And since we profess to be authentic Poor of the Mother of God, we shall never look down in any way on poor children but with great patience and love we shall try to enrich them with every good quality, especially in view of the words of the Lord: “What you did to one of the least of my little ones this you did to me” (Const No. 4).

A sheet is given to participants to write an attitude that as educators we can have to make poor children feel welcomed in our school, parish, and social center. We write it in the form of a prayer to God: “I ask you, Lord, give me patience with the hardest children in my class...”

When sentences have already been made, you can pray the Magnificat highlighting
the idea that Mary is the best model of a Piarist educator because she is poor and humble before God.

Prayer:

Our protector and loving father, Joseph Calasanz: you, who sacrificed your long life in favor of children, watch us compassionately from heaven; defend us from all dangers, bless our families and protect those who are your disciples, so that fulfilling our duties on earth we can venerate in your company Jesus and his Mother in heaven for all eternity. Amen.
TEXTS OF CALASANZ AND POOR CHILDREN

One of the big concerns Calasanz expressed throughout his life was defending the right of the poor to a quality education. In this sense, he is a pioneer of public and universal education for all. This idea is well developed in many of his letters, the Constitutions and some of the memorials that he writes in defence of the Order.

IN THE LETTERS

Be sure that schools proceed with all diligence and there are no idle children around the city, mostly poor, to avoid the bad example that they give to those who go to school (EP 469).

The shortest and easiest way to be exalted to self-knowledge and from it to the attributes of mercy, wisdom and infinite patience and God’s goodness, is to lower oneself to give light to children and in particular to those who are as fully helpless, because being this trade in the eyes of the world so low and vile, few want to lower themselves to it and God uses to repay a hundredfold (EP 1296).

I’ve received great knowing that you have introduced in our church the exercise of Christian doctrine for poor children, to whom, after having taught them, you say that you give them a bun that is easily found among those who do charity, and being this work in service of the poor, it must be very pleasing to God and meritorious to those who carry it out (EP 3093).

In terms of receiving poor students, you do a holy thing admitting all who come, because for them, our Institute was founded. And what is done for them, is made for Jesus Christ, and is not said the same of the rich ones (EP 2812).

In the school of writing you should not admit older students, because one of them bothers the teacher more than ten small poor ones, and the elderly are not going because of poverty, but for convenience (EP 2235).

Always try to become more able to teach the poor writing and accounts, and also the holy fear of God. Don’t worry to admit more students in your school, but to attend to the poor (EP 2238).
On Tuesday, the third feast of the Holy Spirit, or on Wednesday morning, Fr. Domenico Antonio will depart from Rome to Florence, leaving abandoned the music class, in which many poor children learned and then eventually earned the bread with the music; this class he may not have it there because of the Decree of the General Chapter not allowing to teach music in any house, except in Rome (EP 4003).

IN THE CONSTITUTIONS OF CALASANZ
And since we profess to be authentic Poor of the Mother of God, we shall never look down in any way on poor children but with great patience and love we shall try to enrich them with every good quality, especially in view of the words of the Lord: “What you did to one of the least of my little ones this you did to me” (CC 4).

Religious must love the venerable poverty - mother of the delicate humility and other virtues - as the strongest defence of our Congregation. They must keep it in all integrity and try to experience sometimes its consequences (CC 137).

In most countries the majority of citizens is poor and can only afford to keep their children in school for a short time. Therefore, the Superior must assign an intelligent teacher to these boys. He must teach them reading and arithmetic. This will help them earn a living more easily. (CC 198)

IN MEMORIALS
The Order of the Poor Clerics of the Mother de God of the Pious Schools has, as its own ministry, godly education of the youngsters and, particularly the poor, starting to teach them the first elements to read, write and counting well, and to those of good wit, grammar, humanities and rhetoric. (To the prelates of the apostolic visitation, 27-10-1625)

Do not give ear to the policy little inclined to Poverty, which thinks that the letters must not be taught to the poor, as if talent depended of the riches, and not in nature, wanting to believe that teaching them is harmful to the Republic, both because they deviate from the mechanical arts, and because, in the majority of cases, not learning enough letters, they remain without these and without the arts; so it is necessary for them to live idly and to maintain themselves they become vicious (to the cardinal Ginetti 1644).

If you suppressed this Institute it would be a serious harm to the poor, who have no means to pay the teacher, and who therefore could not learn letters, which together with Christian doctrine and morality, are taught at the Institute. (To the Commis-
Children, for being poor, should not be abandoned constituting, as it has been said, the vast majority of the Christian Republic, having been redeemed they also by the precious blood of Jesus Christ and being so appreciated by her Majesty that he said to have been sent to the world by his eternal Father to teach them: Evangelizare pauperibus misit me (Lk 4,18).

Whereby we can conclude how far from Christian piety and from Christ’s feeling is that policy claiming to be harmful to the Republic to teach the poor because it diverts them, they say, from the exercise of mechanical arts.

The experience has proved to be a very false reason, given that, here in Rome, after about 50 years that the Pious Schools teach the poor, we don’t see that there is a dearth of any kind of craftsman, but we see that, mostly, with the benefit of the schools, they are capable of carrying accounts of their goods, without no one to write them and to make accounts for them, as it was done until the activity of schools started. (Exhibition defending the right of the poor to education 1945).
Setting: In the chapel or in a suitable location is installed a photograph of a poor child with the light of a candle and the sentence of the Gospel: “What you do to one of these little ones you do it to me”

Monitor: On this day, the Pious Schools invite us to renew in an atmosphere of prayer, our Piarist commitment to educate the poor. They are the place where we can experience the presence of God who became human to enrich us with his poverty.

In front of the tender and innocent child’s eyes, I invite you to spend a little time and on this face remember all the kids you know and who are a part of your life history; especially of those most in need.

(There can be a soothing music that will help to internalize)

Monitor: Contact with poor children in the districts of Rome provoked in Joseph Calasanz a spiritual experience of encounter with God that led him to found the Pious Schools. In many of his writings, he manifests a clear option for the poor:

And since we profess to be authentic Poor of the Mother of God, we shall never look down in any way on poor children but with great patience and love we shall try to enrich them with every good quality, especially in view of the words of the Lord: “What you did to one of the least of my little ones this you did to me” (CC 4)

The shorter and easier way to be exalted to self-knowledge and from it to the attributes of mercy, wisdom and infinite patience and God’s goodness, is to abase himself to give light to children and in particular to those who are as fully helpless, because being this trade in the eyes of the world so low and vile, few want to abase to it and God uses to repay a hundredfold (EP 1296)

Song: Let the children come to me

Monitor: In the 1st century Jewish society, children were not considered persons until reaching the age of majority and they were subject to the raising of the mother. Children come to Jesus for his tenderness, his closeness and blessing.

Then some people took little children to him, so that he might put his hands on them in blessing: and the disciples said sharp words to them. But Jesus said, Let the little ones
come to me, and do not keep them away: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And he put his hands on them, and went away. (Matthew 19: 13-15).

**Monitor**: Now, in the presence of God, we will renew our Piarist commitment to educate poor children. I invite you to pray this prayer together:

You Lord, were born poor in Bethlehem, suffered exile in Egypt, grew up in the simplicity of the home of Nazareth, welcomed the poor with mercy and patiently endured the suffering on the cross.

You taught us to have mercy on the poor and to bless children with tenderness. You said firmly: what you did to one of these smaller brethren, you did it to me.

Grant us the grace to do good to the neediest children at the example of Saint Joseph Calasanz who found in them the definitive way to serve God.

Don’t allow the temptations of the world or the vanity of riches separate us from the noble mission of working so that the poor achieve true happiness through education in piety and letters.

**Petitions**:

You, who were born in a humble manger in Bethlehem, take care of all the children who come to the world in precarious conditions and without adequate health care.

You, who lived the exile in Egypt, have mercy on all the children who are forced to move from their homeland fleeing from hunger, violence and racial hatred.

You, who grew up in a simple home but full of love, take care for children suffering from family violence and growing up without the care and education of parents.

You, who learned from the elders the reading and practice of Divine Law; do not allow children to grow up without a proper education in piety and letters.

You, who welcomed the poor with mercy, give to the Pious Schools a true dedication to the most needy in our schools.

You, who bless the children, make us bearers of divine blessings so that we help children to grow in grace and wisdom

**Lord’s Prayer**
Closing prayer

*Our protector and loving father, Joseph Calasanz: you, who sacrificed your long life in favor of children, watch us compassionate from heaven; defend us from all dangers, bless our family/s and protect those who are your disciples, so that fulfilling our duties on earth we can venerate in your company Jesus and his Mother in heaven for all eternity. Amen.*
ANNUS IUBILÆI SCHOLARUM PIARUM
400 ANNI 1617-2017