



SANTO DOMINGO-1ST PART

# *Not only shepherds, but also fishermen*

LETTER TO OUR  
BRETHREN  
APRIL 2018

At the end of last January the Encounter of Vocational Ministry Leaders of the Pious Schools was held in Santo Domingo. It was an important meeting, in which the participants could share with openness and in which clear options were marked to “*advance in the development of an authentic Piarist vocational culture*”<sup>1</sup>. I will try to collect some of the ideas and options worked on, in order to contribute to socialize what I experienced during the meeting. I will transmit the convictions that were most valued in the meeting, or that found echoes of greater commitment, and I will highlight some bets that I think we should take into account.

I want to start by emphasizing the youth of the participants. The great majority of those in charge of Vocation Ministry of the Order have been appointed to their post beginning in 2015. I think this is a very significant fact, which can help us to understand that perhaps we are facing a new stage of our Vocation Ministry. I think that this data requires us to reaffirm some fundamental needs: to empower the training of those responsible; to enhance the construction of teams that work; to work to place well the Vocation Ministry in the life and mission of the demarcation, etc. Let’s make this stage, really, new. And let us know that the Piarists who are in charge of the Vocation Ministry have no doubt that “*we must change the culture and mentality of the Pious Schools in relation to the Vocational Culture*”. They feel called to fight for this change.

1.- 47th General Chapter of the Pious Schools. Key of Life n° 1: “To move towards an authentic Piarist Vocational Culture “. This was, clearly, the framework of the encounter of Santo Domingo.

I will dedicate two “salutatio” to this meeting. In this first I will focus on aspects that have to do with us as people and as religious, highlighting some aspects that we must think about how we live and how we assume the great challenge that “we are all called to promote the Vocational Culture”. The second one will be more focused on institutional, strategic and programmatic aspects. Let’s go there.

**1-I begin by giving a voice to the participants in Santo Domingo, who highlighted the importance -essential- of caring for one’s vocation**, of living the received vocational treasure, of the authenticity of our Piarist life, of first love, of passion vocational, the effort to uninstall, etc. This was expressed in many ways, but I think we are facing an unanimous challenge of the Piarists who have been commissioned to promote Vocational Culture and Ministry Care: ***to strive to live with passion, with clarity, with humility and conviction, their own vocation***. One of the most “memorable” meetings of the Order was held in the year 2000 and was later known as the “Mimosas Encounter”. Those responsible for Vocations Ministry were there at that time. Well, in this meeting in Santo Domingo I told the audience that ten of the participants in that meeting are no longer Piarists, and most of those ten have left the priesthood. I did not seek to say this “after anesthesia”, but directly. It is the truth of the facts. This can also help to understand the importance of this first reflection: let us take care of our vocation.

**2-To renew our mentality, that of all the Piarists.** We left Santo Domingo with this task clear and assumed. We all need to convert ourselves - I think that “conversion” is a word well used for this challenge - in this matter of Culture and Vocation Ministry. We must recognize, with humility, that we have a long way to go in this work of “changing our mentality”

Many times we say that “every Piarist is responsible for the vocation ministry”. And it is true. But we know that, in practice, sometimes this is not the case, and that there are Piarists who do not live -or do not know how to do it- this dimension. But it is true. And the reason is very clear: our

vocation is not “for us”, and we do not call anyone “to be more numerous”, but for children, for young people, for the Kingdom of God and its Justice, according to the charism of Calasanz.

We do not think of ourselves when we call young people. We think of the Mission, we think of the children and young people who need fathers and teachers. Therefore, those who live their vocation with strength and clarity, understand immediately that to call others to the task of building the Kingdom is part of their vocation. The vocational commitment thus becomes, for us, a clear sign of vocational authenticity. It is part of the mission “to work so that there are missionaries”. It is part of the Piarist vocation “to work so that there are Piarists”, it is part of the love for the mission of the Order “to call others to be part of it”.

It is not enough to give one’s life for the mission. We have to do things as Calasanz did: to give our life for the mission and to work hard for the continuity of his dream. It is the example. I believe that Calasanz, therefore, said with force that “*we should not give the habit to those who do not have the soul of a founder*”<sup>2</sup>. The person in charge of Vocational Ministry is a founder, but Calasanz did not say this about the “responsible”, but about everyone. What does it mean to have the soul of a founder?

**3-Shepherds and Fishermen.** The thing started with the call to be fishermen<sup>3</sup>, and was completed with the invitation to be shepherds<sup>4</sup>. I am not going to enter here into the great ministry question that is posed today in the Church (“*we must become fishermen again, so as not to work only feeding those who are already in the flock*”). I simply want to highlight two very clear dimensions in the person in charge of Vocation Ministry and, therefore, of all Piarists. They are two simultaneous dimensions, which must be lived by the Piarist and, in a special way, by the one who assumes the collaboration with the Lord in the convocation to the construction of the Kingdom.

2.- St. Joseph Calasanz. EP 4031, year 1642.

3.- “And he told them: Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Mt. 4, 19)

4.- “I am the good shepherd; and I know my sheep, and mine know me, like the Father knows me, and I know the Father; and I give my life for the sheep” (Jn 10, 14-15)

Both dimensions come, in us, from a single center. When that center is clear, when it is truly *center*, everything changes. The two attitudes are nonnegotiable, and come from the core of the call we have received from the Lord.

Being fishermen and being shepherds. Summoning and accompanying. Calling and walking next to the called ones. Proposing and getting committed to the proposal. The person in charge of Vocational Ministry knows and assumes two extraordinary dynamics:

- To be active, to call, to propose, to sow, to search, to disturb, to present, to announce, to prepare the context, etc. We must know how to “walk with” in order to make a real call, but always strong and uninstilling. There is no comfortable vocational call, but it will always be a source of joy.
- To be a “shepherd”, to accompany, to know, to share, to listen, to take care of, to generate a process, to lead to the suitable pasture, to propose the suitable steps, etc. Being a “good shepherd” is a deeply active attitude, typical of those who always think of others.

I think that both dynamics have a component that radicalizes them.

- We are “fishermen” only if we go after Him. The caller must be credible, and make it clear on behalf of Who he calls. If not, it is not a vocational call.
- We are “shepherds” if we give life, if we give ourselves without reservations. This is perceived, the “sheep feel it, know it”. And that’s why they accept the shepherd and trust him.

These two components signify two spiritual attitudes proper to the Piarist who feels responsible for the Vocation Ministry. Each of us has the challenge of thinking what they mean to me, what they are demanding of me, what turns I must give in my life. If something was clear in Santo Domingo, it is the challenge of assuming that all this uninstalls us.

#### **4-To be bridges between God and the youth.**

We can never forget it: the Piarist, as person in charge of Vocation Ministry, is situated in an extraordinary place: it is the bridge between the calls of God and the generous heart of young people. This is the exact place. It is a formidable place, which demands from us some very strong keys of life:

- a. Being very close to God. To understand his calls, to scrutinize his Word, to understand the “air of life He proposes”, to understand what He expects. To Pray much, much, much.
- b. Being very close to young people. To understand their heart, to understand and love what lives in them, to help them understand what they have inside, to be able to clearly propose what they expect and need, to be able to accompany them from a “demanding respect”, because that is precisely what they need
- c. Throbbing with the Order of Saint Joseph Calasanz, from the soul of the Pious Schools. To fight for it, to understand its challenges, to transmit what we dream, to invite to surrender our life, to demand from it the changes that are necessary to deserve so many gifts from God.

Only in this way can it be a bridge, because the bridge must be firmly anchored on both sides, and it must have consistency to allow it to pass through it, knowing that it is only a place of passage, but a formidable place. Few like it. It is a spiritual place, like all the “Piarist places”. But it’s very special one...

But we all know that we are “clay pots” for a challenge like this. The same thing happens to us as to the utopian Jeremiah, who felt young and inexperienced, or to Moses the shepherd, who could not speak, or to the impassioned Paul, who knew that he was “the last of all.” The “consciousness of smallness” is wonderful. It helps us to feel the need for support, to value more the prayer, to make ourselves aware that, if there are successes, I am not the cause, but the love of God. And that prepares us to know how to continue forward also when things come badly given.

But the conscience of smallness can never prevent me from being a person “passionate” about vocations ministry, completely dedicated to this central task of the Order. We have numerous examples of what it means to “be passionate about this mission.” I can quote names and stories...

**5-Sharing the feelings of the participants in the Meeting.** I want to finish this first salutatio on the Encounter of Santo Domingo sharing with all of you the feelings expressed by the participants in the meeting. All responded, in a public meeting, to the question asked: “*To what do you feel personally called after this meeting?*” Maybe reading some of their reflections can help us understand the importance for us to “feel responsible for something.” Let’s listen to them and accompany them.

*“Renewal and growth, the opportunity to ask questions about the experience of my vocation and the passion for the mission / I know I have to be closer to God, closer to the young and more passionate about the Order / Back to the first love / The challenge is to live all this fully and to be a witness to children and young people, to leave the Pious Schools a little better than what I have found them / To be a little more accompanied to grow in the dynamism of the mentality of Order. I need the contrasts of the Local Community and the Demarcation / I feel called to value my vocation more and to recognize that the Vocational Ministry is wider than the Youth Ministry / To recognize myself as a bridge between the young person and God, and to be consistent with it / To give greater importance to prayer in my personal life. To clearly renew the “yes” to follow the Lord more closely, in community, for the good of the children / To promote a project of Piarist revitalization / I am passionate about vocation ministry, but I recognize that I have not allow this to go outside me / Forming myself better and preparing myself to take up the vocational work / Losing the fear of proposing changes in the Province / Feeling the urgency of this meeting marking a before and after and, therefore, doing something to overcome the inertia with the that lives my Demarcation / To integrate better the vocational character of my life in the diverse dimensions of my Piarist being / To connect with the feelings of Christ as fisherman*

*and uninstall myself / Deepen on what it means to have a founder’s soul / Lose anxiety and fear thinking that we are few and inexperienced / See young people with a renewed look, as people capable of changing and strong bets / Find creativity to build Ministry Vocational in a Province where it is difficult to understand these issues / Make a path of renunciation and transformation, leaving behind the “it has always been done like this” / Achieving a balance between spiritual life and ministry activities / Devoting more time to the brothers and to young people / To cultivate and renew my own vocation, with a more robust fidelity: to be closer to God, to young people and to vibrate with the Order of Saint Joseph of Calasanz “.*

I think that an attentive reading of this “*shared life*” can help us all to understand what is lived in the soul of the Piarists who have assumed - with fear and trembling - the task of being responsible for the Vocation Ministry. To all of them, my gratitude and my blessing.

Receive a fraternal hug.

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