



Christ is alive! (2nd part)

LETTER TO OUR
BRETHREN
NOV 2019

Dear Brothers, I offer you a second reflection on the Synod of Youth, this time bearing in mind all that we lived and worked in Oaxaca, during the General Assembly of the Piarist Synod of Youth, as well as the Apostolic Exhortation “Christus Vivit” (ChV), by Pope Francis. I invite you all to read the exhortation and to study the proposals that young people make to the Pious Schools, contained in the document approved in Oaxaca and which is available on the website of the “Piarist Synod”. It is worth getting into this reflection.

My contribution will be very simple, because I think the real job is to read the documents to which I refer. But I think it may help for me to present you some underlines that may be especially meaningful to us.

1-Eight proposals to the Pious Schools. The young people gathered in Oaxaca, collecting the work carried out in the provincial and continental phases of the Piarist Synod of Youth, make eight proposals to the Pious Schools. Clear, significant, demanding: Calasanz Movement; relationship with God; proclamation of the Gospel; work for the poor and volunteering; discernment and vocational acceptance; accompaniment; communication and networks and, finally, non-formal education.

In the dynamic of mutual listening that we have proposed, these eight proposals clearly express the sensitivity of young people who grow up among us. They clearly bet on the Calasanz Movement as a privileged process to grow in faith; they seek spaces and times of prayer and yearn for a more consolidated and shared spiritual experience; they hope and welcome the Christian proposal and

bet on being, in turn, witnesses and proclaimers of the Gospel; they wish to give themselves to the poor and to discover in the treasure of the Pious Schools - the poor children and young people - their encounter with Christ; they seek to discover their vocation and be faithful to it; they need to be accompanied by people who can believe in them, understand them, listen to them, and demand them; they feel comfortable on social media and seek the construction of Piarist networks of life and mission and, finally, they have understood very well the opportunity that Non-Formal Education represents to promote our charism.

Obviously, these eight are not the only paths we have to go, but they are options in which we must grow. They are not our “keys of life,” but they interpret and develop them. They do not include all the aspects that the Pious Schools should consider in relation to young people, but they indicate important priorities. Let’s keep them in mind.

Let’s take it a step further. The Oaxaca assembly did not indicate only eight priorities, but clearly set *the key to each of them*. That is why I believe that the “Oaxaca document” is important to all of us. It is because it not only underscores eight fundamental options but indicates the direction in which we can and should walk.

CALASANZ MOVEMENT. The challenge is to consolidate it in each Province, developing its multiple virtualities and always highlighting what is the focal point: to accompany the young people so that they can make Christ the center of their life and choose to share that faith in community. The clues offered by young people are worthy of work and reflection.

RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. It is a cry among our youth: that we be men and women of prayer, and try to help them grow in their faith and their relationship with God. They need our testimony and our help.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE GOSPEL. They expect us to proclaim the Gospel clearly, so that this proclamation will “move their hearts.” They seek to celebrate the Eucharist with joy and that, among all, we can seek ways of encountering those who are not close to the faith.

THE PEOPLE AND VOLUNTEERING. They expect from us the witness of poverty, and that we will carry out new works and missions among the poor, as well as a strong and systematic organization of volunteering.

VOCATIONAL AND WELCOME DISCERNMENT. The insistence is clear, thank God: they ask for vocational pastoral teams and projects in all the Provinces and in each of the local presences; they seek to be accompanied in the task of discerning and developing their vocation, and they expect clear proposals of vocational discernment for consecrated life, both men and women.

ACCOMPANIMENT. They look for it and they want it, but not in any way. They ask for trained and serious companions.

COMMUNICATION AND NETWORKS. They want to get strongly involved in this challenge and offer many creative ideas to take it forward.

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION. They have clearly discovered the capacity for social transformation of Non-Formal Education and want it to continue to grow in each of the Provinces.

Clearly, every one of these eight options would deserve broader development, but this is not the objective of my letter. I am simply looking to encourage you to read the “document of Oaxaca”, and to do so in the light of Pope Francis’ “Christus Vivit”.

2-The Pope’s proposals to young people.

I invite everyone to make an attentive reading of the Pope’s Apostolic Exhortation “*to the young people and to all the people of God*”. It’s a rich, suggestive document. I would like to highlight two aspects, in this line of “*proposals to young people who commit the Piarists*”. Because this is the key to this whole process: the proposals we make to young people commit us all, as do the needs and hopes that they express.

First of all, I stress that the Pope proposes ***to young people (ChV 111-129) three great truths***. He synthesizes them like this: *God loves you and bets for you, Christ saves you, Christ is alive*. This

is the essential Christian experience that Francis proposes to young people. And in doing so, he is asking all educators, companions, catechists, pastoral workers, to be able to transmit this essential experience to young people; to take care of it and accompany it; to develop it and to turn it into life, experience and choice; in short, to make it grow as the real treasure hidden in the field that is worth losing everything for. When we live this profound experience, everything is possible and only from this experience emerges the young man passionate for Christ and the mission, the young missionary that the Order seeks and the Church needs.

Secondly, **Francis proposes a serious vocational discernment and a consistent capacity for acceptance and accompaniment.** I invite you only to read numbers 283 and 287 of the Pope's exhortation.

283. *"A particular form of discernment involves the effort to discover our own vocation. Since this is a very personal decision that others cannot make for us, it requires a certain degree of solitude and silence. "The Lord speaks to us in a variety of ways, at work, through others and at every moment. Yet we simply cannot do without the silence of prolonged prayer, which enables us better to perceive God's language, to interpret the real meaning of the inspirations we believe we have received, to calm our anxieties and to see the whole of our existence afresh in his own light"*.

285: *"When seeking to discern our own vocation, there are certain questions we ought to ask. We should not start with wondering where we could make more money, or achieve greater recognition and social status. Nor even by asking what kind of work would be most pleasing to us. If we are not to go astray, we need a different starting point. We need to ask: Do I know myself, quite apart from my illusions and emotions? Do I know what brings joy or sorrow to my heart? What are my strengths and weaknesses? These questions immediately give rise to others: How can I serve people better and prove most helpful to our world and to the Church? What is my real place in this world? What can I offer to society? Even more realistic questions then follow: Do I have the abili-*

ties needed to offer this kind of service? Could I develop those abilities?"

Our young people want and ask to be accompanied in their vocational quest. Accompanied with respect, listening, closeness, testimony and demand. Personal and group accompaniment. Experienceal and missionary accompaniment. Praying and formative accompaniment. School accompaniment. It's a cry. And it's necessary.

3-What they expect from us and us from them

As you know, I had the opportunity to be present throughout the assembly of Oaxaca of the Piarist Synod of Youth. This allowed me to reflect with them on two questions: *what does the Order need and expect from youth, and what do youth need and expect from the Order?*

I discovered that the answer to these two questions is the same. What the Order needs and expects from young people is the same as what young people expect and need from the Pious Schools.

What the Order needs from young people.

Authenticity. We need and hope that young people will live what they dream of, what they discover at the bottom of their souls. And to work to do it every day.

Demand. We need them not to allow us to "remain calm." We don't want Piarists without time for young people. We truly need those who are part of our lives to demand us to live it to the fullest.

We need their dedication and enthusiasm to build, with us, better Pious Schools, a common house for all, in order to work for the Kingdom of God from the charism of Calasanz.

To believe that the Piarist projects we have are possible, and to fight for them. We need young people to discover them, know them, develop them, carry them forward. The Piarist projects, from Calasanz, are bigger than us, thank God. That's why we need young people to take them on and work to make them possible.

We need boldness and tenacity, as the Constitutions say: “The Pious Schools are the work of God and the fortunate daring and patience of St. Joseph Calasanz.” This is what we expect from young people.¹

What young people need from the Order is exactly the same. That is why this project will succeed, because it is built from a deep communion.

They need Piarists who live their vocation with authenticity, and that transmit and educate in that authenticity. They need witnesses to believe. The great affirmation of Paul VI remains true, demonstrating that this need is typical of the young people of all times: *“contemporary man listens more at ease to witnesses than to teachers or if he listens to teachers it is because they are witnesses”*²

They need demanding proposals. Only demanding proposals are worthy of being answered by the generous hearts of young people. Only proposals bigger than them, that help them understand what it means to think about life from faith.

They need the dedication and enthusiasm of the Piarists. They don’t need tired or discouraged Piarists, unable to love and understand the present time to help them look “a little further.”

They need to see that we have projects, that we believe in them and that we dedicate our lives. Calasanz is the best example. We need our young Piarists to feel called to be “a new Calasanz”.

In short, they need our lives to convey what we say about ourselves when we talk about the Pious Schools being the work of God and the fruit of Calasanz’s boldness and patience. This is still true. And he’s still demanding us.

4-The next step.

I can assure you that whenever I have the opportunity to meet young people in our processes, I see that they always “expect something else”. I see in them gratitude for everything they are liv-

ing and discovering, and I also see longing for new steps. Maybe it should always be like this. But this should help us to two important things: to value everything we do and drive and, on the other hand, to always be ready for new steps that help us to be the *Piarists that young people expect and need.*

Here is the key to the next step that we must consider in this Piarist Synod of Youth, and we will reflect these months together with the Synod Coordinating Team: *what is the next step? Young People to the General Chapter?*

Let’s keep walking, brothers. With the confidence and joy of those who know that they are building Pious Schools.

Get a brotherly hug.

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Father General*

1.- Constitutions of the Pious Schools n. 1.

2.- St. Paul VI. Evangelii Nuntiandi n. 41.