



Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit

LETTER TO OUR
BRETHREN
SEPT 2020

Calasanx began his Constitutions, written now 400 years ago, including a phrase that Piarists of all generations learned by heart: “*Spiritu Sancto duce*”. The General Congregation has decided that our 48th General Chapter should be convened under this motto so beloved by the holy founder: “***Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit***”.

It is not just an “anniversary memory.” It is true that when we approach the fourth centenary of the drafting of the Constitutions of Saint Joseph Calasanx we all feel especially grateful to God for the fatherhood of Calasanx on the Pious Schools and for the greatness and simplicity of the vocation that he engendered in the Church, the Piarist vocation. It is also true that the desire to commemorate, to celebrate, to highlight God’s goodness to the Work of Calasanx, which has been on the road and in history of surrendering to children and young people, is in us. It is true that, in this dynamic, we like to underline ideas or phrases that attract especially our attention and that we want to highlight, being the one that we are dealing with -*under the guidance of the Holy Spirit*- one of the most significant.

However, what we want and need is much more. What we seek, dream and hope is that our General Chapter will indeed be an ***occasion of the Spirit***,

an opportunity to listen and welcome its inspirations, a space of spiritual discernment that will help us to mark the direction that the Order must follow in the coming years, in fidelity to the Gospel, to Calasanz and to our educational and pastoral mission.

I write this fraternal letter with the aim of contributing to this precious objective: that we reflect in depth on what it means to celebrate a General Chapter *“under the guidance of the Holy Spirit”*.

I would like to focus only on two aspects, in order to respect not only space, but also the sense of a *Salutatio*. On the one hand, I would like to invite you to approach the keys from which Calasanz speaks of fidelity to the Spirit. On the other hand, I want to propose some attitudes that can help us in this exciting task.

First, I believe that there are three particularly important spaces in which Calasanz speaks of the guidance of the Spirit: the Church, Formation and Prayer. There are many more, but these are especially clear and meaningful to me.

The Preamble of Calasanz (CC 1 and C4) begins by saying **“Cum in Ecclesia Dei”**. From the first moment, Calasanz is clear that he wants to live in the Church, be faithful to her, and listen in her to the voice of the Spirit, which impels (*tendant*) and calls (*vocavit*) to cooperate diligently in the evangelizing mission. It is very clear to Calasanz: we live and are “in the Church of God”, and in it we discern, work, cooperate and feel. What does this mean for us today? Without a doubt, the same as for Calasanz: fidelity, belonging, commitment, listening, prayer... so many things!

We need to hear the voice of the Church, who today calls us to the centrality of Jesus Christ, to the preference for the poor, the authenticity of life, mercy, the joyful proclamation of the Good News, the poverty and simplicity of life, to the authentic and firm experience of our specific charism, and to the evangelical witness to the overcoming of self-referentiality and clericalism. We listen to the Pope who calls us *“to be, really, experts in communion and to leave ourselves to go courageously to the existential peripheries*, and he invites us to a new *“Pentecost of the Piarists”*. We welcome the wishes of Francis, who *hopes that the common house of the Pious Schools will be filled with the Holy Spirit, so that we may be believed in the communion necessary to carry forward with force the mission of the Piarists in the world, overcoming fears and barriers of all kinds. That your people, communities, and works can radiate in all languages, places and cultures, the liberating and saving force of the gospel. May the Lord help you always have a missionary spirit and willing to set out on your way.”*¹

I think this has to be one of the keys from which our Chapter should live “under the guidance of the Holy Spirit”: to hear the voice of the People of God and to make decisions in deep ecclesial communion. We live in a Church,

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1.- Francisco. “Message to the Pious Schools in the Calasanz Jubilee Year”. November 2016

which helps us to look at *young people, faith and vocational discernment*; in a Church that seeks to grow in *synodality and co-responsible participation*; in a Church that proposes a new *Global Educational Pact*; in a Church that seeks education from a *comprehensive ecology*. We are part of a Church that strives in every context to clearly proclaim the message of the Gospel, and to bear Christ's charity for all men and women.

Secondly, I like to contemplate Calasanz talking about the Master of Novices (CC23). Calasanz asks the trainer to “***interpret with fine discernment in each novice his deep tendency or the orientation of the Holy Spirit***”. The formative task is contemplated by Calasanz as an exercise in **continuous discernment** to discover and support the inspirations of the Holy Spirit in one's heart. And, if this can be said of the formation of novices, we can and must say it of all the Piarist life, at any age and vital moment.

If we live open to God's desire, trying to embody the vocation with an honest and humble desire for authenticity, the person and life of the Piarist are constituted in a space of manifestation of God, which propels from within (*internam propensionem*) towards the vocational fullness.

This is why our General Chapter will spend time reflecting on “*the Piarist we need*” and the mediations from which we can help each other grow. Initial training is key in this task, but above all is the Piarist life lived in increasing authenticity effort. There is also at stake the opening to the Spirit.

A third space of which Calasanz speaks explicitly as an occasion of the Spirit is **prayer, the calm and serene meditation of the Word of God, the sincere experience of spiritual life**. We all know the precious expression of Calasanz in which - quoting John 3, 8 - he affirms *that “the voice of God is the voice of spirit that comes and goes, touches the heart and passes; it is not known where it comes from or when it blows; where it is very important to always be vigilant so that he does not come impromptly and pass without fruit.”*²

I am deeply pleased that the General Chapter will dedicate some of its work to entering what we might call the “*Calasanzian mode of praying*”, and can offer us some clues to deepen our spirituality that we can sometimes neglect. In Calasanz, prayer is a space of listening and docility to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, linked to calmness and inner silence, with the Meditation and Contemplation of the Lord.

I have often thought that we Piarists do not know or neglect the depth of Calasanzian spirituality, and sometimes we turn to other spiritualities or devotions more or less removed from our own identity. We need to dig deeper into the spiritual heritage of Calasanz, and train our young people from it. Sometimes I see even in Houses of Formation certain ways of praying that do not respond to what we have received as a heritage, and well established, of our own spiritual heritage.

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2.- San José de Calasanz. OPERA OMNIA. Volume 1, page 169. Letter of 23 November 1622.

I synthesize this first part of my shared reflection by recalling its common thread. It helps us to understand what it means to hold a General Chapter under the guidance of the Holy Spirit by approaching the privileged spaces that Calasanz stands out as “*occasions of the Spirit*”. I wanted to highlight above all three: our ecclesial **experience**, our formation and **Piarist life** attentive to the inner work of the Spirit and our spiritual and prayer **experience**. Without a doubt, three areas that we must keep in mind in these months and in the next six-year time.

I would like to dedicate **the second part** of my fraternal letter to highlighting two **attitudes** that can help us in this exciting task of living under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I believe that our General Chapter will do us a great service if he proposes them and reminds us all of us, and that we will make the Chapter a good space of discernment if we live them and share them. Each of them would give for a very broad reflection, but I think it is worth saying something about each.

Living life as a spiritual process. Our lives are often full of activity, work and various responsibilities. This will probably never change. Nevertheless, there are certain dynamisms that, without “saving us work”, help us to live more consciously all that we do, and to know how to perceive the presence of God in our lives. It is about knowing how to name what we live; working to put it in God’s hands. Taking care of the mediations that help us live more faith-centered. Working our inner freedom that helps us decide from the common good and not from our personal plans. Taking care of the various dimensions of our vocation by being aware of our fragility. Seek those aids that can strengthen us. Finding in mission and in the community support and strength. Taking care of those times when we can be more dedicated to inner work, valuing them to their fair measure. Living everyday life as a key to fidelity, etc. In short, what it is about is assuming that our vocation needs a *spiritual process that is cared for and shared*. I hope our Chapter will give us a word on all this.

Appreciate the delivery to the mission. For Piarist, giving themselves to children and young people is the most genuine expression of the encounter with Christ. Since the birth of our Order, this “Calasanzian secret” has deeply marked us: “*Whoever welcomes one of these little ones in my name welcomes me*” (Mk 9:37). Calasanz refers to this text in his Preamble, and made it flesh of his own duringt all his life. It is good that our General Chapter, which will keep the Memorial to Cardinal Tonti’s 400th anniversary well in mind, offers guidance on our *irreplaceable* ministry. It is helpful to read in the Preamble de Calasanz that we tend to the perfection of charity, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, through the exercise of our own ministry (CC1, C4). Our mission is not only a “work”, but the privileged space of encounter with Christ.

I have the experience of having spoken with many young Piarists who initiate their ministry and have their first experiences as educators and priests. It is very common for them to tell me something like this: “*it is much more what children give me than what I give them*” or “*what sustains me in my vo-*

tion is the encounter with the children". During the pandemic experience, I was able to converse with several Piarists, all of them coincident in a deep nostalgia: *"I miss children"*. Our mission, our daily dedication to children and young people, is a central element of our spiritual experience and our ability to live under the guidance of the Holy Ghost.

Let us continue to pray for the fruits of our General Chapter, that it may all be for the Glory of God and the Utility of the Neighbor.

Receive a fraternal embrace.

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