



An irreplaceable ministry

LETTER TO OUR
BRETHREN
DEC 2020

The Piarist Ministry, defined by Calasanz as *irreplaceable*, will be the third important nucleus we want to work on in the next General Chapter, together with the two which have been the subject of my previous fraternal letters (“the construction of the Order” and “the Piarist we need”) and the fourth to which I will refer in the next, God willing (the centrality of Jesus Christ). Calasanz puts it in the Memorial to Cardinal Tonti as follows. *“And among the latter is the Work of the Poor of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools, with an irreplaceable ministry, in the opinion common to all, ecclesiastic and lay people, princes and citizens, and perhaps the main one for the reform of corrupted customs; a ministry that consists of the good education of boys, since on it depends all the rest of the good or bad living of the future man.”*¹

There are a variety of points of view from which we can approach the keys of our Piarist ministry. No doubt that the General Chapter will have the opportunity to delve into several of them. I would like to focus, in this brief reflection, on three aspects that I think are very important to me.

The first is precisely the adjective that Calasanz uses to refer to our ministry: **“irreplaceable”**. I’ve thought a lot about this statement. And I think it has a very deep meaning.

Some people may think that the educational mission carried out by the Pious

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1.- Saint Joseph Calasanz. Memorial to Cardinal Tonti. Opera Omnia, Volume IX, page 302

Schools makes sense as long as states do not fully assume the duty to guarantee education to young generations. According to this view, Calasanz' proposal would be born with a "fallback mentality", until other bodies took on the challenge of education.

Nothing further from reality. Neither Calasanz, nor many other founders of religious congregations dedicated to education made their decisions from a fallback mentality. Quite the opposite. They wanted to give a holistic response to a holistic need. Our educational project will never cease to be essential, because never before, now or in the future, will be fully taken over by states. The Piarist School has *something else*, and it must contribute it. The Piarist School must believe in its project and offer it without a doubt and with conviction, for the sake of children and young people. That is why the joint work of all those who believe in this educational proposal is essential. That's the only way it is going to move on. There are still many children and teens without schooling, and many more who need a school that actually works as such. And it will always be necessary to have a school that evangelizes education, one that brings them to Christ, one that bets on the poor, one that smells of the Kingdom of God. This is not offered by any official curriculum.

Calasanz taught us to believe in what we are called to contribute. To believe not only theoretically, but also in a committed way, as believers believe. Believing so that we give ourselves to what we believe in. To believe is to work for it, for a bold project of the Piarist School. Without being afraid of the difficulties that may arise.

Believing in our project, without downgrading or dissolving it in the educational market, for responding to expectations, and summoning everyone to a common project, leading it as much as necessary.

Believing in our own project means that – although we must know how to position ourselves in each context – we do not adapt it to the demands, but we offer it as something valuable, in such a way, of course, that it can be received and welcomed. We offer it as a humble service, but with conviction.

Because we believe, we invite others to this project. The world, children, young people need convinced educators, they need Piarist religious, they need dedicated shepherds, they need convinced parents. Calling is an extraordinary task. It is not self-centered. There is nothing more committed to human beings than calling to be educators. It is not enough just to give our life for education, we must look for others who will do it after us. This is one of the good teachings of Calasanz.

Sometimes it gives the impression that we do not have a project. Or that we are content to comply with the requirements of the legislation of each country. There are people in our institutions who think that ours brings very little novelty and that, if we leave, nothing happens. Quite the contrary, we must say that leaving a school is something that we cannot afford to, or be in it without working for its future, for its growth, for its consolidation.

There is a second point of view from which I want to refer to our ministry, and it is none other than the context provoked by Pope Francis calling the whole society to “**Rebuild the Global Educational Pact**”.

From the moment the Pope summoned us to this formidable challenge, I have been collaborating in some teams, especially from the coordination of the answers that we can give the various religious congregations that are dedicated to education. I would like to offer you a summary of what is at stake in this topic of the GLOBAL EDUCATIONAL PACT.

As a starting point, the Pope believes that we have to “*rebuild*” the educational pact, because there are important fractures that we must recognize and face, especially three: between the person and God; then, that of human relationships in their diversity (the relationship with the one who is different from me) and, finally, that of the person with nature. These three fractures can only be overcome through education. That is why a global pact is needed to address them and allow us to fight for a different world.

The itinerary from which this work of reconstruction of the GLOBAL EDUCATIONAL PACT is addressed provides for various meetings and forums for reflection, the definition of some central nuclei from which to articulate the Pact process, and preferential options from which to move forward. I set aside the reference to the various meetings, the information of which is public and available to all, and I am referring to the cores and options.

The four central cores from which we want to work have become clear: *human dignity and rights; integral ecology* from the perspective of *Laudato Si'*; *peace and citizenship; solidarity and development*. The three options from which to drive the whole process in these cores are also clear. There are three: *putting the person at the center; driving all the processes* that help the person grow; *educating in service* to the common good of all human beings.

I think that we are not facing a series of more or less interesting events, but are in front of a formidable process of rethinking education and placing it in place, as the key to a better world, of a more just and fraternal society. For us, Piarists, sons and daughters of the founder of the Christian popular school, it is easy to understand this process, because we have been working on it for four centuries and because we know from the beginning of our Piarist history that “*if from childhood the child is diligently imbued in piety and in the letters, a happy course of his life can be foreseen, with foundation*”², and that “*on the careful education of children depends the reform of society*”.³ That is why our ministry is “*irreplaceable*”.⁴ Calasanz put it sublimely in one of the best-known paragraphs of his Memorial to Cardinal Tonti: “*Very meritorious, for establishing and applying with fullness of charity in the Church, a preventive and healing remedy of evil, inductive and enlightening for good, intended for all children of all conditions - and therefore all those who pass through that age first - through letters and spirit,*

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2.- Saint Joseph Calasanz. Constitutions Pauline Congregation, 2

3.- Saint Joseph Calasanz. Constitutions Pauline Congregation, 175

4.- Saint Joseph Calasanz. Memorial to Cardinal Tonti. Opera Omnia, Volume IX, page 302

good customs and manners, the light of God and the world. ⁵

I would like to invite you all to be part of this challenge proposed to the world by Pope Francis. Let us be attentive to the process and look for our best ways to participate in this universal task of rebuilding the global education pact. We are facing a challenge that has already been initiated - prophetically - by Calasanz, and in which today we can and must continue to do our best. We know that the current situation is not easy. But that is why it is more urgent.

And the **third aspect** from which I want to approach the reflection on our ministry has to do with some **bets that we have made as an Order** and which we must deepen. They are a lot of them, but I am going to mention only five of them.

The first is *to sustain our schools*. We have to be realistic: we have schools in crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a situation where sustainability is not guaranteed for some of our schools. This is the reality. We are going to have to go down a difficult path, in which we will have to make complicated decisions, so that we can sustain some of our schools until the situation improves and we can return to the pre-pandemic state, if we can. We need to speak to each other clearly, but we must also encourage ourselves to fight, as An Order, for our works. Things are not easy, especially in some contexts that have suffered especially the pandemic, such as our American provinces. A few months ago I wouldn't have even been put up with this "hold our schools" bet. But the scenario we have forces us to take it very seriously.

There is a second, exciting bet that we are making in relation to our ministry: *the synodal process and the Calasanz Movement*. The Piarist Synod that we are living, and the work sustained to consolidate the Calasanz Movement in all the Pious Schools is opening new "*mission windows*" and is posing new challenges for us. I'm sure that our General Chapter, which will have the presence of some young people in the last days of work, will give us clues about all this. Among these challenges, we can cite some that already appear strongly: what kind of Piarists today's young people need; what proposals for co-responsibility in the mission should be built with young people; what testimony we must offer them; what quality in the keys of the Calasanz Movement we must guarantee; what vocational dynamisms we must promote; what processes of faith we can and must accompany, etc.

The third bet has to do with *educational innovation* on our educational platforms. We're all working here. I just want to name the main concern I perceive among those responsible for our ministry: innovation, yes, but from who we are, from our identity. This is the challenge of the Pious Schools. We are immersed in a process of deep innovation. We are aware that nothing can be the same for a long time, and that we must know how to be in the world in which we live and in the one that will come. We know that the real Piarist is the one that prepares its students to know how to live in a world that does not yet exist but empowers them to create and transform it. That's why we believe in inno-

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5.- Saint Joseph Calasanz. Memorial to Cardinal Tonti. Opera Omnia, Volume IX, page 303

vation. But real innovation, one from the perspective of which we are speaking, can only be made starting from our own and indispensable identity of who we are and determining, with certain discernment, what are the essential vectors from which we want to innovate our school. Then, once we have changed the vectors, methods and resources will come.

The fourth bet is raised directly by the process of the Global Education Pact itself, and we can synthesize it like this: *to educate for global citizenship, with a strong inspiration in the proposals of the encyclical Laudato si' of Pope Francis*. There is even a concept that is already being coined, and it is the *eco-education* concept. Our schools have a clear, gospel-based educational project. We know what we want. We make it known. We try to make its keys imprint the daily work of educators. We're looking for it to be known to the families. We turn it into challenging educational proposals for our students, and we try to properly accompany their holistic growth process as people. Well, to this need of having a clear, assumed and shared project, we must add a very clear certainty today: among the axes of this project must be the challenge of educating for a global citizenship and in the awareness of the importance of integral ecology. This commitment must be at the heart of our project, if we are to be faithful to what the Church proposes to us and to what our world needs: young people committed to building a better world, for them and for future generations.

And the fifth bet I want to refer to is deeply Calasanctian, and Our Holy Father left it written in his Constitutions: *to care painstakingly for our mission*. The text of Calasanz is very beautiful: *"If our Work is carried out with due care, undoubted the insistent requests for foundation will continue in many states, cities and towns, as has been proven to the present"*.⁶ Our ministry must be lived like this: with daily care and attention. Class by class, meeting by meeting, project by project, student by student, day by day, every day. Only in this way do we live in fidelity the Piarist vocation. It's good to remember it once in a while. For us there is no quality without commitment.

Receive a fraternal embrace.

*Fr. Pedro Aguado Sch. P.
Father General*

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6.- San José de Calasanz. Congregation Constitutions Paulina, 175.