



# Growing up “as God wishes it”

LETTER TO OUR  
BRETHREN  
JUN 2021

I am writing this fraternal letter in the midst of a process of reflection on the major nuclei that will be worked on in our next General Chapter, and shortly after having participated in the assembly of the General Piarist Fraternity, which was held in online mode because of the pandemic situation we are experiencing. In both contexts we are talking about the process of growth that we are living, and we are happy to know that in various contexts of the Pious Schools more and more young people are joining us who want to become religious, or that the Order is gradually expanding into new contexts and new missions. We are deeply happy because our mission is to serve, and whatever we do and live will always be less than the needs and challenges we have. We are happy to grow little by little.

But I am concerned that we fall into the temptation of understanding growth only as a quantitative issue, of being more people or being in new places.

So I would like to invite you to think about other criteria that can help us to assess our growth - or challenge it - in addition to the purely quantitative one, important though it is, of course.

I am inspired by the text of Luke’s gospel in which it says that Jesus, as a child, was growing up. It says of this child that he grew “*in maturity, wisdom and grace in the sight of God and people*”. I would like to use this text to reflect, with you, on what it means to “grow up as God intended”. *What does it mean for the Pious Schools to grow in maturity, wisdom and grace before God and people?* A few simple reflections on each of these.

## MATURITY

What does it mean to “grow in maturity”? There are certainly many ways to approach this challenge. I have chosen only four aspects, always thinking of

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1.- Lc 2, 52

our reality. I believe that all four would help us a lot to grow in the maturity that Calasanz wanted for our Order.

**Clarity in one's identity and project.** This is the first point, and it is essential. A group, a community, a religious Order will be able to grow if it is clear about what it is and what it is called to be. Everything we do to deepen our identity, to know more and better the founder's proposal and its actualisation, to live our charism with more quality, to strengthen all the dynamisms of life that we have been consolidating throughout our long history, all this will help us.

We have many young people in formation who have the right to live a clear identity, and this is not just a matter of time. It is an option that needs to be worked on. We have very young presences, which need clear and Piarist references in order to grow. We have very consolidated demarcations that must open a process of "greater identity contribution" to the whole of the Pious Schools. We have a Calasanzian treasure to deepen, promote, publish and offer. There is much work to be done. In this line, the General Congregation has just created a new department of the General Curia on "Calasanzian identity and charism".

**Sustainability.** It is one of the challenges we are talking about most. The concept of "*integral sustainability*" is slowly making its way among us and is making us think. There are social dynamics that do not depend on us and that complicate and weaken us (political choices, economic crises, pandemics, etc.). But there are others that do depend on us and that we have to face up to: working from projects; leadership teams; increasing our internal collaboration; the process of participation; promoting the "keys of life"; growing in our capacity to obtain external resources; working in networks and weaving networks; convening; training young people from this mindset; promoting the Fraternity, etc.

**Capacity to engender.** The capacity to engender life is characteristic of maturity. This has always been the case in the Order. The maturity of the Provinces is what has made them capable not only of sustaining and increasing their own reali-

ties, but also of opening new presences in different parts of the world. Thanks to this mentality our Order is today with new possibilities of life and mission. Our young people understand this very well. They know that they have not come to the Order only to maintain what we have. They love and admire it. Our reality is the fruit of the work and courage of our elders, and they feel grateful for it and committed to its development. But they feel called to give new answers. This is a very good thing; it is a gift that we must know how to accompany.

**Dynamisms of life.** Our previous General Chapter made a great contribution to the whole of the Pious Schools by approving the nine "Keys of Life" which have marked the way for the six years that are coming to an end. They are by no means exhausted. We will have to continue to work on them, looking for new ways forward. It is clear that some will emerge and will be worked on by the Chapter. Among them, the processes proper to synodality, the hopes of the young, the renewal of the "culture of Order", etc. We are living in a very rich time. We must take care that the problems and difficulties do not obscure the calls that we receive and that we must heed. It is not in our hands to "guarantee maturity", but what is in our hands is to "put in place the conditions to make maturity possible". And this is the challenge of our "keys of life".

## WISDOM

What does it mean to grow in wisdom? It is very good to "*give concrete names*" to the challenge of "growing in wisdom". I am sure that all of you could come up with very rich and plural ways of approaching this challenge. I would like to offer four possibilities.

**Open formation.** Formation remains central. Not only initial formation, but lifelong formation. Only a formation that is clear and open to the reality in which we live, that enables us to understand it and to overcome it by transforming it, only that formation will make us capable of "growing in wisdom". There is much work to be done: improving the formation of our young people in philosophy, theology, pedagogy and, in

general, in civil studies; caring for and using libraries; reading; publishing; offering specialised studies; promoting formation within communities; languages; participation in ecclesial and social life; the creation of educational inputs, etc.

**Reading reality.** There is no doubt that our founder was a master in this dimension of wisdom: knowing how to read the reality in which he lived, allowing himself to be challenged by it and seeking the way to transform it. Only from these dynamics can we, as Piarists, continue to be useful to the world in which we live. Partial, short-term or disincarnated visions are not worthy of the sons of Calasanz. It would be good to go deeper into all this. And a good way to do this is to make our communities true spaces for listening to reality. God also speaks through the struggles and aspirations of the people, of the women and men of our time.

**Listening to the Spirit and evangelical discernment.** Here lies one of the central dimensions of the wisdom in which we are called to grow: learning to discern in openness to the Holy Spirit. Discernment is far removed from ideological struggles or the defence of our own positions. Likewise, it is far removed from the simplification of decisions simply through majority mechanisms. If our Lord had put the decision to “*go up to Jerusalem to face it*”<sup>2</sup> to a vote of the community - without calm and serene discernment -, the result would probably have been negative. It will be good to give some thought to this precious and exciting challenge.

**Promote a “culture of Order” that helps us to be in a dynamic of change and conversion.** The “culture of a religious Order” is made up of those dynamics and ways of acting which, over time, consolidate and stabilise. But if we do not introduce into them the capacity to transform them, if we do not take decisions that allow us to increase our capacity for change and evolution, we run the risk of falling into the “it has always been done this way”. And that is not wise. We cannot turn our “culture” into “it has always been done this way”.

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2.- Lc 9, 51

## GRACE

Grace is a gift of God. But it is also the fruit of a way of life. From the combination of both dimensions we can ask ourselves the question “what does it mean to grow in grace”.

**Living the faith and the centrality of the Lord.** There is no doubt that living the centrality of the Lord Jesus in our lives is what will help us to grow in that precious dimension of every Christian’s life which is “making God’s presence transparent”. We need to recover the conviction that we are called to be saints. We must lose the fear of saying it and sharing it: what we do and what we live we do and we live for the glory of God and the benefit of our neighbour. But sometimes we have remained only with the first or the second part of Calasanz’ motto, which is a unity. It would be good for us to reflect on this as well.

**Ability to contribute Way.** We are followers of the One who said “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life”. This affirmation of the Lord must inspire our service to children and young people: we are here to offer them roads that bring them closer to Christ and lead them to Him. And we will only do so if we walk these roads with them.

**Ability to contribute Truth.** The Truth of which we are the bearers is not of this world, nor is it widely understood or valued by it. But we are its co-operators. And this involves many dynamisms, from the personal challenge of “living in truth”, without falsehoods - I have to admit with pain that this is not always the case in all the brothers, and that there are sometimes “back rooms” that overshadow us - to the great and definitive challenge of always offering the Truth of the Gospel, the Christian proposal, without lowering it or adapting it to the cultural or dominant currents of the moment. And neither one nor the other is easy, one because we are sinners, and the other because the temptation of “applause” is always very attractive.

**Ability to contribute Life.** What else is education but an offer of life? What is it that gives full identity and meaning to our mission? Let me put it succinctly and clearly: the questions and the

deepest searches of young people can only be answered by the One who is the answer. We are not here just to “prepare young people to find their place in the world”, but to enable them to transform it and to inspire them to overcome its limits, helping them to desire the fullness of eternal life. Sometimes we are left with short-sighted proposals that are not bad, but are profoundly incomplete

## IN FRONT OF GOD AND PEOPLE

The Pious Schools walk in history “before God and people”. Increasing this awareness can help us to integrate some options that are knocking at our doors. I simply cite a few examples: to assume that we must be accountable for the witness we offer and for the quality with which we work; to allow ourselves to be questioned by the Christian community, by families, by young people, by the educational world, etc.; to live with a sincere capacity for self-criticism the decisions we make and the path we follow, etc. We live in the world, we are an ecclesial institution, we have an educational proposal, people have the right to believe what we say, seeing what we live. This is also to grow.

For all this we must have a General Chapter that helps us in the process of “*growing as God wishes it*”, and that can offer the Order a word on the centrality of the Lord in our life, on the Piarist we need, on the challenges we have to make better Pious Schools and on the mission - irreplaceable - that we have. These are the main focuses of our Chapter.

Receive a fraternal hug.

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Father General*