



# *The basic synodality*

LETTER TO OUR  
BRETHREN  
JUL-AUG 2021

**A**s you all know, Pope Francis has launched a formidable process of *ecclesial discernment on synodality*. For two years, the whole Church will be working on this exciting challenge of seeking a “*synodal Church, based on communion, participation and mission.*”<sup>1</sup>

There is no doubt that this is the context in which we will live, work and receive our 48th General Chapter, scheduled for next January. Synodality will also be one of the specific themes we will be working on in the chapter meetings.

In this fraternal letter I want to share with you some reflections on what I like to call “*basic synodality*”, that is, the life of the small Piarist community in which we each live our vocation. I believe that we will not be able to advance credibly

in the proposal of synodality if we do not take special care of the small “*daily synod*” that we live in our communities, through our shared life, our meetings, our prayer, our daily witness. I still believe that this basic synodality is a condition for the possibility of the other, the Piarist and ecclesial synodality.

Obviously, our community life has many dimensions and very diverse keys, which make it the integral space out of which each of us lives our vocation, our following of the Lord. I am not going to write about all this, but I am going to focus especially on one of the most important aspects which, in my opinion, we must try to recover in our Order, and that is none other than the issue of the ***community meeting***.

I have consciously used the verb “recover”, and I do so because I believe that we have to recognize that in some places our communities do not meet or do so in a very sporadic way, without rhythm or plans, thus turning the meeting into

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1.- Mario, Cardinal GRECH, secretary-general of the Synod of Bishops. Presentation of the XVI General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: “For a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission”. Vatican, May 21, 2021.

an event tending towards irrelevance. I think we have to make a strong turnaround in all of this, with a clear commitment to a consistent and prepared weekly meeting of the religious community.

Let us approach this proposal from various points of view. First of all, I would like to invite you to review what our Constitutions say about the community meeting. It is a matter that is dealt with, as you know, in numbers 32, 134, 165 and 167. It is very interesting to make us aware of the dynamisms that our Constitutions associate with the “family meeting”. They are these:

- a) The development of common action and shared responsibility. And for this to work, they must be prepared with the effort and cooperation of all (C134).
- b) The place of reflection on the really important questions(C165).
- c) The context in which we review and propose improvements for our spiritual, Calasancian and apostolic life(C167).
- d) The construction of authentic community (C32).

I have always been struck by these objectives that our Constitutions associate with community meeting. No more and no less than these: building authentic communities; the discernment of the major issues; the development of co-responsibility and common action; our ability to review what we are experiencing and to improve it. In other words, a Piarist community life worthy of the name is not possible without the properly prepared and systematically held community meeting.

Let us ask ourselves, thinking about our specific community, ***how does all this resonate in our daily Piarist life?***

Moving on a little further, I would like to share with you that, after these years of service to the Order, I have come to a certain clarity on what are the most important aspects that we must

take care of in all aspects of our community life. Reducing them as much as possible and being aware of the risk of simplification - I hope you will allow me - I think there are three: the *centrality of Christ in our life; the care of the vocational process of the brothers and the impulse of our mission.*

It is around these three major aspects, which are directly related to *consecration, communion and mission*, that we can and should situate all the objectives and all the choices we wish to make in order to improve our community life. And, for the same reason, these would be the three great nuclei that should inspire all our community meetings, which should be placed at “*the shared table*” of our homes, in our fraternal meetings. Our communities do not meet “*to discuss more or less interesting topics*”, but to take care of the centrality of the Lord in our life, to accompany the vocational process of the brothers and to carry out the mission entrusted.

The image of the “**shared table**”, which has deep New Testament roots, can help us to explore these themes in greater depth. In our homes we have the “table of the Eucharist”, the “table of the Word”, the “table of the shared meeting”, etc. All of them are expressions of this synodality, and all of them serve the three great options to which I have referred above. All of them are indispensable in our common life, and all of them must be cherished with care and co-responsibility.

I will try to suggest some avenues in which we can move forward in this care of the ‘shared table’, referring in particular to the aspects that I think we need to review.

The **daily celebration of the Community Eucharist** is central to our Piarist life. Without it, the community loses its center. It is true that in many communities it is difficult for all the religious to be present in the common Eucharist, because there are many other celebratory commitments (parish, chaplaincies, churches, school, pastoral work). But when this happens, it would be important that at least once a week the whole community gathers around the Eucharistic table to share and celebrate the center of the community. There should not be any community that

did not make this effort, and with a particularly cared-for celebration.

The **Word shared** through a community *lectio divina*, as a school of meditation and discernment based on the Word of God. Few communities do this, and although in many formation houses this dynamic is carried out, it is then lost and forgotten. It does not have to be weekly, but it must be.

**Community discernment** on the really important issues that affect us and that need our response. Many times we have talked about the need we have to learn to discern, to make decisions based on a proper and careful evangelical and Calasancian discernment. We can learn little by little, we can move towards more open and caring communities in their capacity for shared discernment, but only if we accept that we need to learn how to do it.

The **sharing of life**, where we share our own history, or some recent experience, or our work and discoveries, or the review of the community's own life or the responsibilities of each one, etc. There are many and diverse ways in which "shared life" can be enhanced. It is a question of valuing it. This is one of the aspects most dear to young people in formation and which they miss the most when they join the life of mission communities.

**Formation**, which is so necessary among us, and which helps us to always be "attentive" to reality and its challenges. It is impossible to have a community life in which we do not reflect, in a shared way, on themes proper to the Order, to the life of the Church, to education, to pastoral care, to culture, to society, and so on. Recovering - I use the same verb again - the community as a formative space is very important for us.

**Accompanying the mission.** In most of our presences the Piarist communities are associated with a mission. It is good that we take care of the community reflection on the mission to which we are committed. It will be a discernment more and more in the key of shared mission and in the key of Piarist presence, but equally necessary for all.

**Collaboration in the Piarist presence** of which we are part. It is one of the keys that is gradually taking root among us and that offers many ways of enrichment for the community, because it is based on relationship, openness, welcome, decentralization and the search for the global impulse of what is Piarist. And this is very necessary for our communities, for the development of synodality.

The **festivity and the shared joy.** This is also synodality. Celebration, shared free time, thanksgiving for the brothers, welcome of those who come and bidding farewell to those who leave for a new destination, celebrating the great landmarks of the Order, etc., all this also builds community.

The **connection of the community with the life of the Province and of the Order**, through topics, meetings, proposals, shared documents, common searches, tasks entrusted to us, and so forth. We need to connect the life of the communities and the life of the demarcation.

The elaboration and development of the **community project**, always in connection with the project of the presence and with the project of the Province, and inspired by the "keys of life of the Order". This is the basic framework (not the only one) within which *we live and work on the basis of projects*, as we have been affirming in most of our meetings over these years.

These and other dynamics can inspire and enrich the community meeting among us. They are not all of them, nor have I intended an exhaustive inventory. I have only wanted to suggest areas on which I think we should focus our attention, so that we can give new life to our Piarist religious communities.

Allow me to conclude with a very concrete proposal: that all our communities meet weekly at a "shared table" where they can develop a good part of these dynamisms proper to our consecrated life and which would help us so much in the three great challenges that we propose to ourselves in each of our houses: to lead a life centered on the

Lord, to accompany the development of the vocation of each one and promote our mission.

The recovery of the weekly community meeting will be a good step in the line proposed by Pope Francis to walk in synodal dynamics, taking care of communion, participation, and shared mission. We are invited to do so.

A fraternal embrace to you.

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Father General*