

Seeds bearing new life

LETTER TO OUR
BRETHREN
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After a year and a half, we are still living in the midst of a pandemic that we are not being able to control and that we still do not know when and how it will end. It is undoubtedly an exceptional experience for all mankind and, therefore, for Consecrated Life and for the whole of the Pious Schools.

We can approach this experience from very different points of view, but I would like to do so from a perspective that I have been thinking about for quite some time and which is based on a very specific conviction. I would like to formulate this conviction with the help of a question: ***what is the Spirit bringing forth in the midst of these difficult circumstances we are living through, in the midst of a pandemic that seems to have no end?***

If we analyze the history of Consecrated Life, we see that in times of difficulty and suffering new answers have arisen which began with small seeds but which

over time became leafy trees bursting with fruit and life. This is the experience of Calasanz and other founders who, in the context of that Rome full of injustice and suffering, gave rise to “*answers of life*”, inspired by the Spirit, to care for children, the poor, the sick and, without a doubt, a Church in need of reform and transformation.

I think nothing that happens is simply an event. It is also an opportunity, a context, a reality in which “sprouts of life” emerge that are at first imperceptible but which, over time, end up generating exciting processes of change, blessing and life. Therefore, I would like to invite you to ask yourself this question: *what seeds of new life have been sown throughout this pandemic in the context of Consecrated Life and the Pious Schools?* What seeds of renewal, of new discoveries, of new responses to mission, are already germinating in our midst and will undoubtedly trigger new opportunities for our Piarist life and mission?

I would like to point out ten examples, based on a simple and initial observation of what we are experiencing. There are ten affirmations that begin to mark direction in our life and will help us to walk with greater authenticity as Piarists. I am sure of that.

First of all, I believe that among us there has grown the extraordinary experience of human limitation, of our fragility, of the fact that **we are small creatures in the hands of God**. The pandemic has contributed greatly to the fact that we men and women of faith have come closer to the love of God and to an encounter with the Lord with greater need - the fruit of our littleness. Who has not had renewed experiences of prayer and encounter with God in the face of people's suffering, in the face of bewilderment in the face of an uncertain future, in the face of sickness and death? Perhaps even we religious, so used to making plans and projects, have also been able to rediscover that *"we must work as if everything depended on us, knowing that everything depends on God"*. This is the first seed that will bear much fruit: let us take care of our experience of fragility, in order to understand that *fullness is the smallness inhabited by God*.

The second seed that is germinating is that **of the value of community**, the importance of relationships, of caring for one another. I think there has been a rediscovery of community, of community prayer, of community discernment, of fraternal life. I think we have become more aware of the profound challenge of building authentic community life among different personalities, dreams, visions, and experiences.

There is a third experience that I think will mark us and very deeply. We have met religious who have maintained a dynamic of help and service to the people who are suffering most in this pandemic, but we have also met religious men and women who have taken refuge in the security of their lives, perhaps yielding to the temptation to think only of themselves. We are human, and we have our contradictions. But I believe that this pandemic will help us to **"look more deeply at reality"**, to approach it with more Calasanzian eyes, seeking to grow, as an Order, in our capacity

to respond to the needs of children and young people, something that does not have to be in contradiction with the due prudence in taking care of ourselves. We cannot succumb to the virus of indifference, because that would be an incurable pandemic.

The fourth seed has a well-known name: **Pious Schools Going Forth**. I thank God that our Order has been able to start two foundations during the pandemic. With all kinds of difficulties, but there is our presence in Guatemala and East Timor. Perhaps these are the two most striking initiatives, but I do not want to omit to say something that seems to me formidable: in all the Provinces there have been movements and initiatives of mission. The pandemic has not stopped us. Just some simple examples to illustrate this statement: the steps taken in Mozambique to propose a second presence in the diocese of Tete; the opening of a new mission in Puerto Rico, in the town of Adjuntas; the systematic planning that is going on in India to open some new presence in other states and in other rites; the opening of a new "Hogar Calasanz" in Argentina; the opening of our second presence in the Ukraine, in the Province of Poland; the steps taken to be able to take on a new school in the Dominican Republic, etc. All this is happening in these months. The seed of apostolic audacity has been germinating for a long time among us, but at this time it does so underlining a conviction: *nothing can and should stop the charism*.

The seed of the intercultural. Obviously, it has been sown among us a long time ago, but there is something new that should make us think. Nations have been closing borders and putting requirements on people from outside to enter them. Perhaps it is a prudent measure, we will not argue with it. But what we are very clear about is that in Consecrated Life and in the Church we are committed to the opposite: to open our doors to the different, and to travel the exciting path of building something new and common among those who are different. The path of transformation of our world passes through bridges and not through walls. I am sure that the experience of these months will help us to consolidate the path we are on. Our communities have responded to

the closing of borders with a greater experience of fraternity and prayer for one another. We have grown in the conviction that we form one body.

Despite the situation, what we have experienced is that **we have communicated more and better**. The new channels opened by digital communication, although they can never replace the fullness of face-to-face relationships, have offered us a new experience: we have communicated more. We have never had so many meetings for formation and fraternal communication as in this pandemic. Never have we brought together all the juniors of the Order. Never have we been so close to one another. Digital is here to stay and to transform our relationships, making them more alive and fruitful.

We need the children; the children need us.

The experience of the pandemic makes us more aware of the importance of the educational relationship in our schools, parishes and socio-educational centers. We fight and work for physical presence, not only because it is a value we believe in, but also because there is no other way to carry out our mission. The school, the true educational relationship, is a right of the children. We cannot forget this.

We can say with joy and humility that, in this very difficult experience, **we know how to get ahead**, overcome obstacles, and continue to give the best of ourselves for the children and young people. The seed of the effort to continue building Pious Schools keeps germinating among us.

And there is a very new seed that will also bear fruit in the short term: we are realizing that nothing will be the same after this pandemic. We are not seeking a return to the “old normal”, simply because we did not like it. **What we seek is to build the new society**, based on values that are emerging among us in a renewed way and that will help us to reorient our mission: the centrality of the Lord, the only answer to all questions; the value of education as a key to social transformation; attention to the poor and the needy; the importance of the community; the struggle for the right to education; the search for global citizenship, etc.

In the midst of the pandemic, the Order gave birth to a new Province, that of Asia Pacific. This is perhaps one of the most significant events we have experienced in recent months. I would like to end this fraternal letter with some words that I wrote to the brothers of this new Province in the letter in which I informed them of the decision: *“There is a quotation from the Gospel that can help us in this historic moment in which we live. It is a parable, that of the mustard seed. It goes like this: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a man planted in his field. Although it is the smallest of all seeds, when it grows it is the largest of the vegetables and becomes a tree, so that birds come and nest in its branches.’ (Mt. 13, 31-32). I like to apply this parable to the life of our Order. We start with small presences. But little by little, with God’s favor, with daring and patience, with generous co-responsibility, with a missionary spirit, the Order grows and becomes a space of welcome, mission and of the Kingdom.*

We know that seeds bear fruit, but they depend on the soil in which they germinate. Let us work to make our Pious Schools that “good soil” that makes life possible.

Receive a fraternal embrace.

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