



Accents in Formation

Letter to our
brethren

DEC 2022

I continue with the task of sharing with all of you some reflections related to the Keys of Life approved by our 48th General Chapter, highlighting those nuances that enrich them and make them challenging for us. I dedicate this salutatio to the theme of Initial Formation, one of the issues that was most worked on, both in the Chapter sessions and in the previous process of reflection and preparation.

I begin by recalling the text of the key to life that we approved: *“To promote those options and experiences that today are most urgent and necessary for the proper development of our Initial Formation processes”*. The meaning of this wording is very evident: Initial Formation is very worked and reflected among us, we have a complete and renewed Directory (FEDE), but new challenges must be considered. The Chapter did not say again everything that needs to be told about Initial Formation but highlighted and underlined some concrete aspects of the formation process. Therefore, the proposal says, **“options and experiences that are more necessary today.”** Therefore, I will not devote this letter to outlining the essential nuclei of our Initial Formation, but to underline some of the convictions that the General Chapter considered important

I am going to highlight only five of the several themes that the Chapter proposed, and I am going to add two more that I see as particularly significant at this time for the Order. Obviously, the subject remains open, like almost all of them, so that we can continue our reflection within our communities and prov-

inces. I begin with the five that I would like to highlight from those approved by the Chapter.

The “**missionary culture**”. I am impressed by the synthetic expression and the depth of the content. The Chapter asks that Initial Formation be pregnant with missionary culture and that it generate that culture in young people and, consequently, in the Order. “*Culture*” refers to something stable that guides our way of living, working and discerning. This is what is asked for. The “*missionary*” topic refers to the particular pastoral practice in the three senses the Order thinks of when it speaks of “mission,” namely:

- To live with enthusiasm the mission entrusted to us and to which we have been sent, wherever we are.
- To live the availability to assume new sendings in new places of the Order.
- To dedicate our vocation to new foundations or a mission in contexts in which the proclamation of the faith is still very fragile, in dynamic “*ad gentes*”.

It will be important that in all our houses of formation and within our demarcations, we consider what we can do to advance in this missionary culture. Undoubtedly, the experience of a time of mission in different places of the Order, and the emphasis on an integral formation that includes the appropriate educational and pastoral experience will be two of the most necessary options.

“**Integral ecology**” as a transversal approach in formation. The Church, encouraged by Pope Francis, has become clearly aware of the importance of working for an integral ecology, from which we can all grow and walk from a new ecological approach that transforms our way of inhabiting the world, our lifestyles, our relationship with the earth’s resources and, in general, our way of seeing human beings and living life. It is about promoting, on a daily basis, an integral human ecology, which involves not only environmental issues but the whole person, so that he or she becomes capable of listening to the cry of the poor and of being a leaven for a new society. The Chapter asks us to introduce

this key into our formation processes, and calls us to connect decisively with this ecclesial call.

“**Culture of entrepreneurship**”. The chapter’s insistence on “*culture change*” is extremely interesting and has to do with something that is very much at the heart of our concerns. We can try to renew our “*culture of Order*” in those aspects that we consider significant. For this, fine discernment is necessary to help us guide the direction we want to walk. At this point, the Chapter tells us that we need our young people to be entrepreneurs. Something like this Calasanz must have thought when he insisted that “*we should give the habit only to people who have the soul of a founder*”. [1]

I believe that this is a very demanding proposal for formators and formation communities. We want our young people to grow in autonomy, be creative, have experiences of gradually assuming responsibilities, and be sufficiently aware of the type of Piarist we need. Our Initial Formation must offer and ask young people for transparent and objective growth in their responsibility for life, studies, mission, the Province and their vocation. And this has, at times, its risks. It is better to learn from mistakes than not to have the opportunity to make mistakes because they give me everything, done or decided. Life is not lived in a glass bell but in the middle of a world in which you have to know how to fight and strive to move forward. For this reason, the General Chapter proposed: “*to educate in freedom as a condition of possibility of the formative process. To advance from heteronomy to autonomy, fostering processes of personal growth and capacity for interdependence*”. [2]

Attention to “**clericalism and abuse of power**”. The General Chapter was strong on this issue. We want an initial formation that contributes decisively to eradicating the temptation of clericalism and abusive attitudes, which are usually consequences of the same clericalism. Perhaps the insistence with which this issue appears has to do with its character of a “hidden dynamic” that it has at times because it may happen that we are not fully aware that we may be falling into these pathologies.

We must design formation programs that help us understand what we are talking about and offer

means and dynamics that allow a community reflection and accurate and courageous formation work. I am pleased to know that several Juniorates have organized training courses on all this. We expect good fruits from all this effort.

In these issues, as in almost all, nothing should be taken for granted. Calasanz already warned us clearly when he wrote in his *Constitutions* that “*the twisted tendencies that nest in the heart of man, with difficulty are diagnosed and with greater difficulty are uprooted*”.[3] This is a famous phrase by Calasanz, which we have read and thought about many times. I believe that we are in an ecclesial moment that helps us to give name to these “*twisted tendencies*” that must be diagnosed and uprooted. Let’s work on it. The General Secretariat for the Piarist we need will try to address this issue systemically in the coming years.

“Language proficiency.” Our young people are making significant progress in language management, but it is still insufficient. Our Order has four official languages, and perhaps this is not something we should change. But we must move forward by deciding that there are two languages that all young Piarists must master before finishing their initial training. We will work on this issue in the areas and formation teams. Still, I advance the proposal I will make in the General Congregation: that all young Piarists can communicate quickly in English and Spanish before their solemn vows. In this way, we will have enough guarantee that, in our Pious Schools, shortly, we will be able to communicate without difficulty. Moreover, distinguishing between official languages (4) and languages of use (2) can be pretty illuminating.

Along with these five keys proposed by our General Chapter, I want to add two more that I see as primarily decisive in our formation processes. I’m talking about **transparency** and **process awareness**. I will leave for another letter a third aspect that I consider essential: the accompaniment of the formators, accompanying the one who accompanies.

The “**transparency of life**”. I referred to it in a recent fraternal letter. I am convinced that when a young person lives his process with transparency,

the chances for his going along on the way of vocation to be fruitful are much more significant. In other words, if there is no transparency, there is no possibility of process. Transparency is the key to authenticity. It is a transparency that has to do with oneself, our experience of God, the formator and the brothers. These are three beautiful areas of transparency that, when lived sincerely, provoke an authentic experience of vocation.

To transparency with oneself, Calasanz gave a very demanding name: self-knowledge. It is the correct path. Knowing how to provide a name to what I live without self-deception or postponement.

Spiritual transparency is what helps us feel free and sincere before God. Personal prayer opens one’s soul to the Lord, enabling us to walk in truth. No one deceives God.

And sufficient transparency with the formator and the brothers helps us to let ourselves be accompanied, listen to suggestions and clues of progress, and enter into ourselves with a sincere desire to grow. This transparency is something that the formator must know how to work with, and it must be earned little by little, honestly promoting trust and rejecting authoritarian attitudes for what they do is provoke the silence of the young person.

Transparency is a permanent, demanding, courageous and honest task. The young man who lives it sincerely: grows. The formator who inspires and respects it (the two things are fundamental and inseparable) is the formator that the young person values and needs. This is the way.

The second lesson I would like to propose is “**being aware of the process**”. Initial formation is a process that must be lived in a conscious way. This is one of the most important objectives of accompaniment in formation: to help the young Piarist to live initial formation as a real process of growth. And this can only be done if we are able to give a name to the struggles, to the discoveries, to the options, to the inner movements.

A formation process goes through many phases without excluding crises or disappointments. But the inner work that each one can do is what makes

us aware of who we are. This “awareness of the process”, becoming aware of the steps I take, of the advances and setbacks, of the changes and discoveries, of the Piarist I am becoming, is an exciting task that should never be neglected. It is deeply related to the “*self-knowledge*” of which Calasanz speaks. Pope Francis referred to this challenge in a recent general audience: “*Knowing oneself is not difficult, but it is laborious: it entails patient soul-searching. It requires the capacity to stop, to “deactivate the autopilot”, to acquire awareness of our way of acting, of the feelings that dwell within us, of the recurrent thoughts that condition us, and often unconsciously. Prayer and self-knowledge enable us to grow in freedom.*” [4]

These are some of the keys that can make possible the dream of the 48th General Chapter for young people in formation: “*a Piarist able to learn to learn, so that, over time, a Piarist open to and passionate about Jesus Christ and his mission in the world will emerge.*” [5]

Receive a fraternal embrace.

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

[1] Saint Joseph CALASANZ. Letter to Fr. Onofrio Conti, 1642
Opera Omnia vol. VIII, page 39.

[2] GENERAL CONGREGATION. «Keys to Life of the Order». CUADERNOS Collection, n. 69. ICCE Publications, Madrid 2022.

[3] Saint Joseph CALASANZ. Constitutions of the Pauline Congregation n.16.

[4] Pope FRANCIS. General Audience of 5 October 2022.

[5] GENERAL CONGREGATION. 48th General Chapter. Chapter Document. Cuadernos Collection n. 65, p. 70. ICCE Publications. Madrid 2022.