



Reflecting on our Piarist Ministry (1st part)

Letter to our
brethren
OCT 2023

”**T**he reason for our Order’s existence is derived from its office of evangelization entrusted to it by the Church.”¹ Thus begins the third chapter of our Rules, which is entirely devoted to our Piarist ministry. The text of this chapter differs from the rest of the contents of our Rules, which, as is proper, have a fundamentally juridical and normative sense. The chapter devoted to ministry is essentially propositional, without losing one iota of normativity. This is how it should be read and understood.

I would like to use this fraternal letter to highlight some aspects of our educational ministry that seem important to me and that we remember in our Rules, even if sometimes we do not pay as much attention to them. I will only touch on a few of them, but I do not want to miss the opportunity to invite you to read this third chapter of our Rules in its entirety. It is worth it.

1- We begin with a high- level affirmation aimed at changing many of our attitudes and priorities. We say of ourselves that *“anything related to the education of children and youth and the problems of their evangelization is to be con-*

1.- Common Rules of the Pious Schools, ed. 2022, number 100.

sidered as pertaining to our vocation as Christian educators, to whom we are engaged by our fourth vow”.²

I am impressed by this statement. And it gives me a lot to think about. **Everything that has to do with the education of children and young people concerns us**, we must take an interest in it. The Rules see this attitude as a direct consequence of our consecration. I suggest three points that we could think about:

- a) Let us ask ourselves a question on a personal level: How much do I care about the reality of children and young people? How is this attitude part of my spiritual life? How much do I read about it and educate myself? What dynamics of connection with children and young people do I carry within me? How much time do I spend with them? How much do they influence my decisions, my priorities, my way of life?
- b) A suggestion for our communities. Regardless of the type of community we live in, it seems to me very important that all of them hold training meetings on the reality of children and young people locally and globally. There are always people we can invite or courses we can attend. And I think that this is not only something that belongs in the formation houses (where it would be indispensable), but in all the communities.
- c) And some institutional considerations: the importance of being present in international and national educational platforms and organisations; the need to include this objective in the priorities of our teams; our active presence in Youth Pastoral networks, as we have already done, etc. And an idea: perhaps, as part of this process of “refounding the ICCE” that we are aiming for, the Institute could reflect on how it could facilitate this “constant updating” of our awareness of the educational reality of children and young people that

would help the Pious Schools as a whole. Food for thought.

2- Second, the **preferential treatment of the poor**. The Rules state that “*we should take special care of the poor or needy [...]. This criterion should have great weight when planning the work of the Demarcations*”³.

We are talking here about the “*criteria for our planning*”. I find this commitment that we make to ourselves very inspiring. Perhaps this is an issue that we clearly have at the affective level, at the level of identity with Calasanz and at the level of sensitivity, but not at the operational level, it is not a criterion that we prioritise in the development of our plans and projects. And that is something that we need to review. That is what our Rules ask us to do.

It would be good to see whether we have considered this criterion in any meaningful way in our last chapters, or whether it has influenced our decisions and discernment. I believe that we are facing a question that, if it really becomes an institutional criterion of discernment, will bring about a number of changes in our reality. Perhaps we are facing a challenge that we must accept.

3- Thirdly, I would like to comment on number 103, which is new and comes from the last General Chapter. We commit ourselves to **combat any kind of abuse**, *be it sexual abuse, abuse of conscience or abuse of power, as well as any kind of exploitation, both of minors and of vulnerable persons*.

I think it is an important step that the Order has included the protection of minors and vulnerable persons in the Rules, because it expresses a clear commitment to the fight against this scourge. I think it is good that the Order already has a framework document and I think the department we have created in the General Curia is fundamental. Likewise, I think that each of the demarcations should have its own documents and structures and update them regularly. I also believe that this matter should be examined in depth in a Council

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2.- Common Rules of the Pious Schools, ed. 2022, number 101.

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3.- Common Rules of the Pious Schools, ed. 2022, number 102.

of Major Superiors and likewise in a meeting of formators.

The issue of child protection and the protection of vulnerable persons is being studied and researched in depth. There are many aspects of this that we have not yet been able to explore sufficiently. We are probably dealing with an “evolving issue” that will continue to affect our lives and the way we plan and work. Sexual abuse, abuse of conscience and abuse of power have common roots, even though they also have specific aspects that need to be explored. I think that one of the tasks of our protection and prevention teams is training and constant updating in this important area.

In order to understand the complexity of the issue, I would like to exemplify some of the areas examined in these questions, which should be well understood and appreciated: the priority attention to victims; the signs of possible abuse; cultural diversity; the organisation of prevention; clericalism; interdisciplinary formation in relation to abuse prevention; the model of the educative relationship; the internal dynamics of the Church and religious institutions; the profile and formation of candidates for the priesthood and religious life; the structural factors that favour or hinder abuse; the Christian vision of the person, etc. We are faced with a problem where the credibility of our mission and the well-being of children is at stake, for which Calasanz founded the Pious Schools: To offer children *a happy course of their entire lives*⁴.

4- Fourth, I would like to refer to the mandate ***to create and strengthen the Piarist Christian Community*** in each of our Piarist presences⁵. The Rules devote two numbers to this subject. In the first they describe the importance of Christian community in each work, making it a prerequisite for the fulfilment of the evangelising mission, and in the second they describe the Piarist Christian Community that we must create in order to

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4.- Saint Joseph CALASANZ. Constitutions of the Pauline Congregation of the Poor of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools, number 2.

5.- Common Rules of the Pious Schools, ed.2022, numbers 106 and 107.

allow the growth of the Piarist identity of our mission.

The aim is interesting: *the development of the Calasanzian identity*. It seems to me very important to be aware of this: In order for the Calasanzian identity of our works to grow, consolidate and become alive, we need the Piarist Christian community.

Dear brothers, this is not a matter that depends on the sensitivities of individual provinces or the maturity of individual demarcations in relation to the keys of religious life. Quite the contrary. It is a priority and of fundamental importance for each and every one of our presences if we are to be truly faithful to ourselves and to our way of understanding the challenge of building Pious Schools.

I am very happy to know that the Secretariat for an Irreplaceable Ministry has the issue of the Piarist Christian Community among its priorities and is working on it in all the platforms from which it is trying to coordinate our mission. I think that the Secretariat for the Building of Pious Schools is considering the same. Let us deepen this theme, which is called to change and renew in a demanding way our reality and our place as religious communities at the service of mission.

5- I add a fifth interesting point: ***the role of women in the Pious Schools***⁶. The Rules give two very suggestive indications: the guarantee of an education in equality and justice, and the *co-responsibility of men and women in our works*. This point is also new and was adopted at the last General Chapter.

This is another high-level issue that deserves broad and deep reflection. As an example, I would like to suggest three areas for reflection.

- a) On the one hand, it is about how we provide for the education of our boys and girls so that they can grow in a dynamic of deep respect and appreciation for the opposite sex, in awareness of equality and in clarity of their

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6.- Common Rules of the Pious Schools, ed. 2022, number 108.

own identity, whether female or male. We face a great challenge that is clearly in line with our educational project and the Christian vision of the human person.

- b) On the other hand, we are challenged by many issues that are interconnected: the gender issue, the accompaniment of each person's sexual identity, respect for the different sensitivities that exist among us, Christian and Piarist educational proposal, the formation and accompaniment of families, our own formation, etc.
- c) And a third, very concrete point, which relates to the presence of women in leadership positions in our works and teams. In some provinces we have come very far, in others not so much. And little at the level of the secretariats and teams of the Order. The issue is open and we need to address it.

6- Sixth, our Rules devote several numbers to the **transformative dimension of our Piarist education**. Numbers 109, 110 and 111 explicitly refer to this fundamental dimension of our mission, which we formulated at the time with these three verbs: educate, proclaim, transform⁷.

One of the Piarist ministries that we entrust to our young people and to some members of the Piarist Fraternities is "*attention to the poor for social transformation*". We have always been clear that our schools are called to transform society and that this is the purpose and goal of our educational offer: to contribute to a more just and fraternal world. This is how Calasanz conceived the Pious Schools, and this is how it has always been.

I think it would be very interesting and fruitful if we could work out some studies on the transformative role of our schools throughout history and in the present. I encourage those who feel in an investigative spirit to do so.

But in the context of this fraternal letter, I would like to emphasise that our Rules literally propose that we seek to prepare our students to "*devote*

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7.- Motto of the Piarist Jubilee Year of 2017.

themselves to political realities through free, active and responsible participation".⁸

The point is to prepare our students to feel responsible for political participation in their contexts and societies. I do not think we have done much on this issue, although I know of initiatives and projects. Perhaps the discrediting of politics in many contexts has not helped us in this. But it is clear that we need to think about it. We need to work on creating citizens, citizens of their environment and global citizens. This is one of the clearest areas of the Global Compact on Education project promoted by the Pope, and we need to address it.

In this chapter of our Rules you will find more inspiring points for our ministry. I do not want to tyre you. I will leave you with a second part of this *salutatio*. They are very interesting: the witness of the educator, the sacramental life, the mission "*ad gentes*", the different platforms of service, etc. We will go step by step.

Receive a fraternal embrace.

*Fr Pedro Aguado Sch.P.
Father General*

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8.- Common Rules of the Pious Schools, ed. 2022, number 109.