



# Being an educator in the style of Calasanz

Letter to our  
brethren  
JULY / AUGUST 2024

I am writing this fraternal letter with a view to the thousands of educators in our schools and in all our Piarist works, trying to offer them some reflections that will help them in the precious challenge that we set them: *to grow in their identity with the Piarist proposal and with the charism that Calasanz received, lived and transmitted.* There is no doubt that this is one of the central commitments of the Order: that the people who carry out our mission increasingly identify with the keys by which the Order understands it.

I recognise the enormous diversity of the contexts in which we work and the different ways in which religious experience, for example, is understood. But I have chosen to present a reflection that attempts to comprehensively set out the keys by which we Piarists understand our identity. I am doing this because it is good that the people who are committed to our mission are clear about what moves us and what defines us. It is up to the people in their respective contexts how they can propose – and accompany – these options.

## **1-The centre of our Piarist educational proposal.**

It is important to be clear about the core of everything we live and do. The best wording I can find to express this centre is in Mark 9:37: *“Whoever receives one of these children in my name receives me.”* Sometimes I get the impression that we need to reflect deeply about this affirmation of the Lord: In the child who is in my school, in the young person who is in my pastoral group, in the boy or girl who struggles to grow day by day, in the child who is often poor and helpless, in this

child is Jesus. What's more, **this child is Jesus**. And whoever welcomes him or her in the name of Jesus welcomes Christ.

While we deeply respect the religious positions of each individual, as it cannot be otherwise, we cannot fail to convey the perspective from which the Piarist educator educates: in the name of Christ, welcome Christ. For this reason, and above all for this reason, our vocation is exceptional, beyond our own powers and different from any other vocation or vision of education. For the Piarist teacher, for Piarist educational institutions, for the Pious Schools, education is a mission entrusted and supported by the Lord. It is a precious challenge to accompany the faith of our educators. We must look for different ways to do this, because - I assure you - they need it and they expect it.

## 2-Calasanz' educational project.

It is impossible to summarise the Calasanzian educational project in a few lines. I will try, inspired by our tradition and the basically established choices from which we start. I believe that we can summarise the Calasanzian educational project in seven basic points.

- a) **A centre:** the child. This is of central importance to us and is clearly expressed in the institutional document dedicated to the "*Elements of Calasanzian Identity*"<sup>1</sup>.
- b) **A conviction** that the Church recognises as a charism: if a boy or girl meets an authentic educator who is able to make them grow from the best of themselves and from the proposal of the Gospel, this boy or girl will grow into a good man or woman, capable of working for a better world. This is the charism of Calasanz, who sought "the happy course of his life"<sup>2</sup>.
- c) **An educational project:** education based on faith, in all dimensions, contexts and times of the child's life. Calasanz formulated his charism from a project. He did not stop at the

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1.- GENERAL CONGREGATION. "The Calasanzian Identity of Our Ministry." Ed. Calasancias. "Cuadernos" Collection. Rome 2012.

2.- Saint Joseph Calasanz. Constitutions of the Pauline Congregation n. 2.

idea, but developed it further to make it viable and real. We are the bearers of a project.

- d) **A privileged medium:** the popular Christian school for all. That was the choice of Calasanz. Of course, the Order carries out the Calasanzian project on different platforms, not only in the school. But we realise that the school is the privileged environment from which we promote it<sup>3</sup>.
- e) **A bet:** the best methods. Finding the best methods to carry out the Calasanzian project is fundamental for us as educators. That is why we believe in innovation, but an innovation based on our identity.
- f) **A "secret":** Identified educators. None of this can work if those who want to implement it are not identified with the project. Identity consists of living processes of identification. Perfection is never achieved. But we have learnt that identity consists of trying to identify with the project for a lifetime.
- g) **An institution.** Calasanz founded the Pious Schools. He wanted to endow his charism and his project with an institution that would guarantee it and set in motion all the processes that would make it possible: the Pious Schools. We must always try to continue building the Pious Schools on the basis of the different vocations that the Spirit awakens.

## 3-The Piarist educator who wants to be a better Piarist educator.

I would like to offer some simple clues that can help our educators on their journey to identity.

- a) **a) Believe in the Piarist project.** It's great to dedicate your life to a project bigger than yourself. It is great to work on a project that you believe in because you see that it is necessary and you are passionate about it. And that's the only way to live work as a vocation. The prerequisite for this possibility is authenticity.

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3.- GENERAL CONGREGATION. SHARED MISSION. The Piarist Ministry: Evangelizing by Educating in Calasanzian Style. Ed. Calasancias, Cuadernos 23, p. 29 B.11. Madrid 1999

- b) Seek and live processes that generate identity as a vocation.** Identity is not something theoretical that you learn in a course; it is the progressive result of a process of identification. The key lies in the desire to grow and in taking steps that help me. Identity leads to conversion and change. The process of identification of educators with the identity of our school, if it does not lead to change, if it does not have consequences, if it does not become concrete in processes of renewal, in discoveries, in groups in which one participates, in experiences, in progress in one's vocation, then it does not exist. We cannot accept a "superficial veneer of identity". The holistic sustainability of schools is at stake.
- c) Work together to build the "soul of the school".** The soul of the school is the human and Piarist space where we enjoy who we are. There are many processes that we promote that have to do with the "soul of the school": the Fraternity, the Common Mission, the Piarist Christian Community, the Continuous Prayer, the Calasanz Movement, the different projects for the formation of educators that we promote, etc. All of this is aimed at creating a soul, a common soul.
- d) Putting the child and the young person at the centre.** This decision completely changes our lives and the way we fulfil our educational ministry. It transforms our work into a vocation. Like Calasanz, who was made a Piarist by the children. The focus is on their challenges, their questions, their future, their lives. And this also has to do with our prayer, our preparation, our dedication, etc.
- e) Educators who are ready to learn.** This is the great challenge we all face. At least that's how I feel, and I feel it in myself. I have to do my job in a way that I wasn't trained for. And it's quite possible that this will happen to all of us. We need educators who are not afraid of discovery. Educators who assume that every day is new and that much of what they have learnt in their school days has already been surpassed by their students. But they want to keep learning.
- f) Educators who want to work in a team.** Educators who search together. Perhaps we face one of the greatest challenges in our schools: creating a culture of collaboration, of thinking together for the benefit of the students entrusted to us. There are mechanisms for learning to work together, but there is also a temptation in the heart of every educator: to believe that I can do everything on my own. And that doesn't work. That's why Calasanz made it clear that a school works when the community works. There is no other way.

#### 4- What Pious Schools do our educators need?

Our educators will grow in identity if the Pious Schools in which they live and work are increasingly worthy of the founder. It is clear that this subject would be enough for a book, but I dare to describe those Pious Schools that our educators seek. The Order must assume that not only does it expect educators to grow and be better and better, but that educators also expect the Order to take steps of greater capacity for life and Piarist mission, and, above all, this is what they expect from the Pious Schools. I will deal with the name of what we try to live in the Pious Schools and that is especially exciting and convening for our educators.

- a) The "integral" key.** The Piarist school is an integral response to an integral need. The Piarist school is not a substitute option; it makes perfect sense in any context. But only if it is truly integral.
- b) The "full-time" school, beyond the school.** This is a key that derives directly from the concept of integral education. Our school is open, the courtyard is always full of students, families participate, the premises are centres of activity, the chapel is always occupied, our house is open... this is the Piarist school.
- c) The challenge of innovating from what we are.** Identity encourages innovation because it is part of the vision from which Calasanz created the school. We are always open to new ideas so that we can focus on the essentials.

- d) The ability to convoke.** We do not validate ourselves by doing our work well. We want to invite others to do it, continue it and expand it. We try to win over educators. We try to create contexts of co-responsibility. That is our dynamic. Our school is made up of people who are committed to it and increasingly identify with it.
- e) The Piarist Christian community.** We are committed to schools with a soul, with spaces in which faith calls, in which we pray, in which we celebrate, in which we entrust, in which we send. Our schools have a soul that pulsates, and it is a common soul, like mission. As I said before, there can be no common mission without a common soul.
- f) Pastoral care.** This is a central treasure. Prayer, celebration, faith formation, welcoming all people regardless of their religious convictions, ongoing life and faith processes, groups, camps, retreats, commitments, work camps, spiritual accompaniment, pastoral care for vocation, etc.
- g) The poor.** The Lord's favourites. Those who evangelise us. Those who change us. Those in whose direction we educate. Those we welcome. Those for whom we were born. May God always keep us close to them. Calasanz's proposal is inclusion.
- h) A school that changes the world.** We know that only education can change the world. That is why we are committed to making this dimension ever more present in our educational programmes. We want education to empower students to change their own reality. They are the protagonists of pedagogical action and social change; students must be the future agents of change. Let us advocate for students who are able to change the world.
- i) A school going forth.** Pope Francis has given an impressive key to understanding Calasanz today. There are schools that are *self-centred*, lacking nothing that makes for a good academic curriculum, but in danger of being self-sufficient and self-centred without opening up to a more diverse student body or to other schools

and going out to meet those who are not receiving a good education.

- j) Special Piarist treasures.** We have some, and valuable ones. For example, the Calasanz Movement or Continuous Prayer. I have mentioned them on other occasions, but I cannot fail to mention them in this letter because we are talking about our identity.

### 5-A final proposal: the secret of Calasanz

I can't help but say what I think is most central to Calasanctian education: the "DAY AFTER DAY". The "day after the day" contradicts or reinforces convictions. Therefore, we must value the everyday, which is sometimes routine, but woven with fidelity. This is the way.

I would like to quote St Joseph Calasanz here. He left this impressive statement in his Constitutions: "*If our work is carried out with due diligence, there is no doubt that the persistent requests for foundations in numerous states, cities and communities will continue, as has been the case until now.*"<sup>4</sup> Our ministry must be lived this way: with daily care and attention. Class by class, meeting by meeting, project by project, student by student, day by day, every day. Only in this way can we live the Piarist vocation faithfully. It is good to remind ourselves of this from time to time. For us, there is no quality without dedication.

I wish you all a good journey of identity. I send you my fraternal embrace.

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

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4.- San José de Calasanz. Constitutions of the Pauline Congregation, 175.