



Conversation in the Spirit

*Letter to our
brethren*
MAR 2025

I would like to dedicate this month's Salutatio to one of the best contributions that the synodal dynamic we are experiencing offers us. I speak of the "conversation in the Spirit" We can consider it a simple method of communal discernment, and this is undoubtedly true. But I think it is good to delve a little deeper into the meaning of this term.

As "method", it is another one. It is clear and defined, it has its steps, and when these are followed, dialog and decision-making are truly enriched. To understand the method, it is enough to read and practice its structure, and I certainly invite you to do so. However, I would like to delve a little deeper into the meaning of "conversation in the Spirit" and try to fathom its keys.

I am not approaching these reflections from a theoretical standpoint that is alien to lived experience. On the contrary, I am doing so in the light of what we have experienced together this past year in the successive spiritual retreats that I have held with all the "young adult" religious of the Order. In each province, on the last day of the retreat, we had the experience of "Conversation in the Spirit" and I must say that this experience was truly impressive, as were the fruits of communal discernment that we reaped. Therefore, I think it is good for all of us to approach the method and its keys.

1-What are the central points from which the “conversation in the Spirit” is articulated?

There are basically five that we must always keep in mind. I have already mentioned them on a previous occasion, but I would like to elaborate on them again.

- a. First of all, it is important that we are clear about the topic we want to talk about. We need to prepare the work well; to think well about the topic we want to dialog about and gain insight. To prepare it well, we need to take time to think about it personally, to consider it in the light of the Word and to pray about it.
- b. This is the second important axis: prayer. We are talking about personal prayer and community prayer; we are talking about openness to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. I do not just approach the dialog with my ideas, but I try to enrich them with spiritual experience, listening to the Word and the data of the reality in which we live.
- c. The third key is listening. We strive to listen respectfully and deeply to everyone’s opinion and try to realize this listening from the depths of our interior, taking time to weigh what the opinions of the brothers have triggered in me. This kind of listening is not easy.
- d. When the first three points have worked well, we set out in search of consensus: what things are clear to us, what aspects need to be deepened because we do not yet see them with maturity, what proposals we believe we can advance to take steps in the right direction. By formulating things in this way, a consensus emerges because clarity becomes a “culture”, dissent is not seen as a problem but as a challenge and we see proposals as paths to progress.
- e. Finally, the fifth key is precisely the formulation of consensus: writing it, approving it and proposing it as something good for the community, for the Province, for our lives. The “art of formulation”, of putting the agreements in writing, is also important in

order to be able to come back to them and thus move forward. The risk of not doing this is to repeat the discussions on issues that we have already decided on.

2. In a second moment, I would like to approach the **keys to the “conversation in the Spirit” by reflecting on the meaning of the Pentecost experience** as told to us in the Acts of the Apostles. I do this because I believe that the experience of the first Pentecost can help us to understand what we are saying when we ask the Lord for the gift of a “new Pentecost”

I would like to point out three valuable experiences that occur in this narrative in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. I will summarize them in three words: *Novelty, harmony and mission*. Pope Francis mentioned them in his homily on Pentecost 2013, the first of his pontificate. I am saving them because they seem to me to illustrate very well the three fundamental experiences that arise from the dynamics of the “conversation in the Spirit”: ***Novelty, harmony and mission***.

a) Novelty. Francis tells us that we often find it difficult to let the Holy Spirit enliven our lives and our choices because we are afraid that God will lead us in new ways and take us out of our often narrow and limited horizons. But when we welcome the Spirit, the newness of God appears and completely transforms us, just as it did with the fearful apostles in the Upper Room in Jerusalem.

The new is always a little scary because we feel safer when we have everything under control, when we are the ones who build, program and plan our lives according to our plans, certainties and preferences.

I am impressed by the Pope’s message to our Pious Schools, on the occasion of the meeting of the Calasanzian Family. This is what Pope Francis told us: *“This is how the Pious Schools were born; not so much through a fixed and guaranteed program, but through the courage of a good priest who allowed himself to be challenged by the needs of his neighbor where*

the Lord placed them before him. This is very beautiful, and I would also like to invite you to maintain the same openness and availability in your choices, without calculating too much, overcoming fears and hesitations, especially in the face of the new forms of poverty of our time. The new poverty. It would be good if one day in your meeting you would try to describe what the new forms of poverty are. Do not be afraid to take different paths than in the past to respond to the needs of the poor, even if it means revising your plans and resizing your expectations. In this trusting devotion lie their roots, and if they remain faithful to them, they will keep their charism alive.”

These are the questions the Pope asks us: Are we open to God’s surprises? Are we determined to follow the new paths that God’s newness shows us, or do we persist in the paths we have always followed, so that we lose the ability to respond?

b) Harmony. When we read the Acts of the Apostles, it is very beautiful to look at the diversity that the Spirit brings about and the harmony out of which this diversity is lived in key of community. Only openness to the Holy Spirit can turn diversity and plurality into unity. He alone can bring about the “harmony of diversity” As St. Ambrose said in a beautiful oxymoron, what the disciples experienced was the “sober intoxication of the Spirit”

In our research and discernment, we must avoid two important temptations: the search for diversity without unity and the search for unity without diversity. The first provokes sides and parties, causes division and traps us in positions that “we must defend”. The second leads to uniformity because we believe that we have to do everything the same way. Let us never forget how good it is to build a community out of diversity. That is the Church, that is the Order. I really liked the synthesis that a teacher in Chile shared with me at the end of the Piarist Congress “Coedupia”: “*It helped me a lot to see how different we are and how united we are in Calasanz*”. Calasanz is a sure trace of harmony.

c) Mission. The first Pentecost brought the apostles into mission. This is the *raison d’être* of the Church and the Order, and it is in the line of mission that we must see all the fruits and decisions of our communal discernment. We come together to live our vocation more faithfully and thus proclaim more authentically the message of which we are the bearers. Everything is proclamation, everything is witness. Let us do it well, “calasanzially” and evangelically.

The Spirit protects us from a self-centered, self-contained Pious Schools and urges us to respond with openness to what God shows us, for example, through the lived reality of the children and young people to whom we dedicate ourselves.

3-Finally, I would like to approach the “conversation in the Spirit” by referring to the **gifts of the Holy Spirit**. In our tradition, we identify seven gifts and by this number we refer to the fullness of God’s gift. I will not refer to all of them, but to some that appear with great richness in the “Conversation in the Spirit”. For example:

- a. The gift of **wisdom**, which is essentially seeing everything with the eyes of God. None of this is improvised, and none of it is experienced without careful spiritual experience and a consistent prayer life.
- b. The gift of **counsel**, which is expressed through the testimony of the brothers who live with serene depth the words of Jesus: “*Do not worry about what you will say or how you will say it; at that time, it will be suggested to you what you have to say, for it is not you who will speak, but the Spirit of your Father will speak for you.*” It is truly wonderful to find men and women of faith to help enlighten our hearts and seek God’s will at important moments in our lives. Allow me at this point to quote the many mothers of our juniors who are absolutely right in the simple and profound advice they give their children when they share about their vocational struggles.

- c. The gift of the **fear of God**, which helps us to see ourselves as small and to increase our humility, docility and obedience, with the joy of a child who feels supported by the Father.

4. I conclude this fraternal letter by inviting you **to enter little by little into this dynamic** with which the Church wants to revitalize the life of our communities and their capacity for discernment. The General Congregation convenes “continental Piarist Days” in each circumscription, during which we want to take up the challenge of renewing our “*culture of Order*” by trying to discover some keys that are truly inspiring for us at this time, taking into account the different realities in which we live. It would be very good if these keys could guide the work of our chapters and if we could celebrate them in the dynamics of the “Conversation in the Spirit”.

Receive my fraternal good wishes.

Fr. Pedro Aguado Sch.P.
Father General