



To expand and to propagate

*Letter to our
brethren*
MAY 2025

These are the verbs Calasanz uses when he speaks about the building of the Pious Schools. He refers to them in the conclusion of the Memorandum to Cardinal Tonti¹. It is clear that in his mentality, the work of building the Pious Schools with the treasure he has discovered is a priority challenge, it is the horizon of his life. Since our last General Chapter, the Order has adopted the “*building Pious Schools*” as one of the points of reference for each Province and for all the Pious Schools. It is therefore good for us to try to approach this challenge from different perspectives and to understand it in its entirety.

It is not my aim to develop this theme in the short space of a fraternal letter, but I would like to invite you to reflect on some of the dimensions of this exciting task. I will focus on one of the central dimensions of the effort to “continue to build” Pious Schools: the transformation of our “Piarist culture” to try to move more faithfully toward what we are called to be.

The “culture of the Order” is the consolidated embodiment of our identity and charism. Can we renew the Piarist culture? This is one of the most important questions we can ask ourselves. Over the years (or centuries), ways of liv-

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1.- St. Joseph Calasanz. Memorandum to Cardinal Tonti. Opera Omnia, volume IX, page 305-306.

ing, acting, responding, praying and deciding that constitute the “institutional culture” have been consolidated

When we speak of “Piarist culture”, we mean our way of organizing, living, working, deciding or facing challenges. There is a culture of the Order, without a doubt. There is an organizational culture. And that will be the key to the challenge we are talking about. That is why in all the “continental conferences” that we have convened, we are working on this question: what kind of Pious Schools do we want on our continent?

All institutions have a culture that relates to the values and practices that give meaning to their work. We are talking about the beliefs and values that are shared to a greater or lesser extent by the members of a group. These values and beliefs are consolidated and passed on to the new members of the institution and provide the necessary institutional coherence. But no group can understand its culture as something immovable, permanent, alien to the new situations in which the group lives.

Our culture is like an iceberg. There is a visible culture (the way we say we are doing things) and a subliminal culture (the way we actually do things). The first consists of the vision, strategies, shared values, goals, policies, structures, procedures, etc. We usually express them in Constitutions, Rules, Directories and Documents.

But there is also an invisible, subliminal culture. There are the beliefs, the shared assumptions, the perceptions, the traditions, the norms, the values that move us, the unwritten rules, the stories, the feelings and so on. Only when we understand the iceberg can we open ourselves up to a new moment. But to do this, we need a huge dose of institutional honesty.

The vectors of “institutional culture change”. The cultural change, the process of renewal, requires three keys: the values we believe in and want to develop, the options from which we want to bring forth them, and the way we want to implement those options. And this is where a key concept comes into play: the “vectors of change”.

The leadership of an institution implies to recognize what the “vectors of cultural change” are, what are the options that can help us on the path of opening up to a new moment. I have seen this clearly in some of our provinces, which defined the “vectors of change” at the time and are now reaping the rewards over time. And I have also seen the opposite, demarcations that never thought they had to change and whose horizons are gradually fading. The same applies to the Order as a whole.

We are talking about the dynamics that can drive change, maturation, processes and growth. They are choices that can help us to renew our practices and ways of acting and to position ourselves in mission, in our lifestyle, in our understanding of the world in which we live, in our discernment processes, etc.

I’m not going to go into them now or explain them in detail. I will content myself with some examples that can help us understand what we are talking about. I will give some *vectors of change that I have seen in the Order* that are indeed changing us. And I will end with a final proposal for the challenge ahead.

1-To decide that vocation ministry is not only a “work of the one in charge” but of all, and that it depends very much on the real presence of Piarists among children and young people. As long as we are not convinced of this statement and draw the consequences from it; as long as we continue to think that vocation ministry is the task of a few and not of all; as long as we Piarists are not convinced that we must “spend hours” with students and young people and closely accompany their process and their journey at all levels, the desired trending change will not be possible and we will continue to be “surprised” that most of the young people who enter the Order come from outside our works. This change is possible and real, and it is a fundamental vector of change for our “culture of Order”

2 – To really believe in communities and teams. We need to generate co-responsibility. The religious community or formation community is made up of adults who are able to understand and take on the tasks necessary for the smooth

functioning of the group and the mission. When the community or the team or the secretariat approves an idea, a plan, some goals, some tasks, some projects... then everyone in the group takes on that task. When the project is shared, everyone feels that it belongs to them. Shared responsibility and availability are attitudes that go hand in hand, like shared responsibility and sending. And that can change us profoundly.

3 - Never stop building identity. It is an eternal task. People renew themselves, contexts change, new challenges surprise us. We need an “open and connected antenna” to understand what needs to be highlighted at a given moment to strengthen our identity. There are spaces and options that are particularly important for promoting a sustainable identity. I refer in particular to the following: the religious community embedded in mission with a vocation to share and convoke; the Piarist Christian community accepting the challenge of being the soul of mission; the Piarist ministries embraced for what they are, expressions of core aspects of our identity; the shared mission teams; the formation processes; the relationship with the laity; and, above all, the ability to call young people to take on Piarist life and mission vocationally.

4 - To give back to the community meeting the central place that our Constitutions give it and not to be satisfied with holding as few meetings as possible. I have always been impressed by the objectives that our Constitutions² associate with the Community Meeting. No more and no less than these: Building authentic communities; discerning the big questions; developing co-responsibility and common action; our ability to review and improve what we live. In other words, a Piarist community life worthy of the name is not possible without the well-prepared and systematically conducted community assembly. And this “makes culture” and builds Order, without any doubt.

5-To encourage the accompaniment. This is undoubtedly an important vector of cultural change in our Order. Living accompanied is essential to our vocational fidelity. And I am not just referring to the personal spiritual companionship

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2.- Constitutions of the Pious Schools Nos. 32, 134, 165 and 167

we seek from wise people whose ability to listen and advise we recognize. I am referring to the community’s capacity for accompaniment, to the role of the superior, and to the accompaniment we receive from so many people with whom we share life and mission. Perhaps we are facing one of the most important keys that emerge during my visit to the young adult religious: We need and want to live accompanied.

6 - To really bet on a Calasanz movement that triggers serious processes of faith life and Piarist identity and that, little by little, presupposes the commitment of numerous young people in the common task of building more welcoming and missionary Pious Schools. I believe that the Calasanz Movement is a powerful “vector of change” if we give it the opportunity, if we link it to the development of stable community processes such as that of the Fraternity, and if we promote in it a serious and consistent vocation offer.

7-To recognize and respond appropriately to new challenges. The charismatic richness of a group does not only have to do with the history or with the keys that the founder has contributed, because the charisms of religious institutes are incarnate and, in their incarnation, offer clues on how to understand them. We need to know how to live our charism with as much fidelity as we are able, to respond to today’s circumstances. A charism remains fruitful when it can provide new responses to new situations that arise. The charism is by definition inculturated. And now it has voluntarily become intercultural. We need to promote “anticipatory discernment” capable of deepening the direction in which our reality and that of the society we serve is evolving, in order to prepare ourselves to give appropriate responses, that are often counter-cultural. It is about recognizing what is essential and understanding the context in which we need to develop it. An exciting challenge.

8 – To highly value the community. Community is the space from which we can shape and live our path of renewal. I see in us an enormous longing for fraternal community life. And I see the broad lines from which we dream of that community life: the daily celebration of the Eucharist as community; the Word shared from a lectio divi-

na in community; the community discernment about the really important questions that concern us and that need our response; the sharing of life, from which we share what we live; the formation that is so necessary among us and that helps us to be always “attentive” to reality and its challenges; the accompaniment of the mission; the collaboration in the Piarist presence to which we belong; the celebration and the common joy; the connection of the community with the life of the Province and the Order; the elaboration, development and life of a community project, etc. I see a great desire to reflect on the renewal of our communities.

9. Passion for the mission, the apostolic zeal.

We Piarists have a particular fondness for a phrase attributed to Calasanz that we all know by heart: “*I discovered in Rome the definitive way to serve God by doing good to the little ones, and I will not give it up for anything in the world*”. This is the best definition of “passion for the mission”

The lives of many people today, flooded with a thousand offers and opportunities, are fragmented, without axes that preserve identity and give a clearly defined direction to the process of personal growth. Calasanz comes to a unified definition of his vocation at the ripe old age of 44. He has a center around which his life will revolve, leaving aside the things he forever considers secondary, as Paul said³. Based on his personal encounter with God, he defines his vocation as total and perpetual self-giving. He finds what gives his life meaning and unity, the source of his inner peace, which he will never lose. Only one thing seems definitive: **To live from God and devote himself entirely to the education of poor children.** Only this radical decision can satisfy his heart.

We need to challenge certain lifestyles in which apostolic zeal and the spirit of work are lost, certain life choices that, deep down, seek comfort and lack dedication. Until this changes, nothing will change. The “passion for mission” transforms the Order, the community and the person. But only if it is passion – and it will be sustained as such – if it is inspired and supported by the experience of God. That is why we must start from this seeming-

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3.- Flp 3, 8

ly contradictory dynamic: We must be as spiritual as we are dedicated to mission. This is also a key secret of the new paradigm we are striving for.

10 - An initial formation that can change what we are living.

I will end with an allusion to the initial formation. In it we try to promote the authenticity of community life, accompaniment, transparency of life, the spirit of service and common prayer. But all too often, at their end of initial formation, young people are asked to conform to a prefabricated lifestyle that does not take these things into account and, worse still, they are told that this dynamic is typical of formation houses and not of adult life. We need to advocate for initial formation that is capable of renewing our Piarist life, and that requires that we all believe in the options we endorse in our Chapters.

I conclude this letter by quoting a paragraph adopted by our 48th General Chapter, in which reference is made to one of the nuclei of the Chapter: the building of Pious Schools. The Chapter reads as follows: “Our Order and the whole of the Pious Schools live and move in a context of profound changes and upheavals that oblige us to a delicate and attentive discernment of the signs of the times. The building of Pious Schools requires us to pay particular attention to the changes that are taking place in our “Piarist culture”, in our processes and in our journey. To this end, it will be good to recognize the most important transformation processes that we are experiencing. It will be important to take them into account if we really want to contribute to a dynamic of building Pious Schools that remain faithful to the charism and to the reality.”⁴ Perhaps this is another interesting “vector of change”: to pay attention to what we have approved in the chapters.

Receive my fraternal best regards.

Fr. Pedro Aguado Sch.P.
Father General

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4.- 48th General Chapter of the Order of the Pious Schools. Nucleus 2, page 27. Collection “CUADERNOS” 65. ICCE Publications. Madrid 2022.