

03

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Piarist Identity Notebooks SUMMARY 03

- 3 CALASANZ'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LAITY
- 4 THE PROGRESSIVE INCORPORATION OF THE LAITY INTO THE PIARIST CHARISM
- 6 PROPOSALS TO INCLUDE IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROJECT
EXPERIENCES THAT HELP EDUCATORS FOR GREATER INTEGRATION IN THE PIARIST CHARISM
- 7 REFLECTION AND DIALOGUE IN GROUPS



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SHARED MISSION

Orientation that allows open co-responsibility to the laity with whom we work together. Development of a “Piarist laity” with whom charism and mission is shared, and with which Christian communities are formed in reference to our Works.

CALASANZ’S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LAITY

To give stability and consistency to the Pious Schools, Calasanz surrounded himself with a good number of teachers; Some hired, other volunteers. He was soon convinced that a good solution to maintain the motivation of the teachers was to unite the group by giving it a common life structure.

Already initiated the schools, in 1602 Calasanz leaves the Colonna palace and moves to live with his collaborators. We know that in 1604 there is a community of 18 people (7 priests and 11 lay people) who live together with a certain degree of coexistence: common food, communion of goods and the same task. His lifestyle was very similar to a religious congregation, but without the legal bond of the votes. Of this group, twelve were salaried. After a few years, only Joseph Calasanz and Gaspar Dragonetti persevered. From 1601 to 1612 Calasanz had 73 collaborators, of which eight died, 5 left the work and only one dressed the habit with Calasanz in 1617.

In practice, the loyalty of secular teachers was quite difficult; above all, if they had the requirement of the strict common life required by the regulations of the Pauline Congregation. After an ephemeral union with the Congregation of the Mother of God, Providence leads him to find the first Catholic religious congregation dedicated to popular education.

However, the founder maintained the relationship with some secular teachers such as the case of Bonaventura Serafellini, a prestigious calligrapher who began working at the Pious Schools being single; He later married and continued with a contract that ensured his permanence in the schools. Francisco Selvagi collaborated as a calligraphy teacher, but he widowed and was welcomed into the religious house until his death. Other lay people had a great role; above all, in the founding period of the Pious schools.

It is very interesting to deepen Calasanz’s attitude towards the laity (parents and collaborators) and which is manifested in his numerous letters.

He wants his religious to always show appreciation and courtesy to the laity: *“In past times, the laity lamented that VR did not put a good face on anyone, but that it seemed that it felt bad for them to go (to school). Correct this and show appreciation to the laity and do all possible courtesies”* (EP101). He wants the benefits of his collaborators before his own: *“it could be that (Mr. Ventura) has hope that, and in some other place, he will be given more than we give him and, if so, I would prefer what it was better for him, as if it were about myself”* (EP 60).

“The new way of understanding the Church as a people of God has promoted the presence of the laity in all areas, especially in education”

On many occasions, Calasanz has the need to hire lay teachers because he does not have enough religious; all for substitutions or some specific matters; He even starts new schools based on laity: “As for opening schools (in Palermo), it will be necessary to use secular subjects ... but to be of ‘great talent’” (EP 2186).

He expresses a clear concern for workers to have a good salary: “Write me also about how the master mason Jose is, what he does, and if he earns enough to support the family” (EP 1257).

THE PROGRESSIVE INCORPORATION OF THE LAITY INTO THE PIARIST CHARISM

Since its approval as a religious congregation (1617), most of the staff working in the Pious Schools have been religious, especially priests. The presence of lay collaborators has been very punctual until the second half of the 20th century with the arrival of the Second Vatican Council.

The significant decline in vocations has forced the help of lay teachers and non-teachers. In addition, the new way of understanding the Church as a people of God has promoted the presence of the laity in all areas, especially in education.

In the Special General Chapter (1967-1969) a decree on “our relations with the laity” was approved; which tries to regulate the relations with the parents of the students, the alumni, the teachers, the employees and servants and even, of the parents of the religious. Regarding lay teachers, *it is recognized that religious in the school ministry are equated by giving them equitable and fair treatment and training them to be good cooperators in schools (n° 1000-1004)*¹. The first General Chapter of the post-council did not consider the laity as useful and necessary cooperators of the religious who are the owners of the Piarist charism.

Ten years later, in the General Chapter of 1979, in a document entitled “For a more evangelical education”, the Order is committed to the Christian Educational Communities, and insists on the active and responsible presence of the laity in them: “We say YES to the school, but as a Christian educational community, composed of religious, secular teachers, students, parents and non-teaching staff. To ensure that these educational communities are alive and fruitful, there is a need for genuine participation and co-responsibility of all members”².

Along the same lines, Father Ángel Ruiz published in 1983 a brave and visionary reflection on the calasanzian ecclesial communities. If the mission of the Pious Schools as a work of the Church is to evangelize, a true evangelizing community inserted in the school would be needed, which is subject to the mission and mouth of the educational and pastoral processes. In a moment of deep crisis, Father Ángel calls for a renewal of the Order in which the presence of the laity is essential.

The letter was a call for the renewal of the Piarist charism through the impulse of authentic Christian communities in each school that are the ferment of Christian life throughout the educational community.

In the letter, he solemnly declares that “the Piarist charism is not only of the Piarists. It is not owned by the Order. It is from the People of God. And there will be and there are people, of both sexes and of all ages, in addition to the Piarists, who have the charism

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¹ *Declaraciones y decretos del capítulo general especial (1970)* Casa Pompiliana Madrid.

² CGEP (1980) *Los escolapios se interrogan*, Salamanca. Ediciones Calasancias. p.236).

to the evangelizing vocation of young people. If this were the case, those people would participate in the calasanzian charism.³

The General Chapter of 1985, in a weighted document entitled “The laity in the Pious Schools”, understood that the north had already been indicated by the letter of Father Ángel Ruiz, and that this was the line of the future. Subsequently, the General Congregation published the constitutional decree of the “Fraternity of the Pious Schools”, as a result of another General Chapter and the Council of Major Superiors in Czestochowa (July 1987). In that document, Father General pointed out that the laity were the option for the future of the Church and the Pious Schools.

In 1987 the Church celebrated the Synod on the laity that crystallized in a letter from Pope John Paul II, the *Christifideles laici* on the vocation of the laity in the Church and in the world. The Pious School also assumes and bets on the laity in such a crucial moment for the Church and the Pious School. Nine years later, the “*Vita Concrecrata*” states that “*Due to new situations, not a few institutes have come to the conviction that their charism can be shared by the laity*”⁴.

Certainly, the Pious Schools had reached that conviction. Proof of this is that there were very rich experiences of shared mission between lay and religious; not only in the field of educational and pastoral action, but in prayer and joint reflection. Groups and communities also appeared with the clear intention of deepening Calasanz and his charisma. The Piarist charism is being updated from a joint path between religious and laity where life and mission are shared.

Already with a good accumulated experience and after a wide consultation, the 44th General Chapter (1997), approved the Document *The Laity in the Pious Schools*, frame of reference and foundation of the Institutional Project of the Laity in the Order.

The Document lists four modalities of relationship between the laity and the Order to explain with simplicity the various possible situations. Thus, in addition to helping to understand the rich variety of the laity in relation to the Order, it configures four axes around which the proposals made by the Order can turn to those who, from their lay vocation, feel called to share their charism or collaborate. They are autonomous modalities, although complementary that admit a certain circularity of relationship. Each of them accommodates a multitude of nuances and possibilities, perhaps

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3 RUIZ ISLA, A (1983) *Comunidades Eclesiales Calasancias*. Ediciones Calasancias. Salamanca, p. 64

4 *Vita Consecrata*. *Exhortación postsinodal de Juan Pablo II*, 25 de marzo de 1996, n.54).

5 Aunque en algunos casos tenga que vivirse de manera individual (Cfr. *El laicado en las Escuelas Pías*, n. 22 c).

as many as the people involved. Here is the description of the four modalities:

- a) Cooperation with the Piarist activity: it is offered to all the people who collaborate in the Piarist projects or works.
- b) Shared Mission: it is offered to those who feel personally and in a responsible way involved in the ecclesial mission of the Pious Schools.
- c) Charismatic integration: it is offered to those who want to live associatively⁵ the Charism of Calasanz and the Piarists.
- d) Legal integration: offered to individuals and groups who, from their membership in an ecclesiastical community of Piarist charism, pose a legal link with the Order.

The 46th General Chapter (2009) invited the Order to promote a process of strengthening Piarist life and mission. The breadth and urgency of the Piarist mission, together with the opening of the Pious Schools to the laity, leads to prioritizing the call to participate in the Pious Schools in the various modalities. In a special way the Order chooses to summon, in addition to the Piarist religious life, to:

- The Fraternity of the Pious Schools (charismatic integration)
- The shared mission teams
- Piarist ministries.

To carry out these calls one of the most important ways is the promotion of pastoral processes of incorporation into the Church and the Pious Schools, mainly through the Calasanz Movement.

As the final product of all these fruitful years of reflection and experiences, it was approved in the Directory of Participation in the Pious Schools “in the 47th General Chapter (2015). The presentation of the document reflects the fruits of years of work: *New Piarist Fraternities have emerged, the Piarist ministries entrusted to the laity have been defined: ministry of Christian education, pastoral, social transformation. Various Shared Mission itineraries have been defined, the vocation of the “lay Piarist” has been consolidated and experiences of community life shared between religious and members of the Piarist fraternities have been carried out; progress has been made in the awareness that among all of us we build Pious Schools, in this way we need the religious and lay*

*vocation to live intensely, each according to its specificity, so that communion is truly rich*⁶.

One way of giving solidity to this new way of understanding the Pious Schools is the incorporation into the Rules of the concepts of “Piarist Fraternity” (R 228), “Piarist Christian Community” (R 103) and “Piarist Presence” (R 12).

PROPOSALS TO INCLUDE IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROJECT

In the Participation Directory (2015) there is already a good proposal to energize each of the four modalities of integration in the Piarist charism and that we cannot develop in this article for reasons of space.

We want to highlight that the incorporation of this dimension in the educational project is essential for the charismatic sustainability of a Piarist presence in time. It must be accompanied and encouraged by the provincial government and the council of the Fraternity.

EXPERIENCES THAT HELP EDUCATORS FOR GREATER INTEGRATION IN THE PIARIST CHARISM

1. Knowledge of the figure of Calasanz, his spirituality and pedagogy.
2. Direct knowledge of people in the different modalities of participation.
3. Knowledge of the different existing realities of participation: Christian Scholastic Community, presence teams, communities of religious and lay communities, missionaries and the Itaka-Escolapios foundation Network.
4. Opportunity to exercise the educational vocation.
5. Growth spaces as a person in the Pious Schools.
6. Testimony and closeness of some Piarist religious.
7. Welcome and confidence given by the Pious Schools.
8. Participation in processes (courses, experiences ...) of Piarist formation.
9. Share the mission (lay and religious)
10. Clear commitment of the Pious Schools to integrate the laity
11. Participation in pastoral processes since childhood, especially the vocation ministry and the Calasanz Movement.
12. Contact with children in need, especially in works where the joint work of lay people and religious is visible.
13. Participation in the Christian Scholastic Community live in the school
14. Contact with other living experiences of the Piarist charism.

6 Aunque en algunos casos tenga que vivirse de manera individual (Cfr. *El laicado en las Escuelas Pías*, n. 22 c).



REFLECTION AND DIALOGUE IN GROUPS

- *Share what Calasanz's relationship with the laity is like.*
- *What proposal does the school make for educators to participate in the charism? How do you value it?*
- *What is the Piarist Christian Community? Who makes it up? How to strengthen it?*
- *What experiences have influenced your history the most to identify you with the Piarist charism?*
- *In which mode of participation are you located? Which one do you feel called to?*
- *What attitude do the religious you know have regarding the integration of the laity in the charism?*
- *What attitude do your classmates have regarding the proposal made by the Pious Schools about participation in the charism?*