

05

SENSE OF BELONGING TO THE CHURCH



**Piarist Identity
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SENSE OF BELONGING TO THE CHURCH

Orientation by which our Works feel that they are part of the Church and foster Piarist Christian communities. They participate in the evangelizing and human promotion mission of the local and universal Church according to our own ministry.

THE LOVE OF THE CHURCH IN CALASANZ

If a spiritual feature is highlighted in the biography of Calasanz that is the love of the Church. Ordained priest in the spirit of Trent, he shares with the Church of his time important keys such as the care of the formation of priests, the enthusiasm for the reform of society from the model of “perfect societies” that the Church proposes to the world, institutional obedience to the papacy and the teaching of Christian doctrine.

The Church that knows Calasanz is impregnated with an ecclesiology that, overcoming the medieval model of the Church as an empire, focuses on institutional, social, organizational and legal aspects. In this ecclesial model a hierarchical structure will be consolidated, and a mission of the church in front of the world, to which it is necessary to Christianize. It will take time for Vatican II to settle a new model of ecclesiology: “The Church communion.” We may be unfair in criticizing from these new keys to that tridentine model of the Church, and we cannot see the merits of the ecclesial experience of those centuries.

The anecdotes of the young priest who was Calasanz in Spain tell us about his reformist ecclesial commitment. Already in the Rome of the popes he could easily have been influenced by the temptation of a comfortable and bright life, which justified the rise in the hierarchy as a spiritual good. However, it was aligned in that part of the post-Tridentine church that is responsible for the misfortunes and miseries of the same city that built hundreds of Baroque churches. Participating in the charitable explosion of the Church of Trento, it points to various Fraternities among which the Christian Doctrine stands out.

Also in this period, called the quinquennium of conversion (1592-1597), it establishes relationships with people of deep spirituality and a great interest in the apostolate and charity (John Leonardi of the Christian Doctrine, the Carmelites Domenico Ruzzola and Juan de Jesús and Mary puts him in touch with Carmelite spirituality and the reformist airs of his saint; the Franciscans, neighbors to his first residence in Rome, are inspired by his love for the poor lady of Poverello; the work of Phillip Neri and his spirituality attract him, he collaborates with Camillus of Lelis and his apostolate of health, etc.) The Church that Calasanz knows increasingly sees the habit of the Samaritan who leans on the wounds of others.

Poverty, which at first is for Calasanz the scourge to fight, is becoming an option of life and spirituality, until it is considered indispensable for the apostolate and the model of religious life that he wants to establish. In much of the Calasanzian iconography Calasanz is described hugging the children and Mary and leaving the staff and the miter of the bishop on the ground.

“The Order suffers a “growth” crisis that leads Calasanz to defend himself against certain accusations”

His love for the schools, his failure in the attempts to involve other ecclesial instances and his deep spirituality will lead him to ask the Church to create a new form of consecrated life in his bosom. Each school will be animated by a community of consecrated persons with a vow of extreme poverty. With the brief pontifical “*Ad ea per quae*” of March 6, 1617, Pope Paul V officially recognized in the Church the Pauline Congregation of the Poor of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools. The association of lay teachers, created in Rome seventeen years earlier by S. José de Calasanz, was thus transformed into a Religious Congregation; its founder was appointed Prefect of it and of the schools, giving him faculty to elaborate Constitutions. They will be elaborated in Narni in 1620 and begin with the significant expression “In the Church of God.” Calasanz has no doubt that the Pious Schools exercise a “different, necessary and particular ministry in the Church of God (Memorial to Cardinal Tonti). He is convinced that it is a work of God. The ecclesial intuition is clear: the ministry of schools for the poorest requires a community of consecrated persons.

Both in the epistolary and in the critical biography of San José de Calasanz we find everyday examples of the deep ecclesial meaning that animated the life of the founder. Many cardinals valued and supported him, while others were carried away by hostile prejudices to this novelty within the Church. The memorials he will write to Cardinal Roma and Cardinal Tonti show his vehement desire to enforce his proposal as a work of the Church. The need for support for the work of schools to move forward will lead to a cordial relationship with bishops and cardinals, marked by simplicity and practicality.

Calasanz knew in his life different Popes, who did not have the same attitude towards him. Clement VIII accompanied the first steps of the schools with financial donations. Paul V and Gregory XV were two good friends of Calasanz, a friendship that is reflected in the qualification of “Pauline” that is put to the Congregation. The second elevated the Congregation to the Order category, at a time of special legal difficulty and prohibition of this concession. Mediator of these friendly relations with the papacy was Cardinal Agustiniani, protector of our institute.

The Order suffers a “growth” crisis that leads Calasanz to defend himself against certain accusations, some of them with some foundation, but many others fueled by prejudices and interests opposed to a work of popular promotion like the one that was emerging. Reviewing the letters of these times of accusations and slander, we found no condemnation trials against those Church bodies that made them suffer so much.

The accusations from within the Order itself by Sozzi and Cherubini, echoed in Cardinal Albizzi to the detriment of the calasanzian work. Removed from their positions of government in the order Calasanz and his curia, and appointed Sozzi superior general, the conflict reaches its darkest point. If Pope Urban VIII had been hostile, more will Innocentius X, who in the brief of 1646 abolishes the Order. Calasanz’s faith at this point becomes heroic. In letter 4340 we can read: “*There is no wound so great that I cannot help it and I am sure that what men will fail will supply God, who by his great mercy will be pleased to guide all our things with his greatest glory*”. Hope is not lost, the decision is not recriminated although it does not hide the existence of powerful enemies with His Holiness. However, the support received from previous superiors invites you to continue thinking about the usefulness of your ministry for the construction of the Church. In this darkness our saint dies, asking at the moment of dying the indulgence and blessing of the Pope who had destroyed his work.

ECCLESIAL BELONGING IN THE PIOUS SCHOOLS OF TODAY

Our ecclesial time participates in the ecclesiological model of Vatican II, with fifty years of travel and still in the process of development and incarnation. The Church has stopped worrying less about its organization and consolidation and extends a loving look on the world, with whom it shares the joys and hopes and whom it feels called to serve by generating in it a better world.

The call to the new evangelization is constant currently (John Paul II in Nova Huta 1979, and Santo Domingo 1992), to be reborn as missionary disciples (Benedict XVI, Brazil 2007), to be an outgoing Church (Francisco, Evangelii Gaudeum, 2013).

The Pious Schools, faithful to this missionary and evangelizing sensitivity, collaborate with the Church in its task of creating the Kingdom of God from its ministry of Evangelizing Educating early childhood children and young people, especially poor. In the Message of Pope Francis for the Calasanzian Jubilee Year we are reminded of the actuality and ecclesiality of our ministry within the Church.

“Although the circumstances in which the Order was born are not those of today, the needs to which it responds remain essentially the same: children and young people need the bread of piety and letters distributed to them, The poor continue to call and summon us, society asks to be transformed according to the values of the Gospel, and the preaching of Jesus must be carried to all peoples and all nations. The Piarists, religious and laity, united in the Piarist Christian community, as an order and as a church, are the current heirs of the legacy of Calasanz.”

The Pious Schools, as a religious Order, also contributes to the church its special way of consecrated life, from the communion of diverse vocations forming community, which are offered to children, youth and adults as a way of insertion in the Church.

Piarist religious are primarily responsible for making Calasanz’s pastoral attitudes present and for carrying out the mission entrusted to him by the Church. With their testimony of life in common and their works, dedicated to the little ones, they seek an open, dialogic and close lifestyle that facilitates a kind access to the Gospel and the sacraments.

The Piarist Fraternities constitute small communities where religious and lay people meet together by

Calasanz, which gives them a spirituality, a way of life, and a mission among children and young people in need. Because we live the Piarist life with enthusiasm, we will continue to propose it to young people and adults who know us and participate with us and integrate charismatically in the order. Each year new people are incorporated and bring new wealth from the conviction that the Piarist Charism can also be shared with lay people. The reference document is “The Fraternity of the Pious Schools”, published by the general congregation in 2011¹.

Some of these lay people are also legally linked as **Piarist Lay**, highlighting the option of poverty and availability from the vocational identity and state of lay life.

And around them, many more people and much more life, because people of all kinds such as alumni, families, catechists and animators, teachers and teachers, collaborators ... are forming a **Piarist Christian Community**. Some of them participate in Shared Mission teams, to better live their Piarist vocation in their work or in their volunteering. The meeting center is always the celebration of the weekly Eucharist.

This is the new subject of the Piarist mission, in whose center they are religious and lay in fraternity, because they assume this function in a conscious and committed way, because they summon more people to collaborate in this mission and because they are also offered as a place of ecclesial insertion for those who want it: to be Piarist as a religious or as a lay person.

We call it the **Piarist Christian Community**, and it is **present in the life of the Piarist work** in many ways: in the Sunday Eucharist, in the celebratory moments throughout the year, in the sending of religious, of educators in shared mission, of catechists and animators; in the connection and information with the rest of Piarist presences and of order, in the projects assumed by everyone inside and outside the school, many of them in solidarity with the most needy, etc.

These various forms of association with the Church through participation in the Piarist charism are detailed in the Directory “Participation in the Pious Schools”², approved by the XLVII General Chapter of 2015.

It is noteworthy that in the last General Chapter some modifications are introduced in the rules that have a significant ecclesial content: the concept of **“Piarist presence”** is defined (A new number of the Rules is added, 12, which says it defines it as the set of community and apostolic institutions (and the relational platforms

1 Congregación General (2011) *La fraternidad de las Escuelas Pías*. Ediciones Calasancias. Madrid/Roma.

2 Congregación General (2015). *La Participación en las Escuelas Pías*. Madrid/Roma 2015

that are established in their environment) that constitute and configure the specific Piarist reality of a place, local, demarcation or general. We will endow our Piarist presences with the appropriate projects and equipment for its growth and consolidation) and the concept of “Piarist Christian community” is defined (A new number of the Rules, 103, is added, which states: *We will strive to strengthen our presence in each locality by configuring the Piarist Christian Community in which the religious, the members of the Piarist Fraternities and all the people who are part of the whole of the piarist presence, can you meet to share your faith and grow in your calasanzian identity.*)

Of special relevance for the ecclesial insertion of the people linked to the Order are the **pastoral processes** that, initiated at an early age, extend beyond the school stages. The Calasanz Movement institutionally coordinates these processes of group life and ensures their identity as calasanzian and the proposal of ecclesial insertion in the Pious Schools through its different modalities. Its spirituality and basic lines are described in its foundational documents (Manifesto, Options and Methodology of the Calasanz Movement).

Formative itineraries are also developed in the Pious Schools that invite all who participate in the Piarist life and work to form and discern their way of ecclesial insertion through the Order. Thus, we highlight the itineraries to the Shared Mission, or to the Fraternity, as well as all the formative experiences that deepen our charism.

Going deeper into the renewal key of the Church in line of co-responsibility, the Order also develops **the Piarist Ministries**, which mean in our ecclesial reality fundamental services for the Pious Schools and their mission, with specific formation, a long time commitment and with visible entrustment within the Piarist Christian community of each place. There are three ministries that the Order has launched: Lay Ministry of Pastoral Care, Ministry of Christian Education, and Ministry of Care for the Poor for Social Transformation. Each of them has its statutes, and from the above-mentioned Board of Directors it is encouraged to start up (Participation in the Pious Schools No. 73). Reference document is Participate in the Pious Schools, orientations, published by the General Secretariat of Charismatic Integration and Shared Mission in 2011.

The order has also developed a shared mission platform between the Order and the Piarist Fraternity, **the Itaka-Escolapios network**, from which the Piarist mission is promoted in areas of Non-Formal Education, Evangelization, Awareness campaigns, residential re-

sources, educational infrastructure, and a long list of projects whose recipients are preferentially the poorest children and youth.

The Piarist Christian community in each presence is **integrated into the local Church** of the geographical area and of the diocese, participating in their pastoral projects and contributing their specificity to the specific mission assigned by the Church. Far from forming an isolated redoubt, we understand that the ecclesiology of communion invites us to enrich ourselves from the different charisms in the Church and to organically integrate our own wealth in coordination with the rest of the People of God. Thus, we are present in structures and teams that drive this coordination: Catholic school networks, Christian community tables, youth pastoral teams, catechesis, family pastoral, vocational pastoral, laity, networks of religious life ... In addition, we collaborate with availability in how many requirements are made from the needs of the local church.

PROPOSALS FOR OUR PRESENCE PROJECTS

1. Know and value the deep ecclesial sense in our founder.
2. Know and reflect the current ecclesial documents to bring their proposals closer to our Piarist reality
3. Know the Piarist reference documents for the construction of the Church from the Order.
4. Reflect on the role of the religious and the laity in their various vocations and in the configuration of the Piarist presence and the Piarist Christian community.
5. Promote formative itineraries and pastoral processes with a proposal for ecclesial insertion in the Pious Schools, especially the Calasanz Movement.
6. Promote an authentic Piarist vocational culture among all the people who are part of the life of our presences, implementing the different ways of participation in the Order
7. Promote joint responsibility in the articulation and animation of the Piarist presence and the Piarist Christian community.
8. Participate in the local ecclesial life in a constructive way, articulating our Piarist contribution and enriching ourselves with the different charisms and proposals, showing availability for work in favor of the local church.



REFLECTION AND DIALOGUE IN GROUPS

- *Do you know the ecclesial experience of Calasanz? What can we learn from it for our ecclesial context?*
- *Do you know the proposal of ecclesial insertion that the Order is making to all the people linked to it?*
- *Analyze your Piarist presence from the point of view of a co-responsible organization as a presence.*
- *Analyze your Piarist presence from the point of view of the diversity of Piarist vocations and its articulation as a Piarist Christian community.*
- *How do you value the integration of the Piarist presence of your city in the local Church? What does it contribute to the Church? What does it receive from it?*