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# EDUCATIONAL AND PASTORAL QUALITY

**Piarist Identity  
Notebooks**

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## Piarist Identity Notebooks SUMMARY 07

### 3 CALASANCTIAN EDUCATIONAL QUALITY CRITERIA

1. IDENTITY.
2. INTENTIONALITY.
3. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RELEVANCE.
4. ORGANIZATION AT THE SERVICE OF THE PIARIST MISSION.
5. CALL FOR PAPERS. COMMUNICATION. PROPHECY.
6. INNOVATION.
7. ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PLACES.



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# EDUCATIONAL AND PASTORAL QUALITY

Educational process through which our Projects offer an integral formation that prepares for life and includes all the components of the educational action: goals, objectives, contents, methodologies, resources, and evaluation.

**C**hen the question of the quality of any system is raised, it always refers to the degree to which it conforms to standards and models that describe the optimum possible performance and are issued by some recognized authority. Thus, we have the different quality models and standards and the various agencies that recognize and certify the systems.

In the case of the pedagogical and pastoral quality of the Piarist ministry, we can take advantage of the general standards and models and apply them to specific aspects of our performance, as is being done in many places with ISO standards, the EFQM model or others. We can also define our own model, defined, and sanctioned by the competent Piarist authority and measure our performance according to the defined standards that describe the accepted consensus on the optimal development of our ministry. This was the choice of the Order in 2001 and 2006, when the elements of Calasanctian quality in our works were defined and evaluated.

The complexity of the evaluated object, the pedagogical and pastoral quality, the difficulty of defining universal standards in a matter so dependent on the ecclesial, social and cultural historical context and, ultimately, the desire to animate the Piarist ministry in all the presences rather than to homologate and qualify it quantitatively, has led the Order since the General Chapter of 2009 to prefer a qualitative description, which, without giving up the necessary objective of definition, updating and orientation, would allow a more relevant analysis and a more calm self-evaluation. This was the mandate of that Chapter, which led to the elaboration of the elements of Calasanctian identity and the tools for its evaluation.

## CALASANCTIAN EDUCATIONAL QUALITY CRITERIA

With the intention of giving continuity to this reflection, we provide some criteria that can help to integrate these elements of Calasanctian identity in the ongoing task of growing in quality in the development of our ministry.

### 1. Identity

It does not seem to be by chance that all the institutional reflection that, at the time, the Order carried out on the Calasanctian quality of our ministry, led to the need to clearly enumerate the main elements that define the Calasanctian identity. If in some concrete aspect of all those measured by the models of evaluation of quality, we would play the essential, this would be the specific contribution that we can make from our charismatic

identity. That, if we are not able to develop our ministry with the traits that define us as Piarists, the rest of the aspects that can be evaluated, although important, are, in any case, secondary.

It seems clear, at least from the logic of the Gospel, that, just as if salt becomes bland, no matter how perfectly crystallized it is and how white it may seem, it is worthless if we do not contribute what is proper to us from our identity roots. Even if our performance were completely impeccable, we would not be faithful to our original mandate, we would not respond to the reason for our existence and, in the long run, we would be totally dispensable.

Accordingly, we can affirm that, although the question of quality cannot be reduced to the issue of identity, the latter is a necessary, although not sufficient, condition for the former. On other occasions we have explained more extensively the concept of identity, which we believe is essential to handle, so here we only propose a definition. We can summarize the idea of identity if we link it to the complex cyclical process by which an organization looks at and analyzes reality, according to criteria and emphases proper to its original inspiration; it proposes objectives and acts accordingly, applying techniques resulting from its historical experience; it narrates, celebrates and represents its spiritual experience according to its own sensitivity and that of each context; and it innovates, recreates itself and summons new members, guaranteeing its own sustainability and, therefore, that of the Mission it carries out.

According to this approach, the promotion of the quality of our ministry would necessarily involve ensuring the sustainable functioning of this “identity cycle”, so that, in addition, each of the elements that compose it, we manage it with criteria of quality and excellence. The maintenance of this cycle requires attention to some basic features to which we would like to draw attention.

## **2. Intentionality**

The quality in the performance of the Piarist ministry demands that there is a “Piarist intention” in it. Following the proposed scheme, both the analysis of the reality and the definition of objectives must be clearly stated from the Piarist identity.

Our analysis of reality will focus on those aspects to which we are more sensitive, according to the charism received by Calasanz and those of us who consider ourselves his followers. The situation of children, especially the most unprotected, and their needs in the educational, social, and pastoral fields will be fundamental aspects of our analysis.

Faced with the analyzed reality, the mission entrusted to us according to our charism, directs us towards certain objectives that seek to generate processes of accompaniment of the people we consider our main recipients and the context in which they live, in the direction of greater personal virtue, and greater justice and dignity. In terms of social theory, we seek the promotion of people who influence changes in structures and structural changes that, in a reciprocal way, shape people, through the institutions of each culture and society.

Our intention as an organization will be defined through the formulation of the Piarist Presence Projects, which include what some quality management models call Vision of the organization. More specifically, in the case of educational centers, our intention will be embodied in the Integral Educational Projects, which must contain our educational, evangelizing and transforming purposes, as well as the profile of the student we are looking for. The fact that our objectives are public and known is a first step in achieving them, since the transformation of people and reality, passes, in the first place, through the elaboration of alternative stories that speak of the promise in which we believe and that allow us to glimpse the possibility of a new life and a new world, as well as to summon those who feel called to share this vision.



Certainly, every organization runs the risk of enumerating its highest intentions in the most sublime way and, however, developing an action that in goals and methods have little to do with them. For this not to happen, it is essential that the Piarist action is always questioned and purified from its own objectives and the values it intends to promote. For this, a continuous, systematic, and participative evaluation is presented as an essential element to guarantee the Piarist intentionality of our ministry.

### 3. Social and cultural relevance

A second essential feature for the quality development of our ministry is that of social and cultural relevance. This trait refers to the necessary adaptation of our analyses, objectives, and proposals to the specific social and cultural context in which we find ourselves. Being part of a global organization, with common identity traits that allow us to recognize ourselves as charismatic heirs of Calasanz and members of the Pious Schools, should not be an obstacle for our proposal to be deeply rooted in the social and cultural reality in which it is developed. There is a growing conviction among us that without a minimum inculturation of our ministry, it is not possible to unleash the personal and social processes necessary for the achievement of our objectives. Considering the living conditions of our recipients, starting from their own values, even if our objective is to educate, or precisely because our cen-

tral mission is education, is a condition of possibility for the development of our ministry. On the contrary, not considering the main institutions of the societies where we are inserted, or the cultural identity of the people with whom we develop our ministry, limits its scope, in the best case, to superficial transformations that often remain in formal aspects, and in the worst case, in processes of declassification and escape from the reality that we intend to transform.

### 4. Organization at the service of the Piarist mission

A quality performance of our educational-pastoral ministry requires an organization in accordance with the objectives we seek. In the first place, it is necessary that there be a sustainable Piarist leadership in our presences. The Mission to educate and evangelize requires a sustained momentum in the long term. However, many projects with an excellent analysis of the reality, a clear Piarist intentionality, with relevant proposals for action, end up fading away when the leadership that drove them weakened due to changes in people, in the sources of funding, or for other reasons. Sustainable Piarist leadership can only be guaranteed if, in addition to leaders with the capacity for vision and work, there are teams of people identified, who share the long-term project, and who participate in the daily decisions, in the planning, execution and evaluation of the actions, so that, when the time comes, they can take over the leadership tasks. This configuration of **lead-**

**er-team-project** must be the axis of any lasting Piarist organization, which pretends a minimum of efficiency and fidelity to the entrusted task. This triple vision must be present in the different initiatives that we develop with the objective of forming the Piarist leaders of the future: formation houses for religious, processes of the Calasanz Movement, schools of monitors and catechists, commissions of Piarist lay ministries, so that we avoid unipersonal and self-sufficient leaderships.

A second element that guarantees the sustainability of our organization, and therefore of our ministry, is the necessary “feedback” that must exist in our educational and evangelizing processes. If a part of the recipients of our ministry do not feel called to be linked to it in any of the ways we propose, the survival of our organization, and of our ministry, is seriously compromised. An indicator of the quality of our performance will be, therefore, the number of people who are swelling the Piarist subject and assuming the Piarist Mission as their own. The young religious who are discovering their Piarist vocation, as well as the Fraternity of the Pious Schools, the shared mission, the thousands of collaborators that we have in our presences, are the answer of God to our prayers and our work so that He sends more laborers to such a priority task.

## 5. Call for papers. Communication. Prophecy

This need for feedback from our organization reminds us of the double importance for our ministry of perseverance in our convoking dynamic. The proclamation of the Gospel, which is the core of the Church’s Mission, is nothing but a great call to Faith in God the Father, to the Fraternity of his daughters and sons, to Justice and Peace among those who recognize themselves as brothers and sisters, to the Joy of knowing they are saved, to the Hope of one day seeing this dream come true, and to the Community of those of us who announce the Good News of this event. The promise of Fraternity is not possible without already living fraternity. Joy cannot be announced from lamentation or anguish, just as there is no announcement of the Gospel without a call to join those who announce it.

This principle of quality determines the style of communication required by our Mission. Those who educate children and young people can never forget that the future belongs to them and that it is there where Hope dwells. There is no room, therefore, for a style of communication that emphasizes the evils and sins of our present, and even if it does not forget to always call for conversion, the immense mercy of God, who guarantees forgiveness and Grace, allows every person, especially young people, to be capable of their own prophecy of fidelity and happiness. We communicate what we do and who we are to announce the Good News, which is God’s promise to all who hear us. And God always fulfills. Only

if we are convinced of this, our communication will be convincing, and we will summon.

## 6. Innovation

An organization that claims to be faithful to the original intuition of its founders must, in an apparent paradox, be able to innovate to provide a quality response to a reality that is constantly changing. If its ministry has to do with the youngest people, as is our case, even more so. Children and young people are the ones who carry the light that will illuminate the future, and our mission is as important as turning on and keeping that light on, and, therefore, collaborating in the Illumination of the World through them. This irreplaceable task requires being attentive to the novelty that our children and young people have to live, as well as to the progress of knowledge related to it.

Piarist innovation, therefore, can never be dictated by the market or fashion, which almost always have interests that are different and distant from those of children and young people, even if they come up with attractive proposals that are difficult to refuse.

Some of the key characteristics that can be used to define indicators of the suitability of our innovative proposals:

1. An innovation with a Piarist identity.
  - » Part of an integral conception of the human being, which includes the intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual dimension. One of the geniuses of Calasanz was the proposal of essential integration of Spirituality and Culture, Piety and Letters. An innovative proposal that is reduced to a merely technical or functional approach, without considering the integrality of our educational proposal, cannot be Piarist.
  - » Part of the social and cultural reality of children and young people. If there is an unmistakable feature of the Piarist identity, it is the centrality of children and young people. An innovative approach that starts from the reality of the students must consider their social and human environment, which guarantees the significance and relevance of our ministry. This emphasis provides as a criterion for discernment of an innovative proposal its usefulness for the development of the competency profile that we want our children and young people to develop, as well as for the reform of the society in which we live.
  - » It is accessible and inclusive because it understands the diversity of children and young people from all points of view, with special sensitivity to the most disadvantaged, and always turns it into a learning opportunity.

- » It also generates social, cultural, economic, political, religious, social inclusion, ...
  - » It proposes useful and simple methods that can be used by all families.
2. Collegial, non-individualistic, systematic, sustainable, institutionalized, and non-anecdotal innovation.
    - » It starts with diagnoses, reflections on their own practice and shared proposals.
    - » It guarantees reflection on one's own knowledge construction processes that allow for conscious lifelong learning.
    - » Applies the discoveries of science.
    - » Integrated into management processes in PDCA-type continuous improvement cycles.
    - » Encourages the sharing of best practices and peer review and support.
    - » Facilitates the training and updating of educators.
    - » Generates a common pedagogical style.
    - » Strengthens the sense of an educational community that shares a mission.
  3. An innovation that aims to trigger profound personal and social changes.
    - » Evaluates the results of the training processes that we develop in an integrated manner in the training process itself as an element of reflection and growth, always considering the educational profile we seek and our social purpose.
    - » Strengthens the itineraries of significant educational experiences so that they allow the elaboration of narratives and stories that help the construction of an adequate personal identity and subjectivity, which includes Forgiveness, as a healing element of the past and the Promise as an impulse towards the best that God has prepared for us.
    - » It promotes cultural and social transformation through the generation of ideas, places, symbols, experiences, narratives, and alternative representations that advance and, in some way, make our educational, ecclesial, social, and cultural proposal a reality.

“Joseph Calasanz is one of the forerunners of this magnificent institution, which has been the key to the universalization of culture and welfare”

## 7. Anthropological and theological places

The school institution, as we know it, is a modern invention. Joseph Calasanz is one of the forerunners of this magnificent institution, which has been the key to the universalization of culture and welfare. It is true that, like all modern institutions, it runs the risk of specialization and, ultimately, of depersonalization. In anthropological terms, it runs the risk of becoming non-places, to be transited, where the products dispensed there are consumed, but not inhabited. Thank God, the school model invented by Calasanz, of which we are heirs, contained the keys to avoid this danger. We will seek the configuration of our presences and schools as authentic “anthropological and theological places” where we create human community and summon the Christian community, where we live and relate, where we live together and share, where we recognize and celebrate, where we teach and learn, where we experience fraternity and, therefore, each one, from his own spiritual sensitivity, vital moment, personal history, particular vocation, discovers the loving Presence of God, who welcomes us and promises the best.



## REFLECTION AND DIALOGUE IN GROUPS

- *After reading this article, share in the group some ideas that you have learned most suggestive result.*
- *The work you work on; Is it subject to a quality assessment process? If so, Do you think it is positive?*
- *What does a true Piarist innovation consist of?*
- *How is educational and pastoral innovation understood where you live and work?*
- *In what aspects is it necessary to innovate in your Piarist presence?*