



With a great spirit

Piarist volunteers

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*Education requires the educator to be a man of spirit, to have **a great spirit** to help not only the youngsters in the schools but also the laity, by example and doctrine, to embrace the true path to paradise (EP 4321).*

With a great spirit

The days of December were very dear to the inhabitants of Rome as they joyfully remembered the birth of Jesus. Many visited a beautiful crib that the Franciscan friars put up in the Basilica of the Twelve Apostles following the tradition started by St. Francis in Assisi.

Fr. Joseph Calasanz promised the children of the school of Santa Dorotea to take them on an outing to the basilica to admire the beautiful crib that the friars had put up. He thought it would be an opportunity to explain to them in simple terms the mystery of the incarnation. Afterwards, he would invite them to a nice glass of milk and sweet bread in the courtyard of the palace.

He couldn't take all the school children for a walk. There were too many and he did not have enough helpers to accompany them in the street. So, he chose a few of them who showed good performance in the classes. It was 23 December 1598 and Fr Joseph went with the children to the Basilica of the Twelve Apostles even though the sky was grey, the atmosphere damp and there was a clear threat of rain. They went along the river Tiber until he reached the Emilio Bridge, an old vestige of imperial Rome. He decided to make the visit very quickly so that the children would soon return to their homes and prepare for the great storm.

And on Christmas Eve, the heavens opened their gates to unleash an enormous flood of water on the Lazio region. So much so that the river Tiber burst its banks and buried most of the city under water. Only the houses on the seven hills of the city remained intact. In anticipation of the danger, many residents of Trastevere managed to escape the flood by climbing the Janiculo Hill, seeing their humble homes buried under water and mud. Many others did not manage to escape and drowned.

From the window of his room in the palace, Joseph Calasanz saw how the waters of the river raged through the streets, sweeping away all kinds of belongings, animals and people. He thought about what would become of the school children and their families, about what would have become of the premises that Fr. Antonio Brandini had lent him for the classes.

When the rain stopped, the flow of the river began to recede, revealing a wave of destruction: houses swept away, lifeless bodies, mud, rubbish and trunks swept away by the fury of the water. Fr. Joseph, accompanied by Marco Antonio Arcangeli, his great friend and collaborator, decided to go to the neighborhood to assess the damage and see how he could help. The waters had split the Emilio bridge in two, so they had to go around the Sixto bridge, which withstood the onslaught of the water much better.

When they arrived in the neighborhood, they found that the disaster was far worse than expected. Many school children and their families were swept away by the river - God knows where their bodies turned up - others were stuck in the rubble, and crowds of people milled around in the wreckage of their poor homes salvaging what little they had.

It was a real humanitarian disaster, and the whole of Rome moved swiftly to care for the victims. Churches were set up as makeshift hospitals, charitable Confraternities were activated to give food, water and a roof over the heads of the stricken families. People of means offered generous donations and, of course, the Pope was personally involved in bringing the citizens of Rome out of the disaster.

The city's charitable Confraternities called upon their members to care for the sick, bury the dead, distribute meals and provide a roof over the heads of flood victims. Joseph Calasanz was still an active member of one of them, the Confraternity of the Twelve Apostles, whose mission was "to provide with all possible piety, honesty and secrecy for poor people, and even more so for families who suffer from illness, misery and need and can neither fend for themselves nor deserve to be seen begging".

The confreres met in a room in the Franciscan convent and divided up the tasks for the first emergencies. Together with other confreres, they entrusted Fr. Calasanz with the coordination of the aid in Trastevere, in the area of the parish of Santa Dorotea.

Thanks to his years of participation in the Confraternity, Fr. Joseph got to know very well the reality of the poor families of the city. He always went out accompanied by another confrere to distribute alms, visit the sick, bring some food and, above all, listen to the simple people in their anguish and problems, of which there were many. They also had to be ready to ask for alms to distribute them later, with the consequent humiliation, mockery and scorn from the poor themselves.

The Confraternity elected twelve people each year who had to visit the poor or sick in their neighborhood twice a week, accompanied by one or two assistants. They also had to attend the weekly meetings of the leaders and the general meeting each month.

And together with his good friend Marco Antonio and other volunteers, he set to work tirelessly on behalf of the simple people. The two small school classrooms had been completely destroyed, and it took months for the damp to disappear. However, with the help of the children themselves and their parents, the classrooms were soon refurbished and daily classes were re-established.

Some children joined the school with the pain of having lost their homes and family members, but they had to go on. They knew that a good education would help them to improve their lives and get out of the poverty in which they lived.

Little by little, the rhythm of the city took its pulse. The poor have a great resistance to suffering, they soon get over it and get on with their lives. Joseph's schools were reopened in the basement of Santa Dorotea's parish and the children returned to the daily routine of school work.

Some teachers left, but others took their place. It was not easy to maintain the stability of the classes because most of the teachers worked for free. Thanks to the support of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine and Mr. Marco Antonio Arcangeli, the schools were able to continue, but more resources were needed because the number of children increased and so did their needs.

Marco persuaded Calasanz to join the Confraternity as a volunteer because he hoped that one day, it would take on the school as his own work. So, during the week, Fr. Joseph worked in the school in

Trastevere and on Sundays he taught catechism in some churches of the city as a volunteer of the “Dottrina Cristiana”.

The city was recovering its rhythm after the great flood, but it had left many orphans, beggars and a lot of poverty. Fortunately, the celebrations organized for the Holy Year 1600 were soon welcomed by the population with great jubilation, and the citizens of Rome organized themselves to welcome the pilgrims who came from all over Europe, which meant that the city’s ailing economy was revived.

Many people volunteered to welcome pilgrims. The church of the Holy Trinity, near Trastevere, was home to a Confraternity specialized in welcoming and sheltering poor pilgrims who came to Rome to visit the holy places and to care for convalescents who could not afford medical care.

As it could not be otherwise, Calasanz also collaborated actively in welcoming the pilgrims, many of whom came from his native land.

And at the beginning of the Holy Year, the schools were moved to a small house near the inn of Paradise, but as the number of pupils grew, it was necessary to rent another house next door, where 500 boys attended.

It is difficult to imagine where Joseph Calasanz found the time to direct the schools and to continue involved in other pastoral tasks as a volunteer, but the apostolic passion he had acquired in his youth moved him to collaborate in catechesis, especially to girls and gypsies, together with the confreres Francisco Villoslada and Francesco Laterio in San Nicola in campo Marzio.

Little by little, his commitment to the schools took up all his time and he neglected his voluntary work in the Confraternities which had helped him so much to get to know the reality of poverty and had served him as a platform to initiate a more ambitious project than pure social assistance or Sunday catechesis: the mission of reforming corrupt customs through education in piety and letters.

His participation in Confraternities had been a true school of apostolic life and the fertile ground from which the Pious Schools were born. Calasanz was **a man with a great spirit** who, overcoming adversity, remained faithful to the Lord, who manifested himself in the poorest.

Volunteering: at the heart of the Piarist mission

A necessary reflection

In recent years, some very timely reflections have been published on the style of education systems in an increasingly complex and dynamic society. They all agree that education should not be reduced to school or to the mere transmission of skills as entry into the world of work. There is talk of “lifelong education”, “life-wide”, “integral” and “humanistic” education where the responsibility lies with the whole community, not only with formal educational institutions.

UNESCO proposes a change of paradigm that goes beyond the traditional scheme where the School (Formal Education) was the main focus in the education of young people. There are other educational settings as relevant as the school: *“However, the transformation of the education landscape in the contemporary world is leading to a growing recognition of the importance and relevance of learning outside formal institutions. There is a shift from traditional educational institutions to a varied, multiform and complicated learning landscape in which formal, non-formal and informal learning take place through diverse educational institutions and the participation of others”*¹.

The education system goes beyond the school network. Other spaces, other models and other environments other than school have served and are currently used for learning. Therefore, any reflection on the renewal of the school involves placing it in relation to the community that sustains it.

1 UNESCO (2015) Rethinking education: towards a global common good. P. 50.

And in this new educational scenario, volunteer educators are of great importance because they accompany important moments in the growth of children and young people. Volunteers act as sports coaches, leisure time educators, catechists, school canteen monitors, etc. Because of their special relationship with the children, their educational influence is very relevant. Moreover, their dedication complements the work of the contracted professionals.

In our schools, parishes and non-formal education centers there are volunteers. Without them, many of the educational and pastoral programs would be impossible to carry out. The volunteer landscape of our presences is complex, but very rich and represents a great opportunity to exercise the Piarist mission.

This lively reality requires *“a reflection on Piarist voluntary work for its strengthening and promotion throughout the Order: identity, processes, types, formation”*².

This book is born from the experience of many years of working with young Piarist volunteers, especially in the field of educational action with children in vulnerable situations and aimed at all Piarist organizations whose human capital is supported by volunteers who need adequate training and accompaniment.

In the first part, we will reflect on the identity of Piarist volunteers and the possible dynamics of a formative process. In the second part, we will develop 19 themes that can be useful for volunteers to reflect on their action, to grow in Piarist identity and to incorporate the experience of service into their own life project.

With this material, we do not intend to make volunteering a complete Christian initiation; for that, there are already catechumenal groups very well organized. But we believe that volunteering is an educational tool that helps to channel the apostolic commitment that every Christian should have and a great help for personal growth and the construction of a more just and inclusive society. Therefore, promoting volunteering in the Piarist presences is a unique opportunity for the Piarist mission.

2 GENERAL CONGREGATION of the Pious Schools. Programming for the six-year period 2015-2021.

The figure of the volunteer formator is the real key to the whole process. It is important that all organizations have more experienced people who take on the role of helping volunteers to integrate action with reflection.

This book is aimed at volunteers, but it can also be very useful for “social educators” who are not volunteers, but who carry out their work in a true spirit of service to the community, especially to the most socially vulnerable groups.

Calasanz, teacher of volunteers

In 1621, Calasanz wrote a document in which he masterfully argued the need for the Pious Schools to be approved as a religious Order, which would give them a great juridical stability. The memorandum to Cardinal Michelangelo Tonti (1621)³ is a *pedagogical jewel* in which Calasanz defends the popular school as an essential tool for evangelization at a time when the Church needed to recompose itself after the great division it had experienced in the XVI century.

To carry out the mission of educating the poor in an integral way, “*many workers are needed who have a great spirit and are called with a particular vocation*”; that is, educators with a vocation and a great motivation. The saintly educator notes from his own experience that daily contact with children is very hard, laborious and “*despicable in the eyes of the flesh*”; for this mission, “*men of apostolic life, very poor and very simple*” are needed.

Calasanz states emphatically that “*the credit of schools lies in having good teachers*” (EP 49). For this reason, it is necessary to select young people of good wit, with human qualities and a good interior life. Once they had been tested, they would be formed by daily experience in the classroom and with the help of expert teachers.

When he writes about teachers, he thinks of consecrated persons, if possible, priests, who have to keep to a definite timetable and lesson plan. These teachers have been called with a “*particular voca-*

3 Memorandum to Cardinal Tonti. In: FAUBELL, V. *Antología pedagógica calasanziana*. p. 50-57. Pontifical University of Salamanca. 2004.

tion” to educate children in piety and letters and must do so in a true apostolic spirit in order to contribute to the work of salvation.

Almost 30 years before writing the memorandum, the young priest Joseph Calasanz travelled to Rome to obtain an ecclesiastical dignity (1592). In the first years (1592-1597) he actively collaborated with some Confraternities that proposed to their associates the care of the spiritual life through practices of piety and an apostolic commitment, especially with the neediest. His participation in the Confraternity of “Dottrina Cristiana” brought him into close contact with the children of Rome, especially in the district of Trastevere, where he went to visit the sick, give catechesis to the children and help them in their early schooling.

Social sensitivity and desire for God led him through the streets and humble homes where he discovered a multitude of children who, because of their poverty, did not receive any education. In this search he discovered a little school run by some members of the “Dottrina Cristiana” (Christian Doctrine). In the parish of Santa Dorotea, he intensified his apostolic work with the children until he spent all his time there. In the autumn of 1597, he decided to open a free school every day for the children of the neighborhood together with other members and volunteers. This was the beginning of the first Christian popular school in Europe.

At the end of the XVI century the concept of “voluntary work” as we understand it today did not exist, but there were many church associations that encouraged their members to perform works of mercy in an altruistic way. The practice of helping others without financial reward has been practiced since man has been a social being and has become aware of his responsibility towards others.

Jesus of Nazareth himself practices charity towards the poor and invites his disciples to give alms, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and welcome strangers (cf. Mt 25, 31-46); in short, to help and care for those whom society discards and leaves abandoned by the roadside. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, he teaches the best way to help the poor (Lk 10:25-37).

From their origins, Christians have embraced the Gospel mandate to share goods, to help the poor generously and to give their lives freely in order to proclaim the Gospel to all nations. In IV century,

St. John Chrysostom is recorded as having established charitable institutions that specialized in welcoming pilgrims, providing social assistance to beggars, caring for the sick and the elderly. In the course of history, many groups specialized in helping the vulnerable arose. Many religious congregations have sprung up specializing in the sick (Camillian Fathers, Brothers of St John of God), care of the imprisoned (Mercedarians), migrants and refugees (Scalabrinians), the elderly (Sisters of the Elderly Poor), social ministry (Daughters of Charity) and education (Salesians, LaSalle, Marists, Piarists, etc.).

All the founders of religious Institutes began as part-time volunteers, became involved little by little and with time discovered the call to consecrate themselves entirely to the service of the poorest. Calasanz understood that God was calling him to renounce a more comfortable life project and dedicate himself to the education of poor children. A key moment was when he had to give up the canonry he had been granted in Seville, saying: *“I have found in Rome the way of serving God, doing good to the little ones and I will not give it up for anything in the world”*⁴. The holy educator went from volunteering for hours to the donation of himself. He had found the hidden treasure of the Gospel.

Volunteering in the Pious Schools

The mission of the Pious Schools is possible thanks to the collaboration of the Piarist religious who have consecrated themselves with vows to the educational mission in the school, contracted lay collaborators and, above all, many people who, on a voluntary basis, contribute their time and qualities in the Sunday oratory, in catechesis, free time, scouts, courses and sports activities.

4 *“Many thought and did diligences so that the parish [of Santa Dorotea] would be granted to Fr. Joseph, but he did not want to accept in any way, neither this charge nor a canonry in the city of Seville, of 1.200 escudos, saying that for the parish he would have had to leave the Pious Schools; and to the secretary of the Embassy of the Catholic King, thanking him for the offer, he said: “I have found in Rome a better way to serve God, helping these poor boys; I will not leave him for anything in the world” P. V. Berro quoted by GINER, S. (1992) Calasanz. Critical biography. BAC Madrid. P. 417.*

The schools are opening their doors to “other educators” who cooperate in the Piarist mission in non-formal settings. New educational presences with a strong social character are initiated, such as homes and cultural centers that require volunteer educators to develop their programs.

In the 1980s, the concept of “voluntary service” was introduced in legislation, in the practice of socially useful associations and in pedagogical literature. It also appeared in the documents of the Pious Schools.

The document of the General Congregation “Shared Mission in the Pious Schools” (1999) already offers a broad definition of educators as “*all those who intervene in the educational process, whether in the strictly school environment or in any other: family, social, leisure time*” (n. 27). It is understood that Piarist educators are not only hired persons but also volunteers. Further on, it specifies what type of educators should receive training: “*pastoral agents, teachers, monitors, collaborators, parents...*”. In social action, a transversal axis in Calasanzian education, it is necessary to “*promote contact with NGOs, volunteers and solidarity movements*”, as well as to “*carry out signs of help and service that will induce the student to broader and more organic commitments*”⁵.

The current reality of voluntary work in the Piarist presences is very broad, rich and plural:

1. Educators of pastoral groups with children and young people who accompany processes of Christian initiation which lead to the discovery of one’s own vocation and full insertion in the Church. In most of the Piarist demarcations, this group is identified with the Calasanz Movement. Its scope is the action of explicit evangelization.
2. Educators working in leisure activities and focused on building active citizenship. They are involved in holiday camps, scouts, ecology groups, etc... Contact with nature is the framework in which they operate. There are also monitors who accompany sports groups. Their field is play and sport.

5 GENERAL CONGREGATION OF THE PIOUS SCHOOLS (1999) “Shared mission in the Pious Schools”. ICCE. Madrid.

3. Educators who collaborate in different non-formal education programs in schools and socio-community centers aimed at the care and accompaniment of disadvantaged groups, such as minors at risk of exclusion, immigrants, the elderly, etc. Their field is social and cultural action from an educational perspective.
4. Volunteers in the management and running of organizations. These are people who collaborate in the maintenance and coordination of facilities, helping to carry out economic management tasks or preparing part of the communication and dissemination materials.
5. Volunteers for formation courses or workshops. Teaching materials adapted to the reality of the people who are going to receive them in the Educators' Schools, pastoral groups or in any of the projects run by the Foundations.
6. Volunteers who participate in awareness-raising initiatives such as peace week, talks on human rights, solidarity campaigns, solidarity flea markets, fair trade, etc.

Identity and profile of the Piarist volunteer

Of the many definitions of a volunteer, we have taken up the one proposed by Luis Aranguren, which fits very well with the model we want to promote in the Piarist presences:

*“A volunteer is a person who, moved by **compassion** for those who suffer, tries to respond with his or her **abilities** and, dedicating part of his or her time to other people, participates **altruistically** in different projects within a solidarity **organisation**”⁶.*

The model for a Piarist volunteer is St. Joseph Calasanz. So, we will comment on this definition in the light of the vital experience that the saint had and led him to the total dedication to poor children.

Moved by compassion: The force that moved Calasanz to work with poor children was compassion, a feeling that comes from the core of the person who sees, hears, observes and feels a reality where

6 ARANGUREN, L. Lo esencial del voluntariado. Buenos Aires. PPC. 2015.

suffering, injustice and lack of recognition of the dignity of the other causes indignation and desire to help to reverse the unjust situation. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10, 25-37) describes well the process by which a volunteer is affected by the reality of the wounded person who is abandoned by the roadside and takes the decision to help him until his complete recovery. Calasanz gradually became responsible for the fate of the poor children until he devoted himself entirely to their care and education.

Like Calasanz, the Piarist volunteer approaches places where children and young people live a reality of exclusion and vulnerability (Trastevere), has a compassionate look and seeks ways to get them out of the dynamics of exclusion.

Respond with their abilities. Calasanz had great qualities. He was a priest with a good theological formation, who has shown leadership and experience of pastoral work in the parishes of the diocese of Urgel where “*he was able to know at first hand the difficult reality of the people of the countryside and the religious ignorance in which they were immersed. So, with his colleagues in the curia, he worked to ensure that education reached every corner of the diocese*”⁷.

With these abilities, he could have achieved an important position in the Church. However, he understood that he had to put them at the service of the poorest. He had a perfect mastering of the Latin language and the classical authors, knew how to handle the abacus well, enthusiastically assumed the reform of the Church promoted by the Council of Trent and, above all, had the vision that the integral education of children was the foundation of a new society.

The Piarist volunteer moves away from the world of good intentions or good will. It is not enough to want to help; it is necessary to know how best to help according to one’s own personal abilities. The volunteer must have a good motivation for action, a certain facility for human encounter, for active listening and for expressing the right word at each moment.

As the volunteer becomes aware of his or her abilities, the initial compassion translates into a way of staying helping with concrete tasks

7 ALONSO ARROYO, FJ (2017) Sanctity for social change. PPC. P. 19.

that help to raise the dignity of people: teaching, listening, managing resources, accompanying personal processes, teaching reading, helping with school work, sharing games, training in a sport, rehabilitating the sick, etc. A volunteer must be competent to help well.

Participating altruistically. Doing a social service free of charge in a Confraternity was an essential condition for membership. The great need in the population demanded many people available to visit the sick, instruct children, welcome pilgrims and care for orphans. Calasanz was one of the many restless “volunteers” who gave his time freely. As a member of the Confraternity of the Twelve Apostles he visited all the districts of Rome 157 times. During these visits he went out together with another person to visit the sick and the poor, helping them with alms and encouraging them to lead a Christian life with patience. In the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine he worked helping and visiting the many catechesis in the churches of Rome, which the Confraternity attended, including some that cared for gypsies.

In the Confraternity of Convalescents and Pilgrims, he cared for the poor who, having been admitted to public hospitals, still needed help and assistance in their own homes. Likewise, poor pilgrims arriving in Rome, particularly in the holy year of 1600, needed special attention in terms of accommodation, sustenance, catechesis and accompaniment. Even today, in the Holy Year 2000, one could still see in Rome, especially in the Basilicas of the Jubilee, a multitude of young people with the word “volunteers” visible on their T-shirts, as they dedicated themselves to assisting the pilgrims in all sorts of ways. As member of the Confraternities of the Stigmata of St. Francis and of the Suffrage, he also collaborated in the tasks and finalities of each of them which, together with their more spiritual character of prayer and pilgrimages, all had as a common obligation to help the poor in need.

In the midst of so many occupations, the Piarist volunteer takes time to dedicate it to others in an altruistic way because he is convinced that “*there is more joy in giving than in receiving*” (Act 20, 35) and that “*what has been received freely, must be given freely*” (Mt 10, 8).

Within a voluntary organization. Earlier, we listed the organizations (Confraternities) in which Calasanz participates. They had defined statutes, responsibilities and a system of participation of their members. There were established protocols and rules for

carrying out the “works of mercy”; a fundamental one is to record them in a book. Calasanz participated actively in the activities of all of them. Not only did he participate in direct action, but he had to attend many meetings, to cast his votes, etc....

The Piarist volunteer is not a “sniper”. He or she must be associated with an organization that designs and develops effective programs that help vulnerable groups to have greater dignity. The need to be well organized, to work as a team and to accept responsibility must be promoted. Only in this way will voluntary action have the power to transform reality.

Organizations must be committed to welcoming, training and accompanying volunteers who come to offer their collaboration in these entities. Volunteers, on joining a specific organization, undertake to comply with the rules and channels of action that are described, as well as to fulfil their personal commitment to volunteering in that organization.

Participating in an organization implies that the volunteers accept a personal and group accompaniment that facilitates the integration of the action in the personal process of human growth. For this, the proximity of “teachers”, of “accompaniers” who are interlocutors in this encounter with reality of the excluded “other” is essential. This is how Calasanz lived it when he let himself be accompanied by the Discalced Carmelites of the convent of La Scala in Trastevere. In personal dialogue and in the small group, experiences are contrasted and help each other to improve their actions and to grow in their motivations. The poor are also a privileged place of God’s presence: “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25).

Volunteering: a place of personal growth

Working for others free of charge helps the volunteer to grow in humanity as he/she can acquire the virtues proper to the Calasanzian tradition and which are a true *“energy of growth: poverty, humility, loving patience and patient love”*⁸.

8 CONGREGACIÓN GENERAL DE LAS ESCUELAS PÍAS. Shared Mission p. 40 Ediciones Calasancias 1999.

Living an experience of service can become a true educational process which transforms the person. Through action, personal change is produced, as Jean Lacroix expresses it: *By acting, we continually recreate ourselves; in the smallest of our acts is contained the possibility of transfiguration of a whole life.*⁹

Personal change is produced if three elements are articulated:

1. An educational itinerary that has a starting point, a horizon of arrival, some basic options and some defined stages that we will develop later on. The itinerary is the external manifestation of the personal process that the volunteer lives. It is observable, measurable and objectifiable. The process, however, is subjective and can only be known if the person communicates it and, indirectly, through the data of the itinerary. The process explains the itinerary: if we only see the itinerary, we are left in the surface of the person.
2. A structure of accompaniment. The experiences lived by the volunteers cannot be left to spontaneity. The role of the mentor helps volunteers to integrate into the organization's team, to make their work more efficient and, above all, to integrate their experiences into their own personal growth process.
3. A community of reference. In the case of Piarist volunteers, the formative reference should be the Piarist Christian community that sends them to the mission. This community is made up of *“the religious, the members of the Piarist Fraternities and all the people who form part of the whole Piarist presence who meet to share their faith and grow in their Calasanzian identity”* (Rules 100bis). Within the Piarist presence there are Piarist mission platforms: schools, parishes, non-formal education centers and foundations where volunteers can exercise the mission. It is the whole community that must welcome the volunteers and accompany them in their process of personal growth.

Educational itinerary of Piarist volunteers

The Pious Schools, through their different mission platforms, must design and offer **educational itineraries** for the formation of their

9 LACROIX, J. (1996) Amor y persona. Caparrós editores. P. 19.

volunteers, which take into account their process of maturity and personal growth. In this sense, they must establish permanent formative spaces, diversified according to *the needs, contents and fields of action*. They *must adapt* to the complexity of reality, to new methods of intervention, to the dynamics of organizations and to the new challenges presented by the socio-political reality.

The rise of the volunteering phenomenon has helped to reflect on the different moments of the itinerary. The most complete reflection has been done by Luis Aranguren¹⁰ in the different books he has published, the ideas of which we will present in this section, adapting them to our Piarist reality.

Those in charge of organizations should consider “educational pathways” in the plural, because there is no single pathway as a beacon and guide for the others, and because the same pathway affects different actors (volunteers, employees and managers). Sometimes, in order not to distort the meaning of the text, we will adopt the form “pathway” in the singular. What is really important is that in no case will you find here “the” recipe for a finished model, but only the encouragement for the individual volunteer managers to imagine possible futures in this difficult and exciting educational challenge.

The starting point of the itinerary is the individual volunteer in his or her personal situation and previous experience, with his or her fears and dreams, with his or her ignorance and knowledge. It starts with fears and insecurities, but also with great expectations and the desire that the experience gained be a fruitful one.

The arrival horizon. Each volunteering experience is original and therefore has a different duration. Some people do service for a short time, while others do it for life. The “time spent” does not necessarily coincide with the “time lived”; this is why it is not possible to define a specific time to achieve certain objectives. The “horizon” refers to the life project (vocation) to which every person is called. It answers the question of where the person directs his or her efforts, illusions and most important options. The best image to explain this idea is the force that moves Ulysses to reach the island

10 ARANGUREN GONZALO, L.A., *Cartografía del voluntariado*, PPC, Madrid, 2000.

of Ithaka, which he never reaches, but the desire to do so moves him to overcome all obstacles.

Background options: The path will be adequate if the following pedagogical dynamisms are guaranteed:

- *Care*. The organization must take care of people, which implies that it must ensure personalized attention, trust in the possibilities of each person and help them in their personal growth.
- *Action*. This is the place where volunteering is verified and validated. For a real action to take place, there must be a defined task with a meaning and the degree of transformation it generates: *“Understanding is not enough. You have to act. Our finality, our ultimate finality, is not to develop in us or around us the maximum of conscience, the maximum of sincerity, but to assume the maximum of the reality in the light of the truths we have come to know”¹¹*.
- *Encounter*. A large part of the capacity to transform reality is to generate links with people. What really educates is the encounter, which will be more effective if empathy and respect are present.
- *Institutional relevance*. The organization must have a defined formation plan (itinerary) and have suitable formators to accompany the volunteers in their personal process.
- *Patience*. Each person has his or her own personal process and learns in different ways, especially from life experience. So, formators should be patient if volunteers do not learn at the pace they expect.

Stages of the pathway

Having defined the starting point, the horizon of arrival and the options of the pathway, we now will describe the different stages that a volunteer can go through.¹²

11 MOUNIER, E (1992): Obras Completas I. Salamanca. Sígueme. P. 743.

12 Manual de gestión del voluntariado 2009. Obra Social La Caixa.

Invitation. The organization designs how it can invite people to join an action-reflection process in a friendly and cordial way. To do this, it must define the profile of the people it is looking for to initiate the process in order to plan relevant actions. This profile depends very much on the nature of the task to be carried out. It is not the same to recruit young people to work in educational programs with children as it is to recruit adults to work in primary social care.

A concrete and very Piarist example. An urban camp has been organized for children from a working-class neighborhood, for which young people are needed to organize fun activities and help them with school work such as reading, writing and arithmetic.

They must be young people in good spirits, willing to work in a team, creative, open to reflection and generously involved.

Now, a “invitation plan” must be designed in which the whole organization actively participates, as it is necessary to provoke the interest of the greatest number of young people. The places where the activity will be presented and the most appropriate strategies are defined. For the urban camp, a team of volunteers can go to the classes of older students in the school, to youth groups and even visit nearby public schools.

Every call for volunteers must have a description of the specific action, the place, the recipients, the skills to be acquired by the volunteer, the time of commitment and the objectives of the experience.

Reception. Not everyone who comes to an organization to start volunteering can do so. It is necessary to make a rigorous selection in which those in charge must discover through an interview the initial motivations and the degree of suitability of the volunteer.

At first, the interviewer must be aware of some personal aspects of the candidate: degree of empathy, capacity for dialogue, cordiality and discretion, affability, respect, open-mindedness and active listening. The interview is essential to rule out people who do not have the right profile for the task.

The first welcome is fundamental in establishing a personal relationship between the organization and the volunteer. The objectives of this stage are:

- To welcome the new volunteer in a cordial and empathetic way.
- To inform the volunteer about the organization's structure and the possibilities of work.
- To integrate the volunteer into the organization's team.
- To accompany the volunteer in his/her first weeks of initiation.

By means of a written agreement, both parties take responsibility for complying with the agreed dedication of the volunteer and, on the other hand, the volunteer is offered all the material, formative and human support for his/her work and adequate progression on the part of the organization. In addition, a positive relationship between the person in charge and the volunteer must be facilitated in order to accompany them during the first days of their work, introduce them to the people on the team, get to know the spaces, etc.

Initiation into action. This first moment of the voluntary action must be directed not so much at doing, at the task, but at being, learning and observing. The volunteer is initiated through meeting and observation. The accompanying person has to be aware of how the new volunteer is integrating and the feelings that emerge in his or her first experiences.

Among the many actions that the volunteer can develop in this initiation phase, we highlight those proposed by A. Pangrazzi, based on four verbs that summarize the being and acting of the volunteer and define his or her relational and presence capacity. These are¹³:

- | | |
|--|----------|
| - What can I DO with the other? | Action |
| - What can I COMMUNICATE to the other? | Dialogue |
| - What can I BE for the other? | Presence |
| - What can I LEARN from the other? | Learning |

13 Cfr. PANGRAZZI, A., *Hacer bien el bien*, PPC, Madrid, 2006, 100-102. Although Pangrazzi's proposal is intended for volunteers among people in the world of care for the sick, here we offer an adaptation to social volunteering in general.

With this scheme, Luis Aranguren¹⁴ proposes a list of tasks that we have included in its entirety because it can be very useful for accompanying volunteers.

What can I DO with the other? I can...

- Be with them
- Encourage their autonomy and personal value. This is a fundamental way of contributing to human care
- Carry out small tasks or errands or help in carrying out small tasks.
- Occupy him/her in some small or recreational activity
- Carry out all those activities that have been entrusted to me.

What can I COMMUNICATE to others? I can...

- Accompany especially those who are alone, remaining accessible to the communication that each person wants to establish, offering an empathetic and understanding response
- Contribute with relaxed listening, simple communication, actions that facilitate comfort and well-being
- Give and receive information
- Convey my own reflections
- Affirm their values and attitudes
- Answer their questions honestly and with authenticity.
- Convey closeness through physical contact (a caress, a gesture of affection, etc.).

What can I BE for the other person? I can...

- Be present
- Be humble and sensitive
- Be calm and patient

14 ARANGUREN, L. (2015) Lo esencial del voluntariado. Oc.

- Be a friendly person, easily accessible
- Be human and behave as such, without appearances or pretending to be someone other than who I am
- Be available and discreet
- Be competent in service
- Be coherent with myself
- Be an instrument of kindness, care, harmony
- Be a bearer of hope.

What can I LEARN from others?

- To know their history.
- To recognize constructive and humanizing attitudes, and others that do not go in that direction.
- To question myself about the reasons for suffering and injustice.
- To recognize and adequately manage inner resources of which I was hardly aware.
- To appreciate and value solidarity in this field of voluntary action.
- To resize my problems, my worries, my needs, my complaints.
- To value my health and take care of it.
- To accept my powerlessness, my fragility and recognize my constitutive vulnerability: I am a vulnerable person, I am not omnipotent.
- To understand myself better and to understand others better.
- To appreciate the value of the small, the detail, the barely insignificant that in the long run means a lot.

Formation. The place of formation in a Piarist entity is in accordance with the identity, mission and values of the Piarist mission. A plan has to be designed that contemplates formal and non-formal

formative moments. The formal moments are organized in courses and workshops on specific topics

- *Basic formation* is organized so that the volunteer becomes aware of the importance of formation to carry out the service well, develops practical skills for social work, deepens the profile of a Piarist volunteer and shares work and reflection with volunteers who have been in the program for a longer period of time. It is a formation aimed at integrating into the organization and learning certain notions about educational action. It focuses on content.
- With *specific formation*, the volunteer acquires skills for the specific action he or she is carrying out. These are specialized courses and workshops that help to improve the service they perform in the organization. It is a formation designed to help the volunteer learn strategies for action.
- With *ongoing formation*, volunteers maintain their motivation, grow in identity and strengthen the organization. It is a cross-cutting option at all stages of the volunteer process. It is centered on the construction of identity.

It is necessary to design the formation of volunteers by combining formal spaces (basic, specific, permanent) with the non-formal ones that are carried out in the accompaniment.

Accompaniment. Once the person has joined the organization, the organization must ensure the development of the assigned tasks and the relationships established with the rest of the team and with the beneficiaries. Accompanying volunteers is essential to improve their performance, to integrate them into the organization's team and to keep them motivated over time. The accompaniment of volunteers is structured in several areas¹⁵:

- **Personal situation:** It is important to accompany volunteers in their personal development. Their affectivity, self-esteem and their vital moment affect the task at hand and it is necessary to be attentive to each person with their singularity.

15 Plan General de Voluntariado. Itaka Escolapios.

- Relationship with the team: The monitoring of this area aims to ensure the evolution of the person in the group, their relationships with the volunteers and with the professionals, their participation, etc.
- Relationship with beneficiaries: Knowing and assessing this relationship and detecting strengths and weaknesses helps us to better understand the role that the volunteer assumes with regard to the beneficiaries.
- The concrete task: This area is related to the implication in the preparation, realization and evaluation of the assigned task that will be developed on a daily basis.

An important dimension of the continuous accompaniment is the motivation that sustains the action of the person in the organization. It is a stimulus that triggers the action of the volunteer and brings him/her closer to our organization. Therefore, within the accompaniment we propose a necessary formation to strengthen this motivation and to continue with the process of change and personal growth.

Construction of the identity of Piarist volunteers

In the Constitutions of the Piarist Schools, Calasanz describes the meaning and the formative structure of a Piarist teacher:

“Since the aim of our Congregation through the exercise of the Pious Schools is the formation of children in piety and human letters, so that they may attain eternal life, we believe it necessary to achieve this aim not only to offer an example of spiritual life, but also to acquire doctrine and the way to teach it” (CC 203).

From this perspective, the formation of a Piarist volunteer must take into account three dimensions: *spiritual identity* (being), *cultural contents* (knowing) and *methodologies* (knowing how to do).

Knowledge. Through courses and workshops, the volunteer must know:

- the social framework, its problems, inequalities and resources;
- the place of voluntary action in its context;
- the institution or association to which he/she belongs;

- the fields and activities in which he/she can offer his/her time and person;
- the specific group in which he/she will provide his/her service.

Knowing how to do. This is the area of skills necessary for voluntary action, such as:

- Helping relationship techniques, educational practices, methodologies, competences.
- Habits of participation.
- To possess appropriate working tools.
- To plan the action by interacting with others.
- To participate in the organization and programming of the association's activities.
- To acquire habits of dynamization and animation of the community.

To Be. Building the Piarist identity in the formative processes will allow to connect the action with the vital project of the volunteer so that he/she lives the voluntary service as a mission. If the vocational identity is taken care of, it must be foreseen that the volunteer is more committed and does his/her service better.

Initially, Calasanz focused the formation on the spiritual dimension, foundation of everything else. Education requires the educator to *be a man of spirit, to have a great spirit to help not only the youngsters in the schools but also the laity, by example and doctrine, to embrace the true path to paradise.* (EP 4321)

In tune with the founding spirit of the Pious Schools, we must ensure that the volunteers who work in the Pious Schools have a great spirit and a particular vocation so that they can carry out their educational mission as an apostolate.

We will focus on how to form the volunteers in the “being”; that is to say, the area of Christian and Piarist identity. To do this, we must ensure that the volunteer lives a **process of personal growth** that is original and unrepeatable. No one starts from the same point, no one has the same starting conditions or the same abilities, and no

one encounters exactly the same obstacles and possibilities along the way. The objectives of this formation are:

- To acquire a critical awareness of society
- To deepen their motivations for voluntary action
- To mature in their sense of gratuity and responsibility
- To acquire an alternative way of life to that which exists in our society
- To grow in their sense of belonging to the Pious Schools.
- To live the service as an expression of a living faith.

In a survey that I did in 2017 to a group of 200 educators very involved in the Pious Schools, I asked them about the reasons of their own personal history that led them to identify themselves so much with the Piarist project. The results reveal some reasons that have been decisive in identifying with the Piarist style:

1. The living encounter with Calasanz, his spirituality and his pedagogy.
2. The warm welcome received from the Pious Schools.
3. The testimony of the Piarists, religious and lay people.
4. The experience of sharing the mission.
5. The participation in Piarist formation processes.
6. The opportunity that the Pious Schools have given me to exercise a mission.
7. The identification with the Piarist vocation as an educator.
8. The experience of contact with children in need

A more detailed analysis of the results of the survey shows that at the origin of the Piarist commitment of the educators, there are a series of experiences of encounter that have had the strength to link them to the Piarist charism: Encounter with Calasanz, with specific Piarists, with a welcoming community and with children in need.

For volunteers to acquire a Piarist vocational identity, the organization must foster affective and narrative links (feeling and reason) with the Piarist Christian community, the repository of the charism.

The affective link is the first element that configures identity. It begins to develop in the relationship with specific persons, participation in the life of the group and involvement in a work. The person enters into relationship with the members of the group; in this way he becomes involved in experiences proper to the mission, and through them he empathizes with educators identified with the Piarist charism.

The volunteer connects with the concrete reality, establishes bonds of communion with his or her companions in the mission, feels moved by the needs of the children, is enthusiastic about the mission, and tests his or her gifts and capacity to serve, and feels welcomed and valued by those in charge of the work who trust in his or her work.

At the beginning, the new volunteer is linked to concrete people and works. Many of those who are very committed today became involved in the Pious Schools because of the witness of a Piarist (religious or lay person) who served as a vocational reference, because they trusted him to be a catechist or they were invited to participate in a summer camp. They felt good in the parish or school because it helped them in their personal growth. In many cases, the Pious Schools have been the place where they have forged great friendships and discovered their own vocation.

Sometimes, the volunteer remains only at the level of feelings and everything ends up in the place and with the specific people with whom he had the experience. His link with the charism is with a Piarist and a concrete educational reality that, when it disappears, the involvement fades away.

In this case, he has not been able to universalize his experience and make it more consistent.

With the narrative link the volunteer overcomes the “here and now” and discovers that his vital experience of affective type has a story that explains it. Narrative is the perspective with which a person contemplates his or her life, discovering the plot that links the events in which he or she has been involved, the roots of the existential situations he or she is living now, and can dare to outline the ways in which he or she is walking towards the future.

Every person seeks to give an explanation to the events he lives, and to do so, he makes use of powerful stories that illuminate his

experience. For an educator to acquire a Piarist Christian vocation there must be a connection between his life experience and the Christian and Calasanzian stories; that is, to tell his vocation from the reference to Jesus and Calasanz.

There are Piarist educators who tell their vocational experience using episodes from the life of Calasanz or fragments of his writings; of course, also the biblical passages are a very powerful story that illuminates one's own experience.

The ***community bond*** arises from the narration of events in which some people have been involved in solidarity. When these people tell each other over and over again about their educational experience, they become aware that they have a common mission.

For a person to be integrated into the collective Piarist identity, he or she must feel recognized in the story that sustains this identity. For this reason, the formation of volunteers aims to build personal identity in relation to the collective identity; that is, to help them discover and insert their existential story into the collective identity until they feel part of it.

The volunteer understands that he/she has been called to be an instrument of God within the Piarist vocation and that he/she is fulfilled within a community. Then, a step is taken towards the charismatic belonging to the Pious Schools.

In order to awaken in the volunteers the desire to be linked to the Piarist Christian community, the feeling of belonging to the Pious Schools, of responsibility for the mission and of love for Calasanz must be activated.

The feeling of belonging appears when the educator feels welcomed and valued in the educational community, when he feels that the Pious Schools are a place of integral growth and when he is accompanied in his personal process. After a time of mission in the work, many say that they feel at home.

The feeling of responsibility appears when the educator discovers himself as an instrument in God's hands and becomes aware that his action is decisive for the Piarist mission.

Love for Calasanz is the feeling that unifies the personal and community experience.

Botana argues how affective, narrative and community bonds develop through configurative experiences. *The person who is being initiated into an identity has to go through fundamental configurative experiences that allow him or her to enter into this identity, to become imbued with it and to make it his or her own*¹⁶.

Thus, the volunteer organization must propose experiences capable of configuring in the educators a collective Piarist identity. It has been verified how these experiences have made possible the leap to a greater link to the Pious Schools.

1. Dedication to the neediest from a gratuity in relation to the Piarist charism.
2. Sharing the experience and the encounter with God and the call to collaborate in the work of salvation.
3. Feeling accompanied in the vocational process itself.
4. To know people and living Piarist realities, even in countries other than one's own.
5. To share the same project with religious and lay people.

These experiences acquire a deeper meaning if they are accompanied by a systematic proposal of Calasanzian formation: readings, workshops and courses.

If the experiences configure the vocational identity of a volunteer, he/she will also be able to build the collective Piarist vocational identity by seeing experiences in the Piarist community linking him/her to the original story that gave birth to the Pious Schools.

It has been widely demonstrated that volunteers make bonding processes when they have been proposed meaningful experiences and have been accompanied in a personal and group-work way.

Accompanying the volunteers

The formator accompanying volunteers must be someone capable of establishing an educational itinerary within the organization, a

16 BOTANA, A. (2008) Compartir carisma y misión con los laicos. Frontera Egian. P. 71.

person with a **strong educational accent**, interested in the formation of others, a facilitator of meeting spaces and interpersonal relationships, a scout of paths for personal growth in others and the improvement of voluntary action as a whole. This does not mean that the person accompanying the volunteer must be a teacher or pedagogue, but it must be borne in mind that they must be a reference for the volunteer and therefore, whether they want to or not, whoever takes on this role becomes an example: it is the pedagogy of example that must be transmitted.

He establishes an educational relationship with the volunteer to help them in their personal growth, to transform social relations and to generate a better quality of life for the beneficiaries of this action.

Nobody is born as an accompanier, you become one through experience and reflection.

1. He/she knows the volunteers he/she accompanies: their interests, their concerns and the expectations with which they go to the service.
2. Explicitly he/she demonstrates that he/she is available for whatever the other person needs.
3. He/she conveys positive messages to the volunteers: “You can...”, “You have qualities that you should exercise...”, “You lead the activity, you can do it...”
4. He/she keeps in mind that the main message the other person receives is the example and coherence of life.
5. He/she exercises the patience that comes from love; he/she will gain the volunteer’s trust and thus confidence. This process requires some shared time.
6. As trust emerges, questions arise. Even if they are sometimes annoying or unexpected, they should be considered a good symptom.
7. He/she is very observant and sensitive; for this, he/she needs to be close and actively listening.
8. He/she encourages volunteers to deepen their personal commitment by helping them to discover increasingly consistent motivations.

9. He/she helps volunteers to integrate action and reflection, struggle and contemplation, faith and life. In synthesis, it is the unity that helps personal development and social transformation.
10. He/she brings hope wherever he/she goes because is convinced that the human future does not spring mechanically from the present, but is prepared from it.

Themes for the formation of volunteers in Piarist identity

The themes offered in the second part of this book are intended to train volunteers in “Calasanzian identity”. Nineteen possible situations have been identified which can be experienced by a person in the dynamics of voluntary work and which occur at any time in the process. The educational praxis in the field of voluntary work has shown that people make processes when the methodology used is coherent with the identity and the finality of the project. The centrality of the experience, personal and in a group, internalized and personalized, is the driving force that makes it possible to make a personal process through the different itineraries proposed to the young people. We will now reflect on both.

We speak of a pedagogy of experience that leads to thinking, feeling and acting. We do not refer to activism, but to the integral human experience, to the living experience, to everything that constitutes the real life of the volunteer, but, above all, that which can be most significant. There are everyday experiences, others that stand out for their intensity, and others that are promoted because they help to live in depth. The experience of the volunteer action itself is the main educational resource. It is the sphere in which to consolidate and to contrast what is being intuited and discovered. From the lived experience, open to communication, everything acquires vital density. As the experience itself will be reflected, we propose to adapt the different steps of Kolb’s cycle of experiential learning with flexibility.

Kolb states that, in order to obtain optimal learning, it is necessary to work with information in four phases, the beginning of which is

a concrete experience (**immersion**), which is observed and analyzed by the individual (**reflection**) to create abstract concepts (**conceptualization**) that are later actively experienced or tested by the person (**application**), creating a new concrete experience and starting the learning cycle again.

With the experience of relating to events, places and people, new learning is incorporated that broadens the volunteer's perception of reality. The model proposed by Kolb applies to any experience. On this occasion, it will be adapted to that which can be produced by the "encounter" of volunteers with the direct beneficiaries of their action or with those with whom they share their work.

1. *Concrete experience.* The dynamics of voluntary action is full of encounters and misunderstandings, joys and sorrows, successes and failures, disappointments and dreams. In voluntary action, there are many situations that can become a source of energy for personal growth. The opening story of each theme is intended to evoke personal experience:
 - Have you had an experience similar to the one described in the story?
 - How did you deal with the situation? Tell a personal experience

Each theme is a narrated experience of a fictitious but possible case.

2. *Reflexive observation.* For the experience to be meaningful, it is necessary to reflect on the action and incorporate the learning acquired into one's own life project. Without reflection, voluntary action falls into superficial activism that leads to personal burnout. Volunteers experience many sensations and have access to exciting experiences, but everything remains superficial if it is not properly assimilated.

Dialogue, reflection and study are necessary to internalize the experience. At this point, the accompanying person should listen to the volunteers and ask them new questions in order to deepen their understanding of the reality. He/she helps them to interpret the experience and give it a meaning.

The companion will seek to give meaning to the experience from the Gospel narratives and the texts of Calasanz. These two sources gather a Calasanzian and believer view on work, human nature and its relationships, the meaning of history and social organization; also on people living in poverty and exclusion.

The Word illuminates the reality giving it a salvific meaning. The connection with the “word of Calasanz” builds charismatic identity. There is an experience of faith when we discover the presence of God in the experiences that make up our existence. Undoubtedly, the encounter and service to others is an experience where God can be discovered.

- What aspects of the life and words of Jesus connect with your experience? What do they bring to you?
- What strikes you about the experience of St. Joseph Calasanz? What can you learn from him and what helps you to improve your service?

Each theme presents a reflection from the Gospel and the experience of Calasanz.

3. *Conceptualization.* Once the reflective phase is over, the accompanying person helps the volunteers to “build knowledge” and to give it a meaning:
 - What new concepts have I learned in the reflected experience?
 - How can I improve my work as a volunteer?

Each theme offers some final conclusions that build up a “profile of the Piarist volunteer”.

4. *Application.* The volunteer grows in experience and identity with the learning acquired and taken on board. When confronted with difficult situations, he/she will be able to deal with them with the wisdom acquired in practice.

The topics are written to be shared in a small group led by an accompanying person who must always keep in mind the phases of experiential learning. They are suitable for an ongoing identity formation plan.

Be ready for service

“Make haste; do not trust in the hours to come. He who is not ready today will be less ready tomorrow”. Ovid

One of the reasons why young people engage in service to others is the good example they have seen in other volunteers. Many found inspiration in the monitors they had in their youth group, in the school sports team or at summer camps, and they were probably attracted by the warmth with which they dealt with people and their enthusiasm in preparing activities.

Children should have well-paid professional educators, but more importantly, they should have educators with a vocation and who work for free. True education is not just about teaching concepts and skills, but about transmitting an identity and giving meaning to life. Love is the dynamism that really educates people and gives them the strength to live fully.

Many of the volunteers can tell of the experience of having had enthusiastic educators in their childhood, close to them and dedicated to their mission. Curiously, they were not so much influenced by the “professionals” as by the “volunteers” who shared with them significant moments in their lives.

Perhaps, the educational experience that young people have lived through in their childhood is a good starting point for deciding to begin the adventure of being a volunteer. Many of them express their decision to help others, just as they were helped as children.

Calasanz also had a good educational experience in his early years. He received a careful education from his parents, learned his first letters in the little school in his village of Peralta, studied Latin grammar in the convent of the Trinitarians and studied the humanities in the long years of university where he had excellent professors who transmitted to him the love of truth.

His years of initial formation left him with a great social sensitivity. In fact, during his time as a priest in Urgel and Tremp he had some initiatives to help the poorest, especially children. It is not strange that, in his first stage of stay in Rome (1592-1597), he devoted a good part of his time to visit the sick and to teach Christian doctrine to

the poorest children free of charge, as a volunteer. Throughout his formative process, Calasanz strengthened his motivations and acquired skills to serve others through his ministry as a priest and educator.

From a very early age, children discover the importance of helping those most in need and collaborating to improve a community (family, school, neighborhood, association). If, from an early age, children are taught the habit of helping for free and meet volunteers, it can be foreseen that, when they grow up, they will also want to serve others.

There is a moment when the young person receives a first proposal to collaborate in a group, to go as a monitor to a camp, to help in a center for poor children or to serve in an old people's home. If the young person is restless and open-minded, he/she will receive the invitation with joy and with some trepidation because of the insecurity of starting something new.

Doing voluntary service is an opportunity where the young person can interact with children, work in a team and get to know the reality. In the service, they will discover their talents and become aware of their limitations.

The young person starting out as a volunteer is expectant. They do not know if they will be able to do well the task they have been given and, logically, they feel insecure when faced with a new situation that is too big for them. At this moment, it is important that the new volunteer feels very welcome and accompanied in his or her new work by other more experienced volunteers.

In this first phase of integration in the action, the volunteer assumes the commitment of:

- Being familiar with the mission, vision and values of the Association he/she is joining
- Being consistent in the service he/she has undertaken
- Taking the initial courses offered by the Association
- Being accompanied by an experienced volunteer
- Participating in planning and evaluation meetings.

It is only through good support that the volunteer can remain faithful to the commitment he or she has made. Even if they have a pleasant initial experience, they may soon feel a sense of helplessness when they discover how difficult it can be to do the service well.

Young people undoubtedly start out with a lot of enthusiasm and believe that everything will be easy. They understand that just because they mean well and give their time for free, the world will bow down at their feet. Experience shows that there are always rebellious, undisciplined, rude children who, with their bad behavior, test newcomers to the job. A feeling of worthlessness is very likely to manifest itself in the volunteer. Expressions such as *“I’m not good at being with children”*, *“they don’t value the free time I give”*, *“I made a bad decision when I started volunteering...”*, *“they don’t listen to me and make fun of me”* can be heard.

One should not be discouraged and give up at the first experience of frustration. The prophet Jeremiah also experiences his personal limitation in the face of the mission that God entrusts to him and excuses himself:

“Ah, Lord, I do not know how to speak, for I am too young”
(Jer 1:6). However, he accepts the mission because he trusts in God who gives him strength: *“I am with you to deliver you, I put my words in your mouth”* (Jer 1:8-9).

Calasanz also had his own personal struggle when the work with the children of Trastevere became complicated. He wanted to leave this mission to others: Jesuits, Dominicans, the town council.... In the end, he understood that it was God who was calling him, so he was not discouraged by the difficulties he encountered. As much to the prophet Jeremiah as to Calasanz, God gives him the strength to carry out such a difficult mission.

Difficulties must be experienced as an opportunity to grow as a person. By facing them, the volunteer strengthens his motivations and gains experience in the relationship with children.

If there is one thing that is learned at the beginning, it is that the volunteer must have a great willingness to learn from experience, to ask how something can be done rather than say it cannot be done. With the commitment to do a service, the volunteer assumes that

he/she must be accompanied by more experienced volunteers until he/she becomes more autonomous and “Always ready to serve”.

When speaking of the educational mission, Calasanz wrote: “*by the dawn the day is known and by the good beginning the good end*”. It is necessary that the young volunteers have a good start, a good welcome, a good accompaniment, but, above all, a good disposition for service.

The Piarist volunteer is a person open

1. To the education he/she has received in his childhood.
2. To the closeness and witness of other volunteers.
3. To begin a new journey as a volunteer.
4. To learn from the experience of service with children.
5. To integrate possible disappointments and failures.

Great spirit and particular vocation

“Our main purpose in this life is to help others, and if you cannot help them, at least don’t hurt them” Dalai Lama

From experience

*Maria had her first experience of working with children in a **home for orphans**. In fact, she was obliged by the school to do community service hours, a prerequisite for graduating from high school. She did not start out with much interest, but the desire to do well and get good grades motivated her to participate in the program every Saturday of the year.*

At the end of the “community service”, she was asked to continue as a volunteer. Although she was attending the social center out of obligation, she had also received a lot of personal satisfaction in dealing with the children. The time spent volunteering could even be useful for her professional curriculum. Besides, she had nothing better to do until she was accepted at the university.

So, she decided to start volunteering on Saturday mornings. She helped the children with their homework, played a little with them and accompanied them for lunch at midday. She made it clear to the head of the program that her service would last until she was admitted to university.

Her life plan was not to devote herself to the children. She wanted to study diplomacy, learn a language, continue playing tennis and do her professional internship in another country. Finally, she started university and gave up her volunteering, claiming that she needed time for her studies and personal leisure.

After a few years, Maria is now a professional, speaks several languages and belongs to a select tennis club. She remembers fondly the time she spent helping out at the orphanage. She admits that working with the children was a good experience in her teenage years, but adult life has demands that are incompatible with voluntary work.

For Maria, the time spent volunteering was only an occasional experience that did not influence her life plan. She remembered the affection of the children and perhaps she would look with admiration at

other volunteers who persevered more than she did. Being a volunteer was definitely not the lifestyle she wanted for her life.

Maria had a good, short experience as a volunteer, but she did not have a strong motivation to continue with the children in the orphanage. She was not willing to give up her other commitments, which she would probably see as more productive than voluntary service.

Like Maria, many young people have had an occasional experience of service and have not gone on to a more stable commitment. They see volunteering as just another activity in their schedule alongside their studies, family, work and leisure.

Those who have a first experience as volunteers will continue to be volunteers if they discover that the exercise of solidarity makes them happier and offers them a new way of life. They will continue if they have discovered that the encounter with poor children makes them better persons because it challenges them and calls them to responsibility. They will continue if they discover that the identity of the person is constituted from the responsibility towards the “vulnerable other”.

In the light of the Gospel

In the Gospel stories, the decision to help the poor in their needs is not proposed as a personal choice. It is an obligation of justice and the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10, 25- 37) is a very clear example. When the Samaritan meets a wounded man on the roadside, he does not ask himself whether he likes to serve or whether he has time to help him. He simply goes to the wounded man, gives him first aid, mounts him on his horse and takes him to an inn to be healed. He understands that helping him is an impulse of humanity, not just a personal choice. It is a call for help that obliges him in conscience.

God calls through the reality of suffering people. Jesus also “*was moved with compassion before a crowd of people who were weary and distressed, like sheep without a shepherd*” (Mt 9:36). His reaction to this reality of need among the people was to turn to his disciples and say to them: “*The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are poor.*”

Ask the owner of the fields to send out laborers for his harvest” (Mt 9:38). It is the disciples who are charged with guiding and helping the disoriented people. On another similar occasion, Jesus felt sorry for the people who had no food, so he said to his disciples, “You give them something to eat”. The disciples had only five loaves of bread and two fish, too little for so many people. So, Jesus pronounced a blessing on them, and they multiplied and fed them all (Mt 14:13-21).

The initiative of every vocation comes from God who speaks through his word, through events and the witness of others. It is a call that touches the heart and moves to action. Jesus says: *“It is not you who have chosen me, it is I who have chosen you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should last” (Jn 15, 16).*

In the light of Calasanz

Like the Good Samaritan, Calasanz helps children who are wounded by the neglect and lack of affection of their parents, by ignorance and the vices of the street. After many hours of dealing with them, he discovers that God is calling him to commit himself even more and decides to found the Pious Schools. He discovers that God is calling him through the little ones to educate the children in piety and letters *“Which cannot be done without many workers, and it is not possible to obtain them if they do not have a great spirit and are not called with a particular vocation (...) they will encounter other difficulties which derive from a life mortified by the obligatory contact with children, laborious because of the continuous effort of their profession and despicable in the eyes of the flesh, which considers the education of poor children as something vile...” (Tonti no. 24).*

For the schools to run well, Calasanz looked for young candidates of good wit and manners, preferably those who had been educated in the Pious Schools. He constantly repeated that he was not looking for quantity but quality, because it is better *to be few and good than many and not very self-sacrificing (EP 1516).*

Once the first vocational discernment was done, the formation focused on the spiritual dimension, which is the foundation of everything else, because education requires people *“with a great spirit to help not only the young boys in the schools but also the laity, by example and doctrine, to embrace the true path to paradise” (EP 4321).*

The Piarist volunteer has a vocation of service:

1. He/she discovers an inner call to help others freely.
2. He/she nourishes his/her life project from the service he/she does.
3. He/she has the experience that voluntary service gives meaning to life.
4. He/she experiences the joy of serving others.

A clean look

“Here is my secret, which could not be simpler: it is only with the heart that one can see well. What is essential is invisible to the eyes”. Antoine de Saint Exupery

From experience

Finally, the conflict erupted at a training day on “The challenges of interculturality” organized by the Itaka Foundation at the school premises. It was about a statement made by the speaker: “Migrants are an opportunity for the development of our country. Moreover, if we get to know them closely, we can learn to be more tolerant of those who are different”.

Years ago, the foundation started a free Spanish classes program for immigrants arriving in the city and looking for a job to earn a living. The program is called OJALÁ, which in Arabic means “God willing”.

Andrés, one of the older volunteers started the discussion: “It’s good to help them, but do I have doubts that they will integrate into our society. Is it worth the effort that is being made? In other countries like France and Germany, they have created closed ghettos and are creating serious problems of coexistence. In England itself, Pakistanis have been found to support Islamic terrorist cells”.

The speaker replied calmly: “What you say is true, but you cannot judge a large collective by a few who do not integrate and may even be a threat to security”.

In my street lives a family of Syrian origin” - replied another participant. - They look like strangers. We neighbors are worried, what if they take in terrorists?

Yes, we are a bit silly,” replied another volunteer, “We go out of our way to help them and they take advantage of our goodwill,” said another volunteer.

“Also, they don’t get our traditions. In a few years, we will have lost them”.

The discussion got lively until Samir, a volunteer of Syrian origin, asked to speak:

You know me well. I had to leave the country I love to escape the war and you welcomed me unconditionally. Not only did I learn the lan-

guage, but I have good friends in the foundation. It is true that there are bad people among my fellow countrymen, but you cannot make simple analyses of reality. Most of the migrants are honest people who are looking to live with dignity and they have found that here. You should be proud of your work as volunteers.

After this statement, there was a silence of approval and the speaker concluded his dissertation:

Thank you very much Samir. Your testimony teaches us that a volunteer must know well the reality of the people he or she works with, it teaches us that we must overcome prejudices if we really want to help people.

Not everyone perceives and interprets social reality in the same way, and even less so when it comes to interpersonal relations with people from another culture. We do not see things as they are, but as we are; that is, from our particular ideology.

In the case of the perception of people, various factors have an influence: expectations about the subject with whom we are going to interact, the motivations that make the perceiving person see in the other individual what he or she wants to see, familiarity and experience.

Andrés has a distorted perception of reality, i.e. a prejudice that he has built up from very particular ideas, experiences and opinions that he has not checked properly. He has a stereotypical image, he has pigeonholed Syrian migrants, not because of their personal qualities but because of other circumstantial situations (social class, their ethnicity, language or their way of dressing).

A bad perception leads to the creation of stereotypes, prejudices and projections. Stereotyping assigns attributes based on group identity. Prejudice is the way of establishing judgements about people or things that are far from the common social perception. Projection is the effect of one's own emotions when evaluating people or situations.

From the Gospel

In Jesus' time there were different religious groups: The ones that appear most in the Gospels are the Pharisees, Sadducees and Zealots. They were all part of the people of Israel, but in practice, they had different perspectives on the interpretation of the Scriptures,

salvation, and the image of the Messiah. Moreover, their perception of people depended on their particular ideology.

The Pharisees were a very closed and exclusive community. They were especially concerned with ritual purity and keeping the law. They considered it essential not to have contact with people who were ritually impure. They tried to associate only with people of their group, avoiding the common people. Jesus questions them very much because they despised others and did not observe the precept of love.

The Sadducees were more a political party than a sect, composed of the aristocrats, the rich and the priests. They denied the afterlife and retribution because they did not believe in resurrection and immortality. They hoped for the Messiah, but were suspicious of any messianic movement. They accommodated themselves to the established regime on condition that religion was respected. Like the “good rich”, they despised the poor and those who did not think like them.

The Zealots recognized no other master than God. They rejected the passivity of the Pharisees and sought to hasten the coming of the kingdom of God by fighting against the Roman oppressor. The motivation for their actions was basically religious, but they were confused with political agitation.

Jesus does not identify with any particular group. He considers that all of them have an ideology contaminated by a misinterpretation of the Law and by nationalistic prejudices. For him there is no difference between people because they are all children of God, with the same dignity.

From Calasanz

So many centuries of Christian faith have not eliminated the Pharisaiic mentality of considering the poor as impure and of lesser dignity. In practice, the poor did not have the same rights as the nobles, including the right to education. Social origin determined the whole of life.

Society saw the poor as the recipients of the works of mercy: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, visiting the sick, welcoming the stranger.... The poor are the opportunity for “good Christians”

to exercise charity and to save themselves. No thought was given to lifting them out of poverty because that was the condition in which God wanted them. The social condition was maintained from the cradle to the grave.

With the popular school, Calasanz changed this perception that society had of the poor. He understood that, through letters and piety, the poor could get out of their miserable condition and become good citizens useful for society. Against those who were against the poor being educated, he wrote: *“Nor give ear to the policy little affectionate to Poverty, which thinks that letters should not be taught to the poor, as if talent could depend on riches, and not on nature, wanting to make believe that teaching them is harmful to the Republic, both because they are diverted from the mechanical arts and because, in the majority of cases, not learning enough letters, they remain without these and without the arts; so that it is necessary that they live idly and in order to support themselves they become vicious.”* (To Cardinal Ginetti. 1644).

The Piarist volunteer has a clear vision

1. He/she is curious and interested in knowing and interpreting reality in depth.
2. He/she has critical thinking: the ability to question, disagree and argue.
3. He/she has a mind free of prejudices and stereotypes that helps him/her to relate to different people and to adapt better to the environment.

Looking with the eyes of God

“Often a word, a look, a gesture is enough to fill the heart of the one we love”. Teresa of Kolkata

From experience

The Congregation of the “Daughters of Charity” has a Children’s Centre where they take in minors abandoned by their families. They provide them with a welcoming environment where the children grow as people and learn to integrate into society.

A small group of young people came to the Children’s Centre who wanted to live an experience of service. They had heard very good things about the work done by the nuns, the joy that was in the air and, above all, the prestige that the Centre enjoyed throughout the city. On entering, they were warmly welcomed by Sister Cristina:

“What a joy your visit is! Blessed and praised be our Lord Jesus Christ. It was the same God who brought you to our house”.

At that moment, a little girl approached the Sister, joined hands, asked her blessing and entered the chapel where she stayed for a while to pray before the Blessed Sacrament.

“For us it is important that the children discover that there is a God who loves and protects them. They have suffered so much; they have grown up with so many fears...”. Our founder, St. Vincent de Paul told us that “our Lord dwells in the simple of heart, in the poor”. We believe that these children are the living presence of Jesus among us who told us “What you did to one of the least of these, you did it to me”.

After touring the facilities and greeting the children, the young volunteers coordinated with the sister the days when they could help with school revision classes and the care of the toy library with the little ones.

On the first visit, the young people were struck by the clarity and simplicity with which the sister spoke about God. They just wanted to be with the children, to do a service.

When they left the center, Mario, who openly confessed to being an agnostic, declared that he did not feel at ease in that environment and decided to look for another place. He only wanted to do voluntary work, nothing else.

The Church runs many programs to help the poorest, many of which are run by religious communities that were born with a clear social vocation. All of them base their social commitment on a strong experience of encountering God present in the poor: *“The Daughters of Charity, in fidelity to their Baptism and in response to a call from God, give themselves entirely and in community to the service of Christ in the poor, their brothers and sisters, in an evangelical spirit of humility, simplicity and charity”* (Constitutions n° 7). For them, service to the poor is the expression of a deep spirituality.

Faith helps to look at the poor as Jesus looks at them, without any prejudice. With faith, one looks at the heart, not at appearances. With faith, the volunteer sees the best that each person has. Faith is the door that opens to a compassionate, patient and generous love.

From the Gospel

Jewish society in the first century nurtured many prejudices against people who did not belong to the group of those who strictly kept the law. Foreigners were looked upon with suspicion, others bore the stigma of impurity such as women and the chronically ill. Publicans and Romans were considered enemies of Israel.

The sect of the Pharisees imposed their racist ideology which, in practice, marginalized the majority of the population by depriving them of access to the community of salvation. The priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan look at the wounded man on the roadside and pass by. They do not want to defile themselves by helping him. It is a dirty look that builds walls of indifference to those who are different from them.

Jesus' gaze is clean with everyone because he looks at the heart and not at appearances. When the Pharisees condemn the woman for her adultery, Jesus looks at her with love, inviting her to change her life: *“Neither do I condemn you, Jesus said to her. Go, sin no more from now on”* (Jn 8:11). He looks with pleasure on the children who come to him to be blessed even though his disciples scold him harshly (Mt 19:13-15). He looks with love on the rich young man who could not sell his possessions: *“Jesus looked at him with love and said to him, ‘You lack only one thing; go, sell what you have and give to the poor; then you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me’”* (Mk 10:21).

“When he disembarked, he saw many people and felt compassion for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them many things” (Mk 6:34). The evangelist emphasizes the gaze of Jesus. He is not irritated because they have interrupted his plans. He looks at them carefully and is moved. He is never bothered by people. His heart senses the disorientation and abandonment in which the peasants of those villages find themselves.

The disciple looks at the people as Jesus looked at them: capturing the suffering, the loneliness, the bewilderment or the abandonment of the people. Compassion does not spring from attention to rules. It is awakened when one’s gaze is turned to those who suffer.

From Calasanz

Calasanz acquires a very deep knowledge of children through the direct experience he has with them and the full confidence in their capacities. His experience of faith helped him to see in the children the image of God, the person of Christ: *“I like to serve poor children because in them I see Jesus Christ”* as the Gospel indicates: *“What you did for one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did for me”* (Mt 25, 40).

From a believing view of human nature, he understands that the child is wounded by original sin and must return to friendship with God through the practice of piety. In this way, the pupils *“repent of offending God and many are preserved in baptismal innocence, and consequently the majority of those who, if they were to die in their youth, would be condemned for faults committed perhaps unscrupulously and lightly, and confessed with constraint, if not silenced, are spared from manifest condemnation”* (Tonti n. 9).

Calasanz takes a faith-filled view of events, especially illness and setbacks. He considers that *“they tend to be great favors from the fatherly hand of God. Whoever knows how to receive them from his infinite wisdom and not from the hand of personal enemies, and knows how to conform himself with patience and knowledge of this truth, will arrive with great merit of grace in this life and of very great glory in the next”* (EP 4397). He even sees the provident hand of God when the Pious Schools are crumbling: *“Do not believe that our Religion, although it now seems to be destroyed at the behest of God knows who, it will not rise again, but that it will grow more than ever with the help*

of the Lord, and I believe that it will not be long before it does; therefore it is good to remain firm in the mortification that God commands us, because by it he wants to prove who truly serves him for love and whoever perseveres will see the help of God upon himself” (EP 4364).

The Piarist volunteer has a look of faith

1. He/she lives his voluntary service from a spiritual motivation.
2. He/she witnesses by his works the experience of feeling loved by God
3. He/she gives freely what has received freely.
4. He/she makes a believing reading of the suffering of the poor because of sin and injustice.

For the reform of society

“Any reform which does not mean the reform of customs will always be inoperative”. Thomas Caryle

From experience

The Amaltea Association was founded by a group of young people fond of Villa Teresita, a small religious congregation dedicated to the care and social integration of marginalized women. For 25 years, the Piarist volunteers have been collaborating in the different programs they have, especially in the area of childhood.

The work of these years has not been easy. Along with great achievements, they have also had many disappointments. Sometimes, those who have been there the longest get discouraged. They say that the neighborhood is not progressing, that the time and money invested is not compensated by the fruits obtained. They also complain that the public authorities do not give enough support and that society itself does not favor integration.

Eva, the head of the Centre, says that we should work more in coordination with other institutions and work with long-term objectives” because the children are only at the Association for a few hours a week, the rest of the time they spend at school, in the street and, if they are lucky, with their families.

The great challenge for social action with vulnerable children is how to connect in a single project the educational action of the school, the family, social services and the business world.

Eva is very critical of young people who are content to do a few hours a week of voluntary work and are only interested in the immediate relationship with the children, the affection they receive from them. In general, this type of volunteer does not last long in the Association.

This year, the Association has set itself the objective of strengthening relations with other institutions in the city and, if possible, to create a shared project. They are well aware that, in this way, there will be a better chance of breaking with the situation of marginalization in which the children live and integrating them into society. It is a uto-

pian and long-term project, but there is a firm decision to eliminate child poverty in the city.

The path is solidarity and the horizon is a fairer society.

The story criticizes the volunteers who focus only on the direct relationship with the children and do not want to get involved in other responsibilities of the Association. Nor do they participate when there is a need to network with other social actors. They do not seem to care much about eradicating the problem, but rather about temporarily alleviating it and “feeling good” by volunteering.

Primary care for the poor is necessary, but a good transformative educational project should not stop at that stage. It is necessary to work to eradicate the causes of social marginalization and to put in place the conditions so that the situation no longer occurs, as the old Chinese proverb says: “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach him to fish and you feed him for the rest of his life”.

The ultimate goal of all social intervention is to build a fairer and more inclusive society where it is no longer necessary to open childcare centers to alleviate children’s needs. The horizon is social justice, the path is compassion and solidarity. A single Association is insufficient; a great deal of work is needed to coordinate all the social agents involved in the education of children.

From the Gospel

Jesus not only cares for the poor, but also fights against the ideology that marginalizes them. He gives the kingdom of God first place in his preaching: “*Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people*” (Mt 4:23).

The image of the “Kingdom of God” points to a new society based on love, where the poor have dignity, “*the captives are set free, the blind receive their sight and the oppressed are set free*” (Lk 4:18).

A wedding feast is the image Jesus uses to help people understand what the Kingdom of God is (Mt 22:1-14). At the feast, the king makes a first invitation, but many are excused and do not attend. Anyway,

the wedding will take place and the king extends an invitation to all who are on the roads.

The message is clear: the wedding feast is for all. God wants everyone to enjoy the feast, that is, the goods of salvation. At this banquet there are no racial, cultural or economic differences.

The Jewish religious leaders did not accept this message. How could a Pharisee, a zealous law-abiding Pharisee be equated with a heretic Samaritan? How could women be given credit in a trial? Why does Jesus eat with the tax collectors?

The disciples of Jesus understood well that the Church should be a united community that shares its goods: *“All who believed were together and put their possessions in common; they sold their possessions and goods and distributed the money among themselves according to each one’s needs”* (Acts 2:44-45).

In a deeply class-based society, early Christians were able to form communities where slaves and free, Jews and Greeks, men and women lived side by side. As the Christian message permeated society, many unjust practices such as slavery, property ownership, and begging disappeared. Jesus’ message of love permeated all areas of society, humanizing it.

Unfortunately, humanity is reluctant to change. There are many ambitions, social inequalities and injustices that affect the weakest. However, Jesus’ call to build a new kingdom based on justice and peace continues to ring out.

From Calasanz

Thomas Campanella, one of the great humanists of the XVII century wrote “The City of the Sun”, a social utopia where he describes what a new, fairer and more inclusive society would be like. As fate would have it, he met Calasanz and discovered in the Pious Schools a powerful tool to build the new world he had envisioned. Faced with the enemies of the Pious Schools, he made an implacable defense of the right of the poor to receive education, as it was very necessary for the reform of customs.

The peculiar way in which Calasanz contributed to social change was the proposal of an inclusive school model that favored a quality

education for all. This brilliant intuition is expressed in a lapidary way in the Constitutions of the Pious Schools: *“The reform of Christian society lies in the diligent practice of such a mission, because if from childhood the child is diligently imbued in Piety and Letters, the happy course of his life is to be foreseen”* (CC n° 2).

Thus, one of the finalities of the Pious Schools is the Reform of Society, as he also explicitly expresses it: *It (the educational ministry) is also very necessary to him whom from the earliest years helps the good life, on which depends the good death, the peace and tranquility of peoples, the good government of cities and princes, the obedience and fidelity of subjects, the propagation of the faith, the conservation and preservation of heresies, the reform of the whole of Christendom by employing men of apostolic life”* (Tonti no. 26).

The Piarist volunteer has a vision of the future:

1. He/she seeks to build a more just society through education and faith.
2. He/she has strategic vision on projects
3. He/she has a vision of systemic ecology (what matters is the improvement of a system or systems).
4. He/she networks with other social actors.

With ordered love

It is possible to achieve something after three hours of fighting, but it is certain that it can be achieved with just three words imbued with affection. Confucius

From experience

Blanca will be about twelve years old and has been participating in the school support program at the Cultural Centre since the age of five when she arrived hand in hand with her older siblings.

She is a very popular child, intelligent and very affectionate with the volunteers. She has learned to win the affection of all her classmates and the team of educators. She comes from a very poor and honest family who live close to the Centre. His mother is a housewife and his father is a travelling merchant.

In the summer, Juan arrived with two other young people, thanks to a short-term international volunteer program promoted by the Piarists. This program is aimed at getting to know the reality of the countries of the South and acquiring a commitment to the poorest of the poor.

From the very first day, Juan lived the experience at the Cultural Centre with intensity and was particularly taken with Blanca's personality. So, he went to meet her parents in the neighborhood and established a very familiar relationship with them.

For a poor family, it is a great honor to enjoy the friendship of a visitor from the "first world". They are well aware that establishing such a bond could be of great benefit to them. On the other hand, the volunteer has the opportunity to get to know how the simplest people live.

He was so captivated by the month of volunteering that Juan decided to do it again the following summer. He really enjoyed the work with the children, the local culture and, above all, the relationship with Blanca and her humble family. After the second year, he decided to pay for the girl's secondary education in a good school.

Gradually, Juan began to detach himself from the Cultural Centre and focused especially on the family with whom he already felt a great familiarity. With the young girl's scholarship, other commit-

ments came: building a house, buying a fridge, money for food.... Some years went by and what nobody imagined happened: Blanca fell in love with her benefactor. Perhaps she thought that Juan could be the father who could give her the affection she needed.

Blanca's mother, very intuitive and sensible, realized that the unhealthy relationship had done Blanca a lot of harm. She politely decided to call Juan privately and put an end to a relationship that could have ended tragically.

A young person's first time as a volunteer is often an impactful experience, especially if he or she has first-hand experience of extreme poverty. Juan was also very impressed and decided to do something useful that would really help the poorest of the poor. He would like to change many things, but decided to be less ambitious and focus on one family.

The problem is that he became personally involved in helping without the institutional mediation of a foundation. When this happens, relationships tend to become distorted, generating bonds of dependency that can end badly.

The volunteer must be an empathetic and kind person, he must work with passion and generosity, but he must be very careful how he handles his emotions so as not to damage the quality of the work. In their service they should not seek social approval or become emotionally attached to anyone.

Compassion for the poor must be linked to empathy, i.e. the ability to perceive and understand the suffering of others. In this situation, the desire arises to help them so that their pain is alleviated or eliminated, but without generating bonds of dependence.

From the Gospel

Just as man craves money and power, he also seeks to be accepted by others, social approval for his actions and allows himself to be manipulated by others in exchange for benefits. The search for affection is also a form of idolatry.

In the story of the temptations in the desert (Mt 4:1-11) Jesus overcomes the temptation of money, power and social recognition. His

true passion is to love God and his neighbor, even if it means sacrificing his life.

If Jesus loved with the heart of man, his affectivity and his feelings must be very similar to our affections and feelings. In Jesus we see, in a living, concrete and existential way, what it means to love, that is, to be attracted to other people, to feel sad at the sorrows of friends, to seek with passion the good of the beloved, or to live the joy of knowing oneself to be loved.

When Mary and Martha tell Jesus of the death of their brother, they do so with these words: “*the one you love*” (Jn 11:3). “The one you love” is more than our brother, more than your disciple, he is the object of your affection. When Jesus heard the news, he was devastated, he let his tears flow, he could not contain his emotion, so that the witnesses, moved, concluded: “how he loved him”. Jesus loves in the truest sense of the word. His heart is touched and he physically feels the grief of those he loves. We could go on. And we could speak of Jesus’ flirtations with a Samaritan woman at the edge of a well, of his presence at weddings where good wine was flowing, or of his meals with Zacchaeus. Concrete gestures of friendship, closeness, tenderness, affection, sensitivity, affectivity.

Jesus is also free from affective relationships that try to manipulate him. He interacts freely with tax collectors and sinners at the risk of being severely criticized by the Pharisees. His public denunciation of the hypocrisy in which many Jews live brings him many enemies.

On many occasions, Jesus’ compassion for the poor scandalizes the orthodox Jews who do not understand that love is above the law. Jesus quotes the Scriptures to make them see that they are wrong, “*If they had understood what it means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice, they would not condemn the innocent*” (Mt 12:7).

From Calasanz

Calasanz understood well that it was not possible to educate well without the commitment of the teachers. He was convinced that only love is capable of opening the hearts of children who come to school with great emotional wounds. Only love generates a climate of trust that motivates students to strive to learn. Only love makes

people grow. That is why he wanted poor children to be treated with great kindness and affection.

When teachers truly love their pupils, they acquire authority over them and create a good working atmosphere in the classroom that is conducive to learning. If one works out of love for God and for the children, the work is not alienating or burdensome; on the contrary, it helps personal growth. *“Love makes work easier, especially when our love for God is reflected in our neighbor”* (EP 2859).

Thus, the affection of the educator generates a climate of *trust and security* with the pupils, which facilitates learning, especially in the more difficult subjects. Calasanz wants the children to feel valued from the first day of school, because only in an atmosphere of security, joy and trust can there be mutual respect and motivation, so essential for good learning.

It is very difficult to create a climate conducive to study if the pupils do not feel loved by their teachers: *“Regarding Brother Camillus, I refer to Your Reverence. Let him know that, when the pupils see the love of a father in the teacher and diligence for their advancement, they come to school with pleasure, even if there are no [theatrical] performances”* (EP 2148).

The Piarist volunteer is compassionate:

1. Is sensitive to the needs of the poorest and knows how to manage emotions.
2. Avoids affective dependence on other people in his/her voluntary work.
3. He/she lives an effective love, but without generating paternalism.
4. Is careful not to resolve his or her needs for recognition and affection in the relationship with the people he or she serves.
5. They do not involve their personal problems in the place where they carry out their social action.

Serving out of gratitude

“We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give...” - John Maxwell

From Experience

Monica has been involved in the Calasanz Movement at her school since she was a child. Now that she has reached the age of majority, she has been asked to be a monitor for a group of primary school children. She understood that she had to accept the proposal out of gratitude for the years she had received so much and because the school was short of monitors.

She began her work as a monitor with a lot of enthusiasm. She prepared the activities well and attended the trainings with interest. It was not easy for her to keep her job, because she had to reconcile her commitment to the Movement with her engineering studies and her social life.

After a year, she began to feel burdened by other commitments. She began to miss the weekly preparatory meeting for activities and some trainings under the pretext that she needed the time to study. Occasionally, she did not attend the Saturday meeting with the children in the group.

Little by little she distanced herself from the school to focus more on her studies and her friends. She said that working with the children took up too much of her time and she was not willing to give it up. So, she spoke to the head of the Movement and explained her conditions for continuing as a volunteer, which were limited to attending on Saturday afternoons as long as she was not in the exam period.

As the school was short of monitors, the head accepted Monica's proposal. She thought that she might be motivated again at some point and make a more consistent commitment.

But this was not the case. Her commitment became weaker and weaker until finally, she left the group for good.

Monica finished her degree with good marks. She is now an excellent professional and remembers fondly how much fun she had at school in the Movement's activities. After a few years, she honestly admits that she stopped being a monitor because she was unable to organ-

ize her time to keep the commitment she had accepted. However, she greatly admires the young volunteers who give their time for free to make a better world possible.

Many decide to volunteer because of the example of generous people who were important in their childhood. In a way, they want to imitate the example they received from them. Monica cannot refuse to collaborate as a monitor in the Calasanz Movement because it would be very selfish. However, she is not constant in her commitment because she has other interests that occupy her time: studies and friends.

There are young people who are not able to integrate their voluntary service with other responsibilities; rather, they come to see it as an obstacle to their life project. They have not understood that well-focused volunteering can help them to grow as a person by integrating other facets of their life, such as studies and friends. Service to others in a freeway should never be seen as just another activity, but as a way of life.

To behave generously implies that there is satisfaction in the fact of collaborating, doing a favor, helping someone or, in short, helping one's neighbor. On the other hand, true generosity is selfless, that is, it is not intended to receive anything in return.

From the Gospel

Jesus lived his public life as a generous dedication to the service of God and others. *"He went about doing good and healing all who had fallen into the power of the devil, because God was with him"* (Acts 10:38): He proclaims the Good News, heals the sick, comforts the sad, guides those who are lost and gives hope to those who live in anguish. He was so devoted to others, especially to the poorest of the poor. His dedication was so intense that *he did not even have time to eat because everyone was looking for him* (Mk 3:20).

His passion and death on the cross ratify this total self-giving. The resurrection is the proof of the truth of his self-giving in love even unto death. As the decisive moment of his death draws near, Jesus instructs his disciples: *Amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat which falls into the ground dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it*

bears much fruit. He who is attached to his life will lose it; and he who is not attached to his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever wishes to serve me, let him follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also (Jn 12:24-26).

The gratuitous service that Jesus proposes is a way of dying, that is, of renouncing personal goods and interests, a way of disposing of one's time, of suffering out of faithfulness to a commitment and of sacrificing oneself so that another may benefit. It is living for the poor, who are in need of help.

The apostle Peter writes: *“Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps”* (1Pet 2:21). Therefore, the sacrifice of Jesus is a call to give generously, especially to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, without seeking any material reward, because *we must give freely what we have received freely* (Mt 10:8).

From Calasanz

In the first years that Joseph Calasanz arrived in Rome, he voluntarily participated in some Confraternities that demanded to give some time of free service to the poorest of the poor. During this time, he learned to detach himself from his affection for his homeland, his time and his goods, and even renounced the pretensions of obtaining a canonry to dedicate himself to the education of the poorest, a decision that is expressed in the sentence he pronounced: *“I have found in Rome the best way to serve God, doing good to the little ones and I will not leave it for anything of this world”*.

Many followed Calasanz, but not all of them were able to carry out the commitment that the schools implied. The vocation of a teacher implied a lot of generosity in dedication, a virtue that only those who put their trust in God have: *“I would like you have a large heart like those who, with little human strength, did great things in the service of God, trusting more in God's help than in human advice”* (24-6-1616) Having a large heart means investing time, effort, money and one's own life project in order to have a “full life”. If one works out of love for God and for the children, the work is not alienating or burdensome; on the contrary, it helps to personal growth. *“Love makes work easier, especially when our love for God is reflected in our neighbor”* (EP 2859).

Until the end of his long life, Calasanz was attentive to the good running of the schools. Already in the last years of his life, he had the experience that his life's work was crumbling, that the years of dedication were disappearing into oblivion. Nevertheless, he remains steadfast and "resolved rather to die than to abandon the enterprise" and he wants his educators also to become "heroic in the pure love of God, which is the first and principal precept of the most holy law of the Lord".

The Piarist volunteer is generous

1. He/she acts in favor of other people unselfishly, joyfully, without asking anything in return and even if it costs some effort.
2. When he/she meets fragile and needy people, the desire to help them generously arises.
3. He/she does not expect financial reward.
4. He/she devotes his time freely to the service of others.

With serene patience

“The trees that are slow to grow bear the best fruit”. Molière

From experience

Mario runs a boys home for minors at social risk. Most of them are teenagers who come from dysfunctional families, others are migrants who fled their country and lost everything. The inmates come to the home with great emotional instability, a tendency to conflict and little discipline in their work.

This year the group was especially difficult because there were some very tough situations. The worst episode was dealing with the case of a fifteen-year-old girl who tried to commit suicide, which unbalanced the emotional climate of the whole group.

Mario finished the course very tired and with the feeling that his work with the minors was not useful. The suicide attempt was the straw that broke the camel's back. Definitely, he needed to disconnect from that difficult reality and to reflect with perspective on his mission with the minors.

It is very hard to see that, after so many years of work, some young people end up as delinquents. It seems that the care they received from their educators was not enough to reverse the social stigma with which many are born.

Despite the difficult times, Mario acknowledges that, in his years as a social educator, he has had more successes than failures. All of this has been thanks to educational teamwork that has required a great deal of perseverance and patience.

At the beginning of the school year, six volunteers started the project, but only one of them finished. The boys at home are difficult and it is not easy for them to gain trust with someone new. Ordinarily, it takes almost a year to gain that trust. Not everyone is suitable for this type of volunteering, as it requires a lot of patience in dealing with the children on a daily basis. Also, they have to accept calmly that the educational processes are long and that they are only a part of the process of change for the children.

Educational work with severely emotionally wounded adolescents requires very experienced, well-balanced educators with proven patience. Volunteers who come to the boys home must be aware that they will only gain the trust of the boys with a lot of dedication.

Any educational process requires time for the boys to acquire a mature personality. Parents must be very insistent in correction and patient so that their children acquire good habits. Teachers must bear with patience the routine of the classes and the indiscipline of the boys if they are to succeed in their work.

And every volunteer who starts out must be aware that he will only see the fruits of his labors if he is constant and bears with patience the setbacks he will experience in the service.

Patience is a virtue that consists of facing adversity with tenacity and without regret. It also indicates slowness and delay in the execution of a goal. Consequently, the act of being patient means to be persevering in relation to something that does not have a date to be achieved, as in the case of an educational process.

From the Gospel

Jesus shows his patience with Martha because she was very busy with the household chores and her sister Mary did not come to help her. Martha gets angry and says to Jesus: *“Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me alone at work? Tell her to help me”* (Lk 10:40). Jesus does not get angry with her, but answers her patiently, saying: *“Martha, Martha, you worry and fret over many things; and there is need of few, or rather, of only one. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her”* (Lk 10:41).

He also shows his patience with his disciples: *‘Why are you talking about having no loaves? Do you not yet understand or comprehend? Is it that your minds are dull? Having eyes, do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? Do you not remember when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand? How many baskets full of fragments did you gather? Twelve,’ they say to him. And when I broke the seven among the four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you gather?’ They say to him: ‘Seven. And he continued, ‘Do you still not understand?’”* (Mk 8:14-21).

He shows his patience with those who insult him, scourge him, strip him of his clothes and nail him to a cross. Jesus does not protest, nor does he complain, even when he is right. *“He was oppressed, and He humbled Himself and did not open His mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and like a sheep that is dumb before those who shear it, he did not open his mouth”* (Is 53:7). Jesus waits patiently for God’s plan to be fulfilled. He trusts in God and knows that everything is necessary to accomplish the mission of the salvation of the whole world.

Likewise, the dynamics of life require a great deal of patience: *“Therefore, brethren, be patient until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently until he receives the early and latter rain. Be patient, and let your hearts be steadfast, for the coming of the Lord is at hand”* (James 5:7-11). We must also be patient in serving our neighbor: *“Love is patient”* (1 Cor 13:4).

From Calasanz

For Calasanz, love for children and patience always go together: *“Father James has a holy zeal, but I want it united to a holy prudence, with patience and compassion”* (EP 1427). Sometimes, the teacher has to put up with a lot so that the educational work is done well: *“the more he endures so as not to break charity with his neighbor, the more merit he will have before God; for patience, on such occasions, “works perfectly”* (EP 4082).

Humility and patience in the educator are necessary to obtain good results in the children: *“I beg you to walk in holy simplicity and to try to reap an abundant harvest of merits, through great patience, which the Lord will grant you if, with devotion and perseverance, you ask for it”* (EP 893). With patience, everything can be obtained. The patient educator trusts in the capacities of the children, forgets their difficult past, knows how to conceal their small faults. He does not shout or despair because he knows that he achieves more by exhorting than by imposing.

Accompanied by perseverance, the virtue of patience will help the educator to deal with the most difficult pupils. It encourages them *“to remain strong, helping to heal the spiritually sick. If a drop of wa-*

ter, falling continually from on high, ends up breaking the stone, the greater effect will be the exhortation of the superior made out of compassion for the sick and out of pure love of God” (EP 3039).

The Piarist volunteer is patient

1. He/she suffers and tolerates adversity without complaining.
2. He/she knows that good results take time and strives to make every day of work count.
3. He/she is aware that real educational results come in the long term and with the help of various actors.

With deep humility

Without humility there can be no humanity. John Buchan

From experience

Bruno is a young man with great talent. He is hard-working, sporty, creative and has great social skills. Since he was a child, he has had leadership responsibilities at school, in sports and in his group of friends.

With this successful profile, nobody thought he would be interested in working as a volunteer with the gypsies in the Almanjayar neighborhood of Granada. He had everything a young man wanted, but he felt that something else was missing.

He was intelligent and thought that he could not give the image of a spoiled and superficial “daddy’s boy”, so he decided to offer his time and qualities to the service of a sports project for teenagers. He had played basketball since he was a child and now, he had acquired the training to be a coach.

On the first day he introduced himself to the boys who received him with great expectation. He told them of his success in the sport and boasted that they were lucky to have him as a coach because he had taken training courses. Little did he know that the boys in the neighborhood care little for such pompous presentations, which only show great vanity. So, without seeking or intending it, he went down badly with the boys.

On the second day he continued with the training, but the boys, who are very cruel, made fun of him and boycotted his game. Bruno didn’t understand what was going on, but he continued training for several days. Why did they make fun of him? What was he doing wrong? He had good intentions and was very capable for the job.

Finally, he shared his experience with Fr. Juan Carlos, the parish priest of the neighborhood. Perhaps he could shed some light on what was happening. He was not used to experiencing such failures. Something was going on that he could not quite understand.

Bruno had many qualities, but he lacked simplicity. After the conversation with the priest, he understood that he had to relate more

humbly to the adolescents, something he did not had learn so far. He understood that, without this virtue, nothing could be done with boys who had suffered so many humiliations in their lives.

The volunteer is an educator who accompanies, listens, dialogues and involves the boys. He allows himself to be led by people with more experience than him and has an attitude of openness to change. His strength lies in the quality of the dedication with which he serves.

Humility is the virtue of knowing one's limitations and weaknesses and acting accordingly. A humble person is able to demonstrate modesty and puts aside the self in order to care for others. He is not selfish or self-centered, does not focus on his own person and achievements, and does not seek to stand out from others.

From the gospel

Many Israelites expected the Messiah to be a powerful king who would restore the splendor of David's kingdom. But this was not the case. Jesus showed himself to be a humble servant who, in the end, submitted to death on a cross.

Jesus was born in the womb of a poor virgin woman of Galilee. He was born in a manger among animals because there was no inn available. He was taken by his parents into forced exile in Egypt because Herod had the first-born children killed. He spent his childhood in his village of Nazareth growing in stature, grace and wisdom until he felt the call to begin his public life.

He could have taken advantage of the fame given him by the authority of his word and the power of his miracles; but he always kept a discreet attitude. He did not seek to be recognized for his miracles, but for the depth of his message. He harshly criticizes the scribes and Pharisees who seek to occupy the first places (Mt 23:1-12). He corrected the disciples who sought power and fame, and whenever he could, he taught them the way of humility: *"The greatest among you will be the one who serves you, for he who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted"* (Mt 23, 11-12).

At the Last Supper, Jesus bends down in front of each of his disciples to wash their feet; a job that was exclusively for slaves (cf. John 13:2-15). Peter does not understand how the Master performs this act of humiliation befitting a servant. Jesus clarifies the meaning:

“You call me ‘Master’ and ‘Lord’, and you are right because I am. For if I, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (John 13:13-15).

Humility is a fundamental characteristic of following Jesus. A humility only understood and practiced by the poor and children: *“whoever becomes little like this child will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18:4)*, a humility that becomes a joyful and generous dedication to the service of others as the apostle Paul testifies: *“In every way I have shown you that by working hard you must help the weak, and that you must remember the words of the Lord Jesus: ‘Happiness is more in giving than in receiving’” (Acts 20:35).*

From Calasanz

The work of the teacher is considered in many places as a *“vile and despicable exercise” (EP 1160)*. Just the fact of dedicating oneself to small and poor children is already considered an act of humility that few want to do. Calasanz constantly exhorts teachers to practice humility in teaching the youngest children: *“whoever has the great benefit of humbling himself not only to teach reading and writing and abacus, but also to teach the little ones to read”*, which implies adapting his abilities (EP 1488).

Humility is also necessary to endure the routine of daily work with the pupils, for spiritual growth and the relationship with the companions. Calasanz writes with great wisdom that *“the shortest and easiest way to be exalted to one’s own knowledge and from this to the attributes of mercy, prudence and the infinite patience of God is to lower oneself to give light to children, and in particular to those who are like the helpless of all, who, being an office in the eyes of the world so low and vile, few want to lower themselves to it” (EP 1236).*

Moreover, humility gives teachers a certain facility in communicating their own ideas, their own thoughts and their own virtue to the pupils, whereas if they communicate them without humility, they are spiritless words, which do not impress. On the basis of such considerations, he affirmed that the educator, *“if he is humble, will be of great use to the pupils and to religion, and if he does not humble himself, he will be of no good either to himself or to the pupils” (EP 899).*

The Piarist volunteer is humble

1. He/she recognizes his own weaknesses, qualities and abilities and uses them to do good without drawing attention to himself/herself or seeking recognition.
2. He/she asks questions when he/she does not know something and has a permanent attitude of learning.
3. He/she has respect for others, does not undervalue anyone and does not consider himself/herself superior.
4. He/she apologizes when he/she makes mistakes.
5. He/she is happy when a colleague succeeds in his/her work.

Poor with the poor

He who knows how to be poor knows everything. Jules Michelet

From experience

La Puya is one of many communities on the outskirts of Santo Domingo that was born in the seventies with the invasion of land by migrant families from the countryside. Given her situation of extreme poverty, she has received a lot of aid from both government and private institutions.

In the heart of the neighborhood, the Piarists have built a Cultural Centre to promote community development, especially through programs for children and youth.

The programs seek to empower the local population to be the protagonists of their own development. It is sought that hired professionals and volunteers are from the community. The population was also accustomed to carrying out activities to raise money. Even the children's parents contributed a small monthly fee. This policy helped the community itself to feel ownership of the Cultural Centre and to value what it offers for local development.

The Piarists also want the La Puya Centre to be a space where graduates of Calasanz School can do voluntary service. They think it would be an excellent way to connect the school, with its upper-middle class families, with the lower-class population of the Cultural Centre.

To this end, a volunteer program was set up with the school's older youths who would work together with volunteers from the neighborhood. After a few months of work, the volunteers became aware of the serious situation of poverty and decided to start a big campaign to raise funds to cover all the needs of the Centre.

They organized a big campaign that raised so much awareness among the population of the city and a lot of good and substantial help arrived.

But there was an unexpected effect. The people of the neighborhood, already accustomed to raising money for the Centre's activities, stopped paying fees and doing fund-raising activities. They said that, if there was already enough money, there was no point in trying to raise more. And the young people in the neighborhood became demotivated and gave up volunteering.

Any community development project that does not involve the beneficiaries is doomed to fail. The poor cannot depend on the benevolent charity of the rich, because it breeds dependency, laziness and ultimately paralysis. Many might say: "Why make the effort if I get it for free?"

Volunteers have to provide the tools for the poor to organize themselves and have initiatives that develop their community. There is no point in volunteers going in to solve something that the poor themselves can do. Nor should resources be wasted in an uncontrolled way. Austerity in voluntary service helps projects to succeed.

The poor can teach volunteers that one can be happy with little.

Poverty is a virtue that implies detachment from material goods and a trusting openness to God, which results in a simple, sober and austere lifestyle that is not followed by imposition but by conviction.

From the Gospel

Jesus proclaims the Beatitudes (Mt 5:1-12), a solemn declaration that reveals the lifestyle of Jesus and the Christian community. In it, he shows the ways that lead to a happy life in communion with God and with others. He declares "happy" those who "*have the soul of the poor*" (M 5, 3), i.e. those who are not attached to riches and have their heart set on God. Luke emphasizes "*Blessed are you poor, for the kingdom of God belongs to you*" (6:20). God is concerned with the human being in his integrity as a person.

The poor are happy because they find joy and security in God who cares for his children. They know that all the gifts they have received - health, ability to listen, artistic talent, inner peace, possibility to love, education, natural tendency to serve, innate joy - come with a serious obligation to share them with the less fortunate and with those who have gifts different from their own.

"Our Lord Jesus Christ, being rich for your sake, became poor so that by his poverty he might make you rich" (2 Cor 8:9). The Gospels show how Jesus led a poor and simple life in the style of the ancient prophets. This enabled him to proclaim the Good News in complete freedom. When he invites his disciples to preach the kingdom of

God, he asks them to go in a spirit of poverty: *“Take no money, no bag, no shoes, and do not stop to greet anyone on the road”* (Lk 10:4). This poor apostolic spirit is the guarantee of the credibility of the preached message.

Before the Corinthians, Paul sets himself as an example of apostolic zeal. To do this, he must become a slave to all, a Jew with the Jews, weak with the weak, *“I became all things to all men, that I might gain at least some of them, at whatever cost. And all this for the sake of the Good News, so that I might share in their good things”* (1 Cor 9, 23). He even takes care to live by his work so as not to be financially dependent on anyone and thus to be free for the preaching of the Gospel: *Remember, brothers, our labor and our toil when we preached the Good News of God to you; we worked day and night so that we would not be a burden to you* (1 Thess 2:9).

From Calasanz

Throughout his personal process, Calasanz discovered the virtue of apostolic poverty as a precious gift given to him by God. His daily relationship with poor children and his familiarity with God in prayer taught him that, in order to educate the poor, one must be poor. *“The more you detach yourselves from property and imitate holy apostolic poverty, the richer you will be and the more you will be enkindled with spiritual gifts by God”*. (15-11-1627)

The apostolic poverty of the educator consists in remaining free of any material and affective ties, having critical and independent thinking, being always available for service, sharing goods with the poorest, and teaching the poor free of charge.

Calasanz writes that the religious *who does not have the spirit to teach the poor, does not have the vocation of our Institute* (EP 1319).

A poverty that manifests itself in patience and humility, in the way he treats others and, above all, in the generosity with which he carries out his ministry. The Calasanzian teacher cannot be a hired hand who does not care about the sheep. He offers his personal qualities and his time and even his goods at the disposal of the poor. With great claims and particular demands, with an excessive attachment to worldly goods and comforts, this mission would be impossible.

Calasanz wanted the children to have good facilities so that they could be taught in comfort. When it was necessary to build a new building, *he wanted the plans to be sent to him so that he could make them show true poverty, adorned with simplicity* (CC n.181).

Whoever asks for a school in his town *must provide the following: first of all, a church with the necessary furnishings and in accordance with our poverty, as has already been said; the school for the pupils; the house for our religious, humbly furnished; the library, supplied according to our needs, and an adjoining vegetable garden, to avoid idleness.* (CC n.178). The spirit of poverty also consists in making goods available to the poor.

The Piarist volunteer is poor

1. He/she knows that the greatest value he/she can bring is the quality of human relationships and dedication.
2. He/she values and appreciates the material resources it receives.
3. He/she is available for the care of the needy.
4. He/she helps the poor by giving them tools to get out of their situation of poverty.

Competent to serve

Those who have the privilege of knowing have the obligation to act. Albert Einstein

From experience

Every couple always goes through moments of tension, misunderstandings and even mood swings due to the pressures of modern life. But when a couple frequently touches the subject of separation or when tensions and disagreements are permanent and increasingly difficult to handle, it is necessary to seek professional help. If this help is sought in time, the immediate difficulties can be dealt with without waiting until the conflicts reach almost unmanageable dimensions.

In order to respond in solidarity to this phenomenon, the parish family ministry is promoting a program of care for couples in crisis with the voluntary support of priests, psychologists, educators, doctors and lawyers. The aim is to offer free care to the poorest people who cannot afford family therapy.

The initiative was well received by the community. So, a good group of volunteers with the right skills for the job were recruited, schedules were organized, the proposal was publicized throughout the city and the couples began to arrive.

As the team of volunteers was very heterogeneous, it was necessary to organize formation meetings so that they could learn about the purpose of the program, aspects of the Church's doctrine on the family, techniques for helping relationships and teamwork. There was no point in having "sniper" volunteers without a shared project. Necessarily, investment in formation was needed.

When the program management demanded ongoing formation, many volunteers dropped out because they were unable or unwilling to give more time. They felt that their professional training was sufficient to work in the program.

After the first years' experience, the volunteers were asked to undergo specific formation as a necessary condition to collaborate in the aid program. Couple problems are of such a magnitude that they require

people who are highly qualified not only in their professional area but also in family therapy.

To help couples in crisis well, it is not only necessary to have extensive experience but also specific training in family therapy. In this very delicate service, only volunteers with a good professional background (lawyers, doctors, psychologists, pedagogues...) and who are willing to have a specific formation in couple therapy are accepted.

The best formation is that which is acquired in life experience (wisdom); but it needs to be reflected and systematized with the help of the human sciences. Studying human nature and the dynamism of emotions allows for a better understanding of possible conflicts and offers clarity on possible solutions.

The competent volunteer is the one who is authoritative and performs effectively in his or her job. This is reflected in the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for effective and quality work.

From the Gospel

The Bible is a book that contains a great deal of practical wisdom. In its pages, we find advice on how to bring up children, how to deal with relationship conflicts, how to bear moments of anguish, how to make vital decisions, how to live with your partner... in short, how to live a happier life. Thus, the one who loves God and keeps the commandments will have a very happy and prosperous life: *“So you will enjoy prosperity and become very numerous in the land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord your God has promised you”* (Dt 6,3).

The sage par excellence is the expert in the art of good living. The sapiential books of the Bible (Proverbs, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Job) develop a wealth of popular wisdom on good conduct, customs, rules of good living that were part of the literature of the people, transmitted from father to son in the family and enriched by the wisdom of the neighboring peoples of Israel, such as Egypt, Mesopotamia and Canaan. They are a profound reflection on the human condition which, illuminated by faith in

God, tries to give an answer to all the problems of human life: love, pain, death, government, etc.

Jesus does not improvise his wisdom, but studies it in the Scriptures as a child. In the rabbinical school of his village, he would spend years learning the Hebrew language and delving into the Scriptures with the help of good teachers. He then used the texts frequently in his preaching. He teaches in the manner of the wisdom teachers of the Old Testament; he readily adopts their genres (proverbs and parables) and, like them, gives rules for life. The spectators are not deceived in marveling at this wisdom, proven by miraculous deeds.

From Calasanz

In order to carry out the educational mission, teachers with a good formation are needed, above all, in the spiritual dimension. Calasanz clearly describes the meaning and the formative structure of the Piarist: *As the aim of our Congregation through the exercise of the Pious Schools is the formation of children in piety and human letters so that they can reach eternal life, we believe it is necessary to achieve this aim, not only to offer an example of spiritual life, but also to acquire doctrine and the way to teach it* (CC 203). The text points out the three pillars of Piarist formation: spiritual identity (being), cultural contents (knowing) and methodologies (knowing how to do).

In the first place, the educator must be *“a man of spirit”, who has a great spirit to help not only the youngsters in the schools but also the laity, by example and doctrine, to embrace the true way of paradise* (EP 4321). A good interior life is the condition for the teacher to attain the wisdom necessary to educate: *The way to become wise and prudent in the interior school is to make oneself like a fool in the eyes of men, allowing oneself to be led like a donkey* (EP 2300).

Once the spiritual basis was assured, the teachers received the cultural contents together with the way to teach them to the children, alternating school work with study. In this way, they were creating a synthesis between theory and teaching practice. In their formation, teachers were expected to learn the humanities, good penmanship, arithmetic and the reading of classical authors in Latin.

The Piarist volunteer is competent

1. Mastering the basic contents (concepts and skills) that he/she has to teach in the voluntary work.
2. He/she plans and evaluates the activities he/she will carry out with the beneficiaries.
3. He/she is trained in social skills and helping relationships.
4. He/she is concerned about being formed in the task to which he/she has been assigned.

To embrace with creativity

“The main aim of education is to create people capable of doing new things, and not simply to repeat what other generations have done”. Jean Piaget

From the experience

“Abrazo amigo” (Friendly Hug) was born in a dinner conversation between friends who had been through different volunteering experiences and had the same conviction: that small details can change the course of the world. And from there came the idea of welcoming refugees, especially in their first months of stay in the country. The hug does not solve the problem, but it offers welcome and alleviates the burden of suffering.

The mission of “Abrazo amigo” is to make the endless hours of the refugee reception process and hospital treatment more bearable, of waiting for a change, for a result, for something that has to happen but doesn’t seem to come. And so, over a toast in a bar, the project was born.

Any skill is a good way to get in touch with migrants who do not know the local language. The idea of this volunteering is to put yourself at the service of others for a while, in what you know how to do. The premise of this NGO is creativity, so there is room for everything. Making origami, drawing, storytelling, playing a musical instrument, singing... Welcoming migrants is expressed by sharing skills to generate a bond of affection that makes their stay more pleasant.

“Abrazo amigo” works in public refugee reception centers. It also works in the pediatric area of hospitals. Every month, it organizes with the inmates (refugees, sick people...) a cultural event where all those who have an artistic skill share it in a festive atmosphere.

As the aim is to unite art and solidarity, very creative and willing volunteers are required to adapt to the changing reality of the people inside. The important thing is not what is done, but the care that is put into the relationships. When volunteers enter the Association, they receive a workshop on human relations and helping relationships.

Volunteers say that every day they go to the hospital or the refugee center, there is always something new to discover, there is no routine.

The working style of “Friendly Hug” is flexible depending on the volunteer’s profile and skills, as well as on the recipients of the action. This allows the exercise of solidarity to also be a very creative action and adaptable to different types of people.

Creativity is the human capacity to solve problems with originality and efficiency. It consists of finding procedures or elements to develop tasks in a different way from the traditional one, with the intention of satisfying a certain purpose. The following features are attributed to it: originality (considering things or relationships from a new angle), flexibility (using objects in unusual but reasonable ways), sensitivity (detecting problems or relationships hitherto ignored), fluidity (moving away from rigid mental schemes) and non-conformism.

It is a dynamic process; it is the engine of personal development and the basis for the progress of any culture.

From the Gospel

The whole Gospel preached by Jesus is an originality with respect to the way the Jews lived their relationship with God. He himself says it: *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them”* (Mt 5, 7). In fact, it is a new way of understanding the Mosaic Law and he explains it with some examples: *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say to you: Love your enemies, pray for your persecutors’”* (Mt 5, 43-44).

Jesus criticizes the Pharisees for their rigidity of mind, because they cling so tightly to the old traditions that they had lost their original meaning. They were particularly inflexible about keeping the Sabbath and purification rites which prevented them from really helping people in need.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the priest and the Levite do not help the wounded man because they believed that they would defile themselves. Jesus uses a Samaritan as an example, who does not have such religious prejudices because he lives a more dynamic and flexible relationship with people, that is, a more human one.

The way in which Jesus transmits the doctrine is also very attractive and original. He looks for simple images and examples in people's everyday experience to speak to them about the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. He handles narrative language very well, he uses Old Testament texts with lucidity and, above all, he is able to connect with the simplest people.

That Jesus comes to bring something new is expressed in a beautiful image: *"Neither is new wine put into old wineskins, for the skins burst, the wine is spilled and the skins are lost; no, new wine is put into new wineskins, and so both are preserved"* (Mt 9:17). The new wine is a symbol of the new covenant, which requires new, more flexible, dynamic and human structures.

From Calasanz

In the XVII century, Calasanz developed a school model with a complete project of integral education in piety and letters to contribute to the complete development of the person and the reform of society. He was undoubtedly a great innovator because he gave a creative and efficient response to the educational needs of his time.

He defended that education should be free and compulsory for all. In doing so, he responded to a real problem of the time: the access of the poor to a comprehensive quality education, for whom he designed a modern model of school with a complete program from early childhood until the adolescent was ready to enter university or find a job.

He focuses on the true aims of Christian education: the future happiness of the child (eternal life) and the reform of society. It aims to form good citizens and mature Christians conscious of their faith. He integrates the teaching and practice of Christian doctrine (piety) with human science; what we call today integral education. Christian education is at the service of the integral promotion of the person and his or her integration into society.

He dignifies the office of school teacher and makes him a true apostolic ministry; as he says, "an office of angels".

For them, he designs a complete curriculum for teacher formation that integrates the vocational, cultural and methodological dimensions.

The Piarist volunteer is creative

1. He/she gives an innovative response to the problems that arise in the volunteer work.
2. He/she identifies an opportunity and organizes the necessary resources to address it.
3. He/she has an entrepreneurial spirit and is able to take risks to solve a problem.
4. He/she takes advantage of available resources to develop projects.

Act with diligence

“Diligence is a great help to one who possesses a mediocre wit”. Lucius Annaeus Seneca

From experience

As a result of the retreats and talks promoted by the university, the students became interested in assuming a social commitment to the neediest people in the city. They discussed this with the Vice Rector's Office for University Extension and a volunteer program was born.

Students who join the program have to take an induction course on volunteering. The style of work in social action is explained to them, their motivations are explained in depth and the work teams are organized. Finally, if they decide to continue, they are assigned and sign a kind of commitment contract.

The team responsible for social action is particularly concerned that the volunteers' interventions apply the quality criteria required for any other work carried out on the premises. It is not academic work, but it is an educational action that develops competences for life and can be useful for a successful working life.

When the students start the voluntary work, they take on the commitment to work in a team under the coordination of a more experienced volunteer who will have the role of helping them to plan the activities, supervise them and evaluate them. Quality is not only demanded in the process, but also in the relationship with the target groups of the programs, mainly children, elderly people and women.

If a student does not meet these conditions, he or she is invited to leave the service.

Some young people feel that the university's procedures are too demanding. They think that the volunteer's commitment should be more spontaneous and flexible and that the quality standards that were born in the business world cannot be applied to the field of solidarity.

This requirement causes that not many students enroll in the programs, but those in charge are convinced that poor people with a great spirit deserve quality work, even if it is not paid. Perhaps the

great challenge is how to change the mentality of young people so that they understand that free is not synonymous with inefficiency.

It is not enough that the volunteer formally performs the task entrusted to him or her. He or she must do it diligently; that is, promptly, with agility and with quality. If he/she works in this way, he/she will soon gain the trust of all the members of his Association and of the people he/she serves.

Diligence is the cardinal virtue with which laziness is combated. It comes from the Latin *Diligere* which means *to love*, but not love in general, but love with gentleness, with affection. In a higher sense, it is the care and attention to execute something, a readiness to do something with great agility both inwardly and outwardly. The volunteer who carefully prepares the activities with the children and who is tactful in the relationship with others is diligent.

Diligence is the care and painstaking in executing something. It is that readiness of mind, that inner and outer agility, that gentle haste to do well, to do with love, to do joyfully what I have to do at that moment. It is industriousness in carrying out tasks and assignments.

Like all virtues, it is worked at, truly putting it into practice.

From the Gospel

Diligence in work is a quality highly valued among the people of Israel: *“The hand of the diligent shall rule, but indolence shall be subjected to hard labor. The sluggard does not seize his prey, but diligence is a man’s most precious possession”* (Prov 12:24-27), *“The soul of the sluggard desires, but obtains nothing, but the soul of the diligent is satisfied”* (Prov 13:4).

Joseph, one of Jacob’s sons, had been sold into slavery by his brothers who were jealous of him. Once in Egypt, he was given as a slave to an official named Potiphar (Gen 39,1). As a slave, Joseph worked diligently in the service of his master. Whatever work Potiphar gave him to do, Joseph did it carefully and conscientiously. Because he was very diligent in the simple jobs, he gained Potiphar’s trust and gave him even more jobs, to the point where Joseph had the responsibility of handling all the affairs of the household.

Jesus himself lived by his work until he began his public life. We assume that he was a good carpenter who was very responsible in his work. Diligence is a virtue that is contrasted with laziness as the parable of the talents (Mt 25:14-30) captures. That lazy servant who was afraid to trade with the talent he received. Saint Paul considered laziness inappropriate for the Christian believer: *“If anyone will not work, let him not eat either. For we hear that some among you walk disorderly, not working, but being busy-bodies”* (1 Thess 3:10). Therefore, he deliberately set the example of hard work to sustain himself and called the converts to imitate him: *“Remember, brethren, our labor and our toil when we preached to you the good news of God, working day and night so that we would not be a burden to you”* (1 Thess 2:9).

From Calasanz

Let the schools go well! This is one of Calasanz’ great concerns. In his letters, he insists that the teachers be very diligent in the daily running of the schools: *“Every care must be taken that they (the schools) be well run, not only in the teaching of letters, but also in the spirit and the fear of God, by making them frequent the Holy Sacraments”* (EP 3087).

To act diligently is to do the work with quality, with good example and seeking to satisfy the parents who trust in the work of the Pious Schools: *“Let everyone strive to give good example and to apply himself to the schools with all diligence, for this is our ministry and we must do it well so that the youngsters may experience their profit in letters and in spirit and the parents and relatives may be satisfied and content”* (EP 1153). To act diligently is not only to teach the letters, but also the holy fear of God.

If diligence is exercised in the running of schools, pupils will be happy to attend and learn well. They will be highly valued by all: *“If you do this (diligently), our Institute will be in great demand, also because we seek only simple food and clothing”* (EP 3002) and God will show his providence.

On the other hand, if they are neglected, the quality is lost: *“I hear that the schools are going very regularly; that Fr. Diomedes goes out to make collections and the schools are left without anyone to look after*

them, and a person from those places has written to me that they are going very badly; this is what our Institute is all about, and we should insist more than anything else, and everyone should be committed to one thing or another so that the schools go well, and the students are well educated in the fear of God as well as in letters” (EP 1098).

The Piarist volunteer is diligent

1. He/she desires to do the task entrusted to him/her with quality.
2. He/she is always ready to collaborate in an active way.
3. He/she always seeks to improve what he/she does for the good of the community for which he/she works.
4. He/she plans and evaluates activities with a sense of professionalism.

Committed to be responsible

“A person may cause evil to others, not only by his actions, but by his failure to act, and in both cases he is responsible to them”. John Stuart Mill

From experience

The central point on the agenda of the coordination team of the “Escuela de tareas” (After School Center) run by the Piarists in Mexicali is how to deal with the irresponsibility into which many volunteers are falling. Fr. Daniel, the coordinator of the program started the meeting by stating the situation clearly: - “We have a serious problem that affects the smooth running of our project. Many of our volunteers arrive late to the task room, they don’t schedule their work and some of them are absent without prior notice. We can’t go on like this.

A team member replied: - “First, we should check the extent of the problem. Maybe it’s not so serious and we have time to get it under control. Another replied: “Maybe we should take a good look at how we accompany the volunteers and motivate them all the time. Maybe we rely too much on their goodwill and are leaving them on their own.

“We must do something urgently. If we maintain the current situation of impunity for irresponsible volunteers, this project, which does so much good for the children, could collapse” - replied the fourth member of the team. Daniel took note of the observations of his colleagues and concluded: “I propose to organize a general meeting of volunteers with compulsory attendance as soon as possible to raise this issue properly.

Daniel, one of them remarked: “For this meeting, we must propose a good system of accompaniment and supervision on our part. Otherwise, I fear that everything will remain good intentions, and in time, they will make the same mistakes again.

The team members became aware of the situation. They convened a meeting of volunteers and designed a good accompaniment plan.

One of the major problems faced by solidarity associations is the irresponsibility of their volunteer staff. Not having an employ-

ment contract, the link is weaker and the volunteer feels that he or she can decide at will about his or her time and the nature of his or her work.

Responsibility is a quality of people who are able to commit themselves and act in the right way. It is given by a position, a role or a circumstance, such as a job or parenthood. In any institution, and even more so if it is of a solidarity nature, people are expected to act responsibly, exercising their rights and performing their duties.

Responsibility should not be confused with obedience. Carrying out orders does not mean being responsible. When one obeys, it may be to please, to avoid punishment or to get a reward. In this case the motivation is external. On the contrary, the person acts responsibly when he/she decides what to do and motivates him/herself to do it, which implies a personal and free acceptance, with an internal motivation to carry out the order.

From the Gospel

In the parable of the faithful servant (Mt 24, 45-51) Jesus gives a practical teaching to understand well the sense of responsibility that one should have in any job. A master entrusts an employee with the task of distributing food to the workers, a responsibility that he fulfils with punctuality and care. When he sees that the employee is trustworthy, he grants him the administration of all the goods. On the contrary, if he is irresponsible, he will be punished: *“then he will suffer the same fate as the hypocrites. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”* (Mt 24, 51).

In Luke’s Gospel the story is told from another perspective. The manager of a property abuses the trust of the owner and deceives him very cleverly. Jesus criticizes this irresponsible behavior and calls for the good use of property: *“He who is trustworthy in a very little is trustworthy in much; and he who is unjust in a very little is unjust in much”* (Lk 16:10). The steward is not a model of responsibility because he cheats the owner, but his story serves as an example of being responsible in one’s work.

In the parable of the talents (Mt 25, 14-30) Jesus teaches to use responsibly the gifts (talents) received. Whoever puts them to work will reap good benefits. The one who settles in and does not invest

them will be left with nothing. He will be a lazy servant who will not be entrusted with a talent another time.

In the first Christian community, certain needs arose that demanded a social responsibility on the part of the disciples. Those who had more goods had the obligation to share with those who had less: *“No one was in need, for all those who owned land or houses sold them and put the money at the disposal of the apostles, so that it could be distributed to each according to his needs”* (Acts 4:34). The need also arose to care for widows. Then seven deacons were chosen who devoted themselves to the service of the poor (Acts 6:1-7) so that the apostles could take charge of the preaching of the Word.

From Calasanz

The work in the school requires teachers to be very responsible and disciplined. This is the only way to successfully carry out an educational project. When Calasanz started the Pious Schools, he tried to surround himself with a team of teachers motivated by the educational mission. But the reality was that the teachers were very unstable. The school was a very noble and beautiful service, but a very sacrificial one. For many, the hard work in the classrooms did not meet their expectations and they did not last long.

Calasanz was soon convinced that a good solution to maintain the commitment of the teachers was to unite the group, giving it a spirituality and a structure of common life. To this end, he wrote a guideline (Breve Relazione) in which he described the timetable that the workers of the Pious Schools had and which regulated the common life. Little by little, the Pious Schools were organized until they became a religious Order in which the responsibility of the teacher in the school was consecrated by the bond of religious vows.

In a letter to a superior, he recommends him to take into account the talents of each member of the community when assigning responsibilities. *Try to deal with everyone in such a way that everyone is entrusted with the task for which he or she has a talent. For what one does not have a talent for, one cannot so easily adapt to. It is good to know the aptitude of each one* (EP 1227).

He also took care to draw up some specific regulations governing the conduct of the teachers. In the final section of the Declarations

on the Laws of the Pious Schools, he draws up a kind of code of conduct where several responsibilities are assigned to the teacher, some of which are: punctuality, welcoming students in the courtyard, control of absences, relations with parents, accompanying students home, preparing classes well and correcting students with moderation, among others.

The Piarist volunteer is responsible

1. Reliable and constant in the commitment he/she assumes as a volunteer.
2. Assuming the consequences of his or her commitment for the good of others.
3. Actively participates in planning and evaluation activities.
4. Willing to train himself/herself in order to improve his/her service.

Learning together

“Discipline is mightier than numbers, and discipline, that is, perfect co-operation, is an attribute of civilization”.
John Stuart Mill

From experience

At the beginning of the school year, the scout group’s leadership team spends two days defining the year’s objectives and planning the activities. It is a practice they have been doing for years and it works very well for them.

This school year, the main objective they have chosen is: “Learning from the encounter with people, both inside and outside the group” and the motto chosen: “Going out to the encounter...”

The group leader started the meeting with a talk on the competences that a scout leader must have to work well in a team. Afterwards, he invited the participants to write down situations that they had experienced in their service and that break the spirit of cooperation. These are some of them:

“I grew up in a Salesian parish where I acquired a particular style of work from an early age. It was not easy for me to integrate because I came with a style of work. With the good intention of contributing, I wanted to impose what I had experienced in my childhood, because I thought it was the best thing to do. This caused conflicts until I realized that I couldn’t impose anything, no matter how good it was”.

“I have a tendency to be inhibited when I propose an activity to the team and I feel that they don’t listen to me. I think it’s immature of me and it’s bad for the group. Over time, I have learnt that we have to argue the proposals we make, submit them for discussion and receive them calmly if they are not accepted”.

“I consider myself a shy, hard-working person, obedient to whatever the bosses on duty propose. It is an attitude of submission to authority that I learnt at home. Sometimes I don’t agree with decisions, but I don’t speak up, and I also find it very difficult to propose activities. I think this attitude does not contribute much to teamwork. I have struggled to reverse it and I think that the time I have spent as a monitor has helped me to mature”.

After receiving all the statements from the volunteers, the group leader also read out his own: "You know me. I have a very strong personality, I come to meetings full of new ideas, I dedicate time to this group and I feel very supported by you. I have to control myself a lot because my style of working can create conflicts and others can understand that I want to impose my criteria. I have learnt that I have to listen a lot and value the contributions that everyone makes for the good of our scout group"

The volunteers have expressed the limitations they have in working as a team. Communication and therefore collaboration breaks down when someone imposes their own criteria, when they show indifference and do not participate, when submissive behavior appears and when they have little tact in their relationships.

The volunteer team should be aware that it is part of the task to reach consensus, negotiate and accept decisions made by the majority. This implies that they need to develop assertive communication skills, willingness and desire to serve. In most cases this does not happen naturally, but requires training in cooperative work dynamics.

Cooperation is a set of actions and efforts in a group, carried out with the aim of achieving a common goal. It is the result of a joint work strategy that uses a series of methods to facilitate the achievement of an objective, such as, for example, teamwork, distribution of responsibilities, delegation of tasks, coordinated actions, etc.

From the Gospel

One of the first steps Jesus took in his public life was to call a group of men from the region of Galilee and make them his disciples. The Gospel tells us that "*he chose twelve of them and made them apostles*" (Lk 6:12), a symbolic number referring to the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus wanted the twelve apostles to be the foundation of the New Israel, the Church.

He shared many moments with "The Twelve". He taught them with authority, he prayed with them and, at the final moment, he gathered them in an upper room to share the Passover meal where he washed their feet as a sign of service. And in the same context of the Passover, Jesus reveals to them in a long prayer what his will is for the disciples: "*That they may all be one, as you and I are one*" (Jn 17:21). The apostles got the message.

In the book of the Acts of the Apostles the outline of what the Christian community should be like is drawn. A community united by the same spirit where all had the same dignity: “They came together regularly to listen to the apostles’ teaching and to share in the common life, in the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42).

The community is made up of all those who have been called by Jesus to make present his Kingdom of love and justice in the midst of the world. They live with a great sense of communion: “*Do nothing out of rivalry or vainglory, and let humility lead you to esteem others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others*” (Phil 2, 3-4).

The Christian community is like a body: “*Just as the body has many members and yet is one, and these members, though many, form but one body, so it is with Christ*” (1 Cor 12:12). Each member of the body has a function in the whole and all are necessary, even those who seem to be unimportant. Yes, since all are called to cooperate in building up a servant community that makes the kingdom of God present.

From Calasanz

In the community founded by Calasanz, there is a diversity of people: priests and cleric brothers (non-priests) who dedicate themselves to teaching, and Brothers who work in the house. Among the teachers, some are more suitable for the younger children, others for the older ones. Some were specialists in grammar, others in science. The brothers were involved in various manual jobs such as cooks, tailors, shoemakers, bricklayers...

Unity of style in the educational communities is essential for the proper functioning of the Pious Schools: *All our houses must observe the same style in the organization of the community, so that a religious, on being transferred from one house to another, will find everywhere the same customs. But the aim which all Superiors should strive for most earnestly is that all our schools should teach the same way and use the same methodology* (C 212).

Calasanz exhorts the teachers to be united and to work with one heart with their eyes fixed on God. *If they meet together with zeal for the greater glory of God and the benefit of the pupils, they will experi-*

ence that the Holy Spirit is in their midst, for “where two or more are gathered in my name, I am there” (EP 2757).

Furthermore, he advised that at least once a week there should be a meeting to discuss the work of the school: the academic progress of the pupils, discipline, care of the facilities, the way classes were taught, and the various problems that arise in any school. In this regard, they sought harmony among all: *“It is sometimes better to govern with a few who are united than with many, some of whom are disunited. I wish that at least once a week, at break time, they would have a small congregation on the things of the school and how to manage them, listening to the opinion of all, for the Holy Spirit often speaks through the mouth of the one who is least thought of” (EP 0132).*

The Piarist volunteer is cooperative

1. Works in his or her team and with wider networks.
2. Listens to the other person, pays attention to him/her and lets him/her know that he/she is listened to.
3. Communicates clearly and accurately with a wide range of people, as well as their ability to develop
4. Has the ability to show his/her point of view and then listen to the other person’s point of view.

Active citizens

“Citizens should fight as ardently for the defense of the laws as for the defense of their walls, the former being no less necessary than the latter for the preservation of a city”. Heraclitus of Ephesus

From experience

In Managua, many children can be seen on the streets working as shoe-shine boys, cleaning vehicles and selling whatever goods they can get their hands on. Sometimes they are used by local mafias for their purposes. Sometimes they are driven by their parents themselves, pressured by the situation of poverty in which they live. In the case of girls, there is a hidden network of prostitution controlled by the same mafias. Of course, children do not attend school and are exposed to many street vices.

There are many volunteers who try to work with these “street children” in different programs, but the general conviction is that the problem is not being eradicated. It is therefore necessary to study the causes of this situation and to design strategies to eliminate child labor.

The “Save the Children” network brought together all those interested in eliminating this problem from the streets of the city. At the first meeting, experiences were shared and participants proposed some common strategies in order to work in a more coordinated way.

One of the initiatives was the creation of a coordination team with the “Procuraduría Especial de la Niñez y la Adolescencia”, a governmental agency for the protection of children. With the help of UNICEF, a public awareness campaign was launched to combat the practice of child labor. With the Ministry of Education and the local police, strategies were put in place to keep children in school.

It was necessary to set up a specialized voluntary service to visit homes whose children were on the street in order to provide them with guidance and alternatives for their children. Pressure was also put on the government to combat the local mafias that exploit children. Eradicating child labor is a coordinated work of many people.

Unfortunately, there are still some Associations that do not see the need to work in coordination with other entities and are content to maintain their own particular action.

To eliminate a social problem, it has to be tackled from different angles. Getting children off the street implies the collaboration of governmental and non-governmental entities in a good shared project. If there is a good social conscience in the population, it is easier to solve these problems; otherwise, if citizens delegate them to the government, it will be much more difficult.

Social participation is understood as those initiatives in which people make decisions regarding the management of resources, programs and activities that have an impact on the development of the community. It is a possibility to configure new spaces for social movements, governmental and non-governmental organizations to claim situations or demand changes.

It also entails an obligation to get involved in the common good, either through taxes or involvement in concrete actions.

Experience shows that only those who have a sense of belonging to a community are actively involved in its welfare and development.

From the Gospel

Jesus took on the history, culture and cultural traditions of his people. As a child, his parents introduced him to the temple, he participated in all the fiestas and at the age of twelve, he could already read in the synagogue of his village. He lived in a country occupied by the Roman army and with local leaders who were corrupt and sold out to the invading power. In a special way, the Galileans were very combative towards the Roman occupation.

No religious group remained indifferent to this situation of injustice. The sect of the Zealots was very violent against the usurper. The Pharisees were more peaceful, but equally hostile. However, the Sadducees collaborated cordially with the rulers, as did the high priest and the king. The reality is that the Romans tolerated the practice of the Jewish religion, as long as their rulers let them have full control of taxes and trade.

Jesus does not claim political responsibility, but is perceived by many as a Messiah with the power to restore the throne of David, return to the Covenant and drive out the Romans. On one occasion, a large number of his followers were so impressed by Jesus' ability

to feed them miraculously that they tried to take him by force and make him king among them. However, Jesus managed to escape and went to the mountain alone (Jn 6:5-15). Pilate himself questioned him about his supposed royal identity: *“Are you the king of the Jews?”* Jesus answered him skillfully: *“You say it: I am a king. For this I was born and came into the world, to bear witness to the truth. He who is of the truth listens to my voice”* (Jn 18:37).

Although Jesus did not get involved in the politics of the day, He did teach His disciples respect for the government authorities. Regardless of the nation in which one resides, respect for the leaders of the nation is part of the responsibilities of a true follower of Jesus. On the controversy over the payment of taxes, he responds: *“Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s”* (Mt 22:21).

There is no doubt that his preaching challenged a religious and political system that was corrupt, unjust and, in practice, marginalized the majority of the population. From that perspective, his message is an inspiration for all those who feel called to build a more just society.

From Calasanz

The Pious Schools had an enormous social impact on the populations where they took root, raising the cultural level of the poor and contributing to social progress. The “popular education” questioned the social order of the time. This is why Calasanz had his known detractors.

There is a clear social intentionality in the educational project of the Pious Schools. The aim is to form *“citizens who can promote and ennoble themselves and their country by obtaining positions of government and dignity here on earth. This is made clearer by the contrary effects of badly educated people, who by their vituperative actions disturb the peace of the state and bother the citizens”*. (Tonti no. 14).

Calasanz is very attentive to the wars ravaging Europe and asks the pupils to pray for peace and progress of the peoples, as well as the conversion of the Christian princes. A good education contributes to the unity of the Church and to peace: *“Here we pray for universal peace. Let this be done with great devotion in these regions. So that the Lord may send peace to Christendom, which is his people”* (3-1-1643).

He is convinced that education will be more effective if there is coordination between the school, the family and the public authorities. On one occasion, he encouraged the authorities of the town of Narni to reach an agreement between teachers and parents for the good running of the school: “He has written to me many times that, while the pupils entertain themselves with games and pastimes and go to school when they feel like it, and their parents (with the exception of a few good ones) are not diligent enough in this, it is impossible for them to make a profit, neither in virtue nor in letters. If the parents of the pupils were in agreement with the teachers, there is no doubt that they would be satisfied” (EP 143).

The Piarist volunteer is an active citizen

1. He/she has a sense of belonging to one’s own community and of commitment to its improvement.
2. Networking with other organizations in the community
3. He/she actively collaborates for the good of his/her organization.
4. He/she is aware that social commitment is an essential part of making the world a better place.

With kindness and respect

There is nothing more contemptible than respect based on fear. Albert Camus

From experience

Antonia has been a volunteer for two years in the soup kitchen that Cáritas opened in the Vallecas neighborhood to alleviate the crisis caused by high unemployment and growing immigration. Previously, she worked for many years in a second-hand market in the parish of San Ramón.

Antonia is in charge of registering the people who come to the soup kitchen and assigning them a place. She does her job with great dedication and responsibility, but she has a serious problem in dealing with the other volunteers and with those who come to the soup kitchen. She is one of those people who is very curt and ironic in her relationships, who gets angry easily and who hardly shows any visible gestures of kindness and closeness to people.

Given her role, she generates a bad atmosphere in the canteen and has open conflicts with some of her colleagues. The canteen users come in fear of being scolded.

The problem is that Antonia is totally trusted by the parish priest who knows her character very well, but he has no other person with her level of commitment and whom he can trust.

The problem erupted with a fight that broke out with a group of young volunteers who help out on Fridays. Apparently, Antonia scolded them in front of everyone because they were five minutes late. The boys were angry at the abrupt correction procedure and went to the parish priest to express their discomfort.

The parish priest listened politely to the young people, understood their complaints and decided to talk to Antonia personally. He called her into his office, acknowledged her commitment and responsibility, but told her that she should treat people kinder and, of course, never disrespect others. He did not want to lose her, but if Antonia did not change her attitude, he would be forced to dispense with her services or assign her to a place where she would not have to deal with people.

The saying goes that “an old parrot can’t learn to talk”. Antonia acknowledged her lack of tact in the relationship, but was no longer willing to change her character. With great sorrow, she resigned from the service she had been doing for so long and another, friendlier volunteer took her place.

In every association there are always very well identified, responsible and competent volunteers, but with poor social skills and little tact in dealing with people. In that case, they should be given some functions that do not involve much interaction with others.

In general, volunteers must be kind and respectful in order to do their service well, especially if they have to deal with marginalized people, with low self-esteem and very sensitive to relationships.

Respect is the recognition, consideration, attention or deference owed to other people. It is a “sine qua non” condition for knowing how to live and achieving peace and tranquility. When someone is respectful, he or she accepts and understands the ways of thinking and acting of people who are different from him or her. He/she also treats everything around with the utmost care.

It also consists of showing appreciation for another person, regardless of his or her honor and esteem, i.e. one should not look down on a person because of his or her condition, whatever it may be. Honor is a condition that everyone possesses.

From the Gospel

In the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7), Jesus makes a solemn proclamation of the fundamental principles of his message. After updating some rules of conduct based on the Law of Moses, he gives a summary of the law, the golden rule: “*Whatever you want others to do for you, do for them: this is what the Law and the Prophets are all about*” (Mt 7:12). He who does not judge others will not be judged. He who forgives will be forgiven. He who condemns will be condemned. He who respects will be respected. And so, it is with every aspect of human relationships.

Jesus relates kindly to everyone: the sick, the poor, the religious leaders, the scribes and the Pharisees. He even treats with respect

who insult him and lead him to the cross. It is a respect based on unconditional love that does not expect any retribution.

In this sense, the love that Jesus preaches goes beyond what is proposed in the Mosaic Law: *“If you love only those who love you, what reward do you deserve? Do not the tax collectors do likewise? And if you greet only your brethren, what extraordinary thing do you do?; and do not the heathen do the same?”* (Mt 5, 46-47)

Jesus teaches not to speak ill of others, not even of one’s enemies. He teaches to forgive all offences, not to be inopportune, not to meddle in the affairs of others, to be loving towards the least of these, to pray for others and to listen when others are in distress.

Out of the many stories that express the human touch that Jesus had for people, the story of the adulterous woman is particularly beautiful. In contrast to the harsh and accusatory treatment of the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus treats the woman with great respect: *“Neither do I condemn you,” Jesus said to her. Go, sin no more from now on*” (Jn 8, 11).

St. Paul gives some rules of conduct to the Ephesian community so that peace and harmony may reign among them. They are not to speak *“unpleasant words; on the contrary, let your words always be good, so that they may be edifying when necessary and do good to those who hear them. Avoid bitterness, outbursts, anger, shouting, insults and all kinds of evil. Instead, be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ”* (Eph 4:29-31,32).

From Calasanz

In many of his letters, Calasanz exhorts the teachers to treat the pupils with affection and kindness, with respect and *“with a father’s love”*: *“we must attend the school, without making a difference between one pupil and another, but showing to all great fatherly love and teaching them with such affection, that the pupils know that you desire their success, because this will encourage them to be diligent in the classes, and then you will attract them more easily to the service of God, which is our gain”*. (EP 0354).

Love for the children is manifested in an attitude of closeness and kindness to all: *“I exhort you to be kind to all and to procure to en-*

courage all to holy observance with paternal gentleness and patience, so that you forget that opinion and love him as a Father and not as a severe judge” (Calasanz 1641). It is also necessary to be kind to those who think differently: “It is necessary to forgive everything for the love of God and for the good of Religion, and also to be kind in our hearts to those who have been contrary to us, for this is what the law of Christ our Master wants, and to pray for them” (EP 2593).

He also shows deep respect for the civil and ecclesiastical authorities, for his brothers in the community and above all for the children to whom he abases himself in order to obtain God’s favor: *“The shortest and easiest way to be exalted to his own knowledge and from this to the attributes of God’s mercy, prudence and infinite patience, is to lower oneself to give light to children and in particular to those who are like the helpless of all, who, being an office in the eyes of the world so low and vile, few want to lower themselves to it” (EP 1236).*

The Piarist volunteer is respectful

1. He/she accepts and understands ways of thinking and acting that are different from his/her own.
2. He/she acts with kindness and courtesy in his/her relations with his/her companions and with those to whom the educational action is directed.
3. He/she listens actively to those around him/her.
4. He/she expresses his/her opinion in an appropriate way and defends his/her point of view, always respecting the opinion of others (**assertiveness**).

Handling things prudently

Four characteristics belong to a judge: to listen courteously, to answer wisely, to weigh prudently and to decide impartially. Socrates

From experience

Working with adolescents is complex and even more so if they come from dysfunctional homes and have suffered any kind of abuse in their childhood. This is the conviction of Jesús, a social educator at a Day Centre in the city of Pamplona.

He has seen almost everything during the years he has worked with adolescents. He remembers in particular the case of Raquel, a fifteen-year-old girl, forced into prostitution by her stepfather, a dangerous pimp who ran a whole network with minors. The problem was brought to public attention by a comment made by a colleague at the Centre.

The boys are in an uproar and very indignant. Raquel is a loving, simple and very dedicated girl, how can they treat her like that? The most strongminded were determined to teach their stepfather a lesson. Raquel went into a fit of hysteria.

When a case like this arises, one has to act with extreme caution: to study carefully what actions could be taken and to foresee possible consequences. So, Jesús assembled a team of experts and asked them for advice.

Since the issue was in the public domain, the psychologist advised the boys to be very discreet in their comments, out of respect for Rachel's dignity. In addition, the stepfather should be prevented from finding out that the issue was already public.

The lawyer advised to report the case to the juvenile court because there was a serious violation of the law. To do so, one had to be very sure and file a report in firm. It was necessary to act quickly so that the situation would not escalate. It was clear that Rachel's integrity was at risk.

The social worker pointed to the possible consequences of the justice system taking action against the stepfather. If the accusation is not

firm, Rachel would be further harassed and the stepfather could threaten the school's educators with violence.

In the meantime, the girl was to receive a lot of support from her peers and educators.

Many of the adolescents who are in a juvenile center have had a personal history with a lot of emotional wounds and shortcomings. It is not easy for them to live with this burden and they have a feeling of resentment and shame for what they have experienced. Raquel is living a strong experience of abuse from her stepfather that she tries to hide out of fear. When the problem came to public light, it was necessary to act quickly, but with caution, in order to redirect it.

Prudence is a virtue that consists in speaking and acting with care, with fairness and propriety, with caution, with moderation, with foresight and restraint, with reasonableness and with care to avoid possible harm and inconvenience while respecting the lives, feelings and liberties of others. It requires good sense, good judgement, temperance, sanity, wisdom, discernment, poise and caution.

It also involves discerning right from wrong in every circumstance and acting accordingly, following the right or fleeing from the wrong.

From the Gospel

Jesus showed great wisdom and prudence in his relationship with others, with the gestures he made, the parables he told and the examples he gave from everyday life. He spoke in a language that simple people could understand. He had a good knowledge of the Scriptures and applied them to everyday realities. He used stories drawn from experience to explain very deep spiritual truths. After teaching with parables *"all were amazed. And they said, 'Where did he get this wisdom and this power to work miracles?'"* (Mt 13:54)

Jesus is a teacher of wisdom because he uses knowledge wisely and judiciously. He has acquired it through experience, through observation of reality, through reflection on life and, above all, through the study of the Scriptures.

Prudence is a quality of wisdom that is learned in the experience of life. Jesus teaches his disciples to live prudently in difficult times:

“Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Mt 10:16). The virgins in the parable are prudent because they keep oil and remain vigilant for the unexpected visit of the bridegroom (Mt 25).

He is wise who builds his life on the word of God: *“So everyone who hears the words I have just spoken and acts on them can be compared to a wise man who built his house on rock”* (Mt 7:24). The word of God is a source of wisdom: *“Remember that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures: they can give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching and for argument, for correction and for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be perfect and ready to do good always”* (2 Tim 3, 15-17).

From Calasanz

It would not be easy for Calasanz to lead the Pious Schools, especially in so many situations in which he had to solve conflicts and make decisions regarding people: *“Be of good cheer, and do not be troubled by the disturbances that are occurring at present, for I hope by the mercy of God that all will turn out well, if we know how to navigate with patience and prudence while this storm lasts”* (EP 3841).

In his letters he shows great wisdom and prudence in the art of government: *“A single word can ruin a whole business”* (29, 3-1633). *“To accommodate things, a man must dissimulate. Even more, to swallow bitter morsels, because the common good is to be preferred to the particular”* (20-9-1636). *“It is great prudence to know how to make use of one’s talents and to second them in certain things, provided they do not offend God”* (8-3-1635), *“One must adapt oneself to time, as things happen”* (7-12-1641). *“You should not undertake a work without first considering whether you can succeed and remain”* (30-8-1622). *“Things done hastily and, perhaps, without prayer, often give birth to angry regrets”* (25-4-1628). *“Sometimes it is better to govern a house with a few who are united than with many where there are some who are disunited”* (13-12-1622).

In his dealings with his pupils, he also showed great tact and prudence, especially with the poorest and most undisciplined, according to the testimony of a childhood friend: *How he put up with and dominated the insolence, poor judgment and bad manners of those*

boys who, because of their young age and being the children of poor people, had uncivil manners. He put up with them with great charity, instructed and admonished them; and more than once I observed that being those boys, for the reasons mentioned, as little beasts, they respected and kept Father Joseph in such a way that, while the other Fathers could not make them keep tranquil with punishments, he had them like statues with his word, and they did not squeak.

The Piarist volunteer is prudent

1. He/she acts with moderation and affective balance in the face of the conflicts and challenges that occur in voluntary action.
2. He/she thinks and acts according to the consequences of the decisions they have made, after considering the possible effects for themselves and others.
3. He/she distinguishes between facts and opinions, between what is important and what is less relevant.
4. He/she knows when to hold back or when the emotions expressed are appropriate to the moment.
5. He/she uses negotiation, persuasion, conflict resolution and reaches consensual solutions.

Identity and a sense of belonging

“There is no full identity without belonging to a people”.
Pope Francis.

From experience

I remember fondly from my school days the Calasanzian Week where the teachers reminded us of the same stories we loved so much as children. The adventure of little Joseph to go and kill the devil, his wanderings at the university, his trip to Rome and the meeting with the poor children in Trastevere, when he fell from a ladder installing the school bell.... The image of the saint embracing the children has always remained engraved in my memory.

After the confirmation, we were invited to spend a week in Peralta de la Sal, the village where the saint was born. During this time, we got to know his life and thought more closely, so that all of us who took part felt proud to have such an extraordinary patron saint. Truly, that week of living together not only brought us closer together, but also linked us more closely to the project of the Pious Schools.

A few months later, we took part in a volunteer course that would conclude with a summer service experience with poor children in the city. The proposal they made to us was very attractive and a demand for fidelity to the teaching we had received from Calasanz.

When Calasanz arrived in Rome, he did not shut himself up in an office, but went to the neighborhoods of Rome to visit the sick, to give catechesis to the poor children and to attend to the pilgrims. During these years of voluntary service with the poorest of the city, he discovered that God was calling him to dedicate himself entirely to the education of the poorest. These were very special years where God kindled the flame of the educational vocation of the young Calasanz.

The summer experience consisted of a two-week work camp where we had the opportunity to work with poor children, to participate in formative meetings and to pray. All this in a very joyful and dynamic community atmosphere. It was really an extraordinary experience that opened new perspectives in our lives.

After having participated in the work camp and living a year of volunteering, I can say that the encounter with the poor children has made me more of a person and helps me to live life as a vocation of service.

The young volunteer who narrates the experience of his first work camp makes explicit reference to the encounter with poor children, the formative accompaniment, the warm group atmosphere and, above all, the reference to Saint Joseph Calasanz which gives meaning to the human experience he has lived during two weeks of service.

In this first work camp experience, two links are produced: one affective and the other narrative.

The young volunteer is affected by the encounter with the reality of his pupils. He has direct experience of living with children in need and has become vitally involved with them. This generates an emotional bond with them.

The warm welcome and the knowledge of Calasanz and his spiritual pedagogy nourish the motivation of the volunteers by linking them to the Pious Schools. This generates a narrative link with the history of Calasanz and the mission of the Pious Schools.

The combination of the two links in an environment of community accompaniment generates the charismatic Calasanzian identity that is sought. Acquiring a sense of belonging to the Pious Schools is the result of a formative itinerary where storytelling and feeling must be combined to give birth to a new collective Piarist identity.

From the Gospel

The disciples go through a process of identification with Jesus from the time they are called by the lakeshore until they lay down their lives for him. Their perception of Jesus changes over time. At first, they saw him as a rabbi, a teacher of the law who spoke with authority and had special powers to heal the sick. Judging by his works, they thought he might be the Messiah they were so eagerly awaiting. In fact, they ask him openly: "Are you the one who is to come, or must we wait for another" (Jn 7:19).

Little do they learn the true identity of Jesus. James and John make a request to him: “*Grant us to sit one at your right hand and the other at your left, when you are in your glory*” (Mk 10:37). At that time, they believed that Jesus could occupy the throne in Jerusalem, that he would be the Servant Messiah foretold by the prophets.

The intimate moments they shared with the Master, the teachings they received and the signs they witnessed were changing their mentality. Jesus was winning them over to the cause of the Kingdom of God. There was a moment of crisis in a group of disciples who did not fully identify with the cause of Jesus: “*many of his disciples went away from him and left his company*” (Jn 6:66). Simon Peter stepped forward and, in the name of the twelve, made a solemn appeal to Jesus: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (Jn 6, 68).

At the time of the final trial (death of Jesus), the disciples were afraid and abandoned him. Only the experience of the resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit renew their identification with Jesus to whom they trust without fear. St. Paul expresses in what the experience of following Jesus consists: “And it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me: the life which I still live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2, 20).

From Calasanz

When Calasanz arrived in Rome, his vocation of service as a priest was clear to him. He had already demonstrated it in the responsibilities he had carried out as secretary, parish priest and visitor. Little did he know that God had prepared for him a new mission that would transcend the limits of time and space: to be the founder of the first religious Congregation specializing in education.

As he became involved in working with children, Calasanz discovered his vocation as an educator and over the years, the call to religious life. Little by little he adopted a new charismatic identity which he concretized in the drafting of the Constitutions of the Pious Schools. In them he writes solemnly: “And since we profess to be true Poor of the Mother of God, we will not under any circumstances despise poor children; but with tenacious patience and

charity we will strive to enrich them with all qualities, stimulated especially by the Word of the Lord: “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (CC n° 4).

The identity of the follower of Calasanz is formed by educating poor children from an evangelical perspective: to see Jesus in the little ones. When a Piarist religious makes his religious vows, he assumes a new identity “*with a special dedication to poor children*” (CC n° 31) recognized by the Church.

The text approved by the General Chapter of the Piarist Schools in 1997 summarizes what the Piarist identity consists of: “*We, Piarists, the religious and the laity, like St. Joseph Calasanz, feel sent by Christ and the Church to evangelize by educating children and young people, especially the poor, from early childhood, through the integration of Faith and Culture (Piety and Letters) to renew the Church and to transform the society according to the values of the Gospel, creating fraternity. We have received for this purpose a charism that comes from God, a history, a spirituality and a pedagogy of our own, people in communion, schools and specific institutions, which allow us to make Jesus Master and the Motherhood of his Church present to the little ones*”.

The Piarist volunteer has a sense of belonging

1. He/she conceives volunteering as a way of apostolate that is born of an experience of encounter with Jesus.
2. He/she assumes the Calasanzian spirituality and pedagogy as a source and nourishment in his/her voluntary action.
3. He/she knows the mission and vision of the Pious Schools.
4. He/she adapts himself/herself and identifies with the style of the Piarist Association in which he/she works.

Letter to Piarist volunteers

I am happy to receive news that there are many young people who embrace our Institute in spite of the hardships of working with children. It is a sign that the Pious Schools are a work of God and of great use to society.

In your letter you tell me that there are boys who, after their schooling in the Pious Schools, wish to form a group to continue their formation and to exercise an apostolate among the poor as lay people. I am very happy about this news because it shows that they value the education they received at school and wish to continue it. I have no problem as long as they work with love and are competent in the service they do.

The restlessness shown by these young people reminds me very much of my first years in Rome when I devoted myself for years to the works of mercy in the various Confraternities I joined.

When I started to become more involved in Santa Dorotea school, I worked alongside very devoted and helpful volunteers who belonged to the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. Without their unconditional support, the birth of the Pious Schools would have been impossible.

The visits I made to the neighborhoods of Rome as a member of the Confraternity of the Twelve Apostles did me a lot of good. Meeting the elderly, the crippled and the sick reminded me of the Gospel passage of the young man wounded on the roadside and who was helped by the Good Samaritan. It is impossible to look into the eyes of the needy and not feel challenged by them; they are the same Jesus saying from the cross: "I am thirsty".

In the same homes I visited there were many children, some of them with clear signs of malnutrition and with a lot of ignorance, both of the Christian faith and of the human sciences, so we also did some catechesis on Sundays in the churches.

I don't remember well how many visits I made in total. There were weeks when I went out more than three times to bring alms that were given to us and, above all, to listen to the problems and anguish of the simple people, who were the majority.

The Confraternity was a real school of Christian life. I discovered God's presence in the poor and needy, it helped me to pray more and better, it taught me to be more humble, patient and generous with others.

I was very proud to be a priest to accompany people on their spiritual journey, to console the sad and to administer God's grace. I was convinced that I had already discovered my vocation, but children came along the way and stole my heart forever. I discovered that they needed the daily presence of priests ready and willing to give them the bread of piety and letters.

So, if there are boys with a desire to help, find the best way to channel this restlessness. Promote diligently the foundation of some Confraternity or Marian congregation so that the boys can get to know the reality of the simple people and dedicate themselves to the works of mercy, which is something very pleasing to God and very useful for the progress of society.

To young people who are eager to help others, I would ask the same thing that I wish for the teachers of the Pious Schools: that they love God, acquire the virtues of charity, patience, humility, and to be very competent and constant in their commitment. May they remember that, if they work for the pure love of God and inspire a degree of love of God in the hearts of the children, the Lord will give them a hundredfold, if they are in the grace of God (EP 3042).

I wish the volunteers to have a great spirit to help others not only by example and doctrine (EP 4321) but, above all, to remember the words of Jesus which have so resounded in my heart: "As you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me" (Mt 25,40). I began by giving a few hours a week for the poor and ended up consecrated to them as a religious of the Pious Schools.

May God bless all young people who have the restlessness and the desire to help others. They have chosen a beautiful path that will teach them to be good Christians and active citizens for the reform of society.

Joseph Calasanz

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