

Ephemerides Calasanctianae
Salutatio Patris Generalis
Letter to our brethren

Salutatio: July and August 2010

“HE SUMMONED THOSE HE WANTED”

My dear brethren,

I want to give this fraternal letter a title which comes from a verse in the Gospel and is even quoted in our own Constitutions (C 15). It is found in Mark, where it relates that the Lord “*summoned those he wanted. So they came to him ... to be sent out to proclaim the message (Mk 3, 13-14)*”. This wonderfully encapsulates the dynamics of the Vocational Pastoral, which is the subject of my letter to you. I realize that the Vocational Pastoral is one of those topics on which we must all reflect and about which we all have a lot of thinking to do, because both aspects are of urgent importance for the Pious Schools. I should also like to add that it is a topic which not only preoccupies but also occupies the whole Order, but perhaps this is not entirely true in every aspect. **I hope that this simple message will serve to put this subject on your fraternal tables, in your lives and above all in your Piarist prayers and mission.**

I wish to organize the letter in four brief sections: **preliminary points, attitudes, challenges and proposals**. On each of these I shall try to indicate certain attitudes which we need in order to think about them and to strengthen our efforts for vocations, our ability to call and to be Piarist religious, to propose our vocations, to welcome with commitment and accompany with discernment.

PRELIMINARY POINTS

In thinking about the Vocational Pastoral it is wise to be aware of the fact that there are some “preliminary” points which need to be clear and well thought out. A letter of this sort is not suitable for more than a few points to be developed; neither do I expect to draw up a complete document, but to encourage discussion of the topic and offer you some ideas to help us think about it as we go forward. This is the reason why amongst the “preliminary” points I should like to indicate two which we must take into consideration. It will be important not just to think about these two concrete suggestions, rather to try to consider deeply the following statement: there are preliminary things which precede our concrete work, which have to be a matter for reflection, because they have a direct influence on the success of our efforts. I suggest only two, hoping that I make what I want to say clear.

1 - The first thing that we need is to be aware that *things change easily* and that our link to the motivations for vocations, the circumstances in which we act and the ways in which we approach young people must be in continuous movement. In just a few years, new and different circumstances may arise, which will stop

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our being successful if we approach them with our old and habitual methods. Here is one example of this "everything changes" situation: I can tell you that I have asked religious of a certain age, our elders, what helped them to become Piarists. Their replies were more or less these: having a big family / coming from a small village / having entered a small seminary as a child / having grown up in a Christian environment / feeling a sense of "belonging" to a Church which is clear and well-defined and accepted socially / having grown up in the bosom of a religious family, with numerous friends who were priests and religious.

If you were to ask those of my generation, they would more or less give these reasons: living in a dedicated Church, which believes in change / feeling the emotion of a shared and celebrated faith / having a personal and passionate relationship with Jesus of Nazareth / having taken part in pastoral journeys from their beginnings and pointing towards the future / not having had any family objections in considering a vocation / not knowing many other forms of vocations / being sure that following the most challenging vocation is the best way to answer the challenges of the Gospels.

I ask all those responsible for the Vocational Pastoral to ask today's youngsters for their own reasons. I am sure that you will find new and interesting replies. Moreover, some of these will not be considered sufficient for the way we organize things. Here is one "first preliminary point" which I give you to reflect upon: we need those responsible for VP to consider deeply what is happening with young people in the contexts in which they work, so that they may approach them and be heard and understood. Every context is different, and we must never forget this. Even the examples I have given above are typical of certain context but not of others.

2. I should like to mention a second "preliminary point": **clarity when sowing**. This is another aspect upon which we should reflect. The Vocational Pastoral for consecrated and priestly life has specific requirements. The time when we may have thought that this pastoral was well done if it "could provide vocations" is over. That is true only for certain ecclesial situations in the past, which will not return again, at least during the time in which we have for thought and reflection. I am not defending a "ghetto-type" of Vocational Pastoral, which is isolated from the general pastoral. That would be another serious mistake which would lead us to a clergy-based Church, which is not properly founded on the communion of all the various vocations. But we do not think that in itself the general pastoral encourages specific vocations. What I wish to say, as below, is that we must work for:

a. a general pastoral in which the vocational dimension of Christian experience is well integrated and which encourages vocational offers from young people and their questions on "how to be a Christian";

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b. a general pastoral which does not propose a Christian vocation "in general", but which concretely reveals ways in which the challenges of "vocational diversification" may be understood;

c. pastoral planning for sowing, for plans for accompanying and welcoming specific vocations, and in particular religious or priestly vocations;

d. strategies, choices and means which allow us to work concretely with those young people who want to accept a specific vocation. I am not speaking of separate ways of doing this, but of diverse and individual ways, which is something quite different;

e. the transparent formation of lay and religious pastoral workers for this beginning of the specific Vocational Pastoral and for its place within the Church's pastoral.

The harvest depends on many things, but most of all upon the seed which is sown. Clarity when sowing is more than ever a necessity.

We certainly need more topics to reflect upon in this section of "preliminary points". In the coming years we shall, as an Order, be able to consider them in depth, especially upon this, because it is the subject which is the foundation of the work which is being done by the General Secretariat for Vocational Pastoral.

ATTITUDES

When speaking of "attitudes" I mean "the relationship we Piarists have towards the Vocational Pastoral". I think we should be ready to admit we are sometimes wrong, as we note some positive attitudes which need reinforcement and other negative ones which need to be corrected. Amongst the first positive group I can cite various ones which I have experienced in these recent months in which I have been visiting all the Demarcations: a general interest on the part of the Superior Majors and local organizers; the trust which young religious have in the vocational potential of the order as such; progressive growth, even if still slow, in a clear interest which lay people who are close to us are showing in the Vocational Pastoral as a provider of dynamism in our work etc. I may also add one or two negative attitudes: that scepticism, which is to be found in certain places, about our real ability to attract vocations; conformism which is clear in other places and which makes it easy to accept weak reactions to the impoverishment of certain situations, or difficult to reflect with dedication upon them; an ingenuity with which we may sometimes think that "little by little we improve", without any effort to intervene decisively in key areas which would strengthen the Vocational Pastoral; or what I consider the simplification of those people who do not believe it is necessary to work in any specific way in the Vocational Pastoral because that is not our mission.

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We must invite each other to look again at our attitudes towards the Vocational Pastoral. I should like to propose two kinds of attitude which I feel are needed to add impetus to everything regarding our vocational duty.

1 - Firstly, never to separate our vocational opportunities from the kind of consecrated life that we follow. The real situation of our Consecrated Life, the challenges which we have and the way we respond to them, are fundamental elements in our ability to encourage, propose and welcome. It is not any old "Consecrated Life" which gives birth, nor just any dynamic. It must be that Consecrated Life which is alive, which possesses vitality. *Only that Consecrated Life which irradiates life and consecration will be able to attract young people so that they dare to give their all in order to live it.* Everything we do to encourage ways to renew our lives and to emphasize the cardinal points of the way we live the religious life will certainly have repercussions on the development of vocations. Young people are not interested in belonging to a group with no life or valid project. Neither should they be. When they dedicate themselves to something it is to breathe new life into the project that has attracted them, not only to repeat it or support it.

2 - Secondly, never to separate our Vocational Pastoral from the actual situation in which the Order exists. We are calling each other to new life, to sustainable growth in new countries, to encourage organizational changes which are needed to make life and renewal possible, to work as a team, starting from clear projects, to look after our permanent formation and our vocational faith, and so on. We would define this period in the life of the Order as being in the "workshop stage", aware that we are walking a tightrope between the clear knowledge of who we are and our conviction that we have to live it all again. It is clear to me that this dynamism will only bear a good harvest if encouraged in a complex and coordinated way and not from the individual choice of this or that person, which serves an end unconnected to those of others. Furthermore, I say the same thing about the Vocational Pastoral: I invite you to experience it as one of the keys to the renewal of the Order and as one of those conditions which makes things possible. This presupposes, it must presuppose, that we take care about what is happening in the Pious Schools, with our priorities and decisions based upon what we need to breathe life into the Order.

CHALLENGES

We have many! And at the same time, it is true that *we have but one: accepting in a real way that the Vocational Pastoral is at the centre of the life of the Pious Schools.* It is central, as our last General Chapter says, because this Pastoral is directly connected to our very being and to the witness of life that we give, and to our acts, which seek to invite those to whom we dedicate ourselves to be able to give a suitable answer to their vocations; because it places us Piarists where God wants to place us, as mediators between his call and the free

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and generous hearts of young people; because by means of this we feel co-responsible for the construction of the Church and of the Order; because it is clear that through the Vocational Pastoral we are not looking for life for ourselves, but for children and young people, especially the most needy of them; and because we know that the Piarist life and mission is the goal of many young people and that we have to work so that they can discover this and give their essential response to it.

I should like to underline two small contributions so that I can show you that it is really possible to say that the Vocational Pastoral is fundamental:

1 - Firstly, we must do all that is possible so that, within the field of the Vocational Pastoral, all Demarcations have a **project, a person responsible and a team**. Where there is no project, no person responsible nor a team this does not exist as a real priority in a Demarcation. Let us not fool ourselves on this point, which is so central - neither must we accept any less than this. A project which indicates lines to follow, objectives, actions, duties, and which allows us to know where we are and where we are going. A person responsible who has courage, support and an ability to push forward. And a team with which one can think, can find topics for reflection, whose members will provide support, and through which what is most important is always in view. If this does not happen, then this priority does not exist in a Demarcation. With some exceptions based upon individuals, who may well be exceptional themselves, nothing has worked and nothing will work, without a project, without a person responsible, without a coherent team working in harmony. I invite the Superior Majors to take special care of these aspects.

2 - Secondly, turn the method "**Sowing + proposal + assistance + welcome**" into a line of clear decision-taking and for orientation of our vocational work. Each of these stages contains in itself extraordinarily rich content and opportunities, as we see through many projects and work that we are doing. The four stages are complementary, though different, and each of them has a special interest of its own. And what is most important is that the four of them are inter-dependent. A Demarcation without a welcoming house or which thinks that they all fulfill this role - and it is often the case that this is the same thing - or without clear lines about where the "door of entry" to the Order is, will find it difficult to propose vocations or to assist them with real and proper attractive goals which will convince the young people of today. This is only one example of the way in which these four categories in which we are called to organize our vocational work are linked.

A FINAL PROPOSAL

In a some months' time, in 2012 we shall remember the 400th anniversary of the entry into the Pious Schools of a young man who has been loved by all Piarists of

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all times and first of all by Calasanz, Glicerio Landriani. Before the Pious Schools were organized as a part of Religious Life, he had already joined Calasanz as he was attracted by the mission and supported by his experience of faith and his desire to follow the Lord. Because of his premature death, he was the first professed religious of the Paoline Foundation, preceding even the Holy Founder himself. He left witness of his vocation written for us and I take a brief paragraph from it, with some license: *"I find myself in the Pious Schools of Rome. I came here without looking for it, only for pure obedience. It is certainly true that my heart much desired this, but I did not show this so as not to show affection for any one thing, but so that I should in all things be resigned to the will of Our Lord God. I am now certain of having the vocation of the Lord God and I hope that the Lord will use me as He wishes for this work of His, which is so very important that it astonishes me"*.

The General Congregation wishes to work with the General Secretariat of the Pastoral Vocation so that during 2012, the 400th anniversary of a young man like Glicerio's joining of the new Pious Schools, should be a *specialty vocational* year for the Order, so that certain events and enterprises may be carried forward to encourage in all of us greater ability to sow the vocational seed, to propose vocations, to accompany them and to welcome them. We are already beginning to work on this and we invite you to provide us with suggestions and proposals.

I invite you with enthusiasm and conviction to renew our dedication to the new Piarist vocations and to place this, which is a gift and a duty, at the heart of our Piarist life: in our prayers, in our dedication and in our daily lives as Piarists.

Let us ask God to grant the Pious Schools the gift of new vocations and grant all us Piarists the gift of fidelity to our vocations. With my fraternal embrace, full of hope,

Pedro Aguado
Father General