

THE PIARIST CHARISM TODAY

I. OUR CHARISM IN THE HISTORY

1. Our foundational charism rose in the Church by the work of the Spirit in our Father and Founder Joseph Calasanz (1557-1648). The charism began getting its profile and characteristic features in Rome, throughout a process that took about twenty-five years (1597-1622).
2. God prepared, in the person of Calasanz, a mediator to enrich His Church with a new charismatic gift. He bestowed upon Calasanz, natural conditions and the environment of a family that provided an excellent and long Christian and cultural formation. The Almighty called him to priesthood whose ministry he exercised in different pastoral and sacerdotal missions. In 1592, God led him to Rome where He showed Calasanz the ecclesiastic mission he was called to.
3. In the early years of his stay in the Eternal City, providential circumstances took Calasanz to a singular encounter with Jesus Christ. From an evangelical experience of aperture to reality, he reached maturity together with social and spiritual sensibility. This personal evolution of our Holy Founder, deeply felt since 1596 in both spheres of his experience, prepared his spirit to receive a gift from God at Santa Dorotea. In the meantime he was looking for a solution to the spiritual and cultural necessities of children of the popular social classes, in order to contribute to the vitality of the Church and the transformation of the society of his time
4. In the Spring of 1597, Calasanz, as a member of the Confraternity of the Twelve Apostles, visited the neighborhood of the Trastevere and in Santa Dorotea's parish he discovered a small parochial school. This event was decisive to show to his heart, the best path for his life. That school, properly re-arranged as far as students and teachers was concerned, became the starting point for Calasanz' definitive vocational response. It also meant the germ of the Pious School since the Fall of that same year of 1597.
5. This charism was received by Calasanz, above all, as the acceptance of a new evangelizing and educational mission of which his first companions also took part. This determined a particular relationship among them, sharing not only the ministry, dwelling place, prayers and goods in a more stable community. Finally, this particular relationship was expressed when Calasanz and a small group of followers embraced a style of religious life which consolidated and gave unity to what had been done and lived up to that moment. The Church approved it as a Congregation in 1617 and as an Order with a specific vow, in 1622, under the name of Order of the Regular Poor Clerics of the Mother of God of the Pious School.
6. Therefore, the Calasanzian charism was manifesting itself progressively and it was approved by the Church as a Christian educational mission destined to children and youths shared and lived in a community of religious life, carried out by people consecrated to God, mainly priests.

7. In the following years until his death, Joseph Calasanz promoted the expansion of the charism, took special care in the incarnation of the foundational gift and defended it against experiences and interpretations that did not respond to the intuition of the origins...
8. Calasanz was the founder of the first religious Order specifically devoted to popular Christian education through the school. He always insisted on three charismatic features, germinally present from the beginning, explicitly stated in the years of expansion and conflict. They were: to give priority to education since early childhood, to education of the poor, and to education in piety.
9. Spiritual father of his sons, Calasanz promoted among his religious, a spirituality in harmony with the project or way of "mixed" life designed in the already mentioned Constitutions. There are attitudes such as filial confidence in God, identification with the crucified Christ, docility to the Spirit, dedication to the Mother of God, ecclesiastic and liturgical sense, and characteristic virtues such as piety, holy fear of God, poverty and humility, charity and patience, self-donation and abnegation, diligence and simplicity, paternal love and generosity, hope and joy.
10. Calasanz' testimony of life and teaching regarding our charismatic identity within the Christian community, constitutes the most precious heritage for his religious, the Piarists. Throughout its history our Order, in spite of its limitations and with the exception of short periods of crisis or disorientation, has always had a clear vision of the inherited charism and, therefore, its life-style, its specific ministry and an organic structure. All these are the components that make up the ecclesiastical identity of the Order.
11. Our Order bears witness of fidelity to its charismatic identity throughout these centuries, in the statements of the Popes about the life and work of the Congregation and Order of the Pious Schools, since Paul V up to John Paul II, the Pontiff of this time.
12. In this same level of re-affirmation of our Piarist identity, and in addition, with a practical sense of adequation to different circumstances, the General Chapters of the Order have manifested themselves since the beginning.
13. In the atmosphere of renovation brought about by the Vatican II the Special General Chapter of 1967-69 took place. In it, a synthesis of pontifical doctrine and of the previous General Chapters were gathered in the Declarations about the following topics; the Calasanzian charism; the nature and peculiar goal of our Order; the Calasanzian spirituality, and the Decree about Christian education, conciliar renovation of the schools and other means of apostolate.
14. In more recent years the more operative collaborations of the last four General Chapters (1973, 1979, 1985 and 1991) have been really important. They promoted the post-conciliar renovation of the Order and its adequation to our current times, according to the foundational charism. The Chapters' determinations were reflected as a whole in the drafting of the last Constitutions approved by the Holy See and in the Rules.

15. Today, convened to the XLIV General Chapter, celebrated in the IV Centenary of the beginning of the Calasanzian School at Santa Dorotea, we acknowledge in this gift a call addressed to religious and lay people for a greater creative fidelity and we wish to clarify to our religious brothers, the grandeur and depth of the gift received. For this recognition we have discerned how this charism is lived today and how it is interpellated by the urgencies of the world today.

II DESCRIPTIVE SYNTHESIS OF THE PIARIST CHARISM

16. After 400 years of life and development of the Charism received by St. Joseph Calasanz for the good of the Church and of the world, the Order of the Pious Schools recognizes itself as an institute of consecrated apostolic life, of priestly character, made up of religious in community of life and mission, with a specific and peculiar ministry, according to the Constitutions.
17. Because of this charism, we, Piarist religious,
- are called by the Father in the Spirit, to a life of Consecration by professing the evangelical counsel following Jesus Christ as Poor of the Mother of God, according to Calasanz' path in attitude of continuous conversion and formation;
 - are summoned to a style of fraternal life in community, prophetic sign of union within the People of God and in full communion with it, so that the world believe;
 - are sent as co-operators with Truth to evangelize by means of integral education in Piety and Letters, with patience and charity, to children and youths, especially the poor, since the early years, and thus show the sanctity of the Church and collaborate in the formation of the person and in the transformation of society.
18. The Pious Schools consider as their own and characteristic means to carry out their mission, the Christian popular school, organized with simple and efficacious methods. They assume as their own, any other way oriented to form childhood and youth in order to lead them to Christ.
19. As a work of the Church, the Order is called to recognize the participation in its charism, of other members of the People of God, who in different degrees and modalities wish to establish a bond with it. The Order feels itself sent to all children and youths of the world. It is also ready, in case of necessity, to help the neighbour with other ecclesiastic services.

II. THE CREATIVE FIDELITY THE SPIRIT DEMANDS US TODAY

20. The charism has already been described. Considering its present attainments and the challenges the world comes to show us today, we want to point out what our adequate and up-to-date responses are. In them, we keep faithful to what we have received from Calasanz and the today of God, in accordance with the paths of the Spirit.

We believe that **conversion** and the **dynamics of discernment** that made Calasanz' foundational experience possible, constitute the central point of what

the Spirit demands us today. Upon this, and on our capacity to open to processes of personal and community growth, will essentially depend the truth and efficacy of our responses to the challenges of the world of these times.

The creative fidelity the Spirit demands nowadays, affects our identity as consecrated in communion for the mission.

Consecration.

21. In different ways, the Spirit of the Lord is inviting us to renovate our minds and hearts in search of our essence, keeping up with the times so that the image of Christ becomes more visible in us.

With that purpose, it is necessary:

- The constant proclamation of the Gospel to all people, communities and demarcations from the charismatic perspective of our Constitutions and in accordance with Calasanz' Christian experience.
- The cultivation of liturgical life in our communities, as well as a longer and more intense prayer, and the cultivation of spiritual accompanying in such a way that our life can be really called "mixed" in Calasanz' words, that is a life simultaneously active and contemplative.

A spiritual renovation that leads us to stir up, shelter and form the new vocations that God sends us.

22. Living our religious consecration rooted in the Baptism, and living a Church-Communion experience, we believe that the relationship with the laity must be cultivated in its pluralistic manifestation.

The groups of lay people that look for a way to share our charism with us, are of great importance and require special attention.

Communion.

23. Our **Piarist** life is essentially in community and as such it has to be a sign, a testimony and a prophecy of the Kingdom.

With that purpose we must promote:

- The recovery of the community as a theological and primordial place of our charism, renewed in love and poverty as prophetic signs of keeping up with the times.
 - The conversion of all the members of the community by means of an adequate planning to potentiate interpersonal relationships.
 - The offer of new apostolic fields to those who reach the age of retirement, for them to go on living the Piarist mission.
24. The community life to which we have been called by the Calasanzian charism, takes us to a closer communication of goods and persons among places and demarcations. This encourages today, in a very special way, the missionary

dimension of the Order, as well as the generosity and availability of many, to carry out other Piarist projects.

This communication of persons and goods ask us actual achievements, for instance,

- an agreement in the Council of Major Superiors to undertake projects of the Order, to which all the demarcations co-operate;
- the creation of the necessary houses or interdemarcationality works;
- the simplification of the processes of adscription and incardination to other demarcations;
- a continuous progress in the economical centralization and in the present renovation of our economy.

25. Calasanz' broad-minded attitude and receptiveness show the way. He asks the communion to which we have been summoned and promotes the following attitudes in us:

- dialog with and respect to all beliefs and life-options different from ours;
- defense and equality of all persons facing discriminating and xenophobic situations, to build up a more humane and fraternal world;
- clear manifestation of the Christian and cultural identity of our works;
- the acceptance and welcoming reception of people of all social classes and different religious beliefs.

Mission.

26. Calasanz said: "If boys from their earliest years, are instructed diligently in Piety and Letters, it must be expected that their whole life will be a happy one". This thought configures our global specific ministry as the performance of an evangelizing educational service that covers all the ages until maturity. It is especially in the early years when the basic structures of a person are built. And those structures will last for the rest of his life.

From this Calasanzian fundamental intuition, the following points must be stressed:

- to consider children as the first receivers of our mission, mainly the defenseless and abandoned either in an open or hidden way;
- to give priority and to revitalize our attention to the education of the little ones, devoting persons and resources to such aim;
- to create for those little ones, positive and receptive educational environment;
- to valorate the cultivation of children's inner lives and prayers, as well as the attention to their families, as necessary activities to educate them;
- to be always alert and watchful to new pedagogical and educational methods as well as to new technologies;
- to be creative in all the aspects concerning education with a critical aperture to the transformation of society;
- to potentiate the education for social promotion and voluntaryism, in all of our works;
- to give much importance to non-formal education, assuming as a very up-to-date task, the formation in and for spare time.

27. Calasanz' evident option for the poor children, gives a clear universal sense to our ministry. Let us remember his words: "We will never look down on them...because our Institute was founded for them". In order to keep this universal sense, we shall educate preferentially, those who, even now, constitute the majority of mankind.

Encouraged by this universal character Calasanz stamped on his work, let us underline the following criteria:

- to re-affirm as characteristic of our Order, the preferential option for the poor;
 - to transform our works so that the poor have a privileged reception in them;
 - to offer the most adequate type of formation and teachings for each place, so as to enable them to perform their professional activity.
 - to resource to all types of agreements and subsidies to lower the teaching expenses for the families, making education attainable for the majority;
 - to consider among the poorest, children without schooling, those with necessity of integration, those with school failure and some other difficult cases from ours or other schools;
 - to promote the full incorporation to culture and society of the marginated, by means of adequate educational programs;
 - to go to the poor countries which are in strong need of our educational work.
28. The education in human letters and sciences Calasanz promoted, is founded on the Christian faith. This faith must progressively enter into the different cultures so as to reach their complete evangelization. In this regard, the priority of our integral ministry is to educate "principally, the Christian doctrine and piety". According to this Calasanzian purpose, we promote the following lines of action:
- to look at each person with love and help him in his Christian education which confirms and raise human values;
 - to give priority to evangelization, in our works;
 - to create and encourage in all of them, authentic Christian communities which evangelize by educating.
 - to consider the pastoral as a preferential objective of our educational projects, devoting to that aim, enough persons and means.
 - to privilege catechesis as the fundamental Piarist activity to favor a sincere acceptance of the message and the person of Jesus, as well as the integration of the Christian community;
 - to form our students in the love to the Church and to the sacraments;
 - to make of our faith a transversal axis to plenify, and integrate the student's whole personality;
 - to promote in the educational world, an open dialog between the faith and culture of our times.

Conclusion.

29. Let us thank God Father for the charism received from Calasanz as a gift from the Spirit to follow Jesus in our priestly and religious life, and to serve the Church with the specific ministry he began in the Church. Ever since and for four hundred years, many brothers of ours, as disciples of Calasanz, have been transmitted the same charism of the Founder and they have mantained it, lived it, deepened it and faithfully developed it in different historical circumstances.

30. At the threshold of the third millenium and in a world of profound changes, we receive the same gift. We are invited by the Church to live this charism in a creative and dynamic way.

May the grace of God act on us so that we can faithfully achieve our vocation, under the protection of Mary, responding to the necessities of the childhood and youth of our time, **for the glory of God and the benefit of the neighbor.**

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APPENDIX I

PRESENT ACHIEVEMENTS OF OUR CHARISM

1. Ever since their foundation, the Pious Schools have been following the Founder's steps. They have lived and incarnated Calasanz's charism in a variety of situations, moments, cultures and ecclesiologies. For centuries, many Founders of Religious Congregations (both male and female) have nourished themselves from his charism and spirituality, giving life to the Calasanzian Family and to many manifestations of associative character.

Since our Special General Chapter (1967-1969) our Order has been advocated to the renovation of the Piarist life, at personal, in community, demarcational and general levels, following the patterns and lines of the Church.

2. This renovation has been positively helped by the following facts:

- the publication of the Constitutions and Rules and their progressive assimilation;
- the new position of the Order according to the new ecclesiology;
- the renovation of the community prayer (*Liber Precum*);
- the strengthening of life in community;
- the practice of Spiritual Exercises directed by Piarists;
- the courses on spiritual, theological, biblical, pastoral, pedagogical and Calasanzian renovation;
- the configuration of the initial formation according to the patterns and lines established by the Church;
- the programmatic lines of the Order;
- the research works, publications and meetings about the Calasanzian character;
- the expansion of the Order in countries of mission;
- the growing sensibility concerning Piarist topics.

3. The humane and spiritual vitality of the Piarist persons and communities, is fundamental –according to Calasanz's thought- to qualify the evangelizing objective of our mission as well as of the means and works to achieve it.

4. In June 1997, the Order carries out its mission on behalf of the Church, in 34 countries in four continents. We, Piarists, are 1458 in 231 religious houses. Sixteen per cent of the total number of religious, are novices and juniors. Therefore, 235 correspond, to the initial level.
5. There are 151 Piarist educational Centers. Most of them, correspond to pre-school formation, primary and secondary levels. However there are also centers of professional formation and of university level. Those centers are attended by 661 Piarists, 89 priests and religious coming from other institutes and 5592 lay people. The total number of students goes up to 115805; of them, 29947 are fully or partially gratuitous (tuition-free).
6. Likewise, the Piarists pastorally assist 84 parishes with around 700 groups of children, youths and adults and they also assist 136 public churches.
7. There is a remarkable expansion of the Order in countries of mission with new strategies and plannings. Besides our presence in Europe, we are in many countries of America, in five African nations (Senegal, Equatorial Guienne, Camerron, Ivory Coast and Gabon) and in three countries of Asia (Japan, India and Philippines).
8. In addition to the afore-mentioned educational and pastoral works, the Order promotes others which have lately developed (in the last decades) as formative centers for professors, parents' schools, editorials, houses for retreats and spiritual meetings, juvenile centers, street-children houses, primary schools for adults, schools for preceptors and catechists, juvenile movements, social works, volunteer groups, biblical formation groups and cultural groups.
9. In these years we have deepened our connection with the other Institutes of the Calasanzian Family. The same has happened with other religious Congregations and local Churches.
10. We feel and valorate a greater and efficacious presence of the laity in relationship with our charism.

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APPENDIX II

CHALLENGES OF THE WORLD TODAY

1. Some of the challenges of the contemporary world, directly interpellate our charism. We gather them together within the three environments that configurate our identity: consecration, communion and mission.

CONSECRATION

2. Facing the culture and civilization of our world which seems to have lost all trail of God, the first great challenge we, as religious, have, is “to make visible all the wonders God wants to do now through consecrated life”. This renovation of our life of consecration lays before us these main aspects or particular challenges:
 - to continue Calasanz’ path of following Christ with creative fidelity, as the Constitutions establish;
 - to form ourselves permanently in all the aspects of our life, mainly in the theological, spiritual and contemplative dimensions;
 - to be able to draw and form new and numerous vocations;
 - to become sign and prophecy within society;
 - to respond to the challenges of the present world with authentic chastity, poverty and obedience as the already mentioned Exhortation calls for;

COMMUNION

3. In a world characterized by individualism, lack of solidarity and by loathing, religious communities must be the expression especially significative and joyful of the love and unity that Christ sets forth as condition so that the world believe.

The diversity of values that community life has discovered in these past years and the circumstances it goes through, lead us to respond to new challenges:

- to live from evangelical projects above all;
 - to affirm the centrality of the community life and to valorate the different community ministers, among them, that of animator;
 - to find responses to situations of slow aging or progressive reduction in the number of its members.
4. Amidst a world more and more inter-related and at the same time without solidarity, the expression of a fraternal community demands us a more intense interpersonal communication.
This is supposed to be a real threat:
 - to the union and unity of the whole Order and of our Order and the entire Church;
 - to the mobility and communion of goods and persons, in order to animate the newer or weak demarcations above all;
 - to the Piarist missionary presence in the places more in need of our testimony and ministry.
 5. Another important and evident sign of the times, is the laity’s participation in the life and mission of the Church.

Our comprehension and ecclesiastic life as People of God require that we share the Christian vocation of the following of Jesus with all their members. We are required to offer the laity to participate in our charism, as a real means to carry out this following.

This participation, in turn, sets forth the following issues:

- to recognize that the charism also lies in lay people;
- how to form them from the spiritual and Calasanzian points of view;
- in some cases, how to integrate them to the Order by means of apt juridical procedures.

6. The social and ecclesiastic plurality we live in, with their corresponding resonance in our Order and the religious and ideological pluralism that surrounds us, invite us to establish, welcoming relations with blessing and love in the Spirit. Thus, the Pious Schools will remain being the tolerant and open-minded institution it has always been.

MISSION

7. The world today has particular characteristics:

Children are not respected and they are instrumentalized; the existence of new poverties; the educational unablensness of many families; the fragmentation and pragmatism of teaching; in many cases, the lack of sensible and capable educators. These features of the world today, bring about various challenges to the fundamental priorities of the Piarist mission.

8. The Calasanzian intuition to educate a person since early childhood has a fertile validity in the present time, especially in those places and environments where it is hard to recognize a person as a child of God.

Therefore, and as a contribution to so much pedagogical search and research in so many educational environments that society generates and controls, we feel called to recreate the Calasanzian praxis of humanizing education since the early years of life. Such humanizing education:

- assures educational environments as well as methodologies of quality;
- inspires humane and Christian breath to a wide scope of means, techniques and cultures now in abundance;
- encourages families to re-encounter themselves as the site of identification and growth of the child as a person.

9. The Calasanzian intuition of renovating society by the promotion of popular classes, is extremely valid in the tremendously unfair world we live in. This situation calls for:

- a clear, preferential option for the poor;
- our feeling interpellated by millions of children who need educators, especially in under-developed countries;
- our doing the best and the most so that our education may be feasible to popular classes, with a special sensibility for any child who due to social, moral, psychological impediments or to his condition as emigrant, has no possibility to get a harmonious growth;
- our facing to the new forms of poverty emerging in the world of today.

10. The Calasanzian intuition to transform society “**by educating in piety and letters**”, constitutes a challenge even today, in a secularized society full of anti-values, but called to the plenitude of the Kingdom.

It becomes an urgency, when listening to the ecclesiastical call for a “**new evangelization**”. It sets forth the challenge to create authentic Christian communities in our works, where the pastoral ministry be exercised at any time, and in such a way, that faith illuminates and penetrates the cultural and educational process transversally.

Among the “areopagus” John Paul II mentions in the Exhortation **Vita Consecrata**, the reference to our mission concerns us particularly: “The Church has always been conscious that education is an essential issue in its mission... A specific task in this field corresponds to consecrated persons, because they are called to introduce the radical testimony of the goods of the Kingdom in the educational horizon”. We also consider as very important, what concerns to the educational “culture-faith” dialog.

11. To all these challenges the world presents today, we wish to respond generously with the hope that the wonders of God will also be manifested in our times if, (as our Founder in his time did) we give responses to the necessities of today, creatively faithful to the initial inspiration received by Calasanz and recognized by the Church.

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