



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PIARIST FATHERS**

Saturday, 5 July 1997

Dear Brothers,

1. I am pleased to extend my cordial greeting to you all, gathered in Rome for your General Chapter, which is being celebrated on the fourth anniversary of the opening of the first free popular public school in Europe, founded by St Joseph Calasanz in the spring of 1597 in the Trastevere district of Rome.

By recalling the past you intend to analyze the present in order to accept its challenges. This is what the theme of your chapter assembly asks of you, inviting you to reflect on *the Piarist charism and ministry today*. You wish to question yourselves on how to respond to the demands of the present time with a marked sensitivity for what the Church and society need today, but remaining faithful to the spirit of your origins. I must encourage you in this very timely resolution.

I address my greetings to Father José Maria Balcells Xuriach, Superior General of the Congregation, and thank him for the sincere words he has addressed to me on behalf of all present. I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the entire family of the Piarists for its invaluable work in the difficult field of education, encouraging you in this important service in favour of the young generations. This apostolate is not easy, but it indispensable for the spread of the Gospel and Christian culture, as well as for the formation of mature and responsible believers.

2. Your founder thoroughly understood this and did not limit himself to beginning a "school for everyone", but took Christ as his model and sought to pass on to young people the wisdom of the Gospel as well as the profane sciences, teaching them to perceive the loving action of God the Creator and the Redeemer in their lives and in history.

After the example of the divine Master, who "saw the great throng, and ... had compassion on

them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things" (Mk 6:34), he devoted himself particularly to the poor. St Joseph Calasanz can therefore rightly be considered the true founder of the modern Catholic school, whose goal is the integral formation of man and open to everyone. The initiative he took 400 years ago retains its validity today since, in the secularized environment in which the new generations are growing up, it is very important to offer them a school inspired by Christian principles. Precisely for this reason, in the [Letter](#) which I sent a few days ago to your Superior General, I again expressed the wish that "democratic countries may finally implement effective parity for non-State schools, a parity which at the same time respects the latter's educational programme" (24 June, *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 23 July, p. 2).

3. The object of your reflection during this General Chapter is the *specific mission* of Piarist religious in the world of education today. In this regard I wish to emphasize that as religious, you are called to bring to your work in the schoolroom the characteristics that correspond to your special charism which represents an important ecclesial contribution. Your work in schools must primarily reflect your total consecration to God in following Christ. This allows you to draw the attention of the world of culture to that transcendent horizon, in which the question of the meaning of human life is fully resolved, in the light of God's plan in Christ through the Spirit.

The values of the faith must permeate your pastoral and pedagogical projects as well as their concrete achievement. Sustained by love and dedication to Jesus Christ, you are called to guide those whom God entrusts to your care, directing them with your advice in their response to the call which God addresses to each one.

Furthermore, as sons of Calasanz you will not fail to give priority to the education of those who for some reason are marginalized and excluded. Faithful to your original charism and your traditions, you will study how to do all you can to offer these young people the chance to overcome that serious form of poverty that the lack of cultural and religious formation constitutes.

I would also like affectionately to remind you that your specific presence in the world of Christian education will only be possible if each one of the Piarists and all the communities of the Order diligently cultivate a profound Gospel spirituality, nourished by listening to the word of God, by liturgical celebrations, by personal and community prayer, by the practice of virtue and by constant ascetic commitment. Your founder gave you an example of all this and also left you a written memorial in the Constitutions and in his letters.

4. Dear brothers, from the very start lay teachers have co-operated in your mission; their number and the quality of their contribution has increased in our time. Your Founder recommended you to consider those who were closest in spirit and dedication to your ideal as true members of the community. With their witness to faith and their professional competence, they become a concrete and living example of the lay vocation for all the students.

Indeed, it is the proper task of lay Christian teachers to integrate both faith and culture in their personal lives and teaching activity, thus bringing the Gospel into our secular world. They should not do this in a purely theoretical or intellectual way, but in carrying out their educational mission: in the daily contact with their students they can help them to combine human and Christian values in a vital way. Thus lay educators contribute to the evangelization of the young generations and, through them, the Christian renewal of the future society.

5. Dear Piarist Fathers, I hope your chapter assembly will yield abundant fruit and I hope that each one will be able to draw constantly from the riches of the teaching of Christ the Master, whose words "are spirit and life" (Jn 6:64), for the benefit of all those who are entrusted to your teaching ministry.

May Mary most holy, whose name shines in the actual title of your Order of "the Poor of the Mother of God", and to whom St Joseph Calasanz so often commended the institute, assist you always and make your apostolic labours fruitful. Remember what the Saint asked of you, urging you to invoke her with full confidence: "Let your insistence be with our Mother and not with men, because she is never disturbed by our insistence, but men are" (*Letters*, 58). Do not fear, therefore, to be "insistent" with the Blessed Virgin, whom you venerate in a special way as your Mother!

With these sentiments, I sincerely impart my Blessing to you and willingly extend it to your confrères and co-workers and to all those to whom your daily educational commitment is addressed.

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