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INITIAL GREETING AND PRESENTATION

Thank you all for your presence here. We know that we are very busy and that it is not easy to book these days. Thank you for that effort and for all the work that each of you do for the good of the Pious Schools and of so many people who are served from the Piarist mission.

And welcome. Because all of you, and all of us, are highly needed to carry out the Piarist project that unites us and encourages us to continue working.

We want to dedicate this first session to some practical and organizational aspects. But, first, it is convenient to present and situate this meeting that we are going to begin.

We are starting the III Advisory Council of the Itaka – Escolapios Network. We held the first Council in May 2012, the second took place right here in January 2015 and we are now beginning the third one.

We begin by situating this III Council

Although the “**backstory**” begins on October 15, 1985 with the Itaka **Association**, an important step is taken on March 21, **2001** with the creation of the Itaka – Escolapios **Foundation**, by the Province of Vasconia, and of a Fraternity, to have a legal entity in which together we could undertake certain projects and works of the Piarist mission.

On January 28, **2005**, in a meeting of Fr. General, Fr. Jesús Lecea, with the Provincials of Spain in Barcelona, the possibility was raised of opening the Itaka – Escolapios Foundation to other Provinces of the Order as a “**resource office** for cooperation.” This led to the opening in that same year 2005 of **other offices** in Zaragoza, Valencia and other places to serve the Piarist mission in the dependent countries of Vasconia,

On April 16, **2011** the **agreement of the General Congregation** was signed with the Itaka – Escolapios Foundation in Rome to be considered a reality of collective charismatic and juridical integration and to jointly promote the Piarist mission. The Statutes were modified to have a more representative Board of Trustees and for the General Congregation and the General Fraternity Council to become part of it.



And so, we arrived at the **I Advisory Council**, held in Bilbao from May 21 to 25, **2012**, with the participation of Fr. General, all the Provincials that participated at that time, the General Fraternity Council, the Board of Trustees and the coordinators of the different teams from Itaka – Escolapios... as has been maintained in the other Advisory Councils. The objective was to bring together the main people in charge of Itaka – Escolapios to share the moment we were living and to guide the future. It was very interesting and there were a few conclusions that were included in the material delivered.

From January 26 to 28, **2015**, we held the **II Advisory Council** right here. In addition to sharing the moment of Itaka – Escolapios in the different places and preparing the Strategic Plan for the next six years, which you also have in the material delivered, and a few conclusions, an important step was taken with the implementation of the **Programmatic Letter**, signed later in the framework of the General Chapter of Esztergom on July 9, 2015 by Fr. General, the Council of the General Fraternity and the President of the Itaka – Escolapios Foundation. With it, an **International Piarist Network** was set up wherein the Demarcations and Fraternities were invited to participate. This is how a Network began, with some programmatic lines and a strategic plan.

Now, we are starting the **III Advisory Council**, fulfilling the commitment to convene it every three years to follow the rhythm of the Pious Schools and with the aim of continuing to advance as an international network.

Following this Council **another gathering** will take place with the General Congregation, the General Fraternity Council, the Participation Secretariat and the Major Superiors who have a Fraternity in their demarcation. We will coincide enough people in both moments. It's not by chance. Itaka – Escolapios has a lot to do with the Fraternity. In this systemic vision in which we are advancing in the Pious Schools we discover that the keys to life, that the different areas of our life and mission are deeply interrelated, that it is necessary to work all the elements and to do it together to be able to advance more. From our Itaka – Escolapios Network we want to collaborate in this direction.

This is the framework in which we find ourselves and from where we have to set off.

Objective of this III Advisory Council

In these days we intend to share the moment that the Itaka – Escolapios Network is living and mark some **future steps**... as we have done in the previous Councils.

We will start with a session to present the **different possibilities** offered by Itaka – Escolapios. One of the features of our entity is the flexibility in the way we participate in it: some Provinces and Fraternities are sharing many projects and actions, while others are doing it in a more limited way. It will be good to know these potentialities, not only as information or for each of them to see where they can continue to travel, but also to enrich them all and to mark steps that we should follow from Itaka – Escolapios to serve the Pious Schools and their mission more and better.

We will dedicate some time to inform about the **march of Itaka – Escolapios** in the different countries and Demarcations, as well as in the General Teams. Having this general overview will help us to know each other more, to value more what is done in different places, to share with others and to learn from everyone, to design our joint action and the individual action of each one of us here.

After this situation analysis, it is up to **Fr. General** to help us reflect on what we are already achieving in Itaka – Escolapios and how we could continue walking together to respond to the keys of the Order's life and to continue advancing as Pious Schools in the Piarist mission.

The **Council of the General Fraternity** will also make its contribution in this line, from their responsibility, presenting the value they find in Itaka – Escolapios and what they think could be achieved in the coming years.

With all these ingredients, it will be time to define together the **future clues**, the concrete actions that should be implemented... and everything that we consider advisable as an Advisory Council.

We have a good Advisory Council

To carry out this task we have a good Council. We have the complete list with this information in the material delivered. But it is good to be aware that in this group of people we present a few Piarist realities.

We are here

- the General Congregation,
- the ten Major Superiors participating in the Network,
- the Council of the General Fraternity,
- the members of the Board of Trustees,
- the Executive Commission,

- people with special responsibility in the teams and in the Network.

This Advisory Council that we make up offers an interesting opportunity to reflect together on the Pious Schools that we need now and in the future, to see possibilities for those areas in which each one of us has more responsibility and to mark some guidelines for the whole of our Itaka – Escolapios Network.

These days also offer us a good **opportunity** to talk with each other, for more personal interviews, to ask each other, for more specific meetings (some are already scheduled and others can also take place).

In this group there is a lot of experience, a lot of knowledge, many possibilities, many responsibilities... and these days are perfect for sharing them.

We begin this III Advisory Council

I invite you to begin this Council in an **attitude of discernment**. I hope it is not just a pleasant Piarist encounter. Hopefully it is an opportunity to ask the Lord, to ask ourselves, what more can we do to live as Piarists, to carry out the mission to which Jesus calls us through Calasanz and so many people who need us.

That is why we need an attitude of **communion**, of “Order mentality” as we usually say, thinking together as Piarists, religious and lay men and women, in this path we are doing as Itaka – Escolapios.

That is why we need an attitude of listening, of openness, of **communication**.

That is why we need an attitude that is also contemplative and **prayerful**.

I invite you now, before moving on to the most practical aspects of organization, to have a moment of prayer.

PRAYER

Luke 12, 54s

Jesus also said to the crowd: “When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, “It’s going to rain,” and it does. And when the south wind blows, you say, “It’s going to be hot,” and it is. Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don’t know how to interpret this present time, how can you not judge for yourselves what is just?”

Reflexion (The video of the Pope here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nMq2CRHwRU>)

The time in which we live requires us to develop a profound ability to discern... Discern, from all voices, which is the voice of the Lord, which is the voice of Him that leads us to the Resurrection, to Life, and the voice that frees us from falling into the “culture of death.” We need to “read from within” what the Lord asks of us, to live in love and be continuators of this mission of love. Let us pray together so that the whole Church recognizes the urgency of training in spiritual discernment, on a personal and community level.

We pray with the prayer of Jesus the Lord’s Prayer.