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ITAKA-ESCOLAPIOS, A RANGE OF POSSIBILITIES

An example to begin

We all know those multi-purpose knives that can do many functions... and that are normally used for only one. The same could be said today of many devices: the clock, computer programs...

Maybe we find a good example with cell phones, smartphones, which can do many tasks... and most people take advantage of them minimally and perhaps in the least profitable possibilities.

Today we carry in our pocket, in a small device, a telephone, a photo machine, an agenda, e-mail, all the news we want, access to all the information offered by the Internet, entertainment of all kinds, music, reading, GPS, an ever increasing offer of new possibilities... and even many resources to pray.

Some people have, in addition to a “smart phone” that could do everything, a photo machine, a paper diary, a player to listen to music... and who knows how many more devices. And we could do without all of them with that phone that does all that and maybe even better.

It is true that such a capable device can be misused or make us waste time... but not knowing it well or closing ourselves to approaching its possibilities is a way to stay anchored in the past. It is necessary that those of us who have a special responsibility to educate future generations and who are responsible for preparing the Pious Schools of the future, know the possibilities that are already among us and that we use them properly.

Some people still resist the cell phone: “I do not need to carry it on. When I want to make a phone call I find a way...” And they forget that it also serves to locate themselves, which is a service for others as well. Something like this happened with computers and those who resisted using them... or with many of the inventions that change our lives. Maybe it’s not so much what you think you need, but the potentials that we have close to us and the opportunities we can lose.



Something like this can happen with Itaka – Escolapios

These examples can help us to deepen in Itaka – Escolapios and the possibilities it opens up. Our Network has many possibilities, it can respond to many needs, it can open many paths... and we risk staying with a minimum use.

A note that should be taken into account: we do not intend to present a manual of Itaka – Escolapios functions. The objective of this presentation is to open a reflection to complete it among all and enrich us all. Itaka – Escolapios is not a finished reality. It is a path that we are doing every day. Just look in our short history to see the changes produced, the new insights discovered, the initiatives that we continue to implement, the discoveries we continue to make... These days can and should be a good opportunity to open new horizons.

I invite you to write in your notes the questions and doubts that arise... and also any insights and proposals you may come up with. They will be very useful for the next session and to continue advancing in Itaka – Escolapios.

Some possibilities of Itaka – Escolapios

We are going to present some of these possibilities.

1. It serves to get money

What first catches the attention of Itaka – Escolapios is that it serves to get money. And it's true. Each year, on average, almost **one million euros** goes out for Piarist projects from different countries from where they were obtained. Logically it's even more, another **three million euros**, what is achieved and destined in the country with the data from last year.

This amount **could be much higher** if we worked with more time planning, with more clear and defined projects, with a better preparation of those responsible for designing and implementing them. Unfortunately, we have many needs and few projects. We see many calls and challenges, but it is difficult to define the project that could respond to those needs. Today we are missing opportunities to ask for help because we do not have these projects defined and with enough time. It would be good to dedicate people, both religious and lay men and women, to be trained in this field and to work in the Network from each place.

Getting money is something very necessary, colourful... and it's not always the best function of Itaka – Escolapios. Because it is necessary to complement it with a good use

of those resources: I prefer not to put examples of money wasted in projects that have not had continuity nor have achieved the desired objectives. Surely we know all those “white elephants” we have in our countries.

The money we get has an **added value** (we’ll talk about other added values later on). I will explain myself.

There is money that is obtained for a **specific project**: a construction, materials, a vehicle, a concrete action (a well, for example). The most significant ones are those destined for new buildings. **The list here is long:**

- Bolivia: improvements to the four schools and three internships
- Brazil: construction of two social centres, purchase of lar house
- Cameroon: CTC of Bandjoun, school of Bafia, of Yaounde, agrarian school in Menthe, improvements in the other eight primary schools
- Chile: self-construction of housing in Barrancas
- Spain: purchase of a flat, furniture, vehicle...
- Philippines: San Vicente school
- Gabon: Malibe school
- India: collaboration in Aryanad and Kamda
- Indonesia: collaboration in Atambua
- Dominican Republic: cultural centre and school expansion in La Romana
- Venezuela: almost all the Piarist work in Lomas, much in El Trompillo...
- And also other minor projects, where we can highlight vehicles for Bolivia, Brazil, Cameroon, Congo and India.

I couldn’t say now how much money all of this has meant, but it has been a few million euros in recent years (around **15 million in the last ten years**). Undoubtedly, it is a great help and perhaps the most visible of Itaka – Escolapios.

We are referring here to the budgets that we call extraordinary and that depend on whether we get them or not. Here it is necessary to work with time and, if the project is good and falls within the priorities of the funders, it has more possibilities to obtain those resources. It is a type of money that we are getting... and that is very significant. But there is another type of money that we consider even more important: the one that helps sustain those initial projects, year after year, with **regular budgets guaranteed by the Network**. I repeat, guaranteed by the Network, once they have been approved.

This is a very big commitment and a very significant contribution of Itaka – Escolapios. There is little point in starting a project, building a work, if we do not manage to sustain it in time... and we already know that some projects in some countries are not sustainable by themselves now and perhaps in many years.

This is one of the biggest challenges of our Network: **to ensure each year more than one million euros** for the works shared on the Network and to sustain the team of people on the Network that makes them possible. It is money that we have to try to get within the country... and secure it from the whole of the Network if it is not obtained.

The challenge is to try to increase the level of self-financing of the project itself and of the country itself (with the creation of teams, training, accompaniment) by working together and simultaneously searching for sources in all the countries of the Network.

This can only be done with good teamwork and networking. Sometimes we find situations where money is simply requested without further explanations or justifications. Pretending this, which may seem advantageous for those who ask the same thing for several parties, ends up preventing the attainment of resources for them and for the entire Network, usually leads to a misuse of money (too much for some purposes and not enough for others... sometimes it is solved with traps that are not too ethical) and prevents growth as a Demarcation and as a sustainable Piarist mission.

The possibility offered by Itaka – Escolapios is to put a project in the Network, to share it with honesty of information and decisions, to gain efficiency in management and results, in security of sustainability, in transparency and in the creation of Pious Schools of the future.

We get this money through multiple paths: the help of public entities, private entities, stable collaborative partners and specific donations, campaigns, some services we provide and collect and the great contribution of the Piarist “trustees”: the Order and the Fraternity. One piece of information: **each year 140 applications are presented in different entities** (Governments, County Councils, Municipalities, Savings Banks and Banks, Private Entities...), thanks to the **professional work of 13 people** (5.5 full days in total), with a positive result around 65% that depends a lot on how we have responded before. It is a lot of work and a lot of responsibility for efficiency and transparency that has to come from all those who participate in Itaka – Escolapios. Our accounts are audited and published every year.

Getting money is a function of this “smartphone” of Itaka – Escolapios. It is true that we are an NGO, but very particular and much more than that: it is a **sustainable system** to get money that makes it possible to start a project and sustain it over time, it means to achieve it **in an ethical and efficient way**. It’s more than getting money... much more!

2. It helps the organization of the mission

The dynamics of Itaka – Escolapios forces to operate with projects, with equipment, with an annual agreement at the beginning of each year where the objectives, teams and budgets are defined with justifications of accounts, with analysis of the results obtained...

This can be understood as paperwork, as an obligation coming from outside. And it has some difficulties in the places where each religious has his chapel, his money, his action... But it really is an aid to the Piarist organization in each place and in each Province. We are all aware of how hard it is to advance in this basic operation of project, team, calendar, accounts, evaluation, improvement... in each of our Piarist works.

We can say that when Itaka – Escolapios takes a while significant progress is achieved in the forecasting, scheduling, objectives setting and timetable enabling development with its evaluation and improvement, coordinated and sustainable work... which we much need.

The Provincial, who is always the highest authority in Itaka – Escolapios in each country and Demarcation, has this tool that can be very useful for the organization of the mission (and life) of the Province.

Itaka – Escolapios offers a few organizational instruments, among which we can highlight:

- An annual agreement to organize from a Strategic Plan for six years of the entire Network
- An organization with a coordinator, a team and a plan in the Network, Demarcation/country, headquarters
- A follow-up from that team and from the Network with the contact person and the general teams
- An approved budget with its corresponding follow-up and justification
- Some people and places to turn for support whenever necessary

- An experience of networking, in different countries, where we are all contributing
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Itaka – Escolapios helps to organize if it is well located in each country or Province.

But moreover, because Itaka is much more: the same Itaka organization, joint work, general, provincial and local teams, professional dedicated people, cooperative work is a possibility to carry forward the Piarist mission shared in the Network... and the whole Piarist mission. A very real example: if we have a professional in Itaka to carry out economic management, she helps in the management of Itaka... and can also do it in the Province and other works. And the same for other areas of the mission.

To take advantage of this potential means to place Itaka – Escolapios well in the dynamics of Piarist functioning in the place, the country, the Demarcation. If not, it may feel like an added nuisance. If it is well placed, it is a great support.

3. It creates a Piarist network

One very important function of Itaka – Escolapios is to network, to enter into a complex and very rich Network of possibilities.

It unites the Provinces, unites the Fraternities, unites each Province with its Fraternity and/or with the General Fraternity, it unites the people of each place helping them to become aware of belonging and participating in a Piarist network of Order and Fraternity with many other people and works of the Piarist world.

This network is of Piarist sentiment and also of protagonism, of involvement, of personal and community commitment.

Some very concrete examples:

- When we concentrate the effort of **55 Piarist centres of 9 countries** in a Solidarity Campaign in favour of a project we are visualizing and reinforcing a Piarist network characterized by:
 - Knowledge of a reality by all of us... and thus we gain Piarist identity
 - Financial commitment and volunteering... and thus we also gain in involvement
 - Achievement of some economic resources for a project... and thus we gain efficiency and **200,000 euros each year**.

- o Education very close to reality... and thus we complement the educational action
 - o Joint work in each place and in the network... and thus we grow in global Piarist identity
 - o Educational work, with more and more professionalism in the materials and activities proposed... and thus we grow in professional quality.
- We not only talk about solidarity campaigns: we can mention peace campaigns, Piarist campaigns, campaigns supporting initiatives of interest... Having teams in different Provinces and countries, having some experience offers possibilities to network much knowledge, resources, guidance... An example can be www.educa.itakaescolapios.org with hundreds of resources created by all of us and available to all.
- On the economic side, it is also being networked. This is clear with the resources that are being obtained from external entities or partners or from specific actions. But also with the systematic economic sharing, for now, of **three Provinces and five Fraternities**, that put their “tithe” for the projects and needs of the Network. This has an incredible value for the sign that it supposes and for the guaranteed resource that it offers for sustainability. We are talking about an annual average in the last ten years of **330,000 euros from the Provinces and 415,000 from the Fraternities**.
- We can mention the network of people being assigned to another country, or to another locality of the same country, to live a Piarist experience and to promote the Piarist presence and mission. From Itaka – Escolapios, sometimes in its “backstory” phase, **82 people** have been assigned for two or three years to Venezuela, Brazil, Bolivia, Cameroon, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Indonesia... They have been assigned from the Province and the Fraternity through Itaka – Escolapios, which provides training, preparation, accompaniment upon departure and upon return, personal and legal support (contributions, health, financial support), continuity in the assignments so that projects can be sustained and a framework of that experience.
- Today we have **general teams of the network** (the Executive Committee itself, Management, Fundraising, volunteering, training, communication, awareness...), made up more and more by people from different countries, to

share information and resources with the entire Network systemically: more **than 40 people are part of these teams.**

The possibilities of this growing Network are numerous... and there's much to be discovered!

4. It encourages volunteering and convening

We have talked about the assignments, which are a valuable type of Piarist volunteer work. But it does not end with those assignments...

One of the characteristic features of Itaka – Escolapios is volunteering, the gratuity of our commitment, the value of the sign of dedication without reward... so typical of the religious, of the Fraternity and of so many people of good faith that we find in our Piarist environment.

Itaka – Escolapios is sustained thanks to volunteering, promotes it, convenes it, trains it, accompanies it, in an effort to make it a global process for the person and a service for the mission, enriches it with diversity... and we are advancing each year to give it more entity as such.

- Today we have **1,600 “registered” volunteers** (the majority in Spain for now), following the legal regulations of each country, within a volunteer plan that we are enriching, with a specific day of volunteering (March 9), with a general team that drives it...
- In a few places we have “volunteer schools” underway for the older ages of the schools and for people interested.
- Today we can offer a volunteer itinerary according to the time of each volunteer, with different steps to which we can invite them: a time of dedication, some basic knowledge of their work and of our entity, a deeper training in their area of intervention or in the Piarist mission, progressive responsibilities, participation in other activities, an invitation to be part of our processes and groups in the Calasanz Movement...
- Today we can offer people who know us through social networks possibilities of participation in many locations.
- This volunteering program is an educational complement of great value for the Calasanz Movement, for educational action in our schools and works... as well as a very important support for the Piarist mission.

Also here we have another precious function of Itaka – Escolapios. Volunteers are also a good speaker of our reality and a way of convening that goes beyond the usual Piarist spaces. Volunteers, when they live their dedication with enthusiasm, transmit their experience, make known what they are living and are important agents of convening.

Another possibility that is quite close to volunteering is the **collaborating partners** with their regular financial contribution (we do not include here companies or entities that in some cases also contribute in a stable manner). It is another very interesting form of participation financially, for the closeness of people to the Piarist world, for their contribution in making us known where they move, for being also a sign of trust for other people...

A major challenge is to grow in the number of members we have (we do not count the members of the Fraternities and Provinces who are more than just partners): **about 800 members who contribute about 150,000 euros in Spain...** and a horizon for other countries of the Network where it is not yet developed.

5. It strengthens the Fraternity

Itaka – Escolapios offers the Fraternity an **entity to carry out its mission** in a shared way with the Order. Without it, the Fraternity has a very limited functioning or a total legal dependence on the Province: it cannot by itself open an account, receive collaborations, take on a work, purchase something... It would be possible to give the Fraternity a juridical civil entity, something that already exists in some cases, but we avoid possible problems and create a greater bond with the Order with a joint entity like Itaka – Escolapios.

Itaka – Escolapios opens a shared space, not only for that legal aspect, but also to reflect, plan, design, carry out a Piarist mission. The composition of the teams, of the functioning organs, the dynamics of Itaka leads to **give a word to the Fraternity as such**: not only to specific persons of the Fraternity, but to the whole of the Fraternity. This helps to give consistency to the Fraternity. The Programmatic Charter, sign of the adhesion to the Itaka – Escolapios Network, shows this role and facilitates real and institutional participation in the Pious Schools.

Itaka – Escolapios helps to **grow in a Piarist identity** by being a network where “own – shared” projects enter into a global dynamic of the Pious Schools around the world. It helps us to know more, to love more, to connect more with all the Piarist world.

Itaka – Escolapios **gives protagonism** to the Fraternity and makes it feel more part of the Piarist mission, of growth and development where it has participated with its love, its prayer, its volunteering and dedication, its money... and also the Fraternity entity itself.

It is very important for the Fraternity to become aware of its reality of charismatic integration. A Fraternity is not just another group of the Piarist world: it is more than a group of prayer, or work, or training... It is all that, but also a new Piarist subject that the Order and the Province recognize as the face of the Piarist charisma. Taking conscience and making it a reality will depend on many factors: Itaka – Escolapios can greatly help to strengthen the Fraternity, gaining in **identity, entity and capacity** of Piarist service.

6. It strengthens the Province (and the Order)

We have already pointed out in the previous chapters some ways in which Itaka – Escolapios is strengthening the Order and the Provinces (economic support, in the organization, in the network, contributing people, strengthening the Fraternity). Itaka – Escolapios collaborates in that and more:

- Thank God we are **present and collaborating** in those Demarcations that are growing the most, that have more vocations, that are opening new presences... It is a joy for us to be present in the two Provinces of Africa, in Asia, in a large part of America... and throughout the Piarist geography.
- We are happy to be an aid for the **expansion and sustainability** of the Pious Schools, in their growth in new countries, in new presences and in new projects. Our contribution today makes us be present in **200 projects**, some of them large and some of them small, of formal and non-formal education, of evangelization, of solidarity, of growth of the Piarist subject.
- Years ago we made a distinction between Piarist life and mission... and we said that Itaka – Escolapios focused on the mission. Today we see that this distinction is not appropriate because boundaries are not clear and we collaborate in **everything that strengthens the Pious Schools**: supporting the Piarist subject who invigorates the mission is also mission... and quite fundamental! To better explain this we can present our contribution also in the training of religious, in more explicitly pastoral tasks such as the Calasanz Movement or vocation ministry, in supporting the religious community life and the Fraternity... Everything that is Piarist we feel as our own.

- An interesting fact in this sense and possibly little known: **about 75 religious are receiving “their salary” (211,000 euros)** from Itaka – Escolapios, which leads to collaborate in the **strengthening and economic autonomy of the communities and Provinces**. It is a good way to support the sustainability and development of the Order.
- Flexibility in the form of participation in shared projects is also a way to strengthen the Provinces and Order, since they can count on our Network to the extent that they need it and see it convenient in each situation.

7. It offers a new legal framework

The Piarist life and mission are carried in different legal situations.

- It is frequent that some Piarist works have the property and ownership of the corresponding Order or Province... and that's great!
- In many cases the property and/or ownership is not Piarist, but of a Diocese, a public entity, a private entity... and we have an agreement or settlement for a specific period of time or, sometimes, a practice without clear legal coverage.
- Itaka – Escolapios **offers another possibility**: a legally recognized entity (with different forms depending on the countries) that belongs to the Order and also to the Fraternity. In some places it is a civil entity and in other an ecclesial entity (and from there a civil entity). It is a shared ownership that opens another legal framework possibility for the development of our mission.

This can offer something interesting, depending on the different situations and needs, besides being a **legal sharing between the Order and the Fraternity**.

8. More in line with the current Piarist culture

In the Order we have been talking for some time about the need for a systemic vision, a mentality of Order, about the functioning from the presence model, the Christian Piarist Community, the key to life that involves integrating the different modalities of participation in the Pious Schools...

All this has to be specified in each presence with concrete actions. Itaka – Escolapios also contributes a lot in this area:

- **It is a Network in each Province** that helps to situate the Fraternity and all the collaborators around the mission

- **It connects the shared works** in each country and Province... and in the international Network
- It encourages a **mentality and also a very real sharing** of teams, projects, model, human and economic resources...
- It encourages the **shared mission**, being a reality that arises and is sustained from this key
- It is a very appropriate **tool** for the presence team and the Christian Piarist Community

In order to take the steps of the future that we point out in those elements of our Piarist culture and the keys of life of the Order, we also need institutional steps: Itaka – Escolapios is one of these steps.

Today we have, along with other more “traditional” elements (schools, parishes), **four elements that have a great capacity for novelty**, especially when they are combined simultaneously. They are the Order, the Fraternity, the Calasanz Movement and Itaka – Escolapios.

- The **Order**, when it works as more than a sum of Demarcations, with keys of life, joint mentality... it is much enhanced as we are seeing in these years.
- When the **Fraternity** enters, an element is added that enriches the whole of the Pious Schools and expands the possibilities, while the Fraternity comes to life.
- When the **Calasanz Movement** joins these two elements, not only is an interesting initiative added, but the two previous realities have processes of convening, vocational culture, and network that unites the Order and Fraternity... while the Calasanz Movement can exist as such beyond the initiative of some person, work or Province.
- The addition of **Itaka – Escolapios** also introduces another dimension and cannot be understood as one more aspect: it gives new strength to the Order, to the Fraternity, to the Calasanz Movement by being promoted by both in an institutional way... and by multiplying the capacity of the Piarist mission.

9. And more...

We could continue with more possible functions:

- **It helps to the current mission in the schools**, contributing a potential of projects, of shared mission, of another educational focus beyond the school

time, calendar and space... A school, with a religious community and/or of the Fraternity, with a Calasanz Movement and with a headquarters of Itaka – Escolapios is much more than a school. In these moments we are studying the possibility of a transversal program that helps to place political education, social action, the key of social transformation... with more intensity in the schools.

- It helps the **Calasanz Movement**, by offering a certain structure of support to initiate it and of reference as it grows. It is no coincidence that when the Calasanz Movement is integrated into the Itaka – Escolapios Network it becomes bigger and stronger: the synergy with the other projects, the connection of the Fraternity, the training that the schools of official educators can offer... are possibilities more accessible from Itaka – Escolapios.
- It helps the **vocations ministry**, involving more Piarist agents in a more formal way and reaching more people and more areas of these same people and the environment.
- It helps to create **itineraries for the different modalities of participation**, since Itaka – Escolapios is a way of sharing and participating from different realities.
- It helps in the **attitude of “being out”**, by the flexibility of action it offers, by the ability to quickly launch new initiatives.
- It helps in the **development of Non-Formal Education**. It is a field that has great importance today, but always with the risk of personalities and little continuity. A Network like Itaka – Escolapios gives consistency to these projects: it is enough to see the amount of projects that we already have (most of the 200 projects) and their sustainability in resources and people.
- It helps in the **start-up of new projects**, in the places where we are already or in new presences.
- It helps in the **expansion and consolidation of the Order**.
- It helps for the **pastoral and the birth of the Fraternities**.
- It helps in the **path of gaining identity in the Fraternity...**

10. And the most important thing

Itaka – Escolapios offers a **new Piarist space** where we institutionally share the mission (and entity and life) of the Order, the General Fraternity, the Demarcations and the Fraternities that they want. And it is not just any space, but a joint institutional reality with all that this implies.

Having a Fraternity is a **qualitative change for the people who form it and for the Province** that recognizes it. This change manifests itself in many ways: one of them is to have a place shared with the Order that is real, stable, with entity, with possibilities for the future... Itaka – Escolapios also offers this institutional space (that is why we say that Itaka – Escolapios is an entity of collective charismatic and legal integration).

Someone might think that everything we have been mentioning we can already do from the Order... and it is true! In fact, there are many people (from the Fraternity and outside of it) who are collaborating and contributing a lot to the Piarist life and mission. That's very good. And we will have to continue doing it.

But doing it jointly with the Fraternity and in an institutional way is a **whole new dimension**. Not only we can add more people, but we change the way of acting in the Pious Schools: we recognize a new Piarist subject. This is the change and the new stage that we can begin. Itaka – Escolapios is a path that helps to understand it and live it.

Someone may think that all the functions mentioned could be done by the Fraternity alone, by itself (unless we think that it must always be a Piarist subject subordinate to the Order), but there is no doubt that the risks of distancing the Order are large and the possibilities of action are minor.

It is better, much better, instead of opening that path of autonomy of the Fraternity, **to keep walking in a shared entity**, in a common ownership... in the line that Itaka – Escolapios is already doing. The Fraternity has its identity and protagonism here which, by discovering itself subject and together with the Order, is building the Pious Schools of the future and for the future. The Order helps the Fraternity grow, accompanying its coming of age by sharing protagonism and co-responsibility, while at the same time growing in its own possibilities of life and mission. This may be more reason for reflection in the next meeting, although already here is a key issue.

Shall we finish or start?

Here we finish this presentation that aims to be a call for all of us to discover the horizon of possibilities that we have in Itaka – Escolapios. Hopefully this meeting will help us put all of this at the service of so many poor children and young people who need our Piarist action.