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The vocation of the Marist laity

Fourth meeting of the writing commission



The international commission for the drafting of the document "The vocation of the lay Marist" held its fourth and last meeting in Rome from 27 April to 1 May. Its work consisted mainly in revising the 4th draft of the document, which it arrived at after including the contributions received from the administrative units of the Institute on the previous draft.

It also decided on the title of the new document: "Around the same table", having an implicit reference to the "table of La Valla" which, for all Marists (brothers, sisters, laity, priests...), is a symbol of the charism received from God through Marcellin and the first brothers. The subtitle explicitly summarizes the contents of the document: "The vocation of the Champagnat Marist Laity".

It is anticipated that the last steps of this document are that it will be presented to the General Council in its plenary sessions in the month of June for it to approve its publication for the whole Institute. We recall that, as I said previously, although the document concerns the lay Marist vocation, it is addressed to brothers as much as lay people.

As soon as the General Council approves it, a digital copy will be sent immediately to all the participants in the XXI General Chapter. The date anticipated is the end of June, so that the capitulants may have convenient time for reading and reflection. At the same time, the Publications Department will set in motion the usual procedures for its printing in the four official languages of the Institute. Given the summer holidays of the northern hemisphere, it is anticipated that the printed document will reach the administrative units at the beginning of December of the current year.

The drafting commission is very satisfied, as much with the work achieved as with the benefit it has meant for each one of us: a greater knowledge of the Institute, contact with many other brothers and lay persons, and a marvelous spiritual experience concerning one's own Marist vocation.

Once more, after the Secretariate of the Laity, we are grateful for the enthusiastic and expert collaboration of the lay people, Anne Dooley (Melbourne), Annie Girka (L'Hermitage), Bernadette Ropa (Melanesia), Carlos Navajas (America Central), José María Pérez Soba (Iberian Peninsula)



MARIST NEWS

N.º 50 - Year I - May 14th, 2009

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Marist Brother's Institute

General House - Rome

ca), Noel Dabrera (South Asia) and Sergio Schons (Rio Grande do Sul), and of the brothers, Afonso Murad (Brasil Centro-Norte) and Rémy Mbolipasiko (Afrique Centre-Est). Thanks, too, to Brothers Juan Miguel Anaya (Postulator

General) and Pedro Herreros (General Council) for their valuable technical and pastoral contributions, as well as Br. Antonio Martínez Estaún (Director of Communications) for his excellent ideas for the publication of the docu-

ment. And, finally, a recognition of all the translators who, in the course of these three years, have helped us to transcend the different languages and cultures, to form a family with a single heart and the same spirit.



Marist Apostolic Spirituality

Venezuela - IV Interamerican Meeting

Daily experiences are special places of encounter with God. We find God's presence in creation, in the events of every day – work and relationships, silence and noise, joys and sorrows, achievements and anguish, tragedy and death. (Water from the Rock, 54). With this conviction and with the joy of meeting as brothers, we held at Los Teques, Venezuela, the IV Interamerican Meeting on Marist Apostolic Spirituality, from 16 to 23 April.

With the intention of sharing our experiences of life and of faith, 39 representatives came together from the Provinces of Cruz del Sur, Santa María de los Andes, Río Grande do Sul, Brasil Centro Sul, Brasil Centro Norte, América Central, México Occidental, México Central and Norandina (host Province).

The periods of work were dedicated to forming ourselves in the fundamentals of our Spirituality: what we mean in speaking about it (with Br. José Miguel Caballero), the Marial aspect of our Spirituality (supported by Bros. Horacio Bustos and Ismar Portilla) and the Apostolic character (directed by Bros. Horacio and Mariano Varona, coordinator of the Interamerican Network).

We also deepened our prayer life, from the Word of God and from the daily events, as well as the view of faith on the reality of our poor peoples and on the richness of our cultures and differences. Two gifts of encounter were: in the first place, the shared table with the Marist community of the Colegio



Champagnat of Caracas, whose Brothers offered us bread, wine, and their brotherly heart; in second place, the shared life from the dialogue with three religious communities inserted into the reality experienced by many men and women suffering poverty, marginalization, and displacement. The Little Sisters of the Gospel, The Little Sisters of Nazareth (both with the spirit of Charles de Foucauld) and the Marist Brothers of the community of "El Cristo" opened their doors to us, together with their humble lives, their hopes...

We had eight days of sharing, with the simplicity of Marist communities, the spirit which animates us to be, as religious and laity "new hearts for a new world". We now have the mission of spreading through our local and provincial communities the message of hope and commitment we received in Los Teques.

Our profound thanks to the Norandina Province, to the district of Venezuela (represented by Br. José Luis Sebastián) and in particular to the community of Los Teques for their excellent care and courtesy in the details we encountered daily in our meeting. Thanks, too, to Br. Antonio Ramalho and the General Council for their support and accompaniment of RED.

Thanks to Bros. Mariano Varona (Santa María de los Andes), Horacio Bustos (Cruz del Sur) and José Miguel Caballero (Norandina) for organizing the meeting; to Br. Ismar Portilla (Norandina) for his insights on the presence of Mary as woman and disciple, and to all the Provinces participating in the creation of the Spirituality Network (RED), which is a clear response to one of the themes of reflection for the XXI General Chapter.



Marist presence in Algeria

Two Brothers from the General Council in Rome (Brs. Peter Rodney and Emili Turu) visited our two communities in Oran and Mostaghanem. Their report echoes the actual experience of our Brothers at present, but between their lines, I have rediscovered the course extolled here 20 years ago by the late Henri Vergès. Even alone at Sour-el-Ghoslane- he felt himself the representative, better still, the envoy of the Marists of France; he declared that he had not departed for Algeria of his own will, but that it was the will of the Superiors which had sent him and kept him there. He was on Marist Mission among these people and their youth.

Prophet of the new times, he considered Algeria as a frontier between the North (economically developed) and the South (developing), between the West (Christian) and the Middle East (Moslem), between the western and the Arab-Moslem cultures; between modernity and tradition.

How to act faced with these conditions, these constraints, these obstacles? Where was the place of a Little Brother of Mary? To act zealously? To proselytize? Certainly not... To catechize? To baptize? not these things either. So what was the good of being there? His response: «To live in the manner of



Mary, humble, hidden so as to reveal to those who are looking for It the presence of the Totally-Other. As the Little Brothers and Sisters of Charles de Foucauld are doing so well already. To be near, neighbours – not above but beside – but at the service humbly of those who receive us, respecting them, serving them right up to the moment when they ask the question :”But why are they doing this for us? What is it that guides them, drives them, or rather Who drives them to give their life thus for the Algerian people?” The response was strongly felt when the Church decided to stay in place when the country was passing through a grave crisis, the civil war of 1992 to 2004. Why stay, to give your lives if this people is not your own? Many Algerians have taken the message to heart. The lives given by Brother Henri Vergès, Sister Paul-Hélène and the 17 other Christian martyrs are and will

remain a powerful witness of dedication and fidelity, of service to this people loved even to the supreme sacrifice. The Church of Algeria finds in them its letters of nobility: whence the respect owed to them and which is shown to them by the vast majority.

Reading the report of the visit of the two Councillors we rediscover there, if not the actual words of Henri Vergès, his life made present again by those who continue his work in the same Christian and Marist spirit of humble and disinterested service in the name of Jesus Christ.

The Marists are firmly in their place in Algeria and bravo to the present actors; we hope that others will follow and bring relief so that the kingdom of the Saviour and his Mother advances.

Br. Michel Voute, fms



Meeting of European Provincial Councils and capitulants

Spain

In Guardamar, from 16 to 19 April 2009, there was a meeting of the Provincial Councils of Europe (Compostela, Central-West Europe, Iberica, Meditterrenea and the Hermitage) with the capitulants to the XXI General Chap-

ter from the same European Provinces. The majority of the capitulants were Provincial Councillors, except for Brothers Juan Miguel Anaya and Benito Arbués, who also took part in the meeting, as well as Brothers Peter Rodney and Emili

Turú, the liaisons between the General Council and Europe. In all 40 brothers, plus the facilitators and the translators (9 other Brothers). The 17th and 18th were entirely devoted to reflection on the



General Chapter, while on the 16th and 19th the work concentrated on matters proper to Europe.

The organisation of these two days was entrusted to the provincial facilitators.

The house of Guardamar and the Mediterranean Province gave themselves body and soul to facilitate the holding of the meeting and to put at its disposal all the means necessary for the successful outcome of the work planned.

This assembly set up procedures aiming at promoting listening and shared reflection among brothers and capitulants. Thanks to this listening, the capitulants were able to prepare their hearts for the Chapter, and, in a certain way, become better spokesmen for their brothers' deepest wishes. On the other side, the brothers of the communities were also able to share in the chapter proceedings by becoming actively involved in all these initiatives: the initial consultation, the shared reflection on the results of the consultation and the matters arising from it, the analysis of the General Council's report..., etc.

Having been given the dates for the meeting, we tried, in reality, to live together the reception of the two great documents in preparation of the Chapter: « Guidelines for Reflection », of the Preparatory Commission, and « Report of the General Council » (the first arrived several weeks ago, and the second was in process of arrival). The capitulants had the possibility of collating with the Councils the first echos and comments, which will help them in the task of leading the reflection and exchanges with the brothers of their respective Provinces. These circumstances clarify the nature and intentions of the meeting: it was not a question of arriving at the drawing of some conclusion, whatever it might be (it would not be honest to define any position before the brothers have had their say).

Apart from this basic task, the meeting served to try out the method of work-

ing in small groups, seated around a table and in the same room. This was a great novelty for most of us. Despite the languages, we distributed ourselves in different ways to encourage the experience of diversity (each group used two languages at most, and where necessary we could count on the help of the translators).

This arrangement allowed very subtle changes of dynamic, an immediate contrast of opinions in group, a greater participation and listening on the part of all, work facilitating mutual assis-



tance, a more sustained search for consensus; the group spirit was easily perceived when one moved away to work alone in our rooms. The noise of the other groups did not seem annoying for us; little by little, it became a sound base on which bonds became closer and a common spirit was woven.

All these procedures, as well as helping us prepare for the Chapter, are a further step in the building of Marist Europe as a region. We are all aware that we have still some way to travel; this method of working, without the pressure of having to reach conclusions, helped us come to a better understanding of the realities of our provinces, and brought us closer together, so that gradually it became easier to make a mutual valuation as well as to consider the possibility of building something together. The reality of Marist life in Europe will have to be arrived at by all, in a joint manner, and because of that, it will not be possible to make partial responses.

As the fruit of the reflection on the two preparatory documents (day of 17th), 6 topics were chosen which, according to the facilitators, had received the greatest number of contributions on the part of all the groups. These topics were already indicative of the deep wishes of the European region and a more concrete definition of the 4 great topics proposed in the « Guidelines » document.

- 1) Brotherhood, a road for recovering the identity of the brother
- 2) Forms and levels of association and belonging for lay Marists
- 3) Joint and specific formation in charism and in identity
- 4) What Marist school, today, in Europe?
- 5) Being present among the young
- 6) A current call: to become teachers of spirituality. But how ?

The morning of the 18th, the groups freely chose to work on one of the topics mentioned. The choices reveal more clearly the pressing matters and priorities felt by the Provincial Councils of Europe.

In what concerns the animation and government of the Institute, it is appropriate to note that the proposal of a Councillor residing in a region did not arouse much enthusiasm, but rather a number of reservations. It would be sufficient to strengthen the role of the liaison Councillors for the regions (that is to say, a temporary appointment made by the Superior General or his Council, but in no case by the Chapter).

We can finally indicate two calls which were felt deeply in the assembly:

1. Call to take account of the present reality of the brothers, to avoid utopian and idealistic language.
2. Call to be aware that the Chapter has to carry out only the tasks which it alone can bring to a successful issue without making the claim that it must resolve all problems.

