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XXI General Chapter

September 29th, tuesday

The capitulants are riding in a compact bunch towards the finish line. It appears that no work group has the aim of pressing ahead in order to arrive first at the line with its work completed. In cycling circles, they would say a dead calm reigns in the bunch. But work does not stop. The head of each team makes sure his men are well placed so that there are no surprises at the end of the day.

Progress on work on the fundamental call

The group working on the call of God for the Marist world of today has gone on reflecting, as much on the form which they are going to give their work as on the content they are going to transmit to the Institute at the end of the Chapter. They are making progress in working out the

various formulations with which to present the fundamental call: slogans, prayer, message, etc. As the group is a large one, they have divided the task and work in three complementary lines. At present, there is a great unity of thought among the group.

The report presented to the assembly yesterday indicated that reflection on association to the Marist charism was moving forward. They had before their eyes a great variety of expressions of Marist life, some already lived by lay people and others shared by laity and Brothers. The group outlines what has to be done under the charismatic aspect as much as the juridical.

To assist the assembly, they have collected in a draft ten paragraphs, in which they claim to summarize the thinking of the



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assembly on the subject of the call. Each paragraph ends with a recommendation which the government of the Institute can put into practice in the future. In the summary presented to the assembly, it says that Marist life takes on different expressions. Each of them is an integral part of the charism. The group considers these expressions of life from the point of view of juridical association with the Institute as well as from the vitality and diffusion of the charism.

Some adjustments to the Constitutions

The first session of the afternoon was spent traversing the dry but indispensable ways of the law. Yesterday, the assembly moved along the expressway of the Marist Constitutions and Stat-

utes, submitting them to a work of adjustment and completion. Various articles are unnumbered, since they were added immediately when the great expressway was already laid out, in others there is no agreement between what one signal says and what is said in another place, etc. After this work of harmonization and adjustment, the text of the Constitutions, which can only be changed by the Chapter with the approval of the Vatican's Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, will be reissued with internal coherence and consistency.

Government and animation of the Institute

The group studying the animation and government of the Institute devoted

the second afternoon session to determining the number of members of the General Council. The group presented to the assembly for dialogue a proposal consisting of four parts. The working group will work again on the text that should be discussed later by the Assembly.

Such is the progress of the capitular assembly. The holy angels were recalled and invoked at the beginning of the work. A good number of the Brothers present are called Angel or complete their names with the name of one or the other member of the heavenly choirs. While some were looking up to heaven and asking for protection and encouragement, others were contemplating the calendar days left to them. The goal is set: 10 October. Won't it be necessary to race for the finish? **NM**

On the final stretch, the elections for the General Council

Wednesday, September 30th



a tsunami has caused the deaths of over 100 people, and the number continues to rise. Brother Carl Tapp, from the South Island of New Zealand, who has lived more 20 years in Samoa, and is currently Provincial of the Province of New-Zealand (Fiji, Kiribati, New Zealand and Samoa), led the morning prayer in remembering the victims of this natural disaster. "I have spoken to the Brothers living on some of the islands affected by the earthquake and they have informed me they are well, but that they have seen many people who have lost everything".

The news agencies today, Wednesday, announced an earthquake of between 7.9 and 8.3 degrees of magnitude in the Pacific. As a result of this earthquake, which struck the islands of Samoa, American Samoa, and Tonga on Tuesday, 29 September,

The day's work began with planning the topics for the groups. For a time, the secretaries for each topic worked with their groups to define the proposals for dialogue which they were to raise at the assembly during the day. The first group to intervene at

the assembly was the one preparing the methodology and procedures for electing the General Council. These elections are scheduled for the end of the week, 2 and 3 October. All the capitulants had available the document drafted by the group, sent to them electronically. The document proposed for dialogue and discussion at the tables, the method of proposing candidates and the concrete procedure for electing them. Tomorrow voting will take place to establish the assembly's mode of procedure in proposing candidates and in the election of Councillors.

Marist mission in a new world

The work group studying the fundamental call in relation to mission has presented to the capitulants a sheet of 16 concrete proposals for explor-

ing further "Marist mission in a new world". These proposals refer to the international character of the mission, the boundaries within which international or regional Marist networks have to be created, developed or reinforced for mission in the areas of education, social work and solidarity. It also suggests some means for carrying out this mission, such as youth ministry and opening to laity the possibility of volunteering for mission ad gentes. It speaks, as well, of the possibility of organizing a mission assembly similar to the Mendes one, or of giving more strength to the presence of the Marist International Solidarity Foundation and the rights of children. It suggests the possibility of taking action to see that the management of educational works is organized in such a way that more Brothers are directly involved with children and young people. It expresses the desire that Marist mission in a new world transform the educational works in ways which allow Brothers and lay people to accompany children and young people, and help them to become persons committed to building a society of justice and solidarity. All this material has been placed on the tables for dialogue and completion or improvement by the contributions of all.

A lap sprint in the progress of the work of the Chapter

The first session of the afternoon



began with Marial prayer. The Brothers who animate the daily prayer proposed this be a time for contemplating five gifts: family spirit and feeling of belonging, unity of heart, trustful attention and discernment, being men and women of God, and being prophets of love. Each one of these gifts was illustrated with a text taken from the Constitutions or from other Marist documents. The Brothers prayed with prayers and hymns related to these gifts.

The first working session was dedicated to an analysis of the finances. Brother Econome General presented a rapid summary of facts and figures which served to stimulate dialogue around the table. The financial situation of the Institute refers, above all, to the organization of the finances of the General Administration, but

all the administrative units are involved. The topic of finances will come up again at later sessions.

The second session was devoted to voting on some changes in the text of the Constitutions. It was like achieving a lap sprint in the work of the Chapter. The group studying the Constitutions has brought one part of its work to completion. The majority of the changes effected in the text, which were approved in this session, concerned the numbering, the references, or an internal harmonizing of articles to make them coherent. Others, more important, did no more than legalize what is already customary practice in the Institute, as, for example, that relating to the figure of the "Brothers in charge of apostolic works".

A second topic, suggested by the same group, is that of recommending to the next General Council, that it look for ways of enriching the Constitutions in the coming years with vivid texts, which reflect the actual understanding of the Church and of the life of the consecrated Brother. The road the Institute has to traverse in preparation for the bicentenary of its existence in 2017, can be an opportunity to undertake an updating of the life values proposed by the Constitutions. All this matter is baking in the oven of the chapter hall. We hope that the batch provides delicious bread for Brothers and lay Marists to share around the table.



On the threshold of electing the General Council

Thursday, October 1st

The two main actors of the day were the groups working on the fundamental call and the preparation of the methodology and procedures for electing the members of the General Council.

The first made a report at the second work session of the morning, in which they outlined the content of the chapter's message to the Marist world. This large work group has divided its work into three streams. The report corresponds to the one which harvested the main intuitions contributed by the assembly. Little by little, this material is taking on an orderly form. The information presented this morning revolves around four main lines, which already give a faint outline of the final appearance of the work: one revolves around the heart of the Brother, another is centred on the heart of the Marist community, the third develops the relationship with and opening up to the contemporary world, and the fourth brings together everything related to the spirituality. These four paths allow progress, even if not altogether clear, towards what will be the final message.

The conducting shaft, which holds all this together, is Mariology. Those responsible for drafting this proposal have grasped, as the Chapter desires, that the Marist life style must have the life of Mary as the common reference. In this way it is indicated that Mariology will be one of the central conducting shafts of Marist life during the next eight years. Brothers and lay people will find in the life of Mary, from the Annunciation to Pentecost, the reference point to give impulse to their hearts, their communities and their works. The assembly gave a very positive response to this report. They welcomed



with great interest the progress made towards harmonizing the content gradually towards its final form.

The afternoon prayer was animated with a fresh graphic proposal from Brother Tony Leon. He presented the assembly with two new paintings. The first represents Mary journeying with haste to the house of her cousin Elizabeth. This sense of being displaced and urgency has been present at the heart of the Chapter from the beginning. The second is a representation of Champagnat hastening to attend to the young Montagne. Both pick up the internal dynamic which the assembly is experiencing in its work: to follow Champagnat in the style of Mary. With these two contributions Brother Tony has given graphic form to what the texts put together by means of words, at times not as precisely as can be expressed through an image. The creation of an image which will help understand the call of God to the Chapter is one of the initiatives the group working on this subject has picked up from the Assembly.

The work group responsible for prepara-

tions for the elections of the Councillors devoted the two afternoon sessions to harmonizing the criteria to arrive at a final consensus. The first proposal for discussion referred to the number of members to be elected to the next governing body of the Institute. The Constitutions actually indicate that the General Chapter decides on the number of Councillors to be elected (at least four) and on the way they are to be elected (Cfr. Const.136). The decision of the assembly, expressed first in consensus and then officially by vote, was that the next General Council should have six members, as the previous Chapter had decided.

The second session considered how the assembly should proceed with proposing the names of possible candidates. In the dialogue around the tables, reference was made to the worldwide reality of the Institute, to the regions and to the provinces into which it is divided for administrative purposes. In the contributions emerging from this dialogue was a mixture of various formulas, which could together provide a better representation of the complex reality of the Marist world.

