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XXI General Chapter

Thursday, October 8th



Some echoes of the audience with the Pope are still sounding in the General House. Brother Emili informed the capitulants that, in his brief dialogue with the Holy Father, he expressed the Institute's communion with and readiness for service to the Church. The Holy Father had responded with warmth and great interest, thanking the Institute for its service and granting it his blessing.

Something that needs to be emphasized is the promptness with which all the capitulants begin their work. It has been a distinguishing feature of the chapter from the beginning. The first session of 8 October was devoted to analysis, at the tables, of the contents of the letter the Chapter is going to send to the Marist world. This letter is in its final stage of drafting, but is not yet polished

enough to satisfy the members of the Chapter. The comings and goings of the text between the tables and the working group seem to be endless. But a landing time is anticipated. The capitulants are very aware that these texts are going to provide the bread and salt of many spiritual menus for Brothers and lay people. In the time available, they intend that the contribution they carry to the Institute will be the richest possible. All this has to be integrated into a clearly coherent text.

The planes are beginning to land

The second morning session saw some work completed. Of the seven airplanes waiting to land, three have touched down: finance, animation and government, and management of the General House. Finance requested a formal vote,

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General House - Rome

which the assembly gave to approve the work achieved by the group. The details will appear in the acts of the Chapter. Here are emphasized the principles on which their proposal on finances were based: the resources serve the life and mission of the Institute; the government and animation of the Institute are financed by the administrative units; the management costs are distributed fairly among the administrative units; there are guarantees of transparency and responsibility in the management of the General Administration; the administrative units are disposed to provide mutual support to fulfill the objectives of the administration and government of the Institute. These principles allow an insight into the good spirit which has dominated the work of the group.

The animation and government group, for its part, in concluding its contribution, has defined what is contained in these two words: by animation and government it understands the service which the General Council offers to the administrative

units to carry out the project of direction and vitality. The General Council provides animation by very diverse means, but one of the most important is the visits made by the Superior General, his Vicar and the Councillors.

The third group to land this morning was the one which worked on an analysis and projection of the management of the services which the General House offers the Institute. The complications which affect the functioning of this house have led the group to work out several recommendations meant to find the best solution to the problems raised. After various work sessions, in which numerous opinions were shared.

The first draft of the vision

In the opening session of the afternoon, the vision group distributed a text of four pages. It contained a slogan, a prayer, and some concrete proposals to give dynamism to the life of the Brothers and laity in a new spirit of communion, and to the Marist mission in the world. Long di-

alogue at the tables produced sufficient contributions of various types. Some pointed to the formulation, to expressions which needed polishing, to the consistency of the text as a whole, etc. This text is the result of a synthesis made by an editorial group. There was general satisfaction in the hall. The capitulants are beginning to see their contributions collected in a coherent body. With the positive reactions in the chapter hall, the editorial group will add the final touches before presenting the text for final approval tomorrow.

Preparing the balance sheet for the Chapter

At the beginning of the second session of the afternoon, a text was distributed with some guidelines for evaluating the Chapter. The contributions will be collected tomorrow. The end of the afternoon is organized so that the capitulants may dedicate some time of silence and prayer to summing up in their hearts what this chapter has meant for them and what God wishes them to take back to their administrative units.



“Prepare for landing”

Friday, October 9th

Our hearts are awake. Thus begins the song Brother Nicholas Fernando first taught to, and then sang with the other members of the Chapter. Accompanied by Brother Miquel Cubeles on the guitar, Br. Nicholas shared with the assembly the beautiful melody born from the activity of the chapter. A song was one of the first proposals for transmitting the sentiments and experiences of the Chapter to the

wider Marist world. Morning prayer provided an opportunity for presenting this melody for the first time. The song speaks of travelling towards a marvelous new land and of exploring as witnesses of a life carrying the good news. The expertise of the music teachers and the ability of the students were evident. In a matter of minutes, all had learned the melody.

There are other masters of creativity





in the assembly also. The text which aided the Brothers in their prayer was the work of Brother Oscar Vicario, and concerned a prayer similar to the one directed to Mary, approved as the official text of the Chapter, on this occasion directed to Jesus. "Lord Jesus, we come before you with troubled but grateful hearts. Mary, our Good Mother, has been our companion on the journey and our inspiration at the 21st General Chapter. Today, once more, we welcome her into our house, surprised and grateful for her openness, faith, and creativity, which invite us to open ourselves, with her, to the Spirit who is your gift to us, Lord. With your help we want to change..."

With eyes on the provinces and regions

The work of the first morning session was divided into two parts. In the first, the Brothers shared in common the feelings and experiences of the end of the previous day.

In the second, they discussed practical ways of transmitting these experiences to the Brothers of their provinces.

In the second session of the morning, the capitulants met in regional groups to share initiatives about transmitting and fostering the dynamics which the Spirit has stirred up

in the Chapter.

The afternoon session started with the groups sharing these initiatives with the assembly. Each region has come up with a way to communicate the riches of the Chapter to the Marist world. There is a lovely variety. Those regions which already have a long history of working together and have structures which work well, have stated their intention to continue reinforcing these means of animation. Other regions point to more recent initiatives which are going to be strengthened as a result of the Chapter. The initiative to adapt the resources to the style of each region is one way of making sure it reaches the smallest Marist community or work. The members of each of the regions have spoken of dates and concrete practices. One of the most interesting initiatives is the one concerning the continuing of the transmission. Preparation for the Chapter was a long and captivating process. What is being heard in the chapter hall is that this process, which has led to the holding of the Chapter, should be continued in the provinces as a living of the Chapter.

The Chapter's letter to the Institute

The editorial team for the Chapter's letter to the Marist world presented its work to the assembly today. As

each region arrived at the Chapter with a letter, so the Chapter, through its delegates, is sending a response to the whole Marist world. Today the assembly expressed agreement with the general lines and contents of the text, although some Brothers still wanted to nuance some expressions or to summarise some elements more precisely. The letter is well on its way to posting.

The group responsible for harmonizing a vision of what the Chapter is offering to motivate the Institute's progress for the next eight years also delivered the fruits of their work to the assembly today. The critical and experienced eye of the assembly, nevertheless, required improvement of style, harmonizing of the text to give consistency, making the graphic presentation as didactic as possible, etc. With these face-lifts, the text was soon on the way to the typesetters.

Fiesta and thanksgiving

The festive atmosphere began with the evening Eucharist. Brother Tony Leon surprised us once again with his creativity. After the portraits of the Superior Generals, he produced those of the new Councillors. The presentation took place in the chapel. At the beginning of the Eucharist, the lower row of boxes bore the portraits of the Superior Generals, while the upper showed the new members of the General Council. Before the assembly dispersed, the boxes were turned around to reveal the faces of all taking part in the General Chapter. A very pleasant surprise.

After supper, the fiesta continued in the chapter hall. Thanks was given to the large cast of persons who had collaborated in the progress of the chapter: translators, auxiliaries, drivers, technicians, managers, etc. All received a personal present from the Superior General or his Vicar. The birthdays of Brothers Francisco Castellanos and AMEstaún, which had occurred during the week, were also commemorated.



Closing of the 21st General Chapter

Saturday, October 10th

The last voting for the capitulants was on the Central Commission's proposal for the conclusion of the Chapter. After the assembly had shown their agreement, the Superior General, President of the Chapter, proclaimed: "I declare the 21st General Chapter closed". The meeting in Rome had lasted 33 days. At this moment, the brothers presented one another with little bag containing soil from the Hermitage and from Davao. In this way, they tried to give form to the invitation which the Chapter is addressing the whole Marist world: "With Mary, going with haste towards a new land".

Before the closing of the Chapter, in the last moments of the morning of 10 October 2009, there was intense activity in the chapter hall. First, there was the vote for approving the text of the letter and the accompanying message. This was the moment for putting the full stop to the contributions of the assembly. Now it was simply a matter for the editor to finalize the details. As soon as the official version is ready, it will be communicated on the website. Following this vote, there were other decisions concerned with the approval of the acts of the meeting and with the use of information obtained during the Chapter.

At the break, the group photograph was taken. Photos of the members of each region of the Marist world were also taken. The new General Council appears in each. There was also one featuring the veterans of previous Chapters, including one who had participated in five General Chapters.

Brother Emili Turú's closing words

Before the closure, Brother Emili



Turú, Superior General, addressed the capitulants. He made reference to some of the most significant experiences of the Chapter. He began by indicating the four reference points he was using as a framework for his address. The first part revolved around a picturesque metaphor: "The cold alters the course of the ridges". The atmosphere prevalent during the Chapter can be a reference point for showing the course of the many activities taking place in the Institute. The change of temperature in the methodology favoured dialogue and consensus and opened up to an international perspective.

The second reference point took up the words Brother Sean had addressed to the assembly at the beginning of the Chapter: "To see the world through the eyes of a poor child". This phrase had struck a chord in the hearts of the capitulants. During the work sessions, the eyes of poor children had been a recurrent

theme. Brother Emili reminded them that the Institute had to do everything possible for them. "We have to be experts in the evangelization of children and young people and in the defence of their rights".

Returning to the figure of Mary of the Visitation, to whom reference had been made many times during the Chapter, he invited all to live a spirituality of a full interior life. Mary hurries to the encounter with the needy but carrying within her yes to Jesus. Mary, travelling companion of the brother on the journey of faith, invites us to be mystics in action, harmonizing the interior life with apostolic activity. A price has to be paid for maintaining this attitude of life.

The slide projected on the screens in the hall indicated the title of the fourth part: "We are all one". The quotation comes from Paul's letters. The unity of the Mystical Body is the fruit of the power coming from the Lord. To conclude this part, Brother



Emili left this question hanging: "Can we begin the change by ourselves?" And he quoted Pope Benedict XVI on his recent trip to the Czech Republic: "Creative minorities determine the future".

Brother Sean, in his opening address, presented himself as a good "storyteller". Brother Emili, in concluding his first words directed to the capitulants and the Marist world, said that "in order to follow his predecessor's tradition, he would finish with a story". He related that a man asked a wise man: "The bird I am holding enclosed in my hands, is it alive or dead?" And the wise man replied: "The answer is in your hands". With the conclusion of his words, the doors of the hall were opened and the Brothers started on their return journey home.

United around the same table to give thanks for the Chapter

The Eucharist at the end of the morning was celebrated in a festive spirit. At the beginning, Brother Emili expressed his sincere gratitude to the members of the Central Commission. Brother Tony Leon presented the collection of portraits of the recently elected General Councillors, with the six paintings, three of Champagnat and three of Mary, which he painted during the Chapter. Together, they formed a backdrop around the main altar. At a certain moment, the supports for the Councillors' portraits were turned around, and the faces of all the capitulants appeared, digitally reproduced by the hand of the artist. He received great applause. In a brief reply, he stated that behind a leader there were many co-workers,

supporting him to carry out the common work.

Thanks for following us on the web

The chronicler concludes the information service by sincerely thanking the Marist world for the welcome it has given to the news appearing on the web. The number of messages received, the brotherly acceptance of the work of the Chapter, the beating of the Marist heart in rhythm with that of the capitulants, the interest aroused by this encounter in the whole Marist world, evident in the visits received by the web www.champagnat.org, fill us with satisfaction. We thank God for the gift of brotherhood that we have been able to share so intensely through the world of electronics. 

