C

HAPTERS…

**GENERAL CHAPTER**

“The General Chapter is an assembly representative of the whole Institute. It expresses the participation of all of the Brothers in the Institution’s life and mission, as well as their co-responsibility in the governance.” It exercises the highest extraordinary authority. The Superior General convokes an ordinary General Chapter every eight years. It is made up of members by right and members elected by the Provinces and Districts. The total number of elected members must be more than the number of the members by right. This body has the following functions: to elect the Brother Superior General, the Brother Vicar General and the members of the General Council; to deal with major issues concerning the nature, aim and spirit of the Institute, and to further their renewal and adaptation, preserving all the while the spiritual heritage of the Institute[[1]](#footnote-1).

One can consider the first General Chapter to be the one held in l’Hermitage in 1839, while the health of Fr Champagnat was deteriorating, and Br Francisco was elected as Director General of the Institute. Ninety-two brothers of the Institute’s 280 participated. The one after, also held in l’Hermitage, was in 1852. From 1860 onwards, eight Chapters were held in Saint-Genis-Laval. From 1907, the next five Chapters were held in Grugliasco, Italy, where the General House had moved to in 1903 when the brothers in France were expelled. Since the General House has been in Rome since 1967, the Chapters are held in this city. The Chapter of that year had two sessions (1967-1968) and it was an answer to the calls of the Second Vatican Council to renewal or update. It was the Chapter with the highest number of participants in the history of the Institute: 155 brothers. It should be noted that since the Chapter of 1993, lay people have been participating as guests. In the 21st General Chapter, the chapter’s message was addressed to all, brothers and laity.

**PROVINCIAL CHAPTER**

The Provincial Chapter is an assembly which represents a specific Marist Province, which expresses the participation of all of the Brothers in the governing of that Province. It must meet at the time of the installation of the Brother Provincial. It constitutes an extraordinary authority at the provincial level. Its role is deliberative, like drawing up its own rules of procedure, deciding on the number of Provincial Councillors and electing them; and a consultative role, like suggesting the main orientations to be followed during the period of three year governance that is starting[[2]](#footnote-2). The frequency of the chapters is triennial, coinciding with the periods of the appointment of the Brother Provincial.

**GENERAL CONFERENCE**

It is a consultative assembly, made up of the Brother Superior General, the Brother Vicar General, the Brothers Councillors General, the Brothers Provincial and the Superiors of the Districts. It is convoked to: strengthen the unity of the Institute and to enable the Superiors to have direct contact among each other and with the Brother Superior General and the members of his Council; to study questions of general concern and to propose ways of answering them. The Brother Superior General Convokes the General Conference in the periods between two General Chapters. If he judges it opportune, he can invite other persons to attend[[3]](#footnote-3).

The first General Conference took place in Rome in 1971. There, the then Superior General, Br Basilio Rueda, addressed the provincials with his famous “Meditation Out Loud.” This Conference had to deal with the discernment of the rapid evolution of the world, the Church and the Institute.

All of the Conferences have taken place in Rome except the one held in 1989, which took place in Veranópolis, Brasil, convoked by Br Charles Howard, taking into account that America was preparing for the Fifth Centenary since its evangelization. Aside from the provincials, a group of young brothers of different provinces were invited. The General Conference met in Sri Lanka in 2005, and then in l’Hermitage in 2013, for which the members of the secretariats were invited, aside from the provincials. Each Conference has stood out due to a particular emphasis, orientation or project. In the Conference of 1997, lay men and women started to be invited[[4]](#footnote-4).

**PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY**

It is a meeting open to all Brothers in order to bring the Brothers and the communities into closer contact, and to arouse the interest of all by a study of the important questions concerning the Province. This assembly is consultative. The Brother Provincial may also invite other persons[[5]](#footnote-5).

The General Chapter of 1968 was the one that made the provincial assemblies official and recommended them: “The Brother Provincial can convoke a Provincial Assembly”[[6]](#footnote-6).

The frequency of the provincial assemblies depends on the customs of the Administrative Units, for some it is annually, for others triennially or, on certain circumstances, it serves as an occasion to reflect on some important topic. For participating in the Assemblies, the most widely used criteria has been to openly invite all brothers who wish to attend, and to determine a certain number of lay guests.

1. Cf. Constitutions of the Marist Brothers 138-139-140-141-142 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Cf. Constitutions of the Marist Brothers 151 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. Constitutions of the Marist Brothers 137.11 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The history of the General Conferences is on the Institute’s website.

URL: <http://www.champagnat.org/401.php?a=8> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Cf. Constitutions of the Marist Brothers 151 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Cf Constitutions 151.9 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)