

Marist ECHO

Institute of the Marist Brothers

Number 38 - Year 14 - December 2001

LIFE IN ABUNDANCE

The 20th General Chapter wished to distill the results of its discernment into a single message, "Choose Life." Is it a revelation and surefire guide for these changing times? I don't believe so. Then how should we interpret it? It's been said that every written message needs to be seen through the eyes of its author. The 118 delegates would probably recognize themselves in the words of St. Paul: "But now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem. What will happen to me there I do not know." (Acts 20, 22) In pursuit of vitality, they searched, listening attentively to God's Word and finding common ground as they developed insights and objectives. The result: more questions than answers. In spite of humbly recognizing this, we note a deep-seated conviction that injects the document with meaning and strength from beginning to end, a conviction centered on the thoughts of Paul: "...for I know him in whom I have believed..." (2 Tim 1, 12) and Jesus: "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly." (Jn 10, 10). This candid, stimulating document points out paths while inviting us to discern as we make our way.

Heralds of hope

Br. Seán Sammon, Superior General

As 2001 comes to a close, many of us will take time to view through the eyes of faith all that has happened during the past 12 months. This December we cannot help but include in our reflections events of September 11th in the US, and the subsequent war and violence to which they have given birth.

Repulsed by acts of terrorism and the destruction and loss of life that result from war, many of us look to our faith for some consolation. The feast of Christmas and the birth of a new year remind us that when all evidence points to the contrary, the virtue of hope helps us to believe that a new day and more just world are possible.

Our times are not unlike Mar-

cellin's: faced with the chaos that followed the Revolution of 1789, many people lost hope. And yet, our founder, with his reliance on Mary and dream of evangelizing poor children and young people, became a herald of hope, and began a worldwide movement that now encompasses 76 countries.

Today we can do no less. So, as this year comes to an end, let us promote peace by working for justice. And, like Marcellin, let us be heralds of hope by lighting the fire of a new Pentecost in our hearts and those of the poor children and young people whom we are called to serve. And, may the God of hope grant peace to our hearts, peace between peoples and peace among nations. ♦



Brother Seán Sammon at the time of his election as Superior General.

T H E R E ' S A L W A Y S A F I R S T S T E P

A moving experience

Br. Roland Bourassa, Province of Iberville, Canada

After a talk by a Marist Brother doing missionary work in Haiti, Audray De Serre, about to graduate from Marcellin Champagnat High School, got the idea to do volunteer work in an orphanage run by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, one of the places the missionary Brother had mentioned. She shared her plan with her religion teacher, Mr. John Dansereau, and he encouraged her and promised to accompany her group.

She explained the project to her classmates. Christine Normandin, Evelyn Gauthier, and Amélie-Limoilou Renaud were enthusiastic about joining up for the two-week program. Different motives prompted these four teenagers: providing help for the poor, learning about another culture, practicing Christian solidarity, taking part in the work and prayer of the Sisters, and developing a sense of responsibility and organization.

The four students and their teacher enjoyed a most rewarding experience. For two weeks they worked in a children's nursery, an orphanage, a cooperative for Haitian women wanting to establish their economic independence, and the Sisters' garden.

The witness of these young women

"We wanted to get at the heart of a country in a way that would open up for us the culture and values of



Nursery run by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Jérémie



The garden of the Sisters' community in Jérémie.
The women volunteers at work.

its people, all the while giving an unexpected lift to the Sisters' community," explains Christine.

"At the nursery, our role was to help volunteers provide for the needs of the children in matters of hygiene, education, and recreation. We showed them a bit of affection, and so when we said goodbye to them at the end of the day, you could see the sadness on their little faces," recalls Audray.

"There were about 60 children in the orphanage... Every day, after breakfast, we went to the nursery. Afternoons we worked either in the community's garden or at the nursery. Sometimes we alternated," adds Evelyn.

"In the garden, we helped the Haitian women till the soil... We have learned that poverty doesn't lessen people's goodness in any way. On the contrary, their values are their greatest wealth. Haitians are a very religious people. Our being with them has renewed our life of Faith," admits Amélie.

A dream

Exhilarated by their experience, these four students have expressed their desire to return to Haiti and teach there for a year when they graduate. Their teacher, John Dansereau, is looking forward to accompanying another group of students next year. ♦

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May life flood our hearts

Br. Óscar Martín, interviewed by Br. Lluís Serra

Óscar Martín was the youngest brother delegate at the 20th General Chapter, turning 35 while the Chapter was in progress. He has worked in schools, formation programs, and pastoral care. At present he is Vice Provincial in the Province of Castille, Spain.



At 35, the youngest brother delegate.

VERY BRIEFLY, HOW WOULD YOU SUM UP THE 20TH GENERAL CHAPTER?

Using a broad brush, I'd highlight the following expressions: vitality, multicultural approach, horizons, spirituality of seeking, in community, sharing not only mission but also life, wisdom, growth and development, authenticity, fraternity.

A CHAPTER IN PURSUIT OF VITALITY. WHAT IS THE ELIXIR OF LIFE FOR THE MARIOT INSTITUTE?

There is no magic formula for life, but there are indeed processes for life. The Chapter speaks to us of setting out on our journey, being openhearted, searching our wellsprings for greater human and spiritual depths, growing as persons and brothers.

HOW DO YOU VIEW THE DOCUMENT "CHOOSE LIFE"?

It is a document meant to

energize. Not big on doctrinal novelties, but containing many small steps we can take. It's like a life plan for the next eight years, with five clearly-defined starting points. We will be blessed with abundant life and able to radiate this.

WHAT STANDS OUT IN YOUR MIND ABOUT THE NEW GENERAL SUPERIOR AND HIS TEAM?

It's early to be specific, but I will venture to make three observations: they're very human, down-to-earth people, which I'm sure will be a feature of their style of animation and government; they possess all the qualities to form a true team, capable of finding common ground, discussing, working together, and building community; they illustrate well the diversity, vitality, and future direction of our Institute, and earned the solid, overwhelming support of the Chapter.

HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT TAKING PART IN SUCH AN INTERNATIONAL ASSEMBLY?

It was a greatly enriching experience. A grace. It opened my eyes, mind, and heart to the wonder of being a brother. I felt injected with optimism, an ever greater affection for the Institute, personalized in names, faces, stories, and situations.

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT THE

FACT THAT LAY PEOPLE PARTICIPATED IN THIS CHAPTER?

Their inclusion was to be expected, as family, close to us. They share spirituality and mission with us... when you come right down to it, life. I also think that their presence witnessed well to the way things are today in the Institute.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO A YOUNG MAN WHO WANTS TO BECOME A BROTHER?

More than saying anything, what I would do is open up my life to him, our life, welcome him and accompany him on the road to growing as a person and a Christian. How I wish I could - we could show him with our lives that we are people whose hearts are on fire for Jesus, sharing our family life, firmly committed to our mission of educating and evangelizing as Mary and Champagnat did. All of that would be the best presentation and question-and-answer session we could give. Our aim is to fill our hearts to the brim with Life and let It shine for all to see. ♦



Br. Óscar in his role as a teller at the Chapter

• LETTER OF THE 20TH TO THE ENTIRE

Dear Friends,

Greetings to everyone! A heartfelt letter to the whole Marist world, filled with our warmest tidings of life and hope.

You are countless in number, from places and cultures all over the world, forming with us one enormous family. Teachers and co-workers, catechists and animators, students and graduates of our schools, parents and relatives, members of Fraternities, and people belonging to many other Marist organizations... What abundant life!

Our General Chapter has been a rich and powerful experience, and we are eager to share it with you by means of this letter. We are convinced that each and every one of you and all of us have been filled to overflowing with graces (cf. Jn 10, 10), and that the presence of our Lord and Savior, God-with-us, is behind all of this.

The Lord is speaking to us forcefully - in the wide-awake eyes of children, the refreshing smiles of youth, the dedicated work of adults, the welcoming hugs of the elderly... He is calling on us to continue on our journey, our search for new paths.

We want to remember in a special way those of you who are ill, weak, having needs of every kind, those of you who are feeling discouraged and lonely, those mired in poverty... We feel closer to you than ever, and are certain that life contains in itself a miracle and source of prophecy in the small and fragile realities of every day, as it does in the form of a seed. The Father of Life will not be silenced!

For six weeks at this General Chapter in Rome, the 118 of us brothers have been

immersed in an intense experience, been enriched besides by the participation of 17 lay men and women who shared their time with us. In addition, we are very aware that the whole Marist world has been with us at this Chapter. You have. Thank you!

We thank you one and all for your interest and the hopes and dreams that you brought to the Chapter, your closeness to us in thought and prayer, and your many thoughtful signs of support and encouragement.

And we ask you to continue to accompany us on our journey into the future, toward our growth as persons, as communities, and as an Institute.

Reflecting together in a process of discernment, we have looked at and embraced the reality of young people and our world, our Marist life, and the Church. In doing so, we have come upon many lights and shadows, and also many signs of vibrant life. From these, we have chosen five on which we felt a strong desire to take action and to implement in concrete and practical ways.

- In the fountain of living waters... we feel called to center our lives and communities around Jesus Christ - with passion, as Mary did. To accomplish this, to set in motion processes leading to human growth and conversion.

- Realizing how priceless it is for brothers to live as one in heart and mind... we feel called to revitalize our communities, so that they will be beacons of fraternity, simplicity, and a life rooted in the Gospel, at the service of our mission.

- Enlarging our tent... we feel called to

GENERAL CHAPTER • MARIST FAMILY

deepen our specific identity as brothers and lay persons as we share our lives together - our spirituality, mission, formation, . . .

- *Like an all-consuming fire... we feel called to go forward together, brothers and laity - decisively and unambiguously - to live in the presence of the poorest, most marginalized of children and young people, educating, evangelizing and being in solidarity with them.*

- *All of this being carried out with the style of governing and animating that we want, a style that will be more and more at the service of life.*

As you can see, the ever-revivifying Spirit (cf. Gal 5, 25) is continuing to fill us with life and hope-filled dreams. But turning our vision into reality will not be easy. How does one go about developing processes for promoting our Marist apostolic spirituality? Deepening levels of fraternity? Making our present-day mission and solidarity more tangible and effective? Taking new steps on the road we share as brothers and lay persons?

Dearest friends, you know us and esteem us - and so we feel encouraged to ask you for your full support and blessing. In sharing with you these calls that we have discerned, we hope you will look upon them as your own. Especially because, as you understand so well, the road we share as brothers and lay persons is one of our common concerns and challenges. You have a crucial role to play.

To be successful we will need to work side by side in meeting many of these challenges: promoting events and processes for reflecting together to arrive at a deeper sense of who we are; fully supporting com-

mon formation programs that include content specific to each of our vocations; growing in co-responsibility and mutual cooperation, both in our existing works and new endeavors; and moving ahead with the creation of open communities, dedicated to working with young people, especially those who are most abandoned and forsaken.

God willing, with our gaze fixed on Mary, we will learn once again how to listen and be welcoming and innovative in our ways of living in the midst of these young people. These attitudes are central to our Marist apostolic spirituality. May Mary inspire us as educators and heralds of the Gospel, so that we can give top priority to those who are most in need, those who "have no wine" (Jn 2, 3), no education, no guidance, no love...

Today, with Champagnat - the man of great love and the heart that knows no bounds - we are again looking upon the world through the eyes of faith and tender love. And again he is telling every single one of us: "How much good you can do, my friend!"

Thank you for your presence in our lives, for your friendship and goodness to us. And thanks also to Jesus, who invites all of us to "put out into deep water. . ." (Lk 5, 4). For life is never-ending. Our God is a God of the living, and we have many reasons for believing, hoping and loving... certain that "this hope of ours will not leave us disappointed." (Rom 5, 5)

Ever-united with you in our commitment to Choose life!

**Your brothers, The Delegates
of the 20th General Chapter
Rome, 13 October 2001**

Fraternities choose life, too

FRATERNITY MEMBERS AT THE 20TH GENERAL CHAPTER.

The 20th General Chapter of the Marist Brothers has come to an end. For 10 days a group of 17 laywomen and men, including 5 members of Fraternities, took part in our sessions. We have all been greatly enriched by the diversity and wealth of their lived experience and their many commitments in today's world. Although time was short, there's no doubt that their presence gave the Chapter an appearance and flavor that it wouldn't have had without them. Their presence and input were invaluable in helping us chart our course for the years ahead.

Before departing, in a letter addressed to the Chapter, they expressed to us these challenges:

- **LAY MARIST IDENTITY:** We believe this Charism is claimed by each person as a gift from the Spirit through Champagnat.
- **THE BUILDING OF HEALING COMMUNITIES:** Through collaboration and experimenting with new ways of being Marist and together forming creative ways of being community.
- **GREATER CO-RESPONSIBILITY** in mission, including leadership and lay initiatives.

You can rely on us! The disciples of Champagnat are not only Brothers of the Institute but also women and men, single and married, young and adult, ready to share with you our Charism and challenges. We want to be part of your spirituality and mission.

Catherine Demougin, who lives



The Likuni Fraternity in Malawi, established June 4, 2000, with Br. Adrian L. Duchesne

with her husband and three Brothers in a community in Mulhouse, France, has sent us a wonderful written testimony, including the following:

"I arrived in Rome feeling a little nervous... even though it wasn't the first time that I was to stay at the General House. The welcome was such that my worries soon disappeared. Brothers of every language and country greeted me and quickly put me at ease. And the adventure began.

I spent the first day among the laity. We were then completely incorporated into the Chapter, being able to intervene in Chapter Hall discussions just like all the brother delegates, and participate in working groups with them. During our last two days, in addition to working with the brothers, we held a meeting among ourselves for a few hours to compose our

final message. The brothers reminded us that they expected us to join with them in discerning the calls for revitalizing the Institute.

Personally, this is what I lived:

- A powerful spiritual experience. I viewed the Chapter as a retreat that raised questions about my own life as well as the life of the Institute.
- An experience of God's presence. That powerful experience has never left me, and has implanted in me a deep desire to live in the presence of God morning, noon, and night.
- An appeal to be attentive to the plaintive cries of poorest youth, those most at risk.
- A deep attachment to Marist spirituality and a call to become much more involved in the Institute. Marist apostolic spirituality offers a way of life for me,

BROTHER SEÁN AND HIS TEAM

The new General Council, elected by the 20th General Chapter for a term of eight years, 2001 to 2009. Seated, left to right: Brothers Peter Rodney, Emili Turú, Seán Sammon (Superior General), Luis García Sobrado (Vicar General), and Théoneste Kalisa. Standing, left to right: Brothers Pedro Herreros, Antonio Ramalho, and Maurice Berquet.



Marcellin, and the brothers with whom I live.

- A powerful experience of fraternity. There was never a time when I felt lonely. The presence of the brothers and lay people enriched my every moment. We experienced living in a large family happy to be together for a most important occasion in its history."

Many are the Fraternities that have sent us their support and encouragement, in the form of prayers and best wishes. A sample from Ipiales, Colombia: "Brothers, General Chapter, Marist Family - with you in choosing life and everything that it means to put Champagnat's charism into practice." To all who have contacted us, and in the name of all the Brother delegates, we send our heartfelt thanks for your presence with us.

NEWS FROM FRATERNITIES

Brazil: The Province of Porto

Alegre put together a retreat for members from its 23 Fraternities. Participants came away enthusiastic about their commitment to help build communities modeled on those of the first Christians, with Mary at the center.

For its part, the Province of Rio de Janeiro organized a course for Animators of Fraternities, attended by 57 laymen and women and 15 Brothers from several Provinces in Brazil. They reflected on the following themes: the lay person in the Church, Christian spirituality, the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family, and the qualities needed to be a lay animator in Fraternities.

France: A meeting of Animators and Accompanists of Fraternities took place on October 20-21. Work centered on the results of a survey distributed to every group, for the purpose of renewing the Movement throughout the country. ♦

The Marist men and women who participated in our 20th General Chapter: Choosing Life!



Seated, left to right: João Valdecir Bianchi (Brazil), Carlos Robla (Spain), Rita F. Rokocakau (Fiji), Br. Benito Arbués (outgoing Superior General, Spain), Jacques Boudrias (Canada), Erika Shishido (Peru), Noémie Silva (Philippines). Standing, left to right: Ricardo Miño (Bolivia), Fernando Domínguez (Spain), J. Francisco Murillo (Colombia), Paul Cummings (Scotland), Catherine Hannon (Australia), Catherine Demougín (France), Silvana Pereira (Brazil), Ana Sarrate (Spain), Br. Charles Howard (former Superior General, Australia), José Eduardo Robles (Mexico), Gary Norton (South Africa), Jean-Marie Amusini (Democratic Republic of the Congo).



Ana Sarrate
Norte Province,
Spain

I think that our presence as laywomen and men at the Chapter, for the first time having a direct role side by side with the brothers, was a very enriching experience for all of us. We shared our experiences as Marists, our difficulties, dreams, and hopes for the future. I felt that the brothers were deeply interested in getting to know our opinions and that our voices were truly heard. To me, this was our greatest contribution as lay people at the Chapter.

Two vivid signs of LIFE.

In the conclusions reached by the Chapter, you can clearly see how intensely the laity was involved in the process. In my view this was an indisputable reality that came through loud and clear during our sessions. We brothers and lay people need each other to continue giving Life and Hope to our world. It is a specific call from the Chapter, and now we must continue to develop it in our Provinces. This is nothing new - the Church is moving in the direction of bringing our vocations into communion, in which each of our callings has the same dignity and we are responsible to one another in mutual service.

Another important call from the Chapter revolves around the choice to serve the most neglected and abandoned, with all that that implies - closing down some places and opening new ones, and revising and transforming existing works.

Marcellin Champagnat: A World Greater Than Himself

Bro. George Fontana, Province of Poughkeepsie, USA

A story is told about Father Champagnat in his later years. Seeing how the Marist Society had begun to flourish, someone was praising him and the other early Marists. Father Champagnat deflected the compliment. He said that he was merely like an unpolished stone that the mason casts into the foundation of a large building. The stone helps form a solid base; it is not externally shown for noble appearance. Marcellin's words reflect one of his abiding attitudes. He believed deeply that he was playing a role in a large "work," divinely willed, of which he and his Brothers were but one dimension. Despite the vast energy and love that he expended upon the Brothers, Champagnat knew that they alone did not exhaust the fullness of the Marist charism. They were but one "branch" of the overall Marist Society. We find him, for example, directing to Mother Saint Joseph, Foundress of the Marist Sisters, three young women who were

experiencing a call to consecrated life. His letter of recommendation to the Superior on their behalf is a typical Champagnat missive, blending straightforward vigor with charm and warmth.

Marcellin was an important figure in the early history of the Marist Fathers, especially the priest-aspirants of the Lyons Archdiocese. The Hermitage was their first communal base, and, in some ways, it was Marcellin who formed them in Marist ways. His was later elected first Provincial of the Fathers. Marcellin was one of four priests who remained loyal to the Marist dream, from the pledge of July 1816 to the first profession ceremony years later, in September 1836.

A final example of Marcellin's ecclesial vision is the striking expression in his Last Will and Testament: "By the boundless love of Jesus Christ, I call on you most solemnly to beware of ever envying ... those whom God has called to the religious life to labor, like you, for the education of youth. Be the first to rejoice at their success and to grieve at their misfortunes."

In his mature years, then, Father Champagnat was guided by an ecclesial vision, in the realization of which he invested his love and dynamism: the Marist Society, and particularly the Marist Brothers.

Marcellin's attitude is a reminder for those associated with his charism and mission to preserve a broad vision, to fight the temptation to reduce the dimensions of our call, whether as lay persons or as members of the consecrated life. Those who strive to be Champagnat-inspired are positively disposed to the Church and its evangelizing mission, and put themselves at the service of young people, especially the least favored. ♦



Artist: Mr Frank Mesaric. Painting done in 1995. College in Traralgon, Victoria, Australia.

CHAPTER FOR A WORLD WITHOUT BORDERS

www.champagnat.org

The 20th General Chapter's web site enjoyed a tremendous reception. www.champagnat.org, hosting more than a thousand visitors every day, provided up-to-the-minute coverage of the main events at the Chapter held in Rome September 4th to October 13th. A daily Bulletin sent to more than 1700 subscribers, hundreds of photos, and the posting of a large number of texts and documents helped many people follow the delegates' discernment process step by step. Because of the net, some of the remotest places on earth had front row seats. The theme Choose Life resonated in - and continues to excite - the hearts of many lay people in touch with the charism of Saint Marcellin. Many have expressed their thanks and joy in feeling that they too belong to the Marist family.

Marist Bulletin

The final issue of the General Chapter Bulletin, No. 50, appeared on November 30th. Beginning in December, a new electronic communication has started up - Marist Bulletin - featuring up-to-the-minute Marist news and reflections for all our subscribers. "Give the gift of a subscription" is a campaign intended to expand our readership. We invite everyone to join us in this effort. The Marist Bulletin appears in the Institute's four official languages: English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese.