

To the Ends of the Earth

Collaboration for Mission International

2
January
2013

Letter of the
Superior
General

Marist Brothers



Dear Marists of Champagnat,

On this date when we remember the 196th anniversary of the foundation of the Marist Institute, it is a joy for me to send you this letter on the subject of our call to spread the good news of the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

There could be no better date than 2 January to reflect on this theme. When one visits for the first time the house of the first Marist community in La Valla or spends a few days at the Hermitage, this question arises: **How could Champagnat, in the midst of these narrow and isolated valleys, have such an open mind as to say that "all the dioceses of the world enter into our views"?** I feel profoundly challenged by the expansive vision and audacity of this man who, aged 27, with little more than a dream which burned within him, set in motion a religious family which today we find scattered over the five continents.

During the three weeks of the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization, I followed each day the same path to reach the synod hall, passing under the statue of Saint Marcellin, which is on the exterior of the left transept of the Basilica of Saint Peter in the Vatican. Seeing this son of Marlies in such an eminent place reminded me, each day, that our mission only has sense in the context of the ecclesial community, and that we are called to live it with a heart that knows no bounds. In fact, various bishops taking part in this Synod, coming from the most distant places on the planet, confirmed for me the universality of our vocation by reminding me that they were former students of ours or had worked side by side with us.

Invited to renew our enthusiasm for an evangelization that should be "new in its ardor, in its methods, in its expression", we must let ourselves be challenged by the experience lived by our Institute during these last few years through the "Program **Ad gentes**". Frequently, in the meetings the members of the General Council and I

*"You will receive
power when the Holy
Spirit comes on you
and then you will be
my witnesses
not only in Jerusalem
but throughout Judea
and Samaria,
and indeed to the ends
of the earth."*

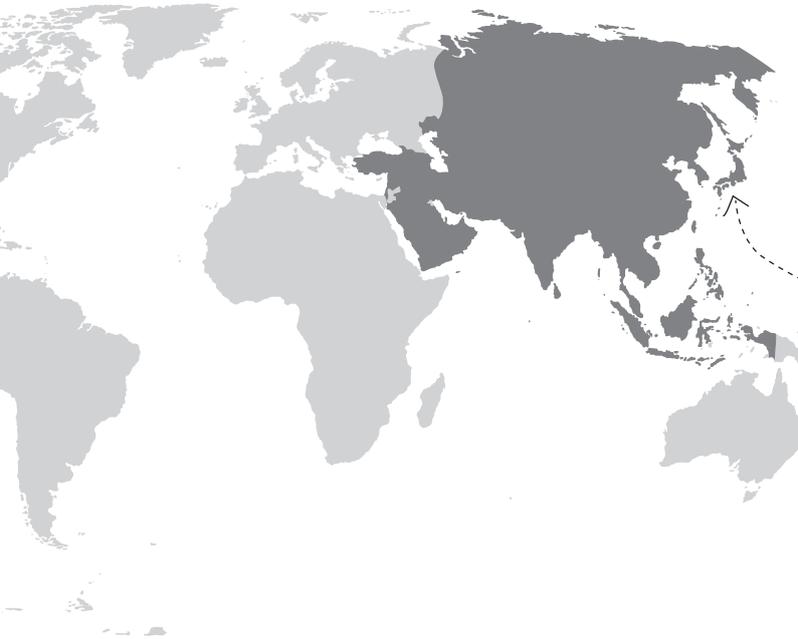
Act 1:8

have in the different parts of the Institute with brothers and laity, we are asked about this program, for information about its actual state, as well as about its future. This theme will occupy the first part of this letter. It is a matter of a program which has aroused great expectations and which has depended upon enormous support in all parts, so it is a matter of justice for us to provide a detailed report.

In addition, the current General Council has sought to situate this program within a wider context than the continent of Asia, and for this reason I am going to try to explain what is the function of the new Secretariat CMI (Collaboration for Mission International) and how it can help the Institute. This will be the second part of the letter.

Finally, in the context of the celebration of the Year of Faith, we will be invited to ask ourselves anew how and where we wish to share this marvellous gift of faith that we have received, beyond the strict limits of political, ethnic, religious, cultural boundaries... It involves continuing to expand our hearts to world dimensions, and to committing ourselves, in some way, so that our beloved Institute, already close to the bicentenary of its foundation, may become day by day more fully international and intercultural.

1. The call of Asia



In October 2004, Br Sean Sammon sent the whole Institute the letter of convocation of the VII General Conference, announcing that it would be held in Sri Lanka in September 2005. It was the first time that a meeting of this kind was called in Asia, and the choice was based on sound reasons.

Br Sean and his Council wanted to propose an ambitious project for growth in Asia and thought that, for a better understanding, a firsthand knowledge of the situation was very important. For this reason, the participants in this General Conference (the Superior General and his Council, Provincials and District Superiors) were invited, in small groups and as a pre-Conference activity, to visit some of the Marist presences on the Asian continent.

These visits as much as the stay in Sri Lanka for four weeks helped provide a better understanding of the proposal, which received massive support during the General Conference.

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE PROGRAM "AMAG" (ASIA MISSION AD GENTES)

In the letter convoking the General Conference, Br Sean allowed a glimpse of some of the reasons behind this bold adventure. In the first place, he noted the fact that we had been an **international Institute** for more than a century but had not always acted as one. In the second place, he emphasized that a fundamental aspect of our life, such as is the **mission ad gentes**, had been progressively lost sight of over recent years. And finally, he recorded that **simplicity of life** and the call **to serve persons who are poor** continued requiring our attention, although we had spoken and written about these matters almost from the end of Vatican II.

The 2nd of January 2006 marks the beginning of the AMAG program, with a personal letter from Br Sean addressed to each brother in the Institute, in which he explains, among other things, why Asia was chosen: because unevangelized countries and young Churches enjoyed preference in the Institute, according to our Constitutions (90); because Pope John Paul II launched an explicit invitation to the Church: "Just as in the first millennium the Cross was planted on the soil of Europe, and in the second on that of America and Africa, we can pray that in the Third Christian Millennium a great harvest of faith will be reaped in this vast and vital continent" (Ecclesia in Asia, 1); because Asia is the home of approximately two thirds of the world population, whereas we had fewer than 200 Brothers in this continent. The UNO also identifies Asia as the poorest region in the world in the segments of youth. There are many youth there; almost 50% of the population of South Asia are under the age of 24. And of these, half survive on less than two US dollars a day.

"Just as in the first millennium the Cross was planted on the soil of Europe, and in the second on that of America and Africa, we can pray that in the Third Christian Millennium a great harvest of faith will be reaped in this vast and vital continent" (Ecclesia in Asia, 1).

Almost **50%** of the population of South Asia are under the age of **24**.

In the same letter he exposes in detail what is hoped for:

At the heart of the new mission ad gentes project is this dream: to mission over the next four years 150 or more brothers to new apostolic works throughout the countries of Asia and also to send a smaller number to those restructured Provinces that have not yet achieved the levels of vitality and viability that are needed if a future is to be theirs.

186 Brothers replied saying that they would like, in one way or another, to take part in the program of Mission Ad Gentes.

We can qualify as extraordinary the response made by the brothers to Br Sean's letter. **186 brothers** replied saying that they would like, in one way or another, to take part in the program of Mission Ad Gentes. Some indicated their availability in an immediate way; others gave their names, but said they could not join in, given the responsibilities they had at the time; others, finally, said that because of their age they could "only" pray, as if this were a small thing!

The implementation of the program supposed a notable effort, both in organization and the mobilization of resources of every kind. The drive and the co-ordination on the part of Br Luis G. Sobrado were fundamental for the success of AMAG.

EVOLUTION OF AMAG

From 2006 to 2010 a total of **7 sessions** were organized in Davao, in the Philippines, **for the discernment and formation** of candidates for the program. There

was a total of 81 participants (including the 5 lay women and 2 lay men in the 2010 session). In the last two years, formation has been prepared in accordance with the concrete requirements of the persons joining the program, a total of 3 brothers and 4 lay persons. So the total number of participants in the processes of discernment and formation has been 88 persons. Of these, some were incorporated into the AMAG countries, others directed to Marist presences in other countries, and some decided to return to their countries of origin, whether during the discernment process or after a period in their host communities.

Today AMAG counts on **38 brothers and 5 lay persons**, present in 6 countries of the Asian continent. In some of these countries, we have candidates to Marist life, including some already in the novitiate. As I said above, some brothers who responded to Br Sean's invitation are now collaborating in the Marist mission in different countries which do not belong to the Sector AMAG.

38 Brothers
5 lay persons
6 countries
of the Asian
continent

WHEN WE LOOK OVER THE ROAD TRAVELLED, WE RECOGNIZE MANY VALUES, AMONG WHICH I UNDERLINE THE FOLLOWING:

- A clear style of Marist presence: discreet, close to the people, simple, respectful of the context;
- A commitment with the poorest children and young people, with a presence in places where the Church presence is lacking;
- A great effort to become established in the different countries: language, culture, customs, etc.;
- A simple life style, in harmony with the social surroundings;
- A quest for a spirituality inserted in the Asian context;
- An effort to build community in the international and intercultural diversity;
- The first Marist candidates in various countries;
- Some communities with brothers and lay persons;
- Initial steps taken by some communities to become self-sufficient.

In the course of these five years, when we have felt very visibly the presence and blessing of the Lord, there has been no lack of trials and sufferings of various kinds and origins. We recognize, however, with the perspective given us today by a certain distance in time, that we committed some errors of method or process, from which we want to learn for the future.

These first years, which we could qualify as the "period of constitution", have been truly special for AMAG, full of enthusiasm and energy, but also of the questions and vacillations common to those who are in search.

I believe that we can all congratulate ourselves for the injection of vitality that the program has meant for the Institute, as well as for the achievements already made.

All the progress made has been possible thanks to the availability of the persons taking part .

I believe that we can all congratulate ourselves for the injection of vitality that the program has meant for the Institute, as well as for the achievements already made.

As is easy to imagine, all the progress made has been possible thanks to the availability of the persons taking part and also thanks to the generosity of those who have shared economic resources, coming mainly from the internal solidarity of the Institute.

In my own name and the name of the brothers of the General Council, I would like to express my thanks and admiration for all the persons who, in one way or another, have been and are involved in this program so important to the Institute. Both I and the brothers of the Council are profoundly convinced of its validity and, for this reason, we wish to assure its continuity and consolidation, as the last General Chapter requested.



CRITERIA FOR NEW MARIST PRESENCES IN ASIA

- Possibilities of evangelization through educational projects.
- Work with materially poor children and young people.
- To go where others cannot or do not want to go. To stay until we are no longer needed.
- To help the local churches undertake something that they can continue.
- To be together in community and in the apostolate.
- To aim for financial stability in the long term (2009)

TOWARDS THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE PROGRAM

Now the initial times have passed, we believe that a second stage is beginning for AMAG, a "period of consolidation". For this purpose, besides continuing to maintain the advances already made, we think we should give priority to the following aspects:

- To strengthen community life, paying special attention to interculturality;
- To give impetus to the spiritual life of each member of AMAG, especially through a greater familiarity with the great spiritualities of the Asian continent;
- To foster the quality of vocations ministry and initial formation of Marist brothers and laity;
- To promote processes of discernment as the way towards a common vision, as much of the mission as of its concrete implementation;
- To foster the new relationship between brothers and laity requested by the XXI General Chapter and help reinforce the leadership of local laity;
- To support the sustainability of AMAG (finances, personnel, inculturation, etc.)

We are relying on the current members of AMAG for this period of consolidation, but we are going to continue needing new members in the next few years, both brothers and lay persons.

Recently we have initiated periods of short term collaboration with AMAG (at least three months), as a trial plan, with the aim of supporting projects which require this type of assistance. According to the evaluation of the experiment, we will see if continuing with this type of collaboration in the future is profitable or not.



2. Collaboration for mission international (CMI)



"As Marist Brothers and Lay Marists living in today's globalized world we are called to have hearts and minds that are international in outlook."

"As Marist Brothers and Lay Marists living in today's globalized world we are called to have hearts and minds that are international in outlook." Thus do the members of the last General Chapter express themselves clearly, echoing those magnificent words of our Founder: "All the dioceses of the world enter into our plans."

I believe that one of the indisputable advances with us, in part thanks to the restructuring of the administrative units, has been that of a greater awareness of the internationality of the Institute. Certainly, it is something that is entering little by little "into our minds and hearts", as the Chapter asked. But we probably have to put in place the means to continue making significant steps in this regard. We remind you of some of the proposals for action of the XXI General Chapter:

- To establish international and interprovincial communities which will be open to Marist Brothers and Lay Marists and serve in the vanguard of new areas of mission.
- To strengthen the further development of Mission Ad Gentes in Asia, and open it out to other areas where a need is discerned.
- To establish a Marist volunteer service in support of our mission, whose members are available to work in our ministries in need or to be mobilized for emergencies.

With the aim of providing an institutional response to these challenges posed by our Chapter, the General Council decided to create a new Secretariat in the General Administration, called "Collaboration for Mission International" (CMI), which is attempting to promote an awareness of mission which transcends the geographical boundaries of our countries and administrative units, and thus facilitate the mobility of persons at the service of the mission.

The Director of the Secretariat, Br Chris Wills, who took up this service in January 2012, is trying to give gradual shape to the Secretariat, which, in harmony with the "Plan of animation and government of the General Administration", will have the following characteristics:

- A collaborative management approach, in the spirit of fraternal dialogue, with the administrative units, the four other secretariats and the General Council, in accordance with systems of best professional practice;
- The understanding that our international commitment is an institutional strategy responding to the call of the General Chapter;
- The valuing of partnerships between Marist and other agencies engaged in international collaboration for mission;
- The recognition of the roles, rights and responsibilities of all involved at the different levels: personal, administrative units, Institute, as well as a readiness to assist with formation and accompaniment;
- The promotion of a culture of international mission in all Marist formation programs and the fostering of international experiences in the initial formation of brothers;
- Collaboration in the accompaniment of Marist laity and brothers who offer themselves as volunteers for international mission.

This Secretariat includes the AMAG program, but it is not limited to it. We know that there are many other regions of the world whose situation demands special attention and for that reason deserve international support.

Our idea is that this Secretariat can accompany the different types of missionary collaboration that are in operation among us, whether dependent on the General Administration, or else facilitating agreements between provinces.

3. Invited to discern

The Message of the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization begins with a beautiful Gospel image: the meeting of Jesus with the Samaritan woman. We are all represented there, because "there is no man or woman who, in one's life, would not find oneself like the woman of Samaria beside a well with an empty bucket, with the hope of finding the fulfillment of the heart's most profound desire, that which alone could give full meaning to existence".

It appears to me an excellent declaration of principles with regard to evangelization: it involves giving the word to Jesus and not in engaging in self propaganda; fostering sincere, open dialogue, without accusation or prejudice; recognizing that we are all in search of a basic meaning for our lives, together with all persons of good will, and that, therefore, we can all learn from one another...

"Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion is to take off our shoes, since the place we are approaching is holy. In any other way, we can find ourselves treading on the dreams of others. Even more serious, we could forget that God was there before our arrival" (Max Warren). With great humility, we feel ourselves privileged at knowing ourselves heirs and continuators of the apostles and martyrs, wherever we carry out our mission:

Leading the men and women of our time to Jesus, to the encounter with him is a necessity that touches all the regions of the world, those of the old and those of the recent evangelization...

It is not about starting again, but entering into the long path of proclaiming the Gospel with the apostolic courage of Paul who would go so far as to say "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16). Throughout history, from the first centuries of the Christian era to the present, the Gospel has edified communities of believers in all parts of the world. Whether small or great, these are the fruit of the dedication of generations of witnesses to Jesus – missionaries and martyrs – whom we remember with gratitude. (Final Message to the People of God from the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization, 2)

Br Sean addressed two letters to all the brothers of the Institute, at different times, inviting them to discern, before God, if they felt **called to leave their own homeland to become part of an international community in another place in the world.**

Today I renew this invitation, but addressed to **all the Marists of Champagnat.** If you feel the call to commit some years of your life to the service of the Marist

mission beyond the frontiers of your province or your country, I encourage you **to step forward and show your availability**, whether it is for a long period of time or for a shorter presence (minimum of three months).

You can do this by speaking or writing to your Br Provincial, who will indicate to you how to proceed. If for any reason in particular you wish to communicate directly with me, you can also do that.

Each province will have a person who will co-ordinate, at provincial level, the volunteer service for the Marist mission. This person is the one who will normally facilitate the successive steps to be taken, depending on the type of collaboration.

You can do this by speaking or writing to your Br Provincial, who will indicate to you how to proceed.



4. In praise of journeying: go in haste to a new land

"We feel impelled by God to go out into a new land, to facilitate the birth of a new epoch for the Marist charism".

"With Mary, go in haste to a new land!" With this graphic phrase, the members of the XXI General Chapter expressed the urgent invitation they felt to embark on a journey. And they explained it thus: "We feel impelled by God to go out into a new land, to facilitate the birth of a new epoch for the Marist charism".

In the something more than three years since the end of the General Chapter, many persons have asked themselves what it means for them to "go out to a new land", which the same Chapter qualified as the "new land of an authentic renewal of the Institute". The responses have not been the same everywhere, but all have felt that to make this move means paying a price:

"We know that this presupposes a willingness to move on, to let go of the familiar, and to embark on a journey of institutional and personal conversion over the next eight years".

The first name for Christians in the Acts of the Apostles (cf. 24: 14) was "those of the Way": who are not idle, who have a goal, who know where to go. The Church, like life, is faithful to itself when it evolves and changes, not when it is defending what it has acquired. As the great Italian poet Eugenio Montale said: "Every image carries the word: further".

Two journeys distinguish the narratives which are at the origin of Western and Biblical cultures: those of Ulysses and Abraham. For Ulysses, the journey is a return home, while Abraham sets out not to return. The symbol of Ulysses' journey is a circle completed. In the case of Abraham, it is the trajectory of an arrow. For Ulysses, the journey is towards memory, backwards; for Abraham, a journey towards the future, the new, which brings enthusiasm, but also fear because of the uncertainty.



What moves us is not nostalgia for what we have left, but hope, based on the conviction that the journey is worth the pain.

I imagine that our Institute's journey is closer to Abraham's rather than Ulysses'; what moves us is not nostalgia for what we have left, but hope, based on the conviction that the journey is worth the pain. Often, fatigued by the journey or seduced by the beauty or the comfort of some place, we have wanted to settle down and send out roots, but we continue sensing as our own the call addressed to Abraham: "Go to the land I will show you!"

This invitation, which displeases us because it disturbs our comfort, is presented at times under the form of provincial restructuring, or of a new initiative, as the AMAG program was a few years ago, or perhaps concealed beneath the circumstances of history, like the promulgation of the secular laws in France in 1903... Whatever the case, a marvellous result is that all these calls have always found generous hearts ready to respond and go "further". And I am sure that this will continue being so today and in the future.

We are not looking for heroes who do spectacular things, but simple, normal persons, who are capable of asking themselves honestly what "to go in haste to a new land, with Mary" means for them, and immediately take the first step to respond: "The river begins with the first drop of water; love with the first glance; night with the first star; spring with the first flower" (Primo Mazzolari).

With the celebration of the 200 years of the Institute on the horizon, we are stimulated to embrace our vocation as itinerants, in Mary's footsteps.

The Church with the Marian face which we want to build is the one which follows Mary, which sets out in haste on the journey. A barefooted Church which, like Mary, has dust on its feet.

Faternally,

"The river begins with the first drop of water; love with the first glance; night with the first star; spring with the first flower" (Primo Mazzolari).

Superior General

