**REFLECTIONS AT IHE**

Br. John Klein - 8 October 2012

Two years ago Brother Emili Turu in the address that he prepared for you last gathering shared some of his dreams “For the Future of the Marist International Network of Institutions of Higher Education.” At one point he reflected that, “…We have the moral obligation of assuring a presence with its proper style, incarnating the charism which identifies us. It is not worth doing what everyone else does. If we contribute something, it is because there is something that distinguishes us, that is to say, that the Marist Presence contributes something other public or private institutions do not offer. What is it that makes the IHE different?” I believe that your ongoing response to this question will demonstrate the importance of the role of our Marist institutions of higher education in furthering the mission and charism of Marcellin Champagnat.

Section 3 of your document entitled, “Marist Mission in Higher Education,” proudly proclaims that we carry on the dream of Champagnat. In developing this you further state that Marist Higher Education is “more and more aware of the values, principles, and fundamental attitudes that mark the Marist presence in the world.” It is at time a daunting task to translate these values, principles, and attitudes into reality. Nonetheless, despite the challenges, it is worth the effort because it has the potential to have a transforming effect upon the lives of the students you serve, those with whom you work and upon yourselves, as well. I believe that what you will do here at this gathering this week can have a profound impact on the rest of our Marist Institute and therefore is critically important. You are probably familiar with what in chaos theory is called, the Butterfly Effect. This theory, as you know, holds that a small change at one place can result in large differences that can occur to large-scale alterations of events. Hence, a butterfly flapping its wings in East Timor has the potential to create a chain of events that could lead to a tornado in Oklahoma. The butterfly does not cause the tornado, of course, but it starts the chain of events.

The Fundamental Call of the XXI General Chapter asserted that with Mary we 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 charisma.” This call is meant for all of us and, in particular, today for the IHE. So, during your deliberations this week I would like to suggest that you keep in mind what the call to the new land might mean for the Marist Network of Higher Education.

Typically, in our Marist documents and iconography we employ the image of Mary of the Visitation in our references to moving to a new land. This evening, however, I would like to offer a different image of moving to a new land that is found in one of the writings Gustavo Gutierrez. In this passage he describes a remarkable event in the life of the Prophet Jeremiah. “The country was devastated, threatened by the Chaldeans in the north and the Egyptians from of the south, conflicted by a war whose consequences made the Jewish people suffer. This was before the Babylonian exile. In those circumstances, a relative comes along to say that he, Jeremiah, has the first right of purchase for territory left by an uncle. The prophet asks himself what this territory (new land) might mean in a country partially destroyed and in which people have abandoned their property and fled abroad. Nevertheless, he soon realized that the Lord was speaking to him through this act. His task was to raise the hope of the people in the midst of a crisis and to heal his own depression and that of his people. To do this he had to set foot on the new land and witness with concrete actions that there still is hope and that there is someone who believes that the circumstances of the moment can be overcome.”

This, I believe, is the task of the IHE today: to set foot on new land; to witness with concrete actions that there still is hope; to demonstrate that there still is someone who believes that the circumstances of this age and present moment can be overcome.

In this light I would like to propose four possible ways through which you might become new Jeremiahs for your particular Institution, the Network and for the Institute.

1. Could this new land mean creating new and innovative programs for the evangelization of your students…keeping in mind the call of the General Chapter that we become “experts in evangelization?” Does it mean that pastoral ministry will become your priority?
2. Could this new land mean implementing new ways of sharing your intellectual know-how with the Institute in response to Brother Emili’s request two years ago? This is already happening through the efforts and generosity of the University (PUCP) in Curitiba in assisting the General Administration in designing a new model for its financing and the implementation of the Pergamum Program for organizing our records, information and archives. In addition, the new online program “Charism, Mission, and Marist Educational Principles that currently is being designed holds great potential for the future of the network and of the Institute.
3. Could this new land mean creating a network program for the development and training of brothers and laypeople in our emerging provinces to become competent school administrators and managers of province works? Could you make a significant intellectual and technical contribution to the provinces in the Third World who are struggling to become self-sufficient and sustainable into the future? The provincials at the EGC in Nairobi last December highlighted this as one of the critical needs of our African provinces and District.
4. Finally, could this new land mean working closely with Brother Chris Wills and the Secretariat for International Mission Collaborating in encouraging young men and women imbued with the Marist spirit to volunteer to work with fellow Marists in areas of significant need particularly in the countries of our Asia Ad Gentes Sector? This could prove to be a concrete way to “build networks of international solidarity.”

Clearly there is much to be done and the Network has a future rich with many possibilities. Independently it might be too much but together I am confident that the network can achieve great things.

There is an African Proverb that goes like this:

Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up.

It knows that it must run faster than the fastest lion or it will be killed.

Every morning a lion wakes up.

It knows that it must outrun the slowest gazelle or it will starve to death.

It doesn’t matter whether you are a lion or a gazelle.

When the sun comes up, you better start running.

I believe that the sun has risen for the IHE with great hope and possibility for the future. Truly you do carry on the dream of Champagnat. Like Jeremiah you can set foot on new land and with concrete actions can demonstrate that there still is hope. Like the lion and the gazelle in the Proverb, it is time to start running.