At a press conference held at the Provincial House of the Marist Brothers in Negombo, Brother Luis Sobrado, the Vicar General of the Religious Congregation of the Marist Brothers, briefed the journalists about the Conference. Five of the earlier conferences of the congregation have been held in Rome and one in Brazil. Asked why the venue for the VII General Conference is Sri Lanka, Brother Luis said, that 51,500 Marist Brothers and lay collaborators work in 77 countries, serving 497,300 children and young people in the field of education. It is only 7% of those human resources who work in Asia. When two-thirds of young people live in Asia, it is only fair that the Marist Brothers should focus their attention on young people here, as young people have a right to an holistic education. While dwelling on the matters related to the leadership in the congregation, the conference will attempt to explore the possibilities of assisting Asia in its work of education with young people.

The conference will be held in Goldi Sands Hotel in Negombo from the 5th to the 30th September. The participants will include Brother Seán Sammon, the Superior General, his Council based in Rome and Brothers Provincial coming from forty-four countries. All together there will be fifty-nine persons participating in the conference using the four languages: English, French, Spanish and Portuguese. Another press conference is scheduled during this international assembly with Brother Superior General.

Brother Michael De Waas, the Provincial of the Province of Sri Lanka and Pakistan, and Brother Joseph Peiris, the coordinator of the Press conference, also participated in the meeting.

The convocation in Sri Lanka will bring the leaders of the Institute to Asia for a month. With them, brothers, postulants, novices and laypeople are turning their attention towards the largest continent, inhabited by about two-thirds of the world’s population. China and India together form nearly half of the world’s population.

I am turning my attention today towards Asia to accompany the pilgrimage of Brothers Provincial who carry in their dossiers and hearts the dynamism of the Marist Congregation for the countries of this continent. Each one of them has been encouraged to undertake a voyage with hearts and eyes open so as to be in harmony with the lived experience of the Church in Asia and of the Marist Brothers who give witness to the Gospel by their lives on this continent.

Encouraged by this desire to open new Gospel pathways, I also have started a contemplative journey in my heart towards these immense lands, by trying to discover their richness which is always concealed behind these unknown and faraway places, these numerous and different cultures or these foreign religions. I am sharing these reflections with you confidently and freely, reflections that arouse in me certain elements that form the setting of this institutional event that constitutes the VII General Conference.
Sri Lanka is a pause on the journey between the XX General Chapter, through which our Institute started the new millennium by choosing life, and the XXI General Chapter which will crown the first decade of this itinerary towards more vitality and vigour. Looking towards the future, I contemplate these countries that speak to me of an uncertain present, a past with a rich heritage and a future that is calling for responsibility.

The Convocation of the General Conference in Sri Lanka, from the 5th to the 30th September 2005, cites its objective as “fostering vitality in Marist Life and ministry today”. It is a proposition addressed especially to the leaders of the Congregation, to brothers and to laypeople. Each Brother Provincial sees himself being assigned the task of energising his Administrative Unit in his own way. It is an invitation to discern where the Spirit is blowing and what the calls are for the Church in Asia and for these people who have developed cultures and religions that have lasted thousands of years. It is an occasion to arouse initiatives capable of renewing our communities and our works, so that they manifest the plans of God and write a new chapter in the history of the Church and of the Congregation. It is also a formidable occasion for each of the works and communities of the Institute. Brothers and laypeople, we have a rendezvous at the VII General Conference, where we will take a pause in our institutional journey to see if the direction which we are navigating is really that fixed by the XX General Chapter. But we must also “take up more ambitious topics” as Brother Seán Sammon mentioned in his letter of convocation. We are living today full of hope.

SRI LANKA THROUGH THE EYES OF A JOURNALIST

The General conference in the region affected by the tsunami catastrophe

The convocation of the VII General Conference in Sri Lanka, the “Pearl of the Indian Ocean”, the “Queen of the Mannar”, the “Splendid Island”, with all of these titles by which it is known, arouses in me the need to learn more about this place by investigating something that illustrates for me this unknown country and the great Asian continent. I dedicated some time in the holidays for this. Having a book in hand, “El despertar de Asia” (The awakening of Asia) written by Georgina Higuera in a synthetic way, with an attractive journalistic style, with a language full of statistical references, I did a tour of China, Taiwan, Japan, Iran, India, Indonesia, Iraq and even Australia. The journalistic profession obliges one to bear witness and to struggle to access the places where news is born, to search for information and, maybe without thinking, write it there where one finds oneself in a more or less quiet corner to broadcast rapidly and to be part of the first edition.

In this Asian panorama, which the author of this book offers, Sri Lanka occupies a small space to describe the effects of the “tsunami”, a Japanese word made well known by this tragedy. The huge wave devastated 75% of the coastline of this island, thus becoming one of the greatest catastrophes possible. By putting together a collection of pictures of the tsunami, including pictures of Panadura, Trincomale, Galle, Negombo, Nilaveli y Atagama, the author described how this catastrophe affected the economy and the daily life of its inhabitants.

70 % of the Sri Lankan fishing fleet remain destroyed. A large number of the people who died or have disappeared are from the 200,000 fishermen and their families. Another 100,000 families that inhabited the sector as shipbuilders, makers of fishing nets, salespeople, motor repairers and also those who lived closest to the coast have also suffered great personal and financial losses.
Negombo, situated about forty kilometres to the north of Colombo, which is hosting the VII General Conference, is one of the principal fishing cities of Sri Lanka. In this central zone of the west coast of the island, people have not lamented loss of human life, but after the catastrophe, its look has been desolate. In the large natural lake that sometimes acts as a port, bows and sterns of boats have surfaced, many of which were destroyed when the huge wave threw them against the bridge that crosses the lake, pushing some against others and dropping a lot of them on land.

In comparison with the fishermen of the east coast, those of Negombo are nearly fortunate. In many villages, such as Velur, not even devastation is felt as the tsunami destroyed everything totally, including entire families, especially women and children. In many towns, the only building left standing was the mosque or the church, causing many superstitions. More than 80% of fishermen in Sri Lanka are Catholics and the rest, especially on the east coast, are Moslems.

The Sri Lankan fleet consisted of 29,694 boats, of which only 1,500 were more than ten metres in length. Another 1,5000 were between nine and ten metres and the 11,000 others of fibreglass were between five and eight metres of length. The rest were boats without motors: canoes, catamarans and sailboats.

According to the Ministry of Fish and Ocean Resources, in 2003 the catch of fish in Sri Lanka rose to 300,000 tons, part of which was exported principally to the European Union, Japan and the United States of America: 15,690 tons of tuna, shark, sole and prawns. The rest was consumed by the Sri Lankan people. The majority of the inhabitants of the island are great consumers of fish, but after the catastrophe, no one wants to eat fish. They say that the fish are feeding on the dead bodies in the ocean.

Only three ports were spared the destruction of the tsunami: Kalpitiya, in the northeast of Sri Lanka, and those close to Colombo, Mutual and Chilaw. In these ports the great concern is the superstition that the deaths have contaminated the waters of the Indian Ocean. If the people continue to refrain from eating fish, for them, the worst is yet to come.

**A NEW LANGUAGE FOR A RESPONSIBILITY THAT WILL LAST FOREVER**

Some peculiarities of the VII General Conference

**The meeting’s location**

The meeting’s location for this convocation will not be Rome, or Europe, but Asia. The VII General Conference will take place in Sri Lanka, also known as the “Pearl of the Indian Ocean” to bring the brothers closer to this part of humanity sometimes so unfamiliar to us than our own. This follows the criteria with which the V General Conference was organised in Veranopolis (Brazil) for the first time in the history of this type of meeting away from Rome and in Latin America.

**The mission ad gentes as the background**

The VII General Conference is taking place in Asia, the largest continent on Earth, under the banner of mission ad gentes. It was in Asia where God, from the beginning, revealed and realised his plan of salvation. Jesus of Nazareth, the Saviour, who was incarnated as an Asian, who was born in a small part of western Asia, who knew and loved this earth, is still not known. The presence of Christians on the Asian continent, inhabited by about two-thirds of the world's population, is a minority considered very often as foreigners and they represent foreign powers, but at the same time promise and hope. The number of Marists on this continent is a small grain of mustard, a presence, day-by-day, insignificant, but alive.

The mission ad gentes that summons the Church to “go and teach all nations”, according to the Superior General, “has grown steadily weaker in recent years” in the Institute. “A waning of the missionary spirit... needs strengthening today... and warrants further study at next year's Conference.” Brother Seán Sammon foresees in his letter of convocation for the Conference that
an upcoming circular will treat “mission, the works of the Little Brothers of Mary, and the Jean-Baptiste Montagnes of today”.

**We will not have invited laypeople**

During the last two general Chapters and in the 1997 General Conference, a small group of laypeople participated as observers and advisors. But the Brother Superior General has decided “not to invite a small group of laymen and women to next year’s Conference”. He is conscious that “lay participation in those three gatherings was a good beginning but something more is needed today.”

The work with laypeople has travelled other paths, promoted by the General Conference from the Chapter mandate, with the aim of proposing “a new vocabulary” and of promoting “new structures” that foster “more effective representation” than was obtained when they were selected by the Brothers Provincial and their Councils and when they were not allowed to be “invited”.

On these previous occasions during which laypeople were present, due to the nature of the meeting of the General Chapter and of the General Conference “and the directives of our Marist Constitutions and Statutes the role of these lay groups was often limited”.

It is to be hoped that in the meanwhile the presence of laypeople in Marist works is not valued only as “a positive element”, as noted in the minutes of previous events, but as a participation with their own character shared with the brothers.

**A new language for a responsibility that will last forever**

The language of Brother Seán Sammon has been new since his first written message; new in its form and in its contents. The letter of convocation for the VII General Conference, which was not sent exclusively to Superiors and brothers, as can be seen in the opening greeting of Brother Superior General to “all who cherish and hold dear the charism of Marcellin Champagnat”, is offered to us with a double title: “Life–giving Leadership” and “Fostering vitality in Marist life and ministry today”. Two proposals that concern us all but that, in the development of the letter, puts the emphasis on the responsibility of the Superiors, called here, in this document “leaders”. This is a new concomitant to the Conference that is not used in the language of the Constitutions and Statutes.

Brother Superior General, in describing “the mission of leaders in the Marist Institute” states that it must be seen in the light of faith as a choice of the Holy Spirit “to lead”. “If you are a Provincial, District Superior, or Superior of a local community {and we could add Superior General, General Councillor, etc.} God elected you to lead, to have the ability to get other people to do what they don’t want to do and to like it”. I found myself asking “What is it that the others (those who are not leaders?) do not want to do? To get them to do it and do it with pleasure are two challenges for a “mission of the heart” that can be translated as “providing a vision for our brothers and lay partners” and as “extending mercy and care to them”, “to confront them” and “to encourage them”.

With this promise of the Brothers Provincial and District Superiors to “carry in our hearts the very same spirit of charity” we hope to meet Brother Superior General with his brothers in Sri Lanka so that “our time together there will give us even more reason to hope that a new day is dawning for our Institute and its mission”.

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**GREETINGS TO OUR READERS**

VII General Conference - September, 03

We are initiating this chronicle from Sri Lanka. On our arrival at Goldi Sands Hotel where the VII General Conference is going to be held from the 5th until the 30th September, we found some brothers who had arrived early to take advantage of the beautiful natural setting to have some rest and to attend to final details before the start of the Conference. The logistical organisation has functioned perfectly. The employees of Goldi Sands Hotel have been punctual at the airport, list in hand, waiting for the different arrivals of planes. The journeys have been undertaken...
without any difficulties, apart from the anecdotes that break the monotony of the hours in flight and the large expanses of the airports.

In collaboration with Brother Onorino Rota and with Luiz Da Rosa, both co-ordinating from Rome the translation of articles into the four official languages of the Institute and the publishing of these articles on the website, we hope to keep you informed of the highlights of the Conference.

From this moment we invite you to share, with all the participants, this fraternal meeting in which all hope to consider “fostering vitality in Marist Life and ministry today!”

Reception of the Brother Superior General

The Marist Province of Sri Lanka and Pakistan, through the Provincial, Brother Mike de Waas, held a reception for the Superior General, Brother Seán Sammon, and his companions on their arrival at Goldi Sands Hotel.

After getting out of the car and reaching the hotel door, the visitors walked along a red carpet up to the place where a Sinhalese hostess wearing elegant clothing was waiting for them. At the same time, a group of dancers and musicians, in typical regional costume, accompanied their steps with the rhythm of various percussion instruments. The hostess gave a gift to them in the form of a collar of violet flowers for the Superior General and for the others frangipane flowers.

At the entrance to the hall, they found a bronze candelabrum. The upper part of the candelabrum was crowned by the figure of a rooster and just below this there was a receptacle of oil from which emerged various wicks. The rooster announces the start of a new day and with his song he welcomes all to the new light at dawn. Those entering took the new light of their own person and lit the wick of the candelabra as a sign of welcome and greeting to those living in the house.

Afterwards, Brother Mike de Waas, the hotel manager and some of the brothers present accompanied Brother Seán Sammon to the dining room where breakfast was being served. With this symbolic gesture, the Brother Provincial of the Province of Sri Lanka and Pakistan wanted to give a very cordial welcome in the person of the Brother Superior General to all the brothers who are participating in this VII General Conference.

MARCELLIN AND THE LAMP

Appearing on the pathways of Asia illuminated by the light of faith

At the Hermitage, where I had the good fortune to do my retreat, I spent some time contemplating the stained glass windows that decorate Marcellin’s tomb. One particular part grabbed my attention: the scene in which Marcellin received an intuition one day as his glance and heart transcended the horizon of the ranges of Mount Pilat. He was moved by the urging of the word of God, “Go and teach all nations”. He thus drew up his map of Marist works such that all the dioceses of the world would come into his plans.

I remember times in the life of Marcellin in which reference is made to a lamp. One: Marcellin said to Mary, “If you do not put oil in the lamp, your work will extinguish.” And one day, trusting that the Lord would provide the institutional lamp with the new oil of abundant vocations he dared to open wide the frontiers of the Marist mission: “All the dioceses of the world come into our plans.” And another: when his strength was debilitated a short time before he died he said to the brother with him: “Brother, the light of the lamp is being extinguished.” The lamp that stood by the brother was burning brightly, full of life. It was the sight and the life of Marcellin that was declining. The moment for Marcellin to surrender his will had arrived. The light of the mission continued to burn brightly. Some will think it lunacy to look today toward Asia, toward new parts of the vineyard of the Lord, toward new dioceses and nations where there is no Marist presence, when the troops we do have on the ground can hardly cover the present demands. We will need the oil of more vocations and we will need to exercise a trust in Mary like that of Marcellin. The command of the Lord is always...
current: "Go and teach." Champagnat translated the "go and teach" as an evangelical proposal for the nascent congregation, a concrete goal, able to be evaluated, as we say today: "all the dioceses of the world". It is clear that there are still dioceses for us to realise our plans. There are still nations where we can go to teach. Today, through the VII general Conference, our attention is focussed on the voice and face of Asia in order to strengthen the faith and the mission.

Today the Congregation feels older, biologically aged; many of our members, after arduous work and a generous commitment, foresee that the end is coming and it seems that the light of the lamp is fading. Many, who wagered their lives for a new diocese, suffer the thirst of the dying Christ, a thirst that was theirs in the fervent moments of youth, and they look around them seeking to give witness to the mission in countries and dioceses in which their energy has been greatly consumed. They no longer find a brother at their side holding the lamp in his hand. How should we look at Asia, the largest continent on earth, to find somebody who is interested in the light that has illuminated our lives? Can a General Conference of leaders in a remote continent be attractive for older brothers? What can it say to the younger generation and to those who are the older generation?

The cry of the dying Christ “I am thirsty” has been interpreted many times, and has been experienced in major moments of our lives, like the thirst of a soul, like the thirst yet to be quenched, felt by the worker called to work for the Kingdom at the end of the day, when the sun of life is setting and he looks at the fields and the Lord’s vineyards where the task is still immense even though they have been among the workers of the first hour and they have born the burden of the day. The agonising Christ is thirsty. A lot of brothers have died, also afflicted by this thirst. Having arrived at dusk, when the light is fading, as Champagnat experienced, the places of our presence stretch past the horizon that we have attained and past the limits of our strength. The Church, and the Congregation with it, is once more a pathway on which one can quench one’s thirst because an abundant harvest of faith is anticipated for the next millennium.

Many brothers and lay people want to quench this thirst. This allows us to understand the invitation of the VII General Conference to come to Asia as an Institute. As many brothers arrive at midlife, when it seems that the lamp that the brother carries with his head does not shine for his eyes, you can hear the institutional clamour: “I am thirsty.” A thirst that the Gospel must bring to the nations who do not know it! The thirst of the Marist presence in the dioceses where Marcellin’s dream has not yet been realised! Thus, all is possible for those who believe, more for those who hope and who love and infinitely more yet for those who persevere in the practice of the three virtues. By the VII General Conference, our Institute appeals to our faith, to our hope and to our charity along the pathways of Asia. AMEstaún.

THE GOLDI SANDS HOTEL - A MARIST HOUSE FOR ONE MONTH
VII General Conference - September 04

When we arrived at the Goldi Sans Hotel the final details were being organised to accommodate the hotel to the needs of the Conference. Some spaces in the hotel have been refitted. It could be said that the Marist Brothers will have one extra house in the world, at least for one month. This hotel, where the VII General Conference is being celebrated, is trying to be as similar as possible to a Marist house for the progress of the work and the life in common during these days.

The Goldi Sands Hotel is situated in a suburb of Negombo, next to a beach to which it has direct access. It was constructed in 1975 in a modest fashion with room for seventy guests. Its main activity during the year is tourism. It hosts mainly French, German, English and some Italian and Spanish tourists. It is also booked for weddings, conventions and seminars – but usually for a short time. This is the first time that the hotel has had a booking of such a long duration. As it is being used by the brothers for the entire month of September, they have had to put a sign on the door, “No vacancies for the whole month – sorry for any inconvenience”.

VII General Conference – Sri Lanka – 5 - 30 September 2005
One of the dining rooms has been adapted so that it could be used as a chapel and another small building, a kind of pavilion, is being used as a prayer room. Next to the conference room, a space has been set up for computers and for Internet access.
The brothers of Sri Lanka have seen to the ambiance of the place through banners, panels and various murals in keeping with the event.
The external temperature is not very high; at this moment it reads 27 degrees Celsius, but there is 60% humidity. The meeting room, the room used for computers and the bedrooms are all air-conditioned.

The anticipated rhythm
The daily timetable anticipated at the beginning has been very flexible. Mealtimes have been given a longer time span to allow each person to make use of a free buffet.
There are two Catholic churches near the hotel where there are Masses both in the morning and the evening. All of these are in Sinhalese, the native language. Features of these Masses were the large crowd of people, their devotion and participation. During this afternoon, we were able to go to a Mass, the first celebrated in the hotel, with Father Joaquín Fernández, Marist Father, as celebrant. He will be the chaplain for the entire conference.
At a quarter to nine in the evening, the brothers had a meeting in the Conference room to test the functioning of the microphones, the headphones, the connections for simultaneous translations and other procedures to be used during the sessions.
The atmosphere among the participants is one of great joy and fraternity. There are more than thirty different nationalities participating in this meeting. This is one of the great riches of the Institute. This meeting for many of them, four years after they had left Rome after the General Chapter, is a particular event of great transcendence. The Lord has allowed us to be reunited once more for a month of work, of prayer and of friendly sharing in order to undertake once more the strength of animating the works and the communities of the Institute throughout the entire world. And for those who are participating for the first time in this meeting of brothers, it is a gift from God to be able to share the ambiance and the work that is going to be realised.

BISHOP FRANK MARCUS GREETS THE VII GENERAL CONFERENCE
VII General Conference - September 5th

The morning of white soutanes
Today was a day of the portico, of the beginning. The day of the white soutanes, yes! The participants in the VII General Conference had an appointment in the entry hall of the house at nine o’clock in the morning dressed in formal wear to receive the authorities. The space was filled with white clothing. A good number of brothers were wearing a white soutane. Not only brothers from Sri Lanka, which is usual for them, but also from other parts of the world. Also a large group of children from Stella Maris College were dressed in white which is usual in this country for a gala day. The college is not mixed. Only boys attend classes here. Their teachers attended to the finest details so that everything was perfect. Each student carried betel leaves in their hands for the brothers.
The arrival of Bishop Frank Marcus was punctual; there was no need to wait. He is a former student of Stella Maris College and the brothers of Sri Lanka wanted him to be present at the start of these working days of the Conference. The brothers who work in this country were also present. After the acts of protocol with the bishop, various teachers with their students won the hearts of all the participants when each brother received a child who accompanied him, hand in hand, from the door of the house. The little ones treated the brothers with betel leaves and a deep bow before each one with both knees on the ground. Ancient tradition between these welcoming, happy and close people!
Welcome with the flavour of the house
With the sound of the “hakgediya”, a sea conch, song and dance was convoked to greet the visitors. A group of musicians and dancers in their festive attire accompanied all the participants from the door of the house.
In the Conference’s meeting room, the wicks of the candelabra were lit culminating in a rooster, repeating a gesture similar to that which welcomed Brother Seán Sammon on the first day. Following this, Brother Mike De Wass welcomed all to the General Conference in Sri Lanka. He highlighted, in the first place, the history of the country where the brothers have realised their missionary work. He thanked everyone for the help received from the Institute to overcome the consequences of the tsunami. He gave a description of the attractions of this country and invited the visitors to enjoy his country and the welcome of its people. He welcomed all to the VII General Conference on behalf of all the Provincials of Asia and thanked the General Conference for having chosen Sri Lanka to represent Asia.

The colour saffron
A procession was organised from the session hall to the chapel, with the statues of Mary and Marcellin with the local tradition of being accompanied by musicians and the voices of students from Stella Marist College. They enjoyed the use of liturgical vestments, their colours and symbolism.
Vestments: Saffron robes. The colour saffron is the traditional colour of the religious in South Asia.
Lotus flower: The most cherished flower in religious observances in the island.
Blue Lotus ‘Nil Manel’: National flower
Naa: National tree
Arriconut flower: Peace, Tranquility
Coconut flower: Prosperity
Two young people carrying the lit fire and burning aromatic wood approached Brothers Luis García Sobrado and Seán Sammon at the start of the Mass to place on their foreheads the “potu”, a custom coming from India, a saffron coloured mark that symbolises the reception of the person.
In his homily, the bishop highlighted his personal links with the brothers from when he was a child until he became a priest. He remembered how on the first day that he arrived at the college as a priest, the Brother Director accompanied him to all the classes and asked the students, “Who wants to be like him?” He also mentioned how the brothers always promoted priestly vocations. Following this, he shared some anecdotes about his personal relationship with the brothers. He stressed the need to promote the Marist vocation more, underlining that the vocation of a brother is not always well understood. The vocation of a brother has meaning on its own and within the Church. He then shared some of the difficulties that the Church in Asia experiences, concluding by wishing everyone the best for the Conference.

Exchange on the visits to Asia. Light and shade
The planning of the first two weeks was based on the following principles: That there be sufficient time to situate oneself in this new cultural context (Asia, Sri Lanka) and that the brothers be able to start to share amongst themselves about their experiences. It was clear that we have not come to Sri Lanka exclusively to listen to presentations or expositions from the General Council but to offer significant contributions from one’s own personal experiences and as leaders of the Institute. With this objective in mind, the afternoon was set aside for one of the two sessions planned for the visits that the brothers had undertaken in various countries. The objective of these two sessions was to ensure that the brothers could speak amongst themselves about these experiences. It was an opportunity to share experiences, impressions, etc., but above all else to centre our attention on Asia and to have questions to pose to the assembly in a later session.
The brothers were divided into six groups. The following are some of the contributions: Some highlighted “the style of life of the brothers for its austerity and simplicity of life” and the “sense of communion and integration of towns of various cultures and religions”. The felt they were “treated nobly and humanely” during their visits. They had visited countries ranging from the Philippines, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Korea, Cambodia, Japan and continental China.

“They have so much youth, so much life”, affirmed another group, but “the Marist presence is quite small in this immense continent”. Nevertheless, “the dream of Marcellin lives on in Asia” in relation to the millions of children and young people who need education.

The communication media and the thirst for power on the part of many international organisations “is undermining the cultural and religious values” for all young people. Through the larger religions and the multi-secular traditions of Asia, “the mission is a challenge for the Asian brothers and also for the Institute”. There was a testimony that “the religious community is called to present” Christian communities.

Two significant anecdotes
One of the brothers who visited continental China shared during one of these meetings, “It impressed me to be with a brother who had been in prison many times for having evangelised.”

And another time, there was this observation. In the visit to continental China we could only communicate with a few small gestures, especially with the older brothers who did not speak English. But all participated when we sang “Salve Regina”.

The family of the day
All the community celebrated the birthday of Brother Lawrence Ndawala, Provincial of the Province of África Austral/Southern Africa. During the evening, the animation team organised a small feast.

Help on the web page
In the section of the webpage, champagnat.org, dedicated to the General Conference, are included the prayers that are being used each day. The leaflet prepared for each day gathers together texts in the four official languages of the Institute. The brothers and communities who so desire can find in this place some resources in order to share the prayer of the brothers who are participating in the General Conference.

AN ECCLESIOLOGY FROM ASIA (1)
VII General Conference - 06 September

Asia as seen by the specialists
In the work plan of the General Conference, today was dedicated to the reflection on the challenges that Asia poses for the Church and for the Marist Institute. Asia needs a pathway to God. And we also need the richness that Asia brings to be close to God. It is not a matter of a study or of an intellectual analysis but of a “very fine and greatly sensitive evolution” for that which Asia means for each one of us, for the Church and for the Marist Institute. The work that was realised this day intended that each one of the participants in the Conference have an “affective heart-felt contact” with the reality of this great continent. This proposal is in accord with one of the objectives of the General Council that intends to re-establish the mission “ad gentes” for the entire Institute. Four experts were invited to share their experience and their knowledge of Asia, through a panel, to motivate reflection. Here are some features that were highlighted in the presentation to the assembly.

Father Aloysius Peiris S.J.
A Jesuit priest, founder and director of the Tula Research Centre in Kalania, Colombo. He has studied Hindu themes. His doctorate was entitled “Buddhist Studies ever awarded to a non-Buddhist” in the University of Sri Lanka. He has made an important academic contribution in North America, Europe and Asia as a professor and researcher in civil and religious universities. He has published more than 160 articles, has collaborated for the magazine “Concilium” for eight years and has written five books. The first of these was about liberation theology in Asia. Some of these have been translated into nine languages. As well as this, he has cultivated his musical talent, giving public organ recitals. His personal life style is simple and austere.

Sister Noel Christine Fernando
Sister is a member of the Congregation of the Daughters of Charity of Jesus and Mary. She works with poor working women from the now called “Investment and Promotion Zone” of Katunayake, close to the international airport. Previously this was called the “Foreign trade zone” or “Free trade zone”. Sister works with poor people trying to educate them so that they can defend their rights.

Brother Emmanuel Nicholas, FSC
Brother is a member of the Congregation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. He has been a teacher and the Director of a secondary school in Pakistan where the teaching was carried out in the mother tongue and in English. He has also been Inspector of Schools and Director of the Committee for Catholic Education in the Diocese of Multan, in the province of Punjab, Pakistan. He is a Master of Psychology and Educational Administration from the University of Fordham, New York, Doctor of Education from the University of Columbia, New York and member of the Executive Committee of the World Council of Curriculum and Instruction. As Provincial of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Sri Lanka and Pakistan he urged the young brothers to be close to the poor and he is personally committed to the communities of the suburbs of Colombo.

Lae Wijesinghe
A layperson, with a degree in sacred Scripture from the Biblicum in Rome. He has a Doctorate in Biblical Exegesis from the University of Louvain. He is well recognised as a professor in the University of Kelaniya, in Sri Lanka and in religious circles within his country.

Asia today: religious and cultural aspects and the place of this region in the world
The theme, “Asia today: religious and cultural aspects and the place of the region in the world”, was entrusted to Father Aloysius Peiris S.J. Some highlights from his first talk in the morning follow:
To evaluate the Asian reality and the Christian option in Asia, one has to start from two concepts used habitually: Occidentalism, created in the West and its opposite, Orientalism, also created in the West, which has given origin to a eurocentric vision of Asia. This mentality has been largely accepted even though it is theoretically unsustainable. “The West contemplates world wide nature of its own culture as an operation of salvation that the Asians, scientifically behind, politically indecisive and incorrigibly indolent, must accept for their own good and an East that perceives this process as an invasion of its own cultural space, a violation of its political sovereignty and a desacralisation of its religious patrimony.” The nuclear powers of the West, for example, manifest their own confidence in their own moral rectitude for the utilisation of atomic energy, but show themselves to be not only suspicious and fearful but critical and severe with the idea that Asian countries, such as Iran or North Korea, can use nuclear energy. This mentality, admittedly unconsciously, proceeds from the Christian eurocentralism, born of the eurocentric Christianism, and ignores that the eastern Churches, neither western nor colonial, have made valiant and peaceful missionary work in central and eastern Asia from the first centuries of the modern era.
Dilemma of Christianism

The geopolitical implications of this vision of Christianism are alarming. It is understandable that Blair condemned the terrorism of the “extremist Moslems” for the fifty-six innocent victims of London. But also we understand the group of Moslems who reviled a group of “extremist Christians” from the West for the loss of more than 56 victims during each day of the first days of the unjustifiable invasion of the Moslem Iraq.

We see that India and China, the two principal Asian civilisations, are transforming themselves into two great nuclear powers and are associating commercially, which makes it possible for Asia to exercise a great influence in the international political area. But the Christian participation in the emancipation lends itself to a geopolitical interpretation. The patriotic Church and the subterranean Church are perceived in China as a tension between the Christians allied to the West (Vatican) and those that are faithful to their own nation. Through this perception, one meets the explicit accusation that Christianism is drawing benefits from the Western world power and of the growing Eastern poverty.

In this context Father set the new paradigms in which the Asian religions deal with separating themselves from every type of discourse based on the geopolitical East – West, two false concepts when applied to religion, and those that ground the reconstruction of Christianism.

The first way of exiting the western – eastern bog is that all religions find their common Asian sources of spirituality in the idea of a life of detachment not idolatry. Every model of development or of education that militates against this pan-Asian spirituality must be avoided. The contrary can be interpreted as an anti-evangelical connivance with anti-Asian forces of universality. And the second is to dewesternise the received Christianism consulting the Asian sources of Christianism in order to meet the God of Moses who claimed to be the one and only God who participates in the liberation of slaves and of servitude. Yahweh revealed the distinct sign of the true God defining himself as the guarantee of the Alliance for the liberation of the slaves for all time. It is He who goes out to our meeting in Jesus, God made man, who was born poor and who knew the ignominious death of a slave on a cross, crying out until his spirit left him for all to understand: “It is Me, Your God, Whom you kill when you rob my people of their life”.

We are always in the wrong place on the battlefield if we do not embrace a Christianism faithful to this original revelation, that Christianism that we have separated for so many centuries. (To continue)

Given the extensive richness of the intervention of Father Aloysius Peiris we will offer the continuation of this synthesis of his discourse in a second delivery of this diary chronicle. Also, once the whole presentation has been translated into the four official languages of the Institute, you will be able to read the entire text in the section entitled “Documents” on this webpage.

Brother Emmanuel Nicholas, FSC

Brother Emmanuel, conscious of the calls that the Second Vatican Council had made to the brothers to return to the sources of our charisms to encounter the poor, described his experience of being with the marginalised of society. “I am convinced that the Holy Spirit is working in us,” he affirmed. And as the Holy Spirit guides us towards the poor, we are going to discover the face of God. We do not go towards the poor to tell them something, but “to listen to them”, he affirmed. The poor and the poorest of the poor, so numerous in this part of the world, have a voice but “few are capable of hearing it”. The Church asks us as brothers to listen to the poor. This listening can make us disposed to tell them some good news that they can understand. The poor are calling us to be poor and simple with them and like them in order to be able to educate them.

Lae Wijesinghe

Lae Wijesinghe affirmed before the brothers at the Conference that in Asia the poor are becoming more and more poor while the rich and becoming more and more rich. The Christians have interpreted this phenomenon in theological terms from the principle “create in order to liberate”. Before this growth in poverty, degrading for human dignity, he emphasised the necessity to pass over these theological principles and to go towards the true Jesus of history. Jesus lived close to the poor and shared their limits and reality.
He also emphasised the need of an education as a service and not as a privilege of the rich. For that, he proposes the creation in Asia of an educational service which is inspired by the spirituality of Exodus. God wanted to liberate the slaves and at the same time also the oppressors.

**Sister Noel Christine Fernando**

Sister Christine gave the Conference Assembly her testimony as a religious committed to working with poor women workers. The daily salary received by these women is one dollar. Sister’s work consists in educating the women so that they know how to defend their rights when faced with injustice and exploitation. Sister Christine affirmed that there are a lot of people in this category and that they are victims of globalisation. How can this challenge be confronted through education?

**Open questions and reflection in groups**

The brothers posed some questions on various topics to the panel members. One of these questions concerned how to look to religion to bring science and faith into harmony. They answered that without technology, we cannot survive. The poor need a base technology, but “it is not the essential need of the poor” (Christine). There are technologies that isolate us and separate us from the poor. And then she asked, “What technology do we offer to the poor and where does this technology lead them?”

Another response used the metaphor of bread, as used by Saint Paul. Bread is good and we only have to produce enough of it to suppress hunger. If we share it, it is sacrament. If it stays in the hands of some, it is a sin. That can be applied today to technology.

The work of the afternoon started with the second part of the talk by Father Aloysius Peiris, the summary of which we will provide tomorrow morning. The Assembly continued its work of reflection in small groups, followed by a sharing in common of the groups’ work.

**Messages of support**

We have received a message of support from the brothers of Nairobi. The Assembly listened to the whole message and each of the names of the signatories. A large number of Brothers Provincial felt themselves linked to these names.

We have also received a message from the brothers at El Escorial and from Korea, addressed to the Brother Superior General and to all the members of the VII General Conference, expressing their best wishes and success at this Conference.

**A TIME FOR DECISION MAKING!**

**VII General Conference - 07 September**

**Opening address of Brother Seán Sammon**

In his opening address, ‘A time for decision making!’ Brother Seán Sammon, Superior General, proposed three areas of priority work for the next four years: identity, mission and leadership.

He highlighted that of all the times in which we have renewed the Institute, as requested by the second Vatican Council, the current time is the most perilous encountered in forty years. The cause of this perilousness is the type of decisions that we have to make today as leaders of the Institute. For forty years we have made decisions concerning the renewal of religious life. Today we need to make decisions regarding our identity.

**Identity**

The members of the XX General Chapter challenged us to clarify the identity of the brother and the identity of the lay Marist. To form an identity or reform the previous one, we have to take options and commit ourselves to living values or indeed choose other new ones.
The Superior General indicated two impediments for carrying forward options that clearly affirm our identity.

First. Our respect for diversity that has been exaggerated and that has paralysed us. Internal differences have grown much in some regions. Differences of perspective exist in reference to the vows, the place and significance of community life, spirituality, apostolic work, the poor, formation, making it more difficult, if not impossible, to form a common identity and to give witness as a group.

Second. The fear of thinking that to adopt new practices that identify us would be a regression to the past. We need to encounter new signs that define our identity and this task is one we need to accomplish together. The evangelical counsels, as well as the ideals of loving God, the compassionate concern for the poor and their needs, and the commitment to community life, should be translated in a unique Marist way of being, manifested in behaviours and practices that are clear and understandable for others.

**Mission**

Mission is at the heart of our identity. There is only one mission, the same mission as that of the Church: to proclaim the Kingdom of God and its imminence. Our apostolic works are part of this mission and directed at a specific group of people: the young and, among them, the poor. The members of our XX General Chapter reminded us that we need to undertake a valiant evaluation of our apostolic works in which we have been involved during the last four decades. As well, the Capitulants called us to get out of our offices more to be in more contact with young people. There are many valiant works but they are not the works of the Little Brothers of Mary founded by Marcellin Champagnat.

**Leadership**

A leader is not a good manager or a good administrator except if this helps others to dream as Champagnat did. The young people that the Founder met perceived that he was proposing something to them that was worth the effort of starting in their lives.

The Brother Superior General sees that there are optimistic signs on the horizon and that we are living in times of daring action. But the need also exists to modify the way in which we exercise authority. In some Administrative Units, the Provincial or District Superior has become only a coordinator, entrusted with maintaining the welfare and happiness of all. And in other places there is hardly any authority being exercised at all. It is not enough for us to be effective managers, or to assure a pastoral presence or even to be men of prayer. We must take the responsibility of working together in our Institute presenting to our brothers and to our lay collaborators, to the Church and the world, a wider vision than we are capable of leading.

The Brother Superior General thanked the brothers present for all that they do for the brothers, the Institute and the Church. He finished his talk by saying, “I see these as special days that we are spending together where we have the opportunity to fix the course for the next four years.”

**Personal reflection on the document**

With this proposal, the Brother Superior General opened the work of the Conference to develop proposals and directives for the next four years until the Convocation of the XXI General Chapter. Each person received a text, written and translated into four languages, and was invited to have some personal quiet time to be open to the gifts that the Lords wants to give us and the grace which we are seeking by reading the text. It was very important that each of the participants would be conscious of the existential aspect of the moment. They were recommended to direct their attention to the signs of vitality in the Institute.

This reflection should give us a vision that is more unified from the calls of the XX General Chapter. For this, it was suggested to the participants of the Conference to revise the calls to see if there were new shades appearing.

**Pooling in common**

After the time that they dedicated to rereading Brother Seán’s talk, question time was opened. It was asked why this moment in time is interpreted as the most perilous time during the last four decades. He affirmed that the decisions that we can make now concerning formation, community or government, for example, are going to have decisive repercussions. Historically the decisions of
the last forty years have concerned the renewal of religious life. The ones we are making now affect the identity of the Marists. There are young people in the Institute grounded in spirituality. They want a proposal offered to them for which it is worth living the life. The offers in the documents are clear and we believe in them, but we do not manifest clearly our identity. The brothers’ interventions highlighted some criteria for reinforcing the sense of fraternity in new communities. We are brothers, but that cannot be taken for granted. As well, the phenomenon of structural change experienced in the Institute was alluded to. For some the change is an enigma. But it is a reality that must be taken on joyfully.

The afternoon tasks
During the afternoon reflection, there was a synthesis of the responses to the questionnaire sent to the Provincials by the General Conference’s Preparatory Commission concerning the calls of the XX General Chapter. All the responses from the Administrative Units were received. In a certain number of Units, it was the Provincials or District Superiors who responded personally; in others the response came from the Provincial and his Council. Concerning the first capitular call, there was an impressive unity detected in the thirty-one responses, even though there were some important differences according to the continents. There were strong expressions that appeared practically in all the responses. For example, the following:

In respect to the first call: “we are centred in Jesus Christ” - “This call is current, urgent and necessary. It is our reason for being. It is an essential point in our lives. Our identity must essentially speak for itself and we must appear as witnesses before the world. People must see us as men of God, marked by Christ’s presence. Not to live this call is not to give meaning to our vocation, our apostolate and our relationships. In this call we encounter the roots of our Marist Apostolic Spirituality. And the inverse, if we live it, we will have Christ at the centre of our lives.”

The first part of the session was dedicated to a personal reading of the document and then during the second part the participants shared their findings.

Remembering Brasil on its national day
Today’s sessions started with a sincere and heart-felt greeting to all the Brazilian brothers present at the Conference. Today Brasil celebrated its national day. Brother Claudino Falchetto, Provincial of Brasil Centro-Norte, summed up the meaning of this day for Brazil. The people present then received a little souvenir. During the community prayer, we remembered the activities in which the brothers participate and the works that they support in this large country.

An Ecclesiology for Asia (Part II)

We continue the synthesis of the vast exposé of Father Aloysius Peiris S.J. on the challenges posed to the Church by Asia. An objective of the United Nations is to eliminate illiteracy by 2025. Half of the adults in South Asia can neither read nor write and a quarter of the people do not have access to a basic education. Every serious educational programme should be radical enough to eliminate the cycle of poverty and illiteracy and their consequences, such as the exploitation of women and of children. The adventurous amongst us who dare to take a basic education of children as their sacred mission hold the future of Asia in their hands. The illiteracy of the majority is the human sacrifice offered on the altar of Mammon in exchange for the riches produced for the world’s leaders.

On the contrary, the type of Christianism that appeared with the revelation of the God of Moses, such as the Abba of Jesus, would tolerate no form of creation of riches that meant at the same time the multiplication of poverty for the masses. But he would demand that we change our policies
and our educational techniques in a revolutionary way to allow the poorest to participate in the production of the riches without allowing others to steal the fruit of their work.

The new instruction creates new forms of poverty
Basic instruction means the study of reading, writing and arithmetic in one’s own mother tongue and an emancipation of the masses. But the industry of knowledge is now monopolised by electronic technology which uses English as its means of communication. A worker in Bangladesh needs an income of eight years to acquire a computer while an American can acquire one with the salary of one month. The objective of the year 2025 will be unrealisable because each time more people are excluded from this form of instruction.

The techno-science and the religions of Asia
The technical capacity of mankind to improve his good fortune on earth was not a European discovery, but an eastern one. Europe learnt from Asia, even though they say that Asia is lagging behind. Asia has always united religious wisdom with science and technology, whereas on the other hand Europe has separated science and faith with disastrous consequences. Today the world is hoping for a rare species of humankind to unite science and faith. This will be the moment when East and West meet.

The Magisterium and the poor
The ideal of the first Christian communities was to share so as to eliminate the class of the rich as much as of the poor. God chose the poor not because they were holy but because they were poor. They start to become holy when they accept and live the call of God to unite themselves to Him and to construct a society where only God reigns. The mission to teach all nations or educate all nations, in other words evangelise the gentiles, reaffirms the call to holiness. But the people were unfaithful and copied unjust social practices. The same happens amongst we Christians.

Three principles guide Christian education: education (evangelisation) “for” the poor, education (evangelisation) “of” the poor and Education (evangelisation “of the rich for the poor”.

Science and technology united in education in favour of the poor
Father used in his conference the example of Latin America where the poor are described in the Universidad Centro-americana (UCA) as a group of men of great faith capable of moving mountains yet at the same time aware that the culture invasion is also Christian. The Christian professors of UCA suggest that all university or para-university activity have an effect on society in general and especially on the least educated. This model wants to go further than the liberal western model. Our apostolic intentions are often corrupted when we do not note the pernicious link that exists between liberal education without a social conscience given to the privileged classes and the social services without a free education given to the poor.

The challenge of the educational social project of Christian education is to offer a service that liberates the poor and the rich at the same time: the poor from their poverty and the rich from their wealth.

THE BIRTHDAY OF MARY
VII General Conference - 08 September

The Conference celebrates the birth of Mary
Today the liturgy celebrated the birth of Mary, our Good Mother. The booklet printed for today's prayer was entitled, “The Birthday of Mary.” From the beautiful beaches of India, we heard this morning a hymn of praise and gratitude for “Mary who has done everything for us.” Different races, languages and faces expressed their gratitude for our Good Mother. We realised once more, in a Marist way, the prophecy that announced: “All people will call me blessed.” The brothers joyfully intoned the song “Happy birthday to you, Mary!” For several brothers, it was also their
anniversary of taking the habit or of their first profession. Congratulations to them also. Brother Réal Fournier also added one more year to his age. His celebration gave us great joy because we could see him maturing in age and in grace before God and before the community. He is working at the Conference as a translator. In the card written to him by the brothers, there were phrases full of fraternal affection such as: “May the Lord continue to bless you and give you many more years!” and “May you be day after day a living presence of Jesus amongst us!”

Messages of support
Before starting the work of the day, Brother Luis García Sobrado read the messages of support sent to the Conference. There were messages from Sister Judith Moore smsm, Superior General of the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary and from Brother Álvaro Rodríguez fsc, Superior General of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and currently the President of the Union of Superior Generals.

Study of the 3rd and 4th Calls of the General Chapter
The brothers continued their reflection on the vitality of the Institute from the five calls. They reflected today especially on the 3rd and 4th calls that refer to the lay Marists, to mission and to solidarity.

The responses to the questionnaire sent to the Provinces before the Conference show unanimity in the Institute for recognising the importance of laypeople for our vitality. Even though the principle of collaborating and sharing the charism and mission is accepted by all, we see great differences in the number of laypeople who participate effectively in our structures, either individually or in groups.

We note some peculiarities according to continents. The presence of lay Marists in our works and in society is more evident in America than in Africa, where the economic conditions do not facilitate this work.

The Marist Fraternities are more rare in Asia than in Europe. On the contrary, we witness a certain ageing in the members of our Fraternities in Europe.

The 4th call speaks of mission and solidarity. There is no longer any doubt that our mission is intimately linked to solidarity which must be at the heart of our mission. This principle is accepted by all who answered the questionnaire, even though there were some nuances. Latin America is the continent that insists more on this link between mission and solidarity.

One of the realisations evaluated most by the participants has been the common programmes of formation for the brothers and laypeople, despite the costs that they incur. The interest manifested by laypeople in the documents of the Superior General is also significant. More so, there are encouraging signs: brothers are trying to live a dynamic of human growth and of conversion, of new models of community and of growth appearing in the Institute in the area of solidarity.

Generating life between brothers and laypeople
The afternoon started with a personal reflection on the following topics:

1. What gives vitality and is important for the brothers and laypeople?
2. What do you consider to be a creator of life and important for brothers and laypeople in your Administrative Unit?

The Superior General asked all the participants to live this day in an atmosphere of silence and personal reflection. In this spirit, we had lunch on silence before proceeding to the community prayer in honour of Mary.

This contemplative reflection helped the brothers to meditate before undertaking the afternoon activities. The fruits of this reflection were shared in regional groups until the afternoon tea break. After the break, Brother Seán proposed a reflection on “The Provincial as a shepherd.” As he usually does, he started with a story. A man wanted to be a blacksmith and possessed all the instruments for his occupation. He only lacked the fire to make the metal malleable. The leader’s fire of passion comes from God, he told the Provincials. Brother Seán thus encouraged the Superiors to be open to the Spirit, because he lives in us and sees us as we are at this moment.
In his talk, Brother Seán insisted on three roles of the Superior: 1) to maintain hope, 2) to always say the truth, even if one cannot say all the truth, or all of it at once, 3) to inspire courage and hope.

Brother Seán’s proposition touched the heart of the participants who reacted with comments and very enriching personal anecdotes. The topic of the pastoral responsibility of the provincials and district superiors occupied all the time until the celebration of Mass. The words that were heard the most included: dialogue, accompaniment, mercy, forgiveness and presence.

Mary at the centre of the day and life
The day which had started with a hymn to our Good Mother finished with the celebration of the Eucharist in her honour. All the brothers repeated the consecration to Mary made so often by Saint Marcellin. The Superior General repeated the action of Saint Marcellin, entrusting his brothers of the Hermitage to Mary by writing their names on paper which he then placed in a metal heart and attached this to the statue of Mary. Brother Seán did this during the evening Mass. He placed the names of the brothers representing the administrative units. We were able to rest easily as we were confident of being in very good hands.

There was time for personal adoration before the Blessed Sacrament at the close of the day, after having paid fraternal homage to Brother Réal.

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR A PROJECT OF MISSION AD GENTES
VII General Conference - 09 September

Mission “ad gentes”
The focus of interest for this day was in the hands of the brothers from the first moments of the day when they received the booklet for morning prayer. Its title was “Missionary Evangelisation”. The reflection was aimed at clarifying the Marist leaders’ vision of the nature of mission “ad gentes” whose importance is decisive for the Kingdom of God, the Church, for the world and for Marists.

The morning work session started with a motivating talk by Brother Seán which he started by saying that the mission “ad gentes” is the evangelisation of those people who have not heard of Jesus of Nazareth and his good news, something related to the vitality of the Institute. He recalled also the phrase of John Paul II in his document “Vita Consecrata”, that the congregations ‘have a beautiful history not only to be remembered, but also on which to build”. The Institute will build on this beautiful history if it has the courage to do so. Following this, Brother Seán gave a brief summary of the history of the Institute, from the Second Vatican Council until the present, highlighting the policies regarding mission “ad gentes”.

Mission “ad gentes” and the Institute
Mission “ad gentes” forms part of the history of the Institute. Champagnat wanted to be a missionary and he himself sent the first missionary brothers. One of the most important missionary moments for the Institute was in 1903 when about 900 brothers left France. The Institute must recognise the efforts of these brothers who went to other lands without being prepared to be missionaries and without knowing the language of the places to which they were dispatched, but they were animated by a great and daring faith.

The Institute created the Saint Francis Xavier Work which functioned in the houses at Grugliasco and Bairo, to prepare missionaries. In 1967, they had to change their direction. The General House
decentralised the responsibility for promoting mission “ad gentes” transferring it to the Provinces. The dynamism of this formula was decaying and with time there started to exist a list of names who were at the disposition of the Superior General to be sent wherever he considered it to be opportune. In the XIX General Chapter mission “ad gentes” was energised based on the principles of solidarity and international co-operation. From the XX General Chapter the possibility of writing a new chapter in this missionary history was opened.

**Rules for a new chapter in the Marist missionary history**
The present situation of the Marists in relation to the mission “ad gentes” in the Institute has some immediate antecedents. From the reading of the following statistics one can attempt to learn a lesson about the events of this history.

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Missionaries</th>
<th>Average age</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>553</td>
<td>51,37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>556</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>596</td>
<td>63,76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With these figures in hand, one can note:

a. That the Provinces have done good work in their mission “ad gentes” continuing and opening new Marist missionary presences after the International Missionary Houses were closed.

b. That with the passing of time, the Provinces have met difficulties in sending brothers less than fifty years of age to the projects of mission “ad gentes”.

c. That the Institute still has a margin of opportunity to revitalise this important dimension of its mission and life.

d. That, though the number of brothers have diminished in the Institute, the number of missionary brothers has not diminished, but they have become older.

**Project for a mission “ad gentes”**
Brother Luis García Sobrado, Vicar General, expressed the master guidelines of a operative plan to send a significant number of brothers in the coming years in mission to Asia as a priority, but also to Marist Provinces in need, as well as encouraging the internationality of the Provinces’ projects “ad gentes”.
The project anticipates an appropriate formation for the candidate, with English as the common language for the participants, to be the most used as the means of communication in Asia and also the second language most known by the brothers of the Institute less than forty years of age. The place where this formation could take place is Manila due to its proximity to the Asian continent and where there exists a strong Catholic presence. Other places, such as Sri Lanka and Rome, have not been excluded. The brothers shared their reactions in groups of three or four and two sessions were dedicated to regional groups followed by a plenary session to analyse the viability of the project. The project was well accepted due to its global nature, though there were questions concerning how to carry this out and about the places for its application.

Conclusion of the first week of work of the Conference
Brother Seán led a small reflection to end the first week of work of the Conference. He said a huge amount of work has been done. And he animated the brothers to continue their work as a service of love to the brothers of the Institute. Marcellin was a man of great constancy because he believed in what he did, a dreamer who worked with great constancy to realise his dreams. And so it should be amongst ourselves. There is passion for the Kingdom in the heart of life, a portrait of the Founder. Let us persevere in our work.

Reception of Marist aspirants
The Marist aspirants of Sri Lanka joined the brothers in the Eucharist accompanied by Brothers Nicholas and Sandalal, their formators. Afterwards, they shared the meal with the brothers in a family ambiance. Before leaving they sang two beautiful songs and danced, dressed in some very smart costumes.

Death of the father of the Brother Provincial of the Province of Canada
Brother Réal Cloutier, Provincial of Canada, received the sad news of the death of his father at the age of ninety-four. He was a farmer who was well known for his gentle and conciliatory character. He had twelve children of whom Réal was the first-born. At the moment of his death he had forty-five grandchildren. The brothers at the Conference showed their fraternal closeness and solidarity at this time of sorrow. They are united with the whole of Réal's family and have recommended all to the Lord during this difficult time.

CONCLUSION OF THE FIRST WEEK OF CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES
VII General Conference - 10th September

The weekend
Saturday morning was dedicated to personal reflection after a week of intense work. The gears of the Conference have been truly broken in during this first week. After some adjustment, each piece is now well in place. The amount as well as the quality of information is impressive. There is no time to lose and the brothers, well used to well organised meetings, are conscious of the need of a demanding method. Styles may vary, but the planned programme is so vast and complex that it requires a discipline that one accepts without difficulty. The atmosphere of work is excellent. One tries to effectively treat all the subjects that the brothers have brought in their dossiers from every part of the Institute. The afternoon break is well appreciated by all. This is a time for everyone to enjoy one's personal rhythm.
Taking the pulse of the Conference
The climate of the house is one of recollection, serenity, joy and work. Physical exercise allows one to relax. A walk on the beach or diving into the water is invigorating. The temperature is very pleasant, as is the sea breeze. The atmosphere of recollection which encourages prayer consoles the soul. Thank god, there have been no health problems during this first week. All the brothers have fully taken part in the works of the Conference.
The food is of a very good quality. The self-service allows each person to take what he wishes according to his diet. There is heavy rain for a few minutes at time sometimes several times a day, but the showers are brief. No Conference activity has been affected. During the first few days, the monsoon winds had blown strongly and rattled the windows. At night, you can hear the waves and in the morning the happy singing of exotic birds.

The Conference and the web
The web page has started to gather the messages of those who are one with the work of the Conference. In a lot of places, people are following the events of the Conference through the web page and also in Marist Update 186. Several Provincials have received the news placed on the Institute’s webpage through their Province’s web pages. The majority of messages received have come from brothers who find this a way of participating effectively in the Conference. The participants who want to revitalise their Administrative Units are very grateful for this unity of brothers throughout the whole world.
We thank you for the interest that you have shown in our daily chronicle. The web page is put together in Rome from documents sent from Negombo in Sri Lanka. Brother Onorino Rota, helped by Mr. Luiz Da Rosa, produces the daily edition on the Internet. But each of you can follow the progress of the Conference in your own language thanks to the translators who are entrusted each day with translating the abundant work sent to Rome.
Due to the free day on Sunday, you will receive the chronicle for Saturday at the start of the week. The brothers at the Conference are very grateful for the technical effort made this week in adapting the web page and keeping it up-to-date. This has also been a period of breaking-in, but at present the reports on the Conference are read with curiosity and interest.

The Conference welcomes the communities of Sri Lanka
The participants of the Conference were able to fraternise with the thirty-five brothers from Sri Lanka who came to Negombo this afternoon. They started to arrive towards three thirty in the afternoon, with the eight novices of the Province: three Pakistanis, three Indians and two Sri Lankans. The Conference Social Committee as well as Brothers Luis Garcia Sobrado took charge of the welcome.
The Conference meeting room had been prepared to receive the brothers and Noel Cabrera and Rajami, affiliated to the Institute.
The meeting started with words of welcome from Brother Seán, Superior General, who spoke of the joy of everyone in being united with the brothers from Sri Lanka on this occasion of the VII General Conference. At the same time, he thanked them for the work that they do for the good of the Gospel, of the Church, of the Institute and of this country.
Following this, Brother Luis Garcia Sobrado made a brief presentation of all the brothers participating in the Conference by mentioning their responsibilities.

The Marist communities of Sri Lanka
The Brother Provincial presented the communities of Sri Lanka and the Superiors presented their community: Brother Godfrey Nugegada for the community of Saint Joseph and Brother Clinton for Our Lady of the Hermitage, Tudella, who he said a few words regarding each of his brothers. The Novitiate community at Tudella, neighbours to the previous community were presented by Brother Joseph Fonseca who mentioned the work of each person. The Master of Novices, Brother Michael Sexton, presented each of the novices. Brother Noel presented the community of Haldanduwana
and Brother Gregory did the same for Marcellin Nivasa, the Provincial House situated at Negombo. Brother Leal did the same for the community of Kalpitiya and Brother Linus for the Holy Cross College at Kalutara. Brother Victor represented the brothers in Pakistan. At the end of a power-point display, Brother Joseph Peiris highlighted the work of the brothers at Maris Stella College, Negombo.

This simple meeting finished with a word of thanks to Brothers Paul Gilchrist, Provincial of Melbourne, and John Thompson, Provincial of Sydney, for the help offered generously by their Provinces to the Sector of India during these last fifteen years. In January this sector will become part of the new Province of Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Brother Lazar Hirudayasamy, Superior of the Sector of India offered them a beautiful gift.

Then in a meaningful gesture, Brother Seán presented a beautiful sculpture of the Good Mother to the Province of Sri Lanka and Pakistan, in recognition of all the work done by the Province to host the General Conference at Negombo.

Arrival of former students
During the break before the Mass, refreshments were served to the participants. During this time a delegation of fifteen former students of different colleges arrived.

During the Eucharist, all were united in thanking the Lord for the fruits he has given to this country and to the Institute by the work of our brothers.

Then, all dined at the Conference hotel where we were able to share the international savour of the table of Marist fraternity. Brothers, having travelled a long way in the Institute, were able to share with the novices. Champagnat and Mary, invited by right to the Conference since the opening day, must have smiled lovingly and rejoiced that the vitality of the Institute is expressed thus in manifestations that are filled with hope.

Cultural evening
At the end of dinner, about ninety students, dressed in shimmering costumes and accompanied by fifteen teachers and ten former students of Joseph Vaz College, offered a spectacle of dance and music which mixed with the magic of the night and the sea.

To the rhythm of a drum, one of the traditional instruments of Buddhist worship, they performed various dances such as the Samuha vadanaya, the dance of the Kandyan and the Gini sisila, a fire dance. The masked dance, Naga gurulu, is for exorcising the possessed from their demons. It is still practised in Sri Lanka to treat mental illness.

The unity and harmony of the drumbeats delighted the spectators who were moved by the colours, the rhythm and the grace of the dances.

One Sri Lanka student introduced the dances and the Superior General thanked all the performers, the organisers and the former students. The national anthem of Sri Lanka brought the evening to a close.

NEW STRUCTURES FOR NEW TIMES
General Conference - September 12

September 12th - Celebrating the Holy Name of Mary
"...And the Virgin's name was 'Mary'."

Our Institute's name, "Marist"; its members, the "Little brothers of Mary." People call other religious congregations by their founders' first or last name - the Franciscans, the Combonians, the DeLaSalle Brothers.... Ours comes from Mary. As Marcellin used to say, she has done everything for us.

Regionalization
Work in the morning session began with a sharing of personal thoughts on different aspects of the government of the Institute. Provincials and District Superiors made use of three different-colored cards to express their agreement, disagreement or doubts. Brother Peter Rodney spelled out personal or
collective situations in a province, and the brothers held up one of the cards to express their opinion. This allowed for getting a quick sense of everyone's thinking, while acknowledging the absence of nuancing.

Vicars Provincial
Together Brothers Xavier Barceló, Provincial of the Hermitage Province, and Pedro Marcos, Provincial of Santa María de los Andes, explained new approaches incorporated into the government of their Provinces. For the first time in the Institute, these two Provinces have created the office of Vicar Provincial. Ratified by the 20th General Chapter, this involves a new figure, different than that of the Vice Provincial. He is the Provincial's Vicar and ranks as a major superior, empowered by Canon Law to represent the Institute before civil and ecclesiastical authorities. In the Hermitage Province, the Vicar works side by side with the Provincial in animating the brothers, who can approach him as they would the Provincial. Authority is not duplicated, just exercised in "concert."
This experience has been a very positive one. The Provincial and Vicar Provincial live in the same community and work as a team. When the Provincial Council finishes its work, together these two set up a calendar to coordinate their activities and visits.
To animate the Province they have established two Sectors: France and Catalunya. Following Brother Xavier's presentation, Brother Pedro Marcos, Provincial of Santa María de los Andes, explained the new governmental structure in his Province, which encompasses Bolivia, Chile, and Peru. Three Vicars, one for each Sector, have been named, to serve as official representatives before the civil and ecclesiastical authorities in their respective country, and as animators for the brothers and their work in education. The Provincial Council reserves the right to name school board members and administrators. Brothers as well as lay people have been very positive about the idea of having a Vicar for each Sector of the Province.

New models of government introduced in Provinces
A panel consisting of Brothers Claudino Falchetto, Provincial of Brasil Centro Norte, Primitivo Mendoza, Provincial of Compostela, and Demetrio Espinosa, Provincial of Cruz del Sur, shared the initiatives that each of their Provinces has undertaken for its process of animation. These three brothers highlighted the complex situation that has arisen from the restructuring process, and the creative ways in which needs have been addressed.
The Province of Brasil Centro Norte, born in 2003 as a result of bringing together the former Provinces of Brasil Norte and Río de Janeiro, illustrates just how complex this restructuring process can be. Extending over approximately 4,000,000 square kilometers, the Province started out with 28 schools, 32 religious communities, 35,000 students, more than 40 social programs, 4500 teachers and staff members, two teachers colleges, and a considerable presence at the University of Brasilia, with its 18,000 students. To spearhead this operation, it has relied on just 146 brothers. Adding to this complexity, the Province operates under the aegis of two organizations or civil societies, in two jurisdictions, subject to all kinds of legal and bureaucratic redtape.
Brother Primitivo Mendoza, Provincial of the Province of Compostela, spoke about the new structures in his Province, one that brought together the institutions of the former Provinces of Portugal, Castile, and Leon.
Taking his turn, Brother Demetrio Espinosa, Provincial of the Province of Cruz del Sur, presented the initiatives involved in reorganizing the former Provinces of Argentina, Uruguay, and the District of Paraguay.

From new Provinces to renewed Provinces
Brother Peter Rodney, General Councilor, led the afternoon session. He proposed as its objective taking a close look at the most important aspects of the challenges of the 20th General Chapter, and directing all the dynamic forces and expectations brought about by restructuring toward the vitality of the Institute. During his talk he referred to several of Brother Benito's writings that speak of restructuring as an opportunity to enhance the vitality of the Institute, and to No. 37 of the Letter from the 20th General Chapter.
Following this, Brother Maurice Berquet shared with the brothers the General Council's efforts to find ways to collaborate with Provinces in regard to spiritual animation, mission, formation, the laity, community life, solidarity, communications, lay volunteers, new ways of being present, education, and government. Brother Maurice noted that these efforts to be of assistance have come about from the Council's having lived and worked together over the past four years, and pointed out what was most significant. Today the words restructuring and regionalization are being applied throughout the Institute to two distinct but complementary processes. Regionalization is a consequence of restructuring.

First, there was a presentation concerning the structure of the five great areas in which the Administrative Units of the Institute have been grouped together to foster cooperation and collaboration - basically, areas that coincide with the five Continents. The General Council has named Brothers Pedro Herreros and Antonio Ramalho for the Region of the Americas; Brothers Peter Rodney and Emili Turú for Asia and Europe; and Brothers Maurice Berquet and Thóneste Kalisa for Africa and Oceania. The Councilors have been visiting Regions, not Provinces. The expanded General Council that has concluded these visits and in which the Region's Provincial Councils have participated, have assembled throughout these last four years in Nairobi, Kenya; Hong Kong, People's Republic of China; Mittagong, Australia; Maryknoll, USA; Madrid, Spain; Cochabamba, Bolivia; and in Guatemala.

Following this presentation, four Provincials were invited to share their experience in this regard. Brother Lawrence Ndawala, Provincial of the Province of Southern Africa, was the first to take up this invitation. His is a very complex Province, young and growing. Then Brother Jacques Scholte, Provincial of West Central Europe, emphasized the need to move on from individual to shared leadership, going beyond the traditional model contained in the Constitutions.

Brother Tercilio Sevegnani, Provincial de Brasil Centro-Sur, was the third brother to speak. He described the complex task of restructuring as a challenge requiring creativity, one that has helped to revitalize the mission. It has provided an opportunity to raise awareness and focus the attention of the brothers and the laity, and to question and take stock of the habitual way of doing things in our establishments. It has brought brothers and lay people together to examine each existing structure and procedure in place up until now.

Challenges are open-ended. Is restructuring a process that only deals with reconfiguring lines on maps, or is it one that also goes to the heart of the religious life and mission? Brother Samuel Holguín, Provincial of the Province of Ibérica, was the last speaker at this session. He related his experience of the restructuring process in his new Province, which has brought together the former Provinces of Norte and Madrid plus the communities in Romania. The Province came into existence on January 2, 2004. It's small in size when compared with those of West Central Europe or Brasil Centro-Sur. "Right from the start," affirmed Brother Samuel, "we proposed to build the Province the way Champagnat built his - building a unified community at the same time he was constructing the Hermitage." Brother Samuel expressed his deep appreciation for the leadership shown by the team of people that have bonded together to direct the Province. He emphasized what a great support it has been for the Provincial Council to have spirituality, mission, and finance Commissions, composed of brothers and lay people. The Expanded General Council has been a new structure in which the Provincial Council and Teams of Specialists have been able to contribute in making decisions concerning organization and government.

The objectives of restructuring are helping to accelerate the union of the two former Provinces, through encounters, retreats, and meetings involving as many brothers and lay people as possible on commissions.

A Marist vision of five Continents

Africa

Brother Eugène Kabanguka, Provincial of the Province of East Central Africa, talked about Africa. He presented the structure of Marist Africa, which takes in the District of West Africa and the

Two great initiatives connected with the regionalization of Africa have been the Marist International Centre (MIC) and the Conference of Superiors on the African Continent (CSAC). The General Council established the MIC at the urging of Brother Charles Howard. The CSAC started out by bringing together 20 Superiors from 19 African countries to oversee the MIC and Marist animation throughout the Continent.

Restructuring has brought about a sharing of novitiates - Kumasi for the District of West Africa and the Province of Nigeria; Save for the Provinces of Madagascar and East Central Africa; and Kutama for the Province of Southern Africa. After the novitiate, the young brothers go to the Marist International Centre in Nairobi.

Asia
Brother Manny de Leon, Provincial of the Philippines, gave a presentation on Asia. This Region consists of the Marist Provinces of China, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, and Korea, plus the Sector of India and the Marist communities in Cambodia, East Timor, and Japan. It is a Region that is home to ancestral cultures and religions. The vast distances and the variety of languages involved are major drawbacks. As in other parts of the world, people in this Region use English as their common language.

Europe
Brother Manuel Jorques, Provincial of the Province of Mediterránea, was given the task of explaining the complex situation in Europe and the new Spanish Marist Conference, which traces its origins back to 1942 and Spain's former Marist Assistancy, looked after by an Assistant General.

On October 2 and 3, 2004, during the General Assembly in Valladolid, the focus of that regional structure was shifted to Europe. At this time new statutes are being drawn up.

Oceania
Brother Paul Gilchrist, Provincial of the Province of Melbourne, spoke about the Region of Oceania. This Region is made up of the Provinces of Melbourne, Sydney, New Zealand, and the District of Melanesia. A vast Region, one that requires long travel times between destinations and uses many languages - English helping to bridge this great divide.

The Americas
Brother Laurentino Albalá, Provincial of the Norandina Province, gave a very enlightening presentation on this part of the world.

Until 2004, Latin America was divided into the following Regions:
- Arco Norte: consisting of the Marist Provinces of Mexico Occidental, Mexico Central, América Central, and Norandina.
- Cono Sur: made up of the Provinces of Santa María de los Andes, Cruz del Sur, and the District of Paraguay.
- Brazil: formed by the Provinces of Brasil Centro-Norte, Brasil Centro-Sur, Rio Grande Del Sur, and the District of Amazonia.

The Latin American Conference of Provincials (CLAP), established in 1979, has been the central organization for animation at the level of Latin America. Over the past 25 years it has held ten assemblies.

Beginning in 2004 the Provinces of Canada and the United States entered the picture. Since that time North and South America have made up the Region of the Americas, and the Inter-American Conference of Provincials (CIAP) has become the organization for animation. CIAP is made up of the Provincials and District Superiors of the Americas. Invited brothers and lay people may also participate. It holds a General Assembly every four years and serves as a source of animation for Marist religious life throughout the Americas. It may convene additional gatherings whenever necessary.
The Latin American Conference of Provincials (CLAP) has supplied know-how and helped bring Provinces together, supporting Provincial programs in initial and ongoing formation and encouraging the exchange of materials used for ministering to youth, vocations, and education. Among its limitations, one needs to highlight the difficulty involved in finding animators and time periods that fit into everyone's calendar, the cost of international travel and accommodations, and the need to devise programs for narrow timeframes.

**VOCATIONS MINISTRY IN THE INSTITUTE**

**General Conference - 13th September**

**The service of Vocations Promotion**

The first working session today presented objectives and a plan for the day which was to be entirely devoted to Vocations Ministry in the Institute. The day was directed by Brothers Théoneste Kalisa (General Councillor) and Ernesto Sánchez (from the Commission for Vocations Ministry).

Today's objectives were intended to foster reflection on vocations ministry starting from what has already been achieved in the Administrative Units and what is required for the future. Hence: the sharing of experiences and reflections among Provincials and District Superiors, offering an improved service of animation to the A.U.s, and the sharing of reflections and projects.

The personal call which each of us has received from God is a gift freely given. Jesus and Champagnat insistently beg us to develop and share it, transmitting from one generation to the next. Nowadays we experience great difficulty in transmitting this gift. This is a generalized phenomenon in the Church. What worked almost spontaneously during much of our past, no longer works in today's world, in spite of the great efforts that are being made in the Institute.

Attempts to explain this situation have habitually concentrated on external reasons. But currently there is growing insistence on reasons which penetrate to the inner life of the Church, of religious institutions, and to the personal life of the religious themselves.

**In our Provinces and Districts**

The General Council’s Commission on Vocations Ministry singles out with gratitude the interest and great effort which many Brothers have brought to bear on vocations in all the Institute's Provinces and Districts over the last four years.

Generally speaking we could say that during the "Marist Year of Vocations" the sensitivity of the Brothers regarding vocational animation has noticeably increased, and many are those who have committed themselves to it. A good number of communities are showing enhanced openness to welcoming young people in their midst.

Information and testimonies coming to the attention of the Commission from Provinces and Districts, give evidence that Brothers are reaching out to the young in order to listen to them, and they discover in these young people a genuine appreciation for religious life. At the same time, Brothers are questioning their own vision and strategies for vocational promotion, and are showing themselves open to change.

**The Commission's Point of View**

Considered from the Commission's perspective, the work of vocations ministry in the Provinces has achieved three major results. It has animated us all to keep working in spite of our own reduced numbers, and—in some regions of the Institute—the fwness of candidates entering. It has also revealed the weakness of our vocations ministry. And, finally, it has moved us to invite our agents of vocational promotion to engage in a profound and serene reflection on what has happened in the past, and from there to engender new creativity.
The Commission would like to thank Brothers Provincial and District Superiors for their commitment and work of animation in this general movement which is observable across the Institute. It is a very clear sign of the vitality which our Institute retains.

**Contribution of the Groups**
The Brothers have now brought to conclusion a labour of long personal reflection concerning the signs of hope they observe in their A.U.s, on the obstacles they are encountering, and on the challenges that are currently presenting themselves as they face the future. Each Provincial and District Superior shared his reflection in the interregional groups, until the end of the morning. The dynamic of the meeting allowed for the group sharing to be presented during the afternoon plenary, with all Brothers present. This was to be organized around three significant contributions as outlined by the group.

**Contribution of the Brothers**
The Brothers’ contributions feature echoes of the Marist Vocations Year just finished, and many allusions were made to the experience of it. It was certainly a grace-filled event for the Institute and there is a generalized satisfaction regarding its results.

The first and second groups seemed to complement one another in their presentation. One the one hand, the importance of giving visibility to the vocation of “Brother”, utilizing all possible means to make it present in the Church was underlined. One the other, the need to vigorously present the Marist alternative as a valuable solution. For them, the issue of where to exercise presence and accompaniment of the young is precisely where the Church has ceased to be meaningful.

The third group brought out the pastoral challenge facing a Brother who would dare to launch a direct and personal invitation to young people to commit themselves vocationally. Such a gesture provokes an important support for a possible candidate in clarifying his vocation, since it places before him the question of what God wants of him. And for the Brother himself in his turn, it surfaces the fundamental changes he needs to make in his heart so that his involvement may have authenticity.

The fourth group emphasized the idea that we must make Marist vocation openly visible in the midst of the Church and the world. If we remain shut up in our communities we are not giving ourselves to be known. So if people do not know what a Marist Brother is, it is not their fault. Hence they singled out the importance of work with families through youth movements, the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family and other similar apostolates, in order to make Marist Brotherhood attractive.

Those in the fifth group brought out the importance of a systematic province plan for Vocations Ministry with well defined strategies for attending to young people in their vocational development. Such a plan must explicitly include tertiary students. Also pointed out was the situation common today where young people will say: “Why be a Brother if I can be Marist without being one?”

The sixth group summarized their reflection with an idea which complements that of the previous group. Provinces need to have a Province plan for Vocations Ministry which includes structures of welcoming in the Brothers’ communities, allowing candidates to live with them for a time. Secondly, that there be provision for Vocations Ministry teams—made up of Brothers and lay associates—whose functioning is coordinated with all the apostolic movements of the Province. And, finally, that there be opportunities for work with the poor and marginalized.

**Challenges and Goals**
After the break there was time to hear observations and suggestions from the Provincials relating to vocations promotion in their A.U.s in the future.

Paramount amongst the concerns expressed was the need to make our saintly Brothers known, since they are the models to be imitated. Also raised was the possibility of organizing at international level a clearly identified Marist youth movement with well-defined processes. This
approach remains open, and it is suggested that options be taken in its regard. A further possibility was raised: that, in view of the upcoming World Youth Day fixed for 2008 in Sydney, an Institute-wide meeting of all Youth Ministry animators might be held.

The day’s timetable had set aside some minutes for the Commission itself to offer reflections. Br Théoneste Kalisa emphasized that the General Council, in forming the Vocations Commission, intended to foster the search for new paths and harmonious collaboration with the Provinces. He asserted that the biggest limitation encountered so far has been the lack of adequate reflection on what is going on in the field. The Commission has stimulated networks which strengthen exchanges, regional workshops, youth meetings, and information exchange via the web (www.champagnat.org) as well via the print media. The most significant achievement, without doubt, had been the organization, popularization and completion of the “Marist Vocations Year”. Before concluding his presentation, Br Théoneste expressed his gratitude, on behalf of the Commission, to all the Brothers for the effort of vocations promotion which has been achieved across the Provinces. Finally, he presented a power point synthesis of the events which the “Marist Vocations Year” had stimulated throughout the Institute.

**Open Forum**

This was one of the richest moments of the day. The Brothers were able to express their personal vision of vocations ministry in relation to the apostolic challenges of the future. God is present in our world challenging us to undertake a complex and demanding evangelization. Our mission “ad gentes” of tomorrow will have no comparison with that of yesterday. The Marist charism is going to adapt itself to a better response. A new focus may be glimpsed, seen with new eyes. Since the final success is not ours, and does not depend on us but solely on God, we have to remain open to hope.

Our attitudes regarding the future of vocations ministry demand a revision of the criteria which are guiding us right now. The centrality of Jesus must prevail in our lives and in our passion for humanity. Bravery in making the Marist charism visible through our lives. Bravery in presenting ourselves before society with our own identity. Many times, the very ones with whom we work do not know we are Marist Brothers.

**The “Marist Year of Vocations”, a year of grace**

After a brief pause, the open forum continued with the sharing of reflections and experiences.

The General Council had met with young people from all over Europe in Sigüenza (Spain) in order to listen to them. In what does this “listening” consist? What were its results? Br Seán replied as follows: “We were with this group of young men and women to listen to them sharing their experiences on Church life and their spirituality.” One girl said to me: “In the group setting you [Brothers] are very different from Church authorities; you listen to us rather than preach to us.”

Revisiting the statement made by some young people that “to be Marist they don’t have to be Brothers”, one Brother added the following comment: “This is true. One Brother in my Province went so far as to say that ‘the charism has passed from us to the lay people, and that’s how it will continue.’ Sure, it is possible to be Marist without being a Brother! Witness the numerous Fraternities which has sprung up in recent years.” But the Brothers need to have a very clear identity. The best means of vocations promotion is the shine on the face of the Brothers.

Another Brother observed that times are changing, for sure, but young peoples’ criteria for judging who is authentic have not changed. He continued, noting that Br Seán’s circular requested 20% of our time for vocations promotion. “For me this was a big challenge. I made up a plan, and promptly abandoned it. From this effort, one experience remained. For the first time I began to write regularly to my nephews, who are very secularized. One of them replied to me: ‘Your proposal interests me. I want to understand it.’ The influence of
the vocations year in my life teaches me three things. To live the tension of vocational dialogue in a secularized society is one of the deepest sources of living my own vocation. I begin to understand that vocations apostolate is an integral part of all apostolate. I can't live my vocation unless I communicate it. If I don't speak to my nephew of why the Marist Brothers exist, he loses interest. But when I tell him that we dedicate ourselves to youth, he replies that any NGO could do this. The great centre of interest in all his questioning is 'what sets my heart on fire?' My reply is that what ignites my heart is the presence of Jesus and Mary. When that flame goes out, I lose my happiness. This vocations year has been a great grace for me."

**IN SEARCH OF THE UNIFICATION OF CRITERIA IN INITIAL FORMATION**

**General Conference - 14th September**

**Initial Formation on the mat**

Today's work sessions were dedicated to a reflection on the theme of Initial Formation. This theme was presented by Brothers Antonio Ramalho, General Councillor, and Ernesto Sanchez from the General Council's Religious Life Commission.

The objectives that were proposed to the assembly are: to foster a reflection and dialogue on the important challenges in Initial formation, in view of evaluating what is seen to be positive; to have a clearer and unified vision of some important topics; to deepen the Provincials' and District Superiors' understanding of these themes in relation to their Administrative Units; and, finally, to shed light on the future work of animation of formation at the level of the Administrative Units and at the level of the Religious Life Commission.

A document was given to the participants to help them in their task. It described the style of visits to houses of formation during the last three years and gave general information on the current situation of novitiates and post-novitiates in the Marist world.

**Marist novitiates in the world**

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<th>NOVITIATES</th>
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<td><strong>Spanish</strong></td>
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**Marist post-novitiate in the world**

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<td>Amazonia: communities</td>
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**Visit to the houses of initial formation**

During the visits to the regions by the Brother Superior General and his Council, from 2002 to 2005, a special team visited the novitiates, the post-novitiates and sometimes the postulancies. This initiative of Brother Seán is an integral part of the plan for the visits to Administrative Units. More than responding to the need of a pastoral visit (canonical), these visits allow one to have a global vision of the formation in the entire Institute and to offer topics for reflection to each house visited and to the Administrative Units. At the end of the visit to each house, a document in the form of a project is produced in its final form, having been studied in the house during the visit and discussed with the Brothers Provincial and their Councils during the Extended General Council meeting.

**Strengths and challenges**

Among the strengths, the following were highlighted:

* There are great efforts on the part of Administrative Units to offer a solid formation and to dedicate the necessary human and financial resources, and a great desire on the part of those
involved to come to a better knowledge of Marist charism and to live it. There is a paternal presence of formators and a good family spirit.
* The enthusiasm, commitment and devotion of the formators who carry out their mission in a working team in international and/or interprovincial houses of formation. For some this presents a strength, for others a challenge.
* Unification of the work of formation by seeking continuity and coherence in everything.
* Attention to a formation adapted and personalised thanks to personal accompaniment.
* Always a greater effort to offer a formation that is adaptable and better immersed in the social, cultural and religious reality of the country.
* Unification of criteria of formation in all the novitiates of the Institute.
* Appreciation of prayer according to the spirit of Marist Apostolic Spirituality in many houses of formation.

Challenges in Initial Formation
The Religious Life Commission presented the challenges under the form of seven core themes to highlight the role of the Provincial or of the District Superior, and to shed light on what the Administrative Units can bring to others who are in a similar situation. It is important to share not only theoretical reflections but especially experiences.
Some challenges have already been mentioned by Brother Seán in his letter of convocation to the Conference: “in parts of our Institute differences of opinion and competing ideologies also exist about how to best carry out this important work.” “Differences of opinion exist about issues such as the most appropriate theological formation for candidates and young brothers, the ongoing influence of the human sciences in the process of formation, and the best geographic location for a house of formation.” (cf page 18) Other than these three subjects presented by Brother Seán, the Commission proposed four more for our reflection: ongoing formation, the two stages of the post-novitiate and the inculturation of formation.

The future of initial formation
During the last three years, the Commission has visited, supported and encouraged initial formation in the houses that were visited as well as in the Administrative Units. The Religious Life Commission organised for today and a part of tomorrow activities that permit the participants to give some directions to the Commission for the four coming years. We will give details about the contributions of the participants tomorrow.

A gift
Brother Laurentino Albalá, Provincial of the Province of Norandina, gave all the brothers present a CD with fourteen songs, produced by his Province. Its title is “Alégrate de ser marista” (Rejoice in being Marist). These songs are used during youth ministry and vocation ministry meetings.

Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows
Today, the participants in the Conference celebrated the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows. Yesterday, before the Mass there was a small procession with the Cross, celebrating the liturgical feasts of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. These are two feasts that remind us of our sorrowful Saviour. And together with the Lord and his Mother we remember all the people who suffer from cruel injustice. Brother Adolfo Cermeño, Provincial de América Central gave all the brothers a beautiful cross made by ex-drug addicts with a seed from the locust tree! And all in detail!

Change of timetable in the calendar
The revision of the first week of work was subjected to an evaluation on the part of the participants in the Conference. The observations made concerning the rhythm of daily work, the work sessions and their organisation and the liturgical session led to a suggestion of some changes in the timetable. From today the morning work session has been shortened by fifteen minutes and it finishes with Marial prayer and the afternoon session will start fifteen minutes later.

The calendar programme also underwent a slight modification. The 21st September had been set-aside for school visits but this happens to be a school holiday. Hence, the morning programme of the 28th will be moved to the 21st and there will be a visit to Stella Maris College on the morning of he 28th September.

Initial formation under seven magnifying glasses
As we said yesterday, we are sharing today some details of the reflection reports from the groups of brothers about initial formation. The total reality of initial formation has been organised into seven themes and each theme has been studied by a group of brothers. In the presentation that follows we start with a reference to Marist documents. Following this there is a summary of the group’s report, followed by the reactions of the Assembly.

Theme 1
The programmes of theological formation (religious identity)

In respect to the Novitiate the Marist documents propose that the Provinces have to develop programmes of theological formation to help the novices “to deepen their faith and their awareness of the love of God.”

The young men need a good orientation on what this stage means. Sometimes one aspect of formation at this stage is accentuated to the detriment of another. On the other hand, the brothers have verified that the difference of situations in the various countries makes it difficult to have common criteria. The repetition in themes does not signify an obstacle in the process of formation since each stage is treated from a different perspective. Despite the difficulties that are experienced in various places, it can be verified that the formation plan for the novitiate is one of the ones that holds greatest consistency in the Institute.

In respect to the post-novitiate the documents stress that the theological and personal studies occupy a good part of the time during the first stage of professional qualification “for the apostolic tasks of the Institute.” The objective is to form a good Marist apostle, who will be at the same tie a good teacher, capable “of making Jesus Christ known and loved.”

At the novitiate, the accompaniment is close and intense. As the young brother accomplishes apostolic tasks, he must act independently in choosing himself the fields of apostolate and study. During this period, he is not only a student in search of a diploma but also a religious in search of a solid religious formation. The formulas can vary, but the common centres for several congregations, with a theological and pastoral orientation are a valued formula.

Theme 2
The influence of human sciences on formation

Our documents speak of human sciences as a preventive and pedagogical aid; that is the case with psychology that guides the human and professional growth of candidates through accompaniment.

Accompaniment, which is diversely understood in the Institute, was treated first. The group saw the formator as one walking with the candidate: a warm, encouraging and open presence to the young person to support him in his growth. The aim of accompaniment is to help the brother to fully realise himself. As a consequence, the formators need not be experts or therapists.

We then spoke about human development (competence, sexuality, etc). Here also our houses of formation present differences. The group recommends that they exchange more amongst themselves and that their programmes of formation be revised to better take into account cultural differences and to better integrate the brothers.
Finally, the group discussed the need to evaluate the programmes of formation. In seeing the great
differences in programmes and points of view, the group suggested revising the Formation Guide,
or at least bringing it up-to-date.

Theme 3
Place of the houses of formation
The General Chapter asked the General Council to
encourage the brothers to create new presences in the
works for the poor, so that the houses of formation, while
respecting the proper objectives of each stage, can be
situated in neighbourhoods favourable to a style of life that
facilitates the communion and co-operation with the local
Church.

Our documents specify that the postulancy house must be
simple and adapted to the work of formation, and that the
novitiate must be simple, welcoming and favourable to
reflection, to prayer and to community life. Finally, the house of the post-novitiate must be in a
place where one can easily access study centres, where one can engage the poor face-to-face
and where there is a relative autonomy between the two groups of the community, there where a
community in formation and an apostolic community co-exist.

The participants in the Conference reflected on the directives of our documents. The group that
discussed this theme is of the opinion that we need to give priority to a poor and simple style of life,
rather than the choice of a place. The place certainly has importance, but it is not an objective of
formation. Since the objectives are different at each stage, the place must also be a way of serving
these objectives. The important thing is to be able to achieve the objective at each stage without
expecting the young person has every possible experience; there needs to be an balance the
ministry, the studies, the immersion, the psychological equilibrium, etc. in order to create the
conditions that will permit him to face the great challenges as an adult brother. The houses need to
be simple and in a poor area, but without necessarily being immersed entirely among the poor as
for an apostolic community.

As a reaction, the members of the assembly posed a question without answering it: What did
Champagnat have in mind when he constructed the Hermitage as a house of formation?
Another intervention recalled that we have the experience of a great variety of houses of formation:
some co-exist with other communities, sometimes with elderly brothers, others group together
novices from different Provinces, sometimes they live in small house, in a rural environment or in
an apartment in the city, etc. All of this has negative and positive points. It seems that the choice of
place of the house responds more to the worry of formators than the needs of formation.

The majority of speakers highlighted that the atmosphere and spirit of a house are more important
than the geographical situation and its architecture. It is the style of life that must guide our
judgement.

Theme 4
Ongoing formation
All the stages of formation follow the objective of forming men capable of giving their life to God at
the heart of a Marist apostolic community. The Institute is concerned that this be solid and adapted
to the personality and culture of each person.

The group that reflected on this subject saw a problem in the lack of criteria demanded to pass
from one stage to another, visible at the same time in the objectives and contents of the stages.
This lack of co-ordination is still more apparent when the candidates are poorly prepared or when
the formators work too independently.

The brothers added the lack of follow-up during the period of the novitiate to perpetual profession.
People are not aware what is done in the other novitiates of a same region. Sometimes, there are
divergences between the Provincial Council and the team of formators as to the type of formation.
The assembly recommended following the Formation Guide, at least to evaluate it. It is basic to
have a Provincial formation plan, with objectives, contents, method and clear criteria, as well as
regular meetings for the formators.
Theme 5
Post-novitiate – First Stage
To harmonise the studies and the apostolic activities with prayer life and community life.
Duration of the first stage.
Our documents propose that the brother continues during this time to reflect on the meaning of his consecration, in a systematic and balanced way, until final profession. The brother adapts himself to the needs of the Church and of people according to his personal qualities and the charism of the Institute.
The Conference participants stressed that the post-novitiate stage is the most decisive for forming the identity as a religious. One notes that sometimes there is a rush to send young brothers into community as soon as possible, once they have finished their novitiate, without being well prepared. Upon leaving the novitiate, the professed are not usually prepared for the apostolate. The balance needed in each preparation is the responsibility of each person, but it is also part of the formation that the young brother must assume with the help of his formator.
On reflecting on the conditions necessary to bring the Marist identity to maturity and to live an integrated life, one realises that it is necessary to have a minimum number of brothers in a group. How can an identity be formed in a novitiate with only one novice or in a "scholasticate of individuals" inserted in a community?
We need brothers specifically formed to accompany the young people who leave the novitiate, as well as communities motivated to welcome them at the start of their apostolic life.
The assembly expressed the widespread conviction that we need to be prepared to adapt whenever faced with changes.

Theme 6
Post-novitiate – Second stage
The first years of apostolic activity are of premiere importance for the temporarily professed brother when he assumes his formation in a responsible manner in an appropriate community. He participates fully in the life and mission of his community. During this stage, he prepares himself seriously for perpetual profession.
The group stressed the need to integrate the young brother in the activities of the community and to those of the Administrative Unit as far as possible, to help him to evolve his own personal prayer style to forms more adapted to the apostolate, to admit him to vows after dialogue with the community and to invite him to stay in periodic contact with the Brother Provincial.

Theme 7
Inculturation
While respecting the values of a culture, formation helps to liberate yourself from some of these values in the concrete expressions: attitudes, gestures, customs, and symbols.
The team presented two experiences of the Administrative Units: one in the novitiate at Medellin (Columbia) and the other at Cochabamba (Bolivia). Found in well-populated areas, these houses receive young people from different countries of Latin America. The international and multicultural aspects are highlighted. In the area of Chipas (Mexico) some young autochthones feel attracted by the vocation to be a Marist Brother. Their integration in the process of formation demands from them a very strong uprooting.
The advantages of having formators who share the same culture as those in formation were stressed.
The role of the Provincial or District Superior is to build and prepare good teams of formators (because it is these who mark the young) and to assure that the programmes of formation are serious. On considering inculturation, we need to know that there are aspects that one cannot negotiate no matter the culture, for example in that which concerns sexuality.
Today’s afternoon allowed the Provincials and District Superiors to work in Regions or by Conferences of Provincials. The General Council held a regular meeting.
Objectives and themes
On-going formation touches various aspects of Marist life and mission and affects all the brothers. That is why the General Council and the Religious Life Commission proposed to the Provincials and to the District Superiors to reflect on the on-going formation courses offered by the General Council or those carried out in the Administrative Units, and to dialogue on the animation of Marist apostolic spirituality, especially in respect to NETWORKS. We spoke particularly about the on-going formation that continues on from the initial formation of the brothers because later on we will study the on-going formation of laypeople during the day reserved for the Laity Commission.
To reflect on on-going formation is part of the two first calls of the General Chapter which directed this to the heart of each brother and of each community to encourage a conversion and to find new responses to new situations.

Action of the General Council
The General Council has made the animation of these two first calls one of its priorities. From 2002 to 2005, Brother Seán and his Council have started their visits to the Administrative Units by animating retreats based on the calls of the Chapter. The first circular of Brother Seán treated spirituality and his most recent is on community life. Also, the Religious Life Commission was created to support the work of the General Council and of the Administrative Units in the animation of the religious life of the brothers and of communities, to establish structures and to form support teams for initial and on-going formation in their growth, according to the first two calls of the XX General Chapter. The Commission is formed by Brothers Antonio Ramalho (chairperson), Théoneste Kalisa, Peter Rodney and Ernesto Sánchez (secretary).

Spirituality and third age: Manziana and El Escorial
Courses of on-going formation (spirituality and third age) are offered regularly at Manziana and at El Escorial in English, Spanish and Portuguese. In 2005, courses have also been offered at Manziana in French. The co-ordination of these courses is under the responsibility of certain General Councillors who keep in regular contact with the animation teams:

Spirituality, English language (Manziana): Peter Rodney.
Spirituality, Spanish and Portuguese languages (Escorial): Antonio Ramalho.
Spirituality, French language (Manziana): Théoneste Kalisa.
Third age, English language (Manziana): Peter Rodney.
Third age, Spanish and Portuguese language (Manziana): Pedro Herreros.
Thirds age, French language (Manziana): Théoneste Kalisa.

The brothers reflected in five language groups. In general, the groups recalled the satisfaction experienced by brothers who had participated in these sessions. On their return to their Provinces, these brothers say how they have been personally helped and motivated to continue their services, especially by being more available and open. Nearly all the groups spoke of the visit to the Hermitage as an unforgettable and enriching experience; A difficulty does come about when one does not enter into the dynamic of the group, mainly for personal reasons; the Institute must find another way of helping them. It was also suggested to the General Council to organise courses of the same kind but shorter for a Region or a Province and to develop a course especially for the brothers from fifty-five to sixty-five years of age.

Course of animators of community: Nemi and El Escorial
The Commission tried to promote the formation of leaders in the Administrative Units that have such programmes of animation, of discernment and personal and community accompaniment as the General Chapter had asked.

As a response to the Chapter, they also offered three courses for the animators of community who help the Provincials in their task of animation of local superiors. Forty-seven brothers took part.

The majority of participants came with the idea of being able to share later in the mission of animation in their own Administrative Unit. This was not a course for Superiors of communities, but for the animators who would collaborate in animation with the Provincial and his Council. For some, this objective was not perhaps very clear on their arrival, but this situation was quickly clarified during the session.

The Brothers who participated appreciated the course that brought a new dynamic to their lives. It is an initiative that has a lot of future as it affects very positively the community life that is fundamental to our religious life. The Religious Life Commission should ensure that it continues.

Where there are already community animation projects, this course strengthened the conviction that these projects are necessary to energise community life. The on-going formation teams should include this dynamic and these courses in their programming. In Brazil, all the brothers who participated in the session have been grouped together, in order to help each other to animate communities.

We support this initiative and recommend that it continue.

**Spirituality and networks of Marist apostolic spirituality**

The General Chapter asked the General Council to encourage in the Institute the four linguistic networks of Marist apostolic spirituality, in the aim of clarifying and developing it more.

Several years ago, spirituality networks were established by languages throughout the entire Institute to promote Marist apostolic spirituality. Where they set their roots, they flourished; the networks were transformed into a precious instrument for deepening the awareness and experience of Marist apostolic spirituality. However, the cultural complexity of the Institute meant that this model was not effective in some parts of the Marist world.

Leaving the animation of Marist apostolic spirituality to spirituality networks had differing results according to regions; if they were satisfying in Latin America, they were nul in Asia, in Africa and in Oceania where there are no longer any networks.

Some Provincials expressed their disorientation and said they did not know what to do faced with the imprecision of such an expression: Marist apostolic spirituality. On their arrival at the Conference, they were hoping to find a document guide them. The General Council dedicated some time to this study but the work remains imperfect. Until the present, the reflection has been very open and it appears clearly that spirituality and identity are linked and that one must develop slowly so as to not create more confusion. The brothers highlighted, however, the need to get past this impasse.

**Programmes of on-going formation in the A.U.**

There exists an ordinary on-going formation, made by the individual from everyday things. The Constitutions propose this by ordinary means such as the revision of the day, spiritual reading, etc. But there is also an extraordinary on-going formation, proposed by the Institute at different levels. The two types should normally be united. On-going formation lasts the whole life; it is not an extraordinary thing, done at precise moments, reserved to a few people and concerning only some aspects of the person.

The brothers consider the animation of on-going formation in the Administrative Units as one of their fundamental responsibilities as Provincial or District Superior.

In the groups, the brothers noted that the Provinces organise meetings, courses or workshops in which a lot of brothers participate. The Provinces produce material to help with personal reflection and to share this material. In several places, the Provinces are very happy that the brothers develop a personal life plan. The community project also needs to be taken seriously and the Provincial needs to follow this up during his visits to the communities. It is proposed that a formation plan be created that is well thought out, or at least, to profit from organised courses, offered by the Church or by other religious Institutes.
Among the comments made at the assembly, it was stated that it is not clear if on-going formation is a process of personal and continued growth or indeed something that is optional. It was also mentioned that we need to help people who suffer from personal problems.

It was proposed that the General Council organise courses for formators in Spanish and Portuguese to help in on-going formation.

In the light of these exchanges, the Religious Life Commission will develop its plan for the four following years, knowing that it is about supporting the Provinces and the Districts in their work of animation of religious life of the brothers and of communities.

Brother Seán made a final point in the reflection by thanking the brothers for the work accomplished during this week and he thanked the Religious Life Commission for having guided the reflection of the brothers today.

Brother Seán said that formation is one of the means of feeding the fire in our heart. The General Chapter’s call to centre our lives passionately on Jesus Christ is the most prophetic call of all. It is very strong to talk of passion, but this is part of the fire that we must kindle because it is part of religious life. Love centres us bit by bit on Jesus Christ and the time is coming when we will not be able to satisfy this fire without giving our whole life.

The General Conference with the tsunami victims

The brothers of Sri Lanka invited today two exceptional witnesses of the tsunami to speak about their experience to the brothers during the homely at Mass. Father Juan Gladwin Peters from Payagala and Sister Calixta Mallikkararchchi, from the Sisters of the Charity of Jesus and Mary, both had worrying times during the tsunami at Payagala where the force of the water had carried away a large part of the annex to Holy Cross College. This week, the reconstruction of this annex has started.

The General Conference wanted to be united to the many families who lost loved ones in this natural disaster by celebrating the Eucharist with the parish priest of Payagala and the sister who runs the convent St. Marys of Matara. The Marist choir from Stella Maris College accompanied the hymns.

To create an appropriate ambiance for the Mass, a video of some of the tragic moments that this country suffered was shown.

The reconstruction of the Marist building at Payagala was able to start this week thanks to the many gifts received in favour of the victims of the tsunami. Brother Dominick Pujia, Director BIS, showed us photos of the work in progress.

I FEEL VERY MUCH AT EASE AND HAPPY TO BE ABLE TO OFFER THIS SMALL SERVICE TO THE BROTHERS

Interview with Marist Father Joaquin Fernández

Brother Antonio Martínez Estaún

Father Joaquin Fernández, a Spanish Marist Father, was a General Councillor from 1981 to 1989 and the Superior General from 1993 to 2001. Gifted in languages with a fraternal allure, he is ideal for our General Conference of which he is the chaplain. We can sense his discreet presence, authentically Marist, as a brother amongst brothers. He responded with simplicity to our questions.

Father Joaquin, we are finishing the work of the second week of the Conference. As an observer, how do you see the group, the work, the planning, the atmosphere?
From the start, the group has seemed to be well integrated, coming from very different experiences and places. It is a sign that this is not the first time that they have been together, or at least for the majority of them. What has attracted my attention is the number of Brothers Provincial and District Superiors with a relatively low average age, and the predominance of brothers from the Spanish language, not only among the Superiors, but also among the translators and the support people.

The timetable of the meetings is precise to the minute and it is obvious that the topics and their documentation have been well prepared with good information, reflection and discussions. During the first week, I thought that the work would be difficult, because the times for personal reflection and in groups was short according to my experience of similar meetings. I think that a lot of participants thought the same thing. But during the second week, we saw that this rhythm had been thought only for the first week, as an introduction and general presentation. This second week is a lot more balanced with a better allotment of time.

The atmosphere is thus pleasant, serene, with frequent exchanges. I am very interested in the country where the Conference is being held: its history, monuments, clothing and consequences of the tsunami, etc. I see here that many brothers are residing and working away from their country of origin or have done so. I consider this aspect very important in international meetings.

The Conference had started with an expose offering a vision of the Church and of Marist life in Asia. What was your perception of the service that the Church and Asia expect from the brothers?

In his second talk, Father Pieris gave a lot of importance to the education of children and young people, and this is essential for a very young continent. It is the immense domain of the specific mission of the Marist Brothers. It was important for me to discover that the brothers are present in many countries of Asia. It is not a massive presence as in other parts of the world, but it indicates that they are in places adapted to their mission and that their school and their other educational works must integrate the children and young people of different cultures and religions. Asia should be currently the continent that gives an example of co-existence, of respect, or interaction and of learning between different cultures and religions. The world needs this.

The brothers cannot perhaps accomplish all of this on their own, but as they have done in other countries, they can undertake this other important work of formation of lay teachers, who can imitate their energy and spirit. It is a multiplying factor which must be considered.

According to you, what challenges does this continent posed for the brothers?

The first refers to the mission of evangelisation of cultures. Sometimes we want to undertake the mission by presences and by works that are limited and even marginalised by the culture, attitudes and values of the people or social groups. These are sometimes important actions, but with provisory results which do not have a long-term effect. Education, on the other hand, acts in the long-term, not only in forming results, but also ensuring that they last.

This reality represents important challenges for the brothers; what type of education must they give or where should they be present? We are not talking about academic matters that are generally fixed by governments. These are other domains of the formation of the person which must nourish what Father Pieris called the spirituality proper to these cultures, faced with the predominant technique in the other countries. The reality is very different in developed countries or of the western culture, and that is why we do not have to repeat the same schemas and arrive at the same results.

There are the places of this presence which, according to Marcellin Champagnat, will not be in the environments that have sufficient means, but where they have no other possibilities of personal and social development. The brothers originating from Asia have a very important and decisive task in this domain and must dedicate sufficient time to it.
The Marist Fathers were born with a very clear missionary vocation. According to you, what worth does the project “ad gentes” have as proposed at the Conference?
I at first reacted with surprise and envy. The brothers are advancing in a domain that we the fathers have had as a priority for many years, and which has been part of the mission and the dynamism of our congregation. All of that was lost or reduced to a minimum with the maturity of the mission in Oceania in the seventies. I know that our General Council is studying the possibility of relaunching this aspect of mission in local missions and in the countries who have been evangelised but are no longer so.
The plan presented is ambitious, but not impossible. The preparation programme must be revised but that is of little importance.
What concerns me in what was said at the Conference is that many young brothers leave their period of formation not very aware of the values of internationality and of mission outside of their country. The concrete formation plans perhaps need to be revised. As well, during the period of formation, we should make them aware of the presence of many brothers transplanted in different countries and the richness that that supposes for them and their Provinces or origin.

How do you feel as the Conference chaplain?
I feel very much at ease and happy to be able to offer this small service to the brothers. Let us hope that this will be an example for us to help each other more as members of the same family. I knew some of the participants before and others had met me during the celebrations of the canonisation of Saint Marcellin at Rome.
On the other hand, the Eucharistic celebrations are very well prepared in the booklets, which makes the work very easy. It suffices to follow the directions in the booklets and those given by the brothers looking after the Eucharist for the day. With a bit of obedience and a bit of preparation of the readings and prayers in the language of the day, my work is done!
The most important thing for me is the fraternity with the brothers coming from all parts of the world and listening to what the brothers are saying and sharing. I remember some things and I am learning new things. I am very grateful to the General Council for their invitation and to my brothers in community who made my response easy.

THE CONFERENCE CROSSES THE EQUATOR
General Conference - 19th September

Cultural and religious visit
Saturday and Sunday were programmed for visiting various significant places of the country. The first visit was to an elephant orphanage in Pinnawela. On this reserve there are about seventy elephants, of different ages in semi-freedom. The smallest broods are looked after with special care to ensure their subsistence. The flock is governed by a timetable imposed on them by the caretakers. Mid-morning they are taken to the river through the streets of the town. All the traffic stops to let them pass. Many people come to watch them as they bathe in the river.
The religious visit was to the city of Kandy, one of the paradigmatic places of Buddhism. The temple is famous as it conserves in a special place one of the teeth of Buddha. Hence it is called “the temple of the tooth”. The roof is covered in gold. The visit coincided with the beginning of the full moon which is a holiday par excellence for the Buddhists. For that reason the temple was very packed. It was an opportunity to have a first hand experience of how the people express the philosophy of life of Buddhism in a sacred space.
Another cultural dimension of the day was the visit to the tea cultivations. Sri Lanka is the main exporter of world tea. For hours we could see the extensive fields of tea from the bus. The great care they show in looking after these crops offers a beautiful view of hundreds of hectares appearing like a green carpet on the hillsides. The brothers had the opportunity to have the whole process of tea production explained to them.
In the celebration of Sunday Mass, Chile was particularly remembered due to the celebration of its national day. The brothers and all their works were special intentions during the Mass. Upon our return to the house we enjoyed dinner with Chilean music in the background and a nice red wine from the valley of the Maipo.

Open Forum
The weekend break gave some breathing space to the rhythm of the work of the group. Today the work rhythm recommenced with gusto. The open forum included some questions that had already been submitted in writing. Tomorrow’s time has been dedicated to treating these questions.

Marian dimension of the Institute
The first question made reference to the Marian dimension of the Institute. When discerning the calls of the XX General Chapter, fruit of a long discernment, many thought about this question: Where is Mary in all this? Brother Seán Sammon, Superior General, remarked that the last Superior General to have written on Mary and the Institute was Brother Basilio. But he affirmed that, in the Institute, Mary continues to be present in the charism, apostolic spirituality, in the apostolate and in vocations ministry. And to confirm this, he gave a quick synthesis of the mariology that is found in the Constitutions. Mary’s strong presence exists in the fundamental documents of the Institute. But he also recognised that there is also a certain fear in many brothers that Mary can be seen to be more important than Jesus.

He recalled some initiatives developed by some Provinces to know Mary better by organising a Marian year or choosing this as the core topic for retreats. Brother Seán promised that after writing the circular on mission and identity at the beginning of 2006, he will dedicate another one to Mary at the end of that same year.

Some brothers intervened to highlight that it is important to be familiar with the renewed mariology as proposed in the Second Vatican Council in which Mary is seen as being an older sister in faith. Saint Marcellin supported the sentimental dimension of devotion to Mary: "I am a son of Mary."

What challenges confront BIS?
The first challenge that must be confronted is the one of balancing the different functions that have been commended: to promote the education for justice in the Institute, to collaborate with other institutions in the field of solidarity, to be present in international institutions that promote solidarity programmes, the defence of fair causes, to help in diverse projects of solidarity and to find financing for these projects.

A second necessity is the one of looking for a coordinator of projects.

And finally, it is indicated that the projects that the Provinces carry out with international organisations would have to be coordinated by BIS because it gives responsibility to the Institute, is more transparent and encourages the trust of the donors.

Cost of the general Conference
The third question made reference to the convocation of the VII General Conference in Sri Lanka. This question alluded to three types of problems: the cost of the Conference; the use of evangelical goods; and the socio-economic ambiance of the meeting.

Regarding the first aspect of the question, the criteria for choosing Asia as the place for the Conference were recalled. An itemised account was given of the steps of consultation and programming taken by the General Council, the Preparatory Commission and the Brother Provincial of the Province of Sri Lanka and Pakistan and his Council that decided the place for the Conference. This hotel has been used by the Episcopal Conference of Sri Lanka for its meetings. The last meeting of the International Organisation of Catholic Education was held here. On the other hand, Brother Mike de Waas had shown the brothers of Sri Lanka were very happy for the
Conference to be held here. A comparison was made between the costs of the VI General Conference held in Rome and the proposed budget for this General Conference and the costs for Sri Lanka did not appear to be superior.

Regarding introducing this realisation to the programme of reflection on the evangelical use of goods, it was said that the project of holding General Conferences began before the institutional reflection of the evangelical use of goods.

Finally, some figures were managed on the social indicators of the economic reality of the environment where the Conference is taking place.

The brothers were satisfied with the explanations that had been given. Also mentioned was the great welcome offered to all and effort of the inhabitants of this country to overcome the consequences of the tsunami.

**The “hermanitas” (little sisters) and the Conference**

Some brothers from the Province of Norandina, working in Ecuador, have noted the desire in some women “to be Marist Sisters in the style of the brothers.” They asked if anyone had thought of this possibility.

The brothers of the General Council, who have the responsibility of pursuing these initiatives, shared some situations where this is the case. All of these experiences had in common that there are women who have shown the interest to consecrate their lives according to Champagnat’s charism. At the present time there is a group of six women in Guatemala who are known as “las hermanitas”. Three are professed, two are novices and one is a postulant.

The sisters at Guatemala are taking steps in personal and communal maturation. They base their consecrated life on Marist community and have contact with the brothers of the Province of América Central. They participate in the life of the Province and in some retreats with the brothers. This experience of consecrated life may well respond to the wishes that the brothers have noticed in some women in Ecuador.

**The organisational management of the General Council**

Sometimes the General Council has organised numerous activities for the whole Institute. But each Province has its own activities. On some occasions, difficulties can arise in trying to find a balance between the activities of the Institute and the Province. Planning and exchange of information through the established channels are needed as well as ensuring that there is a flexibility in the programmes.

**Second visit of the General Council to the Administrative Units**

The afternoon session started with a summary of the activities realised by the brothers in the visits they have made to the Regions, looking forward to the second round of visits. At the start and end of the visit, meetings were held with the Brother Provincial and his Council to programme the meeting with the communities, the fraternities, the governing Councils of works and their leaders. At the end of each visit a report was written and delivered. These are some figures that reflect the activity of the General Council during this first round of visits.

**Retreats**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Retreats</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>08 – 09 2002</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>December 2002</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>12/2002 01/2003</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>07/08 2003</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>07/08 2004</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arco Norte</td>
<td>December 2004</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>60</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.300</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evaluation of the retreats
In the evaluation that was done at the end of the visits, it was noted that the retreats encouraged the renewal and deepening of the calls of the XX General Chapter. The brothers felt strengthened in their faith by the closeness and simplicity of the Brother Superior General and his Council and the sharing of their convictions. They offered a wider vision and hope for the future on the mission and life of the Institute.

Extended General Council Meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Brothers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
<td>October 2002</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>February 2003</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cono Sur and Brazil</td>
<td>Cochabamba</td>
<td>May 2003</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Madrid</td>
<td>November 2003</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>Mittagong</td>
<td>May 2004</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>Maryknoll</td>
<td>November 2004</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arco Norte</td>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>May 2005</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evaluation of the Extended Council Meetings
Particularly evident in this evaluation were the closeness and simplicity of the Brother Superior General and his Council gathered with the Provincial Councils of a Region looking together to the future.

Preparing the second visit
Brother Seán finished this session by explaining the style of the second round of visits that the General Councillors will make in the next four years. He also added that a letter explaining these will be sent to the Provincials later this year. The brothers dedicated a period of time to responding to two questions: “What was the greatest help that you received for your Province or District during these visits by the General Council? What would you change? The valuation of the visits on the part of the brothers has been very positive. The report made at the end stood out as being very valuable. One obstacle that was noted was the speed of the visit. The afternoon concluded with regional group meetings to contribute concrete suggestions for the organisation of the second round of visits from the General Council to the Administrative Units.

FINANCES AND EVANGELICAL USE OF GOODS
General Conference - 20th September 2005

Study of “financial matters” of the Institute
Today's subject was the financial management of the General Administration. The General Council’s Financial Affairs Committee consists of Brothers Antonio Martínez Fernández (chair), Maurice Berquet, Dominick Pujia, Juan Arconada, Peter Rodney and Guy Palandre, as secretary. Today’s work sessions were dedicated to information about the financial activities of the General Administration in order to promote dialogue and to respond to any questions raised. Under the direction of Brother Antonio Martinez Fernández, Econome General, the first session studied the annual financial reports of the General Administration,
balances up until the 31st December, the General Administration’s reserves and the “per capita” contribution of the Provinces

Financial report for the Conference
Brother Antonio Martínez Fernández presented a resume of the financial reports from 2001 to 2004, indicating the income, the expenses and the results. Each year the General Council approves the budgets and the finance report. To make it easier to understand, Brother Antonio divided the income and expenses into two large sectors. Activities that repeat each year were treated with similar parameters. The income and expense of particular activities subject to unforeseeable fluctuations, such as devaluation of money, investments and annuities, were also treated.

General Administrative Reserves
The General Council has approved a sum of money for emergency situations as maximum reserves. The concept of “reserves” corresponds to proper funds minus the funds created by the XX General Chapter. Whatever is in excess of this maximum quantity will serve to increase the funds created by the XX General Chapter.

Per Capita
By the technical expression “Per Capita”, one needs to understand the contribution of each Province to the General Administration according to the number of brothers in the province, to cover ordinary general expenses. The “Per Capita” is calculated on the number of brothers of each Province at the 31st December of the preceding year. The “Per Capita” contribution varies from one Province to another and for the moment it does not cover all the ordinary expenses of the year.

Ordinary Activity and Solidarity activity
An analysis was made of the income and expenses corresponding to the ordinary activity and solidarity activity. The objective of the Commission is to finance the ordinary activities with fixed income and the solidarity activities with voluntary contributions from the Provinces.

XX General Chapter Solidarity Fund
The XX General Chapter recommended to the Superior General, to his Council and to Provincials to enter into dialogue with the Econome General, between 2002 and 2005, and to donate between 30% and 40% of their annual excess to the Solidarity Funds of the Institute with the objective of arriving at 9 million dollars each year. The contributions received have been generous but insufficient to attain the fixed objective for various reasons.

The following question came from the groups of sharing and dialogue: “In taking account of the reality of the two last years, what must be the objectives of the XX General Chapter Fund and what must be its functioning in the next four years?

The brothers made various suggestions to maintain the criteria of the XX General Chapter as to the process of consolidation of the Fund and of the affectation of resources. As we did not have enough time to finish this dialogue, it will be taken up again another day.

Formation Funds in the Institute
The objective of the Institute’s Formation Funds is to help finance the formation at MIC in Africa and at MAPAC in Asia and also the formation of novices in the novitiates at Save, Kumasi, Kutuma and Tudella.

For the creation of this Fund, the General Administration and the Province of Canada participated with the idea of a contribution that could generate enough interest to assure the functioning of the centres of formation mentioned above.
The centres benefiting from the Institute’s Formation Fund present their annual budget and the accounts for the previous year to the General Administration. The General Council approves the annual donations made to each centre.

**General Administration’s Real Estate**

The problem of real estate could not be discussed due to lack of time, but in the work document there is talk of real estate. At the present moment, the General Administration has only the property of the General House and of Manziana. In 2004, the house at El Escorial was given to the Province of Ibérica in exchange for a financial sum. In 2005, we presented a project to construct an office building on part of the land of the General House to the municipality of Rome. The objective is to sell a part of the land concerning the project, in the case of it being approved.

**Evangelical use of goods**

In the afternoon we looked at the topic of evangelical use of goods. The Commission started by the presentation of its work with Brothers Maurice Berquet, chair, Guy Palandre, secretary, Antonio Martínez, Econome General and Dominick Pujia, Director of BIS. The tasks of the Commission are well defined. “The General Chapter asked the General Council to establish a plan of discernment on the evangelical use of goods in the Institute and to accompany its execution in each Administrative Unit.”

The plan of discernment was approved by the Superior General and his Council on the 5th February 2004, and published in March of the same year. This plan can be accessed on our website [www.champagnat.org](http://www.champagnat.org). The reserved are of this page allows brothers to share their reflections on the themes.

**Animations that have been realised or are in project**

* Presentation to the new Provincials before the orientation session (Rome, 22nd July 2004, Brother Maurice Berquet).
* Workshop animated by Brother Dominick Pujia for the brothers of the Province of Nigeria (7th – 9th September 2004)
* Workshop animated by Brother Maurice Berquet for the Superiors of communities of the Province of Mediterránea (3rd January 2005)
* Presentation to the brothers of the francophone renewal group at Manziana (28th April 2005, Brothers Antonio and Guy)
* Presentation to the brothers of the Province of Norandina during the visit to this Province (Brother Maurice, February – March 2005)
* Presentation to the communities of the General House (1st semester 2005, Brothers Antonio, Dominick, Guy and Maurice)
* Presentation to the groups of economes at Curitiba (Brother Antonio) and at Lardero (Brothers Antonio and Guy).
* Presentation to members of the CIAE (Brother Maurice).
* Workshop for the student brothers at MIC (19th – 21st December 2005)

**Presentation of three experiences**

The Commission invited three brothers to present three experiences of the execution of the Plan of discernment in their Provinces. The first was presented by Brother Claudino Falquette from the Province of Brasil Centro-Norte. The second by Brother Primitivo Mendoza, Provincial of the Province of Compostela and the third by Brother Christian Mbam, Provincial of Nigeria. The three presented different methodologies adapted to the reality of each Province.

Work continued in small groups by region in which the brothers discussed the methodology that could be taken in their area of the world. In the Plenary session it was stressed that the Marist value of simplicity of life deserves greater attention during the next four years.
Visit of the Episcopal Conference
Six of the ten bishops of Sri Lanka joined the brothers for several hours. The celebration of Mass and the meal afterwards were very important aspects of this contact between the brothers and the bishops. The President of the Episcopal Conference, Dr Vianney, emphasised in his homily: “I have heard a lot about some of your brothers who have touched the lives of so many people” who have studied in Marist schools. And he reminded the brothers of the three fundamentals of the Marist vocation: “contemplation” which leads to the building of a profound spiritual life, “being men of communion” and “men of mission”. He encouraged the brothers to live their consecration enthusiastically. And he concluded: “Your vocation is both beautiful and passionate.”

The Archbishop of Colombo, Dr Oswaldo Gomis, addressed a few words at the end of Mass and thanked the brothers for the presence of the General Conference in Sri Lanka as a sign of closeness between the Institute and the church in Asia. Brother Seán thanked the bishops for their visit and offered them a precious book that relates the placing of the statue of Saint Marcellin in the Vatican basilica.

A MASTER WORK-PLAN FOR MARIST PLACES
General Conference - 21st September

Starting motivation
The Conference focussed on a master work-plan for the Hermitage and other Marist places this morning. The session started with a reflection from the Superior General on the audacity of Champagnat in building the Hermitage. Among other things, he said that Champagnat was someone who had dreams and built his dreams with his own hands. The Hermitage is a place of pilgrimage and as such is a privileged place. All the history of the Institute is alive here and this house has been converted bit by bit to maintain this history. The project speaks of spirituality and interior renovation. The history, the cost and the usefulness of what we want to do concern us but what would the Founder do with this project? No doubt he would want it to be a place where young people can be enlightened. Thus the conclusion was to “let’s do this project with vision and future zeal!”

Presentation of the origin of the project and its philosophy
Brother Luis García Sobrado, Vicar General, gave a brief history of the process up to the present stage. The Hermitage has been the Motherhouse, the General House, Provincial House, House of Formation, Retreat House, etc. Brother Basilio Rueda concluded the first management accord between the General Administration and the Province of the Hermitage. This project was born in this accord.

Stages of development of the project
June 2004 – Meeting of Committee: Province of L’Hermitage and the General Administration.
January 2005 – Study of the Committee’s work-plan by the General Council.
April 2005 - Consultation with Provincials. Responses from Amazônia, Brasil Centro-Sur, Canada, China, Compostela, Cruz del Sur, Europe Centre-Ouest, Korea, y Rio Grande del Sur. Other Provinces contributed afterwards.
June 2005 – Committee’s final plan.
August 2005 – Study of the plan by the Provincial Council of L’Hermitage with Brothers Luis García Sobrado and Maurice Berquet, from the General Council.
The master plan
A master plan requires that one has well reflected on the needs in order to establish lines of action that one develops by stages in order to arrive at coherent results and that one uses intellectual and economic resources well.
Brother Maurice Berquet presented this plan which includes all the buildings of the Hermitage: reception, chapel, spaces reserved for hospitality, Le Rocher, Le Cèdre, the laundry and its annexes, the kitchen and Les Sources which is found in front of the main entrance. The activities at la Valla, le Rosey and les Maisonnettes are also to be included.
The renovation of all of this is not a new idea as a reflection has been undertaken for several years concerning our charism and our identity at the start of the 21st century. The aims of the plan are to find, clarify and present the historical memory of the places, to adapt the places for the users’ needs, to transform Route Champagnat into a spiritual experience of high quality, to centralise the services and to consolidate the buildings.

The underlying philosophy
It is not a matter of just bringing the house up-to-date with today's needs. We confuse sometimes ‘accommodate’ with ‘adapt’. Accommodate means to harmonise with the needs of the moment without too much worry about the identity that could be affected or diminished. On the contrary, adapting is to bring up-to-date in all the senses of the word with the idea of maintaining the identity. That is especially true for the Hermitage due to its symbolic and spiritual value for many brothers. May the place be more open to brothers and laypeople so that they can be formed in the charism of Marcellin! May it present the history, not to encourage nostalgia for the past, but to inspire what is new in the Institute! May the expression ‘journey’ take on its more spiritual meaning of growth!

Propositions and finance
It is proposed to create a principal access to the Hermitage on the northern façade, under the chapel, for all who arrive at the Hermitage. The central courtyard will be covered with a transparent roof high enough to create a large interior space which will serve as a meeting point and a departure point for all the places of the house. The kitchen will be situated outside of the historic buildings. The laundry will be converted and enlarged with a new construction to accommodate the dining room and one of the historical places by a corridor. The community spaces for relaxation, eating and prayer will be grouped together on the first level of Le Cèdre. The first floor will be dedicated totally to the Champagnat circuit.
An international and intercultural community will be formed to look after hospitality and the animation of visitors, but without being the community of Marist researchers as has been the case up til now.
At la Valla, the school will continue to function where it is. The spaces of the former boarding school, the chapel and the construction effected in 1822 beside the Bonaire house will be spaces for hospitality and a museum.
At Marlhes, the areas for hospitality and meetings that already exist will be improved and at les Maisonnettes the structures will be strengthened.
The Province of L’Hermitage, conscious of looking after one of its houses, is committed to covering two-thirds of the work costs. The other third will be charged to the General Administration and the Provinces.

Reflection in inter-regional groups
The brothers reflected on the following questions: With what aspects of the project do I identify? What aspects concern me? What is the project lacking? Do I think that my Council and the brothers and laypeople of my Province will be interested by this project?
It was noted that the plan was a result of a serious and deep study. All the groups agreed with the philosophy that inspires this enthusiastic project. Some Provincial said they were unaware of how
their Province would react. On the contrary, others thought that they would see the changes as favourable, but it will be more difficult to energise its use. Others focussed on the cost. The economic efforts and the contribution of brothers to form the international community appears difficult to some Provinces. If we find it difficult to contribute to the XX General Chapter Solidarity Fund, it seems unrealistic to dream about another contribution. “We are amazed that the Province of L’Hermitage can contribute two-thirds of the cost,” said one group, “but it will be a gift to future generations.” Someone also suggested including lay co-workers in the hospitality community.

A free afternoon
Even though the timetable had planned a free afternoon, all the brothers were well occupied writing reports of which some will be used for a special edition of FMS Message on the Conference. Other Provincials had private correspondence to attend to.

THE PATHWAYS OF MISSION FOR THE INSTITUTE
General Conference – 22nd September

Marist mission
Today was entirely devoted to the mission. The morning prayer recalled Mary, the Marist apostolate and the signs of the times mentioned by Brother Seán for the Conference. These signs trace our pathways of mission.

The work was led by the president of the Mission Commission, Brother Emili Turú, with the participation of Brothers Pedro Herreros (Laity), Dominick Piuja (BIS) and Juan Manuel Anaya, Secretary.

Brother Emili first showed a power point on our works. “Let us centre our reflection on these children to make them stronger. We exist for them. Champagnat created us for them.” With these words, he invited the participants to take on audaciously and clearly the challenge of Marist mission.

At the service of the poorest and excluded children and young people
It was a matter of 1) deepening the sense and the urgency of the call of the XX General Chapter to commit ourselves to the poor and the excluded, 2) giving a glimpse of the vision of the General Council and the reflexion made in the Institute, 3) sharing on the pathway travelled in the Provinces by retaining the essential for planning for the future, 4) presenting to the Superiors new international initiatives such as the defence and the promotion of the rights of the child before the UN and the International Marist Mission Assembly.

We started with this call: “Go forward, brothers and lay persons together, in a clear and decisive way, drawing closer to the poorest and most marginalised of young people, through new ways in education, evangelisation and solidarity.” (Choose Life, 31)

Then there was an exchange in groups – some of the missions discussed included the following: Brasil Centro-Norte supports forty-two social works; México Central has looked after centres for the indigenous people of the Chiapas for forty years; Rio Grande do Sul has a centre that counts more than 120 brothers and laypeople actively engaged; India has developed a project that looks after people with AIDS.

“International Marist Mission Assembly”
After this, Brother Juan Miguel Anaya presented the project of the International Marist Mission Assembly which will take place at Mendes in Brasil from the 3rd to the 12th September 2007, in order to respond to the wishes of the XX General Chapter.

The Preparatory Commission for this Assembly used the expression: “The International Assembly constitutes a new stage in the life of the Marist Institute, which offers the brothers and laypeople the opportunity to reflect together, on equal terms, concerning the mission of the Institute at the present time and in the future, as well as on their own identity.”
The assembly will be an important moment to evaluate what has been done and what is to be done in the Provinces and in the Districts.

Brother Seán in his letter of convocation recalled that: even though we are an international Institute, we have not always acted as one. The Institute is now offering to brothers and laypeople an occasion to have an experience of international communion, to feel as an active member of this body that surpasses the frontiers of each Administrative Unit. It is not so much an historic event for our Institute, but a rebirth for the people involved in Marist mission.

The slogan for the Assembly is “One heart, one mission” and a logo has been designed by the Marist faculty of Fortaleza (Brazil).

**Journey taken to prepare for the Assembly**

The XX General Chapter asked the General Council to “create support structures they judge to be needed for the shared mission of the brothers and laity in their educational and evangelising work among the poorest and the most marginalised children and youth… setting up international forums on aspects of Marist mission.” (Choose Life 48.6)

This Assembly in 2007 will be thus an international forum. The Administrative Units received a questionnaire and the majority showed they are very much in favour of this, giving suggestions for the method, the themes, the participation etc.

In June 2004, the General Council approved the project of an Assembly and constituted a Preparatory Commission formed by Alphonse Balombe fms (R. D. Congo); Chema Pérez Soba (Spain); Dilma Alves Rodrigues (Brazil); Erica Pegorer (Australia); John Y Tan fms (Philippines); and for the General Administration Brothers Juan Miguel Anaya, Michael Flanigan, Pedro Herreros and Emili Turú. The Commission has met twice (December 2004 and July 2005) to fix the practical details in accord with the General Council.

**Why an International Assembly?**

As well as the reasons mentioned above, it will serve as an occasion to strengthen the restructuring and internationalisation of the Provinces at the start of this 21st century, to dialogue between brothers and laypeople on our concerns in the service of young people.

Its preparation and celebration will be occasions to question our selves on Marist mission itself, on our convictions and on our vocations as apostles, to reread the text “In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat, A Vision for Marist Education Today”, and to deepen our understanding of the XX General Chapter.

Finally, the suggestions and the recommendations of the Assembly will be able to be studied by the participants in the XXI General Chapter (2009), if they wish, and will be able to contribute in setting directions for the Marist world.

**Objectives**

To encourage dialogue and the commitment of all in Marist mission so as to: 1) to relook at the Marist mission from the life of Champagnat, his passion to announce the Good News, his desire to be with young people, especially those most in need, his attitude of constant discernment, his capacity to adapt to the changing needs of his environment. 2) Clarify and deepen what we understand by ‘Marist vocation’: what is proper and common to brothers and laypeople, etc. To promote co-responsibility among those who share the mission especially by offering models, structures etc that promote it. 3) Better understand and appreciate the diversity of the Marist mission in the world of today and to see in its internationality a strength from which we must profit.

**Stages**

Three stages are planned: Local, Provincial and International. Each Province fixes the dates for the Local and Provincial stages. Here is the calendar:

2006 January: start of Local and Provincial phases
2006 December: end of the Provincial phase, a summary is sent to Rome, election of the representatives of each Province
2007 January – August: possible regional action, preparation of participants
2007 September: International Assembly.
Local Phase
Mixed groups will be formed of brothers and laypeople, with people from different environments who identify with the Marist charism (schools, universities, special education, fraternities, pastoral centres, etc)
All is done on a voluntary basis.
The Commission will provide the material for the meetings at the local level.
The webpage of the Institute will also be a place for exchanges, discussions etc.

Provincial phase
Each Province determines the way of proceeding: number of meetings, their duration, the process used, etc.
At the end of this phase, a summary is sent to the Preparatory Commission which speaks of the spirit present in the Province meetings, the recommendations from the Province for the International Assembly, under the form of a ‘credo’ which summarises the shared convictions and suggestions of the Province.
Each Province chooses the delegates (they must have participated in the Local and Provincial phases to be eligible) who take on Marist mission and who represent more the Provincial reality rather than just one local work.
It will be good to assure a good representation of works in which laypeople participate in Marist life and mission, to seek a balance between the number of men and women.

International Phase
The Assembly will take place at Mendes, Brazil, from the 3rd to the 12th September 2007. This place was chosen because it is the region of the world where there is the greatest number of works.
The aim of the Assembly is not to produce a document but to share, to live together and to celebrate God who calls us to this Marist mission. Perhaps a message or some suggestions will be written for the next General Chapter but this is not its main aim.

Its composition
- 1 brother per Administrative Unit (31 brothers)
- 1 layperson for each Administrative Unit (31 laypeople)
- 1 lay person more for the 16 AU’s that have the most apostolic works (16 laypeople)
- Members of the General Council (8 brothers)
- Members of the preparatory Commission (4 brothers and 3 laypeople)
- Translators and people in charge of other services, (about 15 persons)

Reactions of the brothers at the Conference
The brothers expressed their satisfaction as to the preparation of the project and its clarity of presentation. The worries concern the costs that will be charged to the Administrative Units, but the number of two or three participants seems reasonable for the Administrative Units.

Mission and Solidarity: a fire that embraces and consumes
Brother Dominick Pujia, responsible for BIS, presented the project of collaboration with Franciscans International (FI).
The General Chapter asked the General Council, amongst others, to assure the representation of the Institute before international organisations of education and solidarity.
BIS is particularly responsible for this work of representation.

Strategic Plan for BIS
In 2004, a special committee of the General Council evaluated BIS and formulated 37 recommendations, praising its work of co-ordination and organisation of projects at the same time encouraging the General Council and BIS to develop activities in the areas of education, network working, communications, animation and defence of rights.
By BIS, the Institute is present before important organisations of the United Nations to promote the defence of the rights of the child in the name of the Institute. For that, we collaborate with FI which
is an NGO of the Franciscan family with “a consultative status” before the United Nations (Economic and Social Council – ECOSOC). This new Marist presence is a new pastoral mission realised on behalf of the entire Institute.

Our situation at the UN
Our work in Geneva is part of our mission of working for children, especially those most neglected. It is done in the setting of the Convention of the Rights of the Child and its Committee in which FI officially participates.

FI
Franciscans International is a NGO with a consultative status with the United Nations and it is sponsored by the Franciscan family (OFM, OFM CAP, OFM CONV. TOR, OFS. IFC-TOR) to promote the Franciscan ideal on the International scene (Forums and agencies of the UN) in four domains: development, human rights, work for peace and protection of creation.

FI brings testimonies of the violations of human rights to the sessions of the Commission of Human Rights (UNCHR) of the United Nations and other forums of the UN, as much as at New York as at Geneva. FI organises sessions on human rights for the Franciscans and those who work in its office. It animates the Franciscan world by distributing information and educating by its programmes.

Terms of our collaboration
FI provides us with an office at Geneva and gives us access to its services and to the organisations of the UN, helping us to gain accreditation with ECOSOC. Sometime, they give us accommodation at their House of welcome. In return, the Marists bring their vast knowledge of the world of children and of education. They provide a collaborator with FI to work on activities relative to human rights.

Strategy for Marist collaboration
- See what is done in the Administrative Units in this area.
- Under the leadership of BIS and with the support of FI, our delegate and Marist expert will work with the UN for the rights of the child.

Calendar
March 2005: signing of the agreement with FI
July 2005: César Henríquez, FMS (América Central) was appointed Delegate and Expert before FI and the UN, Geneva.
2006: Orientation, Preparation, and Regular Visits to Geneva from Rome.
2007: Establish a community in Geneva?

INTERVIEW WITH FRÈRE XAVIER BARCELÓ
Brother Xavier Barceló is the Provincial of the Province of L'Hermitage

AMEstaún. You were a young brother when you were invited by Brother Charles Howard, Superior General, to the V General Conference at Veranópolis. Today, you are taking part in the VII General Conference as a Provincial.

Brother Xavier Barceló. Yes, my Province then of Catalonia had a number of young brothers and Brother Charles invited the Provinces to send a young brother. My Provincial invited me and I accepted. Before the Conference I had a solidarity experience in Bolivia, Latin America with eight or nine Provinceals. This was an
experience of ten days in contact with the Marist reality and the Bolivian religious and Church life to better understand the life that God was arouising among the autochthones, the children and the young people in our schools. I also spent two days in Paraguay to meet the brothers. I promised myself I would return to Latin America with a one-way ticket only, but I have not been able to accomplish my promise.

**AMEstaún.** Assuredly, more than one Provincial from Latin America will take note of your availability. But let’s look for a moment at the past to realise the gifts of God. From Veranópolis to Negombo, the Institute has taken an interesting pathway. We have experienced important events that have made the history of the Institute.

**Brother Xavier Barceló.** Sixteen years have passed: two General Chapters and another General Conference. Even though I did not take part in any of these events, I believe that all the brothers were witnesses to the evolution of our Institute with the vigour that followed these meetings, under the leadership of Charles Howard, Benito Arbués and Seán Sammon, and guided by their letters and circulars. The map of the Provinces has changed notably. The number of brothers is reduced but we are still present in more countries. The average age in some areas is much higher, while in other places the novitiates are full. Restructuring, the presence of laypeople in Marist life and mission, Marist apostolic spirituality, the canonisation of our Founder, the Vocation year that we have just had. We are a living Institute and thus changing continually.

**AMEstaún.** What interior journey have the brothers followed since the XX General Chapter up to the VII General Conference?

**Brother Xavier Barceló.** My point of view is limited if you consider the great cultural diversity and the vast internationality of the Institute. What I see in my Province and in my contact with the brothers of other Provinces, is that the interior journey is an attempt to clarify our identity, by an effort to be visible as Marists and in our way of acting, by our vocation as brother in the Church with the laypeople, by a redefinition of our apostolic spirituality, by an updating of our educational and evangelical mission at the service of needy children and young people, and by searching for a style of community life rooted in our charismatic origins and open to the challenges of the culture of the young people of our time.

**AMEstaún.** How do you see the XX General Chapter four years later?

**Brother Xavier Barceló.** In discovering that the five Chapter calls are not only totally up-to-date, but they also conserve all the vigour of a challenge. It seems to be that, founded in personal and community prayer, reflected in fraternal dialogue and shared in the light of experiences effectuated in our Provinces, these calls are going to continue to nourish the life and the future of our Marist journey. I ask Saint Marcellin to give us something of his passion, his interior fire, to live this out personally as well as in community.

**AMEstaún.** What do you perceive as being the most vital at the Conference?

**Brother Xavier Barceló.** We are in the second half. I believe that the phenomenal welcome by the Brothers of Sri Lanka, the great simplicity and eastern freshness, the serious preparation of topics, their co-ordination by the brothers open to consultation and to collaboration, the enlightening and passionate words of Brother Seán facilitated from the debut a climate of frank communication and attentiveness which allows us to take the pulse of the Institute and to see where perhaps God is present in the gentle breeze. I am sure that we form an assembly that is open and attentive enough to glimpse with adequate clarity a few paths for the future, or at least, some recommendations for our journey.

**THE LAITY, ABSENT FROM THE CONFERENCE, BUT VERY MUCH PRESENT**

General Conference - 23rd September

The Laity Commission
The morning started with an African chant: “Mtakatifu Mtakatifu Mtakatifu Bwana!”, led by Brother Théoneste Kalisa. Its captivating rhythm was easy to follow.

The Laity Commission, with Brother Pedro Herreros as President and Michael Flanigan as Secretary and Brothers Emili Turú and Antonio Ramalho completing the team, animated the reflection for this morning, starting with some contributions from the Provinces and Districts.

**The objectives of this session**

The objectives of this session were; 1) to be aware of the pathway travelled by the Institute in the field of mission shared with laity; 2) to share what has helped and what has hindered progress in this journey; 3) to share about the proposals of the General Council as communicated through the Laity Commission; 4) to offer a space where each Provincial or District Superior can look to future pathways adapted to the reality of his own Administrative Unit.

**Work dynamics**

Brother Pedro presented the work methodology for this morning divided into two parts. In the first part, the brothers responded to this question: Where are we as a Province, as a Region, as an Institute? And the second: Where do we want to be?

After this, based on a report on the laity developed from the questionnaire that was sent to the Provinces and Districts, everyone broke into five groups to look at five different areas: programmes of formation, Champagnat Movement, lay participation, belonging and being linked and the Marist lay identity.

**Formation Programmes**

Brother Pedro Herreros informed the total group that 74% of the Administrative Units have developed formation programmes of different types. There are eighty-one different programmes for the formation of laypeople, sixty of which are educational and the others are for fraternities, co-workers, auxiliaries and former students. These courses treat such topics as mission, solidarity, sharing, spirituality and mission, personal growth and prayer. Most of the programmes aim to present content to those participating while there are some programmes that are more experienced based. The participation is mainly voluntary and the duration of these programmes varies greatly from two years to one weekend.

**The Marist Family Champagnat Movement**

Brother Pedro Herreros noted that the Marist Family Champagnat Movement was directed at adults and so cannot be considered as a youth activity. The Institute is currently in seventy-seven countries. There are approximately 50,000 brothers and lay people having an influence on over 500,000 people. There are 257 fraternities that are part of this global picture. They are not equally distributed throughout the world with 75% in America and 19% in Europe. They hardly exist in Africa, Asia and Oceania but other types of groups do exist here.

The type of support they receive from the Provinces also varies greatly. Some Provinces have a Provincial team to accompany them whilst in other Provinces there are no structures at all. In ten Administrative Units there is a bulletin or type of publication to keep in contact with them but there are only two Administrative Units that work in a co-ordinated way with them.

The types of activity in which the fraternities are involved include prayer, solidarity, Marist education and evangelisation.

**Participation of laypeople**

There is a great diversity of situations in the Institute in the way laypeople hold positions of authority. Laypeople are present on teams and Provincial commissions, present at assemblies and Provincial Chapters, as volunteers and co-workers, and some are living in community with the brothers.
Interest for the participation of the laity
There is widespread interest throughout all Administrative Units in the participation of the laity in the Marist mission.

Participation and links
The link to the Institute or to the Marist charism is not the same throughout the entire Institute. In some places, they are looking for ways of being linked to the Congregation, but they are not sure about who should decide the manner, the duration and the extent of this linkage. Some Provinces have sought the permission of the Provincial for these links to occur.

Identity
The General Chapter used the term ‘lay Marist’ but what does ‘lay Marist’ mean? In nineteen Administrative Units there have been attempts to clarify the identity of a lay Marist through written material, meetings, dialogue, etc. Twelve more believe it is urgent that these concepts be clarified. At the end of Brother Pedro’s talk, Brother Michael Flanigan presented some global impressions on these themes. He affirmed that there is a great vigour in the Institute in relation to the laity, but also a great diversity. There is no agreement on the identity of the lay Marist. In the Extended General Council meetings there has been discussion on the identity and participation of the laity. In some brothers there is still some mistrust of the commitment of laypeople. Following this, the brothers met in interregional groups to analyse together what helps and what hinders in this area.

The Identity of the laity
The second work session this morning, under the direction of Brother Pedro Herreros, was dedicated to sharing the steps that the Provinces and Districts are taking. The most outstanding was the interest shown in the formation of the laity and the sharing of mission. But the theme that had aroused most interventions was the identity of the laity. Who are these people that are called lay Marists? Who can be lay Marists?

The XX General Chapter made fairly wide reference to lay Marists, but without eliminating any ambiguity. It is a bit like an unknown pathway that you have undertaken and on which you are making progress. Since Brother Charles Howard published a document on the Marist Family twenty years ago, nothing has been written since on the laity. It seems that the moment has come. The brothers of the Laity Commission hope to prepare a document on the vocation of the lay Marist in order to deepen this subject. It is said that we need to recognise the character of the lay Marist but what does recognise mean?

It was emphasised that the XX General Chapter said that laypeople are a new living face of the charism and that lay people have taken it up seriously. Laypeople are asking themselves what they must give to the Institute, what the Institute will give them in return, what is a lay Marist and how to be one. We need to take what is new seriously and give hope to the future.

Brother Seán concluded the morning session by saying that we need to advance in the discussions, with a new vocabulary and new structures.

Report on the procedures
Brother Juan Anaya, Procurator General, occupied the first session of the afternoon informing the brothers of the Conference on the procedures to follow in the special cases of Exclaustration, leaving the Institute, not renewing temporary vows, etc.

Inter-religious meeting for prayer
Father Hayalah Balagalla, Dominican, presided over this prayer that brought together the Venerable Madanpagama Assaui Thero, Buddhist, the Reverend K Kukeswara Kurukkal, Hindu, and Mohamed Sherief De Alwis, Muslim.

Brother Joseph Peiris, Superior of the Community of Maris Stella College, set the ambiance for us by describing the religious plurality of Sri Lanka through a projection entitled ‘One Truth, Many Ways’, realised by the Vocation Ministry Commission of the Province.

At the start, Father Balagalla thanked the organising committee of the Conference for having included “an event as important as inter-religious prayer” on its calendar. He emphasised that the
reflection on the vitality of the Institute that the brothers had done during these days “demonstrates that they pay a lot of attention to the interior spirituality of their confrères.” He invited “the Institute, destined to education, to make an effort to dialogue with the religions of Asia, since education is the best domain for this apostolate.” He wished “that this VII Conference enlighten especially the brothers who work in Asia that they make an important effort to continue this dialogue with other believers.”

A Buddhist prayer was then recited for peace, praising the Lord Buddha and his sacred teachings, because he is the guide and the glory of the holy monks who follow his teachings. The Hindu rite invoked God by the vinakaya mantras. Then we heard an extract from the sacred Muslim book, the Koran. Final the Catholics chanted a religious hymn from Sri Lanka.

Brother Seán thanked our esteemed visitors and gave them a medallion of the Founder’s canonisation. He recalled that it was religion, that had often incited to war, that had brought us all together today before God to ask for peace for all.

**A TIME FOR INTERIORISING CALMLY WHAT HAS BEEN EXPERIENCED**

**General Conference - 24th and 25th September**

**Feast of Our Lady of Mercy**

Here is the chronicle of the Conference for Saturday and Sunday.

Saturday, Brother Xavier Barceló, Provincial of L’Hermitage, celebrated his birthday. It was a gift from God for his parents and for him that this future Marist was born of the feast of Our Lady of Mercy and that the Good Mother continues to watch over him lovingly. In doing this, she also looks over us! The brothers at the Conference thanked God and Mary for the gift of this confrère. In finishing the morning prayer, we all greeted him cordially, hoping that God would continue to accord him the grace to serve his brothers in joy.

Today was a time for interiorising what had been heard and experienced at the Conference. At the Mass and the Marial prayer, a heart made out of heavy paper was given to the brothers so that they could write a word or a phrase that reminded them of what the Conference has invited us to integrate into our lives, our communities, our Provinces. At the Marial prayer, these hearts were placed at the feet of Mary to recall the covenant of the Lord with us and our response. Five brothers, one per continent, said aloud their prayer of thanksgiving. All the brothers of that continent then joined the brother to place their hearts at the feet of Mary. This act marked the debut of the period of interiorisation that lasted throughout the whole day. All appreciated this break, even the chronicler.

**The task of integration of the chronicler**

Today, I needed to put into order all that I have received and experienced during the Conference. I must start by familiarising myself with Marist geography: sixty brothers whom I must situate in each of their countries. I must first reconstruct a map of the Marist world quite different to the one I had learned in the novitiate. Restructuring has occurred and the Provinces do not necessarily coincide with countries: twenty-six Provinces and five Districts for seventy-seven countries. How fascinating it is to hear a Provincial say that his Province extends for more than four million square kilometres!

Being a little brother in such a family must encourage humility. The fire of vitality must burn inside. One wonders how many dioceses, about which Champagnat dreamed, could be organised in this vast expanse?

I need to revise and bring my geography up to date! But the problem is that the geographical concepts that used to be my reference points have changed. Before, we used to speak of
Provinces of our country, a nation, where there was a common language and where we had Marist maps to situate each community or each house. Today, our Marist geography is different. We have reorganised the continents and oceans by Zones and Regions. We use geometry to define “arcs” and “cones”. New concepts invite us to navigate on interior seas and to animate Administrative Units. And the navigation maps are also part of the indispensable baggage of certain Provincials even if their crafts belong to KLM or Royal Jordanian, and it is necessary to prepare our colour pencils when a hundred brothers start to move towards Asia.

Languages also take an interesting aspect. If four languages are official in the Institute, in some restructured Provinces we find eight or ten different languages, which makes the learning of a language not only a past-time but also a necessity.

The geography of the heart
It is about physical geography, but there is also affective geography. Where do we place a brother on this new map? What does he have in common with the brothers of the same Province? There are faces, ethnic groups, family names, languages, functions and responsibilities, etc. Put all that in its place, with electronic mail, addresses, telephone numbers, etc. Make a place for each one in his calendar and his fraternity, and especially that each one has a privileged place in the heart! What good will come from this time of interiorisation? Others could consecrate it to other things, for they have already learnt this new geography of the Institute at the XX General Chapter.

The mission ad gentes
There are papers to be put into order, but especially ideas. The Asian vision of the Church presented during these first days form a mosaic whose pieces can be seen from different angles. The cultures are moving towards a common credo: a doctrine where men and women feel themselves humanised by religions. But all must fit together discreetly.

To be a believer and a Catholic in Asia means belonging to a minority. Despite all, the Institute is launching its invitation to the mission ad gentes to many brothers. The Church in Asia is conscious of its smallness. The new geography of the Institute makes that each brother feels a little lost in the immensity of the mission ad gentes, as a small insignificant grain which does not have any other strength other than that within. Brother Seán speaks of a fire that embraces and impassions.

The mission ad gentes and the International Marist Mission Assembly are clearer in my mind. On the other hand, we will have to reflect more deeply about the General Chapter Solidarity Fund and move into action. It is the same thing for the laity. The question: ‘what is a lay Marist?’ demands an urgent reply. One can guess a new life in gestation which is developing at the heart of the Institute, being nourished by its charism and the Spirit. It is still an unachieved task for the biologists of the spirit.

The internationality of the Institute
The Institute has been international for a long time. Brother Seán affirmed that we have not always made this dimension obvious. However, the Institute has arrived at the gates of the UN. The brothers feel themselves to be in communion in seventy-seven countries and have a better sense of internationality since restructuring. The help at the interior of a Province and the collaboration for interprovincial projects have placed new challenges before the brothers. Contrary to the past, the international communities are no longer the exception and they are no longer temporary as they were in the Second Novitiate. They have brought a new vigour to our fraternity. The internationality expresses itself better in the ecclesial and evangelical dimension where, in love, we share our goods, our talents, our realisations and even our difficulties. Let us love one another, recalled Champagnat, and that must be experienced in our meetings of the Conference as in our simple experiences in the house.

I put a final point to my task today. There remains the community prayer prepared each day in the four languages, rich with symbols and participation. There remain the anecdotes with the
personnel of the hotel who are surprised that the group do not go out at night, keep their bedrooms in order, do not smoke, do not drink to excess, pray with beautiful hymns, do not waste food and learn new languages so easily. But that will be another episode, if God wishes it.

**Mass in the Duwa area**

On Sunday, we had to get up early to take a bus to a suburb of Negombo. The destination was Duwa which means island. It is in fact a small island of Catholic fishermen linked to neighbouring areas by a bridge. Father P. A. D. Kingsley Ivan is a good friend of the brothers at Negombo; he accepted with pleasure that the brothers take part in Sunday Mass with his parishioners. The reception was informal, but you could sense the welcome. Some people spoke about how they were helped when the tsunami flooded the area and the church. The brothers shared the Eucharist and exchanged a few simple words with the people, then returned to the hotel to attend to what ever they wanted to do.

**PROGRAMMING THE NEXT FOUR YEARS**

**General Conference – 26th September**

**The General Council calendar**

The morning session started with a proposal for the General Council calendar for the next four years. January, half of February, June and the first two weeks of July are reserved for the two Plenary sessions held each year. The second fortnight of July is reserved for the annual retreat and a time of community rest. The rest of the time will be dedicated to the animation of Administrative Units through visits and retreats. The Provincials and District Superiors all met with Brother Seán during the Conference to share about the animation of the Provinces and Districts and to fix the calendar for a second round of visits.

The Plenary session of June 2007 will be dedicated to the plans for the XXI General Chapter and to form its Preparatory Commission. The convocation of the Chapter is planned for September 2008, and the Chapter itself for September – October 2009. We also need to remember the date for the International Marist Mission Assembly in September 2007.

**Towards the XXI General Chapter**

Brother Seán mentioned points of interest to prepare for the next General Chapter. A Chapter is a meeting of brothers, a representative assembly of the whole Institute and not only of Superiors of the Institute. The Chapter establishes its own agenda and its rules of functioning. Brother Seán recalled that we have had Chapters of different types according to the objectives sought by the Chapter itself. The methods and the work procedures have also evolved towards a more participative model.

Before the Chapter, Brother Seán plans to publish several documents. Firstly, the two circulars of which we have spoken in previous chronicles, one on Mission and Identity, and the other on Mary. He is preparing other writings also: “Recommence”, a letter for the mature age brothers (start 2006), “Letter to lay Marists” (end of 2006), “Second letter to my older brothers” (start 2007), “Third letter to a young Marist Brother” (end of 2007) and “Letter to Marist formators” (start 2008).

**Practical Points on the Chapter**

Brother Juan Miguel Anaya, Procurator General of the Institute, touched on a few practical questions of a legal nature for the choice of delegates to the Chapter. The first is the automatic prolongation of the mandate of the Provincial who is finishing his mandate once the Circular of induction to the Chapter is published; the responsibilities of the Provincial finish at the closure of the General Chapter.

The second treated the procedure approved in 1993, and applied for the first time in the Chapter of 2002, to fix the number of capitulants according to the Provinces.
Finally, he communicated three errors in the documents published in the Acts of the XX General Chapter so that they could be corrected.

**Economic Affairs**

Information was then given on the XX General Chapter Fund, a subject that was left incomplete on the 19th September, and then we finished the exchanges by making recommendations to the General Administration and to the Provinces. Brother Seán concluded his reflections and his questions on economic affairs by emphasising the clarity and the transparency with which the reports have been presented. “What we have, we have for the common good,” he said. “I have great confidence in your capacity to administer the goods of the Institute according to the evangelical criteria and to solidarity.”

**Afternoon for regional meetings**

The regions of Asia and of the Pacific have had a dense programme of work in common. The statutes of MAPAC preview an annual meeting of their Administration Board to study the annual report of the Rector and of his co-workers. Instead of holding this meeting in October, in Manilla, the General Conference was taken advantage of for the meeting to occur in September. Brother Jeff Crowe, Rector, came to Negombo and Brother Peter Rodney represented the General Conference at this meeting. They studied the report of the Rector, those of the Personnel Commissions, plan of studies, formation and finances, and those of the Communities of MAPAC. Then they analysed the recommendations and the resolutions presented by the commissions. This work that normally takes three or four days had to be done in one afternoon. The brothers of the Region of Cono Sur and of Brazil compared their calendars at different levels. The brothers of Europe had a first meeting with Brother Giovanni Bigotto to share on the state of the causes of saints and they studied the proposition of a meeting of the Provincial Councils of the region.

**Celebration at Goldi Sands Hotel**

The direction of the Goldi Sands Hotel, place of the Conference, wanted to offer the brothers a typical feast during dinner. They animated the meeting with dances, music and fire-works. The director of the hotel said later that perhaps now the name of the hotel should change from Goldi Sands Hotel to Holy Sands Hotel.

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**THE MARIST SPIRITUAL PATHWAY**

**General Conference - 27th September**

**Celebration of birthdays**

Two brothers celebrated their birthdays today - Brother Jacques Scholte, Provincial of the Province of Europe Centre-Ouest/West Central Europe and Brother Fabricio Galiana, working at the Conference as a translator. All gave thanks to God during Morning Prayer for the gift of these two men to the Institute. The evening meal saw the continuation of the festivities.

**Open forum themes**

The morning was dedicated to an open forum during which a number of themes were discussed.

1. Concerning the results of the General Conference. Fundamentally, it is a matter of agreeing on the five calls of the Chapter four years after the Chapter has finished.
2. Concerning the formation and animation of Provincials and District Superiors and how to prepare successors for the task to be entrusted to them.

3. Concerning a proposal to encourage temporary commitments among laypeople to the Institute, it was considered that more time is needed to arrive at a decision. This has already been considered in other instances, such as in Religious Life Congresses and in the case of the Daughters of Charity who repeatedly make annual vows during their religious life. However, it was considered to be an important theme that deserved more attention.

4. Two brothers presented their reflections on two financial themes: how to generate resources for the many needs of the Institute, and how the Provinces can be economically autonomous. An interesting and enriching debate followed these interventions.

5. Finally, we considered the need to contemplate the way solidarity is integrated into the mission of the Institute which has so many different faces today. It was underlined that it is a priority for the Institute, given the enormous needs of children and young people today, and that it should be present in all our educational institutions.

Press Conference
Today, there was a Press Conference on the Conference. The representatives of three English and four Sinhalese newspapers, two private television stations and two radio stations as well as several catholic newspapers came to meet us. The Brothers Superior General, Vicar General and Provincial of Sri Lanka and Pakistan represented the Conference as well as one brother from each continent. The journalists were interested in the presence of brothers in Sri Lanka and Asia where they form a small group of 170. They wanted to know our position faced with a law before the Parliament of their country that could create problems between the different religions. They were told that Marists have often paid for religious intolerance with their own blood. Many brothers have died or been imprisoned. On the other hand, we coexist peacefully in many schools, colleges and Marist universities with people of other religions. Concerning this particular law, the brothers are working in unity with the Church of Sri Lanka to ask for the European Community to intervene so that this law is not voted in.
Finally, the brothers praised the quality of the hospitality that the Sri Lankans have reserved for the members of the General Conference wherever they have been.

Provincial Secretaries
In the afternoon, Brother Jean Ronzon, Secretary General, gave some information on the General Secretariat and on the official communications with the Provincial Secretaries. It was noted that this service is assured through various means, sometimes even by laypeople, from which has come the idea to the General Council to organise regional meetings of animation and formation for Provincial Secretaries and to develop a guide to complete the Vademecum which is addressed to Provincials.
Following this, Brother Emili Turú, member of the Archives Committee, described the implementation of a new document management system that is to be installed in the General Administration. This system is already used by the Province of L’Hermitage at Barcelona and at the Hermitage, where the files of the French Marist history are conserved. The programme has been adapted to the needs of the General Administration and to serve other interested Provinces. The service is free for the Provinces who are able to adopt it without a great deal of change, as it is already translated into several languages. All that is needed is to make a request and to be connected to the Internet.

Marist Apostolic Spirituality
Brother Peter Rodney, President of the International Commission of Marist Apostolic Spirituality, presented the work of the Commission and asked for suggestions and contributions to improve its work. He also thanked those who had already made a contribution.

This Commission received the mandate from the General Chapter to develop a document on Marist Apostolic Spirituality. For that, a reflection group was convoked and they worked from the 16th to the 20th June 2003 to determine the style and the addressees of the document. They suggested an organisation plan of the document, consulting experts and creating a communication group.

The people who took part in this reflection group were: Michael de Waas (Sri Lanka), Raúl Figuera (León), Juan Carlos Fuentes (Levante), André Lanfrey (Beaucamps Saint Genis), Carlos Martínez Lavín (México Central), John McDonnell (Esopus), Lawrence Ndawala (Southern Africa), Antonio Peralta, (Santa María de los Andes), Seán Sammon (General Council), Luis Sobrado (General Council), Vanderlei Soela (Rio de Janeiro), John Thompson (Sydney)

International Commission Agenda

After this reflection group, an International Commission of Marist Apostolic Spirituality was created by seeking people with experience, capable of articulating and formulating this experience and being able to represent regional, linguistic and cultural groups as well as lay Marists. In August 2003, the Provincials were invited to suggest names of people. In September 2003, the following members were invited to form the Commission: Agnes Reyes (Philippines), member of the faculty of Notre Dame of Marbel, a Marist university, who also teaches our brothers at MAPAC; Bernice Reintjens (Netherlands) who did her thesis on Marist charism; Vivienne Goldstein sm, member of the General Council of the Marist Sisters; and Brothers Maurice Goutagny (France), Benito Arbués (Spain), Bernard Beaudin (Canada), Vanderlei Soela (Brazil), Miguel Ángel Santos (Mexico), Spiridion Ndanga (Rwanda), Lawrence Ndawala (Malawi), Nicholas Fernando (Sri Lanka), and Graham Neist (Australia); and from the General Council, Brothers Luis Sobrado and Peter Rodney. This group of people held their first meeting from the 12th to the 16th February 2004.

They started by consolidating the spirit of their Commission and they studied the recommendations of the reflection group. They attempted to define that mandate that they have received from the General Chapter and to determine the style of this document and the people to whom it will be addressed. After having agreed on the structure of the document, they started a phase of consultation up until the next meeting.

Mandate of the Commission

The International Commission was entrusted with supervising the project whose objective was to deepen the Marist Apostolic Spirituality for brothers and laypeople so that they may better understand it and better live it. It developed and distributed different works to encourage the participation of the brothers and lay Marists and to encourage dialogue in modern and adapted language. An essential part of the project is to realise and distribute a pastoral document that is easy to use and that is addressed to different cultures, life and spirituality experiences, as much for laypeople as for the brothers. It will need to be rich in content and attractive in its conception. This project is inspired by the Marist Education Document, to help Marists to find God in their lives and to live this discovery as people in their communities.

Expectations

Such a document arouses great expectations: that the communities be centres of spirituality that help to convert minds and hearts and to communicate our spirituality to young people. We hope it will be a prominent document on the Marist way to wisdom. We hope that it will be simple, dynamic, more pastoral than speculative, with a great variety of pedagogical approaches, apt to convert minds and hearts. May it also proceed from life and experience according to different situations: brothers, lay Marists, etc.

First phase of consultation about the document

This phase was presented to groups of brothers, laypeople, mixed groups and regional networks of apostolic spirituality. We also had recourse to the
International Patrimony Commission, to groups of experts in Mariology or on the life of Champagnat and of the early brothers. A forum was opened on the Institute's webpage and the Commission used the Institute's Reserved Area to exchange information. The material received was studied at the second meeting, from the 5th to the 12th February 2005; this resulted in a more detailed plan and draft of the document.

"The Marist Spiritual Pathway"
The document will include a preface, an introduction and four chapters: 1) Marist way towards identity; 2) Marist way towards God; 3) Marist way with people; 4) Marist way in mission; and a conclusion. It will be written in November and December 2005, then translated and sent electronically to the members of the Commission.

Agenda for the communication group
This group will support the Spirituality Commission to better understand the document in a creative and formative manner. Its members are Brothers Antonio Martínez Estaún, Director of Communications, Joadir Foresti (Rio Grande del Sur), Jean Pierre Destombes (L'Hermitage), Diogène Musine (East central Africa) and Federico Carpintero (Compostela).
This group will begin their activities at the third meeting of the Commission from the 23rd to the 28th February 2006. At this meeting, the draft copy of the document will be agreed upon, which will then be submitted for general consultation. The communication group will start to study the ways to distribute this document so that it will be formative.
At the start of 2007, there will probably be a fourth meeting for to write the definitive text and to implement to process of distribution and formation of this document.

THE BROTHERS AT THE GENERAL CONFERENCE GO TO SCHOOL
General Conference - 28th September

A tour for the Institute’s webpage
The day’s work started with a presentation of the Institute’s webpage by Brother A. M. Estaún, Director of Communications, and by Brother Emili Turú. This instrument of communication and work forms part of the service to the Institute entrusted to the Department of Communications created to communicate the programme, the reflection, the orientations and the actions of animation and of government of the Superior General and his Council. These objectives are achieved through various periodical printed publications such as FMS Message, FMS Echo, Marist Notebooks and the circulars of the Superior General. There are also publications sent electronically such as FMS Update (only for the brothers), FMS Marist Bulletin (for anybody who wishes to subscribe) and the Marist webpage www.champagnat.org that includes an abundant amount of information of many types.
By using a direct connection, different contents of the webpage were highlighted. We started with a global vision of the map of the site that consists of nine different sections: Home, Marcellin, Marist Brothers, Youth, Commissions, Solidarity, Publications, Links and the Reserved Area. These nine sections group together another sixty subsections such as the Marist Library, News Archives, the Founder’s Biography, Marist Places, Marcellin in art, Prayer, the Plan of Chapter Commissions, new Links and other less known entries such as ‘Intratext’.
Even regular visitors said that this presentation made them aware of sections and possibilities of which they were not aware before.
The section with several surprises was the Reserved Area where one finds information proper to the brothers. It is not well known and you need to subscribe by filling in a small form which is then sent to Rome and validated within forty-eight hours. The abundant information of this section
comes from all the houses of the Institute and includes numerous documents, publications of the Superiors, etc.

Five hundred brothers now have access to the Reserved Area. It is hoped that as they get to know it better, more brothers will subscribe and use this section.

The brothers of the Conference go to school
The brothers went to Maris Stella College, Negombo, to visit the students and the teachers of this school which represented all the Marist schools of Sri Lanka, even though small delegations of these schools were present at Negombo to meet the participants at the General Conference.

The brothers were welcomed under the statue of Our Lady by Brother Michael de Waas, Provincial of Sri Lanka and Pakistan, and the teachers of the College. Accompanied by the fanfare Hevisi of the College, they were accompanied to the door where the students were waiting for them. Brothers Seáin and Luis personally greeted all the teachers. In addressing the students, Brother Seáin alluded to his own experience as a student when he wanted the lessons to finish quickly, but, he said, it was also for him a time to dream about his future, and he invited the students to dream Marcellin’s dream.

The delegations that had come from all over the island met the brothers in the gymnasium. Brother Superior General lit the lamp that lit Marcellin’s statue for the whole meeting. A song of welcome was then intoned and a prayer said. Brother Seáin repeated the story he had told the other students and then the students and brothers shared in small groups. Brother Demetrio, Provincial of Cruz del Sur, said that when he said he came from Argentina the students could not find this country on the map but when he mentioned Maradona their eyes lit up. At the end, everyone had coffee together and the students of the college performed traditional dances.

The brothers’ stay was brief, but there was a beautiful unity among them, the students and all the school’s personnel. The depart saw an exchange of some e-mail addresses, autographs and affectionate greetings. For all associated with Stella Maris College and the brothers of the Conference, this will remain a memorable day. On behalf of the General Conference and the entire Institute we express here our most sincere gratitude to the people of Sri Lanka for having made this experience so rich.

The report of the Postulator General
Brother Giovanni Maria Bigotto, Postulator General, gave a report on the activities of the Postulation team.

This team meets one week each year and consists of five brothers: the Postulator who follows all the causes, Brother Mariano Santamaría who follows the causes of the martyrs in Spain, Brother Alain Delorme who is in charge of the cause for Brother Henri Vergès and Brother José Flores García who is working on the cause of Brother Basilio with the help of Brother Jorge Flores Aceves.

Tasks of the Postulation
The Postulation realises two tasks in the Institute. Firstly, it is our link with the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints at the Vatican. It prepares the positio, which is the study showing the heroicity of virtues; it participates in meetings of the postulators and in meetings of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints; it follows the stages of a cause: diocesan tribunal, Roman phase (decree of validity, study of the positio by the theologians, by the cardinals, decrees of heroicity, of miracle, of martyr etc.)

Secondly, it assures the spiritual animation of our religious family by making our models of sanctity known and by publishing books, brochures, holy cards, posters, prayers, etc. It fixes the times of prayer in the Institute to recall our models and to create times of reflection on holiness; it also prepares conferences, seminars, writings, etc.
Where are our causes up to?
In the Institute, there are two types of causes: the confessors and the martyrs. The confessors are Marcellin Champagnat, François, Alfano and Basilio. Brothers François and Alfano are venerable. The decree on the heroicity of their virtues recognises that they practised the Christian virtues at the highest level. Brother Basilio’s renown for holiness is very great. His cause is open, and the diocesan tribunal at Guadalajara is already finished. In 2006, we think we will open the rogatory tribunals in Spain, in France and other places. After this will come the Roman phase.

Here is the current situation of the martyrs: Brother Bernardo, we are waiting the date of his beatification; the group of Laurentino (45) are at the final stage with the meeting of cardinals and Bishops; the group of Crisanto (67) has its positio already at the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints to be studied by the theologians; the positio of the group of Eusebio (58) is in the final phase. As to the cause of Brother Henri Vergès, this is included in the cause of the martyrs of Algeria and is not yet open.

Possible progress
Great progress is perceived in communication and collaboration. The Postulation regularly gives news concerning our models of sanctity. One example is the collaboration for distributing the work of the Postulation: books, leaflets, cards, posters and especially the celebrations that honour our models and create more unity in our religious family.

The Year of 2006
Brother Bigotto recalled that the year of 2006 will be a little bit special for the Postulation because the tenth anniversary of the death of Brother Basilio and the martyrdom of the four brothers at Bugobe will be celebrated. There will also probably be some beatifications.

Brother Bigotto concluded by inviting all the Marist family to do more to place our Marist models of sanctity in our hearts and in our prayers and to send news and suggestions to the Postulation.

EVALUATION OF THE CONFERENCE
General Conference - 29th September

In search of points in common
This day has been one of recapitulation. The Provincials and the District Superiors researched base orientations for the future activities of the General Council. Since the Conference does not have executive powers, the proposals were not voted on, but points in common were sought by responding to a personal questionnaire. The results will be studied at the General Council’s January 2006 Plenary Session. These common points will help the Council to plan the following four years.

There was also an evaluation of the Conference itself, through a questionnaire that each participant completed after some personal quiet time. The dominant impression after these days of fraternity is that a key moment in the life of the Institute has been experienced.

Participants’ Opinions
We responded first to three questions in groups formed according to Regions, and then we shared freely in the general assembly. We noted that the Conference had progressed rapidly and
peacefully and that the time had come to make courageous decisions not only for the future but also for the present.

Someone affirmed that, according to him, restructuring had been the most decisive moment for the Institute throughout these last years; it has opened the brothers to internationality and given birth to a new geographical configuration. He highlighted that the project mission ad gentes, the presence of the Institute at the UN at Geneva and the International Marist Mission Assembly were three significant contributions of this Conference. For another confrère, the three key expressions of the Conference were identity, union with Christ and solidarity with the poor.

Another general impression is one of satisfaction thanks to the close collaboration of the Brothers Superior General and Vicar General. The two inspire confidence, joy and hope with the team of the General Council. That explains their good work during these last four years.

Humorously, we recalled famous duos: Laurel and Hardy, Tom and Jerry, Mortadelle and Philémon and we spoke of the two musketeers to finally finish with Seán and Luis! At the end of the session a comic did not miss circulating a drawing of Seán Sobrado and Luis Sammon!

According to another, the Conference was the consecration of restructuring. Its excellent organisation was the fruit of the competence of members of the Institute. Someone compared the Institute to sailing boats that we could see each day from the hotel; they navigate with the sails filled with the wind. The Institute moves ahead, its sails filled with the breath of the Holy Spirit. An opinion less optimistic came from someone whose brothers are notably older. What can be done to motivate, enthuse and help these brothers to discover their mission?

A brother saluted the exceptional hospitality of the brothers of the Province of Sri Lanka and Pakistan. He spoke of his admiration for the way in which the Province faces its challenges in an inter-religious environment, as was experienced during the visits to Hindu and Buddhist temples, and during the press conference with the local journalists. This brother also highlighted that it was very encouraging to see the transparency with which the economic topics were treated and the attention given to the poorer Provinces. Someone finally emphasised that we need to support the brothers and laypeople who live passionately for Jesus, in community for mission.

Suggestions to transmit the contents and experiences of the Conference
One of the concerns of the participants is to share with the brothers and laypeople what has been experienced and discussed during these days.

For the General Administration, as well as information placed on the website www.champagnat.org, a CD will be sent to the Administrative Units with photos and the documents produced. But, due to the different situations of the Administrative Units Provincials and District Superiors were asked to make suggestions.

Here are the brothers’ proposals: treat the themes of the Conference during retreats and Provincial meetings, include in the programme of the activities of each Administrative Unit times for sharing what has been experienced at Negombo, as much for the brothers as for laypeople. Three levels of communication can be distinguished: the events, the experiences and the content proper to arouse conversion.

Marial prayer
It continued the spirit of the Morning Prayer. The brothers had summarised in a word or a phrase their experience of the Conference, and had written this on a large board. Little by little the board was covered with varying expressions. Brother Emili Turú who animated the prayer, then asked the brothers who wished to explain their choice.

During the afternoon prayer, the same words were used in a power point. The screen reproduced the calls as emara, fogo, chiyembekezo, espoir, kabataan, paga-sa ng vayan, mipela amamasin yu, etc. In the different languages of the brothers, a choir of supplications and praise to Mary was raised on behalf of the entire Institute. Each of these calls was accompanied by a Hail Mary.
Gratitude in four languages
As the end of the Conference comes closer, the participants have started to reminisce about notable events during this past month. One thing that has been mentioned often has been the hospitality of the people working in the hotel. Some of the characteristics of this people are their hospitality, openness and cordiality. Brother Mike de Waas, Provincial of Sri Lanka and Pakistan said on one occasion that hospitality is the national priority in Sri Lanka. This is certainly practised in this hotel. One month living with the same people has given rise to some pleasant anecdotes and has created an ambiance of closeness and friendship. The difficulties in language, for example, have converted the waiters into teachers and the brothers into students as common phrases for use in the dining room have been learnt. It was decided that a sign of gratitude should be given to the hotel workers and so the hotel staff were asked to gather so that brothers could offer this sign of gratitude through songs and words.

The Brother Superior General dedicated some affectionate words to them on behalf of all the brothers and gave them a small personal gift. Following this, each of the language groups selected a song and performed it for the hotel staff. The hotel staff also offered two of their own national folksongs as a sign of appreciation.

Closing words
The small closing ceremony along with the sign of gratitude monopolised the last morning of the Conference. Brother Seán Sammon, Superior General, closed the Conference in saying that it had been a rich and productive time, a time of grace and a time of speaking of hopes and of dreams for the Institute and the mission.

He began his speech remembering some of the objectives of the General Council in organising this General Conference: to render accounts of the work carried out in animating the Institute and its mission during the last four years and to dedicate time to listening and informing about current concerns. Brother Seán stressed that during the Conference there had been times dedicated to listing to the feeling of the Institute concerning such matters as the promotion and formation of vocations, the laity, mission, solidarity, restructuring among others.

He also said that he wanted to outline a future challenge for himself and everyone else as there is a future for the Institute and it is a matter of this being assured by the brothers and the laity. He explained it was the time of reconstructing the spirit of the Hermitage. It is no use simply redoing the house unless the same spirit that was there during the first construction is there again: sacrifice, hard physical work and the joyful satisfaction of a job well done. He highlighted also that in making plans for the future of the Institute we need to have the same hope, enthusiasm and audacity as in the early days.

Challenges for the future
In the second part of his talk, Brother Seán featured various topics of interest that require the major attention of the Institute: implant spirituality networks in each region of the Institute; emphasise the growing movement of the laity; have more clarity in the funds that are reserved for solidarity “ad intra” and “ad extra”; reserve adequate time for the second visit to the Provinces with clear and helpful objectives. Brother Seán promised to take these and other concerns seriously and he
assured that each one of them will be studied and approached with an action plan and the means that are required.

Restructuring of commissions
Brother Seán affirmed that he has decided to reorganise the General Council by requesting that some Commissions work jointly in the future. The Religious Life and Vocation Ministry Commissions will work together, the Laity and Mission Commissions will work jointly and the Commissions on the evangelical use of goods, finances and of BIS will unite their efforts. He also announced that shortly he will explain in a letter how some aspects of the calls of the XX General Chapter that have not been studied will be treated before the General Chapter in 2009.

In his conclusion, he spoke of initiatives to which we must dedicate ourselves: to make Jesus the centre of our lives and of our communities, to continue restructuring to make the Institute more universal, to be at the service of the poor, to promote vocations and to evaluate our programmes of formation. Then he called all to advance on the journey with our lay Marists, a journey that is so enriching for all and he encouraged the brothers to continue to work for the development of a culture of vocations.

Moment of gratitude
Brother Seán finished by thanking the brothers for the privilege of having been called to the service of Superior General and for having given him the General Councillors as his collaborators. On behalf of the Conference, he said a special word of thanks to Father Joaquín Fernández, former Superior General of the Marist Fathers, who accompanied the brothers as chaplain. Brother Seán offered him a beautiful statue of our Good Mother. Then he thanked Brother Michael de Waas, Provincial of Sri Lanka and Pakistan, for the work, the attention and the care given to the brothers during the General Conference. This gratitude extends to all the brothers of the Province, but especially to Brother Mervyn Pereira who worked day after day at the Conference with unending devotion.

Then he thanked the translators for their difficult task of simultaneous translation and the collaborators in the secretariat and of communications. He gave the Brothers Provincial a picture of the Hermitage to express the wish that each Province return to the spirit of the Hermitage.

At the initiative of the Provincials, a small souvenir of Sri Lanka was given to the Superior General, Vicar general and General Councillors, as a sign of unity and gratitude for their work.

Final Mass
The celebration, animated by Brother Lazar Hirudayasmay, incorporated Indian themes. In effect, the Sector Superior of India was dressed according to the tradition of his country. The altar was decorated with a painting of the Baptism of Jesus and at the foot of the altar were placed symbols that are used in the Indian liturgy.

Before the proclamation of the Word, all gathered to feel the warmth of a fire lit by the Pascal Candle. Each brother extended his hands close to the flame to receive energy and then placed his hands near his face. He could thus listen to the Word of God after having illuminated his face with the light and warmth of the resurrected Christ.

At the moment of the canon that remembers the offering of the altar given to the Father “through Him, with Him, in Him”, the rite of missioning was integrated with the offering. With some ash, the priest made a sign on Brother Seán’s forehead while he said to him on behalf of the Lord: “Seán, do not be afraid for I am with you.” In turn, the Superior General did this for all of his General Councillors who then did it for all the brothers.

The rite of the sign of peace, before communion, consisted in shaking hands and fraternal accolades marking the separation as each brother returns to his Province to share with the brothers of the Institute all that has been experienced during these days of the General Conference.
**Departure**
The final details were seen to carefully by the Co-ordinating Committee of the Conference. Thus, this brings this daily chronicle to an end with the promise of a final personal summary tomorrow. Nevertheless, I would like to thank you today for the welcome reserved for our daily news and for the many messages we received from the whole Institute on the web. Thank you very much.

**DEPARTURE FROM NEGOMBO**
*General Conference - 2nd October*

**A Parable for the Conference**

I arrived at Negombo when the preparations for welcoming the brothers to the Conference were being finalised. The people were busying themselves here and there. The Goldi Sands Hotel was going to become a Marist house for a month. Little by little the places were adopting the necessary characteristics. The hotel's hall was a privileged place for Marcellin and Mary who were greeting us with open arms. Posters, pictures and decorations gave a particular Marist feel.

On arrival on this beautiful island, we received a memorable welcome. At Maris Stella College, the words of a song composed by a brother expressed it well: "We welcome you, dear friends, on the land of this great continent which has seen the four great rivers of religion born, which flow towards the four corners of the earth. With affection and an open heart, we welcome you, dear brothers, on the land where the four doctrines that give spiritual comfort to humanity are developed with enthusiasm, on the land three times blessed by the feet of the Lord Buddha, in the resplendent paradise of Sri Lanka. We share the love of God with his sons spread throughout the world. Welcome, sons of Marcellin! Welcome to Asia! Welcome to Sri Lanka!"

The main picture in the meeting room of the Conference attracted my attention. The sailing boat of the Institute is sailing on an open sea, its sails at full bloom on the seas of Asia. The workers are busying themselves giving the last strikes of a hammer to fix the sign: VII General Conference, 5th to 30th September, Negombo – Sri Lanka. In the place that will serve as a chapel, someone has put a border around a white canvas where an artist has outlined a picture. You could already guess the form of Marcellin surrounded by children, still unfinished and without any colour. On the contrary, in the dining room, a picture coloured with simple but bright lines occupies a place of honour. There is a Marcellin in a brown tint surrounded by children with attractive faces. It expresses the daily activity in a college, giving praise to Marist education. Comparing the two pictures, I saw that one was finished and the other was not. I thought that they had not given enough time to the artist to finish it, but as the end sometimes explains the start, I understood that this canvas and this finished picture were like a parable for the Conference.

I know neither the author of the sketch, nor the subject that he wants to develop, but I believe it can be entitled “The Marist Mission in Asia”. That could be the motive of the unfinished picture which presided over all the liturgical celebrations in the improvised chapel of the hotel. The most defined lines are those of Champagnat. One can also recognise the lines of boys full of activity. But all is scarcely outlined in a few pencil lines.

The canvas stayed thus for the whole Conference, waiting for the final touches that would give it life and colour. Was this the intention of the artist? I asked at the start of the Conference if someone would come to finish the picture. Are we going to leave it like this? I heard a voice behind
me: “And why not?” I had posed the question because I like to finish what I have started without too much delay. But on reflecting a bit, I agreed with the voice behind me. Why must works of art be finished and perfect? Art is like life taking form day by day. Each moment it leaves its reflection and shadow.

During the morning quiet time during the Conference, we remained silent for a long time in the chapel. This was like a “desert” day, as is proposed during recollection days or retreats. To transfer yourself physically or spiritually to a desert, as someone who flies over the Arabic peninsula from Aman to Rome, is to be placed like Jesus before the temptation that present the challenges of the future. Do I run the risk of saying yes to God or do I falter. The silence envelops the contemplation. We search for it as it gives birth to thought, intuition. A word will express it later… when the word is still in the silence and enriched with life.

After a long moment of contemplative silence the brothers were invited to write a word on the canvas, a significant phrase which summarised the Conference. The word is born from this silence which bathed the soul of the Conference. And in the silence there was the Word.

They asked for a word, a brief expression which summarised the sentiment that the work and the encounter of the Conference would leave in the heart. The words that the brothers wrote in their spelling and their languages were like the tongues of fire of Pentecost. The brothers were representing seventy-seven countries: China, Pakistan, Korea, Argentina, Canada, Philippines, Rwanda, Madagascar, Spain, the Netherlands, etc. All animated by one spirit, they expressed themselves in their own languages and were understood by all. These desires, these cries, these challenges, these promises and these sentiments completed the canvas: emarara, fogo, chiyembekezo, esperanza, kabataan, paga-sa ng vayan! , mipela amamasin yu, etc.

The VII Conference is finished. The picture stayed there with its canvas nearly white, an unfinished story but also an important step forward. Negombo prolongated Veranópolis and the two last General Chapters, by opening the Institute to the universal to which it had always aspired. This internationality that Champagnat and his brothers had started one day at the Hermitage with the desire to go to new dioceses.

At Negombo, the picture of Champagnat expresses the new spirit that matured the VII General Conference. An unfinished picture, but one which offers a programme! In each Province of the Institute one will add the appropriate, typical, incultured lines. Each region will bring its own tonality and brilliance. The shadows will also be present; we need to count on them to emphasise the contrasts. Touch by touch, with red to bring out love, the large green lines of hope, the monotone ochre of the indispensable shadows or the white of the alleluias. The life of our Institute will form the base of this painting during the next four years. Negombo will be a new reference point on our journey. The sailboat, with its square and universal sail, has presided at the opening of the works of the Conference by indicating the direction of Asia. Today the Institute deploys its sails before the gusts of wind of the Spirit with the desire that it takes us to a good port, guided by the Virgin of Good Voyage who has presided at the departures of each of the brothers from the church at Duwa: Our Lady of Good Voyage.

Goodbye Negombo and Colombo, we remember the magnificent welcome that they reserved for the brothers. In leaving Sri Lanka we carry in our hearts the task of opening further the frontiers of the Institute ad gentes and to give a place to the laity in the mission, to consolidate the Marist journey towards God with a solid spirituality, sharing in solidarity what we have experienced with the brothers and those in need. All of this should form the beautiful multicoloured picture that we will realise together around Champagnat in the spirit of the Hermitage.
