Meneses, September 3-12 2007

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ALBUM OF MEMORIES
A LONG ROAD TO THE MEETING
MATURE FRUIT FROM VATICAN II

The International Assembly of Marist Mission, which took place in Mendes, saw the birth of a reality which slowly gestated over a long period of time. The fruits of Vatican Council II, born and nurtured in the fertile lands of the Church, cultivated in the Marist garden, abundantly irrigated by the waters of the Holy Spirit, begin to appear before the eyes of history. One of those fruits is the International Assembly of Marist Mission.

By analyzing the global statistics of the Institute, it can be proved that the number of Marist houses and students has increased throughout its history, with the exception of the periods of the two World Wars. The highest number of Brothers in the Institute, according to a sample statistic, can be found in 1965 with 9,752 professed Brothers. Starting from that date, until our own time, the number of Brothers diminishes and paradoxically the number of houses and students increases. This complex phenomenon can only be explained by the presence of the lay people in the Marist works. The harmony of the Brothers with the lay people, the acceptance of the work carried out together and the explicit appreciation shown on the part of the Institute has been channelled more through the facts and through life than through ordinances or laws. The 20th General Chapter, when taking the pulse of the global reality of the Institute, recognized that, although the Brothers were less numerically, the Institute had never been as widespread as it was towards the end of the XXth century. The world-wide presence of the charism and of Marist pedagogy has been accomplished thanks to thousands of the lay people who are integrated the Marist works. For
the first time in history, the General Chapter recommended to the General Council the establishment of processes and appropriate structures to allow the Brothers and the lay people to speak a common language.

A history that comes from afar

The true background history, of the presence and collaboration of the lay people in Marist works, comes from far back in the history of the Institute. This presence becomes significant for the Institute when, after the expulsion of the Brothers from France in 1903, the unanimity of teaching, sustained for decades by the “Guide des Écoles” cannot continue. The Brothers, spread throughout the world, had to adapt Marist teaching to very diverse cultures and countries. The Institute assumed a new pedagogical paradigm. Brother André Lanfrey, in one of his works, puts forward the hypothesis that with the purpose of the “Guide des Écoles” whose revision was decided by the 11th General Chapter (1907), as an obligatory work of reference for Marist teaching, “Marist pedagogies” entered the Marist world. With this change of paradigm there comes into existence an unstoppable evolution of the teaching structure of the Marist school that has lasted for several decades. Social development, the continuous increase in entrance applications to Marist schools and the complexity of scientific, technical, pedagogical and educational demands, cannot be accomplished by a community of Brothers alone and so they begin to introduce into their habitual structures what were called in those times, “employees,” “civil collaborators,” or even, “auxiliary teachers.”

It was an historic Marist pedagogical moment when what was “the Brothers’ school,” directed by a community of Brothers, became “the Marist school” directed by an “educational community” shared by Brothers and lay people.

A new change of paradigm

The “Marist school” did not happen overnight, but rather through an evolutionary process in which “civil teachers” or “assistants” began to be valued as “lay people,” as members of a community of faith in which, without the lay people, there is no Church. When the lay person remains silent, everyone suffers the consequences; if he or she is passive, everyone is weakened; if he or she leaves, everyone is diminished. A full member of the Church, the lay person takes part in its total mission. With this historic step in which the Church
discovers the importance of the laity in the Marist school, college or university, a new paradigm is adopted, emanating from the theological foundations of Vatican Council II. From a Brothers’ school where the lay person was considered as being “civil,” “auxiliary,” “co-worker” and the one who shared with the Brothers, in the best cases, “ideal,” “spirit,” “work”... as expressions of good understanding, he moves on, after a long period of gestation, to sharing in an “educational project” and the “shared inheritance” of a “charism” and “mission”. This way of thinking produced a new educational paradigm in the concept of Marist pedagogy. The “pedagogical” paradigm became the “theological” paradigm. The “civil teacher”, the “assistant” begins to be seen in the institution not just as a salaried worker, not just as a substitute or as a complement, but as heir participant in a charism. This change of mentality has progressed in parallel with decisive events in Marist history. A parallel road between the demands of the Marist pedagogical paradigm and the Marist theological paradigm.

Concerning those invited and the observers

Analyzing the Circular of the superiors, starting from the end of the Second World War, it can be seen that during the terms of Brothers Leonida and Charles Raphael, before Vatican Council II, “the statistics for several years display in certain sectors of the Institute a remarkable disproportion between the number of students and “educational” personnel (Leonida, 1947). Brother Charles Raphael, on the other hand, some years later, confirms that “in most of our Provinces, the number of lay teachers is rapidly increasing in our schools.”Their presence is often necessary if one wants to follow the rhythm of the growth in the school population”. But, on the other hand, he sees as inconvenient “linking up with a large number of lay teachers”... “In general we are happy to be able to count on their assistance. Without them many of our schools would have disappeared some time ago. Time and time again we call on them with greater
frequency to collaborate. But it is necessary to keep a good balance, a moderation that varies according to the conditions in the diverse work of the schools". (Charles Raphael, 1963)

Brother Basilio, who dedicated more than 2,000 pages to writing his circulars, hardly dedicates any of them to the evaluation and promotion of the lay people. His great concern was to prioritise the Brothers. “We will limit ourselves to mentioning the topic (of the lay people) - he writes -, for greater clarity and, mainly, to be able to guide the enthusiasm of the Brothers to raise and to form these valuable people and, today more than ever, important members the Mystical Body of Christ”. (Basilio, 1968)

Starting from Vatican Council II, the lay people are considered in the documents of animation of the Institute, under the guidance of the new theological paradigm. “What is clear is that the theology of the Church developed in the Council, in the Synod on the Laity (1987) and incorporated in the Pope’s Apostolic Exhortation ‘Christi fideles laici’ (1988), recognizes the identity of the lay people, their dignity and sanctity, responsibility and mission”, writes Brother Charles Howard. And from his pen comes the circular “Sowers of Hope” (1990), in which he refers to the “Letter from the Marist animators to the little “Brothers of Mary” entitled Marcellin lives today”, developed in Burgos by the Animators of the Provinces of Spain. In it they affirm the lay people: We “feel vividly the charism of Marcellin, and we are captivated by his spirituality, that special and different form of creative presence that grows in the Church and enriches it”. By including this letter in a circular to the Institute, the Brother Superior General makes an explicit recognition of the merits characteristic of the lay people who feel the right to be linked with the Institute, not by declarations of principles, but by the life that the Spirit has raised in them.

**Attracted by the spirituality**

In the circular “Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family” (1991), Brother Charles Howard directs himself “to all the Brothers”... “as in all the circulars,” but also to the “friends,” because “what is presented also contains something of interest for some lay people.” In that circular he makes a general reference to the “relationships with the lay people” making it quite clear that the reality of the lay people in the Institute overflows into the ownership of this Movement. “When speaking of this Movement, we must be clear that it does not represent any organizational manoeuvre to balance the falling numbers of Brothers, but rather it is the answer to a call” by those who “tell us that they are attracted to what they have learned of our spirituality.” (Charles Howard, 1991)

In the 19th General Chapter (1993) 14 lay people attended as “special guests,” representing very different areas of collaboration with the Brothers: in charge of schools, of parents’ associations, of retreats, of youth movements, of the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family, etc. During the chapter there were several sessions of joint work, assisted by some Brothers, and they prepared a message directed to the Chapter Assembly. On three occasions they spoke to all the capitulants.

**Fruit of the fertility of a charism**

Brother Benito Arbués, some years later, in his circular “Walk peacefully, yet with a sense of urgency” (1997) writes: “Personally I perceive that our openness to the lay people and recognizing their gifts and wealth is no longer optional” In a “Church of communion”... “one of the important aspects of
communion is the recognition of the vocation to which God calls each one of us and the acceptance of the mutual interaction and the exchange of gifts which come from the complementarity of vocations". And he concludes: “To isolate ourselves from the lay people, not to share with them our mission and spirituality, is tantamount to depriving ourselves of the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given to them. They can be an important force in the re-foundation of our Institute’. With the canonization of Champagnat (1999) the Marist charism becomes the patrimony of the whole Church. Little by little we go on forging the vital lines of the new Marist theological paradigm.

The General Chapter welcomes the Marist lay people

For the first time in the history of the Institute, 18 lay people invited as observers to the 20th General Chapter (2001), participated with the right to speak on all capitular activities taking place during the “see-judge” stage of discernment. They were the main speakers in the “Open Forum” on the “Marist lay people,” and their influence was recognised in the “Letter to the whole Marist Family” which the Chapter edited and approved. Likewise, the General Chapter summed up its reflection in five calls. The third is a capitular call to “deepen the specific identity of Brothers and of lay people.” It is a call to “enlarge the space of the tent” to welcome a new reality: “The Marist lay person.”

For this they commit themselves to “promote experiences and processes of combined reflection that help to deepen the Marist identity and profile different forms of ownership of the Institute. This implies processes of combined formation for Brothers and lay people.” For that reason the 20th General Chapter asked the General Council to “create the structures that it considers necessary to assure, in the Institute and as a support to the shared mission among Brothers and lay people and to the evangelizing educational service to the children, the poorest and excluded young people, the setting up of some international forum of Marist mission.” (“Choose Life” 48.6)

This petition was fulfilled in the Assembly which took place in Mendes. In general terms this is the institutional road that the Brothers and lay people have travelled, ending up in the celebration of the International Assembly.

This edition of FMS Message gathers within its pages the most significant actions in the programme experienced by the members of the assembly and the guidelines that encouraged the steps of this historical meeting of Brothers and lay people.
A New Step in the Life of the Institute

The Mendes Assembly: an evaluation

IN PREVIOUS ARTICLES, WE HAVE SPOKEN AT LENGTH ABOUT THE PROCESSES WHICH LED UP TO THE MENDES ASSEMBLY AND HOW IT ACTUALLY TRANSPRIED. NOW WE WILL FOCUS ON (1) THE SOURCES FROM WHICH THE IDEA OF THE ASSEMBLY AROSE AND (2) THE POST-ASSEMBLY EVALUATION.

The General Council’s Mission Commission began to prepare its action plan during the year 2002. In doing so, the Commission carefully examined the recommendations and directives of the 20th General Chapter. Thus the Commission studied the request made by the Chapter to the General Council (“Choose Life,” 48.6).

“At the Institute level, to create structures judged necessary to support (a) the mission shared by Brothers and lay people, and (b) educational and evangelizing work among the poorest and most abandoned children and young people:

- Supporting the Administrative Units
- Coordinating common undertakings
- Promoting formation programs
- Promoting the goals of BIS and its programs
- Organizing international meetings on Marist mission
- Establishing a presence in international organizations which deal with education and solidarity.”

Gradually the idea of conducting an International Assembly came into focus as we tried to imagine what the Chapter had in mind in suggesting an “international meeting on Marist mission.” Why an “assembly?” Principally because we wished to emphasize that the gathering would be different from the Chapter, since our present legislation defines “Chapter” as a gathering in which lay people have a role only on an invitation basis and for a limited time. The word “assembly” underlines, as we desired,
the idea of full and equal participation on the part of all in attendance. By January 2003 we already had the first draft of a proposal for consideration by the Mission Commission. The Commission then sent the draft to representatives of all the Administrative Units of the Institute. Along with the draft a questionnaire was sent. It raised two questions about the idea of an Assembly. The responses, largely favorable to such a meeting, included many suggestions as to how to conduct it, what themes to treat, who to invited, and so forth.

In June 2004, with all the relevant data at hand, the General Council approved the proposal regarding the Assembly, targeting the date September 2007. The Council appointed a preparatory committee, the members being: Mrs. Dilma Alves Rodrigues (Brasil Centro-Norte); Mr. Chema Pérez Soba (Iberica); Brother Alphonse Balombe (PACE Province); Brother John Y. Tan (Philippines); Brothers Pedro Herreros and Emili Turú, as respective heads of the Laity Commission and Mission Commission; Brother Michael Flanigan and Brother Juan Miguel Anaya, secretaries of the two last-named commissions. (Brother Michael Flanigan was later replaced by Brother F. Pau Fornells.)

The newly appointed commission laid out its working document to the General Council which accepted the document as its own. The working document presented detailed reasons for holding the Assembly:
The International Assembly represents a new step in the life of the Marist Brothers. The Assembly will provide Brothers and laity the chance to reflect together, in the same setting, upon the present and future mission of the Institute and upon its self-understanding.

The Assembly would be a chance to strengthen the processes of refounding the Institute and making it more international, two challenges which Provinces are experiencing at the beginning of the 21st century. The Brothers and laity present at the Assembly would treat these matters while discussing among themselves what motivates them in their Marist work and what concerns them in their efforts to help children and young people.

The proposed process established to prepare and carry out the Assembly was to be an occasion for self-examination regarding several points. One point is to examine the real experience of working on the Marist mission, and the beliefs which provide the strength to carry out the mission. Another point concerns the vocational calls which motivate people to dedicate themselves to the Marist mission. The consideration of vocation focuses on two points: looking anew at the document, *In the Footsteps of Marcellin*, and making an in-depth reflection upon the 20th General Chapter.

Lastly, the suggestions and recommendations which will issue from the International Assembly might be studied by those who participate in the 21st General Chapter (2009), if the participants wish to do so. As a result the suggestions and recommendations could contribute to provide broad points of orientation for the Marist world.

The Assembly’s goal as set by the General Council provided guidance for further planning and development of the entire process in its various stages. To give a priority throughout the Institute to dialogue and commitment among those who are the principal actors in carrying out the Marist Mission; thereby a contribution is made to:

- **A reconsideration of Marist Mission in light of Fr. Champagnat’s entire life**
  - in his deep desire to announce the Good News
  - in his wish to send us in the midst of young people, especially those most in need;
  - in his habit of constant discernment which caused him to adapt himself to the changing needs of his collaborators and assistants.

- Get a clearer and deeper idea of what we mean by “the Marist vocation”: that which is distinct, that which is common to Brothers and lay people, etc.

- Promote greater co-responsibility among those engaged in the Marist mission, by making available structures, paradigms, etc. which favor such co-responsibility.

- A greater awareness of expressive diversity as to what the Marist Mission actually looks like today, and a greater esteem for the diversity; in addition, greater awareness of and esteem for the Marist Mission’s international character as a dynamism to be harnessed.

**Gathering up the fruits of the Assembly**

The Assembly’s Preparatory Committee gathered at Rome along with the General Council on January 1-14, 2008 to draw up a report about what had transpired at the September 2007 Mendes Assembly. The springboard for our discussion was the evaluation made at the end of the Assembly by each participant. In doing the evaluation, the first thing we noted was the fruit that the Assembly had produced in us, the Preparatory Committee. From our first meeting in December 2004, three years had passed, a time of sharing our dreams, of working together shoulder to shoulder, all the committee members bringing their
very best to the work. We recognized that the experience of teamwork was very positive. We made special note, however, of the extraordinary benefits which the common work had produced in each person; experiences of faith, family spirit, friendship. To have been able to participate at the birth of the project was a privilege, and so too was the chance to stand alongside the process as it passed through its various stages: local, Provincial, Regional, and finally Mendes itself. Will not our experience be but a small reflection of what has transpired in the Institute at various levels?

Another thing occurred. When we listened attentively to those who attended the Mendes Assembly, we sense that all of participants found the Assembly to be a very moving. Many participants emphasized that they felt that the Holy Spirit had been present and, in a powerful way, active. The Spirit’s presence was seen in a growing sense of togetherness, among the members of the Assembly and with the entire Marist world. Other participants commented upon their experience of re-discovering enthusiasm for the Marist mission and how the experience raised questions about how they look at the world. Others sensed that they were being drawn towards a path of personal conversion. Above all, however, the participants came to sense an intense call to commitment and action, particularly by way of answering the major invitations contained in the final document.

A sense of co-responsibility was emphatically real at the Mendes Assembly, and even throughout the process which led up to the Assembly. With striking clarity, co-responsibility brought to light the wonderful things which can come to be when lay people and Brothers work together, each group with its different gifts, vocations, experiences. The more than one thousand small groups created at the local level, along with the more than 20,000 people involved in the process: such numbers give testimony to the value of co-responsibility. Furthermore, working through the processes which called for co-responsibility served to raise significant issues about the need for a fresh understanding of the Marist vocation. Certainly a new understanding is developing among us, but to deepen the understanding - so it seems - is a must.

The final point concerns the impression we gained: that internationality was one of the experiences which most struck the Assembly participants. The diverse cultural forms and varied modes of expression in which the Marist mission unfolds made a big impact on us. In the group there
arose a profound inter-connectedness which increased our unity and our sense of belonging. This was true particularly among the lay participants (male and female), because, not having a connection to the Marist Brothers at an international level, they could only with difficulty gain an appreciation of this sort of experience. The challenge we face for the future is how to maintain and increase the richness that internationality brings with it.

In the evaluation that we made, we studied in detail the preliminary materials used at the local level. We also examined what occurred during each of the successive phases, particularly the final phase. We have gathered up what we judge to have been the most successful elements of the process as well as those aspects which, if we had to do the process over again, we would do differently. All the material will remain in Rome for the use of future international committees.

Clarifying what is «new»

Speaking for myself, I am convinced that the Assembly was and will remain, not merely an historic event in the history of the Marist Brothers. It was also a moment of grace which all of us had the privilege and the chance to live through in a truly personal way, as the people most involved in what occurred. For such an experience I thank the Lord. At the same time, I feel that we bear a responsibility in view of so many graces which the Lord has granted, particularly in committing ourselves to the Marist mission which is more relevant than ever.

In the course of the Mendes Assembly we all worked on creating a large mandala. In it we placed the image of a pregnant woman, an eloquent symbol of new life germinating. In different ways, we also placed within the mandala various designs. Each design came from the mandala created by a small group. The combined designs represented two bands which intersected and became inseparable though they did not merge into each other. The Assembly itself, from its inception and in its preliminary stages, became a prophetic expression of the whole Marist Institute. Yet, we will continue to require, now and in the future, strength and energy of the prophetic kind, a gift of the Spirit. With the light of “what is new,” is it not really stimulating to be able to move ahead in the Marist Institute, lay people and Brothers together?

LOCAL PHASE

Temas
A mission that is singular and plural
1. Experienced by people today
2. Among the young, especially the most neglected
3. At school and in other educational environments

To which we are called together
4. Marist vocation as a brother and as a layperson
5. Sowers of the Good News
6. In equal partnership

In an attitude of constant renewal
7. Champagnat, attentive to the signs of the times
8. We look together to the future

PROVINCIAL PHASE

• Each province decides how to conduct the provincial phase.
• At the end of the provincial phase, a synthesis is prepared which summarizes:
  a. the spirit in which the process developed in the province;
  b. what the province wants to communicate to the assembly.
• Each province chooses the number of brothers and laypeople allotted to participate in the Assembly.

You, as a member of the Marist Mission, are invited to participate in this singular event together with thousands of MARISTS from the five continents.

Building ONE HEART, ONE MISSION
For us our goal was clear: to start out from God, “to dream” the future of Marist mission and envisage the paths we need to take in order to make this dream come true. The idea was not to hold an Assembly of important and learned people, focusing on intellectual debate, but rather to have a brotherly meeting of Marists who wanted to passionately convey the life and expectations of many people, ready to listen to what God asks us for the well-being of the young boys and girls we work for.

We therefore had to create an environment of genuine communication, authentically community-oriented, of mutual acceptance regardless of our differences of language, customs and perspective, each with our different outlook (so clear to ourselves, but not so evident to others). We had to work to build a Marist community – the image of the Marists in the world – capable of listening to God and understanding what He wants for us; we needed to build a community, to indicate the most appropriate ways for this dream to come true. No more and no less than that!

The main theme we chose was the following:
a. First of all to listen. To listen to God through the needs of the youth and through some significant situations the Marists live in the world today. In order to do this, we selected three moments:

- The first step had to be moving; it had to touch the heart, move it and put us at the heart and foundation of our devotion: children and young people. The “Lata Viva” group invited us to live out a ceremony that echoed the real voices of many children and young people from all over the world, where we could sense, touch and be reminded of the faces and lives of the boys and girls we work for, the ones we wish to give our lives for.
- Starting from this, our hearts touched and willing to give a response, we tried to listen to the voice of God in a wide range of Marist experiences from all over the world. God told us something in Spain, in Australia, in the Philippines, in China, in Ghana, in Brazil... for sure, something that made us creative, which made us look at our differences with admiration, that made us feel that we could do something new, strong with our present fidelity.
- In a third moment again we listened, to hear God calling us and understand how, to hear who he was calling to this renewed mission: together, brothers and laypeople, through dialogue and mutual enrichment we found our common identities and our different and complementary identities...

We devoted the third part of the Assembly to listening. Our natural impatience led us to believe, perhaps, that this was ineffective, but we actually felt that this rhythm was that of religious people who love God and are used to his ways.

b. The following step opened up to the “dream”. Before decisions, “dreams”. What horizons do we perceive, starting from the touch we felt in our hearts? To create, therefore, starting from what is about to be born.

Also, for these ideas to be nourished and strengthened by the feelings that stemmed from listening to God, in this stage we decided to use a methodology that was new for many of us: the “mandala”.

“Mandalas” are geometric drawings that in certain religious traditions are used for meditation. By building “mandalas”, we wanted the different groups not to be lost in debates, and going beyond their diverse origins, to work together on a common feat... a common endeavour endowed with a powerful symbolic force. We wanted to express what we felt was the “dream” of God for the Marist mission, to say it together, to express this dream with the power of a symbol, the energy of the “mandala”, to utter it as it should be done.

In spite of the initial difficulties, this delicate moment generated a profound sense of communion. Starting from each group’s smaller “mandalas”, we built the great “mandala” of the Institute, the symbol of our future, inspired by God. We were one community, brothers and laypeople, united by one feeling, bearers of the future.
c. Also the third moment was quite complex. For this “dream” to be successful, for the mother to bear the child, we had to be aware – and make also others be aware – of the challenges that lie ahead. We needed to show the paths by which this “dream” could come true.

We had to offer a message, translated into words, not too many, but appropriate, audacious and significant, words like a mirror, where we could look at ourselves, starting from each Province, to find our proper place and be filled with enthusiasm, in order to face the renewed mission that was waiting for us.

It was a difficult challenge, but we faced it together, forming an authentic community. The previous days had joined us to the common source of our mission; they allowed us to live the existing tensions with flexibility, understanding and creativity.

Groups of different languages and different cultures worked together to draft a final message focussing with its heart on God, the Mother Mary, and on children and young people, to show us the five great paths we need to follow in order to make this “dream” of God for our mission be successful.

Then, after having listened, after having “dreamt” and discerned concerning the paths that can multiply the Marist mission, we could celebrate the gift of the experience we had lived and present to the Mother Mary, through the Superior General, two wonderful gifts: the message we offered to the world, and the event we had lived, the true symbol of a living and creative Marist Institute that passionately reaches towards the future, towards God’s dream for the Mission of Saint Marcellin.
It is a great joy to be able to accomplish what this International Assembly on the Marist Mission entrusted to me; I am proud of having taken part in it and constantly glad of sharing with my Province in the work that was done.

Nearly two months have gone by since the day when Br. Seán asked us to enliven and share the results of this historical meeting; we may not see its fruits yet, but if we communicate it in a spirit of familiarity it will certainly transform our lives, and we will be able to focus our eyes and our vision in the same direction.

The Assembly was an opportunity for reflection, discussion and dialogue; having been there, we know well that the original idea was to analyse the Marist Mission as a benefit for children and young people, but also to share in the vocation of those who serve them.

They were intense days, certainly full of experience and learning. They gave us a general vision of the Institute and of its current challenges: if we will not be engaged in them directly, with care and co-responsibility, the future will be difficult.

Mission must be a way of evangelising, and we must dream, as Marcellin once dreamt. Every day in the world we must first of all identify ourselves with him, and be close to the good heart of Mary; we took the name of “Marists” and we conceive it as a lifestyle, a way of renewing the sense of our action in the schools.

These days, during which the Marist heart gathered in Mendes, in Brazil, allowed me to discover new things, and to enter even more in the spirit of Champagnat. I definitely believe it is worthwhile to share the experience and the richness of this meeting with everyone. We need to help each other to understand the call that comes from it, and we must join together to enrich each other. Then the Marist call to religious or lay life will be a march of communion, a sharing of life.

Ulises Centro, México Central
THE MARIST SETS OUT
WORLD FOR MENDES

June 2008
Reception

...in the airport
...in Mendes

All the congregation’s roads lead to Mendes

This event is a novelty in the Congregation’s history. For the first time Brothers and lay people are meeting on an equal footing to share the experiences they have lived in the exercise of their mission as Marist religious and lay people.
From 1903 the Marist House at Mendes, located in the middle of an extensive property, has served as a place of Marist formation. It housed juniors, postulants, novices and scholastics for decades.

For a few years it also welcomed retired brothers. In these last decades it has hosted retreats, recollections and encounters. This place has something that from the first moment captivated Brother Adorátor, according to an account in his book “Twenty Years in Brazil,” in which he tells of his memories of the first twenty years of Marist foundation in this country. This work is full of anecdotes related in an elegant and attractive literary style. Today, this house welcomes an event of great importance for the Marist future in the world that can result in stimulating the memory of what the first years in Mendes were like, traced in the spirit of La Valla and the Hermitage.

“All of the brothers who lived the first year of Mendes will never forget it. That first year left us with many memories and we like to recall them. We lacked many things which, in the ordinary conditions of life, seem indispensable. But we didn’t suffer because of their lack, or if so, very little. In Mendes, in the months of June, July and August, there are cold days and the nights more so. The thermometer indicates temperatures below zero. For Brazilians, it’s an intense cold. In the city of Rio the minimum is 14° C (57° F). To withstand that temperature, the women wore furs and the men capes. These explanations help to understand the need that we had
of blankets. Let’s remember that the brothers had hardly more than a doubled towel to protect themselves from the cold and a lumpy mattress of dry grass on a bed frame of iron cross pieces.

Those who were there at the beginning found all of this very difficult. It was necessary to spend almost a month like this. On the 10th of July I was able to distribute to the brothers thirty blankets. For all of them it was a time of great delight; this is the reason that I remember that date. As to the question of food, we made do with what was strictly necessary: rice, beans, a bit of meat and an orange. Bread was very expensive: one franc per kilo. We saved all we could. As for drinking we can say that during hardships we used to drink clear water: often it was cloudy due to the animals or the rain. In the poverty of our diet we did not lose our sense of humour.

When we read in the life of some saints that they didn’t drink wine and in hardship only fresh water, we could not help laughing. For us that did not seem to be a great example of mortification. During recreation, reflections about our spiritual progress certainly weren’t lacking. How many
laughs echo from the Hacienda! Coffee was our luxury. We were well provided for with the basics. The administrator picked up corn, rice and coffee. There were beautiful herds of pigs, sheep and hens. When buying the country property for forty “cuentas” (money of the time), we added forty “cuentas” more to get all that could be had, including the vegetables and the vegetable garden. Well or poorly settled in, we began to work; manual work, intellectual work, we attacked everything. We set ourselves to confronting Por-

**COMPLEXITY AND RICHNESS OF THIS ASSEMBLY**

- Representatives by official languages: Spanish 37, English 33, Portuguese 14 and French 11.
- There are also 18 support staff persons from Brazil, 7 Brothers translating, 2 Brazilians hired as translators, the chaplain (a Marist Father) and the Director of Communications for the Institute.
- Administrative Units are distributed as follows:
  - The Superior General and his Council plus the Preparatory Commission (17 people); 2 representatives for each one of the Provinces (10) of Southern Africa, East Central Africa, Canada, China, USA, West Central Europe, Madagascar, New Zealand, Nigeria and South Asia (20 people),
  - 3 representatives of the other Provinces (16): América Central, Brasil Centro-Norte, Brasil Centro-Sul, Compostela, Cruz del Sur, Ibérica, L’Hermitage, Mediterránea, Melbourne, México Central, México Occidental, Norandina, Philippines, Rio Grande do Sul, Santa María de los Andes, Sydney. (48 people)
  - 2 representatives from each of the Districts of: Paraguay, Western Africa, Korea, Amazonia and Melanesia (10 people)
- By continental regions the number of representatives is as follows:

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To me, taking part in the Assembly meant intensely experiencing the universality of the Marist Institute and the diversity of expressions of its charisma. By living together with my brothers and sisters in mission, I could renew and reassert my desire to live my baptism according to the Marist charism. Thank you for the chance to be there, it was helpful to discern new paths for building one heart and one mission.

Adalgisa de Oliveira Gonçales, Brasil Centro-Sur

This Assembly has been a warm, cooperative and blessed period in the lives of all participants. With 50 countries, over 120 people and 4 official languages it was amazing how consensus was reached on the main issues. It was evident that we shared the same values. As we go back to our countries I am sure that we all have the same determination to expand the partnership & work of the laity, with Jesus at the centre, in the Champagnat way. I want to say a big thank you to all the brothers and lay partners for this memorable experience.

Adrienne Egbers, Southern Africa
1. Inauguration

2. The gift of youth and the Marist Vocation

3. Dreaming the future that God wants for us

4. The dream of the Brothers and Laity

5. Committed in the Marist Mission
MENDES, September 3-12, 2007
Dear Brother Seán Sammon, Superior General,  
Dear Brother Luis García Sobrado, Vicar General,  
Dear Brothers of the General Council,  
Dear Brothers and Marist lay people.

The ground upon which we are walking is sacred soil. It is a Marist birthplace where, at the beginning of the 20th century, the first Brothers coming from France were introduced to Brazilian ways. Here too lived all the Brothers of the former Province of Central Brazil. Here, the Brothers of the Provinces of São Paulo and of Rio de Janeiro drank deeply of the Marist Brothers’ charism and spirituality. On this blessed land lived hundred of Brothers and candidates to the Marist Brothers’ way of life, men who in a relatively short time spread the Marist apostolate across the entire expanse of the country. Everything that has been built on this land or transformed on it has been the work of the Brothers, especially of the enterprising spirit of innumerable missionary Brothers, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, German. They arrived here in order to learn the Portuguese language and to undertake their education in the sciences, in the arts, in holiness.

With profound sensitivity and exquisite realism, Brother Adorátor, the first Provincial, wrote of the beginnings of the Marist Brothers’ mission
in Brazil. He assembled his notes into a book which he entitled, *Twenty Years of Brazil*. The Mendes property was purchased at the beginning of 1903. Here are a few paragraphs of Brother Adorátor’s narrative concerning events during the foundation year.

“The Brothers who lived through the first year at Mendes will never forget it. It was a year which left us with many memories which we happily call to mind. We lacked a great many things, which in normal conditions of life seem to be indispensable, but we were not very bothered by their absence, or only a little bit... We recall that to protect themselves from the cold, the Brothers had but a folded towel and a rough straw mattress lying upon iron slats. For the newcomers that was really tough.

We spent a month under such conditions. On July 10, I was able to hand out about thirty blankets. What a great joy that was for everyone! That’s the reason I can remember the date. The food was limited to the strict necessities: rice, string beans, a bit of meat, an orange. Bread was very expensive at the time, costing one franc a kilo. We used to be as economical as possible. As our beverage, simply water. Yet, despite the dietary limitations, we were not lacking in good spirit.

When we used to read in the lives of the saints, that they did not drink wine, but only a bit of cool water, we could not but smile. The saints’ situation did not strike us as such an outstanding example of mortification. During the recreation which followed the meal, we did not fail to offer various opinions about our progress towards holiness. All around the farm there were echoes of our laughter.

“Well lodged or not, we set ourselves to work. Manual work, intellectual work, we eagerly pursued both kinds. We had to struggle with the Portuguese language and with the weeds which kept spreading onto the farmland. No fruit trees, no cultivated land, no grazing areas. Once divided into teams, we were able to accomplish effectively all sorts of work.

In the course of the year 1903, in eight groups, many Brothers arrived, on the following dates: March 17, 4 Brothers; May 18, 7 Brothers; June 9, 6 Brothers; June 15, 19 Brothers; July 9, 8 Brothers; July 14, 6 Brothers; September 16, 6 Brothers; December 17, 4 Brothers; 60 Brothers all together. At the time, the income was minimal and the needs great. We had to survive, and we were many. The first job was to organize a vegetable garden.”

Today, more than one hundred years later, minimal needs are all taken care of, and often enough we even have a surplus. The mission must
always be attentive to reality. I suppose that the Brothers who are now involved in the Ad Gentes mission in Asia are living in situations like those which the first missionary Brothers encountered in all our Provinces.

This house which has welcomed so many missionary Brothers and so many Brazilian vocations is occupied today by representatives from the entire Marist world. In the name of Brothers Tercílio Sevegnani, Provincial of the Brasil Centro-Sul Province, Brother Lauro Hochscheidt, Provincial of Rio Grande do Sul Province, and Brother João Gutemberg, Superior of the Amazonia District, it is my pleasure to welcome every single participant, Brothers and lay persons, men and women. This house is your house; feel at home in it and enjoy the Marist richness contained in it. Even if cannot offer you all the conveniences you might like, the house embraces you warmly. I hope that the days you spend here will be marked by growth both communally and religiously.

You can be sure that all our Brazilian communities and the entire Marist world have their eyes turned towards Mendes, and that they are praying to Mary and to Saint Marcellin so that from this place there may arise a new life and a renewed missionary fervor.

When the Hebrews were caught between Pharaoh’s army and the Red Sea, the Lord spoke to Moses to encourage him saying, “Tell the Israelites to go forward” (Exodus 14:15). Perhaps that is the directive which the Lord is addressing to us today: Let us go forward!

A hearty welcome to all of you. May Mary, our Good Mother, bless our International Assembly on Marist Mission.

Br. Claudino Falchetto, fms
Provincial anfitrion
Practical organisation of the Assembly

A warm greeting by some lively clowns, who used the four official languages of the Institute as they went among the participants to welcome them, inaugurated the first meeting of September 3rd. They themselves presented the translators who, in turn, gave instructions to all those attending on how to use the translation system correctly. They also introduced the members of the technical team.

Welcome by our host, the Brother Provincial

This happy group of clowns, composed of brothers and Marist students, was in charge of bringing Brother Claudino Falquetto, Provincial of the Province of Brazil Centro Norte to the presidential table, from which he chaired the Assembly. Brother Claudino, in his greeting of welcome to all of the brothers and lay people, recalled the difficult origins of Marist work in Brazil, when Brother Adorátor bought the property at Mendes where this Assembly is being held. He also welcomed everyone in the name of his province and of the other provincials of Brazil.
It is a wonderful privilege to be here today and on behalf of the Preparatory Commission, following in Br Emili’s footsteps and those who have come before him this morning, I also extend to you a warm welcome to this very first International Assembly on Mission.

At the end of our very first meeting in December 2004, as I began my long plane journey home from Rome to Australia it dawned on me that this Assembly needed to be a defining moment in our Institute’s history. I was nervous, excited and daunted by the possibility of what this could be. As a Preparatory Commission, we had accepted the invitation by the Superior General Br. Seán Sammon and his General Council to plan, implement and bring to fruition the call of the 20th General Chapter. All of us here today are testimony to answering that call and not only do I welcome you but I thank you for coming. You have put on hold your personal lives, families and work, but we have been chosen to be here for the good of the future of our Institute.

For the Preparatory Commission and perhaps for you too, the journey has been, both and at the same time, invigorating and challenging. After that first meeting, the only thing that seemed certain to me was that this was indeed an ambitious project with many obstacles to overcome. At first glance we were only too aware of the difficulties with distance, language, cultural expressions, time and cost because
we were being asked to find creative ways to animate thousands of people at our local levels; to discuss issues to do with our current mission; co-responsibility in that mission and renewal of it. In these initial phases, the challenge came in ensuring that as many Marist as possible had a voice in these discernments. Above all, we needed and thankfully received the cooperation of the Provincials, Provinces and Districts.

Secondly, was the question of bringing together five continents and working in only four of our many languages and diverse cultures.

Thirdly, after we had a sense of the potency of the material that was surfacing from around the world – we began to think about the format of the Assembly itself and how we might maintain the programme for 10 days. As we shared our local stories, the Commission began to notice world wide trends that affect our youth today. While the contexts are quite varied and responses unique, it was obvious to the Preparatory Commission that we shared similar concerns and the same strong love for our children.

During the final stages of the Commission’s planning, we revisited our initial goals to ensure that the Assembly's programme was on track with our original meeting. I would like now to take a few moments to focus us all on those initial goals before we proceed with the Assembly proper.

In 2004 when we first began to shape this Assembly, the responsibility of this ambitious project did not escape us but we were united in our belief that the conversations that were to follow, had to be had, with audacity and with hope in our future.

Further, during those moments of tension and impatience that comes when organising such a large event, Br Emilii’s excellent leadership encouraged us to be calm in the tension, to be patient in the finding of the solutions and above all to trust in the work of the Holy Spirit to lead the way.

My God!
The meeting hectic and very challenging.
I am privileged to have attended this important global meeting.
I pray that God enable me to bear expected fruits henceforth be a model to others, especially those whom I have represented.
Jesus is to show me the way.
May Jesus show me the way.

Julius Atete Waritu, East-Central Africa
On behalf of the Preparatory Commission I would like to publicly acknowledge the gift of Br Emili’s leadership to this Assembly. Of course, such an event has an army of behind the scenes workers and while they will be acknowledged in due course, on behalf of us all, I would also like to express our thanks and appreciation, to Br Juan Miguel Anaya and Br Wagner Cruz for their administrative and organisational brilliance and for all those who worked at getting us to this point. No doubt, you would have noticed the great attention paid to detail to ensure that we would feel welcomed and at home from the first moment of our arrival. From the outset, can we please acknowledge the great spirit of hospitality we have already received here in Mendes.

I am sure we have all felt, the spirit working among us already ensuring that our open and compassionate hearts and our strong minds will lead our work over the next ten days. I speak for the Preparatory Commission when I say that we have found it a privilege and a blessing to be involved in this work to date, have better understood the blessings of our Marist world and in the process have become good friends and appreciative of the role we play in our different parts of the world. We hope the same and more for you, as you engage, contribute and take ownership of this historical and defining moment in our Marist History.
**Brother Seán opens the Assembly**

Brother Seán Sammon opened the Assembly with an interesting reflection. Champagnat, besides having an old house, two candidates and empty pockets, had a dream when he began the Institute. And that dream has continued growing to this day. We Marists are in 76 countries with 4,100 brothers, more than 40,000 laypeople who touch the lives of more than 500,000 students.
So well appreciated was this woman of faith among the people of New York that the New York Times headline had only to say: “Sister Mary Irene is dead.” Everyone understood.1 Mary Irene Fitzgibbon established the Foundling Asylum, later known as the New York Foundling Hospital. At any one time, this institution housed an average of 600 women and 1800 infants, and by the time its founder died, was the only facility of its kind in New York City that guaranteed care for all women and children who arrived at its doors regardless of religion, race or ethnicity, marital status or ability to pay. Why tell the story of Mary Irene Fitzgibbon at the outset of this long awaited Marist Mission Assembly? Is it because of the strong and unequivocal challenge that she and her partners in mission posed to those who punished the poor for their poverty and unmarried women for sexual transgressions? Or perhaps because her efforts remind us once again that genuine Church ministry has always been about self-transcendence and not self-fulfillment? Or do I tell her story because she had some special gift that marks religious leaders regardless of the age in which they live?

No, I tell her tale for reasons altogether different. I tell it because her life and death have lessons to teach us about mission and ministry, and Marist mission and ministry in particular. I recount the story of this Sister of Charity because she understood that charism has nothing to do with management and maintenance and everything to do with mission.

I tell it because she responded to the signs of her times with daring, courage, and ingenuity. She did not concern herself with doing things right, rather from the very beginning she set out to do the right things.

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**A word of welcome and a word of thanks**

As we begin, a word of welcome and another of thanks. Welcome to Brazil, to Mendez and this Mission Assembly, to this community of faith. Each of you had at least a few other ways in which to spend these days, and so we are all delighted that you chose to spend them here and that we can do so together.

The Planning Commission has asked me to make a few brief remarks this morning about our Assembly and its focus. These comments are not meant to be the last word nor the defining word about the subject, but simply the words of one person joined with those spoken over many months by other Marists involved in the Church’s mission throughout the world.

A great deal of effort has gone into preparing for this Assembly, not only here in Brazil but throughout the Institute. Brothers and Marist laymen and women have joined efforts in region after region, country after country, Province and District after Province and District to ensure that these days not only give us an opportunity to reflect honestly on the state of Marist Mission in our world today but also to take some time to dream. For if Marcellin Champagnat was anything, he was a dreamer, and a very particular type of dreamer: one who also had the courage and heart to bring his dreams to life.

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Joseph Chua, China
This morning, I want to say a word about charism, another about co-responsibility, and a final one about the challenge we face in being religious leaders today.

Charism

The life of Francis of Assisi, that great saint of the 13th century, teaches us something about the meaning of that most misunderstood word: charism. Some use it to describe a particular type of personality or a movement, while others insist that it refers to certain works thought to be in keeping with the founder’s original vision. It’s meaning, though, is considerably more profound.

Though he was a preacher of some reputation, Francis did not always deliver his sermons from the pulpit of a Church nor did he continually rely on words to make his point. Rather, he preached the gospel in everything he did. In his attention to the poor of his day, his delight in God’s creation, his gentle teasing about simple human failings. Simply put, Francis radiated the Good News of Jesus Christ. “Preach the gospel without ceasing,” he is reported to have said, “but use words only if necessary.”

Call it Franciscan charism, call it what you will, Francis was infected with the Holy Spirit. And that quite simply is what charism is all about: nothing more and nothing less than the presence of the Holy Spirit. Marcellin Champagnat understood that fact and allowed the Holy Spirit to seize him. How else would he have had the courage to launch the Marist movement?

For if we were to be honest, the founder had little more than an old house, two recruits, and no money when he began. But he had a dream. And that dream has grown today to have a presence in seventy six countries, to involve 4100 brothers and more than 40,000 laymen and women and touch the lives of more than 500,000 young people each year.

But do you and I really believe that the Spirit of God who was so active in Marcellin Champagnat longs to live and breathe in us today?

In embracing the charism we allow the Holy Spirit to take the lead and we must also accept the consequences of our action. For the Holy Spirit can accomplish a great deal in a very brief period of time. Vatican II is a good example of that fact.

Marist Laity and Mission

Vatican II was a defining moment for Roman Catholic laity as well as for those of us in religious life. For prior to that historic gathering the Church resembled something of a pyramid. Within this structure, priesthood was seen as the highest calling. Religious life was fitted in at the second tier, while laymen and women, who made up the vast majority of the Church’s membership, found themselves at the base of the pyramid. They were viewed almost entirely as helpers to those considered to be the Church’s true servants: bishops, priests, and religious.

My how times have changed! The proclamation of a universal call to holiness that rang forth from the Council was addressed to everyone in the Church. Here at last was an unambiguous statement that all Christians are baptized into mission: the mission of proclaiming God’s Kingdom and its immanence. Herein lies the heart and ori-
The Assembly was a historic occasion to the each one of us and the entire congregation. The coming together of lay people and Brothers from different walks of life is a great achievement. This can only be attributed to the work of the Spirit. Today more than ever before, we live in a different world altogether with new challenges and together with the lay partners we therefore need to have a new shared vision in assisting the young people more meaningfully. During the assembly different opinions were raised from Brothers and laypeople on how to tackle some problems of our young people. We hope with the different ideas we got we will be able to take new initiatives and assist our young people. The different talents and experiences of lay people and brothers will make our congregation richer. The Marist responses from different parts of the world were an eye opener that it is high time we widen the tent for the laity to come in and together work for the Kingdom and this partnership. Working for the Kingdom of God can never be seen as an individual’s work but rather as a congregation we have a collective mandate to bring the Kingdom of God here and now. I am hopeful that this partnership will be realized simply because it is a call from the Church. More than before, I am more and more convinced that the lay people are also inspired and they have a vocation and together as one will tackle to a certain extent the needs of our young people in our respective region. The lay people were inspired during the assembly. This was very evident by their depth in sharing how they have lived Marcellin Champagnat’s charism in their different settings. I am hopeful that everyone in the Institute will be open to the Spirit and lay people and Brothers will experience a new Pentecost.

Br. Emmanuel Mwanalirenji, Southern Africa
pening today and taking up works that are better done by others.

For religious life at its best is meant to be the Church’s living memory of what the Church longs to be, of what it can be, of what it must be. But religious life can only fulfill that role if it stands somewhat apart from the Church, on the periphery and not at the center.

Religious life is diminishing in parts of our world today because it is failing to be what it was meant to be. For men and women religious profess publically to live radically the gospel plan as the reason a purpose of their life. And that means a life that has its foundation in prayer and a spirit of faith, one that requires sacrifice and self-denial, a life in which Jesus Christ is clearly the center and passion of those professing to live it.

The late Pope John Paul II held the conviction that the Church of this era would eventually become known as that of the laity. Assuming that he was correct, we do well to ask ourselves how we as brothers can best help realize the mission of laymen and women in our Church and world today.

Marist partnership is but one answer to this question. Recognized more fully during the years since Vatican II, its foundation lies in the common mission and prophetic call that we all share as a result of the sacrament of baptism. Partnership, however, runs much deeper than participating in a common work; it is about the sharing of faith and a common set of values, being in love with Jesus Christ, and the collective experience of having Marcellin Champagnat capture our heart and seize our imagination.

Among the many gifts of Vatican II was this realization: the founder’s charism belongs to the Church and not just to his Little Brothers. Consequently, today many laymen and women challenge the notion that that charism is a treasure belonging to the brothers alone. Each and every Marist lay partner, they point out, also has his or her own life story to tell, has made his or her own journey of faith, and has his or her own unique experience of the founder and his spirituality. If we were to listen to those stories, hear these tales of faith, and come to appreciate more fully the many experiences of Marcellin and his spirituality among us, we would be better able to share what we hold in common and respect the differences that exist between the identity of one of Marcellin’s Little Brothers and that of a Marist layman or woman.

Co-responsibility

To foster lay partnership today we need to be brothers and sisters to one another in mission. And that means listening to and learning from one another, sharing our spiritual and apostolic inheritance, and fostering an attitude of cooperation.

Consequently, when we use the term “our” apostolates, we are describing a partnership between Marcellin’s brothers and Marist laity. The time has come for brothers to move beyond simply inviting lay people to join us in these
works to seeing them as co-responsible for them. Over the past few years and in a number of Provinces some laywomen and men have taken on roles of leadership within these works. Those of us who are brothers have been called upon to support them through Marist formation, the witness of our religious lives, and the promotion of Marist apostolic values. As we help the laity live more fully their call in life, we will come to understand ever more clearly the grace of our own vocation as brothers.

Religious leadership

Jesuit Howard Grey tells a story from his years as a young priest. Asked to give a retreat to an older Sister who was in the last stages of multiple sclerosis, he was unsure of what he might encounter. Upon meeting her, however, he found a woman who was witty, insightful, and without an ounce of self-pity. The retreat went well but its most important lesson did not come until the final day. When Grey went to say goodbye to this older Sister, she left him with these words, “Father, you are a young man and I am an old and dying woman, so we are both in the right position for some advice.

“When I was a young nun, I thought that it was important to give God my head, so I studied hard and won my way to the university and to doctoral studies. I saw scholarship as my way to God.

“But then after a few years my community had other needs. I was put into university administration and became the president of a college. Then I thought what God really wanted was my hands, my ability to accomplish great things for the college, to build up this institution.

“Now, here I am. I struggle to remember, and I cannot hold a glass of water. And so I realize as never before that what God has wanted all along was my heart. Give God your head and your hands, but bring your heart along with them.”

Why do I tell this story as I bring these remarks to a close? I tell it quite simply because your mission and mine, first and foremost, is a mission of the heart. The true challenge of Marist mission today is to become, with all its lack of precision and risk, a more loving man or woman. But we can achieve this goal only if we have come to know and to accept ourselves, with all our gifts, as well as our limitations and sin. Jesus was able to speak to the disappointed hearts of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus because his heart too had been opened, his faith tested, his hope challenged, and his love broken. Jesus knew firsthand that there could be no Emmaus without the cross.
Conclusion

One hundred years from now, someone will write the story of our time in history. What will they say about us? That like Mary Irene Fitzgibbon we responded to the signs of our times with courage, daring, ingenuity. That we took the risk of letting the Holy Spirit work in and through us, and consequently became more loving men and women, people capable of being heralds of God’s mercy and love? That we passed on to another generation the dream and passion of Marcellin Champagnat?

I cannot think of a better time to be alive, or a richer period in history to be part of this Marist movement. For if Marcellin was given the grace of bringing our Institute to life, we have been given the responsibility of bringing it to life once again. But we can only do so if the Spirit of God is alive and active within each of us.

If my years in Marist mission have taught me anything, they have taught me about my own limits as a person, my own sinfulness as a man, my ongoing need to be redeemed. These have been difficult learnings but important nonetheless. For they have convinced me how foolish it is not to let God take the lead. Our job is to discern His will and to follow His ways, no matter where they lead and despite the hardships of the journey.

Throughout it all, we must maintain hope and be heralds of this virtue to the poor young people we are called to serve. It was in this spirit that John Paul II ended his final visit to my country. Speaking to those assembled in Baltimore’s baseball stadium, the Pope concluded with words from the prophet Habakkuk. I use them here today to bring this reflection to a close:

*For the vision, it still has its time; it presses on to fulfillment.
If it delays, wait for it, for it will surely come.*

Thank you
Presentation of the General Council

Brother Emili Turú, coordinator of the Assembly Preparatory Commission introduced the members of the General Council and several brothers from the General Administration who are also in attendance: Bro. Juan Miguel Anaya, secretary of the Preparatory Commission, Bro. Antonio Martínez Estaún, Director of Communications for the Institute and Bro. César Henríquez, representative of BIS before the United Nations in Geneva, as well as the members of the Preparatory Commission.

Report of the Preparatory Commission

In the name of the Preparatory Commission. Mrs. Erica Pegorer described the journey taken by the Preparatory Commission from when it was given the task of organizing the Assembly until the present moment. She had words of gratitude for so many who participated in the preparatory steps; she also defined the objectives of this international meeting and manifested the hope of responding to the historical challenges that the Assembly has outlined. When she finished, Brother Seán Sammon gave the inaugural address.
Finally the logo of the Assembly was carried in by five people representing each of the five continents and placed in a prominent part of the hall. During their respective interventions to explain the significance of the logo “One Heart One Mission” they used the languages of each continent: “guaraní” for America; “cebuano” por Asia; “swahili” for Africa; “griego” for Europe “pidgi”, for Papua-New Guinea, for Oceanía.

The participants then sang the Assembly Hymn composed for the occasion by the Marist music group Kairoi. Brother Miquel Cubeles, with his usual great skill, ensured that in a few minutes everyone learned the music and the words, translated into various languages.
2. The Gift of Youth and the Marist Vocation
How give a voice, a soul, an enchantment and a feeling to the life stories of the “Montagnes” of our times, so that they can express, in their own way, their calls to the Marist world of lay people (men and women) and brothers, while at the same time respecting and seeking to understand the internationality of the Institute?

That was the question that challenged and gave direction to the boys and girls of the Unité Sociale of the Marist College Sao Vicente de Minas in the province of Brazil Central-North when they gathered to lend their voices to the gala “Voices of Hope”.

The focus of the gala “Voices of Hope”, presented at the opening of the International Assembly on Marist Mission, was the story of the children and young people of the whole world as told by the students of a Unité Sociale of the Marist province of Brazil central-North, who have raised their voices so that the participants of the Assembly could feel close to the “Montagnes” of our times.
The preparation of the students and the organisation of the gala was conceived and brought about by a group of very different persons who, with the care of a potter working on a ceramic, engaged the students as collaborators. It was necessary to give a life and a voice to the stories of other children and young people, to their calls, to people who had no knowledge of the internationality of the Institute and its founding charism.

It was necessary to take a number of steps, for example, workshops with students and teachers to speak of the Marist presence in the world, the context of the International Assembly on Marist Mission, especially of the preparatory stages and how each and everyone in his corner of the world where Marists are present were invited to participate in the preparation of the Assembly. It is important to note that among most of the stories of children and the young of such distant cultures and identities, there was a resemblance to the stories and life journeys of several of the students who raised their voices as
actors or actresses in the gala. For this reason, seeing themselves as characters in the gala and at the same time representatives passing on the calls of the Marists of the entire world for the Marists of the entire world was a challenge for all those involved in the production of “Voices of Hope”.

Throughout the whole time of preparation the internationality of the Institute was kept in view, and the complications that arose from this... Oceania, Africa, America, Europe and Asia. There were many questions and surprises for the students in the workshops and activities, but when, on arriving at Mendes on the day before the official presentation they had the opportunity to live with the participants of the Assembly participants, they were helped to broaden their horizons and discover the reality of what they had prepared and discussed beforehand. The reality that unfolded for them, different accents, ethnicities, appearances, languages, gestures, all this made clear the diversity of Marists and among Marists.

It is impossible to describe, as much as it might be possible, all that happened during the preparation of the gala, and above all, when the students were present at Mendes, particularly during the special moment of the presentation of “Voices of Hope”: the emotion, the shining eyes, the spell, the joys and fears, the empathy among all present, the changing rhythms of the jam bottles, a rhythm that went to the heart and stirred the soul, the feeling of ownership, of being Marist, the meaning of a tear, speaking slowly the very different languages in the Assembly, reflecting the Marist presence in the five continents, making real the dream of Champagnat to be present in all the dioceses of the world to make Jesus Christ known and loved by all children and young people.
"Lata viva", a young musical group

The strong motivating force of this day was played out by our own Marist students. It is what they do that can carry out the Marist mission in the world. For that reason the music group “Lata viva” brought to the Assembly the voice of the children of the world. The name of the group “Lata viva” originates from the musical instruments that they use. They accompany their musical work “Vozes da esperança” (Voices of Hope), prepared especially for the Assembly, with metal or plastic industrial type containers. To the rhythm of their instruments, a dance group acted out a choreography in which were depicted several true life stories of children in contact with Marists in all parts of the World, among songs and the pronouncements of the universal rights of the child.

The narration of the life stories of the children of the world, through the faces and voices of these children, brought before the eyes and especially to the hearts of the participants at the Assembly the most living of Marist mission today in the world as a good starting point to begin the work.
The day concluded with the celebration of Mass, in which the creed taken from the Marist educational document was recited:

We believe in the continuing relevance of his charism.
We believe in our shared mission as Marist educators.
We believe in our vocation to minister to all young people, with a special love for the poor and excluded.
We believe in our mission to lead young people to life-giving values, to build a better world, to make Jesus Christ known and loved.
We believe that, as Mary did for Jesus, to educate young people we must first love them, and love them equally.
We believe in the value of the integral education we offer in our schools.
We believe in the significance of our hopeful and creative presence among young people in all our places of ministry, especially among those most neglected.
The real situation of children, adolescents and young people in the world today
the international assembly listens to children and young people

This morning’s prayer was an invitation to open the doors of our heart and welcome the sadesses and joys of life. We started with a hymn accompanied by a simple choreography, performed by all the participants, as they repeated: “I open the doors of my heart. I submit myself, commit myself, accept and give thanks”.

Dilma Alves, a member of the preparatory commission, linked the presentation of the musical group Lata Viva, who told us of the sadness that afflicts children and young people of our world, with the reality that has been experienced by all of the members of the assembly as educators in touch with children and young people.

With our hearts prepared we are invited to contemplate the image of the faces of the boys and girls throughout the world, with the help of some pictures which remind each one of us of the children and young people of Marist educational works all over the world. By means of quotations taken from the document The Marist Educational Mission the assembly has been urged to express what these faces have meant for them.

Reflection in groups
The groups share the sentiments provoked by the boys and girls in their musical “Voices of hope”
and the experiences that each educator has had with young people in their places of work.
The cries of the young people remain engraved in the heart of every one of the participants just like the shouts, the questions and the interpretations of the children and young people of the Marist World: lack of opportunities, immigration, drugs, abandonment, need for affection, accompaniment, family crisis, absence of God... What can we do to heal the hearts and lives of som many children and young people?
The responses that the groups brought to the Assembly are expressed through some “graffiti”: “I need you”, “I want a chance”, “Oh, teachers, I exist!”, “I need you. I want to listen to you. I need you... I need your life to touch mine. Come with me! I need a model to keep as a reference point.” Songs have also been the method of manifesting these sentiments: “I cannot keep quiet, I cannot remain indifferent when faced with the sorrow of so many people. I cannot keep quiet. Pardon me, my friends, but now I must commit myself and I have to talk about reality.” Or this one: “We are going to build a new bridge between ourselves to join your heart to mine.”
The invitation is still open to leave our own house, to leave our accustomed structures to meet with the young people.

A reflection from the heart
During the afternoon the members of the assembly revisited the graphic designs and the symbols pre-
sented by the groups in the morning, together with the messages of the group Lata viva. A long period of silence allowed us to hear what God tells each one of us in our heart. This contemplative prayer centres our attention on three aspects: Action of grace for the boys, girls and adolescents and their capacities; the “dream of God” for the development of the boys, girls and adolescents; and, to take into account those needs
which we have not addressed as Marists.

"Who can understand the depth of sorrow in the paternal heart of God for the children we have rejected, for all the lives so deeply wounded? And for every light that we have extinguished, we have brought darkness to our land, to our nation, to our nation. Lord, have mercy!"

Gram. Kendrikc

The day ended in a celebration
The contemplative process helped us to bring a conclusion to the day in the Eucharist. Making use of each phrase, each song, each graphic, and each photo, quotation or bodily expression produced by the groups, a beautiful offering was set in place around the altar, a gift of the whole Assembly.
The aims of the day were:

1. To stimulate the imagination of the participants concerning the response Marists can give to the needs of children and young people in the world today.
2. To give the participants the chance to articulate and express the Marist charism.
3. To offer the participants an opportunity to listen to six experiences that stressed the “prophetic dimension” of the Marist commitment which is lived all around the world.
4. To promote sharing and dialogue among the participants, to help identify the distinctive features and values of these Marist response.
5. To offer a space for personal reflection on the identity of the Marist charism.
6. To open the hearts and minds of the participants to the international nature of the Institute.

To reach these aims, two sessions on the 5th were devoted to listening to some of these “Marist responses”, which were selected so that they would represent the different Continents, as well as different
forms of mission and presence. Another criterion for selecting the responses, was that at least one person should be present at the Assembly who personally knew and loved that experience, so that it would not be a tale of cold facts, but rather it would convey the passion and fire that burns in the heart of people who are committed to the Marist mission.

In the end 12 experiences were selected. The experiences were presented in two 90-minute blocks: six simultaneous presentations at the time. Each experience had thirty minutes available, so that every participant of the Assembly could listen to 6 different presentations.

All the contributions were prepared according to the following model:

- Each experience was prepared in one of the official languages of the Assembly: Spanish, French, English or Portuguese. Each was presented three times, once in the language of the person presenting it, and twice with simultaneous translation. There was no translation from Spanish to Portuguese and Portuguese to Spanish.

- Each experience had thirty minutes available in total: 10 or 15 for the presentation, 10 minutes for dialogue and 5 minutes for the preparation of the next group.

- The majority of the speakers prepared a power point presentation to accompany their spoken contribution.

- A booklet was prepared with the material sent beforehand, providing some basic information on each of the projects that were presented. That way the people had some information to choose the presentations they were most interested in, and they could carry away some written material at the end of the Assembly.

Since the representatives of Nigeria had several problems with their visas and they could not arrive on time to give the presentation on their experience, the Province of Sydney used the time to show what it has prepared to welcome the participants at the World Youth Day (2008), and its offer to organise a Marist Youth Festival a few days before. The day ended with a personal and group reflection on the experience. It was a chance to share group reactions and reflections concerning the Marist work with children and young people in our places of origin and throughout the world.

The summary of the sharing was given during the plenary assembly, using symbols (words, images, songs, plays...) that expressed the vitality of the Marist charism today.
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<tr>
<th>CONTINENT</th>
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Building the Dream of Champagnat
Learning the Marist answers

Today, the members of the Assembly reflected on the development of their own Marist life beside youth in different parts of the world and with quite varied expressions. For this, twelve experiences were presented. This mosaic of Marist experiences is the theme that fills the whole day. The richness of displays, especially those concerning testimonials and proposals, facilitate the exchange of personal experiences and intensely touch the mind and heart of those present.

An Open Forum to Listen to the Heartbeats of the Assembly

The day concluded with an open forum in which everyone could share with the others their ideas and feelings. What has been placed in common will be brought before the altar as an offering.

On the front wall of the room there is a large mural with a heart in the center. Since arriving the participants have been placing on this heart sentences, signs, expressions, and drawings that they gathered from the personal and group reflections. All of this will be carried to the altar as an offering.

Fine-tuning from the Brothers and Laity on Charism and Mission

Some testimony:

“Our charism is summed up in being brother or sister for the neediest and it is expressed in proximate compassion.”
This is what the children need. This offers many opportunities for our life.”
“I think of the Marist charism of today as a Light that shows open roads, like a meeting-place for Brothers and lay people and, finally, as a particular way of life. ”
“This Assembly is a source of water for the Institute. We cannot leave Mendes the same as we arrived... The conversion of the Brothers and lay people will come when we get close to the young people and children. To do this we have to be disciples of Marcellin; disciples, Brothers, lay men and women who open our hearts to these children and young people who expect so much from us. ”
“I feel the Marist charism as a call that unwraps me from my own reality and is concretized in the poor children that come to my school with whom I work as sons and daughters of God.”
“In the reflections that we made today we perceived that during these days the diversity is a great richness.”

To have participated in the Assembly was a grace. I was struck by the strong fraternal feelings with which Brothers and lay people shared their dreams and the reality of their lives. I was struck as well by the deep sense of unity in diversity. The many different ways in which various needs are being confronted helped us to sense the profound vitality of the Marist apostolate in the world, stimulating us to keep the work going and to advance it.

Maite Ballaz César, Ibérica
“To feel as participating in the Marist charism has to be coherent with the Gospel of Jesus. The charism asks of us courage, audacity, but above all love, great love of those who are closest to us and who wait for an answer.”

“Champagnat was a good priest. Still being himself, he went out into the streets of the village, made contact with the reality being lived by the people, which is how he met Montagne. He took risks, as a priest, to work at the margins of his parish. We are good Marists. I believe that, like Champagnat, we need to leave “our parishes” to be in the yards or in other realities of our pupils or of those who are not our pupils today, to listen and to give the responses which the heart of Marcellin desires for the young people of today”.

“In this Assembly one feels a great need for answers in our provinces. I come searching for answers in everything. But what I’m listening to in the Assembly are many questions. Our charism is a challenge and this challenge is summed up in some key words: real, strong and intense presence among the children, the young people and their families; community of brothers and laity, with a strong experience of spirituality, of fraternity, with a lot of tenderness and care for the other.”

“Champagnat was not afraid to confront an inspiration that came from the Spirit and it caused him to do something for others. We, laity and brothers, who must continue the mission of Champagnat, must look especially from the heart to the neediest, to the poor, in order to be faithful to his charism.”
To be a member of this first Marist Mission Assembly was indeed a privilege as we gathered from all around the world. Now it has ended I reflect on the presence of the Holy Spirit active in all facets. As a facilitator it was both challenging and rewarding working with people from five continents and four languages.

The early work of the assembly set the scene for a conclusion which was substantive. That people from diverse backgrounds could communicate easily with one another is testament to the founder and the Institute today. It was people journey to reach the goal which was so valuable. Lay and brothers alike shared openly of their experience as Marists.

As the assembly continued there was an exquisite sense of unity in mind and heart.

Facilitating was most challenging as time constraints forced conclusions to complex discussion. Heavy pressure was experienced as we met in tight timeframes, during breaks, before immediately going on to facilitate our groups.

The final preparation of the document for our ‘Partnership’ group was painful initially, as much disagreement was evident among the Spanish/Portuguese and English grouping, but painstaking work by a dedicated, small, composite group brought effective resolution. The end justified the means.

A highlight of the assembly was the sharing of language and culture from our Marist settings. As for the organisation, facilities and venue, they were excellent. Tireless support workers ensured the smooth running of the assembly and the local people generously served the delegates in various duties in a magnificent complex.

I leave grateful for the experience and inspired to go forward hopeful for the future of the Institute and confident that we have found One Heart, One Mission.

Alan Parker, New Zealand
We felt questioned by the Mission, but we had to approach this with an adequate basis for dialogue. It cannot be said to be a collective mission if someone does not call, if one is not summoned and sent. We have to return to the “rock” where we have been formed, from where arose the “living water” that makes Marist mission possible: God in Jesus, Mary, Marcellin, and so many brothers and lay Marists...

It was a day for returning to the source, a day for contemplating, allowing ourselves to be overtaken by wonder at the action of God in each one: His call, our doubts, our responses and our failures, His attentive accompaniment, our fidelity when compared with His fidelity and that of our witnesses along the way (“marvelous companions”). It was a case of looking again at our life, returning to our first love, the love matured through crises and consolations... it was a case of sharing, discerning, accompanying...

It was our “common Marist vocation” that brought us together, an expression that until the present time had been used only in regard to the broth-
ers. We had spoken of a common spirituality, a shared mission, even of a shared charism… Now we dared to speak even of a “common Marist vocation” and of “specific Marist vocations.”

A power point production helped us to find our place in this “newness” of the Spirit that surged in the Marist world and found expression in a number of convictions:

- The Marist charism of Champagnat belongs to the Church; it is not owned by the Marist brothers. Marist mission no longer belongs exclusively to the Institute.
- Today God continues to invite brothers and lay people to the Marist vocation.
- We share a common Marist vocation, lived in the depths of different specific vocations.
- The dignity and the vocation to holiness are the same for all life projects: celibate lay people, married lay people, sisters, brothers, priests…
- Brothers need lay Marists, and they in their turn need brothers to keep on creating anew the Marist charism and to discover both our common identity and our specific and complementary identities.
- “We are convinced that the Spirit of life has led us on this common path” (XXth General Chapter, 29). Let us allow ourselves to be led by the spirit!

The participants were asked to devote some personal time (an hour and a half) to reply to the following questions in a spirit of prayer:

1. What are the elements of the Marist vocation that God invites us to live in common today, whether we are brothers or lay people?
2. What are the elements that you consider specific or the most significant of your Marist vocation as lay Marist or brother?
3. What are the elements that you consider specific or the most significant...
of the vocation of the Marist brother or lay Marists that go to make up your own voca-
tion?

After this we formed ten groups according to language to share what we had each realised personally. Each group had to achieve a consensus on three elements of our common Marist vocation and three elements of our specific vocations as brother and lay people respectively.

The conclusions of these groups were displayed on three kinds of colour boards: common Marist vocation, Marist vocation of the brother, Marist vocation of the lay person.

For 45 minutes, in silence and against a musical background, the participants walked along the long corridors of Mended, reading and reflecting on the different reports of the each group, taking note of elements that were repeated most often, those that touched their hearts, those that spoke of something quite new... They took personal time to allow themselves to be questioned by what had been said in the groups. Those who had difficulty in understanding what had been written in a language other than their own were helped by other participants or by the interpreters.
A little later, all the participants gathered in a hall for an open forum. They were able to speak of their impressions of the work carried out either personally or in the groups, about that which they had come to agree upon, the general tendencies that were evident, their personal sentiments on the theme, etc. Finally, each one received nine hearts of the assembly logo: 3 indicating the common vocation, 3 the vocation of the lay person, and 3 that of the brother. They were invited to place a heart near the phrase or element of vocation that was considered most important, for the common or for the specific parts. All of this took place in an atmosphere of depth, calm, hope and interior satisfaction.

In silence, and carrying the cards full of red hearts – an expression of our love of our vocation – we went to the chapel to celebrate the Eucharist, the definitive Covenant of the love of God who has consecrated us all, brothers and lay alike.
When the heart is also asked questions sharing the common vocation

Bro. Paul Fornells gave the reason for this day: he began by recalling what had been the itinerary followed by the Assembly at Mendes until now. First of all, to allow oneself to be touched by the needs and possibilities of children and the young, and, secondly, to consider the Marist answers. Today the third step will be to stop before the very vocation of the Marist Brother and lay person.

Pau proposes to the members of the Assembly to review their own life, to return to the first love, to share the most profound and essential aspects of their own vocation by inviting them to silence, to contemplate God’s action in each person’s life. After this first time of personal reflection in silence, members share in groups and reflect so as to discover what is specific to the vocation of the Brothers, to the vocation of the lay persons, and what is common to both.

The results of this reflection, which lasted all afternoon, are displayed on various panels in which appear the characteristic elements of the Brothers’ vocation, the characteristic elements of the lay people’s vocation and on a third poster, the elements common to both. These were the results of this work after the synthesis:
### Results of the Common and Specific Vocational Elements Indicated by the 94 Participants (50 Lay People and 44 Brothers)

#### A Shared Marist Vocation:
- Attention to preference for the poor and excluded children and youth. .................................................. (60)
- Co-responsibility in the Marist mission. Brothers and Laity, heirs of the charism .................. (41)
- Marcellin as reference and inspiration ................................................................. (27)
- Brotherhood - Family spirit (Mary) ........................................................................ (25)
- Witness and apostles, like Mary. To make Jesus known and loved ...................... (23)
- Feel loved by God - Center our life on Jesus - Let oneself be led by the Spirit ............. (21)
- Marist spirituality. Devotion to Mary ................................................................. (15)
- Men and women with a passionate heart ............................................................ (14)

#### Lay Marists:
- To be a Marist presence and witness in the world .................................................. (42)
- A look at the Marist charism of everybody (from the point of view of women) ............ (40)
- Family and community engagement .................................................................... (30)
- Sense of belonging and various forms of adhesion ................................................. (27)
- Inspired by our charism ........................................................................................ (23)
- A sense of being called to be Christians as Marists ............................................. (21)
- Enthusiastic for the mission .................................................................................. (14)

#### A Marist Brother:
- The heart of the life of Marist Brothers is the vows .............................................. (7)
- Being a Brother for everyone: present, listening, welcoming in order to personalize my love ................................................................. (57)
- Community Life .................................................................................................. (49)
- Radical and unconditional availability for mission .............................................. (39)
- Special responsibility for the charism .................................................................. (16)
“We feel called to deepen our specific identity as Brothers and lay people as desired by the General Chapter.”

“This has been a day full of emotion. A path has been opened for Brothers and lay people which cannot be retraced. How do we take this road together? Because in my Province there is an important lay movement and it is supported by many Brothers, but there are also those who do not share this journey. What can be done in this situation if the lay people cannot go backwards?”

“One of the words we repeated in our group is the one to be prophets and to present our mission with prophetic courage.”

“In the mission we share women are something new, and this is a call for the Institute to evaluate the feminine presence in the Institute. Not only look upon us as women, but that the feminine presence be in leading roles. Thus, we have much to offer.”

“It is no longer a matter of enlarging the tent; now the challenge is to build a new house with Brothers and lay people.”

“Symbolic expressions are very important. In the General Chapter the door opened and a group of lay people entered while the Brothers capitulants applauded their presence at that meeting. In the Institute there were many closed doors; situations or attitudes that at the time seemed impossible to open up. Little by little many of those doors have continued to open. Here today we also open a very powerful symbolic door. The single fact of being here brings consequences for the Institute that we cannot foresee. Today is a day of happiness because the Institute has taken a step whose consequences cannot be foreseen.”

“We feel that the Brothers have widened the tent.”

“God is renewing everything. He is renewing our families. The spirit is putting a stamp on us. And following Mary’s example we will say yes. It is up to us to say yes to the lay people. The door is open. What happens now depends on us. The mission ad gentes in Asia is ours. It is also our responsibility to decide to serve the poorest. It is also our decision to give life, like Champagnat, to evangelism through education. We should only say yes, like Mary.”
The contributions of the open forum created an atmosphere of celebration highlighted by the chant of the Magnificat and pursued in the Eucharist. After the readings a central idea of the reflection of the day was expressed with a mime. A group of actors represented the lay people on one hand. Another group, in turn, performed as the Brothers. At a certain point they realised that it was better to act together and decided to create a single group which finished by washing each others feet.
This international Assembly was the start of a new epoch in the life of our Institut. I hope that the experiences there will help us to deepen and strengthen our partnership and to make important steps forward in this area.

The way in which this Assembly has expressed partnership has been particularly encouraging to me.

One sensed openness, enthusiasm, realism about the present and hope for the future, a future of partnership and the further building of our common vocation. In simplicity, modesty and humility, we continue to follow in the footsteps of Mary and Marcellin Champagnat in order to reach Jesus together.

The three steps to dream about the future in listening to young people, learning about marist responses and sharing our vocation was a good method to implicate our dreams to take the mission forward.

A presentation of young Brasilian boys and girls helped us to listen to young people and the irreality. In the presentations of the marist responses I had the opportunity to extend my horizons about the worldwide presence of the brothers and the difficulties but also the courage of some brothers in some parts of the world.

The reflection and discovering about the vocation of brothers and laity helped us to think about our own vocation and what is common to both.

The prayers, Eucharists and the work in groups were a large source for our work during these days.

It was a wonderful and hopeful experience and a good opportunity to meet old friends again. I felt honoured to be chosen as a lay Marist to represent our Province in Mendes.
3. **Dreaming the future that God wants for us**
June 2008 • 71

**Mandalas:**

**The sacred circle and the dreams of God for the Marist Institute**

**Mendes, 7th September 2007**

**Mércia Procópio, Brazil**

I spent a few anxious days after receiving Brother Wagner and Dilma’s invitation, on behalf of the Preparatory Commission, to lead a workshop for the Assembly of Mendes using mandalas as a resource. Undoubtedly, it was a historical moment for the Marist Institute: The International Assembly of Marist Mission. An unheard of meeting in which the Brothers, lay men and women of the five continents, with their rich and varied culture and ways of living the charism, would meet to pray, to share their life, to meditate and to dream about the future of the Institute.

It was necessary, then, for the workshop to facilitate for everyone the freedom to participate and encourage a profound listening to the heart of each man or woman gathered there and particularly to facilitate openness to the voice of the Spirit, so that they could be prophets of God for the Institute, in the current context of humanity. It was, therefore, about dreaming God’s dream and not each one’s human dream.

The proposed challenge was, in the first place, to allow ourselves to be touched by the Spirit of God and to be inspired by the dream of Marcellin:
to make Jesus Christ known and loved by the children and young people, encouraging a climate that would facilitate the representation of those new utopias. That is to say, that the workshop should totally preserve our founder’s charism, should facilitate a reading of our world, so marked by profound contradictions, and provide openness to new dreams and new mission frontiers.

In this way, the experience of collectively building mandalas (which in Sanskrit means sacred circle) in the Assembly was inspired by the expression: “We dream new dreams”, from “Water from the rock.” I found that the expressions “dreaming the dream that God wants for us,” coined by the organizers of the Assembly, “dreaming new dreams” and “we see new visions” (“Water from the Rock”) indicated a way for the workshop on the mandalas which are developed with a symbolic language, free from rationality, that gives rise to new intuitions and inspirations and facilitates new forms of expression.

The workshop was developed from a number of experiences shared by the animators of the groups so that they could contribute to a clearer realization of the proposal previously put forward and giving them greater assurance in conducting the groups.

**Construction of small mandalas**

At the start of the workshop, the delegates, forming a circle, were invited to contemplate the atmosphere, carefully prepared by the atmosphere team: the image of Champagnat reposed on a large mandala decorated with multi-coloured cloths flanked by two white mandalas, while at the same time a sequence of floral mandalas were projected on to the screen. In this way, aided by slow and deep breathing, they were able to open new channels of perception of reality.

That exercise was followed by a second viewing which combined the representation of floral mandalas with scenes of children, young people and adolescents of diverse ethnic and cultural origins, captured in the most diverse circumstances of life: poverty, abandonment, child prostitution, wars, etc. With these images, the Assembly was asked some serious questions: “Which is the call that God directs to us?” and “where is today’s Montagne?” Next they were invited to form small groups to represent with simple mandalas the dreams of God for the future of the Institute.

It is important to point out that for the construction of the group mandalas, they had first to determine the centre of the mandala, that is to
say, the central element on which the Marist Mission is based, since the centre represents the essential element starting from which all the other elements harmonize. Methodologically it was important to begin by building the centre of the mandala as representing the centre of the Marist Mission so that we could sum up in a concrete way the dreams that arose from that centre. Provided with paintbrushes, coloured paper, ink, coloured pencils, the Brothers and lay people devoted themselves with fraternal joy to the construction of mandalas representative of the inspirations that each one had received by listening to the Spirit of God and the challenges and calls of the Marist Mission. Once these dreams and calls had been represented they were shared with everyone and reverently offered in the celebration of the evening Eucharist.

Construction of the large mandala

Starting with the small mandalas from each group, the Assembly was invited to build a large mandala that summarised the collective dream. To do this, during the construction of the group mandala they received a part of a large mandala with five bases, purposely chosen with these characteristics to represent the Marist presence in the five continents.

This part of the process required discernment of the inspirations of God for the Marist Institute. A time to listen humbly and attentively to the heart of each one of those present, listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit, of open and honest dialogue following these times of listening and choices that truly revealed what God wishes for our Institute, starting from the calls, which are sometimes dramatic, of the children, adolescents and young people and of the new frontiers of Mission.

A challenge also to truly and courageously affirm what is the centre of the Marist Mission, which is the first and only reason for the Institute and to unveil the future so that “like Marcellin seeking out the poor Montagnes of his day, we endeavour to become effective Marist educators of faith today (...) moving towards unexplored horizons “ (“Water from the Rock” 155). In that climate of strict spiritual discernment, the large mandala, having Jesus Christ at its centre, reveals the great divine utopia to us.

Brother Guilherme, with Eder, João Carlos, Mauri, Kênia and I, were affectionately called “The mandala team” by the Preparatory Commission For us it was a source of great satisfaction to have this trust placed in our hands and to know with certainty that our people have been an instrument of Mary who leads the Institute and takes care, with maternal love, of each little brother and each little sister of Champagnat.
A mandala to share the implications

The implications of the dreams of the brothers and lay members

The morning prayer today (7 September) was animated by the brothers and lay members from Australia who were inspired by the traditions and the cosmological vision of the aboriginal people of their country, who live in communion with nature.

They began with an account from Alice Springs, an Australian town where there is a Marist school. There the mythology that explains the origin of the world for the aboriginal people is passed on from generation to generation. The mythology tells how two great caterpillars, who arrive by different routes, meet in a great cave. The rivalry soon becomes clear, but at that very moment a huge dog appears and acts as a mediator between them. In this way a dialogue is established and the caterpillars little by little become friends, and they remain together there, giving birth to the mountains and valleys of the region. Ever since that time aboriginal people honour mother earth with great respect.

In the midst of an incomparable part of nature which surrounds the house of Mendes, the members of the assembly have been able to place themselves in harmony with the Lord who made the heavens and the earth and it is in him that we live, move and exist.
Working with the mandala

The Assembly made an analysis of the implications of the dreams that had been shared by the brothers and the lay members. Mercier Procopier, who works at UMBRASIL, explained that a mandala is a symbol that symbolises a “sacred circle” and engaged the participants in an active way in explaining the subject. Many people use the mandala to establish an intuitive relationship between humankind and the universe.

In the assembly this aid for reflection was used to establish a relation between the hearts of the brothers and the lay people and the future of the Institute and its mission. The mandalas can be constructed with the most varied materials organized around a central point. Inside the circle there are an infinity of elements, but the fundamental elements making up a mandala are colour and geometric form. The members of the Assembly have carried out a prior exercise to get to know the technique for this reflection instrument and to be able to apply the whole of tomorrow to constructing the mandala that symbolizes the implications of the dreams that have been shared in the Assembly during this time.

The experiences of the groups in this first exercise have been amazing.
Like all new techniques this one aroused some curiosity, in an atmosphere of joy and high spirits, but at the same time a certain suspicion.

Equipped with brushes, scissors, glue, paper and so on, the members of the Assembly sat on the floor...
like primary school students and began to design, paint, cut, paste... This graphic expression was the way in which the intuitions of the various groups were conveyed to the other members of the Assembly.

The mandala provided a means of moving from the discussion of concepts to the expression of intuitions.

This first exercise started defining the ideas that surfaced during the days before, concerning the implications of the dreams which the Brothers and lay people have brought to this international assembly.
4. The dream of the Brothers and Laity
As representatives of each Province and District in the Marist world we, Brothers and Lay people, gathered in Mendes, Brazil, for the first Marist International Mission Assembly. We listened to God, to the voice of children and to one another; we spoke from our hearts of our desire to work together to shape our dreams. At the centre of these dreams Jesus reveals himself as the son of Mary and as the Risen Lord.

We heard the strong voice of Jesus revealing himself to us at the centre of our mission: listen to your heart; listen to the voice within. This is the centre; this is Jesus.

Jesus is in the heart of each individual who feels the call and responds. We find Him among us in our communities. Filled with His love we have a burning desire that unites us with a passion to serve and proclaim the Kingdom. We have all heard this call to holiness. Just as St. Marcellin responded to this call, we too follow Christ as Mary did. We have been captured by the powerful image of Mary bringing Jesus to life, calling us also to bring Jesus to life with motherly tenderness.

Within us are the eyes and ears, the feet and hands, the heart of Jesus. We see Him in the eyes of children, in the faces of the young people we are caring for in our educational and social works and we hear his voice in the cry of those whom we are yet to meet (Mt 25: 34-40).

Christ the Redeemer, from the Corcovado, with arms extended, sends us to embrace children and young people in all the dioceses of the world as Marcellin dreamt.

With Jesus at the centre of our dream and with the image of Champagnat holding Jean Baptiste Montagne, we imagine a future integrating the following five elements:
1. **Revolution of the Heart:**

**Open to the Breath of the Spirit**

As Marists, we are called to passionately centre our lives on Jesus Christ, developing a spirituality of discipleship. Inspired by Mary, we encounter God in that privileged space where we live our lives with children and young people.

As apostles of the 21st century, we are always searching for new ways to achieve our mission. Our educational and social ministries, and insertion communities are all sacred spaces for conversion. Joined with children and young people, we hear the call of God, and through this we come to know their needs. We are challenged to centre our spirituality in evangelizing, liberating and prophetic action being sure to respect our different cultures. We need to ensure that our mission is shaped and informed by our rich spiritual heritage, and this will require transformational experiences that enhance our different yet complimentary vocations as Lay Marists and Brothers.

In order to develop this spirituality, we believe that the following points are necessary:

1. Particular and combined formation of Brothers and Lay people at provincial, regional and international levels.

2. The development of new resources and sharing of existing ones to support formation programs and activities, particularly in areas of the Institute most in need.

3. The study of our Marist spiritual heritage, particularly through the documents of the Institute and the Church.

4. The promotion of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue.

5. Personal accompaniment and vocational discernment for Brothers and Lay people.

6. In addition to existing groups and opportunities (e.g. Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family, fraternities), the creation of new areas of participation to promote our Marist way of bringing the Gospel of Jesus to life, with a sense of partnership.
2. **Champagnat Marists in Partnership**

As Champagnat Marists, we believe that God is calling us now to be partners, men and women, co-responsible for furthering the mission in a spirit of trust, understanding and mutual respect.

**Vocation**

1. We believe that God calls brothers and lay people in different ways to share and follow the charism of Marcellin, according to their personal call in life.

2. We feel called to promote a new shared Marist vocational ministry and a combined formation, to deepen both our common and specific vocations.

3. We wish to promote forms of association and ways of belonging to the Marist charism, so lay and brothers may hear the call to live their identity.

4. We need to articulate the vision for lay Marist vocation and its organizational structure.

**Mission**

1. We are called to work together in radical ways to announce God’s Kingdom to children and young people, especially the marginalised, promoting opportunity for:

   - sharing life
   - developing different ways of community life
   - discernment
   - management
   - decision making

2. New structures and processes need to be created that emphasise our co-responsibility, respecting the diversity, tradition and customs of each others cultures.
3. To be partners in mission we need to make decisions together, creating ways for representation at Provincial, Regional and General Administration levels.

4. International communication systems (ITC) need to be established, in order to build unity, and be informed of different experiences of shared mission, new projects and networks.

3. **Marist Presence in Evangelisation**

As Marist Brothers and Lay Marists in partnership we affirm that evangelisation is the focus and priority of our ministries.

Each ministry proclaims Jesus and his message. Therefore we feel called by God to be courageous in:

1. Evangelising through integrating faith and life, and promoting dialogue with different cultures and religions.

2. Understanding and learning from the youth culture and applying contemporary content and processes which draw upon their life experiences, in order to liberate and empower.

3. Committing to our own formation in the education for transformation of youth and families to live and proclaim the Gospel as agents of change.

4. Promoting human and Christian values for social transformation and renewing our works to make them more evangelically fruitful.

5. Immersing ourselves at every opportunity with the poor and the marginalised.

6. Being a leaven within a participative, evangelical, prophetic, fraternal, welcoming Church, desiring to develop and share its Marian character.

7. Creating Marist communities of life that visibly and effectively evangelise through their family spirit and commitment to mission.
4. **MARIST EDUCATION: NEW CHALLENGES**

We recognize “In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat” as a referential document, necessary to our educational mission. We are grateful for the dedication of all those who have worked as Marists throughout our history. Their testimony inspires us to respond to the needs of children and young people with creative fidelity to the call of God.

At this moment we want to emphasize particularly the right to education: an education that evangelizes, an education committed to solidarity and to social transformation, respectful of cultures and of environment, and a non-discriminatory education that creates a place for those who do not have it.

We feel the call of God:

1. To complete the Evaluation of Works throughout the Institute, in the spirit of evangelization and in the “Evangelical Use of Goods”.

2. To transform our educational works so that we, Brothers and Lay people, will guide children and youth in such a way that they become people committed to the construction of a society of justice and solidarity for all.

3. To go, in significant numbers, to those places where excluded people live, providing educational opportunities to children and youth, where their right to education is not respected.

4. To promote intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, with respect, mutual enrichment and from a relationship of equality between cultures and religions.

5. To develop a new way to education through Marist networks, at local and international levels, and with other governmental, civil and ecclesial organizations.
5. Advocacy for the Rights of Children and Young People: Empowering the Voiceless

We believe that God is calling us to be a strong and prophetic voice for the defense and promotion of the rights of children and young people. This requires that:

1. We guarantee that principles of Catholic Social Teaching guide our work (structures, policies and behaviors).

2. We promote Human Rights in a critical and integrated Marist education, marked by solidarity and inspired by the Gospel in all our institutions and social projects.

3. With courage, we denounce social, economic, political, cultural and religious structures that oppress children and young people.

4. We witness our advocacy for the rights with our lives on the personal, community and institutional levels.

5. We open our hearts to the call of children and young people in our world and promote a strong Marist presence in the poorest regions, accompanying the least favored.

6. We provide opportunities for those whom we serve, to share and participate in the decision making process and invite children and young people to become strong leaders in this area.

7. We create or strengthen Marist networks for collaboration and communication, being respectful of civil society, the legislature, governments and Church institutions at the local, national and international levels.

Mendes, 12/09/2007
THE ASSEMBLY BEGINS TO DEFINE THE FUTURE
New roads for brothers and laity

Today, the 8th of September, feast of the Nativity of Mary, began with a very special greeting to Mary. For many of the brothers throughout the Institute the feast of the birth of Mary is the anniversary of their taking of the habit, of their first profession or of their perpetual profession. Some of the Brothers showed a list of how long the Lord had let them live in his house.

The morning prayer was done outside, like yesterday, following the rhythm marked by music and all joined hands. The experience was repeated later before beginning the work of the Assembly.

It has been the experience of knowing God, of knowing my own body, seeing it in a very positive way and asking the Lord to help me to use it well to help others, in favour of all the others. Those who were at my side never let me go. Having my hands tied to those beside me helped me to realise that I was in contact with others. I walked with my eyes closed because I felt the support of others who took me by the hand. It was an experience of constant praise of God. I felt very good.

“I like music and dance very much, so I soon closed my eyes and started to dance. With my eyes closed I experienced a lot of peace, a lot of happiness; I enjoyed being carried
along by the music, I had a good time, I felt happy, I was conscious of all my past, all my life, my dreams, my family, my friends. At one point I lost concentration and I stepped on the partner beside me. I remembered the times in my life when I harmed other people or offended them. But that backward step did not discourage me, but rather I experienced hope with the two steps forward that the music asked of me. And I was filled with peace.”

The work of the mandala is long and fulfilling

The work of constructing the mandala is the great work of this Assembly. The methodological means is bringing the participants from synthesis to synthesis toward a convergence of thought. But firstly it is necessary to feel and think before the whole Assembly to get to know oneself and to be able to share. The preparatory commission proposes a double performance guideline to discover the story that there is behind the mandala that was built in yesterday’s groups to connect it to today’s work.

Yesterday, when the mandala was finally constructed each group was asked to put forward the idea which, according to them, ought to constitute the centre of the collective mandala which would be built today. This has been the first step of the morning.

There has been a great coincidence with different accents: they have
spoken of Jesus and of Montagne. Not just any Jesus, but Jesus of Nazareth, the historical Jesus, Jesus the liberator, Jesus of the Beatitudes, who sends his Spirit and gives us the strength for the mission. Others have highlighted that Jesus is our passion.

In the second work, equally long, the participants tried to complete the center of the mandala answering this question: To what is the Lord calling us? It’s a matter of discovering the grand directions that will mark the future of the Marists.

All of the collective effort ended, as every day, in the afternoon Eucharistic celebration where the richness that the Lord has shown in the life of this Assembly was celebrated.
The first approach to the conclusions of the assembly

After a break at Rio de Janeiro the organising commission put forward a practical rhythm of work. The earlier elaboration of the mandala had been of great use in helping everyone greater mutual understanding and communication, as well as putting in place what they had brought from their places of origin. During the reflection, carried out using the mandala, little by little the basic topics appeared and we all had the chance to express our own thoughts. Today is the day.

Five fundamental pillars

The members of the commission did not go on the trip to Rio de Janeiro. For the whole of Sunday they were gathered together to programme the works of the Assembly. Some of the participants missed the presence of their companions during that day of rest.

The Commission named five major points that had been repeated time and time again in interventions during the preceding days:

1. Spirituality and conversion.
2. New relationships between the brothers and lay people.
3. Education for all.
4. Defending the rights of children and young people.

5. The evangelisation of children and young people.

There was a change from earlier days in the method of reporting. Today, all of the participants had the opportunity to express in writing their ideas and feelings on these five subjects. In five separate rooms the walls were covered with paper on which everyone could write reactions to each subject, and these were put together immediately by two secretaries.

After that the work was taken up in the language groups. Each of the subjects proposed was assigned to two groups of different languages for them to make separate syntheses of the material from the walls, and then to establish a common
text together. All of this material was submitted to a vote by the general assembly.

Everyone had a small piece of paper on which indication was given either of agreement or disagreement in a general way with the propositions, and to suggest freely and immediately any observations on the text.

Some indications of the progress made

For the moment, the Assembly approved of two points in general, without these becoming definitive documents. The three other subjects remained for tomorrow, and more about what the Assembly considers to be “the core” and “the heart” of Marist mission.

The 10th of September was an exhausting day. After supper there were still participants gathered round the computer finishing the tasks of the day.
THE ASSEMBLY’S CONTRIBUTIONS ARE OUTLINED FOR THE INSTITUTE
Final stretch of the group work

Three themes are carried over from yesterday. Today, September 11th, has been another day of intense work for the Assembly. The methodology used to approach the four pending themes is similar to the one used for the previous two themes: exposure to the group, clarifications and proposal of observations in writing.

Finally, the sharing with the Assembly of the synthesis prepared by the group in charge of gathering the contributions of the participants to determine which would be the centre of the mandala. The text received a very warm welcome on the part of the Assembly, but the written observations, which were made after the explanation, have yet to be collected.
The generosity and humility of the Assembly participants astounds me. I have great hope that, despite the enormity of the task, Brothers and laypeople together will form a strong and effective bond in call and in mission. Our union will support our work; our work together will strengthen our unity.

Vincent Andiorio, USA

Work by regions

Practically the rest of the day was dedicated to analyzing and sharing the implications that all that was reflected on and lived during the Assembly has for each region of the Institute. The geographic distribution was: Asia, Africa, Pacific, Europe, Arco Norte, Cono Sur and Brazil.
5. Committed in the Marist Mission
During late August 1964 a 34-year-old Baptist preacher by the name of Martin Luther King, Jr. stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC and delivered an address that would forever after be known as the “I have a dream” speech. In a country badly divided by racial prejudice and strife, this young African American had the courage to paint a picture of a world marked by justice and racial harmony. He told his listeners that he had seen the Promised Land: a future in which little white, black, and brown children joined hands and stood together. In so doing, they bore witness to the fact that they were “free at last.”

Less than four years later Martin Luther King, Jr. lay dead, the victim of a lone assassin’s bullet. To dream dreams is one thing; the task of bringing them to life is something very different indeed. Every dream in its unfolding exacts a cost. King paid a price for implementing his dream: the cost was his life. But he had no other choice because he knew only too well that a dream unrealized is nothing more than a fantasy or an illusion.

Marcellin Champagnat also had a dream, the dream of bringing God’s Word to rough country children. They were poor, unlettered, and living in the wake of a revolutionary movement that surged across Europe as the 18th century gave birth to the 19th.

In many ways Marcellin’s life mirrored those of the children and young people whom he set out to serve. Born as the flames of the French Revolution of 1789 were lit, the founder grew up during a period in which primary education had all but collapsed in France. Those who chose teaching as a work did...
so most often because they could do little else. Many beat their charges, drank, and led scandalous lives. Through his faith in God, reliance on Mary, and what we today call his practical Christianity, the founder brought his dream to life. He had courage, he showed daring, he took chances. Yes, he read well the signs of his times and without delay responded to them with innovation and creativity, and in a spirit of faith.

During these days together we have learned about our own dreams and our collective dream as a group. Two themes have also danced in and out of our discussions over the last week and a half. The first is Marist mission, and the second: Marist partnership. Like two 9th graders at a class social, they have sometimes stood uncomfortably alone and on other occasions danced together. Their steps have most often been graceful, one might even say polished. Along the way, though, there have been those inevitable awkward missteps that only serve to remind us all of the tasks that lie ahead.

We have done a fine piece of work during these days together. We have shared prayer and faith, listened to the Word of God and to the voices of children and young people, struggled to put words on our hopes and dreams, and been honest about our fears and concerns. One of the most important aspects of this International Assembly, however, has been the simple joy of meeting and coming to know one another. And in the process, we have discovered that we have so much more in common than divides us. Yes, we are a group of people looking in the same direction, men and women who share a keen desire to tell children and young people just how much Jesus Christ loves them.

These days have also included the experience of living community life. Short term? Yes. But at an international and

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**Virginia C. Manalo, Province of Philippinas**
trans-cultural level, with brothers and lay-women and men sharing, synthesizing, arriving at consensus, taking up together the tasks of organizing and implementing the overall program of these days. Simply put, being co-responsible.

Could we have done more? Of course. Could we have used these days differently? Without a doubt. But we used them as we did and can be duly proud of what we have achieved together. With that said, we must admit that considerable work lies ahead. For this International Mission Assembly has been but another step, albeit an important one, in the process of renewal in which we have been involved now for four decades.

A number of meetings paved the road to Mendez. Each had an important role to play in the process. The steps we take after leaving here will be equally important if not more so. But why should we be surprised? After all, we are living through one of the three great periods of change in the history of our Church. The late Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner reminds us that the first great transition in the history of Christianity occurred when Judaism became Jewish Christianity. This shift occurred just after the death of Christ. Foods once considered forbidden to the Jews were now blessed and declared clean, circumcision for males was put aside and Gentiles were welcomed directly into the early Christian communities.
The second great shift occurred when Jewish Christianity moved from its parochial world in Palestine and spread throughout the then known world. Rome, not Jerusalem was now the center and Hellenistic thought influenced greatly the formulation of doctrine.

Rahner would suggest that today we are living through the third great shift or transition in Christianity as we move toward being truly a world Church. And we ourselves are a transitional generation in the midst of all that is unfolding. Our task is to create a future that generations after us rather than ourselves may fully appreciate. The life and mission of Moses serve as good examples here.

We know that that this great leader of the Jewish people led them out of Egypt through the desert and into the Promised Land. What we forget, however, is that he himself never reached Canaan. He died in the mountains just outside of it. In sight of his goal but still short of it. We are the transitional leaders of today and some of us may never see fully the fruits of our labor, but labor we must if a new day for our Church and Institute is to ever dawn.

So, as I see it in addition to the work already associated with each of the five proclamations, the following tasks still lie ahead. The first is personal conversion. As Francisco and Luis André said so well last Saturday: when all is said and done a fundamental change of heart is foundational to any renewal of mission or a new vision of partnership. Accomplishing this task, however, will be a challenge for like the rich young man of the gospel we are often reluctant to let go of the familiar, and to allow the Lord to shake us up so as to transform our lives.

Second, we must continue to work at defining more clearly exactly what we mean by identity, and be specific about the different identities that make up Marist mission and partnership. We cannot settle
for easy answers in this area for we are speaking about the very elements that give meaning and direction to our respective lives.

Third, we must be clear about the meaning of mission and agree on a common definition of Marist evangelization. There is but one mission: the mission of the Church and that is to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom of God and its immanence. What does that mean, however, in our specific Marist context?

As part of this discussion, we must also come to understand to whom Marcellin was referring when he wrote and spoke about poor children and young people. To raise this question is not to critique any current work. But the day has long passed where we can stretch the word poor to a point where it is unrecognizable. To accomplish these tasks we will need to develop a new vocabulary and should not hesitate to create new structures as needed. Language and ways of organizing that may have been useful in the past could very well fail us during the years ahead. Let us stretch our imaginations and put into place those tools we need to get the job done.

We have many existing resources to help us with this work. We have the Word of God, and almost two hundred years of experience. We have the witness of the lives of so many good people involved in this movement, brothers and laymen and women alike. We have our Marist Constitutions, publication such as In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat and Water from the Rock, circulars, and other Institute documents written over time. We also have our faith, our love for this charism that came into the Church through that simple country priest who lived in LaValla so long ago, and we have our passion for wanting to transform the lives of the young.

So let us be up and doing. As we leave Mendez over the next few days, remember that the Spirit of God that was so alive in Marcellin goes with us. And do not forget that the qualities most often associated with that Spirit are fire and passion. Let both be ours in abundance as we set out to bring news of this gathering to those back home and begin to think about the next steps on our pilgrimage. Let us pray too for Mary’s openness to God’s will in her life, for a generous heart like the founder’s, and for our Church and Institute.

We carry a sacred trust: the charge of evangelizing the poor and the young and in our time in history we are blessed with the possibility of doing it as equal partners. Like Martin Luther King, Jr. we have caught a glimpse of the Promised Land. As we put aside what may have unfortunately separated us in the past and embrace our proper identities let us pray for the freedom to be what we were meant to be: the People of God, religious brothers and committed laymen and women, bearers of the charism of Marcellin Champagnat, heralds of God’s Good News.

For in being what we were meant to be we will finally realize the freedom promised to the children of God and be able to join hands in harmony with the little black, brown and white children described by Martin Luther King, Jr. saying together all the while, “Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, we are free at last.”

Thank you.
The Brazilian writer Guimarães Rosa says that “you do not find the truth at the destination, nor upon departure, you see it with your eyes when you are in the middle of the crossing”. Under many aspects, Mendes was the beginning of a great crossing for the Marist Institute. This crossing summoned us all, brothers, laypeople – men and women – to discern upon God’s dreams for us, Marists of the whole world.

We reached Mendes from different corners of the world, coming from distant lands, different cultures and lifestyles, but moved by one heart and one mission. However, we still could not see clearly how this first step of the crossing was to become a starting point, a challenge on the path of those who follow the way of Champagnat.

The first step of the crossing made us face the rich and complex reality of our Institute. We are unique and different, like the two faces of one coin. It is our richness and our weakness in different moments of our history. It is also what makes us proceed resolutely and, perhaps, what makes us walk slowly in certain contexts and periods of our history.

The Assembly began by spending a bit of time with a group of children and teenagers of St. Vincent de Minas, who embodied among us the life and voice of the children and teenagers whom we direct our care and love to, the object of our selfless educational efforts in all five continents and in the most diverse situations.

We know that the presence and intervention of these children and teenagers was a radical challenge to us, and this challenge aroused in us a sense of uneasiness and hope for our common and distinct futures. The sharing of experiences that followed gave us some responses on how, here and there, in different parts of the world, there are concrete and creative answers to the questions that rise from reality. It
was the experience of truth in the middle of the crossing.
The mosaic of experiences that were presented stressed and captured distinct itineraries, defined and disseminated in different worlds. Until then we had protected ourselves, from within our differences, our ways of being and acting. One could say that we were all ready to start out on the crossing, each according to his own customs, rhythms and convictions. What made us move towards the hearts of the others? We certainly needed something to stir us and inspire us, making us stop hiding our differences and resemblances; something foreign to our many different cultures and ways of being and acting, thinking and working. In that exact moment of the crossing we were introduced to the world of the *mandalas*! The *mandalas* fascinated us, they disquieted us and challenged us. Above all they shook us. All of a sudden the barriers of geography, culture, sex and education seemed to have disappeared. We were men and women, brothers and laypeople, in search of a common vision through a symbolic representation that was foreign to our mindset, but which recalled us to a quest for meaning, to understand our history, the relationship with the sacred, our roots and traditions, our mission. That is when the crossing became a community event. The Assembly was set!
The path that sprang from the experience of the *mandalas* defined a new course and new rhythms to engage in the crossing. We threw down some personal barriers, and built bridges to dialogue, in spite of our profound differences. It made us stop on some aspects that found our identity as brothers and laypeople – men and women – it made us reflect on our common and distinct vocation, and turn our eyes to the future.
Once we arrived at this point, we stopped to visit Rio de Janeiro. We were welcomed by Christ the Redeemer who opened his arms to challenge us once again to make the dream of Champagnat come true “in all the dioceses of the world”.
Starting from this moment of the crossing, we had to focus on collecting the richness of sense contained in what we learnt while creating the *mandalas*. It would allow us to dialogue while retaining our personal and community convictions. We were led to a profound reflection on our Marist identity, to learn God’s dreams for our common future.
At the preparatory Commission, we had long thought of how to adjust the course of the crossing in order not to lose sight of the north, to balance personal and community shifts and movements. It was a challenging time of discernment and it led to adequate choices, in order to reach the results we expected.
The method we chose led us from personal paths to community sharing, with a feeling of co-responsibility. The crossing was done with different timings, rhythms and paces, at a personal level and in small groups. The sharing was not always easy, but the attitude of patience and love of the participants, as well as the availability to experience the crossing in all its complexity, with courage, was a beautiful witness for the Provinces and Districts of the whole world, an inspiration to follow! The summons of the Spirit were perceived with intensity and profundity in some moments.
The final document “At the heart of our Marist dream” expresses the thoughts of the representatives on the five themes that are at the heart of our mission. The methodological routes allowed to bring to surface what everyone carried in his heart, starting from the experience of the preparatory stages in our Provinces and Districts. But above all they allowed the themes to ripen in the sharing that took place within the smaller groups, in tune with God’s dream on all of us. We were called to make a revolution of the heart, opening up ourselves more and more to the Holy Spirit, to explore the meaning of our different and complementary vocations, as brothers and laypeople – men and women – Marists of Champagnat who live and act in collaboration, to develop the future of our mission.

We also discerned the presence of the Marists in evangelisation. Like the apostles of Jesus Christ, we are called to proclaim, determined and clear, what requires a radical change in our hearts.

Once again we could joyfully behold what our mission is as educators. God calls us to be audacious, to dream the new challenges waiting for us in the sphere of education. In this respect, we still have a long way to go as we engage in our crossing.

For the first time we could clearly perceive the call we receive as an International Institute, to stand up, unflinching and firm, in a variety of situations and different ways, for the defence and promotion of the rights of children, teenagers and young people. They need someone to give them the chance to make their own voice be heard. We cannot defer our response to this appeal!

Once again, under many different aspects, the crossing has just begun. We are on our way!
A prophetic Assembly for the 21st century

Mendes, 12 September 2007

Br. Pau Fornells

I am back in Rome from Mendes (Brazil) and I feel privileged to have had this experience of the Spirit. I cannot but speak about all this wave of blessings that have been granted to me.

So, I am anxious to share everything I hold in my heart and I encourage the other delegates to do the same. Let us help one another to share what the Spirit has inspired within us.

What has excited me? What has given me hope to face the future?

1. Certainly the presence of the Holy Spirit in everything: He has been the true main character of the assembly.
2. The exceptional quality of the delegates, laypeople and brothers, present at the assembly: their joy and passion to be Marists, their openness, search for communion, prophetic spirit... And the hope that they will spread that spirit in their local areas and provinces.
3. The joy of discovering that the Marist charism remains very much alive in all of the regions and cultures where we are present. There was not one pessimistic moment, rather, on the contrary: there was an injection of new vitality felt in the entire Institute.
4. Much was said about "NEWNESS:” new wine in new wineskins, helping a new dawn be born, the image of a woman giving birth, expected labor pains that we must know how to live through in hope...
5. We’ve experienced a strong call of Jesus to a conversion of the heart, on the personal and institutional level. We left changed, revitalized. That is the great hope. We believe that, as an assembly, we have been
a meaningful symbol of what is happening in the heart of the Marist world, as much through what we’ve lived as through the document produced.

6. We demonstrated with immense happiness that the path set out upon years ago, of shared life and mission between brothers and laypeople is today a matured reality throughout the Institute, respecting the different rhythms and cultural diversity of the 76 countries in which we are present. We don’t speak so much of brothers and laypeople, but of “Marists of Champagnat.” The assembly convincingly showed “that the life-giving Spirit is leading us along a common path.” (Choose Life, 29) Thus we’ve lived, clearly marking the road to the future: a common vocation lived in different and complimentary life projects, sharing life: spirituality, mission, formation… (Choose Life, 26)

7. Another aspect very clearly highlighted by the assembly was the journey that we must continue making in our common mission: the Spirit leads us toward children and young people, especially the most materially poor, as well as the social transformation of our educational works based on justice, solidarity and the defense of the rights of children and young people. Brother Seán clearly underlined it for us and the assembly felt very touched by this call from the first day, when the children and young Brazilians who were present helped us to be in touch with the worldwide reality of the most abandoned children and young.

8. At the heart of our Marist ideal, which we believe is God-inspired, an important point of convergence is arising. Such too is the case with the five important invitations that spring from the convergence so that we can keep building the future form of Marist apostolate. The invitations are: to personal and institutional conversion; to life and mission as Champagnat Marists; to forms of Marist education that promote freedom and that are especially directed towards those who are not free; evangelization as our priority; to defend and promote the rights of children and young people.

9. Grouped by regions we reflected upon the five important invitations heard at the general gathering. Our reflections, very positive and following the same indications as those heard at the general gathering, suggested future developments which might occur in each area represented in the regional group. The reflections offered by those from Africa had a special impact upon the assembly.

10. We already were aware of the value inherent in the internationality of the charism, but we were once again able to witness its va-
lue. Progress has been made as to the various modalities in which the Marist life is lived. That parts of the Institute have been restructured is a help in this regard. This international assembly itself has given an impetus, particularly in the case of lay people. One sees that there is no retreating; we cannot stay enclosed within our confines, whether Provincial or national. All must learn from all. The Spirit is manifested most clearly in communion of an international nature.

11. Yet, a significant sensitivity was apparent to respect differences: the varying pace of geographic areas and countries; differences of traditions; of cultural mores, etc.

12. Highly emphasized was the importance of sharing life, of formative experiences lived in community, of creating milieux which allow for the evolution of different modes of community life (MCHFM and others)… of trying to find unity and community despite differing sensitivities and ideologies. Only with the experience of shared life and apostolate as starting point, will we arrive at a true formation, at a true perception of reality, finding the impetus to look honestly at the innovations which the Spirit is asking us to undertake.

13. A quite lucid awareness appeared (vis a vis a common Marist vocation) as to the complementarity and reciprocity of the Brothers’ identity and that of the lay people. We need each other. We Brothers need to understand the lay people and vice versa. Starting from such a point, one sees the need for a joint work in vocational promotion and in formation, without, denying the need for formative processes specific to each state of life. We also heard about the enriching side of communities comprised of Brothers and lay people (27 such communities in 15 administrative units), one of the possible supplemental forms of Marist life.

14. The presence of the Superior General and his Council gave us hope that the stimulus for action felt in the assembly may continue to grow strong, and that the next General Chapter may pick up on such a stimulus so as to deepen it and apply it in practical ways in each administrative unit of the Institute.

15. The Assembly has contributed to a greater unity in the Marist world. The sense of belonging has been very strongly felt. Great emphasis was placed on the need to establish networks: of communication, of reflection, of cooperation. By such means we may be helped to live out these invitations of the Spirit. Regional structures can help, but the creation of intercultural and inter-linguistic networks is also necessary. Such was a view strongly expressed by the delegates from the Americas and from Oceania.

16. The success of this Assembly opens the possibility that new steps may be taken so as to set up similar structures at Provincial, Regional and international levels. Such a possibility could also be a first step towards a clear development of the Marist Laity, as has been asked in the final document of the Assembly.
Album of Memories
Today was the national holiday of Brazil. The name “Brazil” is derived from the name of a tree that is native to these parts. The Brothers have been in this country for a hundred years already, and Marist works flourish under the mantle of Our Lady of Aparecida, their guardian. The members of the Assembly gave thanks to the Lord and our Good Mother for the blessings they had bestowed upon the Brazilian people and on Marist works. At the end of one of the morning sessions the national flag was honoured and the national anthem played. During the celebration that followed the dinner, the typical “caipirinha” was served at the bar on the house.
THE INTERNATIONAL MARIST MISSION ASSEMBLY ALSO HAS ITS OWN HYMN, composed by the group “Kairoi”. The words are very meaningful: “It is in your hands to make a better world”, “give life to your mission”, “be sowers of good news and freedom to those who live under oppression”, “and new life will beat in your heart.”

The musical composition avoided all triumphalist or military connotations. It is not meant to be sung as an adornment or to give solemnity to an act but to resonate with the simplest actions of each day, like an act of communion with everything and with all who are around us. The convictions in the song do not ask for a solemn posture, but cherished attitudes. It is a melody that invites us to sing along at any time and many a time, like a mantra that keeps on repeating the deep and moving sentiment, “one heart, one mission”. Again and again it alludes to a mission “without bonds, unconditional”, to the “celebration of fraternity” “there are no boarders for love” “to be with the children”.

The hymn brings about once again an atmosphere of shared prayer. “We are the many who wish to march with the dream of Champagnat: and as we make our way on our journey all of us share the same song, that very same song, the song of us all.”
Sunday, 9th of September, the participants departed in two buses for Rio de Janeiro to visit the monument of Christ the Redeemer in el Corcovado, the beautiful beaches of this city and the cathedral. The brothers of the community and the presidents of the parents, teachers and of the alumni of the Colegio San José welcomed the visitors and offered them a family meal, later entertaining them with a sample of local folklore that included the sensational dance the “capoeira”. Brother Seán Sammon, Superior General, offered some warm words and posed for pictures with the teachers and students who were present. The participants returned quite happy to Mendes.

The day concluded with Sunday Mass on a theme that celebrated the martyrs of the Institute. The 47 brother martyrs of Spain, whose beatification will occur on October 28th in Rome, took an honored place in this celebration of faith.
Brother Seán Sammon at the closing of the International Assembly

At morning prayer the document that carries the result of the work of all these days was placed at the feet of the Good Mother. In this way we wanted to place under Mary’s protection the future roads to be travelled by the Assembly to put into practice what has been dreamt here.

Last of the works

The final document, which will be published when it has been edited in a definitive form in the four official languages, gathers together the dreams of the assembly for its journey in the next years.
Report on the reflection carried out by regions

At the end of the morning reports were given on the meetings held by the regional groups, making obvious the great richness and at the same time the diversity that exists in the entire Marist world. The Assembly has been an opportunity to stretch bonds and to open new perspectives for the future.
The General Council questioned by the Assembly

The participants had the opportunity to formulate a series of questions for the members of the General Council during the first session of the afternoon.

Brother Maurice Berquet presented a panorama on the Evangelical Use of Goods, which was a mandate of the General Chapter, giving a perspective of the activity being developed in the Institute for this purpose. Brother Luis García Sobrado commented on restructuring, affirming that even though it is early to see the results, the indications are interesting. An example: Marist Africa, before restructuring, was lead by non-African brothers; today all of the major superiors are African. Also, it is certain that, with restructuring, the distances have multiplied and have very much underlined the internationality of the Institute.

On what the International Assembly will be involved in facing the future, Brother Emili Turú said that the General Council has not yet decided anything. The topic will be addressed in the plenary sessions of the Council during the upcoming month of January. Meanwhile some resources and a related issue of the FMS Message will be sent out.
Formation of Brothers and lay people was discussed. One of the questions dealt with the formation to be given to new Brothers. Brother Antonio Ramalho presented some criteria that are followed in initial formation within the Institute.

Relative to the impact that this Assembly will have in the animation of the Institute, Brother Seán Sammon spoke of structures of animation that directly involve the General Council, citing as an example the upcoming meeting of the extended General Council that will occur with the provinces of Europe. The topic that they will study will be vocation ministry, but certainly there will also be a reflection on the Assembly.

Someone commented that we have excellent documents in the Institute, but why aren’t they put into practice? On this topic, Brother Théoneste Kalisa said that a document gives life and enthusiasm in its development and application, similar to what occurred in this Assembly. Now this will have to be brought to the educational and mission environments so that it can generate life in each place.

Asked a question about the strengths and weaknesses of lay Marists today, Brother Pedro Herreros showed that it is not easy to answer, since the world reality is very diverse. Perhaps it will be necessary to have another international assembly. And speaking about the position of the Council regarding the ownership of the laity in the Institute, he said that there are already some links like the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family. There is still some ground to be covered in the future.
At the end great gratitude was expressed and very sincere congratulations extended to the numerous people who had made it possible for everything to function so well.

Brother Emili Turú and the Commission that organized the meeting spoke of the relevant role that certain Marist institutions played in the development of this Assembly. In the first place, UMBRASIL, with Brother Wagner in charge. Secondly, the Marist province of Brasil Centro Norte, with its provincial. Finally, the house at Mendes. When they were thinking of an appropriate place to have the Assembly then decided not to look for a hotel, “we have a home as a hotel,” said Brother Turú, showing much gratitude.
He had words of gratitude for the work of the translators, secretaries, support personnel, house keeping staff, and the kitchen, laundry, clearing and reception services etc. highlighting that “Brazil is the paradise of details.”

Brother Seán Sammon gave thanks to the Preparatory Commission, giving a small gift to each member. Finally, Brother Claudino Falchetto, Provincial of Brasil Centro Norte, host of the Assembly, indicated that “in the beginnings of the Marist work in Brazil, Mendes received many missionaries; today Mendes sends missionaries throughout the world to spread the Marist mission.”
In the celebration of the closing Mass we had a sending prayer for new missionaries. More than a hundred Brothers, lay men and women are charged with the task of sharing in all parts of the world what they have experienced and shared in this meeting. Each one received a symbolic coin with the charge to make it increase. The embrace of peace was also the gesture of goodbye. That same night the participants began returning home. Everyone carried luggage filled with memories but, above all, a heart full of dreams and living satisfaction.
GUESTS

Sylvestre
Marist Father

Colin Quine
Facilitator

Br. Antonio Martínez Estaún
Communications

Br. Claudino Falchetto
Provincial
Brazil Centro-Norte

Br. César Henríquez
BIS

TRANSLATORS

June 2008
Hymn - Kairoi
ONE HEART ONE MISSION
Feel the rhythm within your heart
Celebrating our Marist unity.
Shaping for us a brand new world;
We are seeking to follow in our time
the vision of Champagnat.
Men and women of open hearts and minds
with a love that knows no bounds.
A better world is in your hands; in your hands, in your hands.

WITH ONE HEART AND WITH ONE MISSION,
WITHOUT ANY BOUNDARIES,
WITH NO CONDITION.
WITH ONE HEART AND WITH ONE MISSION,
CLOSE TO THE CHILDREN, SEEKING
A BETTER WORLD, SEEKING A BETTER
WORLD. IT’S IN YOUR HANDS,
IN YOUR HANDS, IN YOUR HANDS.

Now the mission is brought to life;
Sow the seeds of the Gospel
with your hearts.
This is freedom; this is Good News
for releasing the poor and the oppressed.
All we Marists will walk along
with the young:
they have spirit in their hearts.
Now the mission is brought to life.
A better world is in your hands,
in your hands, in your hands.

WITH ONE HEART AND WITH ONE MISSION,
WITHOUT ANY BOUNDARIES,
WITH NO CONDITION.
WITH ONE HEART AND WITH ONE MISSION,
CLOSE TO THE CHILDREN, SEEKING
A BETTER WORLD. WE’RE MARIST
IN OUR HEARTS! IT’S IN YOUR HANDS,
IN YOUR HANDS, IN YOUR HANDS.

Without condition; without any ties
the strong heart within you will beat
with new life.
And you will bring to life a bright new world.
It’s in your hands, in your hands.
With our Good Mother, without any fear,
walking together into the future
A Marist world where children can be happy.
It’s in your hands, in your hands,
in your hands.