

New Hearts for a New World

**Convoking the 21st General Chapter
of Marcellin Champagnat's Little Brothers of Mary**

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Superior General

**Institute of the Marist Brothers
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I will give you a new heart
and place within you a new spirit,
I will take your hearts of stone
and transform them into hearts of flesh.

Ezekiel 36, 26

PART I

History and context of the General Chapters

*September 8th, 2008
Feast of the birth of Mary*

Dear Brothers,

At 9:00 AM on Tuesday, September 8th, 2009, members of our 21st General Chapter will gather at the General House in Rome to begin their work. This starting date, the feast of the birth of Mary, and location were fixed by members of the present General Council; those brothers who make up the Chapter Preparatory Commission will suggest a tentative closing date once their own planning has moved ahead. The Chapter members themselves, of course, have the last word when it comes to determining when they will bring their work to completion.



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St. Ignatius took a dim view of Chapters, seeing them as little more than a distraction that took many qualified Jesuits away from their apostolic work.¹ But even he admitted to their necessity for the election of a General Superior for the Society or when difficult matters touching its larger body had to be addressed.

In contrast, others consider a Chapter to be a precious gift in the life of any Institute. In the Benedictine tradition, for example, it is the preferred method of decision making, reminding all involved about the importance of community.

Our Marist tradition of Chapters goes back to the time of Marcellin himself. The first took place in 1839, a year prior to his death; its delegates elected Brother François as Director General. Thirteen years later, the 30 brothers who gathered for our second Chapter gave their assent to a rule of life and approved a form of government and method of teaching.

During subsequent years, General Chapters have continued to play a central role in the life of our Institute, especially since Vatican II when they became an important part of the process of renewal initiated by that historic gathering.

THE STRUCTURE OF THIS CIRCULAR

This Circular is divided into three sections. The first includes a general introduction followed by a brief history of Marist Chapters and some General Conferences held during the years following Vatican II. A discussion about the social and religious context in which the work of these meetings took place is included as well as an analysis of the factors in both areas that may have a bearing on our upcoming Chapter.

Other topics found in this section include: a word about the renewal of Marist life and mission and the important place of discernment in that process, mention of several specific challenges that we face as an Institute today, a short description of the role and responsibilities of a Chapter capitulant, some thoughts about the involvement of Marist laymen and women in the preparation for the Chapter, a few reflections on the changing nature of Church life and the several “worlds” in which more than a few of today’s young people find themselves living, and, finally, some practical suggestions to help you prepare personally for next year’s gathering.

The second part of the text is more technical in nature and includes information about the structure and purpose of a General Chapter, the process to be used for the election of delegates and their substitutes, and those Chapter responsibilities that fall to provinces and districts. Some concluding remarks bring the circular to completion.

The third section of the Circular contains two memos. They will be of particular interest to Provincials in that they list important dates in the process of Chapter preparation and also summarize the steps to take when electing Chapter delegates and their substitutes.

OUR MARIST TRADITION OF CHAPTERS

General Chapters do not take place within a vacuum. The events of history as well as developments in our Church and Institute can influence their organization as well as the matters taken up by their members. We should not be surprised to discover, therefore, that since the close of the Council an evolution has taken place in the organization of our General Chapters; their themes have also varied in keeping with the times. For example, delegates to our 16th General Chapter, held in

two sessions (1967-68), were charged with the challenging task of re-imagining all aspects of our way of life in light of the grace of the Council.

Brother Basilio, newly elected as Superior General, lost little time in challenging his brothers to respond to the calls of the Church and world by moving closer to the poor and rekindling their missionary zeal. By the time the Chapter wrapped-up its work, delegates had produced a library of documents about our Marist life and tradition that remains contemporary to the present day.

Shortly thereafter, however, a series of troubling events began to unfold. To begin with, during the period from 1969 to 1971, 1401 brothers left the Institute. Discontent about community life also began to grow and the personal shortcomings of some brothers, hidden previously by the rigid structures in place prior to the Council, moved into the light of day. Nevertheless, the process of experimentation was embraced with energy and generosity by many who dedicated themselves to refashioning our Institute and its mission for a new age.

In 1971, provincials, along with the Superior General, Vicar General and the members of the General Council gathered for the Institute's first General Conference. Pointing out that the changes called for by the Chapter of 1967-68 were never meant to consist of a simple rejection of the past, Brother Basilio and others reminded all involved in the experimentation and change underway about their obligation to distinguish between what was of value and what was better cast aside. Religious life, they insisted, had to face up to the task of redefining itself in a world that was in the throes of social transformation.

Conference participants did not have to look very far to justify this last observation. Evidence of political and social upheaval was widespread. Newly elected Com-



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unist Party Secretary Alexander Dubcek's reform of political and administrative structures in Czechoslovakia, for example, had raised hopes that a new spring-time of freedom was getting underway in Eastern Europe. Instead, his efforts set the stage for a crushing Soviet invasion in late April 1968. The "Prague Spring" of that year was short lived indeed!

Student movements were also sweeping across the continents of Europe and North America. Marked by calls for greater personal freedom, a new sexual ethic, and greater gender equality, these initiatives offered a sharp challenge to conventional outlooks on morality and past understandings about the nature of authority.

Newly established nation states on the continents of Africa and Asia did not escape the turmoil that marked this period of world history. Recently independent after years of colonial rule, several became the site of political assassination and tribal strife.

In September 1976 another group of Chapter members assembled in Rome. Their charge? To evaluate the *ad experimentum* new *Constitutions* that had been in place since 1968. They made the decision to live with that document for at least another nine years. And, then, taking note of the rapid and profound social change underway at that time, they turned their attention to the topics of poverty and justice studying both through the prism of these foundational areas: prayer, apostolate, and community.

What was the result of their work? A document that was quite prophetic. For the first time in the history of our Institute a link was made between the issues of poverty and justice. Furthermore, Chapter delegates challenged all members of the Institute, as well as our works and communities to make this issue their own.



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Those participating in the Chapter were also moved to compose a letter to all members of the Institute, entitling it *The Marist Brother Today*. Written from the heart, it was meant to inspire and encourage all who read it while, at the same time, introduce them to some of the Chapter's fruits. The text might best be described as a much needed profession of faith in ourselves and our identity as well as an affirmation of those with whom we shared ministry and those whom we had been called to serve.

September of 1985 saw still another group of delegates making their way to Rome. As members of our 18th General Chapter they spent ten weeks hammering out the draft text of what became our revised Constitutions and Statutes. Having completed their work they entrusted the task of redaction to Brother Alain Delorme, of the then-Province of Notre Dame de l'Hermitage, who produced the fine document that we have today.

At the outset Brother Basilio, having completed 18 years as Superior General, spoke about his delight with the number of positive initiatives underway in so many areas. However, he also pointed to the gap that existed between what we said and wrote about ourselves and the reality of our lives and expressed concern about what he saw as a lack of integration in many brothers. He faulted, in part, our initial and ongoing programs of formation. Concern about the quality of community life continued unabated, he reported, and differences of opinion existed about the nature of justice education and what was entailed in service to the poor.

As they concluded their meeting, Chapter members drew up a list of priorities. Vocation promotion and restructuring of apostolic works in light of declining numbers and increasing age secured first and second place respectively. Other topics included strengthening our formation programs and the hope that we would even-

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tually give approval to a Guide in that area², developing our apostolic spirituality, promoting enculturation, revitalizing our identity as brothers and carrying back home the message of our new *Constitutions and Statutes*.

The General Conference of 1989 was the first in the history of our Institute that was held away from Rome. Those involved, along with a group of six young brothers invited by the then Superior General, Brother Charles Howard, gathered for three weeks in Veranopolis, Brazil. Their presence coincided with the 100th anniversary of our brothers' arrival in Latin America. Prior to the Conference itself, each participant had been invited to make a pilgrimage of solidarity in one of the then existing provinces or districts of Latin America.

Our 1993 Chapter took place in Rome. During the months leading up to that meeting, Brother Charles and his Council suggested that these three elements be evident in the work that would follow: greater appreciation of the need for personal and communal discernment, solidarity *ad intra* and *ad extra*, greater openness to our lay colleagues in mission. Delegates eventually focused their attention on four themes: Mission, Solidarity, Apostolic Spirituality, and Formation. Also discussed, however, were the areas of Marist partnership, discernment, and community life.

In spite of the many issues taken up by our 1993 Chapter, the topic of solidarity won the day. As a result of Chapter deliberations, an International Bureau of Solidarity was established; it continues until this day. So also, a Solidarity Fund was put into place and voluntary donations to it gratefully received.

The word refounding was also introduced at this General Chapter. Almost immediately it generated controversy with some embracing the concept as an adequate description of the extent of renewal needed and

others arguing that to refound actually implied the formation of a new Institute.

Likewise, the process of restructuring that has occupied us for the last decade and a half was an initiative of the 1993 Chapter. This bold decision introduced into the Institute a new sense of internationality; some brothers found themselves living in provinces made up of several different countries and using a number of different languages. Over time they began to acquire a better sense of the differences that exist among us as well as an appreciation of all that we share in common.

In reality, however, we are only in the first stages of the process of restructuring. It will take time for the fruits of this initiative to become apparent. Patience and hard work are necessary if we are to ever reach our goal of a restructured and renewed Institute worldwide.

Though lay consultants and observers had been part of previous Chapters, our 1993 gathering marked the first time that a significant group of them was invited for several days and asked near the end of their stay to issue a statement to the Chapter members and the Institute at large.

Finally, Chapter delegates asked that the new General Administration develop a document that captured the philosophy of Marcellin's approach to education and also spoke about its practical application in today's world. This request was eventually answered in the form of a publication entitled *In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat: A vision for Marist education today*.³

The years that followed our 1993 Chapter were marked by continued strife in many parts of our world, strife that touched the life of our Institute: eleven brothers and some family members and others associat-

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ed with the Institute met their deaths due to ethnic violence, war, or at the hands of extremists.

There were bright moments also, with the canonization of our founder, Marcellin Champagnat, being among the most memorable. Provinces and districts also struggled with the process of restructuring, with some at first seeing little purpose to it. Over time, however, most regions of the Institute, accepting the fact that vitality and viability were the aim of the process, embraced this mandate of the Chapter and moved ahead.

A new millennium was just getting underway as delegates gathered for our 20th General Chapter. Working under the heading of *Choose Life*, they produced a brief but substantial document bearing the same title. The text detailed five calls and challenged members of the Institute and all associated with it to be bold and daring in responding to them.

These calls returned to several familiar themes of past Chapters—Jesus as the center and passion of our lives, community life, the lay Marist vocation, and issues of justice and the poorest of young people—and asked the new general government to create structures to address them effectively. Indeed, both general government and local governments were challenged to develop new approaches to animation and authority, approaches that would foster the vitality of our Institute.

At this Chapter the Institute Solidarity Fund was further refined with Provinces being asked to donate to it a certain percentage of their surplus funds at the end of each fiscal year. An overall goal was also set for the Fund.

Finally, delegates asked that a publication be organized, similar in style and format to the aforementioned



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education guide, that would help us all appreciate more fully the richness of Marist apostolic spirituality. *Water from the Rock: Marist Spirituality flowing in the tradition of Marcellin Champagnat* came to life in response.

In the years that followed three bureaus were established by the general administration to help implement a number of Chapter directives. In addition to the already existing Bureau of Solidarity, these new ones focused on Marist laity, vocation promotion, and the evangelical use of goods and worked to develop these important areas of Institute life. A document exploring the identity of Marist laity was planned and a number of circulars and letters were sent out, with some having as their audience the entire Marist family while others were directed solely to brothers, to a particular age group or those working in a specific ministry.

The year 2006 saw the first of 150 brothers begin their orientation in a new mission *ad gentes* initiative aimed at Asia and developed in response to a call on the part of Pope John Paul II to religious congregations throughout the world.

In September 2007, an Assembly held in Mendes, Brazil brought together for the first time in our history as an Institute brothers and laymen and women involved in Marist works throughout the world. A month later, 47 of our brothers who lost their lives around and during the time of the Spanish Civil War were beatified as a part of a much larger group of 498 martyrs. Renovations at the Hermitage in France got underway a few months later. Aimed at preparing this Marist treasure for service in a new century, plans called for a complete refitting of the historical building as well as the construction of a new one aimed at better equipping the center to meet today's needs.

Even a quick study of the fruit of past Chapters and the events surrounding them provides us with a roadmap through Marist history.

Even a quick study of the fruit of past Chapters and the events surrounding them provides us with a roadmap through Marist history. At each point along the way, we get a glimpse of the major concerns of the day, events working together to shape one epoch or other, and the good will of all involved.

Responding as an Institute to events in history and the dramatic change in attitude taking place in many parts of our world during the years following Vatican II, we may not have noticed fully some other powerful but less obvious forces at work shaping our understandings about the age in which we are living. It is to some of these developments that we now turn attention.

THE CHALLENGE OF SECULARITY: MODERNITY AND POST-MODERNITY⁴

As just mentioned, while the history of the last 50 years was unfolding and having its impact on the structure and content of Marist General Chapters, changes of a more profound nature were also underway. Their influence would become evident only with the passage of time.

Modernity, for example, slowly gave way to post-modern thinking and secularity came to be understood as a mixed blessings. On the one hand, the latter promoted values such as personal freedom, equality, human dignity, and rationality, helping us to move beyond superstition, fear, and religious intolerance.

On the other, secularity also often resulted in more darkness than light. Those holding this second point of view associate secularity with the loss of faith, the decline of Church authority, the weakening of family life, sexual irresponsibility, excessive individualism, and



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what Pope Benedict XVI has described as the dictatorship of relativism.

The terms modernity and post-modernity capture two different outlooks on life and help us to appreciate more fully the changes that have occurred in our world and way of living during the last half century. For example, the term modernity was coined to describe a way of understanding that began with the Enlightenment, led on through the Industrial Revolution and Victorian period up until the present. This era was marked by rapid scientific advancement and the growing belief that human reason and human reason alone was capable of not only explaining the nature of our world but of improving it as well. What features characterize this period? Individualism, a confidence in scientific reason, a belief in unlimited material progress.

Since modernity is dependent to a large extent upon economic development, its onset in one country or another has been staggered. Be that as it may, this worldview's emphasis on scientific advancement and material progress has also tended to relegate religion to the sphere of the private thus leading to greater secularization within society.

At first, the Church reacted to these developments with fear and quickly created a self-contained world that managed to survive to a large extent intact until the early 1960s. Vatican II, of course, changed all that: the Council's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* was a clear sign that the Church was at last embracing modernity.

A certain irony is to be found in this development, for by the time the Church decided to make modernity its own, the principles upon which this worldview had been built were being questioned by post-modern thinking.

On what grounds? Many of the catastrophic events of the 20th century cast doubt on the notion that reason could solve life's great issues. While this critique of modernity was taking root, however, many Catholic seminaries and houses of formation in the West were moving in the opposite direction. Explanation was the order of the day; symbolism and mystery had become unwelcome guests.

Retrospectively, this situation can be seen as a mixed-blessing. Candidates to religious life as well as its professed members were challenged to take more personal responsibility; at the same time, however, in embracing the secular world as it did religious life lost much of its previous identity.

Today as an Institute we live with the consequences of this approach to renewal. Many aspects of our way of life have been updated largely along rationalist lines. For a while we appeared to hold the belief that the next consultant, or process for pastoral planning, or packaged program for renewal would do the trick, transforming overnight our way of life and its members. In recent years, however, there has been a renewed longing for the transcendent, particularly among the young.

So marked has been this trend that theologian Harvey Cox, a champion of the notion of Church in a secular world, was moved to make this observation, "Nearly three decades ago I wrote a book, *The Secular City*, in which I tried to work out a theology for the 'post-religious age' that many sociologists had confidently assured us was coming. Since then, however, religion—or at least some religions—seem to have gained a new lease on life. Today it is secularity not spirituality that may be headed for extinction."⁵ And where has the Church and religious life been while these developments have been unfolding? Parts of



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both, including our own Marist way of life, have been caught in a worldview more appropriate for the past than the present.

And what about post-modernity? While difficult to define precisely, this worldview acclaims no absolutes, values feelings over reason, promotes tolerance, welcomes diversity and plurality, and is marked by a return to religion and spirituality. This shift is less evident in the numbers of people joining mainstream Churches than in the number who are once again asking religious questions. But of this much we can be sure: the purely rational and secular no longer satisfy us.

Post-modernity, though, has its problems. It has introduced, for example, a time of moral relativism and social and individual fragmentation. So too it demonstrates impatience with far-reaching explanations of reality and has little regard for commitments. At the same time, post modern thinking has its virtues and we avoid considering them at our peril.

Modernity and post-modernity are complicated concepts and I do not mean to oversimplify either of them. Some religious Institutes in parts of the developed world, however, appear stuck in a post-Vatican II modern phase. They embraced this way of thinking and never looked back, or, for that matter, bothered to look forward.

Once again, that is not to say that the solution to their dilemma lies in a return to the past or a mindless embrace of post-modern thinking. It does suggest, however, that as an Institute we must be aware of the movements taking place in our time and age and, more importantly, must examine the values contained in each. A failure to do so might condemn us to hold on to the past at the very moment a new beginning is getting underway.

The late Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner reminded us more than once that everyone alive at the same time is not necessarily part of the same generation. Though accurate, Rahner's observation failed to go far enough. Today we realize that different generations also exist within the same generation.

Surely this situation is evident among religious congregations whose membership is concentrated in the West and in countries commonly considered secular. In preparing for our 21st General Chapter we can only benefit by taking steps to understand more fully the generational differences that exist among us and learn to appreciate the richness found within those differences.

The year-long pilgrimage of preparation that we set out upon this September 8th provides us with a unique opportunity to prepare not only for the work of our 21st General Chapter but also to look ahead to 2017, the date of our 22nd General Chapter and the 200th anniversary of the founding of our Institute.

How fitting it would be to celebrate that event in the fully restored Hermitage that Marcellin built. Even more fitting: to do so with hearts renewed. Then, and only then, will the true identity of our way of life be evident to all.

SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

The members who make up any General Chapter begin their work with the hope that their efforts will make a difference in the life and mission of their Institute. And, indeed, each Chapter in its own way does just that. Today, however, we must take steps to ensure that our 21st General Chapter makes more than its normally expected contribution, but rather is seen in retrospect as being a turning point in the history of Marist

life and mission. A failure to do so could result in a missed opportunity that we will be hard-pressed to reclaim. Permit me to be quite specific.



Contemporary religious life has not yet been fully renewed nor has our Marist way of living it. And that outcome is due neither to ill-will nor to a lack of trying. But genuine renewal is not a state of being but rather a particular way of living out the gospel of Jesus Christ. How then will we know when renewal is ours? When we can once again dream dreams as Marcellin did and not let the voice of caution get in the way of doing what must be done.

The frank manner in which Benedict XVI addressed the issue of child sexual abuse during his visit to the United States is a good example of what I mean here. Attorneys for some dioceses and archdioceses advised the Pope not to meet with victims for fear that his contact with them might eventually result in greater financial liability for the Church. While grateful for their advice, Benedict made a decision to meet privately with a group of victims. In so doing, he acted like a priest and not an attorney.

We will know also that renewal is ours when the experience of God's unconditional love moves us to courageous action, gives us the strength to take risks in old age and helps us to say "yes" without hesitation, calculation, or excessive worry about our personal needs. We will know ultimately that renewal is ours when we catch fire, live with passion, and know full well that we are men in love with God.

Today we so resemble the rich young man of the gospel story and nod knowingly with him when told by the Lord that keeping the commandments will merit us eternal salvation. The next part of the story, however, is what gives us some trouble, the piece about selling all we have and coming to follow him, without reserve,

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without second thoughts, but rather freely, generously, and with joy and enthusiasm as did François, Laurent, Jean Baptiste, Sylvestre, and so many others before us.

Our upcoming General Chapter's first priority should not be the creation of new documents. Can it instead help all of us find better ways to live the ones we have written already? As a body our 21st General Chapter needs to put aside "business as usual," shed past ways of doing things, and set our Institute in a direction that would allow Marcellin to recognize it should he happen to stop by.

This end can only be achieved through a process of discernment. That word features frequently in discussions about General Chapters. Unfortunately, there appears to be almost as many definitions of the term as there are delegates to the meeting. Regardless of the meaning you and I attach to the word, of this much we can be certain: if a regular rhythm of prayer is absent from your life or mine; evidence of ascetical practices hard to find, and an unbiased and frank exchange on the part of all involved not the medium of communication, a spirit of discernment might be an aspiration but it surely is not a reality.

True discernment disciplines us, allowing us eventually to see the world through God's eyes, to listen to its calls through God's ears, and to make our decisions with God's heart. However, to come to see, hear, and decide as God might requires prayer and fasting and a process of purification that few of us are lining up to embrace.

We must overcome our reluctance if we want this Chapter to both startle and inspire us with its decision, surprise and stir us with the risks it challenges us to take, call us to be our own best selves. Any process of discernment exacts a price but leads us ultimately to

spiritual indifference. Eventually I come to accept the will of God in a spirit of love and surrender because my prejudices, blind spots, and willfulness have been tamed for a while.



Fifty years from now most of us who make up the body of this 21st General Chapter will no longer be alive. Looking back a half-century hence what is it that we might do and decide that would make us proud? What is it that we can do and decide that would give the Institute and its mission a helping hand into the future? The time has long past when we can wait until everyone is on board. We must have the courage instead to set out with some sense of urgency and move toward the future with those willing to make the journey.

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RESPONSIBILITIES OF A CHAPTER MEMBER

Being elected a member of the Chapter is an honor, but should never be considered a privilege. Those who have had an opportunity to participate in past Chapters realized quickly that their role as a capitulant was a service to the Institute as well as to their brothers and all others involved in Marist life and mission. Take note of the fact that our *Statutes and Rules* governing General Chapters state, “a brother elected as a delegate is to consider his duty as a capitulant as a more important obligation than any other.”⁶

Obviously, then, Chapter delegates need to arrive in Rome well-equipped for the task that lies ahead of them. That includes having prepared oneself interiorly through use of the Marist *Pilgrim’s Guide* and collaborating with others to achieve the aims spelled out in the publication *On the Road to the XXI General Chapter* and other documents distributed by the Chapter Preparatory Commission. All of these materials should be read and studied

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well beforehand. Should a delegate misplace any document, a request to the Chapter Preparatory Commission Secretary (teogda@hotmail.com) will secure a replacement copy.

Those elected to the Chapter should also put aside the time necessary so that they can participate in the meeting fully and for as long as the work might require. No one is eager to stay at a Chapter longer than necessary. However, to insist that the meeting must end by a particular self-imposed date places an undue burden on everyone else and undermines any process of discernment that might have been put into place.

Chapter delegates must remain until their work comes to a close. No one should absent himself definitively, except for grave reasons, and then only after receiving a positive response from the Central Commission to a written request to be away from the meeting for a set period of time.⁷

As mentioned earlier, each brother eligible is free to elect delegates to the Chapter according to the rules prescribed in the publication *Acts of the XXth General Chapter* and explained in Part II of this circular. Due note should be taken about the election of substitutes as well as the process for doing so.

SMALL CHANGES IN PRACTICE, SIGNIFICANT SHIFTS IN ATTITUDE

In recent years modifications in the manner of conducting Chapter meetings and in details such as the layout of the hall itself have led to a change in attitudes and outlook. Prior to the Chapter of 1993, for example, the process for gathering information about potential candidates for the office of Superior or Vicar General was haphazard at best.



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Those who made up the membership of our 19th General Chapter took steps to remedy that situation. They conducted a sondage among delegates just prior to the election and circulated among those present and eligible to vote a list with the names of the top five candidates. Time was also provided so that inquiries could be made about those whose names appeared on the list. Chapter member were told, however, that they were free to vote for whomever they judged God was calling to these offices within the Institute.

The introduction of a new seating arrangement during our 20th General Chapter also altered dynamics in the meeting hall. Prior to that time the room was organized in the style of a theater with chairs and tables set up in ever ascending rows, and a head table placed on a raised platform in the front of the room. While the location of the latter provided all in the room with an unobstructed view of the moderator of each session, those in the back of the hall also found themselves facing a sea made up of the backs of the heads of their fellow delegates!

The members of the 2001 Chapter Preparatory Commission decided to arrange the Chapter room in the shape of an oval. In this way those participating in the meeting were able to sit facing one another. With what result? An exchange among delegates that was more conversational and fraternal in tone and spontaneous in style.

MORE EFFECTIVE PREPARATION FOR THE CHAPTER AMONG MARIST LAITY AND OTHERS WHO ARE PART OF OUR LIFE AND MISSION

During the last two General Chapters a small group of Marist laymen and women spent several days at the Chapter serving as consultants and observers. On both

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occasions the group addressed the Chapter body prior to departing.

The members of both groups were selected generally by the Provincials and Councils in one or other regions of the Institute. The purpose of their presence at the Chapter was twofold: one, to allow for the voice of lay Marists to be heard at those moments when discussion and debate would be enriched by their input; two, to allow them to observe the workings of the Chapter, its concerns, and role within the life of the Institute.

In recent years, other congregations who have extended invitations as an observer at their General Chapter to their lay colleagues and partners in mission have sought more effective means of bringing their voice to the Chapter. For example, within the last two years at least one group held an international assembly just prior to the Chapter and invited a representative group of brothers and laymen and women to participate.

This group studied several issues related to their common mission and developed propositions for the Chapter's consideration. During the course of the Chapter itself, a representative panel from the group presented these concerns but was not involved in the meeting beyond that. Instead at the Chapter's close a number returned for a debriefing and to plan on how best to implement Chapter decisions. Other congregations have held Provincial or regional assemblies involving vowed members and laity in preparation for their own Chapters.

Our Mission Assembly in Mendes is another good example of a new effort to include the input of a significant number of laymen and women as well as brothers in the preparatory stage of the Chapter. Those parti-

pating in the Mendes gathering recommended that the results of their work be sent to the Chapter Steering Committee once that group was formed.



While the last General Chapter gave to the present General Council permission to invite observers to our upcoming Chapter, there is no reason that laymen and women could not be invited to Provincial or regional assemblies, especially when the topic of the General Chapter might be on the agenda.

The Chapter Preparatory Commission has also included Marist laymen and women from the first stage of preparation for that meeting. The initial consultation booklet entitled *On the Road to the XXI General Chapter* includes sections that allow for the participation of Marist laity, as well as children and young people. In this way a wide cross section of opinion would be represented, greatly enriching the work of the Chapter delegates.

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NEW HEARTS FOR A NEW WORLD

Putting words in God's mouth, the prophet Ezekiel wrote, "I will give you a new heart and place within you a new spirit, I will take your hearts of stone and transform them into hearts of flesh." Faced with the unavoidable routine of daily living, who among us does not long for a fresh start, a second chance, a new heart?

Achieving this end fully, however, eludes so many of us. For some fear appears to be the culprit: fear of change, fear of the unknown, fear of anything different from that which is familiar. Others among us will tell you that they simply lack the will necessary to muster the energy to begin anew.

Our 21st General Chapter has as its theme, *New hearts for a new world*. In choosing it, members of the

New hearts for a new world

By the year 2000, Catholics worldwide numbered 1.1 billion. But only 380 million of them were living in Europe and North America, fewer than a century before.

The remaining 800 million were to be found in the southern hemisphere, with roughly half of that number living in the countries of Latin America.

Preparatory Commission hoped at the very least to make Ezekiel's message their own: a change of heart on the part of each and all of us is essential if we are ever to achieve the new beginning for which we so long. At the same time, we are aware of the fact that change does not take place within a vacuum. And our willingness to undertake this process can be thwarted by our biases, as well as the customs, events taking place, and cultures of the worlds in which we find ourselves.

Dramatic advances in information technology over the last half century, for example, have given most of us easy access to information about all sorts of topics. So too, progress in other areas of life has also had an impact, often changing the way in which we live and interact with one another and the world at large. The telephone allows you and me to maintain relationships over long distances, sometimes at the expense of those with whom we live and work.

So also, we have only to study the pattern of growth in Catholicism over the last century to get a sense of the dramatic shifts taking place within our Church.⁸ In 1900, for example, at the dawn of the 20th century, there were some 459 million Catholics in the world; 392 million of them were to be found in Europe and North America. The remaining 67 million were scattered across the rest of the world, principally in Latin America.

How times have changed! By the year 2000, Catholics worldwide numbered 1.1 billion. But only 380 million of them were living in Europe and North America, fewer than a century before. The remaining 800 million were to be found in the southern hemisphere, with roughly half of that number living in the countries of Latin America. Given demographic and religious trends, this population realignment in global Catholicism will continue.



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How can we explain this expansion? Population growth accounts for some, but not all, of it. The last half-century has witnessed a striking wave of adult conversions to Christianity, especially on the African continent. For example, between 1970 and 1985, 4,300 people a day were leaving Christian churches in Europe and North America. During the same period, there were 16,500 conversions to Christianity a day in Africa, yielding an annual growth of some 6 million new African Christians. Today among Catholics, more than half of all adult baptisms in the world are found among countries on the African continent.

Note well, though, that the growth in Catholicism occurring on the African continent, in parts of Asia, and to some extent in Latin America is not following pre-existing European patterns of faith and practice. Rather a myriad of new forms of Christianity are being created as the faith mingles with indigenous customs and understandings. Scholars suggest that this development is the most important cultural transformation in Christianity since the period of Hellenization launched by St. Paul.⁹

Our Institute, then, does not exist in a single world rather it is present in many. That fact should come as no surprise. After all, we come from 78 different nations, live with a range of political systems and structures of government, and are involved in a variety of works aimed at evangelizing the young. Poverty and wealth, rural and urban, north and south, east and west—all characterize aspects of our Marist way of life and mission.

Many competing agendas from each of these worlds can clamor for the attention of General Chapter members. We must decide together, however, what is suitable for a meeting held at that level of the Institute.

Finally, in choosing *New Hearts for a new world* as the theme for our 21st General Chapter, the members of the Chapter Preparatory Commission also sought to put responsibility where it belonged. You or I cannot help change the hearts of others if we have not first transformed our own. Also, for a group to transform itself, change must eventually move beyond the individual. But unless it starts with you and me, change has little chance of actually getting underway.

A CHANGING CHURCH

Like our world, the Church today finds itself caught in the midst of a transformation unlike any that has gone before, with the possible exception of the early Christian community's decision to admit Gentiles without prior conversion to Judaism. Consider for a moment the impact of this decision on the devout Jews of that day. Those Pharisees, for example, who had embraced the message of that itinerant teacher named Jesus and accepted him as the long awaited Messiah were told that many of the prayers and customs developed over centuries were to be put aside. We can only imagine how wrenching these changes were for those involved.

The cardinals, archbishops, and bishops who came together for Vatican II took a similar bold step: they moved the Church beyond western Christianity and challenged it to become what it was always meant to be, a world Church. While the full implications of their decisions remain unclear, of this much we can be certain: the directions set by those who made up the Council body have had a tremendous impact on religious life and its identity. In but one example, prior to the Council religious life occupied a secure place in the overall hierarchical structure of the Church. By the time the dust settled on Vatican II, however, we were already showing signs of having lost our way.

What a blessing the confusion and turmoil of the last 45 years has been! It has reminded those of us who have chosen consecrated life for our own that our place is found more appropriately as a part of the charismatic structure of our Church. False respect is the true enemy of consecrated life: we were always meant to be a bit untamed, wild and surely not domesticated.

Our way of life was also never meant to be an ecclesiastical work force. Whenever a layman or woman asks you or me what it is that we can do that they cannot, the appropriate answers is: there is nothing that we can do that they cannot do. But our identity as brothers was never meant to be wrapped up solely in what we could or could not do. Rather, religious life, at its best, is meant to be the Church's living memory of what it can be, what it longs to be, what it must be.

THE WORLD OF THE YOUNG

There has never been such a thing as the “world of the young.” Rather, children and young people live in a number of very distinct worlds. We need to develop once again the heart of a missionary if we wish to enter any of them. This fact is all the more true in the developed world today, for we appear to know more about evangelizing in the developing world than in those countries widely classified as secular.

Brothers, it would do no harm to look on this General Chapter as our brothers looked on our 16th coming as it did just after the close of the Council. That meeting reshaped Marist life and mission as we knew it and set in motion a process of change and renewal that continues to run its course even today. Has the time now come to take stock, to discern what is of the Spirit and what is not, and to make those bold moves



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necessary to keep Marist life and mission vital well into this century?

A General Chapter comes but every eight years and it is up to us to make the best of it. We can be sure that God's grace is there for us; our response is what is always in question. Are we willing to be daring, to make difficult, even unexpected, decisions, and to pay the price to make them a reality? If so, a look at some of the following challenges will be necessary:

One, rather than turning away our attention from the generation to whom Marcellin gave his heart, we must reverse this trend present in parts of our Institute and become instead the Church's experts on the evangelization of poor children and young people, wherever they might be found.

Some among us report sadly that they no longer understand the world of the young, nor do they have the skills necessary to engage them. I have no doubt others once said much the same when speaking about many of us during a younger time in our lives. However, the members of the emerging generation need adults in their lives who will listen to and understand them, love and care for them, give them the gift of hope—all the while telling them just how much Jesus Christ loves them. As an Institute for whom today's poor young people are the focus, we will need to find more effective ways of connecting the gospel to the street and to develop a vocabulary about faith that speaks to the hearts and minds of their generation.

Two, like Marcellin we must be, first and foremost, men of God. That fact should be evident in all that we do and say. No longer can we tolerate in ourselves or in one another a situation wherein we appear to be effective workers for the Kingdom but at the same time fall short when it comes to our own life of prayer and spir-

ituality. The words *Jesus is the center and passion of my life* need to be much more than a far off ideal or inspiring thought, they must to be a living reality in the life of each of us.



Three aspects of our programs of initial and ongoing formation need study and change. Some in the first category appear to be emphasizing professional training more than religious formation. Adequate education for the work we are asked to do is imperative. However, we must also raise this question: are the young men emerging from our novitiates in love with Jesus Christ, and living portraits of Marcellin Champagnat? Scholastics have all but disappeared in some parts of our Marist world.

Formation is aimed at the heart and spirit; to be effective, time and well-prepared formators are essential. Some of our programs of ongoing formation run the risk of becoming speaker's bureaus where brothers are exposed to a series of lecturers presenting updated information in a variety of disciplines. Is this what is needed in the lives of brothers in midlife and the third age?

Four, community is at the heart of our life as brothers. Increasingly the lack of it is also being cited by brothers as among their reasons for seeking dispensation from vows. We must learn the skills necessary to live together in community and to do so in a way that is life-giving, simple and supportive, and open to those with whom we share mission and those whom we are called to serve. Our communities should be places where young people feel welcome, accepted, at home.

A genuine Marist community should be memorable by the fact that any visitor leaves with the sense that he or she has been among people who pray, are in touch with life, have hearts on fire for evangelizing poor chil-

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dren and young people. At the same time, we need to admit that there are among us some who claim to have been scarred by community but whose expectations are so high that can never be met or who are themselves difficult people with whom to live.

Five, the vocation of a Marist brother and a Marist layman or woman are two different callings and both are necessary for the full life of the Church. We must clarify some current confusion about the identity of each by describing those elements held in common by Marist brothers and Marist laymen and women as well as those characteristics that make each of these respective vocations unique. More importantly we must come to understand the important but different role of each state of life in the life of the Church.

Our call to holiness and to mission has a common origin: baptism. Unfortunately from that point on many people, including some men and women religious, come to value sisters, priests, and brothers more for what they do than for who they are. Rigid adherence to such a point of view distorts any understanding about the true place and purpose of religious in the Church. For by their public profession to live radically the gospel plan as the reason and purpose of their lives they take on the task of being that institution's conscience, continually calling it to be its own best self. If consecrated life fails in this task, it suffers and so does the Church.

Six, the promotion of vocations must be a priority for all of us. Prayers for vocations are a given; there is also a great deal of other work that remains to be done. In that efforts, we need to enlist the aid of our Marist lay partners in the effort, find new and creative ways or recycle the best of the old ways of attracting vocations, and free up the necessary personnel to do the job if we expect to make any headway here.



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Obviously, the quality of our religious life as brothers is the most effective tool in attracting new membership. A sensitivity to phenomena such as globalization and internationality is equally important. In more than a few parts of our world, we need to be stretching ourselves sufficiently so as to welcome candidates from the new immigrant groups that have come to our countries in recent years.

Seven, this Chapter would be another good place to show our respect for diverse cultures that exist among us and our many different ways of doing things. The organization of past Chapters, as well as the process used to conduct those meeting, have had their origin almost exclusively in the West. Not a problem, but representing only a portion of the membership of our Institute.

Rather than proceed with traditional rules of order, could we not spend some time either before or at the outset of the Chapter itself talking about how best to conduct the meeting so that everyone feels at home with the process? Whatever we arrive at might take some getting used to, however, if it ensures increased participation on the part of all, we can rest assured that the voice of a greater portion of the Institute is being heard by all involved.

SOME SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

“I am but a small chapel, no great cathedral.” The Founder would have appreciated and taken to heart the words of this one line poem. Marcellin realizing that he did not have the precise constellation of gifts necessary to guide the Institute that he had set in motion, turned to Mary and gave his project to her. I wonder, therefore, if today Marcellin might counsel us to first accept any limitations that we will bring to the work if we want our 21st General Chapter to achieve its potential.

As mentioned earlier, preparation for our 21st General Chapter must include a process of discernment that leads to spiritual indifference. Without one, we run the risk of squandering on useless distractions and petty disagreements the grace offered through this important event in the history of our Institute.

So, to prepare for our upcoming General Chapter I extend this invitation: beginning the week of September 8th 2008 and continuing until the opening day of the Chapter join me in putting aside one day each week to fast and pray, or to take some positive action on behalf of justice among children and young people. The day of the week that you choose is not important; what will bind us together in solidarity is our willingness to embrace these practices together.

Next, where the practice has fallen off, I ask communities to restore the celebration of Eucharist to their day-to-day life. A simple Communion Service two to three times each week would be a vast improvement in those situations where the ancient custom of sharing God's Word as well as his body and blood is nowhere to be found.

If there is a chapel in the school where you and your community serve, consider celebrating your Communion Services there and opening your doors to Marist laity, students, and anyone else who might wish to join us in preparation for next year's General Chapter. And, with sensitivity to culture, keep it simple: a service of twenty minutes duration in the morning or prior to lunch or at day's end will attract more people than one that demands more time of them.

Finally, prepare yourself for the Chapter by making use of these two documents: one, a Chapter *Pilgrim's Guide* and, two, a workbook entitled *On the Road to our XXI General Chapter* and made up of several medi-

tations meant to be shared in community and with various other groups depending upon the Province in question. The texts in this second publication will help all involved to reflect on our upcoming Chapter and to identify those issues which its members should address. In all probability, you will have already received this second booklet and may have met with your community to complete its tasks. If not, please make sure that you do so prior to the deadline for submitting feedback to the Chapter Preparatory Commission. Your input about the Chapter is necessary and important.

PART II

Nature and purpose of a Chapter

When it comes to providing information about General Chapters, our Marist *Constitutions and Statutes*¹⁰ are brief and to the point, offering but five articles and four statutes on the topic. The text defines the nature and purpose of a Chapter, describes its four specific functions, and outlines the procedure to be used for electing its members.

A few points to keep in mind. First of all, a Chapter is a meeting set up to represent all the brothers of the Institute and not just those who are its leaders or superiors. To ensure that this principle is respected, the number of at-large delegates must exceed by 15 the number participating by right of office. The latter group includes the Superior General and his immediate predecessor, the Vicar General and members of the General Council in office at the time the Chapter opens, and the Provincials.



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Perpetually professed brothers, with the exception of those on exclastration or in the process of transferring to another Institute, may serve as Chapter members; those in temporary and perpetual profession, except those exclastrated or transferring, may elect delegates.

Chapter members are free, of course, to invite whomever they wish to a Chapter as observers and consultants. The members of our 20th General Chapter also gave the Superior General and his Council authority to invite various people to the Chapter for a fixed period of time so long as their total number does not exceed 15% of the total number of delegates¹¹. The right to vote in Chapter decisions, however, is reserved to Chapter members. Prior to finalizing these invitations, the Superior General and his Council must be in conversation with those who make up the Chapter Preparatory Commission.

Next, while in session, a Chapter exercises the highest extraordinary authority. In keeping with principles of collegiality and subsidiarity, its members also concern themselves with issues that are within their competency. For example, a brother may write to the Chapter Preparatory Commission and demand that his community superior be changed. Important as this request might seem be to the brother and superior involved, it is not a matter for the agenda of a General Chapter.

Finally, delegates are charged with four responsibilities:

1. to elect the Superior General, Vicar General, and members of the General Council;
2. to deal with major issues concerning the nature, aim, and spirit of the Institute and fur-

ther their renewal and adaptation within the context of our spiritual heritage,

3. to draw up Statutes for the whole Institute;

and

4. to put before the Holy See the modifications that may be needed on some points of the Constitutions.

These four tasks make up a delegate's "job description." While clear in their objectives, they limit neither the creativity nor imagination of those who make up the Chapter body. Past gatherings have addressed these responsibilities in a timely fashion while also studying a theme they judged to be of urgent importance.

POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN VOTING FOR CHAPTER DELEGATES

As mentioned earlier, serving as a Chapter delegate is an honor and not a privilege, even if in years past some brothers were elected to the Chapter as a way of showing appreciation for a job well done. You are free, of course, to elect whomever you believe will best serve as a Chapter delegate. Outlined below are a few points that might prove helpful as you come to a decision about the person or persons for whom you will vote.

The process of choosing Chapter delegates best takes place within an atmosphere of reflection, discussion, and prayer. Take advantage, for example, of the time between the issuance of this circular and the vote for delegates to share with others your thoughts as to who might best serve in this capacity.



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Take time also to pray about your choices, to free yourself of prejudice or what might be called the self-interest of a Province or area of the Institute. A Chapter is a time for thinking beyond the confines of your administrative unit or region and making decisions that are in the best interests of the whole body.

When you are ready to vote, organize a simple prayer service for the community and incorporate the process of voting into that service. If circumstances allow, invite a neighboring community to join you. If you do so, be sure to include sufficient time in the schedule to provide those involved with an opportunity to discuss with others the names of the brothers for whom they plan to vote. In this way, they can share some of the reasons for their choices and listen also to others who may think differently.

Bring the same serious attitude to this vote as you would to a sondage or vote for Provincial. Those participating in the Chapter will set a direction for the Institute for the next several years. Make sure you elect men who are best equipped to carry out that task. Remember also that a Chapter is a pilgrimage, not a business meeting. It requires prayer and patience, knowledge of our history and spirituality, and an ability to understand that each culture has its own way of doing things and that those differences constitute one of the treasures of our Institute.

Choose also persons who can dream, whose creativity is evident. A Chapter calls on all involved to stretch their imagination, to find solutions that often have not been thought about as yet. So choose brothers who can listen well, are thoughtful, flexible and able to change their mind when necessary.

Look for men who can communicate, and do so not only for the sake of the Chapter. Those who serve as del-

egates are the very ones who will bring home the Chapter's message. Choose men who are up to that task.

Elect brothers who remind you of Marcellin. Men open to the Spirit of God, filled with enthusiasm for our mission, able to face difficult problems without being discouraged, men who know that the answers to the questions we face as an Institute are to be found by looking to the future, not to the past.

Finally, look to the future yourself. In choosing brothers for the Chapter you will want to think about men who have the potential to serve as leaders in the future, men with the capacity to both make and implement decisions.

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

Members of our 19th General Chapter (1993) approved a new method for electing Chapter delegates that corrects, as much as possible, for certain inequalities that existed in the past¹². Prior to their decision the formula in place resulted, at times, in a Province made up of 151 brothers having the same number of Chapter delegates as a Province of 299. So also, a Province with 24 brothers might very well have the same number of delegates as another with 149.

The Chapter itself is made up of some members who attend by right of office and others elected by the Provinces and Districts¹³. Thirty four serve by right and include the Superior General, his immediate predecessor, the Vicar General and the Councilors General who are in office at the time the Chapter opens, and the Provincials.

The elected Chapter members will be 49¹⁴ and, as mentioned earlier, this group includes 15 more than



the total number of members by right¹⁵. They are chosen directly by the brothers using secret ballot. An absolute majority of the total number of votes received is required for election on the first ballot.

Among the elected delegates there will be one brother from each administrative unit, i.e., the 25 provinces and 4 districts. Where a Province has a District dependent upon it, the number of professed Brothers in the District is subtracted from the total number of brothers in the Province when calculating the number of delegates to which the Province is entitled.

The remaining 20 elected delegates will be chosen from among those administrative units with the greatest number of brothers¹⁶.

The election is to be carried out in the following manner. A coefficient of representation¹⁷ will be calculated for each administrative unit. In making this computation, only the Provincials are counted among the members by right. All the administrative units will be listed in ascending order according to their coefficient and an additional delegate added to the number of elected delegates in the first unit on the list. The list will be rearranged, and the process repeated, until the stated number of elected delegates has been reached.

Brothers who, in the course of the Chapter, are elected Superior General, Vicar General, or Councilors General become members of the Chapter if they are not already present. If the elected Brother Superior General is not present, the Chapter must await his arrival before continuing its work.

VOTING PROCEDURES

When electing delegates to the General Chapter please keep in mind that Chapter members *as well as* substitutes need to be chosen. The election is to proceed in the following manner:

- **First ballot**

From a list of eligible candidates, each brother voting will choose the same number of names as there are delegates allotted to the administrative unit¹⁸. After you have voted please place your ballot in a small envelope and seal it. When that task has been completed by all involved, their votes are placed in a second envelope and it is sealed in their presence. Each person who voted also signs his name alongside the place where it appears on the outside of the envelope. The second envelope is then placed inside a third and sent by registered mail to the Provincial.

- **Counting the ballots**

A four member Commission will be appointed by the Provincial and his Council to count the ballots. The Provincial presides over this Commission but his Councilors cannot be numbered among its members¹⁹.

Commission members will tally the number of votes each brother receives on a day determined by the Provincial and his Council. They will then list in descending order the names of all those who obtained votes. With the number of delegates to be elected in mind, the Commission members go down the list beginning with the name of the brother who received the greatest number of votes up to and including the



name of the brother whose place on the list is equivalent to the number of elected delegates for that administrative unit.

If all of those names have received an absolute majority of the votes cast, they are declared elected. *If all the delegates have been elected,* the Commission members go to the names that follow immediately on the list and count down until they have a group equal in number to the brothers elected delegates. If those in this second group have received at least one third of the votes cast, they are declared elected as substitutes.

- **Second ballot**

Should the required number of delegates and substitutes not be elected on the first ballot, a second ballot will obviously be necessary. For this second ballot, however, the Commission members draw up the overall list of candidates by taking the names of the brothers who on the first ballot who were the next highest vote getters following those elected delegates. For every position still to be filled three names must appear on this second ballot. From the new list of candidates, each brother voting writes on his ballot paper as many names as the number of delegates to be elected²⁰. The Commission then tallies the total number of votes each brother received and draws up in descending order a list of their names.

Counting down from the head of that list up until and including the name of the brother whose place on the list is equivalent to the number of delegates still to be elected, the Commission members declare those brothers elected as delegates. Continuing to count down the list, beginning with the name that comes immediately after those of the just elected delegates, up until and including the name on the list that is equals to the number of substitutes still to be elected,

the Commission declares them elected substitutes. In every ballot, if there is a tie, the oldest is/are considered elected.

VOTING BY PROXY

If a Brother is absent from the Province and likely to be unable to return his ballot by registered mail to the Brother Provincial before the due date, he may vote by proxy.

In this case the Brother informs the Provincial by whatever means is most secure that he chooses to vote by proxy as well the name of the Brother he appoints as proxy.

The Brother choosing to vote by proxy makes whatever arrangements he chooses with his nominated proxy.

The Provincial informs the Superior of the Community of the Brother nominated as proxy.

The proxy deposits two ballot papers and signs the envelope twice, once in his own name and a second time "as proxy for Brother (followed by the name of the Brother for whom the proxy is voting)."

THE DESTRUCTION OF BALLOT PAPERS

After any election the ballot papers are to be destroyed.

REPORT OF THE ELECTIONS

On the day that the appointed Commission meets to count the votes, the minutes of the meeting are drawn up and signed by all present.

The Provincial sends a copy of the minutes to the Secretary General, advises the delegates of their election, and publishes the names of those elected in the Province.



If they detect any irregularity, the Superior General with his Council can annul the results of an election and require that a new one be held. They will so inform the General Chapter.

LISTS OF BROTHERS

It is the responsibility of each Provincial and District Superior to ensure that the list of the Brothers in his Unit is properly drawn up and verified. The election process cannot move ahead until this task is completed.

There are three lists to prepare:

1. A list of names of the Brothers who are canonical members of the Province and a second and separate list of the Brothers who belong to any District that is dependent on that Province. *These lists are to be accurate as of September 7th, 2008.* No Brother's name may appear on both the Province and the District list at the same time. Consequently, it is imperative that the Provincial and District Superior coordinate their efforts, keeping in mind also the statutes that they have established for the District. *These listings of Brothers must be in the hands of Brother Secretary General before September 15th, 2008.*
2. A list of the Brothers eligible to be elected as Chapter delegates. All perpetually professed Brothers, except those in the canonical status of exclastration or transfer to another Institute, may be elected as delegates to the General Chapter²¹.

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3. A list of the Brothers who will elect Chapter delegates. All Brothers in temporary or perpetual vows, except those in the canonical status of exclastration or transfer to another Institute may vote for delegates to the General Chapter²².
4. Brothers who are temporarily “on loan” to another Province, and Brothers in the process of being transferred, are eligible to vote, and may do so only in the Province they come from.

SUBSTITUTES

To replace the Brothers who may not be able to go to the General Chapter, substitutes will be elected. One substitute will be chosen for each elected delegate²³.

SUBSTITUTE FOR A BROTHER PROVINCIAL

If the Brother Provincial is unable to be present at the General Chapter, one of the substitutes will take his place. The Brother Superior General must be so notified²⁴.

For any additional questions you might have, please consult the Acts of the 20th General Chapter or our Marist Constitutions and Statutes.

CONCLUSION

As brothers throughout the Institute and other members of the Marist Family prepare for our 21st General Chapter, those of us who make up the current General Administration are beginning to clear the way for the government that will follow.

In the course of our work, I find myself looking back over the past seven years and being thankful for God's grace at every step along the way. I realize also that what has been accomplished would not have been possible were it not for your generosity and support.

These have been rich years nurtured by God's grace. At the same time they have not been without their challenges. Luis, the Council members and I did our best to address them and where we have failed to do so adequately I must take responsibility and ask for your pardon. My inadequacies have been all too evident to me over the years here in Rome and elsewhere; I pray that my blind spots did not interfere unduly with our ability to discern God's will for our Institute and its future at this important time in its history.

In retrospect, are there things I would do differently? Certainly. But that is a lesson for the future and not an assessment of the past. I am convinced that were Marcellin Champagnat alive today, he would encounter Jean Baptiste Montagne in sufficient numbers to convince him to found an Institute of brothers dedicated to making Jesus Christ known and loved among poor children and young people.

I am convinced, too, that as he took up that project he would challenge us his brothers to re-imagine consecrated life for our day and age, a consecrate life that included the old-fashion virtues of sacrifice, dedication, and self-transcendence above putting our needs first and settling for comfort and complacency. He would caution us, too, against the perils of professionalism and encourage us instead to become disciples of the Lord, proclaimers of his Word, brothers to the poor children and young people we have been called to serve. Reclaim the passion that first ignited your vocation he would say.

Well aware that his charism belonged neither to him nor to us but rather to the Church, he would be at home with the Marist partnership movement that is growing in so many places across our world and encourage us to work together with our sisters and brothers in that movement to support one another in our respective vocations and to clarify the many areas we share in common as well as those aspects in the life of each group that makes it unique.

We stand today in the doorway of a new chapter in the history of Marist life and mission. We could, though, just as well miss this opportunity for renewal. Let us, then, be prayerful and discerning, let us act with courage, let us be true to the dream and heritage of our Founder as we come together in Chapter next year. Yes, let us be the Little Brothers of Mary that he



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had in mind and heart on January 2nd, 1817 when the Holy Spirit brought us to life. It is that very same Spirit that invites us to renewed life today.

Blessings and affection,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Féamí".

Brother Seán D. Sammon, FMS
Superior General

APPENDIX

IMPORTANT DATES

***First summary note to assist
Provincial and District Superiors
in their preparation for our
21st General Chapter***

Nomination list of the brothers from each Province and District:

1. Please arrange to have an accurate list of the names of those brothers who are members of your Province as of **September 7th, 2008**. The names of brothers belonging to a District under the administration of your Province should not appear on this list. Rather, a separate list of the names of those brothers should be submitted by the same date.

2. Please send these lists to the Secretary General in Rome by e-mail (secgen@fms.it), fax (39) 06 54 51 75 00, or express mail, so that they arrive no later than **September 15th, 2008**. At the same time, an original copy of each list, signed by the Provincial, should also be forwarded by post.

3. No later than **September 30th, 2008**, each Provincial will receive a letter by e-mail or fax indicating the number of General Chapter delegates to be elected by each Province.
4. Each Province should begin the process of election as soon as possible after September 30th, 2008. The final results of that vote must be in the hands of the Secretary General no later than **November 20th, 2008**. You can send these final results by e-mail or fax, but be sure to also send the original documentation, signed by the Provincial, by mail.
5. For each Chapter delegate and substitute from your Province please also send his full mailing address, phone and fax numbers and e-mail address.

DESCRIPTION OF VOTING PROCEDURE
***Second summary note to assist
Provincial and District Superiors
in their preparation for our
21st General Chapter***

Voting procedures

Each elector writes on a piece of paper, or marks on the list of Brothers, the names of as many eligible Brothers as there are positions to fill. He puts the voting paper in a small envelope, which he seals.

The votes are placed in a second envelope, which is sealed in the presence of all the Brothers concerned. This envelope bears the names of each one voting, and each one signs alongside his name.

This second envelope is placed inside a third and sent by registered mail to the Brother Provincial.

Voting by proxy

If a Brother is absent from the Province and likely to be unable to return his ballot by registered mail to the Brother Provincial before the due date, he may vote by proxy.

In this case the Brother informs the Provincial by whatever means is most secure

1. that he chooses to vote by proxy,
2. the name of the Brother he appoints as proxy.

The Brother choosing to vote by proxy makes whatever arrangements he chooses with his nominated proxy.

The Brother Provincial informs the Superior of the Community of the Brother nominated as proxy.

The Brother proxy deposits two ballot papers and signs the envelope twice, once in his own name and a second time «as proxy for Brother N...».

The counting of the votes

A four-Brother Commission to count the votes will be chosen by the Brother Provincial and his Council. The Brother Provincial fixes the date for counting the votes, and presides over the Commission. The Provincial presides over the Commission. Other members of the Commission cannot belong to the Provincial Council.

The destruction of ballot papers

After any election the ballot papers are to be destroyed.

Report of the elections

On the day of the meeting for the counting of the votes, the minutes of the meeting are drawn up and are to be signed by all present.

The Brother Provincial sends a copy of the minutes to the Brother Secretary General. The Brother Provincial advises the delegates of their election, and publishes the names of those elected in the Province. This advice serves as their convocation for the General Chapter.

If they detect any irregularity, Brother Superior General with his Council can annul the results of an election and require that a new one be held. They will so inform the General Chapter.

NOTES

- ¹ See Franc Card. Rodé, C.M. Homily XXXV General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, January 7, 2008 (http://www.gc35.info/pray/ppal/gc35_files.asp?lg=3).
- ² Approval was given to our Institute Guide for Formation in 1993 during the course of the General Chapter held that year.
- ³ Known in English as In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat: A vision for Marist education today, this publication bears the following title in French, La Mission Educative Mariste Un projet pour aujourd'hui, Spanish, Misión Educativa Marista: Un proyecto para hoy, and Portuguese, Missão Educativa Marista: Um projeto para o nosso tempo.
- ⁴ For a fuller discussion of this topic see Ronald Rolheiser. Secularity and the Gospel: Being missionaries to our children, (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2006).
- ⁵ See Harvey Cox, Fire from Heaven: the rise of Pentecostal spirituality and the reshaping of religion in the twenty-first century, (Redwood City, CA: Addison-Wesley / Perseus Books ,1996), p. xv
- ⁶ See General Chapter Statutes and Rules, number 23 in Acts of the XXth General Chapter (Institute of the Marist Brothers, Rome, Italy, May 2002}, p. 91.
- ⁷ See General Chapter Statutes and Rules, number 29, in Acts of the XXth General Chapter (Institute of the Marist Brothers, Rome, Italy, May 2002}, p. 93.
- ⁸ Cited by John Allen, The Word from Rome, National Catholic Reporter, June 16th 2006.
- ⁹ Ibid.

- ¹⁰ See Marist Constitutions and Statutes, arts. 138-142.
- ¹¹ See The General Chapter Statutes and Rules, number 12, in Acts of the 20th General Chapter (Institute of the Marist Brothers, Rome, Italy, May 2002).
- ¹² Marist Constitutions and Statutes, Art. 140.2.
- ¹³ Marist Constitutions and Statutes, Art. 140.
- ¹⁴ Marist Constitutions and Statutes, Art. 140.2.
- ¹⁵ See The General Chapter Statutes and Rules, number 11. in Acts of the 20th General Chapter (Institute of the Marist Brothers, Rome, Italy, May 2002).
- ¹⁶ Cf. Ibid., number 11
- ¹⁷ The ratio of the number of capitulants already determined to the total number of Brothers in that unit
- ¹⁸ Acts of the 20th General Chapter, Statutes and Rules of Procedure, number 17. An error found in number 17 in the original text of the Acts had to be corrected; provincials and district superiors who participated in the 2005 General Conference held in Sri Lanka were informed of this correction.
- ¹⁹ See The General Chapter Statutes and Rules of Procedure, number 20 in Acts of the 20th General Chapter (Institute of the Marist Brothers, Rome, Italy, May 2002).
- ²⁰ If all of the delegates but no substitutes are elected on the first ballot, a second ballot is required. On this second ballot each brother votes for just one person.
- ²¹ See Marist Constitutions and Statutes, Art. 141.
- ²² See Marist Constitutions and Statutes, Art. 142.
- ²³ See The Chapter Statutes and Rules of Procedure, number 17, 2nd and 4th paragraphs, in Acts of the 20th General Chapter (Institute of the Marist Brothers, Rome, Italy, May 2002).
- ²⁴ See The Chapter Statutes and Rules of Procedure, number 24, in Acts of the 20th General Chapter (Institute of the Marist Brothers, Rome, Italy, May 2002).

