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Updates

18/09/2008: Photo gallery: Year of Spirituality – Ghana retreat

18/09/2008: Ghana retreat - 4-21 August 2008

16/09/2008: Marist voluntary workers involved with the NGO SED

16/09/2008: Year of Marist Spirituality - Articles and prayers

15/09/2008: Photo gallery: Remodeling work at the Hermitage - 23

15/09/2008: Prov. Mediterránea: project of vocation animation

12/09/2008: Photo gallery: Year of Spirituality - Cameroun Retreat

12/09/2008: Cameroun Retreat

12/09/2008: Worldwide presence - Photo gallery number 194

12/09/2008: Marist News 15

12/09/2008: Deceased Brother: Luke Driscoll (United States of America)

12/09/2008: New Marist Fraternity of Nyakato/Mwanza

10/09/2008: FMS Message 38: Beatification - Marist International Mission Assembly (Mendes 2007)

10/09/2008: Submission of FMS Message 38 and the Map of the Marist site

10/09/2008: Deceased Brother: Valeriano Pérez Alvarez (Ibérica)

Year of Marist spirituality

Ghana retreat - 4-21 August 2008



The theme of our retreat was Water from the Rock. We gained a wide ranging understanding of the document as we touched upon some of the essential elements of our spirituality. To study the document chapter by chapter served the pedagogical goal of knowing the contents well. We noticed a link between the five parts of the document. The theme helped us to go back to our roots, and we felt ourselves members of this large Marist family present in 80 countries of the world. What we received was very enriching and challenging. We feel that WfR has come at the right time in the history of the Institute.

The presentation of the document was effected by talks and by sharing. Though lengthy, the talks were very lively and kept all the Brothers involved. The short introductions before the reflections were very helpful. They were clear, experiential and related to Marist life. They were presented with conviction, zeal and joy. Along with the presentations we must also make reference to the daily homilies which helped us enter in an atmosphere of prayer. The way they were related to the reading of

the day and to the contents of the WfR showed us how much our spirituality can be biblically grounded. The homilies really did meet the expectation of the retreatants.

The notes which were distributed were adequate; they helped all of us in our personal prayer. We will continue using them for our spiritual growth. They assisted us in entering into a proper relationship with God and to reflect more on what we are and what we do. They helped us to read the book more attentively, to pray with it and to take our own notes. There was enough material for prayer "providing enough food for thought."

Mention has to be made of a special moment of our retreat: the Penitential Celebration and the day for the sacrament of Reconciliation. It was creative and very conducive to meet the Lord and to be fortified by Him. We really felt like new creatures before God. It helped all of us feel like new persons. It was impossible not to understand the "holy transformation" to which we are called.



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Project of vocation animation

Province Mediterránea

The Mediterranean Province has just approved its Project of Vocation Animation. It is in 2 parts. The first one, "Framework in which vocation animation is developed", deals with the principles and aspects of Vocation Animation, the connection between pastoral work and animation and what is meant by the specific Marist pastoral vocation. The second part contains a chart with the programme of activities. Further down we have the presentation of the Project.

"This project which we wish to present is intended as a guide to help animate, accompany and discern vocation in each one of the children and young people in our educational works and in our faith groups. Because each one of them has a life project which they must discover in the future. But, also, there are those who - guided by faith - have allowed God to enter into their

life and who wonder what they can be and do, in the light of the Gospel and of the Marist charism. And who wish to respond by living as a lay Marist or as a Brother.

We are aware that it is God who personally comes closer to each one of us in order to establish a personal relationship with him. Our role, then, - the role of those of us who live the charism of Marcellin - is to raise questions in the hearts of our children and young people, especially with regard to our testimony of life which radiates faith, trust, fraternity, hope and commitment. And we do this in a very simple way, following the example set by Mary of Nazareth. This life testimony is the best way to raise the question for the future, for what God wants of each of us.

Together with this testimony, we need to extend personal invitations for a re-

sponse to this call, especially as Brothers or lay people in the various current forms of Marist life. It is necessary, therefore, to propose, but also to accompany and to discern this call with care, affection and audacity.

Knowing that it is the Holy Spirit who is the author of every vocation, we place in God's hands our work and the lives of all of those He puts in our way, we pray for them often and we encourage them with our words and with our proximity.

And in all of this we turn to Mary. She shows what God can do when he finds individuals who freely welcome his call. Free to pronounce their "yes", free to set out on the long pilgrimage of faith which will also be the pilgrimage of their vocation, like the woman called to be Mother of our Saviour and Mother of the Church."



Year of Marist Spirituality

Cameroun Retreat

The theme of the retreat was most welcomed and it helped understanding better the book Water from the Rock. It was very inspiring and suitable for the Marist Spirituality year. It was very enriching, motivating and challenging too. For some of us, the theme helped us to reflect deeply for the first time on Marist Apostolic Spirituality. It was very good that time was taken to explain all the chapters and even beyond. Apart from that the chance given to us, to express our own feelings towards the chapters, the insights that came up during the meditation were quite good and encouraging. They were, at the same time, simple enough to be understood,

clear and profound. To use one sentence of our book, they were "down-to-earth".

It was enjoyable, in a special way, the invitation to a deep prayer life. In fact it was an invitation coming from the book itself on our spirituality (cf n° 81.83). It was quite challenging to discover it. Other important documents of our institute should be presented in a similar way so as to get the maximum of richness they have. There was an ample space for questions and answers. Therefore the understanding of the document was very clear. The explanation on various numbers of great and special importance coupled with the experience and a wider



information coming from other Marist documents and from the Bible make the whole week very attractive. Through the study of Water from the Rock we came to understand better our identity as Marist Brothers in the Church as well as what we are expected to do.



Marist voluntary workers involved with the NGO SED

Spain

Here we have Beatriz Zandio, 30 years old, a neurologist and Rodrigo Espinedo, 35 years old, a teacher in our Marist school of Pamplona. They were married in the summer of 2007 and decided to go to Chad to spend a year as Marist voluntary workers involved with the NGO SED. They stayed at the District House in Accra, Ghana, before returning to Spain, and they have agreed to an interview.



It is not exactly normal for a newlywed couple to opt for a year of missionary work of this calibre...

In our case, the concern to help the neediest came from a distance; both of us have been involved in the work of SED. As a couple we also decided to commit ourselves in a specific way, at a time when our family and our work situation allowed us. We offered our services to the Iberian Province and the Brothers decided on the place and the work.

There were many possibilities... why Chad?

Certainly: we could have gone anywhere. But the words of Brother Samuel, the Provincial, were very clear: "You are a gift for the Province; and a gift is made to those with the greatest need". He suggested we should go to Chad and we accepted.

Where do your Marist links come from?

Rodrigo is a teacher in the Marist school of Santa María de Real of Pamplona and is involved in the provincial mission teams. Beatriz grew up in the Marist faith youth groups. We both identify with the features of Marist spirituality, with its style and charisma.

You land in Chad: is it a cultural, linguistic shock...?

The first and greatest shock was the situation of poverty throughout the country; we hadn't imagined it to be like this. Day after day we have tried to adapt ourselves to that reality, to the lack of resources... The cultural differences have been rather an enriching element.

When you arrived there were Marists in Koumra and in Sarh. Did you go there with the intention of becoming integrated in one of those communities?

We were very open to any possibility, but we wanted to collaborate closely with the Brothers. We lived in Sarh, forming a community with Carlos and Blaise, the first Chadian Marist. When Carlos had to return to Spain and Blaise went to Koumra, we continued to live in the Brothers' house.

The Marist community of Koumra is more than 100 km from Sarh. What relationship did you have?

A great deal and it was very good. In spite of the distance, we tried to visit the Brothers twice a month, when work permitted. The visits were reciprocal; filled with family joy and... sausage

And what happens when a couple like you is integrated in a Marist community?

I believe that we all benefited. With the Brothers we have shared our prayer life, community meetings, the preparation and application of budgets. And now we continue doing this as a couple.

Your specific work in Sarh...

Rodrigo has collaborated with the bishopric in the preparation of cooperative projects between the Diocese and Spain; Beatriz has worked as a doctor in the diocesan hospital, specializing in HIV/AIDS

Efficacy or witness?

Both, without a doubt. We have tried to work as though the result of our work depends on us; with our feet on the ground and with passion. Knowing, however that it is in the hands of God. We believe that attentive and simple presence is in itself a value and in this way we have shared the realities of the diocese, with our neighbours, in our work...

Much is spoken of "readiness" for the mission; what has that meant for you?

Both in the bishopric and in the hos-

pital we had a work schedule, but we have tried to be open and available to any need, whether it be public health for Beatriz or of the bishopric or of the Brothers in the case of Rodrigo.

What do you think of the Chadian people, of the local church?

The Chadian people are welcoming, their character stamped by their hardships, reserved. Greatly influenced by their ancestral traditions, resignation, fatalism... The church is still very young (our diocese was founded 52 years ago) and it is also filled with young people; little by little there are vocations to the religious life. They have the difficult task of sowing the Gospel while respecting the traditional culture, which is sometimes opposed to it.

You have given a year of your lives. You must have received something in exchange...

In itself the year has been a grace, a gift. We have been made welcome, received affection. We have felt like members of a great family in the diocese of Sarh. We return with the feeling that the reality of what we knew has widened, and we have a new perspective on it.

Joys and difficulties experienced in this year of cooperation?

In the work the difficulties come from the lack of material resources, infrastructures, communications... For Rodrigo a little difficulty has been the language; for Beatriz the lack of essential medicines.

As for joy, there have been many reasons for 'celebration': projects that succeed... a patient who gets well... A daily joy was the Eucharist with the missionaries and sharing our daily life with them.

How do you see the future of the country, of the Church and of the Marist work in Chad?

We see the future of the country as being uncertain, mainly through political uncertainty. The church is young and built on hope; maybe it needs time to grow, to deepen and to immerse society in the values of the Gospel. We believe that the Marist work in Chad is very necessary, both in education and in pastoral work, and it should continue to create Marist schools in the country. The Brothers are looking at the possibility of opening a school in Koumra.

You are not the first voluntary workers, and certainly not the last.

Would you recommend the experience?

Yes, without a doubt; we would encourage other possible volunteers to work in Chad, side by side with the Brothers. To prepare themselves and to specify the missionary concerns although they might seem to be contradictory.

Within a few days, back again in Spain. And what now?

Starting from now, the joy of meeting up with people: Rodrigo returns to school and Beatriz will look for work. We feel the challenge to share the experiences of this year and this newly discovered reality. We will try to stay in contact with Chad and collaborate with the Marist District of western Africa.

What part of the gospel did you find inspiring when you were living this experience?

The story of Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman at the well. It is a hymn to closeness, the seduction of Jesus' message and conversion. "He who drinks of this water will never thirst."

And from Marcellin?

Do good quietly.

Interviewed by: Bro. José M. Ferre



Hermitage: The reconstruction begins

