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Enlarged General Council with the Provinces of Arco Norte

Mexico

Brother Superior General and his Council invited the Provincial Council of Arco Norte, to meet in Guadalajara, Mexico 5- 9 November 2008. The meeting took place at La Quinta San José, a house of spirituality situated in the barrio of Las Pintas de Arriba in the municipality of El Salto (Jalisco).

This meeting had been arranged previously at the General Conference held in Sri Lanka in 2005, and was convoked at the conclusion of the second visit of the General Council to the region of Arco Norte. Also taking part were the Provincial Councils of the Provinces of Canada, United States of America, Central Mexico, Western Mexico, Central America and Norandina which constitute the region called Arco Norte.

The main topic for this meeting was regionalisation, that is to say, cooperation among the Provinces. The hymn with which this morning started repeated the refrain:

"Here I am Lord". This allowed Brother Peter Rodney, at the start of the meeting to reflect: "Here I am also as a member of the region. Where do I fit in? What is my place within the region? "The efforts in the course of these days led to clarifying together the meaning and implications of the dynamics of regionalisation. Arco Norte is a region that in some ways is just beginning. This was the first time that the Provincial Councils of the 6 Provinces came together. It was important to remember the road travelled to arrive at the current situation. The General Chapter of 1993 defined regionalisation as the process by which the administrative units of the Institute are grouped together, to facilitate cooperation and ample cooperation. The fundamental purpose of regionalisation, according to the Chapter, consists in articulating the participation process and it is helpful that it has emerged within the Institute to bring about the notion of international brotherhood.



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Director:

Br. AMEstaún

Production:

Br. Onorino Rota

Mr. Luiz da Rosa

Redaction and Administration:

Piazzale Marcellino Champagnat, 2

C.P. 10250 - 00144 ROMA

Tel.: (39) 06 54 51 71

Fax: (39) 06 54 517 217

E-mail: publica@fms.it

web: www.champagnat.org

Edit:

Marist Brother's Institute

General House - Rome

My Experience as a Marist Volunteer in Ecuador

Agapito Gómez - Colombia

You are reading a personal document that I desire to share with you. First, a brief introduction on the significance of this project; secondly, my experience as an FMS volunteer. That is, an experience of hopefulness for the First Peoples of the Amazonian region of Ecuador. The school bearing the name "Colegio Intercultural Bilingüe Fiscomisiona Abya Yala," lies in the countryside outside of Lago Agrio, in the Sucumbíos Province of Ecuador.

To explain the name: "Intercultural" – because five different indigenous communities are found at the school: Kichwa, Siona, Secoya, Cofán and Shuar. Each community has its own identity, culture, language, customs and rituals. "Bilingüe" – because it preserves the importance of original languages, along with Spanish and English. "Fiscomisional" because the project receives support from the national government of Ecuador ("fisco") and from the Catholic Church ("misional"). Then the school's official name of "Abya Yala," coming from the Cuna community who inhabited Panama before 1492. In the Cuna tongue the words mean "new land, good land." In light of such an ideal, neither cultures nor languages constitute a barrier. On the contrary, fraternity and hope have become its trademark. Yes, it must be said that to live the experience is easier than putting it into words. Words cannot ex-

plain clearly the fulfillment of this ideal and the embodying of this hope – this hope that has been "our apostolate" – saying "our" because with Catalina Bedoya from Manizales, Colombia I share this work, this challenge: in the star-filled nights, accompanied with the rich scent of forest and field, working together during the day which begins pleasantly at 4:45 A.M. and comes to a close at 10:30 P.M. when we enjoy a glass of Fiorvanti soda.

There in Abya Yala: five colors (the yellow, blue and red of the national flag; white as symbol of peace and fraternity; green for the Pachamama forest); five cultures (Shuar, Cofán, Kichwa, Siona and Secoya); five countries (Chile, Spain, Mexico, Ecuador and Colombia) the countries of the lay volunteers, and of the members of the religious communities which support the project; five languages (Paicoca, A'ingae, Kichwa, Shuar and Spanish); but one only goal which we all share as Marists: "to keep Champagnat's dream ablaze in today's world." We share our lives with the local children whose faces are filled with innocent affection, with joy and harmless impudence, with gratitude and simplicity. They are children whose hands are rough from the scars left by the machetes they handle expertly, and from the thorns which "Pachamam" (Mother Earth) has placed along their paths. They are children with a single, pure heart that cries out into the world, "We are here and we really do exist!"

They are children who bear witness to the world that self-forgetfulness expressed in one's daily toil is worthwhile if one is making a dream come true. It happened to me at one of the young people's Easter celebrations in Cali, Colombia when hearing about the experience of former volunteers Cristian Valencia and Jenny.

Something inside of me urged me to do what they had done. Some powerful force drove me to share with Brother Leonardo the wish which was taking shape inside me. I asked him to let me bring the dream to reality . . . and to do so quickly. I spent months filled with expectation and anxiety. The expectations arose because I would have to go to a foreign country, a different culture, among people I would not know. The anxiety surfaced when I began to realize that I would have to live apart from my family and my university friends. But, as I said . . . no question of retreating, no regrets. Then August 2007, my birthday, rolled around. With many others at my side I set out towards the dream which lay within me.

The rich scent of the tropical forest, full of papaya and sugar cane; how can one describe the bright plumage of the toucans and the chattering of the monkeys which greet us each morning? Our dream unfolds in the quotidian events of the classroom, amidst books and tests. We share life with the little heroes who have won over our hearts. They have even enabled us to revise our ideas as to what life is all about. Happiness does not live in the things we possess, but rather in the self-forgetfulness which enables us to perceive the loving countenance of the Creator, and permits to become the kindness of God reaching out to our neighbor, our brother, our sister.

I cannot imagine that my father's illness has called me back from my dream and so necessitated a retrograde step. Everything unfolded in a sigh, in the blinking of an eye. Now, if someone were to ask me, "Do you want to re-live the experience?" I would give a straightforward "Yes" without a moment's delay, like the "Fiat" of our Good Mother.



Creating New Experiences for Sharing the Journey!

Preparatory Committee Prepares the Shared Formation Experience Brothers and Laity

A warm, communal spirit was the main highlight of a committee meeting held in Montreal, Canada, October 20-24, 2008, in order to prepare a formation experience which will involve both Brothers and laity. The committee members are: Brothers Teofilo Minga (Secretary, Religious Life Commission), Bernard Régis (Hermitage), Pau Fornells (Director of the Laity Bureau), Mr. Tony Clarke (Australia), Mr. Robert Giguère (Canada), Miss Linda Corbeil (Canada). The committee's task is to work up a detailed plan, and then to put the plan into action at the formation experience which will take place from April 26 to May 17, 2009 at Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, France.

For one week, the committee worked on planning the formation experience which targets Brothers and lay people of English and French language. It is worth noting that a similar experience - for speakers of Spanish and speakers of Portuguese - took place in Ecuador's capital, Quito, in July 2008, with a mixed, Brother-laity membership.

About twenty Brothers and lay people will join in this first Anglophone experience, one which aims at creating together a new path to enrich the Marist mission around the world. In order to

accomplish such an aim, the participants will be invited to create a community which, in its turn, may assist the members in taking a look at various themes and in grasping and deepening some of the relevant subtleties. The preparatory committee has prepared material on each of the themes and has set up a schedule of three week's duration. The following are the central topics of the experience:

Faith

- * One's personal relation to God
- * Marist spirituality

Vocation

- * One's specific identity
- * Our shared Marist identity

Relating to others

- * One's experience of relating to others
- * The Marist experience in communion with the Church

Mission

- * Personal experiences of mission
- * Our shared mission

Formation

- * One's own formation plan
- * Formation plans within my Province and my Region



We feel that this innovative experience will serve to create life-giving communities which will become signs of a renewal based on charismatic elements. Enriched by the shared experience of life, spirituality and mission, we hope to prepare the participants in such a way as to enable them to create similar experiences in their own Province and Region. We hope too that the experience will give birth to a new community of formators.

The new experience within the Marist Brothers' Institute aims at creating a space and a time suitable for Brothers and lay people to share in common and to build Marist life together. In such togetherness, and by placing Jesus at the center of our lives, we will be able to discern the path along which he is leading us.



75 Years of FMS Presence in Cordoba, Spain



The Marist Brothers came to the Spanish city of Cordoba in 1933. On October 4 of the same year they found in one of the city's buildings an empty ground-floor which they converted into the semblance of a school. In June, at the end of the scholastic year, about thirty students were enrolled in the school, and three

Brothers were looking after the establishment. The times were not very auspicious for religious schools in Spain. At the start of the academic year in the City of the Caliphs (as Toledo is known), the school name became "Cervantes" in order to keep the designation free of religious overtones.



What is a General Chapter?

On the way to the 21st General Chapter

The General Chapter of the Marist Brothers is an Assembly, representative of the whole Institute, which takes place every eight years. It is an expression of the participation of all the Brothers in the life and mission of the Institute, and their co-responsibility in its government. The Chapter elects the Superior General and other members of the Council, and concerns itself with the renewal and adaptation of the Institute. Unfortunately we can't all go to Rome for the meetings, the prayers and the gelato ! The Brothers elect delegates to represent them there. Incidentally, it is worth recalling here that the Marist Brothers were among the pioneers in inviting lay Colleagues to participate in discussions at our recent General Chapters.

Although the elected delegates have special responsibilities, there is a sense of mission about the Chapter for all Brothers throughout the world, seeking to discern where the Lord is leading us. We are all called to reflect on the movement of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, calling us to new challenges. Jesus and Mary are with us, and so are many of those who work with us, who share our mission, and who often inspire and encourage us. The Chapter is an important spiritual journey for every Marist Brother and it can be so for friends and colleagues willing to accompany us. It becomes a pilgrimage in faith, reflecting and praying together. Listening and discerning hearts are so important when we are bombarded and alienated by so much in many of our modern societies. These days, advanced means of communication will enable us to follow more closely what is actually happening at the Chapter in Rome and provide extra stimulus for our reflections and prayers.

My memory is not what it used to be

but among my indelible memories is being present at a meeting of Brothers in South Africa who had been called together to make some very difficult decisions at a complex time in the history of that country. This was in the pre-Mandela era. At the end of the discussion I told them quite frankly that if I had ever felt myself in the presence of the Holy Spirit in a group, it was then. But not all my experiences have been like that. New challenges can often arouse hesitations, fears, and reactions. May we all be brave and generous as those Brothers were. And now a warning! Years ago I read a wonderful book by a Protestant Bishop, John V. Taylor, who had been a missionary in Africa for many years. The rather unusual title of the book is "The Go-Between God"! And the sub-title The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission. And now, with considerable pleasure I share with you the very first lines of the book. Hold them to your heart.

The chief actor in the mission of the Christian Church is the Holy Spirit. The mission consists of the things he is doing in the world. He is the director of the whole enterprise. In a special way it consists of the light that he is focusing upon Jesus Christ. This fact, so patent to Christians in the first century, is largely forgotten in our own. So we have lost our nerve and our sense of direction and have turned the divine initiative into a human enterprise. "It all depends on me" is an attitude that is bedeviling both the practice and the



21st General Chapter **new hearts** for a **new world**

theology of our mission in these days. That is precisely what Jesus forbade at the start of it all. They must NOT go it alone. They must NOT think that the mission is their responsibility. Then he quoted Acts 1, 4 - 8. It is so easy to turn our mission into "a human enterprise", our work, to forget the Holy Spirit and to think that we are working the miracles! Bu read on. If you ever want an injection of courage spend some time with the Acts of the Apostles.

One final remark. Give thanks for the General Chapter even if you miss out on the gelato! Sadly, other sectors of the Church don't always have the opportunity of rigorous regular review, something very important for the complicated times in which we live. Whether it be a school, a parish, the Roman Curia, a diocese, or whatever group, we all need sessions of review and there should be a place for the Holy Spirit there.

Bro. Charles Howard
Sydney Province
Superior General 1985 - 1993

