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Saint Peter's clothed in scaffolding - A message from the canonization

Br. Seán Sammon, Superior General

Who among us, fortunate enough to be in Rome on April 18th, 1999, can ever forget the cage of scaffolding that obscured the façade of Saint Peter's basilica? It made more prominent the center banner attached to a bar; a banner graced by the image of Marcellin Champagnat, priest of the Society of Mary, founder of the Little Brothers of Mary, and soon to be declared a saint of the Roman Catholic Church.

Spirits were high among the crowd that morning as the sky periodically spit and spewed, threatening to put a damper on the events unfolding. And to this day, there are those who remain convinced that it was the good Lord who held off the rains until the service came to a close.

And, then, as quickly as it began, the canonization was history and gatherings celebrating its significance got underway in Rome and abroad. Throughout that day and during the years since, I have often wondered about the Founder's view of it all. His was a formidable presence that morning, but what went through his mind and what did his heart tell him? More importantly, here ten years later to the day, does he have a message for us, or better yet a challenge?

First of all, no doubt that Marcellin would



have found himself surprised to be hanging out at Saint Peter's. After all, he was a man given to simplicity and might even have been bit embarrassed by all the attention.

Second, being a person with a practical bent, my hunch is that he would have quickly gotten over any discomfort at being singled out and used the occasion to remind us about a



MARIST NEWS

N.º 47 - Year I - April 23rd, 2009

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few important points. To begin with, our continuing need to re-imagine and renew consecrated life for our day and age. Those of us who are Marcellin's Little Brothers stand in a doorway today. Whether we go forward or backward is up to us, but of this much we can be sure: we cannot stand in that doorway forever.

The work of renewal that lies ahead will call for sacrifice on the part of all, as well as a change of heart. Make Christ your passion, he would tell us, the gospel the rule of your life, the work of bringing God's Word to poor children and young people your obsession. Put aside excuses, ratio-

nalizations, and fear and embrace the task at hand. Yes, we have come a long way on the journey of renewal, he would say, an equally difficult road lies ahead.

Next, Marcellin would share the late John Paul II's enthusiasm when he declared this millennium as a time for promoting the vocation of the laity. And he would encourage all of us to do everything possible to achieve this end. He would also place before our Marist lay partners the same demands put to his Little Brothers: Christ at the center; proclaim the Word of the Lord; have a heart for the poor.

Finally, Marcellin would invite us to take Mary as a model of what it means to be a disciple of the Lord. Paul VI reminds us that she had the good sense to question God's messenger; with that task complete her yes to God's request was unequivocal. Can we do otherwise?

Yes, ten years after his canonization Marcellin would have a message for us. And for our part? Let's take heed! Marcellin Champagnat, priest of the Society of Mary, Founder, saint of the Roman Catholic Church, our brother: pray for us.



Duration of the XXI General Chapter

Preparatory Commission

In response to the proposal made by the Preparatory Commission for the XXI General Chapter about the duration of the latter (from 8 September to 10 October), the capitulants have expressed their opinions in a forum and by replying to a survey which lasted from the 4th to the 21st of March.

In general, the opinions are favourable to this proposition; out of 69 voters, 62 are for, 2 against, 5 have no opinion on the subject. The reasons given for supporting the proposed length agree on one point : a month of work in a large and heterogeneous group allows a harvesting of good fruit by going to the essentials. The fact of having a fixed date of closure helps discipline oneself to go straight for the goal.

Every Chapter is a work of discernment, an opportunity for renewal, a time for receiving graces ; it will be necessary, in fact, to foresee the main

lines of action which will mark our path for the next eight years, capable of renewing the enthusiasm of our consecration. There it is necessary to give oneself time to study these subjects in depth, for there are some very important ones.

Some affirm likewise that they are not starting from « zero » in coming to the Chapter: there have already been many regional meetings, the exchange by means of the web page of the Chapter is acknowledged to be very rich, and there

are also the communications which are being continually received.

There exists also the concern of not being hustled by the time, which could lead to the taking of precipitate decisions. To avoid this danger, it is suggested that we do not spend too much time on questions of organization, of regulations, etc., which may be studied previously. If in acting in this way, there still remain some important questions to deal with, some are of the opinion that, in the extreme

case, the Chapter could be prolonged, and indeed consider a second session. The fact of not knowing the work plan suggested has been an obstacle to voting in good earnest on the date for the end of the Chapter's work. The definitive decision on this subject will be taken at the last moment, when the capitulants are gathered in the chapter hall.



Brothers and Lay People together

Province of "Rio Grande do Sul"

In Veranópolis, one hundred and eighteen Brothers of Rio Grande Do Sul Province gathered for a Provincial Assembly that ran from March 27 to 29. The Assembly was one stage in the preparations leading up to both the XXI General Chapter and the third Provincial Chapter.


The gathering came into focus at two moments especially. The first was when Brother Pedro Ost, representing the General Council, offered a conference on the topic, Evangelical Use of Goods. Brother Pedro has been engaged with this topic since last year and has presented the theme in many Provinces. The topic is quite relevant, generating, as it does, reflections go beyond material things. For example, the reflections touch upon (1) our intellectual goods and (2) our human resources, that is, the people who are part of the Institute.

March 29 featured a first of its kind



event: lay people participated actively in the Provincial Assembly. The lay representation numbered fifty-three, coming from the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family, from Marist Youth Ministry, and from various Province-based organizations. The occasion provided an apt moment to inform the participants about up-to-date results of the initial consultation being held for

the General Chapter.

In addition, the meeting offered that chance for the Brother Capitulants (Lau-ro Hochscheidt, Inacio Etges and Pedro Ost) to listen to the views of Brothers and lay people regarding the priority topics of the XXI General Chapter, i.e. the identity of the Marist Brother and the identity of the lay Marist. 

Meeting of Marist laity and brothers in Ecuador




With mistaken impressions, doubts, and questions, but with much enthusiasm, the meeting of Brothers and lay men and women took place in Ecuador (4 - 5 April 2009). There were 34 participants in all. The criterion was to organize ourselves in a more structured way by assuming with fervour the Family Spirit in the Marist style.

We surveyed the history of the laity's presence in the Church and especially in the Marist Institute, as a motivation, from the spirituality inspired in the document Water from the Rock, a writing which deeply influenced the year of Marist Spirituality, celebrated in the course of 2007.

We were aided by the text: "Guidelines for reflecting on the XXI General Chapter", which invited us to continue discerning our identity and voluntary commitment in sharing Mission, Faith and Life together with the brothers. Furthermore, there was insistence on a work of vocational type, not only at the level of the brothers, but also directed to lay people who want to follow Jesus more closely, inspired by the charism of Marcellin Champagnat in their reality of life.

Formation is the fuel which animates us and drives us to keep on devoting ourselves to making Jesus Christ known and loved, among those persons who not only have need of our economic support or the daily prayers we can make, but of our personal surrender, free and whole, to the service of humanity and of our home called earth.

We lay people are invited to a common table where we share: prayer, experience, support, relaxation, formation... together with the brothers, everything is animated by a project of shared life, with the aim of helping us mutually and beginning to strengthen our identity from communion and respect, considering our specific differences. 

Mendes to Melbourne and Beyond

Mission Assembly in the Province of Melbourne

The Mission Assembly of Mendes took firm roots in Melbourne as the "Five Call Areas" of the Document of the Assembly 2007 were reflected upon in shaping a vision of the Province of Melbourne. Over 75 people attended the Conference drawn from all missions and ministries of the Province. They worked hard in discerning how to give localized meaning to the global calls being made of the Marist world from the Mendes gathering. A sense of pride was evident as presentations of the participant's visionary ideas and concrete commitment proposals were shared in the presence of the Ministry Council of the Province. This newly formed Council consisting of the Provincial, Brothers and Lay Marists provides oversight and visioning to all the Ministries of the Province listened intently to the local calls being discerned by all present.

Openness to the breath of the Spirit was alive and well! As the participants readily took up the solidarity challenges of Mendes it encouraged them and reaffirmed their commitment to the marginalized Missions and Ministries of the Province. The implementing of new missions to the marginalized, adopting models of practice that are currently working and extending ourselves to open new missions with our most marginalized group, the local indigenous, were readily endorsed. What was heartening in this process was the willingness of participants to say that fellow Marists needed to



take responsibility for these missions to uphold them. The tabling of ideas of how support of these Missions and Marist communities could be carried forward brought other models of practice to light for exploration in the future. These included secondments of personnel for particular Missions of the province, short to medium term commitments in a volunteer capacity and or in another supported form. Partnerships with other organizations in sharing in the mission were considered to be pathways for exploration in carrying forward the mission of the Province.

Participants readily identified with the need to commit to their own formation in the education for the transformation of youth. Endorsement and expansion of what is currently being offered by the formation systems of the Province was encouraged with proposed ideas that committing more resources to improved communication strategies that can educate as well as inform

is critical to good formation. With the soon to be established Centre for Province Ministries, use of technology in achieving this improvement in communication should be enhanced. The acknowledgement that REMAR continues to be transformative for both the youth and the leadership involved, also made calls on the Province to build on it and develop it further.

Outreach, in evangelizing beyond our own country, was seen as important to continue. In upholding our commitment to overseas missions was invaluable in itself, and for the evangelizing influence it can provide to those in our schools and other ministries of the Province.

Participants finished the conference somewhat tired but fulfilled sensing that each other's ideas were being heard and processes were in place to take their visioning forward in making the kingdom present here and among us!



New books received

15 días con Champagnat - Br. Jean Roche (Translated by Br. Teodoro Alonso Cabria) - Ciudad Nueva

Rosário - Orações de outubro - Br. Édison Hüttner - Editora Universitária PUCRS - Porto Alegre, Brazil

Uso Evangélico dos Bens - Br. Pedro Ost - Editora CMC - Porto Alegre, Brazil