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Updates

15/09/2009: Initial Formation in the Province of the United States

14/09/2009: Photo gallery - Chapter: Outing

14/09/2009: Blog: Partners in progress (Ozoh Rufus Chimezie)

14/09/2009: Blog: Challenges for Laypeople and Brothers (Agnes Reyes)

14/09/2009: Election of the Central Commission / Meeting of the Marist Family

14/09/2009: Worldwide presence - Photo gallery number 232

14/09/2009: Chapter's Central Commission

14/09/2009: Seventy-five Years in Uruguay

14/09/2009: Video: Activities September 12th

14/09/2009: Video: Prière pour le XXI Chapitre Général

13/09/2009: Blog: We find ourselves at the crossroads (Arturo Morales Pérez)

13/09/2009: Blog: "Together, we need to make courageous decisions" (Linda Corbeil)

13/09/2009: Photo gallery - Chapter: Activities of the 12th september

12/09/2009: Blog: Listening to Understand (Erica Pegorer)

XXI General Chapter

From the Provisional Committee to the Central



The Chapter agenda included, in its order of the day for 11 September, reaching consensus on the "Global Plan" of the Chapter. By "Global Plan" is understood the results of clarifying the goals it seeks to achieve during the duration of the Chapter, the distribution of time it has to use for each goal, and the final date for bringing the assembly to a close. Those responsible for seeing to the carrying out of the Chapter's "Global Plan" are the members of the Central Commission, chosen from among the capitulants.

The one directing the morning's chapter session explained that the "Global Plan" is a response to an initial question raised by the assembly: What do we seek to achieve during the Chapter? This question has its roots in the whole process of preparation the institute has gone through. The Initial Consultation, the Guidelines subsequently sent, the provincial and regional Letters revealed some relevant "themes" of special interest. The Chapter has to define how to treat these themes and has to find what unites them together. The binding element has already been stated as the "fundamental call" God is making to the Marists of

today. To grasp what God is asking through today's situation requires an attitude of listening and opening the heart to welcome the new challenges.

After listening and defining the central call and the themes which have to be clarified for treatment by the assembly, the Chapter has to determine what and how it is going to transmit to the whole Institute. In this fashion it has brought together in a whole the road the Chapter has to follow through to the closing date.

The proposal approved was couched in these terms: "The Chapter recommends to the Central Commission that the methodology of creating consensus be used for the work of the Chapter, and that voting be used to show the range of consensus achieved". The suggestions expressed for presentation to the Central Commission made reference to a flexible application of the "Global Plan". And finally the capitular assembly revealed that the 10th of October was the date indicated for concluding the tasks of the Chapter.

The afternoon session commenced with

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a brief Marial prayer. The work carried out by the capitulants consisted in reaching agreement on the powers held by the members of the Central Commission, the number of members, the method of proposing candidates and the method of election.

A practical system to indicate progress in the consensus underway, at the tables as well as in the hall, consists in the use of three pieces of coloured cardboard. Green shows that the person agrees with the proposal or decision to be made. Gold indicates that he

desires to carry on dialogue on a point not yet sufficiently shared or clarified. And red shows disagreement with the proposal. This mode of determining progress in the dialogue is no more than a sounding of the consensus taking place. The voting, which consolidates the decisions of the capitulants, takes place in electronic form once the process of consensus is concluded.

In this way it was decided that each table propose four names for the list of persons eligible to make up the Central Commission. The members of

the Provisional Committee would draw up a list of the names, which would be presented to the chapter assembly and serve as the basis of the election.

The Provisional Committee had decided that anniversaries, birthdays and feasts occurring during the week would be celebrated together on Fridays after supper. On Friday, 11 September, there was a joint celebration for the birthday of Br. Óscar Martín Vicario, the anniversary of the Independence of Brasil, and Catalonia Day.



September 12th

Election of the Central Commission / Meeting of the Marist Family

El The name of the Virgin was Mary. Thus the Gospel of Luke identifies the central character of that historic moment, who changed history with her yes to God. Twenty-one centuries later, the Church celebrates the name-day of this woman because of her trust in God. As Christians and as Little Brothers of Mary, we form part of the family of the children of God, and we rejoice to have a sister in the faith called Mary, who became the mother of Jesus, our God and Lord. To dedicate a day to celebrating her name is to celebrate a feast for all God has done through her.

The Institute has celebrated the name of Mary from the beginning with joy and gratitude, because it bears her name. The union of M and A, written in a single figure, is the origin of the monogram of Mary, one of the expressions of the names Mary and Marist, which has been most widely spread in its various forms. This graphic expression of our mother's name has its origin in Greek icons, which abbreviate it with the initial letters of the Greek words Ἁγία Μαρία (Holy Mary).

The cult of the name of Jesus spread through Europe by means of the

monogram of his name devised by Saint Bernardine of Siena (1380-1444). During the XVI and XVII centuries, the veneration of the name of Mary went together with that of Jesus. The miraculous medal (1830) includes on its reverse side the M of Mary.

The monogram of Mary came to be known by the Marists for the first time, according to the researches of Br. Pierre Zind, at the major seminary of Lyon. At the end of the XVII century, the Superior, François Rigoley, obtained the Marial monogram for the armorial of the Seminary of Saint Ireneus, and it was later adopted by the Society of Mary and the Little Brothers of Mary. Since then, the monogram has been widely disseminated in the Institute and by means of the Institute. Documents, stationery, shields, seals, books, pictures, etc. provide a way for studying its evolution.

The celebration of Mary's name was what drew together the four branches of the Society of Mary at the general house of the Brothers on the day of the 12th of September.

During the morning, the capitulants were meeting to adapt the Chapter



Regulations to the new methodology they are using in their work. The Preparatory Commission had anticipated that they would be able to hold the elections to the Central Commission also at this time, but they ran out of time and had to leave this until the evening.

The Mass brought together the Marist Fathers, also holding a Chapter, the Marist Sisters, and the Marist Missionary Sisters.

The intentions of the Mass reveal the feelings of the participants. It prayed "for the Congregations born from the Society of Mary, gathered here, and for all who bear the Holy Name of Mary: may they be animated by the zeal to make Jesus known and loved, and may they extend the cult of Mary in the

missions where they work. We pray that our fidelity in following Jesus as Mary did will gain for us an increase of vitality and progress”.

A particular intention for those meeting in a General Chapter was mentioned: thanks for “the election of Fr. John Hannan as Superior General of the Marist Fathers”. They also asked the Lord “that the sharing of mission and spirituality with lay people would strengthen and promote the witness of an authentic, simple, and evangelical life among our brothers and sisters”. And the final petition to Mary “that she be for us, once again, a source of faith and hope, as she was for those who founded us, that she be the model and inspiration of a new life in Christ. That she continue to intercede for our communities, our parishes, and our works, so that our wine may not fail, and because all that we have she has given us”. The intercessions were read out in the four languages of the Institute.

The gathering in prayer continued with a meal in the gardens of the house



in an atmosphere of good cheer and brotherhood.

In the evening, the capitulants continued their work and elected the Central Commission of the Chapter. Eight were elected and the Chapter left it to them to choose the offices of Commissioner, Vice Commissioner, and Secretary of the Chapter. The Commission is

made up of Brothers: Maurice Berquet (L’Hermitage) Commissioner, Graham Neist (Sydney) Vice Commissioner, Joseph Maria Soterias (L’Hermitage) Secretary, Ben Consigli (United States of America), Ernesto Sánchez (México Occidental), João Carlos do Prado (Brasil Centro-Sul), Manuel de León (East Asia), Yao Kouassi Kan Sylvain (West Africa).



What are our roads for the future?

The capitulants visit three ecclesial communities

Sunday arrived, the first rest day for the capitulants. The members of the Central Commission used the day to organize and prepare their work agenda for directing the assembly. The others went on excursions to three different places. An outing together was envisaged as one means of helping people to get better acquainted, but it also had to be integrated into the dynamic of the Chapter. As the group is a large one, it was proposed to visit three places. The places chosen provided the capitulants with an opportunity

to have an experience of the life of an ecclesial community.

The first option was to spend some hours at Loppiano, a community situated 272 km from Rome, born from the charism of Chiara Lubich, whose life message was that “a fraternal world is possible”. The Focolare Movement brings together 240 movements and communities throughout the world manifesting “unity in diversity”.

The second option was to go to Nomadelfia, 184 km from Rome, where

some 340 persons live in 50 families, all sharing their goods in common.

The third option was to get to know the Community of San Egidio, located in the city of Rome itself. The members of this Christian community without frontiers are committed to living the spirit of the Apostles and of Saint Francis of Assisi. It is present in 70 countries.

On their return from the visits, the faces of all reflected the joy of having encountered something new.



Something is moving in the Institute

September 13th: Some portraits of the Marist world

The Preparatory Committee had anticipated that the Central Commission would need to work Saturday afternoon, Sunday and Monday. For this reason, it included on the capitulants' agenda for Monday 14 September, some presentations from those Provinces which so desired. In addition, in the corridor called "of the Superiors" (the 'La Valla Wing' for the capitulants) various exhibits representative of the Provinces were put on display and will remain there until the end of the Chapter. This initiative replaces the custom at previous chapters of using the free time after supper for presenting information about the Provinces or on initiatives and proposals being put forward. On this occasion, a whole day was given over to these activities, allowing the Central Commission to go ahead with its agenda of work.

The Preparatory Committee had requested that it be notified by those interested in making presentations to let people know about what was happening in the Institute. Eleven different topics were presented over the course of the day. They were: "Lay Marists" (Chema Pérez-Soba) Cruz del Sur Province. "Mission ad gentes" (Michael de Waas) Asia Sector, Mission ad gentes. "Provincial horizon of the Marist mission" (Demetrio Espinosa) L'Hermitage. "Symposium: Houses of Marist Spirituality" (Pere Ferré). "Work in Geneva" (Dominick Pujia). Mission Com-



mission. "WYD Madrid 2011". "Marist Formation" (Emili Turú). "Marist Places" (Luis García Sobrado and Joan Pug-Pey, architect). Lay Secretariate: "Joint formation of brothers and laity" (Pau Fornells). Province of Rio Grande do Sul: "Social Works" (Inacio Etges). Brasil Centro-Sul. "New organization of the Province" (Tercilio Seignani). Mediterránea: "Huelva + Syria Project" (Manuel Jorques).

Each presentation lasted an hour and attendance was optional. The first two mentioned above were repeated at different times to provide more opportunity for attendance. The capitulants were asked to note what surprised them, what

inspired them, what gave them hope or what challenged them in the actual life of Institute as it showed through in the various interventions.

With this gathering of data on the Marist world, a step in the methodology for focusing on reality concluded. The following day, Tuesday, was announced to be a day of retreat, when the capitulants could interiorize and sift, through the sieve of prayer and the heart, the whole contribution of life the Institute has placed in their hands. This begins the Chapter's time of defining the call which God is addressing the Institute today.



Messages received

Each day increases the number of persons who send a message to the Chapter by means of the web. There have already been over 200 in this first week. They come from all over the Marist world, although there are some areas where repetitions are more frequent. This is one of the instruments which measure the interest the chapter has aroused in the Marist world.

All express union with the capitulants and encourage them to be bold and decisive in the choices for the future which they have to make. They also show an explicit union in prayer and harmony of heart with what is happening in Rome. Many thanks for all taking part, whatever the distance, in the life of the Chapter taking place in the chapter hall.