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XXI General Chapter

September 15th: Day of reflection



On Tuesday, all those at the Chapter took part in a day of retreat. It began with morning prayer in the main chapel and concluded with the Eucharist.

The day's objectives

In announcing the day's objectives, the Central Commission hoped it would be a day of relaxation, prayer, reflection and discernment, and encouraged all to take the time necessary to rest body and mind. It was intended that each one would be able to clarify the key areas on which to engage with the Chapter in reflection and dialogue, in order to define the invitations the Lord is offering the Marist brothers and laity at this moment in history. With their gaze fixed on Mary, who said: "Let it be done to me", the capitulants tried to clarify, first, their own attitudes towards the call of God, and, secondly, what they felt they were being called to.

Resources for the day

The Central Commission reminded all, once more, that it was a question of harvesting what was most valuable from the regional letters, the General Council's re-

port, the opening address by Brother Sean, personal reflection and group discussion on the regional letters, the letter each had placed in the lotus flower in the chapel, the visits made on Sunday to the different ecclesial communities, and the exhibitions and presentations of the previous day. The day had its importance for the dynamic of the Chapter, since it provided each with an opportunity to bring to attention the thoughts, feelings, hopes and fears of the days preceding.

On the road to Emmaus

Some members of the assembly shared their discernment in small groups, like the disciples at Emmaus. They were offered three times, using the following dynamic: to form a group of three, who did not know one another well but who could communicate without much difficulty. The first task was to share one moment, or more, of their lives when they had been surprised by the goodness of God towards them, leading them to great confidence. A second time, with the same people, to share "in the manner of Mary", what was of concern to each at this time, when the important part of the Chapter was beginning, and the attitude faith was inviting them to take in response.

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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



The third was to take two or three key areas they believed the Chapter should tackle in discussion and deep dialogue in order to be able to promote "new hearts for a new world".

Preparation and celebration of the Eucharist

The retreat concluded with a reunion around the altar. The Eucharist was pre-

ceded by a personal time of adoration, contemplation, and silence. Each person had written two questions in which he/she sought to reflect his/her state of heart after the day's discernment. These were collected in five baskets of different colours at the offertory time. In this way was achieved a first classification of the interests which the members of the Chapter would begin to share with one another the following day.



What God is asking of the Marists today

Wednesday, September 16th

Starting from today, the chapter assembly advances on two fronts, with a vital rhythm which appears slow but is efficient. It is working out an expression of collective consensus as the instrument which is going to guide the life of the Institute in the coming years and, at the same time, building up the communion of hearts of the capitulants. A slow process, or so it appears to those used to organizing institutions with procedures for efficiency and productivity. The assembly progresses at a rate set by the Spirit. At the first session of the morning, the Central Commission outlined the methodology to be followed during the day. Fundamentally it consisted of bringing together the themes which had most touched the heart during the retreat day. From these elements would begin the collective construction of the fundamental call. The process responds to these four questions: What does God want of the Marists today? What is He calling us to? How to recognize this call? How to respond to what God is asking of us? This is the compass pointing the direction for the next days in the chapter hall. It was also announced that the afternoon of Friday and the morning of Saturday would be dedicated to reflecting on some issues that are pertinent to the Marist laity and to the Brothers at the same time.

The work in the chapter hall

A first dynamic has been to present the members since the tables were new. In addition to presenting each participant shared about how he felt during the first days of the Chapter.

The preliminary phase was for each around the tables to share what he/she had felt most important during the retreat day of 15 September. This was like returning from a feast and sharing first impressions.



The second phase of the morning session was devoted to sharing, in groups of two or three, the basic motivations which affect them at these times. All these personal contributions were transferred to the tables, where they were placed in common.

In the afternoon session, the capitulants were asked to define the themes raised in order to begin naming the needs they felt. This exercise was a first grounding, on paper, of what was moving in the heart of the assembly. Each of the ten tables nominated a secretary who collected the contributions of the participants. From these contributions, a report was composed and presented to the assembly at the end of the afternoon. The methodology consists of enunciating three themes the table considers important and providing reasons for each. The same secretaries are responsible for summarizing the contributions from the tables at the end of the day, for proposal to the chapter at the working session of the next day.

The tables speak

On listening to the contributions which each secretary presented to the hall, as the result of the afternoon’s work, some words began to resonate, repeated in almost all the interventions, but with different nuances. Conversion of heart, the lay Marist vocation, commitment to the poor, religious consecration, identity of the Brother, living a radical life, spirituality, authenticity of life, Mary as model, brothers and laity walking together, the identities of brothers and laity, Marian hearts, animation and government in the service of mission, etc. Expressions which, although somewhat lacking definition, announce what will be the basis for discussion over these next days. It is hoped that the assembly will further clarify these themes and examine them closely to establish priorities. The work has just begun.

Notes along the way

Today the assembly rejoiced in the perseverance in vocation of Brother Felim McCrann, of the Province of West Central



Europe, who died in Athlone at the age of 95, after 80 years of life in religion. Fernando Larrambeberé, Argentinian layman, Director of the Provincial Solidarity Office of the Province of Cruz del Sur, was congratulated on his birthday. The Brothers of Canada announced the celebration of the 125th anniversary of the arrival of the Brothers in their country. And the fiesta of Mexican Independence was celebrated appropriately at various moments during the day.



First consensus steps on the fundamental call

Thursday, September 17th

“Ten days of Chapter already and still nothing!” This from someone who is not part of the Chapter. Seeds below ground stay hidden a long time before the first shoots appear and the colour of the fields begins to change. The Chapter is in a period of gestation. The Central Commission is not of the opinion that in ten days nothing has been reaped, since today it announced with joy that the Chapter has arrived at its first consensus, although the lines are not well defined. Life advances in its creative process.

Today work continued on trying to define the centre of the call, which in some way is what unites all the themes and glues them together. The synthesis of the contributions of the day before had not been completed when the chapter re-assembled. For this reason, the first hour of the morning was spent in personal work.

In the meantime, the secretaries and the Central Commission finished compiling the summary of the contributions.

The feeling of the tables

The contributions from the tables were grouped around three reference points, in which the various nuances had been brought together under different formulas. A first grouping was made of all those which signified newness of heart. For example: “We need to be visible signs and recover significance and our prophetic role”. “The consecrated dimension must be emphasised over the professional”. “We need new hearts to revive our identity: lovers of God, friends and brothers of children and youth, building communities of brotherhood, simplicity and poverty”.



The second reference point collected what referred to Mary and the Church: "To go with Mary of the Visitation in haste to the house of children and youth, brothers and laity together". "With Mary of Pentecost creating the Marial face of the Church given by the Holy Spirit". "Mary will teach us how to discover God incarnate in people and in everyday life".

The third brought together the relationship with mission, that is, with the presence God is requiring of the Marists in the world of today. "The brothers are not sufficiently present among the young". "We need to make present a new spirituality, a new form of mission and a new form of brother and lay relationship". "Cross the frontiers and discover the implications of the international character of our mission". "Create in ourselves, brothers and lay Marists, the missionary heart of Champagnat". "To celebrate our shared vocation and thus remind the Church of what it longs to be". "To express Church as communion".

The second phase was a rereading of what the tables had contributed the previous day in order to detect in them, even the most disparate, an echo appealing to the assembly. By means of this exercise, they were attempting to obtain a global vision of which way God is calling the Institute. The morning session concluded with

an open forum for those who wanted to speak.

Work of the afternoon

The afternoon session started with Marian prayer. There followed some moments of personal time for picking up the thread of the morning's work. At each table, there was discussion to arrive at consensus on the fundamental call. After the break, the whole assembly sought to keep to the rhythm of the work done. Some tables were able to give an outline of what the fundamental call was for them. But for the majority, there was still dissatisfaction with the results obtained. So the following session begins with the search for consensus.

First approximations to expressing the fundamental call

At the conclusion of the day, the contributions from the tables led to the first approximations of the fundamental call in the four languages. The English one was as follows:

Champagnat Marists with a new Marian heart among the poor and religiously ignorant children and young people in our world.

Inspired by Mary and Marcellin, we Marists, brothers and laymen and women together:

1. cannot help but be disturbed and transformed by God's dream for the world and
2. allow God to provoke us to live the gospel in a new world.

WHAT

Impelled by the needs of today across the whole world, with a Marian heart, we are called as Marists to grow together new ways of animating, forming, supporting, organising, and renewing all of those who are attracted to share in our mission

WHY so that:

- (a) they are authentic Marists, spiritu-



ally and apostolically, i.e. like Mary: full of grace, the Lord with them, ready to say yes, ready to go into the hill country with the good news of God's faithful love and mercy, to bring Christ-life to birth, to be with the Church as it gathers;

(b) in each educational and pastoral ministry there will be Marists who see themselves as a community of faith and mission, who live close to young people, and be able bring them to a knowledge and love of Jesus;

(c) the wider Church will see a genuine expression of *communio*, a Marist way of being Church, where all can grow in their respective vocations as Marist.

At the end of the day, Eucharist

At the celebration of the Eucharist, the capitulants presented to the Lord the whole day's work and commended to Him the life and eternal rest of the father of Brother Fernando de la Fuente, one of the martyrs of Zaire, who had just passed away. Three rites marked the day's liturgy: the washing of hands, as a sign of forgiveness, anointing one another with oil at the end of the Mass, and singing the song "A new heart", composed especially for the Chapter by Brothers Miquel Cubeles and Maurice Goutagny. You will find words and music at www.champagnat.org on the page dedicated to the Chapter.

