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September 18th - Continuing the search

The day opened with time dedicated to "lectio divina". The word of God, incarnate in life, is food for the spirit on the journey. The Mendes document reminded the capitulants of the steps in communion the Institute has taken in recent years. Brothers and laity have come together for the spiritual life journey, driven by the call of vocation to share the same charismatic gifts. Thus began the morning session of 18 September.

To provide a change from the activities usually taking place in the chapter hall, Brother Tony Leon presented a stimulating dynamic. "My name is Tony and I teach art in school". Thus he introduced himself to the capitulants. Tony is the one who has decorated the chapter hall with a red cross, the pictures of Champagnat and Mary, etc. "We are going to do a practical exercise to change our way of seeing things". He distributed to the capitulants one sheet of white paper and another of gold with a drawing in the upper half representing Mary on her visit to her cousin Elizabeth. "In two minutes you have to draw in the lower half what you see in the drawing in the upper half of the paper". The proposal was greeted with laughter by all present. In

two minutes the exercise was concluded with reasonably acceptable results. Some received a high mark and the congratulations of the rest. The second part of the activity consisted in doing the same exercise, this time on the gold paper, but placing the original head down. To the great surprise of all, the majority of pupils had improved their results. The artist disappeared from the scene, leaving them to work out the moral.

The Central Commission resumed work by saying that there were many common points shared in the consensus, but that they had not yet defined exactly what the chapter assembly felt and wanted. It was necessary to continue dialogue about the contributions made in the hall. To begin the day's dialogue, it was proposed that the table secretaries share with the members of their table what they had heard at the meeting of the secretaries the previous evening. As well, a member of the Central Commission explained to the assembly what they had learned at the same meeting. Each table also had at hand the written document with the contributions which the tables had sent to the secretaries' meeting.

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In the second session, the Commission changed tactics. They made a hypothetical proposal of what could be a written expression of the call they were all looking for. The formula was this: "Come quickly, Marists of Champaign, my children need you today. You will meet me there and Mary will tell you what you have to do". The Central Commission asked the capitulants to indicate the values contained in this hypothetical formula of the fundamental call. The dialogue lasted twenty minutes. The reactions to the proposal were mixed, but, as a whole, proposals to improve it were numerous. Some nuanced the word used, the attitude of Mary which they gathered from this expression, declared it was necessary to emphasize evangelization more, etc. Others emphasized contributions or deficiencies in the formula.

After listening to the reactions of the tables, it was time for interventions from the floor. Those who spoke emphasized that some images were emerging, which could serve as references for drawing up the fundamental call, a call which has to be collective, for the whole Institute, not just for the individual.

A journey towards the second century of the foundation of the Institute

The afternoon session began with a show of consensus on six elements which have appeared in all the dialogues: conversion; new hearts, new earth; urgency and call to move; mission to poor children and youth; brothers and laity together, and the Marian aspect.

On receiving the hall's confirmation on these elements, the Central Commission provided the following motivation: "We are beginning an imaginary journey towards 2016. It is the year for the next General Chapter. The Institute has been through a process of renewal, of transformation. It has lived the values proposed by the 21st General Chapter. As many brothers as lay people have responded to the calls to go and meet poor children and young people. Working together, praying together, the Congregation has expanded. Jesus is the centre of our lives. Mary is intimately present among us. You have received a message from the Preparatory Commission of the 22nd General Chapter. They want to know how you have lived the challenges laid down by the 21st Chapter. Not only how you have faced them, but how you have carried them out and what means you have used.

It is 6 June. The years have passed. Elections to the chapter have been

held and you come back to meet at the same tables as at the 21st Chapter. Each table is asked to compose a letter to the Central Commission indicating the more important achievements of the Province and what was done to make them a reality".

The Central Commission's work proposal for the afternoon is formulated thus: "Your task as a table is to write this "Letter to the Central Commission" to be presented tomorrow in the first working session. It is not a question of a long text; one side of a sheet maximum".

In many groups, time was lacking to draw up this letter about the road they need to run to enter into celebrating the second centenary of the foundation of the Institute with a new heart.

It is Friday, the day fixed for celebrating whatever anniversaries have occurred during the week. On this occasion, the independence days of Central America, Mexico, Papua-New Guinea and Chile, and the birthdays of Fernando Larrambere, of Cruz del Sur, and Albert Nzabonaliba, Central East Africa. Brother Sean took advantage of the occasion to present a beautiful image of Mary of the Annunciation to each of the lay participants, who are on the eve of departure.



The laity deliver their message to the 21st General Chapter

Saturday, September 19th

Various provinces have taken the opportunity of the time before the organization of the daily work of the assembly to present the capitulants with a souvenir of their province or country. Today the brothers of the Her-

mitage Province gave everyone an electronic one. It included some animated presentations of the remodeling of the Hermitage and the proposal of new services, which it hopes the new house of Marist spirituality will offer in the future.

The "Letter to the Preparatory Commission" written by each table was a work of the imagination in which each one dreamed of the progress the Institute was going to make over the next eight years. As each table shared the

contents of its letter with the assembly, it was observed that new ingredients were added, which gave heart to all. It was an important moment in the development of the Chapter. This activity showed a great unity in the vision of the future for the Institute and a very high level of consensus. Many expressed satisfaction that the exercise had opened horizons for them, given them a broader vision of the future, and filled them with enthusiasm for what could be achieved in the coming years. Although this was a theoretical exercise, it is hoped that some initiatives, which emerged during the drawing up of the letters, will be taken into account later when it is time for decision making.

The laity deliver their message to the Chapter

After a brief break, the lay people shared their message with the Brothers of the Chapter.

The text of the message was entitled: "On Pilgrimage to a new heart for a new world". It begins: "we would like to express our appreciation for the opportunity to be here amongst our brothers" ... "to share community life and to travel a unique spiritual journey together". They recognize that this Chapter has made them feel more strongly committed to the mission, to their own vocation and their responsibility to other lay Marists, and they leave for their homes carrying in their hearts "the conversations and sentiments we have shared, unique to this time and place".

The message goes on to mention the "ideals" and "hopes," and adds three recommendations: "To give definitive recognition to the lay Marist vocation, to promote meetings between Brothers and lay Marists throughout the Institute to enable us to share our lives more deeply, and to strengthen the structures fostering co-responsibility for the charism". The final part reads: "We commit ourselves firmly to work together, Brothers and laity, in fostering all these initiatives". Warm applause greeted this contribution from the lay people.



There were only nine lay people in the hall since Agnes Reyes, from East Asia, could not come. The members of the tenth table, therefore, distributed themselves among the other nine so that each had a lay person to dialogue with on the contents of the message just shared. This dialogue took some time.

This session concluded with the floor being thrown open. Some Brothers expressed appreciation of the witness of the laity at the Chapter, adding that they had discovered a new way of looking at the reality of the lay Marist.

With Chema as spokesperson, the lay persons thanked the capitulants for the attention they had received and the welcome given them. She concluded: "Courage! We are quiet and confident because you are going to perform a spectacular work".

The day and the week concluded with Mass and a meal. The Eucharist began at the door to the chapter hall. Before proclaiming the word of God, the lay people distributed seeds among the capitulants, which were scattered to the four winds as they moved in procession from the hall to the chapel.

Before the homily, Dilma, from Brasil Centro-Norte, explained the significance of this gesture performed in

unión with the word of God. After the priest finished his homily, the nine laity placed themselves under the protection of Mary by reciting the Ave Maria together in the middle of the assembly. The prayers of the faithful were also read by the laity, reflecting the plurality of the charism incarnate in the Marist world. During communion, images of children's faces from different races and countries were projected on the walls. This mosaic of children's and young peoples' faces reminded all of the joint mission of Brothers and laity.

After communion, Erica, of the Province of Sydney, in the name of Linda, Rufus, Angela, Fernando, Arturo, Irma, Chema and Dilma, expressed gratitude for the opportunity of being here among the Brothers, conscious, she said, that "we are breathing new life into this dynamic and precious charism". She finished with a word of thanks to the General Council, and Brother Sean in particular, for having invited them to the Chapter, for the precious souvenir of Mary of the Visitation, presented to them the previous evening, and for all the other opportunities offered them over recent years.

Before the farewells, the laity presented all present with a candle in the form of a heart, a heart representing the light shared.

Change of rhythm and content in the work of the capitulants

Monday, September 21st

Today has been a quiet one. The morning session began with a backward glance at the road covered. The first week was dedicated to organizing the assembly, getting to know one another and becoming open to listening to others. The second week served to highlight the key themes which may determine the life of the Institute at the crossroads. Today came the announcement of important changes in the mode of organizing the assembly's work and in the calendar of activities. In the remaining three weeks of work, the capitulants have to develop the "vision" the Chapter has for the life and mission of the Institute over the next eight years. In addition to this central theme, they have to consider the contributions made previously by the whole Marist world, that is to say, the domestic themes, such as those relating to the Constitutions or finances, prayer life and community, government and animation of the administrative units, etc. and, finally, carrying out responsibilities proper to the Chapter, such as elections and taking decisions for facing the future.

The methodology proposed for this new step maintains the dynamic of trusting in fraternal dialogue and seeking consensus to make progress in the work. The Central Commission is not a privileged group keeping control of the assembly in its hands, but an instrument of mediation which fosters fraternal dialogue.

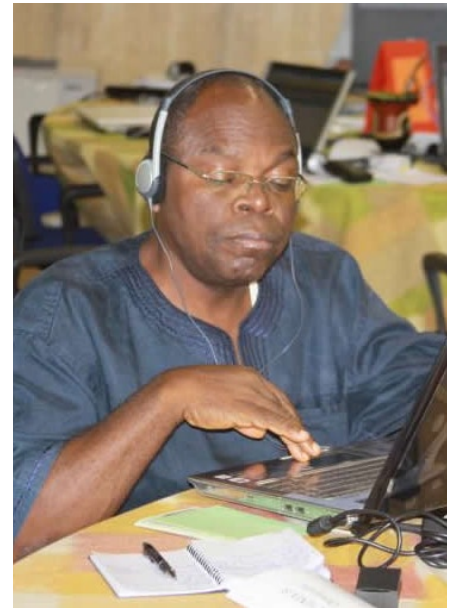
Seven tasks which cannot be deferred

The method offered by the Cen-

tral Commission for consideration by the tables has the following structure. The Commission has identified and defined seven unpostponable "tasks", which the Chapter has to front up to, culled from the process of the previous weeks. They are: to develop the "vision" which this Chapter has for the future of the Institute, more satisfactory structures of government, the revision, correction and updating of the Constitutions, the election of the general government, finances and accounting, the sale of the General House and Manziana, and how to transmit the spirit and decisions of the Chapter to the whole Marist world.

To study these areas, the Commission plans to organize new tables for dialogue and consensus. Each table will choose a Secretary for each of the tasks indicated. Each will also be able to rely on the presence of a member of the Central Commission for each task. The task secretaries have to prepare the work to be carried out by the assembly and the method of consensus to be applied in each case. Their mission, therefore, is to encourage the greatest participation and consensus possible, and one which will lead to practical results.

The method proposed supposes that the theme of the "vision" has to permeate all the rest. By means of it, advances in dialogue and consensus on the themes will be made in parallel, carried out by the whole assembly at the same time. The procedure is as follows. The first session of the morning will be dedicated to a meeting of the task secretaries. Its purpose is to agree on the methodol-



ogy to be proposed to the assembly for the three working sessions. In the second session, the direction of the assembly falls to the charge of the group of secretaries responsible for the study and development of dialogue and consensus on the "vision". In this way, the assembly will be adjusting itself in mind and heart for similar dialogue on the other themes in the two afternoon sessions.

Dates announced in the general plan

The Central Commission has presented a general work plan for the remaining three weeks of the Chapter. It envisages the election of the Superior General and his Vicar for Saturday, 26 September; the election of the new General Council for 2 and 3 October, and the papal audience on 7 October, feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. The closing date continues to be 10 October 2009.