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08/10/2009: Lebanon-Syria: new animation team

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07/10/2009: Photo gallery - Chapter: Tuesday, October 6th

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XXI General Chapter

Plan for the week remaining

At the beginning of the week, the Central Commission explained the plan proposed for the days remaining before the close of the Chapter. It acknowledged the climate of brotherhood reigning, as well as the apprehensions expressed by the capitulants, but hoped that the urgency of the final days would not obstruct the maintenance of fraternal dialogue and the attitude of discernment. Among the initiatives announced by the Commission for this week is that the prayer for each day will centre on one of the themes still to be treated, so that the prayer continues to be integrated into the rhythm of daily work.

To bring together the themes discussed this morning, the work groups were re-structured by joining some together. The one studying the finances of the Institute fused with that analyzing the management of the General House. In the same fashion, the group responsible for the theme of government came together with the one studying the Constitutions.

The group preparing the Chapter's communication to the Marist world is working in three directions. In the first place, it is talking of drafting a "Letter from the Chapter" as a reply to the letters written by the regions. To this letter will be added guidelines for setting the animation of each region on course in the coming years, but with sufficient flexibility to allow for adaptations to local needs. And finally, it is planned to have the Acts of the 21st General Chapter sent to every house. The Central Commission has nominated a group of four responsible for drawing up a summary of what the Chapter is going to communicate to the whole Marist world.



An action under the prophetic sign of the Spirit

The second session of the morning was a brief one, devoted to the official handing over of authority to the new Superior General and his Council. All the personnel of the General House were invited to gather in the chapter hall, together with representatives from the other Marist branches. A ceremony full of symbolism marked the official beginning of the new mandate in the Institute. The ceremony commenced with the reading of the text in which the prophet Elias passes on the power of the Spirit to the prophet Eliseus. Alluding to this text, Brother Sean commented that,

MARIST NEWS

N.º 75 - Year I - October 8th, 2009

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just as the prophet disappeared in a chariot of fire, so were they disappearing from the scene, leaving a wake of burning problems for the new General Council. He prayed that the power of the Spirit would help Brother Emili and his Council to find solutions to them.

The new Superior General presented Brother Sean with a beautiful icon of Mary from Mount Athos, painted on a piece of the wood from a kneeler on which the faithful knelt to pray. The gift was meant to show the gratitude of the whole Institute for his service as Vicar and as Superior General. Loud and sustained applause greeted the gesture and words of Brother Emili.

Then Brother Joseph McKee called attention to the activities of the retiring Council in warm and brotherly words. Brother Emili presented each of them with an icon of the "little madonna" of Divine Love together with the one the Marist Family celebrated the beatification of the Spanish martyrs.

The former Superior General, Brother Sean Sammon, and his Vicar, Brother Luis García Sobrado, then approached a little altar presided over by Saint Marcellin Champagnat and Venerable Father Colin. On the table was a "didgeridoo", a musical instrument used in a spiritual context by the aboriginals of Australia. Among aboriginals, it denotes distinction in rank according to the musical abilities of the one handling it. This was the sign used to express the transmission of authority



from the old Council to the new. Brothers Emili Turú and Joseph McKee accepted this sign in front of all present in the chapter hall.

The Brothers of the old council, in their turn, passed on a sign to each of the new Councillors. Brother Eugene received the Constitutions as a compass for finding direction on the voyage; Brothers John Klein and Michael De Was, a statue of the Good Mother; Brother Josep Maria Soteras, a Bible and Brothers Antonio and Ernesto, the cross which Champagnat had on his work table. Brother Emili gave a brief introduction of the new Councillors to those present, and the ceremony concluded with the singing of the Salve. All present were invited to the festive table.

The work of the afternoon

In the afternoon, the group working on the fundamental call reported on progress. In the water of the chapter reflections, salts capable of forming stalactites had already been detected. By means of this metaphor, they indicated that the means for realizing their work were already at hand. They shared with the assembly the phrasing which had been worked out and in which they tried to collect and sythesize the feeling of all the tables. In the same way, they shared a prayer drafted by

the group, which invited all Marists to journey towards a new land. Finally, they referred to the image of Mary of the Visitation painted by Brother Tony Leon. All these elements were impregnated with the ideas that had risen in the assembly. The work of this group has thus reached a very interesting stage, although some things still have to receive the finishing touch.

The first session of the afternoon was devoted to studying the report on the finances and management of the General House. The study provided abundant information on the economy, the juridical status, and contractual relationships. The complexities of this house aroused very different reactions among the capitulants. Economic solutions point to a better administration of the resources or to other more drastic alternatives. But it appears that this is not the time for taking decisions by consensus.

The second session was dedicated to approving some minor modifications to various articles of the Constitutions. This was a fast process, thanks to the ease of voting using electronic means. The working group then proposed the study of some modifications which involve changes of greater weight than those previously approved. These modifications will be presented for approval at the next working session.



The Chapter on the home stretch

Tuesday, October 6th

Morning prayer today began with alarming news about our boarding school at Nyangezi (Congo). Late last night came a telephone call indicating that the boarding school of Nyangezi had been attacked and shots fired on the outskirts. Later a communication reached the General House from the website « Les Amis de la mission » in the following terms: "The house of the Marist Brothers at Nyangezi, 25 kilometers south of Bukavu, in the Walungu district, was pillaged during the night of Monday/Tuesday by men in military uniforms. The hostel of the Weza school group, conducted by the Marist Brothers, was also pillaged in the same circumstances, according to radio Okapi.

During the day, there were celebrations for the birthday of Brother Francisco Castellanos, who is lending his services to the Chapter as translator.

Before beginning work, the assembly validated the nomination by the Central Commission of a group of four Brothers, one for each official language, to draft the text which the Chapter aims to transmit to the Institute. The formation of this group had been suggested by the Transmission group.

Finance and the Constitutions on the table

The first session was dedicated to the topic of finance. The resources of the Institute have to be at the service of its life and mission. The government and the General Administration of the institution are financed by the administrative units. A particular study was made of the contributions per capita made by the provinces to support the General Administration. A review was also made of the situation of the Solidarity Fund, approved by the 20th General Chapter, and the Fund destined for formation.



The capitulants recognize that there is a very positive attitude to solidarity among the administrative units with regard to mutual assistance, but also advocate that a plan be worked out by experts to obtain self-sufficiency for all the administrative units.

The second part of the morning began with an intense round of voting for the updating of the language of the Constitutions. One of the most important innovations was the suppression of the term "lay" in the first article of the Constitutions in favour of the term "of Brothers". The apostolic exhortation, "Vita consecrata", of John Paul II, published on 25 March 1996, asked Institutes of Brothers to make this change. Some minor changes of language to facilitate bureaucratic procedures at the levels of general government and province were also approved.

Four streams of information flowing in the chapter hall

Work on the fundamental call continues from four complementary perspectives: mission, consecration, Brothers and laity, and poor children. These four tributaries, on which the Chapter has

reflected at length, have flowed into the chapter hall carrying the principles and proposals worked out at the small group meetings. This enumeration of principles and proposals has been classified in such a way that prominence is given to those which have received most endorsement from the assembly in the dialogue and consensus sessions. It has generated a little group representing the different Vision sub-groups, with a view to presenting the Assembly with an integrated proposal, which would go towards helping with the final deliberations.

Finally, the last chapter work of the afternoon was concerned with the animation and government of the Institute. The tables had subjected the text presented by the work group to some adjustments of terminology, and expressed some recommendations to better respond to the thinking of the assembly.

The day's work concluded with a revision of the day in the chapter hall itself. Some directions were also provided for those attending the general papal audience in St Peter's Square tomorrow.

Papal audience

Wednesday, October 7th



On Wednesday, the capitulants attended the general audience which the Pope holds each week for pilgrims to Rome. Through the efficient offices of Brother Juan Miguel Anaya, Procurator General, they were able to obtain a place near the Pope. The audience lasted an hour and a half. Papal general audiences follow a set pattern. The Pope begins with a talk on a catechetical theme. A summary of the talk is then repeated in various languages, while the Pope addresses some words of greeting to different groups in the audience.

The 7th of October was the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, but the Pope devoted his reflection to extolling the person of Saint John Leonardi, who died in Rome 400 years ago. Together with John Baptist Vives and Martin de Funes, he created the Dicastery of Propaganda Fide and laid the foundations of the Urban College of Propaganda Fide, which has formed many priests for the evangelization of the peoples. The Pope emphasized that

the luminous figure of this saint, "invited all Christians to aim constantly for the higher value of the Christian life which sanctity is, each according to his proper state. Only from fidelity to Christ can authentic renewal of the Church come".

Greetings to the pilgrims were delivered in French, English, Spanish, Polish, Hungarian, Czech, Slovakian, Croatian and Italian. The Pope made reference to the capitulants in French: "I greet with joy the French-speaking pilgrims, especially those taking part in the General Chapter of the Marist Brothers of the Schools".

The new Superior General, Brother Emili Turú, had a privileged position, and was able to greet the Pope briefly at the end of the audience.

Progress in the work of the chapter

At the first afternoon session, time was given first to revising the structures of the General Chapter. The tables reflect-

ed on the criterion guiding the procedure for determining representation at the next General Chapter. The criterion used in recent years has been the number of Brothers in each Province.

Further study was then made of the management of the General House. After having listened to figures, technical and economic details, it still seemed further clarification was necessary on the subject, which proves to be particularly complicated. The differing opinions coming from the tables did not permit reaching a consensus on the formula to be applied in the future. The group will aim at continuing to refine the final proposal.

During the second session, the group studying the Constitutions made further progress in the approval of the articles analyzed the previous day. The progress is significant, but time is also needed to explain each nuance of the laws.

Following this technical work, achieved by the whole assembly, there were two work groups, appointed for a concrete assignment, who had made progress towards the final drafting of the communication intended for the whole Marist world. One of them is working on the synthesis of the letters the chapter is preparing as a response to the regional letters. The other is making progress in defining the proposal, which the Chapter will make, on the fundamental call. The final destination is already in sight and they are starting to fasten the seat belts in preparation for landing.

Today the capitulants, at the beginning of the work sessions, dedicated some words of congratulation to the chronicler of the Chapter, who has reached the age of 69.

