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The Marist Brothers in Haiti

Communication of Brother Sergio de Jesús Cáceres from Haiti

On 13 January 2010, Brother Emili Turú, Superior General, informed us, in a brief note, that the Brothers of Haití were all well and that they had not suffered damage from the terrible earthquake which had happened in the island. That is what was known in the few hours after the occurrence of the earthquake. Difficulties of communication prevented us from having more concrete news and faster. Little by little, other channels of communication have been found, first through Brother Gilles, the provincial secretary of Canada, who sent a message drafted by the Redemptorist missionaries giving news about religious men and women affected by the quake. Then Brother Eduardo Navarro, Provincial of México Occidental, made contact with Brother Sergio de Jesús Cáceres, resident in the country, who was able to publish the web "Haití Marista" <http://hermano-scv.iespana.es> In it he includes the following information.

Information on the Marist Communities in Haití, since the earthquake of January 12th

After various days of uninterrupted rain, which did not allow us to begin classes after the Christmas vacations, on Tuesday 12 it seemed that the sun was shining and everything would return to normal. But it was not the case. After four in the afternoon, while we were working in the house, three tremors separated by no more than a second caused us to run out of our house.

For many people here in Haití this is something very rarely seen, since for 250 years such an earthquake has not been experienced in the country, and the whole population was surprised and disconcerted. In our community and neighbourhood of Dame-Marie there was no material damage. Communications were immediately down and everyone wanted to know about their families in the capital, Puerto Prín-



Villa Manrèse

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cipe, or in other parts of the country. The news which slowly reached us through the evening and night was disheartening.

By means of the internet we learned of the terrible misfortune which had occurred in the capital and which would be repeated many times during the night. No one slept in his house, but spent the night outside with many neighbours, until the rain scattered us, and I spent the rest of the night with Br. Frantzley inside our station wagon. What a terrible night! No sleep, rain, and about seven aftershocks, the last past midnight.

On Wednesday morning, things were no better. While people tried to make contact with their families in the capital, you could hear crying all around. Communication by cell-phone, used by most people in the country, was almost impossible. Up to today (16 January), many people continue in the anguish of having no news about their families.

In our Marist works (Dame-Marie, Lati-boliere and Jérémie) we have recorded no serious damage, since we are far from the capital. In these communities, the Brothers are well and uncertain what to do and how. We do not know if classes will resume in our works on Monday 18 January.

Up to today, we have had no direct contact with Br. Yvon Deschamps who normally resides in the capital and is the Econome of the Marist Sector of Haití, but we have heard from other sources that he is alright, although the

house of Villa Manresa was seriously affected, with the uncertain tally of two injured (according to some sources) or four dead (according to others).

Among the families of the Haitian Brothers and those in formation, we know at present of a cousin of a scholastic and a brother of a postulant who are dead. Others have confirmed that their families are safe and a few have had no news. Last night, Br. Frisnel was in the capital to make contact with their families and the families of other person and Brothers who requested it. The journey of more than 8 hours to the capital in station wagon must have been very difficult because there were many survivors walking away from the capital, where they had been studying or working, to return to their villages.

During these days of January, we count on the visit of 6 Haitian scholastics in their first year who make a visit to their families and do some teaching practice in our works. Unfortunately, their stay has been completely changed and we do not know if they will be able to leave the country at the end of this month as planned to continue their university studies in Mexico.

Finally, we know that the populations where we have our centres of Marist mission will be affected by the lack of resources, merchandise, fuel and food which come from the capital. As will the persons from these centres who sell the products of their fields in the capital. Already now, finding fuel in Puerto Príncipe is a problem that will reach us very soon.

Br. Sergio de Jesús Cáceres

The Superior General was able to contact Sergio to send him a brief message: *"Dear Sergio, Thanks for the news. We intend to place some of it on the website of the Institute. From the first moment, I tried to make contact by telephone with someone of you, but it was impossible. I could only do it through Lalo (Eduardo Navarro). I want to tell all the Brothers that we are very close to you at this very difficult time. The Br. Vicar and I and the other members of the General Council send them our prayers and affection and, of course, to the suffering people of Haití. May Our Good Mother make them feel her strength and tenderness so that you yourselves may be, in your turn, the presence of Mary with all those who are suffering.*

A very fraternal embrace",

Emili Turú, Superior General

We are grateful to the numerous persons who have shown an interest in our Brothers in Haití. One message received on the web said: "I would like to know how are the Brothers in Haití after the earthquake of last Tuesday. To send them all our love and support, and how we can serve them and do our best to help them. I would be really happy to know how they are doing". Many others have asked how they can help the Brothers.

The Marist works of Haití belong to the Province of México Occidental.



Remodeling work at the Hermitage



Province of Africa Central East

III Provincial Chapter

The III Provincial Chapter of the Marist Province of Africa Central East (PACE) has gathered at Butare, Rwanda from December 27-30, 2009 in order to begin the provincialate of Bro. Valentin Djawu who takes over from Bro. Eugène Kabanguka who just finished his second term of 3 years as provincial, and recently has been elected General Councilor in our XXIst General Chapter.

The Chapter was composed by 14 elected members + 6 members by right, coming from the five countries that form the province: Central Africa Republic, Dem. Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Kenya and Tanzania. The province has 104 professed members, with 60% of them being less than 40 yrs of age. It is the province of the Institute that has the largest number of young brothers in the life range of 20-30 years (36 brothers).

The province is only 6 yrs old, and has shown some signs of development such as working for vocations, having a central Provincial administration (full time secretariat and provincial bursar), plus establishing a new house as headquarters of the province in the city of Nairobi, and the animation of the province through the visitation to each one of the communities. At the same time, this province faces big challenges, such as struggling to get a financial autonomy and unification on the expenditure reports, to increase the mobility of brothers among the different countries, and the challenge faced on everyday life to witness the evangelical values we have decided to live.

The Chapter took the decision of



following a consensus method in the procedures, and committed then to look for the priorities – calls that are the most important for this time. First of all we listened to the reports from the different Provincial Commissions and also to some invited guests: Fr. Oreste Inchimatata, a Diocesan priest who shared with us what he had begun as a self-reliance project, pointing out that an important point is to be creative and having a vision on what one wants to do, as self-reliance will also give us freedom of action and mind; Bro. Joe McKee, our Vicar General who has come as representative of Bro. Emili Turú, shared with us on the challenge of living in unity within our restructured province, giving a strong emphasis on a deep dialogue as a means to help the growth of our province, definitively we need to create spaces to talk. Also a capitulant, Bro. Christian Gisamonyo shared with us his insights on Community Life, which he helped us to deepen into our realities in the province, and looking into the practical means that

can help us to improve our life. After having this information, then the Chapter pointed out the following priorities: Revitalized Communities, Working on our Finance Autonomy, Looking into a

Unity of life and Government

The Provincial Chapter choose the team of brothers who will be working together with Bro. Valentin as councilors, are: Brothers Albert Nzabonaliba, Charles Nzabanita, Hosea Mugeru, Straton Malisaba and Teodoro Grageda, a council that together with the provincial has 46 years as a mean of age.

In the end, the Chapter also looked into the Norms for the Province and the Rules of Procedure for the Chapter. We closed the gathering with a celebration of birthdays and silver jubilee of the brothers, together with the attendance of the brothers from the neighbouring communities in Rwabuye and Save.



Beatification of a former student

Father Josep Samsó was martyred in 1936



The Catalan priest Josep Samsó i Elias, martyred in 1936, will be beatified on 23 January 2010 in the basilica of Santa María, in the town of Mataró, of which he was parish priest. This will be the first celebration of a beatification held in the archdiocese of Barcelona, following the new regulations of Benedict XVI requiring that beatifications be celebrated in the local churches where the beatified persons lived.

Josep Samsó i Elias was born in Castellbisbal on 17 January 1887, the older of two brothers. After the death of his father, a chemist by profession, the family moved to Rubí (Barcelona), where his aunt Joaquina was living. In Rubí, his sister, Montserrat, was educated in the Colegio de las Teresianas, while Josep attended the Marist Brothers' School.

As a consequence of the good education he received, Josep entered the Seminary of Barcelona, where he observed "exemplary conduct and a great dedication to study". For this reason, his superiors asked him to do graduate studies in Theology at the Pontifical University of Tarragona.

He was ordained priest on 12 March 1910, and worked in various parishes, the last being Santa María de Mataró.

He was a model of a priest committed totally to parish ministry. He was outstanding in the ministry of charity and catechesis. His best known work in this area is the *Guía para catequistas* (Catechist's Guide) prepared in March 1936, but not published until 1940. The Bishop of Barcelona, Manuel Irurita, manifested on several occasions that Doctor Samsó was "the first catechist of the diocese". And the Bishop of Segovia, Daniel Llorente, himself an expert in catechetics, declared that " Doctor Samsó has in his parish of Santa María de Mataró the best organized catechism in all of Spain". At the same time, he guided many to priesthood or religious life through his spiritual direction, established punctuality in the timetable for Masses, strove for perfection in the liturgical services to attain the maximum splendor of worship, and worked intensely on the interior decoration of the church of Santa María, which in 1928 was honoured with the title of Minor Basilica.

Pardon for his executioners

In 1936 he was imprisoned for being a priest. In the prison, he followed a strict timetable which allowed him to read his breviary, make his meditation, and organize shifts for the recitation of the rosary so that the guards would not notice. He also heard the confessions of some of the prisoners, made himself the catechist and apostle of all, showing himself always agreeable and encouraging, sharing with the others the things his visitors brought him. His captivity ended with his execution in the cemetery of Mataró on 1 September 1936.

Samsó offered up his life to Christ with serenity and died pardoning his executioners. He left his prison companions with his usual "God above all" and, with hands bound, was taken to the cemetery. After mounting the steps, he asked to be untied and sought to embrace those who were going to kill him. He told them that he forgave them as Jesus had done those who nailed him to the cross. When they tried to blindfold him, he asked them not to, seeing that he wished to die looking at the town which held such happy memories for him.

His beatification "is above all a spiritual event and all are called to celebrate it as thanksgiving to God and as an invitation to imitate his virtues today, the apostolate and witness of faith -carried as far as martyrdom- which this saintly priest has left us".

This is what the bishops of the ecclesiastical province of Barcelona spelt out in a letter published to explain his beatification.

With the ecclesiastical authorities attending the ceremony, Brother Xavier Barceló, Provincial of the Marist Province of l'Hermitage will be present, together with Brothers and friends from Rubí as well as Mataró. The Marist educational works of Rubí are full of joy in knowing that one of their former students, who spent some time in their classrooms, gave testimony to his faith as a martyr. In addition, the Marists of Mataró, one of the first colleges founded in Spain after the arrival of the first Brothers in this country, feel very close to the parish of Santa María, praising the Lord for the gift of sanctity God has given the town through the life and witness of Fr. Josep.

