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Consecrated life in Europe

General Assembly of the Union of Superiors General



The 76th six monthly Assembly of the Union of Superiors General (USG) took place in Rome from 24 to 26 November. Br. Emili Turú participated as member of the Executive Board of the USG. In line with the previous Assembly, the theme of the meeting was: « Consecrated life in Europe: commitment to evangelical prophecy ». The Union of Major Superiors of men's congregations met for the second time this year to analyse the presence of religious life on the continent and discuss policies to be followed for the future. Europe is the continent most marked by the consecrated life and, at the same time, the land where the religious of today face the greatest challenges from secular society and where need is felt for Christian witness of quality.

In the Assembly's opening address, the Major Rector of the Salesians, Fr. Pascual Chávez Villanueva, president of the USG, affirmed that « consecrated life, having made an in depth analysis of the situation, has decided to take on in Europe the engagement to evangelical prophecy, for awaking in the hearts and spirits of people the Christian faith and the beauty of life consecrated to God. If, in the past, the maintenance of works was the pride of religious, it is necessary at present to revitalise the original charisms which have contributed to modeling the Christian face of Europe. »

The Minister General of the Franciscans, Fra José Rodríguez Carballo, in his address on the central theme, exhorted the members of the assembly to face up to the present

MARIST News

N.º 1 - Year III - December 1st, 2010

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difficulties fearlessly: « If it is in winter, as Saint Augustine says, that the root maintains life, then the present moment of consecrated life in Europe will not be sterile and marked by death, but by concentration on the essential. » The Franciscan pointed out several indicators of the prophetic dimension of religious life in Europe: to revalue the role of the elders – « the great protagonists of early monasticism »; the growth of vocations depends on

the capacity of the elders to be teachers and witnesses for the young. Fra Carballo invited the Assembly to show great optimism: « The hope of which we speak is very different from a passing state of mind. It has a sure foundation, Jesus Christ. » And Fr. Carballo concluded: « I dream of a consecrated life closer to Jesus and closer to men, especially the most abandoned. A consecrated life passionate for Jesus and for humanity. »

On 26 November, at the close of the Assembly, the participants were received in audience by Pope Benedict XVI in the Clementine Hall. The Executive Committee of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) was also present. The Pope pronounced some fine words of love and gratitude with regard to religious life. Considering the importance of his intervention, we offer below the entire text.



Consecrated life: centrality of the gospel, fraternity, mission

Words addressed by the Pope to the participants in the General Assembly of the Union of Superiors General (USG) and the executive of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG).



Dear Brothers and Sisters!
I am delighted to meet with you on the occasion of the half-yearly assembly of the Union of Superiors General, which you are celebrating -- in continuity with that of last May -- on the theme of consecrated life in Europe. I greet the president Don Pascual Chávez, whom I thank for the words that he addressed to me, and the executive council; a special greeting to the directive committee of the International Union of Superiors General and to the numerous superiors general. I extend my thoughts to all of the members of your orders and institutes throughout the world, especially those who suffer persecution for witness to the Gospel. I would like to

express my sincere thanks for what you do in the Church and with the Church on behalf of evangelization and of man. I think of the multiple pastoral activities in the parishes, in the shrines and the centers of worship, for the catechesis and Christian formation of children, of young people and of adults, manifesting your passion for Christ and for humanity. I think of the great work in the field of education, in the universities and in the schools; of the multiple social works, through which you encounter the brothers who are most in need with God's love itself. I think also of the witness, at times dangerous, of the evangelical life in the missions "ad gentes," in often difficult circumstances.

Your last two assemblies have been dedicated to considering the future of consecrated life in Europe. This has meant rethinking the meaning of your vocation itself, which entails, first of all, seeking God, *quaerere Deum*: you are seekers of God by vocation. To this pursuit you consecrate the most precious energies of your life. You pass from secondary things to those that are essential, to what is truly important; you seek the definitive, you seek God, keeping your gaze fixed upon him. Like the first monks, you cultivate an eschatological orientation: Behind the provisory you seek what remains, what does not pass (Cf. Address at the Collège des Bernardins, Paris, September 12, 2008). You



seek God in the confreres whom have been given to you, with whom you share the same life and mission. You seek him in the men and women of our time, to whom you have been sent to offer, with your life and with your words, the gift of the Gospel. You seek him especially in the poor, the first to hear the Good News (cf. Luke 4:18). You seek him in the Church, where the Lord is present, above all in the Eucharist and the other sacraments, and in his Word, which is the master way of the pursuit of God; it leads us into conversation with him and it reveals to us his true face. Always be passionate pursuers and witnesses of God!

The profound renewal of the consecrated life begins with the centrality of the Word of God, and more concretely in the Gospel, supreme rule for all of you, as the Second Vatican Council affirms in the decree "Perfectae Caritatis" (cf. n. 2) and as your founders well understood: The consecrated life is a plant with a wealth of branches that has its roots in the Gospel. This is demonstrated by the history of your institutes, in which the firm will to live the message of Christ and configure your life to him, is and remains the fundamental criterion of vocational discernment and of your personal and communal discernment. The Gospel lived daily is the element that gives beauty to the consecrated life and presents you before the world as a trustworthy alternative. Contemporary society needs and the Church expects you to be a living Gospel.

Another fundamental aspect of the consecrated life that I would like to stress is fraternity: "confession Trinitatis" (cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation "Vita Consecrata," 41) and parable of the Church as communion. The witness of your consecration passes through it. Fraternal life is one of the aspects greatly sought by young people when they draw near to your life; it is an important prophetic element that you offer to a fundamentally individualistic society. I know the efforts that you are making in this field, as I also know the difficulties that communal life has. There is need of serious and constant discernment to listen to what the Spirit says to the communities (cf. Revelation 2:7), to recognize what comes from the Lord and what is contrary to him (cf. "Vita Consecrata," 73). Without discernment accompanied by prayer and by reflection, the consecrated life runs the risk of accommodating itself to the criteria of this world: individualism, consumerism, materialism; criteria that eliminate fraternity and deprive consecrated life of what is striking and attractive about it. Be masters of discernment so that your brothers and sisters assume this "habitus" and your communities become an eloquent sign for the world of today. You who exercise the service of authority, and who have the task of leadership and planning for the future of your religious institutes, remember that an important part of the spiritual animation and government is the common pursuit of means to promote communion, mutual communication, warmth and truth in

reciprocal relations.

A last element that I would like to highlight is mission. Mission is the Church's mode of being and, in it, of the consecrated life itself; it is part of your identity; it moves you to bring the Gospel to everyone, without limits. Mission, supported by a powerful experience of God, by a robust formation and by a fraternal life in community, is a key for understanding and revitalizing consecrated life. Go, then, and in creative fidelity make the challenge of the new evangelization your own. Renew your presence in the Areopaguses of today to proclaim, as St. Paul did in Athens, the "unknown" God (cf. Address at the Collège des Bernardins).

Dear Superiors General, for many institutes the present moment presents the datum of numeric diminishment, especially in Europe. The difficulties, however, must not make us forget that the consecrated life has its origin in the Lord: It is willed by him for the building up and the holiness of his Church, and thus the Church itself will never be deprived of it. As I encourage you to walk in faith and in hope, I ask you for a renewed effort in vocations work and in initial and permanent formation. I entrust you to the Blessed Virgin Mary, to your holy founders and patrons, while from my heart I impart to you my apostolic blessing, which I extend to your religious families.

26 November 2010

Institutional policies on the defence of children

General House: a working team prepares a document

As was published earlier, one of the objectives the General Council gave itself in the coming years was to: "continue to develop the Marist mission, as a mark of our identity and nourishment for our spirituality, especially in the three aspects underlined by the General Chapter: a greater closeness to the poor (children and youth), evangelisation, and defence of the rights of children and young people".

To take part in the promotion and the defence of the rights of children and young people, the General Council judged of capital importance the drafting of a document for the whole Institute, defining the institutional

policy of prevention of possible cases of sexual abuse, as well as procedures to be followed when a situation of abuse has been uncovered.

To draft this document, a working group was set up, consisting of Brothers Brendan Geary (West Central Europe), Jim Jolley (FMSI-Geneva), Gérard Bachand (Canada) and Nicolás García Martínez (Compostela), co-ordinated by Brother John Klein, Councillor General. Having completed the first stage of their work, the team met in Rome, in the General House, from 15 to 17 November 2010, to share their common findings. The document, which will be studied by the General Council in its plenary session



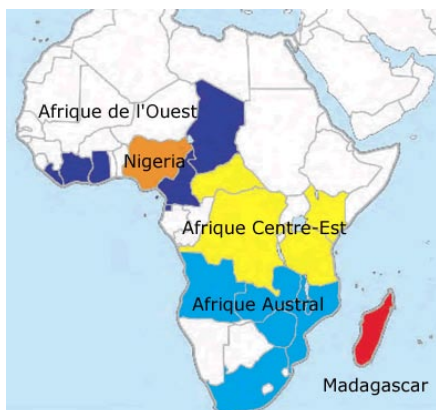
in January 2011, will bring together the principal elements for defining local policies, recommendations for action, and an appendix with models of documentation.



Lay Marist Movement

Province of Nigeria

The Lay Marist Movement of Province of Nigeria had their 3rd Convention at Marist Formation



Centre, Orlu, Imo State, Nigeria, 19-21st November, 2010. During the Holy Mass, the new members were commissioned and the old members renewed their commitments to the Lay Marist Movement. The chief celebrant, Rev. Fr. John Opara, the personal secretary to Bishop Augustine Ukwuoma, Bishop of Orlu diocese thanked the members and challenged them to keep on representing Champagnat and the Marist Brothers where ever they found themselves.

The Provincial, Br. Christian Mbam commended the Lay Marist, Province of Nigeria, for the good work they do and

challenge them to be more committed. The Lay Marist thanked the Brothers for their support and promised to be more committed.

During the convention, they elected five observers (Lay May Marist) to the 7th Provincial Chapter which will commence on 4-8th January, 2011. The observers are Mrs. Magret Mary Ihekaru, Mrs. Jane Ojukwu, Mr. Osuji Patrick. I. and Master Chimezie Clement Agha, a Marist Youth member.

The Convention ended with a Holy Mass.

