

## EXTENDED GENERAL COUNCIL WITH ARCO NORTE

Guatemala, 29 February - 3 March

The meeting of the General Council and the Councils of the Provinces of Arco Norte (Canada, United States, Mexico Central, Mexico Occidental, America Central and Norandina) began on 29 February around 9 am with a welcome from the pupils of the "Liceo Guatemala", to the tune of "One heart, one mission", and the dance of the many coloured flags of the countries represented.

Br Emili Turú, Superior General, first of all thanked the Province of America Central for the preparation of the meeting and the work behind the scenes, including that of the translators. He explained the meeting's logo: the spheres representing the Provinces and the Institute, through the General Council, the yellow arch referring to the meeting in course, and the green jade representing a face. This is a Mayan symbol of a "nahual", symbol of the sun god, the Mayan god of the vital powers of fertility, and harmonizing wonderfully with the motto: "To-



gether for vitality".

Br Emili then thanked each for his presence and explained the meaning of an "Enlarged Council" from the chapter documents. He referred to the General Council and its function of animation and government of the Institute, and explained that the principal work of the General Administration is the accompaniment of the leaders of the Provinces and Districts. This is the first time a General Chapter used the term "Enlarged Council", an expression which has thus become official. Its objective is to "accompany the Provincial and District Councils and to keep up to date with the situation of the Region". It is also an opportunity to express the diversity and exercise co-responsibility in the government of the Institute. Br Emili also referred to a "hatstand" where "we hang up our hat" of the Province to put on

## GENERAL HOUSE

The commission studying the future of the General House began meeting on 7 March and will continue until the 10th. It is composed of 10 persons, including Brothers Joe Mc Kee, Vicar General, Victor Preciado, Econome General, Antonio Salat, Director of the House, José Maria Ferre, secretary, and Brothers from different parts of the world.

The International Council of Mission is also meeting in the house. It is composed of Brothers John Klein, Councillor General, Jao Carlos do Prado, Secretariat of Mission, Chris Wills, Secretariat of International Collaboration for Mission, Brothers and two lay persons from different regions of the Marist world.

the one of the Region, not always easy.

There were three objectives. The first was to get to know, share, analyse the situations of the Provinces of the Region. The second was to move towards a common Regional approach, to try to dream our way together. And the third was to try to find possible orientations for the future in fraternal dialogue, to listen to what the Lord would say to us.

Each of the Provinces then gave a presentation in response to three questions: 1) What does the data tell us? 2) What are we devoting our best efforts to? 3) What do we want to insist on for the future of the Region?

The data presented by the Provinces related to: number of Brothers, prov- enance, median age, lay presence, distribution of com- munities and works, number of pupils and their social class, modalities of organ- isation of the Provin- cial Council, courses and aims, expecta- tions and hopes.



The superior general intervened in the af- ternoon to "broaden" the dialogue and reflection. Be aware, above all, of the phenomenon prevailing on the international level: a globalised world. An ambivalent phenomenon, with spectacular successes and brutal inequalities. What does this mean for us? What is it that the Holy Spirit is in train of saying to us through this immensely complex reality? It is not something to take or leave because we are plunged in it. The report to the General Chapter said it already: the Institute is more strongly multinational and multicultural, this being understood in a «prophetic sense» aimed at promoting an alternative and not simply economic globalisation. But there also exist in the Institute "tribal" mentalities; in some Provinces and among many Brothers, a local vision, and not an international one, is dominant. "We need a new mentality, a new approach to what it means to be members of an international Institute. And also the consequences which follow for the development of our mission at the present time"... Interaction and interde- pendence are required of us.

Br Superior General referred to the social context of vio- lence which keeps on growing. Nelson Mandela signed the introduction of the report to the United Nations: ... "The 20th century will be recalled as a century marked

by violence... Less visible but even more widespread is the heritage of individual and daily suffering, the pain of children mistreated by those who should protect them, women harmed or humiliated by violent partners, elderly people mistreated by their carers, young people intimidated by other young people, and persons of all ages who act violently against themselves. The new gen- erations learn from the violence of previous generations, victims learn from their aggressors and the continuation of social conditions which foster violence is allowed. No country, no city, no community is spared from violence, but neither are we defenceless in the face of it." It is a matter of a "culture of violence"; it is what seems to have the last word. One way of regulating conflict is to put

up barriers, borders – the syndrome of apartheid. What else to do?

A third period of Br Emili's reflection dealt with the need to look at things in a little more sys- tematic way. "The trees prevent us from seeing the forest". Concerned with my own situation, I sometimes do not see the whole clearly enough. We are more and more aware of

the complexity of reality. Each aspect affects all. This is how nature functions in the cycles of water, air, animals and plants, among them, as well as the different systems operating in a person: skin, glands, urinary system, mus- cles... Each interacts with the others. Saint Paul reminds us: we are a body, and we are all members of one another, each one working towards the common good. Even cells develop a sort of social identity for the good of the whole organism. And when they lose this identity, they act in a blind and undifferentiated way, capable of threatening the life of the entire organism: this is cancer.

In conclusion, he issued an invitation to a sense of inter- national community, as at Pentecost; a sense of dialogue, of listening, of openness, based on the principles of subsidiarity, co-responsibility, interculturality and pluric- ulturality, indicated by the General Chapter.

Br Emili's words were followed by time for shared reflec- tion in groups. At the end of the day, we took part in a Eucharist, thanking God for the reality of the Region as well as the light and strength received to be able to move forward together to a new vitality.

# TOGETHER WE PROMOTE VITALITY

## Extended General Council - 1 March

March 1st began with prayer animated by the Province of Canada. The day was devoted to reflection on "What does being part of this Region mean?" The Brother Vicar General, Joe Mc Kee, provided motivation for the work by presenting some avenues: the first part of the day, reflecting on the situation, looking at possibilities of common action; the afternoon, defining future activities for encouraging relations between the Provinces. On Saturday an open forum would be held.

Br Joe began by recalling the progress already made: the Latin American Conference of Provincials (CLAP) in 1979; the meeting of CLAP in 2004 which admitted the Provinces of the USA and Canada to the organization, leading to the creation of the Region "Arco Norte".

The Vicar General insisted on one fact: we are convinced that windows are opening for the future, but they will not always be open. We have the possibility of creating something and these are the circumstances, perhaps, that will oblige us to do it.

He then presented two experiences. The first was that of the Region of Oceania, formed by the two Provinces of Australia, the Province of New Zealand with its Pacific islands, and the District of Melanesia. The Brothers of these zones are in train of restructuring but in a different way from the restructuring model adopted at the beginning of the

21st century. The Australian Provinces will form a single Province towards the end of 2012, and the Province of New Zealand and the District of Melanesia



will be incorporated in 2013. For these brothers, it is clear that it is a matter of commitment not simply vis-à-vis the Provinces but with regard to the Region. And the aim is vitality; together they can grow. A Council of Provincial Superiors has been operating since 2005. It was a Regional Council which set up common commissions in view of animation and vitality.

The second example is furnished by the Salesians. They have opened "Proj-

ect Europe" given the diminution of effective personnel in this zone, and so that their presence and mission among youth regain life in the face of

the new "pop" culture. They have started from looking at the situation in the light of faith and a concern for a more systemic evangelization of youth, which Br Emili had made allusion to earlier. What is happening in Europe is not without repercussions elsewhere. No isolated Europe! The project pushes the Salesians to form new communities and new preferences, and a new way of being and acting. And at the same time, a prophetic presence and witness, neck and neck with the laity, in promoting the evangelization of marginalised youth, immigrants... They have paid particular attention to the international aspect of their personnel. It is not a question of reinforcing already existing presences or of "importing" new personnel, but of starting something new, without great structures. I believe, Br Joe said, that the experience is

valuable because of the courage this decision testifies to. It means letting something die so that something new may be born.

Then the Vicar General posed the Brothers of Arco Norte some questions based on the article "Ars moriendi" (the art of dying) of the theologian Johann Baptist Metz. In 20, 30 or 40 years, the Marist presence will be extinct in certain places. This is already visible in some countries following the diminu-



tion of the Brothers. What matters is the way of living this "death". We think that we are not in this situation. But we can already take decisions. What is God calling us to at this time?

The rest of the morning was spent in taking the experience of "Project Europe" as a point of departure.

In the afternoon, after the Marial prayer, the participants followed an individual dynamic – drawing or words, cutting up magazines – to express the Region they wanted for 2020. Then each explained to the others what he wanted to express. This was continued in groups, underlining the most important elements or aspects, ending thus with a new expression in group.

A "meditative" tour of table allowed those who wished to share something of the experience. Before the Eucharist, animated by the Province of the USA, time was given for formulating concrete proposals or guidelines which were laid before the altar and can be bearers of life for the Region of "Arco Norte".



## Guatemala - 2 March

Friday, 2 March, began by placing the intentions of each Province in the hands of Mary, the Virgin of Guadalupe, patron of the Americas. The prayer was guided by the Province of Mexico Central. Michael de Waas, Councillor General, recalled the objectives of the Enlarged General Council with Arco Norte: 1) to know and analyse the Marist situation of Arco Norte: a diversity of models, presences and missions. Faced with the ageing of our Provinces, what strategic role is to be adopted to maintain significant presences, sustain the mission and encourage the Brothers to rediscover the fascination of their vocation in this context? 2) to adopt a common vision in face of the future: what future do we want as a Region? What can we do together in terms of inter-provincial solidarity for the vitality of the Region (project of interprovincial provinces according to a strategic plan)? 3) to agree on the guidelines proper to the region. Br Michael also recalled what had been discussed and lived on the days preceding.

Then it was up to Br Ernesto Sánchez, Councillor General, to give direction to the work to be done so as to achieve consensus on 2 or 3 options for the future, based on the options presented the evening before during the Eucharist by each of the participants.

Once the group work was finished, a representative of each round table read the content of the future op-



tions which had obtained consensus. As they were read out, they were grouped by theme. After the pause, Br Ernesto invited the participants to make a table tour to hear all the grouped proposals. When they were back in their places, he asked each one to comment freely on the options presented.

In the afternoon, after the Marial prayer around the Virgin of Guadalupe, Br Josep Maria Soterias, Councillor General, continued the programme by directing it towards fraternal dialogue: to take into account the totality of the person, by incorporating what is new and different, without exclusion. All should feel "on the same ground". Dialogue should lead us, he said, to be more "holistic" and "systemic". The work now returned to each Provincial Council, which had to draw up a "credo" and the renunciations deriving from it, with regard to the Region's vitality. This "credo", Br Josep Maria recalled, can go from the most general to the most concrete. Briefly, it must be centred on what, in the opinion of each Council, would give the greatest vitality to the Region.

At the end of the afternoon, each Provincial Council presented to the assembly its "credo" and its decisions concerning what renunciations it was going to make. After a time for interiorisation, the participants had the opportunity to share with the group at the round tables.

The day ended with the Eucharist. The moment of the offertory was highlighted by the blessing of the Marist logo, embroidered on a cloth.



# EXTENDED GENERAL COUNCIL

## The last day, 3 March



**M**orning prayer was animated by the Brothers of Norandina. Then there was a time for question and answer in the open forum.

The first question referred to the current crisis of vocations. Br Ernesto Sánchez responded that the situation was very varied according to country and Province. From his experience during the visits, it is where a Brother develops a specific work, full or part time, that the response to the Lord is best. Certain Provinces devote 5 Brothers to it; others also rely on lay people in the vocations ministry. In other Provinces, there exist communities open to young people.

In Br Ernesto's opinion, as Institute it would be better to strengthen the processes of youth ministry and evangelization, with a concrete proposal directed to Marist vocations ministry; that ought to be truly close to our heart. As for the laity, some see them as a "menace" for consecrated life. There are also social changes which make one think of a religious life with simpler forms and expressions... It is necessary to propose the Marist vocation without fear; to believe that there are vocations.

The second question was about the bicentenary of the foundation of the Institute. Br Emili passed the word to

Br Eugène who said that it had all got underway with the renovation of the Hermitage as a sign and at the same time a centre of Marist spirituality, a renovation which will continue at La Valla and in the other Marist places. He specified that there is no fixed plan for the celebration. As part of the bicentenary, the Commission of Marist Patrimony plans to compose a history of the Institute; for it to become a reality, it will require the collaboration of all.

Certain questions concerned the revision of the Constitutions. We have all received the new edition. The groups following the spirituality courses at the Escorial or Manziana have been asked to make their contribution in this regard.

There was a question referring to participation in the second Marist Mission Assembly. Brother John Klein said that currently there is a committee of 9 Brothers and lay people to prepare for 2014.

Another question was: What is the General Council's greatest concern about Arco Norte? Br Joe replied that they had no "great concern", but a certain interest in Arco Norte envisaging the future by thinking along the lines of growing, of strengthening the vitality. To take account of internationality as requested by the General Chapter. Which direction are they going to direct our steps?

The last question concerned the Secretariat of the Laity. Br Antonio Ramalho, as liaison with this Secretariat, spoke about its structuring. As well as the director, Br Javier Espinosa, it counts two co-directors: one in Spain – Ana Sarrate -, and the other in Australia – Tony Clarke. The insertion of others – brothers and laity – to be part of the enlarged council of the Secretariat was approved recently. It is a matter of fostering what the Church and the General Chapter are asking for. Everyone knows that diverse circles of Marist identity exist: from the teaching collaborator to those who feel a call to live their Marist being as a vocation. The document "Around the same table" is a reference for brothers and laity, but it has served also for other congregations. Within the Secretariat there are also the Fraternities. The Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family was included in the Constitutions by the 1985 General Chapter. The types of Fraternity are very varied. Following meetings with the Fraternities, one senses a greater cohesion among them, a respect for different sensibilities and forms.

It was time then to pass to questions or reflections open to the present. The first touched on mission Ad gentes. Br Joe Mc Kee gave a summary of its history up to the present. 7 groups have been prepared with a total of 73 brothers and 7 lay persons, setting out for 6 different countries (2 communities in each country). At present, there remain more than 40 brothers and 5 laity. In January, the General Council had a meeting with Br Luis G. Sobrado, Superior of mission Ad gentes. The Vicar General thinks that a second stage has just been launched. The programme remains valuable, alive, even if there have been understandable defec-



tions. For the brothers concerned, despite their cultural and linguistic difficulties, the experience has been a source of interior richness, love of the Marist vocation and mission.

Profiting by a question about the participation of several congregations of brothers in a course to be organized in Rome, Br Ernesto Sánchez recalled that the Vatican is going to issue a document on the vocation of religious brothers. As to the course, it is addressed to eight congregations; 6 places have been granted to each congregation, for one does not want it to be too much to manage.

As for the economic model for the financing of the Institute, the General Council has studied the observations of the 18 groups which received the initial plan. In its September session it will take up again the model to be followed, with the contributions received, in order to take the appropriate decisions.

On the eventual sale of the General House, it was recalled that the International Commission had met last June. The impact of the world economic crisis is being felt. The Commission is meeting again on the 7th of March. Two studies have been made on the matter to date.

After the questions, the participants did a written evaluation of the meeting: structure, services, method and content. Then those who wished to share their reflections were given the

floor. Br Emili Turú, Superior General, brought the meeting of the General Council with Arco Norte to a fitting close.

The Provincial of América Central thanked the General Council for their confidence, as well as the Provincial Councils, brothers and other persons concerned in the organisation and holding of the meeting. A souvenir gift was presented to the General Council and each of the participating Provinces. The assembly then went in procession to the chapel, to say the Our Father and sing a hymn to Mary.

In the evening, the brothers of Guatemala met the Superior General. This gathering was followed by the Eucharist. And finally, there was the place owing to feasting and the traditional music of the country!

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