

PROVINCIAL CHAPTER OF THE PROVINCE OF THE UNITED STATES

Transitions: God's Call to Transformation

Fifty-six elected delegates meet in late June at the Loyola House of Retreats in Morristown, New Jersey as the fourth Chapter of the Province of the United States. The Chapter was facilitated by Rev. Michael Crosby OFM.Cap.

In light of the calls of the XXI General Chapter "To go in haste, with Mary, to a new land" and the present situation of the Province, the theme of "Transitions: God's Call to Transformation" was chosen. In order to keep moving towards the new land and living the processes of conversion the Chapter captured the spirit of personal and structural renovation to live our vocation with enthusiasm and to respond to the necessities of the children and young people today.

Br. Ben Consigli, the re-elected Provincial, addressed the assembled delegates and solicited their reflections and responses. He contrasted the difference between proactively reading the signs of the times and passively allowing events to unfold. He emphasized the need to acknowledge the data that describes our world, our church, and our congregation, but not to equate data with reality. While the data is indeed real, what we do with the external data is an internal, psychological and spiritual choice. One sign of our



times is the significant number of Marist young adults who are eager to share our spirituality and our mission. Bro. Ben noted that Fr. Champagnat acknowledged the data of his time: poverty, political turmoil, lack of educational opportunities, his own lack of resources; but Champagnat chose to meet the needs of his time and place by founding a congregation of teaching Brothers, despite the limitations imposed by the data.

In three separate sessions the Chapter dealt with: Transition/Transformation – Personal Relationship with God; Transition/Transformation – Quality of our Life Together/Community; Transition/Transformation – Our Mission/Ministry.

The Chapter met in session to elect a new Council for the Province. Brothers Sean Sammon, Al Rivera, Dan O'Riordan, Patrick McNamara, Roy George, Ken Hogan, and Stephen Schlitte were elected. The Chapter concluded on the feast of the Nativity of John the Baptist with an open forum for all the delegates to share their thoughts and reactions, then a Liturgy of Installation of the Provincial and Council took place.

ALEPPO, SYRIA

For them and because of them, we risk our lives

26 July 2012

It is 11.00 pm on Thursday 26 July 2012. Here in Aleppo, it was more than 40 degrees during the day. In the distance, I hear the firing. I am in my room in the community. Brothers Georges Hakim and Bahjat Azrie are also at home. In fact, we returned together around 9.00 pm after an unforgettable day for the Marist Blues.

If you see our photos, you will see the young and not so young in blue T-shirts. You remember what the local people called the first Little Brothers of Mary? Well, we wanted to place this solidarity campaign under the title of « Marist Blue » (<https://www.facebook.com/MaristesAlep>)

Aleppo, our city, second city of the country, financial capital, major centre of commerce and craft industry, is in its death throes. It has been suffocated for more than a week. The war is in train of spreading into the neighbourhoods. The people flee, become refugees, wander, take shelter in the streets, the public gardens, the schools, everywhere. The inhabitants take in their relatives, the houses are open... Bread is lacking, electricity is lacking, fuel is lacking, milk is lacking, medicines are lacking; the only thing not lacking is the spectre of war. It is on the prowl, it is everywhere. A nauseous smell rises from the streets ...

The city is completely encircled. There is risk of being taken away or killed.

The people are afraid... A fear which depresses, which paralyzes, which kills... So the question is posed: what do we do? Flee, as so many families have done? Stay in place paralysed? Act? What to do?

At the beginning, we chose to continue all our activities. We launched holiday camp projects, and educational activities... But all discretely, we realized the danger was enormous, and that it would be necessary to halt. This was last Tuesday's decision: « Halt our activities ».

But stopping our activities does not mean stopping our mission. It is rather to search together, laity and brothers, for some response to give to the emergency. The call of the last General Chapter urged us to go out to the

we spent our first day.

They welcomed us, the children came out of the holes where they had hidden. A crowd... a mass. A balloon excited them ... They played, sang, danced... each of them is a history, a sacred history which is revealed to us. A little girl who shares her sadness at being an orphan... A boy who offers at the very first a pencil to an animator, « Habaytak » he says to him, I liked you... A girl is quite sweetly transformed thanks to a hand which does not let her go... She dares to take her hands down from blocking her ears. She skips, she smiles... The « sheikh » (Imam), comes to thank us... Someone asks, « You are Christians? » An old man comes up to me to embrace me and say to me « Choukran ». I don not know him, I do not know his name, I do not know why

he has thanked me, but even so, the gesture is made, apart of love and trust is signed... The women listen to the women. What dignity! There is no complaining. One thanks « Allah ». But what a living Gospel we are- we are in train of living!

One question is often asked: « You are going to leave, are you going to come back? And a trust is established. The children accompany us to midday, when we

leave them. They sing around us as if to tell us « Stay, we love you! » And at 5 o'clock when we come back, they are already there, and the celebrations continue, dancing, games, smiles, joy!

But the needs are pressing. More elementary needs. In this month of Ra-



displaced persons. In the quarter of Jabal el Saydeh, a quarter where we have been working for more than 25 years among the most poor, we found people still poorer... The displaced! So to them we hurried, to the children, the women, the men... the young people responded generously. And it was there

madan, the month of fasting, for our Moslem brothers, the needs are enormous : pediatricians, doctors, medicines, milk, beds, sanitary napkins, soap, detergents, mattresses, clothing, food...

They have been distributed in two schools, 900 persons crammed in. The flow does not stop growing. Some families (2000 persons) are set up in the public garden. They endure the heat but do not want to be shut in. Perhaps, they dream of waking up in the morning and going back to their homes... and yet today this dream appears remote, without any hope of being realised in the near future, if a home still exists for them...



And those are a drop in a sea of displaced, homeless, stranded... but for us, they are names : Zeinab, Moustapha, Ali, etc... They have a face, they are a history, they are a look, a poem... For them and because of them, we take risks...

Yes, we risk our lives. Certain young people do not have the support of their parents. Certain benefactors have organised their home to dare a gesture ! All of us know the great risk of working when the weapons keep on firing.

But the single smile of a child- isn't that enough to dispel all our fears?

Br Georges Sabé



"BLUE MARISTS", SYRIA – 2 AUGUST

We are compensated by the smile of children

Since our letter of July 26, the situation on the field has not evolved one way or another; fighting continues in the same suburban neighbourhoods of Alep. In the other neighbourhoods of the town, the intermittent sound of bombs exploding in the distance, the noise of whistling bullets under our windows and the risk of kidnapping or murder puts us on edge. Due to the shortage of fuel and the security situation, streets are empty, bakeries have no more flour, trash is not collected, power and water are rationed and everyone stays at home. Except for the displaced individuals who have left their often very humble homes, abandoning their meagre possessions and fleeing combat zones, and wander along the streets searching for shelter. Public gardens and schools

are their refuges. Authorities have opened thirty-some schools to accommodate displaced individuals; however, they have only provided them with a roof and leave the rest to the NGOs.

Our group, the blue Marists, is now made up of fifty-some people, especially youngsters. We have taken charge of 3 adjoining schools in a popular neighbourhood of Alep that Christian Alepins call "Djabal Al Sayde" (the Hill of Our Lady) and the Muslims call Cheikh Maksoud. Approximately 900 people are crammed in them, especially families with 4 to 8 children each, all Muslim, certainly Syrian but

Latest deceased Brothers

- 16/08/2012:** Mariano Medina Rosique
Mediterránea
- 05/08/2012:** James Patrick McCormick
New Zealand
- 04/08/2012:** Abundio Valle Francés
Santa María de los Andes

- 31/07/2012:** Marcos Teixeira
Brasil Centro-Sul
- 21/07/2012:** Wang Ching Chen
Brasil Centro-Norte
- 19/07/2012:** Gaéтан Larochelle
Canada



FMSI - Emergency in Syria

FMESI is ready to provide aid to the people of Aleppo, involved in these days in internal conflict. For several days, in fact, the Foundation has been in contact with the Marist Brothers who are assisting the people in flight from quarter to quarter, and will soon be in a position to send the first financial aid to cope with the emergency.

For information and to send contributions, contact:
fmsi@fmsi-onlus.org

The Marist Brothers are working with an Imam and a group of volunteers at a post in the district of Jabal El Sayde. At least 2000 have fled there, having abandoned their homes and taken refuge in a public garden for fear of being taken hostage or killed. Another 900 have found shelter in two public schools. This involves poor and large families, some having 10 children per family. The Marist Brothers are occupied particularly with about 400 children among the displaced, providing psychological help, medical assistance, milk.

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The Marist Brothers and their collaborators are a group of 30 volunteers. There is great solidarity among the people of the quarter and ever more persons are offering help to the displaced. All the same, the most necessary items, drinkable water, health products are beginning to run out, in a situation which is becoming ever more dramatic from every point of view.



from different ethnic backgrounds: there are Arabs, Turkmen, Kurdish and many Kourbates (the Rom). Our action takes place at different levels:

- Firstly, provide housing: mattress, towels, drinking water...
- Then food: Iftar (since we are right in the middle of Ramadan) for adults and the three meals for the young, milk for infants...
- Next, hygiene: sanitation equipment, cleanliness of premises, toilets...
- And then health: we have opened a medical unit with young doctors who work on rotation to treat the sick and to especially provide them with medications free of charge.
- We must not forget that these people have left their homes with only the clothes they were wearing. Thus we attempt to provide them with clothing, especially for babies and children.

- Lastly and most importantly, we take care of the children. We try to make them forget the war and their misery. 25 young blue Marists take turns mornings through evenings to



make them play, to distract them and occupy this very long time with educational activities.

Everything we do would be worth nothing if our team were not animated by common values: respect for the other,

treating him as a brother and not as a recipient of aid, humility, simple relations to give back to the other his or her dignity, the accompaniment of the children and the abandonment of all forms of paternalistic attitude.

In return, we are compensated by the smile that is back on children's faces and by the fraternal look of the adults. We are convinced that people say about us "see how they love each other and how much they love", that, to us, is the best testimony.



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