

## ON THE WAY TO THE GENERAL CONFERENCE

### What is a General Conference?

The Marist Constitutions (137.11) describe it as follows:

*The General Conference is a consultative assembly, made up of the Brother Superior General, the Brother Vicar General, the Councilors General, the Brothers Provincial and, if the Statutes of the Districts provide for it, the Superiors of Districts. The aim of the General Conference is,*

1. *to strengthen the unity of the Institute, and to enable the Superiors to have direct contact with the Brother Superior General, the members of his Council, and with one another,*
2. *to study questions of general concern and to propose ways of answering them.*

*The Brother Superior General convokes the General Conference in the period between two General Chapters. If he judges it opportune, he can invite other persons to attend.*

Determining the organization, content, agenda and duration of the General Conference, is a prerogative of the Superior General and his

Council, in dialogue with the Provincials. Being a consultative assembly, its dynamics and functioning differ from those of a General Chapter, which has full autonomy and is the supreme authority of the Institute. By contrast, the General Conference can modify neither the Constitutions nor the Chapter Statutes.



## General Conference 2013

**A W A K E N I N G   T H E   D A W N**  
**P R O P H E T S   A N D   M Y S T I C S   F O R   O U R   T I M E**

### GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

The plenary session of the General Council is over. On Tuesday (last week) it met with the Communications Commission and on Wednesday with the Board of FMSI. Among other topics, it considered administrative and financial questions of the General House and the Institute, and reflected on the accompaniment of the Provinces and various experiences of living the charism and belonging to the Institute. It made a series of appointments and agreements, finishing with an evaluation of its community life and the work of the plenary. At present, the Preparatory Commission for the International Mission Assembly is also meeting in the General House.



From its origins, the aim of the General Conference was to facilitate communication and to evaluate and monitor the implementation of the Constitutions and Chapter decisions. It is also an opportunity to envision the future together and share dreams regarding the

situation of the Institute, the Church and the world.

Some young brothers were invited for the first time to the General Conference in 1989. Since 1997, on the initiative of the Superior General, groups of lay Marists have participated as guests.

**Historical Background**

The tradition of gathering a significant group of brothers to deal with important matters regarding the Institute started with Marcellin, who was aware of how this practice brought unity among the brothers.

Some early signs of what would later be called General Conference were present during the General Chapter meeting of Grugliasco in 1958. An



General Conference 2007: Reclaiming the Spirit of the Hermitage

initial experience of this type took place in Rome in May 1965, bringing together the members of the General Administration and all the Provincials. However, the General Conference as

## Summary of the General Conferences

Date	Place	Convener	Particip.	Major topics
1971 April-May	Rome (Italy)	Br. Basilio Rueda	57	Main issues after the Vatican Council; the period following the Chapter. The Meditation of the Superior General Shared With His Provincials.
1974 April-May	Rome (Italy)	Br. Basilio Rueda	57	Preparation of the XVII General Chapter. The introduction of the laity in the temporal affairs. Reflection on the Hermitage and the Marist places.
1979 October	Rome (Italy)	Br. Basilio Rueda	61	Consecrated life. Community life project. Poverty and justice. The Marist Family. The Marist Heritage.
1982 October	Rome (Italy)	Br. Basilio Rueda	75	Where and how are we as an institution in an apostolic and pastoral sense? Preparation for the writing of the Constitutions and Statutes.
1989 Sept.-Oct.	Veranópolis (Brazil)	Br. Charles Howard	69	Boldness and Hope: The Marist Brother and his mission for the future.
1997 Sept.-Oct.	Rome (Italy)	Br. Benito Arbués	91	Marist Apostolic Spirituality. Solidarity. Mission and educational principles. Formation and vocations ministry. Asset management.
2005 September	Negombo (Sri Lanka)	Br. Seán Sammon	39	Rekindle the vitality of the Marist charism and mission today.
2007 May-June	Rome (Italy)	Br. Seán Sammon	42	Reclaiming the spirit of the Hermitage. Fire and passion in Marist leadership.
2013 September	L'Hermitage (France)	Br. Emili Turú	38	Awakening the Dawn: Prophets and Mystics for Our Time.

we now know it now began to take shape and appear as functional with the renewal atmosphere and new style of government brought about by the Second Vatican Council. The Constitutions of 1986 finally included a General Conference meeting in the period between General Chapters.



General Conference of 2005 in Sri Lanka: General Council



The next General Conference will take place:

- At Our Lady of the Hermitage
- From September 8 to 29, 2013
- Under the motto: Awakening the Dawn: Prophets and Mystics for Our Time

This is the first in a series of articles that will appear periodically in preparation for the General Conference.



# THE "MARISTES BLEUS"

## Letter from Aleppo, Syria

**F**riday 1 February 2013. It is midday. Gunfire continues to occupy a good place in our everyday life. Aleppo lived the month of January in the most dramatic of situations, especially on the human level: the rarity and rise in price of supplies essential to everyday life or survival: bread, medicines, fuel, petrol, electricity etc.

The human dramas with which we, "the Marist Blues", are daily confronted are terrible. The displaced grow in number and need. The little people, poor and miserable, without resources and without work, come to us begging to help them find a little work. Many have set up a "Basta", a little stall out in the street to sell anything at all: biscuits, cigarettes, fruit and vegetables, etc. Elias, for example, has as capital 2,000 Syrian pounds (20 euros). He and his son



Hanna (7 years old), are there all day in front of the "Basta" to sell biscuits, at 5 Syrian pounds a packet. Hassan, father of a family, displaced, without work, spends all night in front of the

bakery in order to buy a few kilos of bread which he will resell at a slightly higher price. This little enterprise will allow him to supply the basic needs of the 7 members of his family.

I think of the children selling petrol, and this adolescent girl who has set herself up in a street used by thousands of pedestrians. Her hands serve as her stall ; she has there a packet of biscuits she is selling.

I think of the youth... There are those who have left the country, with or without their parents, but there are also all those who have stayed: the university students who want to finish their studies in order to plan a future, and those who are without work. So, what words of hope can help them continue on their way ? sometimes, there is only silence and listening...

These same young people have been shocked by the attack made on the University of Aleppo on the first day of the term exams and which caused the deaths of so many students who, in the face of all opposition, are clinging on to an uncertain future.

The city is becoming more and more a city of ghosts. After 4 pm, without electricity and with few passersby, the city is abandoned to itself, to fighting, to various barrages... One would say a city abandoned to its fate, its "Mak-toub".

Aleppo is more and more isolated and asphyxiated. The international airport remains closed. The unique possibility of travel is the land route with all that that represents as danger for the life of the travellers. For these travellers and their families, the day of travel is a day of anguish and uncertainty. Especially on the stretch closest to Aleppo where the telecommunications have been cut and the road-blocks of the different factions are multiplying.

Against this dark background of Aleppo's reality, we continue our action of solidarity:

We have increased the weekly portion of essential everyday food supplies for the displaced families and have added wood for heating. In fact, the cold of January 2013 was so biting that the displaced were burning anything they could lay their hands on to warm themselves: cardboard, plastic, wood, rags, old clothes, sometimes at the risk of asphyxia. Under the same conditions, the children cling to life. They took the opportunity of a day of snow to express their joy and love of play in making their snowmen ! And in the light of candles, they have been

assiduous to the study hours our volunteers assure them.

Some of the young people displaced are preparing for their official exams for the school leaving certificate and the diploma. This was for us an opportunity to enroll them in fee paying private courses not far from the lodging centres where they are.



To the monthly distribution of the "Mountain Basket" (300 families take advantage of it), we added for Christmas some cheese and meat. And we were able to distribute, to the great happiness of all the families, bottles of gas for cooking and heating water.

And today, 3 February 2013, was a very special day. A day of meeting and festivity. A day of sharing and listening. A day of distribution and joy. The media did not come to film and document the event. The TV will not mention it either. But it was a significant day and

event for more than 370 families. Very full and heavy parcels... All these families have also received a special help to obtain heating for themselves... But above all, the warmth of the welcome, the meeting, the sharing. One takes one's time, talks, says a word, leaves a trace... Somewhere, in the open street or in the basement, one does not do charity. We, the Marist Blues, we are in solidarity. But the Marist Blues are not only the residents in Aleppo but a whole network of friends, laity and brothers, whether born in Aleppo or not, all engaged in the same spirit of simplicity and audacity to go to a new land, the land of the other, the most deprived, the most poor, the unemployed, the desperate, the worried, the sad...

So then this evening, Mary, our Good Mother, I confide to you all these faces, all these hands and hearts, all those who form war's other face. A face of love and hope.

I confide them to you, name by name, face by face, person by person... In following in your steps, O Mary, we continue the journey, hastening to bring more light into the dark night of the everyday lives of all these families. I confide to you also the displaced, those families we will meet tomorrow and who are expecting us, not simply for the weekly distribution but for all that this distribution represents of solidarity beyond every frontier.

Mary, for each of the benefactors and the volunteers, for all these hearts that know no bounds, I say to you THANK YOU.

Br Georges Sabe, fms  
For the "Marist Blues"  
Aleppo, 3 February 2013

**MARIST NEWS**  
N.º 254 - Year V - 4 March 2013

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