

## THE "MARIST BLUES"

Letter from Aleppo No.10 - 21 April 2013

Since the 30th of March, events have followed one another rapidly in our city of Aleppo. In fact, at 3.30 in the morning of Good Friday 2013, I received the first telephone call informing me that the quarter of Djabal al Saydé was beginning to be invaded by the rebels who shouted and screamed, warning the people to remain inside their apartments. Was the threat a real one or rather a sporadic incursion without effect on the life of the quarter? Very softly, the news came of a true invasion of the district, with shops smashed in and vehicles stolen or wrecked. Bursts of gunfire paralysed the people and forced them to take refuge in stairwells. Adults and children were crying. Fear spread! The questions came tumbling out: Should we leave? What to do? Real anguish! A real drama was announced...



In the course of hours, combats raged, houses were "visited" by armed elements, electricity was cut off, water too... The families imagined it was a question of time, they hoped, waited, but nothing changed! On the contrary, it proved quite otherwise. Men armed to the teeth installed themselves... Night fell. People listened for the slightest noise, the slightest cry, the smallest howl... No one slept, they watched, they prayed, they awaited help from heaven ... It was their last recourse...

Holy Saturday, at dawn, the buildings start to empty as the inhabitants leave. They take with them what is strictly necessary: some important documents, a few clothes, the few savings left, and nothing else... The exodus begins, a people wandering in search of a possible exit from hell... They leave when it is still dark... One family loses contact with its two little children who should be with neighbours but are not... Another family is looking for any means to help the old man who cannot walk! Neighbours call one another, agree to walk together, protected by their destiny. The streets are empty, the lights extinguished. People take a last look at their apartment, at the interior, at a whole history, a whole dream, a whole life; one would wish the moment would stretch for ever. And before closing the door, one makes the sign of the cross as if to say to the Lord "Into your hands we commit ourselves". The door is locked, double locked, the door is sealed with a hopeful look. But it is necessary to hurry! If not, death can rise at any moment... A people walks, a people wanders, a people is displaced... It is forced to empty the quarter, the place of its life, so that it becomes a cemetery of memories, perhaps a pile of stones... There is no

time to take a last look at the balcony of the house where a sheet that is not yet dry is hanging! Only one idea in the head: we must flee hell as quickly as possible, no matter what the price... No vehicle can circulate. It is necessary to walk, walk, walk... Minutes become an eternity... The page is turned! Everything is finished!

Saturday about 9.00, the most rapid of the inhabitants of the Djabal el Saydeh quarter arrive in the safe zone: some ring at a relative's door and others take the path to our Marist community, sole place of refuge... The Marist Blues are there... They welcome, they listen, they do not stop repeating: "Hamdelah 'al salameh" "Let's thank God that you are safe".

The 300 Christian families and so many other families of the quarter have abandoned it into the hands of armed men... We too, the Marists, can no longer return to our place in the quarter. Our anxiety mounts: what about the refugee Moslem families who are in the schools? No response...

The Marist community becomes a centre of information, of cross checking data: One calls for news of a family or an elderly person... In fact, some families have remained in the quarter...

The last family to leave on 3 April describes its exodus to us: All the members including the elderly grandmother passed by holes the armed men had made in the walls of the houses ... It tells us of the horror of remaining in the hell of the war, the fear, the terror...

Many families come to ask for clothes, mattresses, blankets, pillows, towels, soap... We welcome them, accompany them, respond to their needs...

The empty spaces of the community are all full... We decide to free up the two scout dens and construct 4 showers and 4 toilets...

Together with Caritas and those responsible for Sallet el Djabal, we have organised a eucharistic celebration, followed by a distribution of money and vouchers for the purchase of new underwear and clothes. The majority of the families take part in the eucharist, communicate, pray

and accompany the parish choir... What will become of the two churches of the quarter?

Sallet el Djabal, the food basket which we have distributed every month since August 2012, will be ready in a week... The people need it...

Easter Monday, a surprise: Ghalia, mother of 7 children of whom the oldest is 9, and who is in one of the schools, comes to our place... She has sought to join us... We welcome her... Some days later, another family arrives with 11 children... all will be welcomed and accommodated...

We buy a washing machine, we add 4 reservoirs of water to those which already exist, we buy clothing, underwear, slippers, pillows, mattresses...

The project "To learn to grow" is also displaced... It returns to the rooms of the community... The children

return in number... They need space, they need to draw, to play, to talk about themselves...

We install a medical centre... Daily consultation... Free medicines...

### And what about tomorrow?

All the families of "Djabal al Saydeh" are asking this question... We ask it with them... We do not grow tired of repeating that it is in the hands of God. Should one hope for a possible return to the quarter? Should one dream? Many voices announce the imminent end of the war but how many times have these hopes been vain... Is it true that the temporary situation lasts? And if this temporary situation becomes a point of no return?

For us Marist Blues, we will always have a hand held out to live evangelical solidarity, a solidarity which announces and witnesses the love of God for every man and every woman... Together we seek to construct peace, the peace of Easter morning.



Br Georges Sabe - 21 April 2013  
For the Marist Blues

# CHAMPAGNAT MOVEMENT OF THE MARIST FAMILY (CMMF)

## The Philippine Sector Experience

The seed which was sown in 1989 has grown like a tree branching out, reaching beyond the limits of one school where it was first established. The Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family (CMMF), Philippine Sector, which was initially established at Notre Dame Kidapawan by Bro. Rene Reyes is now organized in all Marist schools in the country. Starting from a small group of people gathered for prayer and faith sharing, CMMF has evolved to include 225 members engaged in sharing faith experiences and doing mission initiatives for the poor.



Called to respond, through concrete and relevant actions to address the needs of the least fortunate children and youth, the CMMF in all schools planned and implemented different activities:

Notre Dame of Dadiangas University community had prayers, recollections, and visitations to the sick in the hospitals. They actively engaged in fellowship meetings with the brother's community. They supported the Marcellin Home for the street children providing donations of goods in-kind and sacks of rice.

Notre Dame of Cotabato community fully supported the decision of members for volunteer service. Some did immersion in Palawan, place where our brothers work in

mission for the education of the children of indigenous people. A member shared her summer time as a volunteer assisting at Marcellin Home, a shelter home for the street-children, children at risk and those in conflict with the law.

The Marist School in Marikina City established strong bond of family spirit shared among members. Mostly retired from work in the school, they made their presence more visible in support of the activities conducted.

Notre Dame of Kidapawan, where the movement originally started, had been actively involved in the school's outreach initiatives. They gathered in prayer, shared fellowship meals with brothers, and helped find resources for the needs of typhoon victims.

Notre Dame of Marbel University community brought the CMMF presence in the local Church. Added to the prayer meetings and

fellowship, the CMMF members served the Church as lectors, Eucharistic Ministers, and volunteers, they made themselves available to the needs of the local Church. They also extended assistance to the children, victims of violence and incest, at the City Department of Social Welfare.

All communities have committed to support the promotion of Marist vocations. Being present on events of professions, and doing promotional activities to raise vocation consciousness are part of each community's activities.

The dynamics of the life of the CMMF is guided by the presence of a Brother in each respective community. For the Sector-wide matters, Bro. John Tan has been very supportive in the development of the Champagnat Movement, providing an accompanying presence and concrete assistance to the initiatives of the Marist Laity.

The seed once sown has grown and like the branch of a tree now, CMMF Philippines continues to spread the richness of its experience. It is in sharing with others the fruits of living their lives imbued with the values and charism of Champagnat that every member becomes a witness in making Jesus and Mother Mary known and loved, the Marist way, and in our time today.

## Latest deceased Brothers

25/04/2013: Austin (Osmund) Redden - Australia  
 23/04/2013: Zeferino Falchetto - Brasil Centro-Norte  
 19/04/2013: Primo Eliseo Brunato - Cruz del Sur  
 15/04/2013: Bernhard Kletzmeier - West Central Europe  
 15/04/2013: Kevin Joseph Hore - New Zealand  
 15/04/2013: Manoel Alles - Rio Grande do Sul  
 14/04/2013: João Batista Camilotto - Rio Grande do Sul

13/04/2013: Luis Castilla del Val - Mediterránea  
 11/04/2013: Luis Narganes García - Norandina  
 10/04/2013: Santiago García Sandoval - Compostela  
 28/03/2013: Manuel Antonio Alvarenga Alvarenga - América Central  
 23/03/2013: Brian Horton - Australia  
 08/03/2013: Honorato Saiz Santamaría - Ibérica

# ARCO NORTE

## Follow-up Committee to the Enlarged General Council

The Follow-up Committee of Arco Norte received the mandate from the six Provincials to study and suggest to the different Provincial Councils how to follow up on the resolutions and proposals made during the Enlarged General Council held in March 2012 in Guatemala.

During a meeting in Canada, we reflected on and studied the projects of a common mission for the poor youth of our Provinces. We reached consensus on the project presented by the province of the United States of America, the opening of a regional interprovincial mixed community of brothers and laity in New York in the Bronx to work with the Mexican immigrants of this megacity.

The reasons which brought us to support this proposal are:

- \* To offer a sign of hope by creating a mission in a profane context. The novelty resides in our firm intention to send the message that it is possible to proclaim the Gospel in this disadvantaged milieu, even if our human resources are restricted. This choice is also a wager on our faith in the Marist charism for the

future of all our provinces.

- \* The mode of community life proposed can generate a new way of being Marist.
- \* This new mission will allow work with immigrants from Latin America, especially Mexicans.
- \* It is a totally new project for Arco Norte.
- \* The mission is financially supported by the diocese of New York.
- \* We want to proclaim that it is a worthy thing to be Marist brothers and laity today. We believe the new mission can help encourage new vocations among the youth of the United States.
- \* The international and multicultural character of the city of New

York is in harmony with what we want to attain in the spirit of the 21st General Chapter.

Another principle for the vitality of this new community is the formation of a mixed community of brothers and laity. If such a mission is established by Arco Norte, it is not to have another mission like all the others in our respective Provinces, but to experiment with new ways for the future of the Marist educational presence in an urban and North American milieu. The challenge is great. It is necessary to dare to explore new routes, sure that the needs of migrant populations are places of life and commitments responding to the the primary aim of the Institute, that is, the education of youth, particularly the poorest and most disadvantaged with a dimension of Evangelisation.

The Follow-up Committee to the Enlarged General Council: Brothers Pau (Norandina), Bernard (Canada), Chiquilin (Mexico Central) – Marius (Canada) – Juan Antonio (America Central)- Steve (United States)

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