

GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Appointments and Commissions

In the first days of July, the International Commission of Brothers Today has begun operation in Rome, formed by Brs Hipólito Pérez (América Central); James Pinheiro (Brasil Centro Norte); Daniel O'Riordan (USA); Juan Carlos Fuertes (Mediterránea); Norbert Mwila (Southern Africa); Albert Nzabonaliba (PACE); Saul Placious (South Asia); Peter Rodney (MAPAC); Jean Marie Batick (Melanesia); Tony León (Australia). Its aim is to support, by an annual meeting, the Secretariat Brothers Today, especially in the areas of vocations ministry and initial formation.

Another two international commissions have been appointed to respond to two chapter mandates:

* The first, to draw up a plan of economic autonomy for the AUs, formed by Brs Víctor Preciado (Econome General), co-ordinator; Mario Meuti (FMSI); Francisco Baeza (Central East Africa); Jude Pieterse (Southern Africa); Mervyn Perera (South Asia); Robert Teoh (East Asia); Tata Oliver (West Africa); John Bwanali (MIC, Southern Africa); Jean-Thomas Randrianantenaina (Madagascar); Celestin Okoye (Nigeria); Mr Marco Cán-



dido (Brasil Centro Sul);

* The second, to implement and accompany the process of revision of the Constitutions, formed by Brs Nicholas Fernando (South Asia), Diogène Musine (Central East Africa), John Hazelman (New Zealand), Patrick McNamara (USA), Devis Fischer (Rio Grande do Sul), Juan Ignacio Fuentes (Cruz del Sur) and Antonio Leal (Compostela). Brs Emili Turú, Joseph Mckee and Antonio Leal will co-ordinate the commission.

Appointments to the General Administration:

- Br César Rojas (Norandina), Director of the Secretariat Brothers Today, for a second term;

- Br Javier Espinosa (América Central), Director of the Secretariat of the Laity, for a second term;

- Co-directors of the Secretariat of the Laity: Mr Tony Clarke (Australia), for a second term, and Mr Josep Buetas (L'Hermitage);

- Br Joarés Pinheiro, Assistant Director of the Spanish and Portuguese-speaking ongoing formation programs;

- FMSI-Geneva: Brothers Manel Mendoza (L'Hermitage) and Vicente Falchetto (Brasil Centro Norte), for a second term; Br Evaristus Kasambwe (Southern Africa), who will be taking up this service in October;

- From January 2014 Br Colin Chalmers (West Central Europe) will begin as Archivist General. Br Juan Moral will continue in this function up to then.

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO BELIEVE WITHOUT SEEING

Vicissitudes of the La Valla table

This evening after dinner I went by car to Valfleury, a small town 20 km away from the Hermitage across the Gier valley, in the opposite direction from La Valla. Jean-François Telley lives and works in this idyllic spot. He is the specialized carpenter who is now restoring the La Valla table, which he withdrew from the Hermitage on Pentecost.

I drive pleasantly in the quietness of the evening, mesmerized by the landscape. Suddenly I find myself pondering the risk of turning La Valla and its table into an idolatrous Champagnat shrine and replacing Jesus of Nazareth. "Is it so?" – I ask myself out loud. It is a risk indeed... But no! La Valla is an ecumenical place which instructs, guides, edifies and sanctifies people. Jesus Christ was there as the cornerstone of the small community born in 1817, and there he awaits the apostles of today, who live out the same mystery of love. A Marist church that was born to evangelize, as the Spirit communicated – and still does today – a diversity of gifts to the little apostles who met in that house – as they still do – around this table.

Oh, what a wonderful table!

Jean-François called me a few days ago: "Joan, ninety percent of the table has been repaired. I need you to come and give me your opinion". "Okay, I will come next Wednesday", I replied. "I'll arrive late" – he added. "I'm teaching sculpture at Saint Etienne. See you around half past nine". I wait for him in the garden of his house, sharing a drink with his wife, Anne-Marie, a good friend of mine. She drew and painted the murals in the oratories of the Hermitage last year. The table awaits us at the workshop.



The waiting is pleasant, listening to Bach in the background: Jesus bleibet, Cantata 147, how nice! The chorale singing as the meadowlark chirps, most unusual! We talk about painting, her mode of artistic expression. Anne-Marie, who also teaches, uses symbolic meanings when she speaks, as I do in some of my architectural works. Suddenly, La Valla Lluís Duch, a Benedictine monk from the Monastery of Montserrat – the spiritual heart of Catalunya – is there "sitting" with us: The symbol is a means leading us beyond what is evident. It does not impose itself. Being ambiguous, it remains wonderfully open! It allows everyone to interpret, translate and update it here and now, depending on personal situations and particular moments in life.

Lluís, wonderful friend! Your wisdom has accompanied me for a long time, and now you return at the right time

this Valfleury evening.

What a relief! From this point of view, La Valla will be a revitalizing experience for all, absolutely not something closed, pietistic, or dogmatic.

The table, our table, the iconic object whose traits actualize the presence of "he" who is absent.

That is why I requested Jean-François to restore the table respecting absolutely all the wounds and mutilations inflicted by its history.

Not a facelift at all! Looking at the table, we must "see" the first brothers, and witness the miracle of love which took place between these walls; reenact the scenario, so that those events can be actualized within us today. The power of suggestion? No, just a way to fully mobilize our symbolic compre-

hension skills so that they can lead us beyond mere reasoning.

I look forward to seeing his work. Jean-François is in his full maturity as a person and artist. Last year he won the MOF Award (Meilleur Ouvrier de France - Best Craftsman of France) in his specialty of woodworking. He is a gift that Providence placed in our path. His works are exceptional.

From the beginning, in 2009, there was a good empathic connection between us allowing a mutual understanding through the language of sensibility and artistic expression. He has restored all the old furniture pieces of the Hermitage: the Chambre Champagnat (bed, armchair and kneeler); the office (desk and confessional chair); the eighteenth century altar, and the first altar from the Chapelle du Bois (actually a chest, also from the eighteenth century). He is now working on the La Valla table, but the list will go on with a big piece of furniture, Le Trésor de l'Hermitage (a glass dresser with a low body of large drawers), a real exhibit piece which Champagnat received in 1838. And then the confessional, and...

The sound of a car engine announces his arrival. "Bonsoir!" We greet warmly with a sense of artistic complicity. Then in silence, with contained emotion, we head to his workshop. But he won't

let me in! He wants to set the stage! I realize he is putting a couple of lamps in place, for the night has fallen and it is complete darkness. "Allez-vous!", he says, reopening the glass door. There, in the middle of the room, is my dear old table. I feel a slight tremor, but pretend to be calm, for I gather he is quietly observing me. Creative souls know very well this unique and exceptional moment: this instant when you open your soul, your work, your art to the scrutiny of a colleague or the general public, while the heart pounds madly in your chest, and the blood freezes in your veins. Just a second, in which any sign, any rictus is captured and amplified, becoming an intimate occasion for painful frustration or overflowing excitement.

"Elle me plait! Superbe!" I mean it sincerely as I break the silence and crack a smile. "Merci, Joan!", he answers. It is true: his work is excellent. At first glance you would say he has done nothing. However, as he starts speaking, he gives me a full explanation of his work, professional and detailed.

Jean-François, a French citizen of Swiss descent, speaks and vocalizes very well. He explains and shows to me how he has imperceptibly placed a massive steel structure inside the table. "Pour les siècles des siècles", he says. "Amen!", I reply.

All the rotten wood has been replaced with oak, and covered with thin layers of old wood reclaimed from the floorboards of father Champagnat's room at the Hermitage which I fortunately kept.

All the drawers have been repaired, and the one that was stolen a few years ago was replaced, although you cannot tell the new one from the old. And – gee! – all the wounds, cuts, scrapes and holes have been respected. "Jean-François, congratulations, I expected nothing less from you". "Thanks to all of you for trusting me", he replies.

After the visit, we celebrate with a drink in a warm atmosphere. Just a sip, for I have to drive! I say goodbye with the midnight bells. Gosh! Everyone must be sound asleep at the Hermitage. A large moon, red and mysterious, rises over the horizon of La Valla across the valley in darkness.

The strength of symbols – I ponder again while driving back. In La Valla, some will only see old wood, withered stones or even a risky modern architecture. Through the symbols, however, others will be able to openly read a message inviting them to look beyond and realize how certain the words from John are: "Blessed are those who believe without seeing" (John 20:29).

Joan Puig-Pey, architect



MARIST BLUES, SYRIA

Letter from Aleppo No 12 - 17 July 2013

Where are things 2 and a half years after the beginning of the events in Syria and one year exactly after the beginning of the war in Aleppo? our friends abroad may be wondering.

At the national level, nothing has changed, the 2 parties continue to

confront each other with no clear winner or loser at a cost of 100,000 killed, a million refugees in the neighbouring countries, 2-3 millions internally displaced, hundred of thousands who have emigrated, an economy in ruins, sectarianism and extremism flourishing and no glimmer of hope for a settlement of the conflict. Following the

retaking of Qoussair (a little town in the centre of Syria) by the Syrian army and the defeat of the rebels there, the leaders of the Western world declared that the fall of Qoussair showed that the balance of force had shifted to the government side and that it was necessary for them to arm the rebels in order to re-establish the balance!!! A very fine

programme: one is not looking to win, one is not resigned to defeat, one simply wants to re-establish the balance so that the two parties can continue to fight... to the last Syrian?

In Aleppo, the military situation is in status quo; the last battle took place 100 days ago with the taking of the Cheikh Maksoud (Djabal Al Sayde) quarter by the rebels. There have been no combats since, but bombardments here and there.

On the other hand, the humanitarian situation is catastrophic with 2 important facts:

1. The blockade of Aleppo has lasted now for 15 days; blockade of persons, no one can leave the city to go elsewhere, to other Syrian towns or abroad. Blockade of merchandise, nothing can get into Aleppo. There are no more vegetables, fruit, milk, cheese meat, chicken or fish, no fuel, gas (for cooking) and very little bread. There remain only imperishable supplies at the grocers such as rice, lentils, tinned goods... but at astronomical prices the majority cannot afford (...).
2. Mortar fire: Every day, mortar shells fall on the quarters inhabited especially by Christians. Fired by the rebels, they are homemade but still cause some deaths and dozens of seriously wounded. Last week, a boy of 14, scout in the Marist Brothers' troop, died from a piece of shrapnel in his head while he was at home (...).

In this context of violence, privation, desolation, suffering and despair, we continue, we Marist Blues, through our presence, our resistance, our accompaniment, our aid and our solidarity to be, for the people, a glimmer of hope in the darkness that surrounds us. What! you are still there, you have not left like the others? And we continue our action with the displaced, the deprived, and the wounded.

(...)
As before, the displaced have always had their place with the

Marist Blues. 23 displaced Christian families (our maximum capacity for hospitality) from Djabal Al Sayde lodge with the Brothers; we are completely responsible for them: food, accommodation, clothing, medical care, psychological accompaniment, etc.

The other families of Djabal frequently come to us to ask for help, advice, medicines, clothes or to pay a visit.

The displaced Moslem families of the schools of Cheikh Maksoud come every Monday to receive a basket of supplies.

We are still hosting 20 young Moslem girls, university students, (before we had some young girls coming to sit for their high school leaving certificate) who live in the areas occupied by the rebels and who are in the city to sit their exams.

(...)

"Learn to grow" for the little ones from 4 to 7, with its 8 supervisors, continues to make about 40 children happy. «Skills School» for the adolescents gives contentment to 30 boys and girls. And finally, «Tawassol» is destined for 2 groups of 6 adults each to teach them computing, a foreign language, and pedagogy.

Our places are full of life: the displaced who live there, the displaced on visit, the people asking for help, the children of «learn to grow», the young people of «Skills School», the adults of «Tawassol», sometimes the scouts of the Champagnat troop and the sick who come to consult the medical clinic open every afternoon; with, in the background, the noise of the thunder of guns and the whistling of bullets. Not forgetting the tanker which stops

each day in the middle of the yard to fill our water tanks and our little lorry which returns several times a day full of supplies and merchandise (such as can be found) purchased or received.

In the evening, about 9 pm, when calm returns, we meet to evaluate our day, take decisions, reply to mail and share. And with you I would like to share some beautiful gestures of solidarity that we have experienced recently.

* Y. S., a youth of 19 was transferred in a critical state to the St Louis Hospital, struck by a bullet which perforated the lung, wind pipe and neck. Placed in intensive care, with artificial ventilation, he was operated on by the greatest thoracic surgeon of Aleppo (who is part of the team of the « War Wounded » project and so will not touch any fee). His state improved but remained critical. That evening, the surgeon and the resuscitating doctor refused to go home and spent the night at the hospital so as to be present if the young patient's situation deteriorated during the night.

* G. Z., a displaced from Djabal Al Sayde, without work, and who lives with us in community with his family of 5, received a gift of 4000 Sp. from his church. This amount is barely enough for the little daily expenses of the family. He wanted to give us 1000 Sp. to share in the purchase of bread which has reached dizzying heights because of the blockade.

So that is where we are. We are trying to resist despite all; resist after exactly one year, 365 days of war. Resist pessimism, fatigue, discouragement and extremism. As our great friend Jean Debruyne** said, «To resist, is never to give up looking out for the sun through the opening of a sewer outlet» or again «To resist, is to be stubborn enough to see the day arise behind the barbed wire».

Nabil Antaki, for the Marist Blues
[Read the complete text](#)



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