

GENERAL CONFERENCE 2013

Notre Dame de l'Hermitage, France
8-29 September 2013

The General Conference took place at Our Lady of the Hermitage, from September 8 to 29, under the motto: *Awakening the Dawn: Prophets and Mystics for Our Time*. Today we send the chronicles of the third and last week. See the pictures and all news about the General Conference at www.champagnat.org

23 de September: Animation, government

On Monday, 23 September, continuing with the presentation of projects, Br Oscar Martín Vicario, Provincial of Compostela, presented the programme for the day after morning prayer.

Br Josep Maria Soteras, C. G. gave the initial presentation on the subject of new forms of government, considering the present and future situation of the Institute. Then, Br João Carlos do Prado, director of the Secretariat of Mission, developed this theme, starting with its previous history. He explained the concepts of animation, government and administration, described the processes used up to the holding of the 21st General Chapter, and indicated the principles which define a Marist model of animation, government and administration. At the same time, he pointed out the new scenarios: the brothers, their vocation and mission; brothers and laity; the evangelization of poor children and youth; the works being carried out and the works wanted and the vitality of religious life; internationality, solidarity and the sustainability of the Institute.

He offered two questions for consideration by the groups: What initiatives have been implemented in the Province or District/Region? What have been the things that helped and what have been the difficulties encountered?

After the reflection in groups and a short break, Br João continued the reflection, presenting a synthetic vision of the current state of the Institute, in order to look to the future, with its challenges and threats, so as to arrive at the introduction of the models which are best suited to each situation. He was



working with an International Commission and a professional company which will help with the introduction of the project of new forms of government.

Finally the groups proceeded to clarifying the project and making suggestions. Each table then presented to the assembly the findings of the group: positive aspects, concerns, suggestions and fears.

Br Ernesto Sánchez, C. G. gave some brief information about the coming Beatifications of the Marist Martyrs in Tarragona, to be held on 13 October.

In the afternoon, Br Chris Wills, director of the Secretariat of

Collaboration for Mission International, presented guidelines for making the on-line evaluation of the General Government plan for 2009-2017. The rest of the afternoon was left to the participants to carry out this evaluation.

At the evening Eucharist, inspired by the Word of God, the participants made use of two symbols: building with tiles, so as to be builders of the Church and the Institute, and light, in order to be light for others.

24 September: Leadership

On Tuesday 24 September, Br Ernesto Sánchez, C.G. gave a brief résumé of the previous two weeks and asked the participants in the Conference what experience had struck them most, so as to comment later on it in the groups.

Then Br Óscar Martín Vicario, Provincial of Compostela, did a rereading of the significance of the weeks preceding with regard to the current one, which is under the eminently Marial icon of Fourvière, a Marial sanctuary emanating a strong spirituality, and the site of the promises and commitment of a group of new priests in 1816, including Fr Champagnat. Br Óscar made allusion to the icon present in the room as a column soaring upward, symbolising the strength of the commitment, but also with a spiritual meaning, in relation with God.

The key question of the week was

: Who ? Br Oscar indicated that the theme of Leadership would be treated during the week and that it would end with a synthesis made in the calm of study and listening to



God. In this way, the General Conference would end at Fourvière with the promise, followed by the closure properly speaking. He specified that the day would be centred on the experience of a Provincial or District

Superior to another Administrative Unit. Two questions needed to be answered : What struck you about the way the Provincial visited performed his service ? What qualities did you discover in him ? After a time of personal reflection, the participants shared in groups of three, then in larger groups in order to find words expressing the qualities of leadership, which were placed around a figure drawn on the ground.

The evening celebration of the Eucharist was also centred on the visit of the Provinces and Districts, through a message to the host Provincial or District Superior. Those taking part used a postcard of the Visitation, icon of one of the oratories of the Hermitage. Then in a circle, each expressed a word or brief message relating to what had been written. At the end of the celebration, all, like Mary, sang the Magnificat.

A NEW RELIGIOUS CULTURE

25 September

Br Joe Mc Kee, V.G., presented the Superior General of the "Christian Brothers", Br Philip Pinto, giving a brief resumé of his congregation and person. Br Philip, a native of India, presented his topic in relation to leadership from the viewpoint of a new

religious culture, to share his being brother, leadership and the mystery of God. This involves seeing things in a different way. He started from the text of Jesus in the synagogue of Nazareth whose message was centred on "to give sight to the blind". He related how

from his own childhood experience emerged his fundamental belief that God is greater than the religions and that this world is God's agenda. He invited a moment of interiority.

In the second part of his paper, he

developed the idea of how the roles of religious men and women have changed and how they question the place they occupy today. This is a matter of beginning again, of acting so as to experience God as Jesus did. For this purpose, it is necessary to change the culture of the Congregation, to opt for animation, create teams of animation, communication with the brothers, of brotherhood, what removes our masks and presents us as we are: fragile. To see Jesus from his humanity. To opt for the non-violence which questions a leader about the way he treats others, on the basis of invitation and not authority. He pointed out that the wound is the seed of the deepest desire. To focus on the wounds, to name them...; from this death life will emerge. Lastly, Br Philip offered a way of action: to



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To help the reflection and sharing, there were some questions: Of the topics treated, which struck you most personally? Which ones throw light on the reflection we have been doing on the Institute and its future? What new significance have you discovered in being mystics, being prophets, being leaders?

At the Eucharist, following the liturgy of the Word, the Brothers who have held the office of Superior General, Benito Arbués, Seán Sammon and the current one, Emili Turú, together with the architect Joan

Puig-Pey, were invited to make a gesture: to remake with the bricks an attractive composition, symbolizing this commitment of reconstruction, in order to awaken the dawn in the Institute.

TOWARDS A SYNTHESIS

26 September

The morning of 26 September began with prayer and a special mention of Brs Emili Turú and Joe Mc Kee on the anniversary of their election as Superior General and Vicar General, respectively.

The plenary session continued with the free expression of echos of the reflection of the previous day on the message of Br Philip Pinto, Superior General of the Christian Brothers. It was a very enriching time of sharing.

Then Br Óscar Martín, Provincial of Compostela, member of the organizing committee, underlined the importance of making a synthesis of the whole experience lived. For this, he proposed starting from the profile of the leader, the topic treated on Tuesday, and the message of Wednesday from Br Philip Pinto. Each one was asked, first, what he felt himself being called to and what resistance he was encountering, and second, at the level of Province or District, what proposals he saw as most applicable

and also the possible obstacles. Then to analyse and evaluate other possible leadership roles at regional level, ending with the strong points and possible resistances. The personal reflection was followed by sharing in regional groups.

The afternoon was divided into two parts. In the first, Br Ernesto Sánchez, C.G. and part of the organizing committee, presented the most relevant aspects of the results of the on-line evaluation of the General Government. In the second, the participants responded to various questions raised in the evaluation, concluding with a time for some brief items of information on the part of some.

At the Eucharist, there was a further commemoration of the anniversary of the election of Brs Emili and Joe, with thanksgiving to God for the gift of their persons to the Institute.

IT IS UP TO US NOW

27 and 28 September

Friday 27 September began with some words from Emili Turú. Of the different aspects treated, some were more significant. He began with an allusion to the icon of the profile of the Virgin in the courtyard of St Joseph. A suggestive presence, in a certain form discrete and transparent, as it was all the time in this Conference. He indicated that there are signs that the dawn is being born, as has been seen during these days: the search for the best and most prophetic for the brothers, the Provinces, the Institute, the quality of fraternal sharing, the intercultural internationality, an "inexplicable hope".

He continued with the image of the Hermitage, which for Br François was "the great reliquary of the Founder" and where "everything speaks to us of Fr Champagnat". He recalled Marcellin's dream as related by Br Jean-Baptiste in the introduction to the "Good Superior". He expressed that today it means that the renovated house of the Hermitage comes to be seen as an act of faith in the future. And he held up as example Br François who spent so many years close to Fr Champagnat and on the death of the Founder wrote a letter to all the Brothers indicating that "it is up to us now". If anything has to change in the Institute, Emili said, it has to start with me.

He then mentioned the message of Pope Francis to the Carmelites, to apply to ourselves the importance of the contemplative dimension it is necessary to live, cultivate and transmit. In conclusion, he expressed we return to the calls of the 21st General Chapter, but by a different road, with a new look.



Fourvière

Afterwards, there was a time for going through the house again, sharing, on three different levels, what spirituality, fraternity and mission mean for leadership: making a pilgrimage to the rock, the cemetery of the first Brothers and around the reliquary of St Marcellin in the chapel.

In the afternoon, there was an evaluation of the General Conference.

The Eucharist was a moving moment of conclusion, with the benches arranged so as to include the reliquary of Saint Marcellin and the tomb of Br François.

Promise at Fourvière

On Saturday 28 September, the members of the General Conference were at the Seminary of Lyon, where Br Ernesto Sánchez spoke to them about the significance of the yes pronounced in the old church of Fourvière. This was followed by a reading

of the promise made by the group of new priests, including St Marcellin, in 1816, before the image of Our Lady of Fourvière.

They went on to personal reflection and then work by regions to define the promise each region would make at the offertory of the Mass. There was time to visit the church before the celebration of the Eucharist at midday. There the promises were made, first by regions, then by the general administration and the Marist Fathers, in the person of the celebrant, Fr Edmund Duffy. The celebration ended with the singing of the Salve. Afterwards, there was free time to visit the city.

On the return to the Hermitage, before the festive supper, Br Emili thanked all for having collaborated in the General Conference, giving each a reproduction of the image of the pregnant Mary, on the road to the Visitation, made by Br Santamarta.

Br Joe took the opportunity to thank Br Emili for all the commitment he brought to his leadership, above all for transmitting to all the spirit and love for the Marist vocation. In this way, the General Conference came to a close.

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