

WE HAVE A PROPHETIC ROLE IN THE CHURCH

An interview with the Vicar General, Joe McKee

In December Br. Joseph McKee, Vicar General, visited the Province of Santa María de los Andes. He animated two retreats, one in Bolivia and another in Peru. He was also in Chile, where he met with the boards of Marist ministries, and took part in the Assembly of Brothers and the Provincial Council. The Marist web site for Chile (<http://www.maristas.cl>) took advantage of the occasion to conduct this interview with Br. Joe. Following are parts of that interview.

How do you view the Institute in today's world, from the perspective of the different countries you have visited?

I believe that for some years and since the Chapter we are in a very interesting moment in the Marist world. I see that we are truly trying to undergo a transformation. We are called by the Chapter to this personal and institutional conversion and we are discovering little by little what this "new land" is. It is an interesting moment in history because, looking at the data, it is evident that the number of Brothers in the world is diminishing. Each year we diminish a bit more. And the average age of the Brothers each year is a little higher. But the truth is that we are more involved in our Marist mission than ever, and with a great number of people, committed laity in the Marist mission, which was not always the case. In the past perhaps there were in a school 10, 12, 15 Brothers and a few lay persons and now, for many years in some countries, there are people discovering our charism, our spirituality, the Marist mission.

For me this is a cause for joy and I think our mission is taking on a different style. We walk together in all of this, at the same time seeking ways to accomplish it.

Of course, not every country walks at the same page. In Africa, for example, they are just now beginning the discussion regarding the communion of brothers-lay people... In other places, on the other hand, there has been rapid advancement.

We are living a significant moment, but obviously, we are invited to discern very clearly the direction of all of this and the forms it will take into the future.



It's been four years since the Chapter and we are four years away from the Bicentennial of the Congregation. How has this journey been and what expectations you have for the time that remains?

In the General Council we are about to evaluate these four years, the course we have run. I believe that in the Institute in general we are doing well; at times, since there aren't any major changes, one might get the idea that there is nothing happening, but when I travel around the Marist world I see that there are certainly steps being taken, there is direction, there are paths being followed, spiritual journeys that are being taken in many provinces. I see it as yes, we are moving forward. Now, there is much more to do. There will always be much more to do. They say the important thing is not arriving at your destination, but the

road you take to get there. And we are on the road, beginning the process of preparation for the Bicentennial.

In September we will have the Second International Assembly on Marist Mission in Nairobi, a significant event for us, as much regarding the mission, as for the Brothers-Laity relationship. We are also going to begin a revision of the Constitutions of the Brothers, to help us enter more deeply into our spiritual life, our mission, our community life. All these processes are being coordinated.

Also in the next few years we will be asking ourselves what models of animation, management and government do we need in today's world, because we cannot continue using the structures of the past. We should seek new models that can help us today, to move forward today. Good things are happening, there is a lot of movement and movement in many senses.

I believe that we have also empowered community life. We have had gatherings and formation experiences for the brothers. Now we are beginning a program for formators of brothers, one in English and another in Spanish. There are many things that we are carrying out in this sense. I think that more and more, and this pleases me very much, everything is being done in a way that is more international, more intercultural, knocking down walls, internal and external borders, bringing us together more.

It is interesting that the last General Conference was a beautiful experience of dialogue, fraternity, and spirituality, with perhaps more human rhythms in contrast to activism. We are seeing that we communicate more easily than before, that there is more harmony, much more dialogue, more seeking together paths and directions for the future. This conference was a vital experience and I think that many who came with their questions and inquiries, left enlivened by a sense that yes, there is life, there are very valuable and important processes

and courses. Perhaps this sense of internationality is what we have to promote in these years leading up to the Bicentennial.

How do you see the Congregation within the Church?

Br. Emili Turú in his circular "They Gave Us the Name of Mary" speaks often of the sense of Church, and it is true that we make up part of the Church, but religious life has always had a prophetic part. We have a prophetic role in the Church because we are not part of the Church hierarchy, we are religious brothers, and I believe this is the role that we have to take in the Church, as well as the Marial face of the Church, that John Paul II himself called us to develop, to be a presence in the world, and I think we are taking it very seriously. We have to discover what it means to be the Marial face of the Church, with tenderness and compassion. Pope Francis is giving us directions on how to do this. Every day he speaks of a Church that is welcoming, that is compassionate, that is for the poor. He is helping us a lot in this sense.

Today we feel ourselves more Church than before, because the Brothers have always been a little on the margins. an experience I had in Peru: one day I went to the cathedral with some other brothers. We visited the museum, but when we wanted to enter the cathedral we were told that only priests and nuns can enter without paying, but they didn't know what to do about our situation.

I feel comfortable in this role, at the margins, I feel good about it. We are not here to be recognized, to play a role as if we were superior or better for having chosen religious life. We are Christians, brothers. And as brothers we live a relationship of equality; we are brothers to everyone. That is our role in the Church. It is a prophetic role, and very evangelical.



Graduation of 26 Brothers in Nairobi, MIUC

On the 6th of December 2013, Marist International University College witnessed the graduation of 26 Brothers and 2 Sisters. These freshly baked Catechists graduated with a Diploma in Religious Studies (DRS). Congratulations Brothers and Sisters for this achievement. Champagnat must have been very proud seeing you ready to go in haste to a new

land. To those more is given more is also expected, said Jesus. These graduands have been given more and they are ready to give out to the young people what Champagnat described as the sole purpose of founding the Congregation of the Little Brothers of Mary: Christian education for the youth, especially the needy children. "What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived, it is what difference

we have made to the lives of Bothers that will determine the significance of the life we lead"(Nelson Mandela). A challenge has been set for you to make a difference in the lives of the young people through the studies and training you have received. It is the difference that you will make in the lives of the young people that will determine the value of your studies.



DISTRICT OF PARAGUAY

Paraguay is a peaceful country in the heart of South America, and is bordered by Argentina, Bolivia and Brazil. The population is barely 7 million in an area of more than 400,000 square kilometers. It is the only bilingual country in South America, with both Spanish and Guaraní recognized as official languages

From history we learn the importance that the famous Jesuit "reductions" and later, the Franciscan missions had in the country. In the present, and having recently celebrated 200 years of independence (1811), the country is experiencing strong demographic and economic growth, based especially in the agricultural sector. It is a great exporter of beef and electricity.

The first Marist Brothers came to the country from Cataluña in 1969. Little by little they opened educational establishments and sowed the Marist charism. Native vocations began to emerge.

In 2003, with the restructuring being done throughout the Institute, Paraguay became a district dependent on the new Province of Cruz del Sur. It has 20 Brothers (10 Spaniards and

10 Paraguayans) living in communities and schools in Horqueta, Caaguazú, Coronel Oviedo, Limpio and Asunción, where the district headquarters is lo-

an laity and others from various countries in the region. Br. Javier Espinosa, director of the Secretariat of the Laity, was also present.



* The District Chapter, this past October, renewed the mandate of Br. Chema Custodi as district superior and set 3 priorities for the coming three years: Marist vocation ministry, identity and mission, and community life (spirituality and fraternal relationships). In attendance were Brs. Horacio Bustos and Juancho Fuentes, provincial and vice-provincial respectively of Cruz del Sur.

cated. A Paraguayan novice continues his novitiate in Cochabamba, Bolivia. Another Brother is a formator in El Escorial and one works in the missions in Thailand (Marist District of Asia). A Paraguayan Lay Marist is part of the international community at the Hermitage.

Four events took place in Marist Paraguay over the past few months:

* The meeting of the Commission of Marist Laity for the Americas, held in June 2013 in Coronel Oviedo. It brought together for a week Paraguay-

* The canonical visit of Br. Josep Maria Soteras, delegate of Br. Superior General, to interview the Brothers and the directors of ministries and to express communion with the Institute. This took place at the beginning of December.

* The annual retreat, held in Coronel Oviedo in the days before Christmas and directed by Br. José María Ferre, personal secretary of the Superior General. All the Brothers living in Paraguay were in attendance.



SECRETARIAT OF LAITY

Various community experiences in the Institute are specifying the meaning of the title. Sharing spirituality, mission, brotherhood... helps us--both brothers and laity--to have a broader sense of our identities, of our charism, of our Institute, of the Church. In an effort to bring to light all these sources of vitality in our Institute, we have compiled in these first four booklets (we are considering

making more) the principal experiences of communion, of the new relationship, of community journeys. These are the materials:

Shared communities of Santa María de los Andes: 28 lay people and 33 brothers, in 12 communities in Chile, Peru and Bolivia, try to live the new relationship requested

by the Chapter. These communities, they point out, were not born from a lack of religious vocations and from the difficulty of maintaining their communities, as it might seem at first glance, but it is the Spirit who is inviting the multiplication in the Church of distinct forms of living communion and mutual enrichment between men and women religious and lay men and women. Basically, these communities are evidence of a new way of living as Church. Adding Lives, Multiplying Horizons

Community Experiences of the Institute: In the Institute there have been arising community experiences as a response to the desires of the laity themselves: "We want to be part of their life, of their spirituality and of their mission" (Message from the Laity at the 20th General Chapter), as well as the conviction of a group of Brothers who declare that living the Marist charism with others enriches and complements their identity. In this booklet several of these communities are described.

Vocational Process for Laity and Lay Marists in Santa María de los Andes: The province of Santa María de los Andes has begun a process of discernment and formation for lay men and women who feel God calling them to live

their life project of following Jesus within the Marist charism. They have been experiencing this for a number of years. In principle, to those who opt to form part of this Movement it is proposed that they go through these four stages: Invitation. Initiation. Deepening. Linking. The document offers identification of the lay communities that follow these processes.

Marist Group Life - Experiences of Ibérica, Compostela and L'Hermitage: Without speaking strictly of community there are community dimensions which develop between Brothers and laity. These can be described as processes of faith, as encounters of reflection, as apostolic experiences, as moments of sharing life. With this vision the Marist groups of the Hermitage, Ibérica and Compostela have arisen. These groups promote meetings where there is faith sharing or dialoging on aspects of formation, or certain apostolic works are carried out... All of this in a climate of much flexibility and without stable structures. The offer another way of living with others the Marist charism.

You can download the PDF files in <http://www.champagnat.org/330.php>



DISTRICT OF ASIA

Marist presence in Cambodia

In the last few months, our community in Sen Monorom (Eastern Cambodia) of three brothers (Bernhard, Max and Pedro), have been very busy. We finally took possession of our utility vehicle that from the beginning has been called on to capacity. The transport of the sick, of animals, shopping journeys, the transport of goods, the transport of students home and other emergencies leave us wondering how we managed to cope before.

In the area of our missionary work we have been able to complete some projects. A computer room with eight new computers, a projector, printer and furniture was set up. Now each evening there are two computer classes and two English classes. The project to upgrade the toilet facilities in the Hostel is complete. We have built four new

toilets with water and electricity while behind the kitchen we have a new roofed-over washroom with four sinks. The old ladder in the hostel has been removed and replaced by a covered outside stairway. Likewise the small Bunong hostel now has a computer and a toilet. In the garden near the hostel there is a small fishpond; ducks on occasion have also found welcome there.

Our Oreang project is still a long way off. When we go about things in an orderly manner, i.e. when we work



together with the authorities, then progress is slow. We could of course take the conventional way and move things along with bribes, but we do not want to encourage corruption. So we need a lot of time and patience.

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