

## THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

### Interview with Br. Seán Sammon

**B**r. Seán Sammon was the Superior General of the Institute from 2001 to 2009. Now he lives in New York. In March, Br Seán Sammon gave an interview to Sr. Camille D'Arienzo published in the National Catholic Report. We share a part of this conversation where he speaks about the religious life. You can read the whole interview here: <http://ncronline.org/blogs/conversations-sr-camille/marist-brother-hopeful-about-future-religious-life>



**Sr. Camille:** Your professional credits include a doctorate in clinical psychology and a position as international clinical director of House of Affirmation from 1982 to 1987. You've published 10 books and often have served as keynote speaker at conferences of many kinds. In which of these arenas have you found the greatest challenges?

**Br. Seán:** My work as the international clinical director of the House of Affirmation was both rewarding and challenging. In the first place, I had the privilege of working with outstanding colleagues. Also, many

who came to the house for its residential and educational programs were an inspiration: people willing to face challenging questions about life and the changes taking place in our church and its religious orders.

There has, however, never been a "golden age" in religious life. Each era has had its challenges. We need to use our energies to address today's, including the changes that very few welcome.

**Sr. Camille:** What impact have these changes had?

**Br. Seán:** We've learned much from all that's transpired. One, religious life was never intended to be an ecclesiastical workforce. Two, our way of life belongs within the charismatic church and not the hierarchical church. Three, religious life is meant to be the church's conscience, reminding that large body continually about its true nature, about what it longs to be, can be, must be.

Young people coming to religious life today are reminding us that community and a vibrant life of prayer are as important a part of religious life as the ministry of our congregation.

The challenge that faces us today is building a future for religious life -- dreaming, taking risks, being willing to change yet again so that

this way of life can continue to be the leaven within church and society that it is meant to be.

**Sr. Camille:** What led you to religious life?

**Br. Seán:** Personal contact with the Marist brothers. When I met the brothers, I found myself drawn very much to their way of life and the work that they were about. They seemed very human, had a strong sense of community, and were friendly to one another and to us, their students. I found a clear sense of family among them; moreover, their expression of faith seemed very much tied to everyday life.

**Sr. Camille:** What have you considered the blessings and challenges of the Marist international missions?

**Br. Seán:** Helping young people fall in love with God is both a blessing and a challenge these days. Our founder, Marcellin Champagnat, was fond of saying that "to teach children and young people, you must love them first and love them all equally."

Though many associate the Marist

brothers with schools, our work has always been evangelization of the young, particularly poor young people. Our founder gave us the name "the Little Brothers of Mary," and quite honestly, it's the one that I prefer. He saw schools as the means in his time for evangelizing, but he didn't set out to establish a school system.

Today, almost 4,000 Marist brothers and approximately 40,000 laywomen and men work with 650,000 young people in Marist institutions in 80 countries throughout the world.

We also have a desk at the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva advocating on behalf of the rights of children. Our apostolates today are diverse, from elementary schools to large universities. We have a school for handicapped street children in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. We work with boy soldiers and host an international volunteer program for young people looking to give a year or two of service.

We take to heart the instruction of our founder: "A brother is a man for whom the world is not large enough."

**Sr. Camille: You've held many positions in and outside of the Marist community. Which among them offered the greatest challenges and satisfaction?**

**Br. Seán:** As I mentioned earlier, I've been lucky enough to have enjoyed just about everything I've been asked to do in life. During the time that I was president of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, our leadership team -- Christian Br. Paul Hennessy, Marianist Fr. Patrick Tonry, Fr. Roland Faley [a member of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis] and Sulpician Fr. Jerry Brown -- visited the Congregation for Religious and other Vatican offices each year. Most years, we went to Rome with the officers of LCWR. For me, these joint trips were the most effective of those we made. Sr. Janet Roesner was then its executive director,



and Dominican Sr. Nadine Foley and Sister of Providence Kathleen Popko were presidents successively. Members of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious taught me a great deal about sisters' love of this way of life; their zeal for the mission was inspiring.



## II MARIST INTERNATIONAL MISSION ASSEMBLY - NAIROBI

### Province of Rio Grande do Sul



The preparatory meetings for the II Marist International Mission Assembly (MIMA), to be held in September in Africa, are increasing throughout the Institute. Following the local meetings, it is now time for the provincial phases in order to line up the activities of the world event that will gather representatives from all Provinces and Districts in Nairobi, Kenya.

The provincial phase of the Province Rio Grande do Sul is scheduled for May 20th, in Porto Alegre, and it will bring together approximately 180 people. On this day, the participants previously listed by Communities, Units and Fraternities will share and celebrate the processes experienced at the local level and also develop the proposals of the Province for the International phase. On that occasion, the representatives for the International Assembly will also be presented.



# EVANGELIZING HAITIAN CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

## Sharing about a visit to Haiti

In February, Brothers Eduardo Navarro (Provincial of Western Mexico) and Agustín Acevedo (Provincial Councilor) visited the Marists in Haiti. The following is an account written by Brother Agustín.

From February 9 to 16 we visited the Marist works in Haiti. It was an intense week to get in touch with the Haiti sector and with Marist life there, which has gradually taken root since our Canadian brothers arrived around 30 years ago to sow, cultivate and harvest Marist life in this beautiful island.

We arrived to Port-au-Prince on the 9th and traveled the next day to Jérémie, where Brothers Antonio Cavazos and Kenny welcomed us. They took us to the postulancy house where there are currently 6 postulants: 3 in the third year, 1 in the second, and 2 in the first. They study at the Normal School in Jérémie, and also follow several Marist courses at home with their formators, Brothers LERS and Rach.

Our next stop was Latibolière, where brothers Laurent Beauregard, Jean Mance, Toño and Kenny are working. This center includes a morning program of secondary school (3 years) and high school (4 years). In the afternoon they teach around 80 primary-school students whose living conditions do not allow them to attend school in the morning (the so-called "rest-avec" program). This school is located in the mountain region, precisely at the top of a mount, and the area offers a very beautiful landscape of clouds and light at sunrise. The different shades of red bathing nature at sunset also become a wonderful view.

Electricity is a luxury still failing to reach the area, so we used solar-energy lamps. When the electric generator was



on, we could use our computers and many students were able to charge their cellphones. In the evening we had a meeting with all the brothers, together with two young men living in the community, and the school director. The night was pleasant despite the attacks of mosquitoes.

The next day we greeted the students at the school, had lunch, and left for Dame Marie, where we met brothers Sergio Cáceres, Chepo Casillas, Toussaint and Wilguins, who are working at Nativity High School and Fatima Elementary School. In the afternoon we had a meeting with the brothers, who shared the joy of working there, and their dreams and hopes about Dame Marie.

The next day we left for Jérémie where we met again with LERS and Rach, and also spoke with the postulants. After a day of rest, we went to Les Cayes with LERS and Toño to take a look at the land where the new postulancy is to be built, and to visit different spots in the city having to do with the formation program. The last day, Saturday, we had an Assembly with all the brothers from the Sector to share about organization and economy issues, and to dream together about the Sector.

The following are some ideas from the Assembly that somehow sum up this visit to Haiti:

\* Thanks to the testimony of our brothers from Canada, and now also from Mex-

ico, there are some young men who envision the option of becoming Haitian Marist Brothers, and the means to make this possible are being ensured.

\* Thanks for sharing the joy of being Brothers in Haiti, and for the joy of seeing new Haitian Brothers, now back after their formation abroad, who are working with the conviction that sowing the seeds of hope is worthwhile.

\* We have seen the energy with which Marist life has been forming so many children and young people, leading the way, firmly investing in the education of Haitian children and young people, and living out Marcellin Champagnat's ideals.

\* I am surprised by the investment of resources to generate hope in a place where hope is rare and opportunities

are scarce, where you struggle against so many habits and customs, knowing that it is essential to work for the dignity and rights of children and young people.

\* The challenge of providing Marist formation to the teachers is clearly perceived. There is an effort to put in place the right structures to guarantee the Marist spirit among them, so as to become "Marist brothers and laity sharing the same mission: evangelizing Haitian children and young people".

\* We are challenged by the economic sustainability of the Marist work in Haiti; evangelization needs many resources and it is very difficult to generate them within Haiti. We still need to offer support from outside the country.

\* I am fully in tune with the solid in-

vestment of resources in the formation of Haitian postulants and novices, so that they can keep loving Jesus and giving their life for the evangelization of children and young people, constructing therefore the Kingdom of God.

\* I am amazed by all the effort to educate Haitian young people through extracurricular activities, moved by the conviction that a small group can make a difference in the Haitian reality.

Thank you, brothers from the Haiti Sector, for giving witness to Marist life among the poorest children and young people in Latin America. May your life continue to be this loud message stating that it is worth spending your life for others!

Agustín Acevedo FMS



## INTER-AMERICAN SUB-COMMISSION OF MARIST EVANGELIZATION

Last March, the meeting of the Inter-American Sub-commission of Evangelization was held in Canada. It is composed of Br Felix Roldán, of the Province of Canada, Carlos Ulises Centeno López, of the Province of Mexico Central, Miriam Gracia, of the District of Paraguay, João Carlos de Paula, of UMBRASIL, and Mercia Procopio of UMBRASIL who is the link with the Inter-American Mission Commission.

The objective of the meeting was to study the Strategic Plan of the Inter-American Mission Commission, approved by CIAP, and review the Sub-commission's Strategic Plan in order to specify the responsibilities and tasks which will allow a better adjustment with the Administrative Units and promote initiatives of evangelization in America in the new perspective of 2017.

One of the activities was the presentation of the evangelization projects in course in the Provinces and Districts; there was also the preparation of a consultation which will soon be sent out in order to find out about the programmes drawn up in view of the New Methods of Evangelization and the contexts of vulnerability, inculturation and attention to children, adolescents and young people.

The Sub-commission has also begun to prepare the programme for the VI Meeting of the Marist Youth Ministry

(MYM) in America, to be held in August 2015, following the meetings in Curitiba 2004, Mendes 2006, Lima 2008, Guatemala 2010 and Campinas in 2012.

During the meeting, we had the opportunity to hear a bit more about the Marist Mission in Canada and visited the residence of Willowdale, an experience of community life of young adults taking place in Montréal. The community of 12 university students and three brothers opened the door of their house to share their daily life with us.

We thank the Provincial of Canada, Br Bernard Baudin, and his Council for the hospitality and attention given us in order to hold the meeting in the best conditions.



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