

Today, in Nairobi, begins the  
II Marist International Mission Assembly.  
See all the information about it in:

<http://www.champagnat.org/nairobi/>



## DIFFICULT SITUATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF CENTRAL AFRICA

### Testimony of a young Marist Brother

**B**r Félix Donald Banam, a young Central African of the community of Berberati, took part in the Provincial Assembly of Central East Africa (PACE), held in Save, Rwanda, from 1 to 3 August 2014. He offers us his testimony on what is happening in his country, the RCA.

The Central African Republic is passing through one of the most difficult periods in its history due to the political-military conflicts of recent years. The social texture is being destroyed and hate is being installed in the hearts of many Central Africans. Already, it is not possible to circulate freely through the country. The Republic is turning into a country without law. The authority of the government is confined to the capital, Bangui, and surrounding areas, while the provinces are in the hands of the militias of the Seleka coalition or the Anti - Balaka. Illegal control points are everywhere on the

roads and the presence of international forces appears to have no influence on the catastrophic situation the country has experienced since the rise to power of the Seleka coalition.

It must be remembered that, until the Seleka came



## GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

On 1 September, the Third Age course for French-speaking Brothers began in Rome in the spirituality centre of the de La Salle Brothers. Today begins the Spanish and Portuguese-language Third Age Course, in the General House. The courses will last for two months.

Br Michael De Waas, CG, was at Manziana from 1-3 September, with those taking part in the course, "Brother formators for a new world".

Brs Ernesto Sánchez and Antonio Ramalho of the General Council visited Chad from 4th to 11th of the month.

Br. Joe Mc Kee, Vicar General, from 13 to 14 September, was in Germany where he took part in the Meeting of the Brothers to celebrate 100 years of the Marist presence in the country.

to power, Christians and Moslems in the Republic of Central Africa always lived in harmony. Now there is much pillaging and massive destruction of properties, fields, granaries in the villages. In the towns, many families have been forced out of their homes while others have had their vehicles confiscated. In the times of disturbances, the Moslems were always protected and kept a culpable silence, and did not unite with the non-Moslems to denounce the conduct of the Seleka. For this reason, the defeat of the Seleka has obliged the Moslems to go into exile.

As for the Marist community of Berberati, although it was saved from sacking thanks to the valiant intervention of the bishop of the diocese, Monsignor Dennis Koffi Agbenyadzi, it has had to face many challenges rising from the conflict. The brothers are obliged at times to close the school for various days if the town is under tension. The feastday of Saint Marcellin Champagnat (6 June) was not celebrated in the school in 2013 and 2014 because it was rumoured it was going to be attacked with grenade launchers. On various occasions, the threats to the security of the children, especially the girls, have caused grave concern to the brothers, teachers and parents. In addition, the brothers are at times forced to give up collecting fees for enrollment of the students when the state does not pay the salaries of its employees, obliging the community to seek help from the Province. At times, the money is deposited in a bank in Bangui, but it is not at all easy for a Brother to travel to Bangui to secure the money that would ease the situation for the school and the community.

Last June, the office of the director of the primary school was attacked. Two computers, a portable telephone and a certain amount of money were taken. The police are still trying to identify the thieves.

One day, a Brother of the community was violently detained by a group of young men who identified themselves as Anti – Balaka. They accused the Brother of being in connivance with the Seleka because the Moslems who had fled the town were lodged in the bishop’s palace which is only a few metres from the Brothers’ house. This was a consequence of an encounter between the Anti-Balaka and the Forces of the African Union based in Berberati. The encounter resulted in the deaths of two Anti-Balaka.

Another very dangerous circumstance is the movement of the Brothers from Berberati. It is becoming more difficult because the white Brothers already cannot travel to Bangui on the highway since the malefactors think they have a lot of money and that by kidnapping them they can demand a lot of money for their release. Only the black Brothers can travel on the highway but this is not without risk. In any case, Berberati being some 100 kms from the frontier with the Cameroons, the only way out for everyone is precisely this highway. It has to be noted also that while the Moslems controlled the diamond trade in Central Africa they had aircraft which assured communication between Bangui – Ber-



Br Félix with Roger Passi

berati. With the departure of the Moslems, only the aircraft belonging to the NGOs can do this flight. These aircraft will accept no passengers for any reason in the world. Because of this, only one Brother could attend the Provincial Assembly in Save, Rwanda.

Our community in Berberati is called to overcome these difficult times with tenacity and abnegation. The simple presence of the brothers in the town despite the menace is a witness of solidarity towards the suffering people of Central Africa. As many teachers in our schools are not paid by the government, their survival depends on the salary we pay them.

Let us note that the Marist schools of Central Africa contribute an enormous service to the Republic as being the best schools in the region. In fact, they are the establishments which have continued functioning with regularity despite the chaotic situation of the country.

The Marist community of Berberati is called to supervise the quality of the administration of the establishments so as to dispel any suspicion of corruption in the heart of the administrators and participate in the Church’s mission for the salvation of the world. Based on an integral formation of the young people, Marist education must not be limited to teaching them theory but to love all equally, boys and girls, rich and poor. They are called to support one another in giving witness to the Gospel through the education of youth.

The life of the Brothers of Berberati is not directly threatened. Without a doubt they must be careful since armed check points are widely spread throughout the town. Two parishes of the town (Sacré Cœur and Saint Basile) have been visited at night by malefactors looking for wealth, especially since the forces of the African Union do not do night patrols.

Br Félix Donald Banam of the community of Berberati



# SANTA MARÍA DE LOS ANDES

## Provincial Chapter in Santa Eulalia, Peru

The province of Santa María de los Andes held its V Provincial Chapter in Peru, from 20 to 23 July, with the attendance of 35 capitulants and 12 invited (2 brothers, 9 laity and 1 priest). The Superior General, Br Emili Turú, was also present.

During the Chapter, Br Saturnino Alonso took up office as Provincial, succeeding Antonio Peralta. The following brothers were elected as provincial councillors: Patricio Pino, Isidro Azpeleta, Óscar Montenegro, César Sema, Pedro Herreros and José Antonio López.



Based on this reflection, consideration was given to the existing structures, laying down guidelines for their reorientation and highlighting the priorities the provincial government should put

items of news, especially those relating to the FMSI office in the province of Cono Sur and the economic questions of the province.

Br Emili met with the members of the Chapter and shared aspects of the life of the Institute. He insisted on internationality, reminding them of the challenge of interprovincial relations. He also emphasized Marist life in the District of Asia, the initiatives inherent in the celebration of the Bicentenary of the Institute, the meeting on lay association, international communities,

The work of the chapter was varied. Initially, all were invited to reflect on their own perception of the Province and on the provincial project.

into practice. There was also time given for various

programs of ongoing formation, the topic of initial formation and the new models project.



# LYON 2016: INTERNATIONAL MEETING OF MARIST YOUTH

On 15 and 16 August Br. Miguel Ángel Espinosa attended the preparatory meeting of the International Marist Youth Meeting (IMYM) for the year 2016 in Lyon, during the celebration of the second centenary of the Promise of Fourvière, and the World Youth Meeting in Krakow, Poland. Representatives of the four branches of the Marist Family took part in the meeting.

This meeting was held in Lyon, France, at the Provincial House of the Marist Province of L'Hermitage. We appreciate the great value of the meeting together of the four Marist Congregations and we have done everything to make possible the meeting in France from 17 to 23 July 2016.



# TO LEAVE OR NOT TO LEAVE

## Syria: letter from the Blue Marists

**T**o leave or not to leave, such is ever more the dilemma facing Syrians, especially Aleppans. What is there to do? Continue to hold on? Stay in spite of all that's going on?... In spite of all that, they have been suffering for over three years now. What is the right thing to do? What will the future look like? But first, will there still be one? As for leaving for good and relocating elsewhere to secure a better future for oneself and - above all - the children, where to? In addition, how to go about it? By putting the past behind, leaving all worldly possessions and starting over from scratch?

This long litany of unanswered questions comes back to haunt us over and over throughout the day. Those who used to procrastinate and put them on the back burner because they wanted to wait and see - either hoping for things to get better or because they had not mustered the courage to move, have now left for good, in ever growing numbers - especially Christians - heading for countries that they have not chosen: "Where I go does not matter. What does is to get wherever it is that I'm going, and to be able to live in peace there."

People are at the end of their rope. Three years after the Syrian conflict erupted - and 192,000 dead and millions of IDPs and refugees later - they still see no solution looming on the horizon. The recent sequence of events has caused even the most die-hard optimists to lose their illusions. There was first the several-week blockade of the city, followed by a complete interruption of the water supply for more than two months, all of which were taking place while shells and mortars continued to rain down

on us and to make their daily harvest of casualties...

However, the worst thing is the fear that grabs one by the guts, instilled by this gang of barbarians who took possession of the whole eastern Syria and northern Iraq, to establish an Islamic State having nothing to do with the Islam that we know. This is a gang of mostly foreign militants with whom fellow Syrian Muslims cannot identify, who slaughter, behead - and not just American journalists - crucify to death, stone allegedly adulterous women, flog to punish (smokers, for example), bury people alive, sell women as slaves ... .The full list of their barbarous and cruel deeds is too long to fit within this newsletter.

But it is especially the tragic fate met by Mosul's and Qaraqosh's Christians - no less Iraqis than the Muslims - and also by other religious "minorities" such as the Yezidis, which was a watershed moment. Summoned to choose between converting, dying or fleeing, hundreds of thousands of people had taken to the road, leaving behind the land of their ancestors, their roots, their history, without being able to bring anything along, not even their wedding rings or a little money. Expelled, then exterminated, like Armenians before them in 1915 at the hands of the Ottomans, during the 20th century's first genocide. That alarming event was the defining moment that precipitated Syrians' deci-

sion to finally leave their country.

And this is how Aleppo got in turn depopulated of its Christians. Only half of them remain now, according to optimistic estimates, but more realistically, probably just one third. Three years ago, it was the affluent elites - doctors, businessmen, academics - who had left, and over time, their temporary exile had become final. Now, on the other hand, it is all population groups who jostle at the gate - middle-income, youth, middle-aged, elderly, even the poor and destitute...

As for us, what can we say, what is there to say to these would-be immigrants? Should we encourage or deter them?

What can we say to these three young couples bound for Lebanon, who signed up with the United Nations Office for Refugees in order to obtain an immigrant visa, and called on us last week to say goodbye? Three years out of work is hard for young families on whom life was smiling when they started their professional and family life a few years ago.

How can we respond to the most destitute of all the families that we help, and who cannot cope any longer with living in the poor neighborhood of Midane, daily targeted by rebel shelling? Or to those who have seen their neighbors killed or injured and who fear for themselves and their children? "We want to go, please help us with the paperwork; we have cousins, or brothers, in Latin America... They will get us a visa."

Read all the letter in <http://www.champagnat.org/400.php?a=6&n=3361>



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<p><b>Director</b> Br. Alberto Ricica</p> <p><b>Production</b> Mr. Luiz da Rosa</p>	<p><b>Redaction</b> Piazzale Marcellino Champagnat, 2 00144 ROMA E-mail: <a href="mailto:publica@fms.it">publica@fms.it</a> Site web: <a href="http://www.champagnat.org">www.champagnat.org</a></p>
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**Edited by:**  
Marist Brothers - General House - Rome

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