

## NEW MARISTS IN MISSION

### III Marist International Mission Assembly

The II Marist International Mission Assembly took place in Nairobi, Kenya, from the 16th to the 27th September. In this bulletin we transmit the second set of chronicles, from Friday 19 to Tuesday 23, describing the work of the participants. The texts were written by Br Antonio Martines Estaun. In [www.champagnat.org/nairobi/](http://www.champagnat.org/nairobi/) you will find the complete information about the meeting.

#### Friday 19 September: The fire that makes us burn

Morning dawns brightly and the community gathers around a bonfire. The material symbol indicates the interior fire we feel, which is the love of God which unites us all. "This fire is the God's loving dream for each of us, for the Institute, for humanity. This fire gives sense to our existence, feeds our convictions, and inspires our actions and our mission". Thus the guide which each has received to pray this morning around the fire.

#### The guidelines for the day's reflection

To initiate the work and reflection of the day, the members of the assembly are given a global view of its development and its principal objectives to help them situate themselves better. The Assembly represents the many situations of the Institute and so the horizon needs to be widened to take in the whole Institute. It must listen to the Spirit in order to grasp what it is saying to the Marist Institute today, so as to find the consensus which aids the journey into the future. To help define this perspective, a diagram illustrates the road the activity of the Assembly must follow in the next few days.

#### An analysis of the situation

Brother Josep María Soterias helps the Assembly center its reflection by stating that this meeting is not devoted simply to studying the mission, but the mission, Marist spirituality and the new relationship between brothers and laity. These three realities "mutually strengthen or weaken one another". His reflection is directed "to present an overall view of the three, but from the perspective of the Spirit," starting from the calls of Mendes and the 21st General Chapter.

From the calls, he emphasizes those which highlight the words "novelty" or "new," such as when the Chapter asks us for a "new mode of being", because the "newness which makes us brothers" or "the new element of our relationship" come above all from being and not from what we do. And he concludes by saying that "doing is a magnificent manifestation of being".

Analyzing the "laity and brothers relationship" highlights the fact that the newness must be born from a "mature relationship" which accomplishes "communion". And communion is

accomplished at the level of being. When maturity of identity has been achieved, true relationship begins. The other neither weakens nor attacks me, but helps me be myself. Here begins a "spiritual journey" of maturity which lasts a lifetime. And in this case, "the relationship of communion" becomes a "vocation". For this reason, life needs to be planned as "vocation".



With the conclusion of the presentation of Br Soteras the Assembly listened to three testimonies from participants. The first was from Marie Elia (Madagascar) who spoke about her spiritual experience in contact with the Marist charism. Then Br Leonard Brito (Southern Africa) emphasized his living of faith in relationship with Christ and Mary. Finally, Matloob Hayat (South Asia), from Pakistan, described his relationship with difficult students and

his care for the most needy in the field of education.

During the first part of the afternoon, six workshops were held: Interiority (Br Oscar Martín), Inter-religious experience (Br Michael De Waas), Experience of God in daily life (Maureen Hagan), Silence and contemplation (Br Emili Turú), Gathered around the Word (Br Michael

Green), Praying from music (Manu Gómez). While the workshops were running, the group of 12 young people taking part in the Assembly had a meeting to discuss the contribution they wished to make.

The day concluded at the feet of Our Lady of Guadalupe with a Marial celebration animated by the delegates from Mexico.

## Saturday 20 September: Brothers and laity in a new spirit of communion

This day was devoted to studying the second call of the 21st General Chapter asking for a new relationship between brothers and laity. The work proposal for the day was an invitation to welcome, accompany and together help this gift of God to grow.

### New relationship between brothers and laity

Brother Joe McKee helped the Assembly reflect on what a "new" relationship of brothers and laity based on communion meant. In his reflection, he presented a brief historical summary of how this relationship had been understood and lived in the Institute. Using the slogans which had appeared on each date since 1962, Br Joe referred to a relationship which began with laity rendering services to the brothers up to the time the Institute discovered that it was a shared mission which invited them to feel gathered around the same table.

"The communion of brothers and laity is the ideal we long for" he emphasized. The essential thing is that we find ourselves reunited under the same tree of the charism and that we feel called by God to give a vocational response. The Marist vocation, consecrated or lay, requires a new way of following Jesus Christ. There are some lay men and women who wish to be recognized as Marists. And Br Joe asked "How do we recognize lay Marist vocations?" The response to this question is one of the tasks entrusted to this Assembly.

A second reflection of the Brother Vicar outlined the change of paradigm in order to understand the relationship as communion. For a long time, the thinking was that the Institute was at the centre and everything revolved around it: its dynamism, its perpetuity, etc. The change of paradigm requires us to contemplate "the charism as the centre". The sons of Marcellin, the brothers, are the first expression of this charism. But there are many other expressions. And he concluded by stating that "today expressions are needed which also recognize the presence of the charism in the laity". The celebration of the 200 years of the foundation of the Institute is an opportunity for a new beginning, perhaps with different forms, but a common Marist future.

### Testimonies

The Assembly heard through a video the testimony of the family of Rodrigo Sánchez and Estela Rodríguez and their children Josué and Lucía (born a few days ago), who had committed themselves for a period of three years to the Marist District of Asia. At present, this Mexican family forms part of a Marist community in Cambodia and serves in the fields of health (Estela) and education (Rodrigo).

Ana Saborío (América Central) talked about her connection with the brothers through her participation in the works of the Province of América Central and the deep communion with the Marist charism which moves her heart.



Br Arturo Buet (Cruz del Sur) presented a rapid panorama of the presence of the Marist community of Fraile Pintado (Jujuy), Argentina, born in response to the call of the 20th General Chapter to "widen the tent, share life as brothers and laity, and journey in solidarity together".

These testimonies presented to the Assembly "the living and the challenges of brothers and laity in face of the future of the Marist charism".

### Exercise of the 5 corners

The afternoon's meeting began with Marian prayer prepared by the representatives of Asia.

The plenary session began with a projection which invited the participants to sharpen their awareness in order to find where we can see God. With his artistic skill, Brother Tony Leon helped the Assembly to do this by means of an exercise of "paraidolia", that is to say, finding meaning in images. The activity proposed to them was to "see the signs of God in the communion of brothers and laity". The dynamic of discovering where God is speaking to the Institute today began with this proposal. Five concrete themes were proposed: spirituality, fraternity, mission, vocation and association - organization.

Each participant wrote his contribution on paper after dialoguing about it with another person, and placed it on a panel specially prepared for each of the themes. Two persons were chosen to draw up a synthesis of the contributions and share it with the Assembly. Some references were repeated in the synthesis, especially those forcefully emphasizing the need for joint formation, and the setting up of communities of faith, significant, welcoming, prophetic, to serve as reference points to accompany the formation of brothers and laity. This also meant vocation as gift and response, the drawing up of a life project for youth, and the creation of associations for laity which manifest clear signs of belonging.

Then came time for an echo of what had been heard for sharing with the Assembly. Emphasis was given to the call of God for us to defend the rights of children with efficient structures, the need to provide a structure for Marist associates which recognizes belonging. This lengthy and interesting reflection concluded with a time for interiorization to write up the Diary.

### Celebration of the communion

The celebration of the communion of the brothers and laity was organized by the delegates of the province of L'Hermitage who helped the Assembly pray with some Byzantine hymns dedicated to Mary and the reading of the Word in Greek. Among the motivations for this celebration it was stated that "to be followers of Christ today in the style of Champagnat means to be committed to the three fundamental Christian and Marist dimensions: mission, shared life and spirituality".

After supper, there was a time of intercultural festivity animated by the musical band of MIC with African songs and rhythm. Thus finished a day full of novelties and a great wealth of topics.



## Sunday, September 21st: Visit to MIC and to the Bomas of Kenya

**S**unday was a day of rest for the Assembly. The morning was spent at MIC, and a cultural program was arranged for the afternoon.

The outdoor Sunday Eucharist at MIC was scheduled for ten o'clock. Before the Mass, we could admire the colourful clothes typical of the African countries of origin of the young Brothers.

White soutanes were also prominent, contrasting sharply with the colorful costumes of each country. A variety of local residents including religious sisters and Brothers of Charity

Hymns led by the MIC band and choir were sung in a variety of African languages. The sunshine made the day even more special.

At the conclusion of the Mass Brother Francis Veye, staff member at MIUC, welcomed all the visitors especially members of the Assembly to whom he wished success in their work. He also thanked their presence for coming to gather around the same table. Looking at brothers and lay people who make up the Assembly he affirmed that brothers plus lay is not equal to two,

but three, because through our union, a new force is born in the church. The General Council was introduced along with the Central Commission who are carrying the responsibility for the running of the Assembly.

Before departure from the Mass Centre, Brother Mario Meuti was congratulated on his birthday.

**Charles Howard Memorial Garden**

Then the participants moved in procession to a garden dedicated as a memorial to Brother Charles Howard who was responsible for initiating this formation centre for Africa. And in his memory, the participants of the II MIMA planted ten more trees in the garden. A picnic lunch in the gardens



of the MIC was enjoyed in a beautiful atmosphere of brotherhood.

**Visit to the cultural center known as Bomas of Kenya**

In the afternoon the participants of

the Assembly moved to the Bomas cultural center where they could visit an open space set amidst nature where samples of various types of housing used by the diverse groups of original peoples in Kenya. Then they enjoyed a display of music, dance and African folklore in a large auditorium. The first part of the show was dominated by dance and music and the second with a program in which acrobats were the protagonists.

In the late evening and upon returning home the faces showed the satisfaction of having shared a beautiful day in the company of the Brothers at MIC and having been immersed in African culture. Our hearts sang gratefully to the Lord for giving us such a beautiful day.

Tuesday, September 23rd

The young people taking part in the Assembly



**Looking at the world through the eyes of young people and children**

Today has been about "seeing" - How to see the world through the eyes of a child. Morning prayer focused on the text of Matthew in which Jesus took a child and put him in the midst of the disciples. Following this example, the assembly placed children and youth at the center of their attention. The song "If I could see the world through the eyes of a child" was very appropriate to our theme. And to

give more depth, those present have been invited to "see the world through the eyes of Marcellin" and respond with "a heart like his."

**Panel Discussion with the young**

The young folk aged between 20 and 30, presented the theme "The youth and the Marist charism". All the young participants but one, are from Marist schools or environments. With great creativity each one presented a symbol that for them identifies the qualities of the Marist charism - symbols that spoke of presence, service, being a light to the world, joy, justice, community, going back to our basics, the way of Mary, illuminating the darkness, etc. Then they introduced individuals who reflect those values. Among them were a number of world leaders (e.g. Mandela) and Marist Brothers with whom they have shared part of their lives.

They were asked how they see the Marist of the future and where they will be personally in 2020. Their answers included in mixed communities, traveling to countries where they live the internationality of the Institute, living the Marist mission in places on the periphery, participating in structures of joint training, etc.. One of them stated that "I met

the Brothers in college when I was doing some volunteering." Another said that she met the Marist charism "living in community" with the Brothers.

In a Q&A session they were asked what the Marist life gives them. They responded by saying that there is a thirst to know what it is to be a Marist Brother. We know it is not a degree of studies but of service. It is not easy as a definite option though they would welcome temporary commitments. "We like mobility," said one of them. Another recalled the great contribution youth ministry has meant to his life. Another suggested how rich it would be to give new meaning to the promise of Fourvière to the youth. "It is tough for young people to make up our minds. So it is important to lift the cover of the tent so that young people see what other young people are doing," said another panelist.

How do young see the Marist life in the future? They then simulated participating in the III MIMA. By then, in at the beginning of the third Marist centenary, will be "a global village", a "consistent" community of brothers and lay "mutually supportive", available to meet any need, working for the poor and other related institutions, with public prominence, with a say in the defense of the rights of children and young ... these were some of the ideas expressed. "If the mission depended upon the brothers, many of us would be willing to become brothers, but the mission is not exclusive to the brothers. "Vocation has to come from within," pointed out one of the young participants in the panel. The dynamic concluded with the statement of one of the young participants: "We have lived a hypothetical game, but nothing far from what we feel."

### Experience and evidence of organization and membership

In the second part of the morning four current Marist initiatives showing how brothers and laypersons are organised and share the Marist charism in different

parts of the world. Silvia introduced the Province of Santa María de los Andes. In this province, membership is done through a process of Marist education launched with an invitation to participate. It is then followed by an initiation process lasting a few years before some form of commitment.



At present there are 14 communities and 142 people of the Champagnat Movement of Laypersons participating in this process.

Brother Michael Green, of the Province of Australia exhibited the characteristics of a future Marist Association of Marcellin Champagnat of Australia that would eventually be recognised both in civil and canon law. "The word Institute does not include all Marists" but only Brothers. "The Marist family is broader than the brothers." Br Michael emphasised that "in Australia lay and brothers want to be together." The Association aims to be a formula to accommodate all Marists of the future.

Brother Réal Cloutier, of the Province of Canada, briefly explained the history of the creation of the Marist Association of Laypersons and some characteristics of this structure created to "share the inheritance of Champagnat" and to get the laypeople "be co-responsible for the Marist life."

Brother Iñigo, from the Province of Ibérica, discussed the process of forming a body that will bind the lay not necessarily to the Institute but to the charism. As part of the initiative a "School of Marist spirituality" has been created, animated by a mixed community to facilitate the processes.

During the Q&A time, one of the participants asked about structures for former brothers. Brother Javier Espinosa, Director of the Office of the Laity responded that there are several very simple structures in the provinces of Cruz del Sur, Central America and Mexico, among others. Leadership, ownership and governance were also mentioned as realities that must be addressed. Brother Emili reported on a meeting in Rome last March about "connection and belonging" and the process initiated at Institute level to find "new models for animation, management and governance of the Institute" which will still take several months to complete.

### Immersion Experience

The afternoon was devoted to short experiences of "immersion". Accompanied by student Brothers from MIC, small groups went to visit: 1. Don Bosco Center for rehabilitation of boys 2 Mother Teresa House – a centre caring for orphans. 3 Kazuri association for women. 4 Ennomatasiani Girls secondary school. 5. Joram G. Boys secondary school. 6 Nyumabani -watotowa Mungu an orphanage.

### Celebration of solidarity

After dinner a celebration of solidarity took place. In it the participants shared the experience of the day. A moment of internalization was then to conclude the day using the text of John 9: 1-12 and answering these questions: What had I not seen before? Who or what helped me to see more clearly? May the Spirit lead the Assembly in its final days.

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