

NEW MARISTS IN MISSION

II 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 third set of chronicles, from 24 to 27, describing the work of the participants. The texts were written by Br Antonio Martines Estaun. In www.champagnat.org/nairobi/ you will find the complete information about the meeting.

24 September: A new era for the Marist charism

What resonates in our hearts?

The Assembly is moving towards the development of its conclusions. The work proposed for this day is to review what has been experienced over the past days. For this purpose, most of the day was spent in an atmosphere of retreat and silence. A contemplative look helps us to "see" beyond the surface and perceive life in its strength, courage, kindness and beauty.

Morning Prayer: The arrival of the drum in Africa

A folk story from Guinea Bissau was used to illustrate the theme. The tale speaks of white-nosed monkeys deciding to reach the moon because it was pleasing and as white as their noses. To get there, they decided to climb on top of one another and form a tower until the highest monkey could touch the moon. But those at the bottom got tired and the tower collapsed. The one who had touched the moon, however, was already hooked to it by its tail. The moon stared at him, saw that he was cute, and gave him a drum as a gift. Once the monkey

had learned to play the instrument, the moon sent him back to the earth hanging on a rope and with a warning: "Do not touch the drum until you have reached the ground. Only when I hear the sound, will I cut the rope." But the monkey was so excited and that he played the drum before setting foot on land. The moon, hearing this, cut the rope and the white-nosed monkey plunged to the earth and was badly injured. A young girl found the poor dying monkey, who still had the strength to tell the story, and give her the drum. That was how the drum came to Africa. Since then people have made many drums and play them when they are happy and also when they are sad. They are used at celebrations and also to communicate from afar. The moon loves to hear the rhythms and tenderly remembers the white-nosed monkey who was the first creature to reach the moon.

Motivation for the retreat

Brother Eugène Kabambuka invited the participants to listen to their hearts as they contemplate the gift of the Marist charism. Champagnat was sensitive to the needs of the ignorant and a spirituality that made him passionate for



Christ. He also found that gift in our "brotherhood." Africa puts it in the word "ubuntu," which means "I am because we are." He also recalled the acrobats at the Bomas, where each performer depended on the others. He cited an African proverb: "If you cross the river along with a multitude, the crocodile will not bite."

For the personal work time, each participant was given guiding questions:

- How do you feel about the future?
- What engages you?
- What is it that nourishes your answers?
- How do you envision expressions of the Marist charism in 2030?

Their task was to define three elements or features of these expressions.

The Evening Prayer centred on Mary's visitation to her cousin Elizabeth making use of a variety of artistic representations of the gospel account.

Afternoon

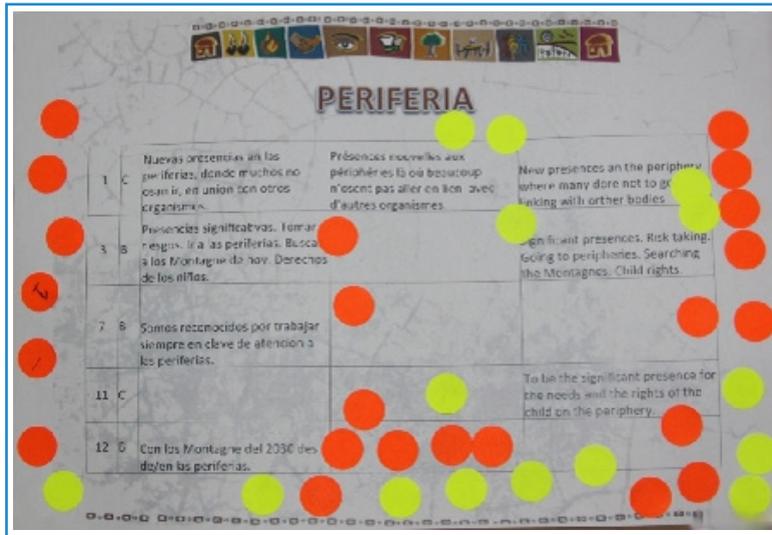
Participants met in their fixed groups to share their reflections and report back to the plenary. They were to envisage various expressions of forms of the Marist charism in 2030. The report back was done in a plenary session.

A first intuition was to see the expressions of the Marist charism as a "great charismatic family in the Church", consisting of "a network of groups or cells" with "diverse forms of meaningful and multicultural Marist communities, which share spirituality, life and mission and where the lay dimension is evident." These Marist communities would be composed of "prophets" and "mystics" witnessing to brotherhood and communion, "taking care of and accompanying the Marist vocation".

Another aspect is more focused on the creation of new structures: "creating a

larger tent," a "new tent" with "structures that include all Marist vocations" and in which "those who identify themselves as Marist are recognized and respected".

A final aspect of the Marist charism deals with issues such as: "strengthening the culture of solidarity and voluntary networks"; "to promote mobile, international and mixed communities in each region with phrases such as



"global availability" "missionary internationalism"; "a presence embodied in the national and international peripheries". And it also strongly emphasises advocacy for youth: "Brothers and lay committed to solidarity and justice"; "defending the rights of children and adolescents"; "involvement in social and political institutions."

Selecting priorities

In the plenary we heard a summary of the contributions of the groups from which a number of key themes emerged: internationality, mystical-spirituality, youth, educational mission, vocation, periphery, communion, and children's rights. Each participant was given two stickers, one red (first priority) and one colored yellow (second priority). Preferences were shown by placing one's stickers next to the key ideas emerging from the group work. The photographic album in www.champagnat.org has some appropriate pictures of the process. The process helped the synthesis group in their work of producing a final document of the Assembly.

Evening

The Assembly gathered for a Eucharist and after supper, the Marist regions of Europe and

Africa presented aspects of their various cultures - culinary, artistic, musical, and tersichorean, the last-named involving participation of all with much fun and laughter. Brother Francis Lukong, president of the Conference of Provincials of Africa, took the opportunity to warmly thank the organizers for choosing this continent to celebrate the Assembly.

25 September: Challenges and Opportunities for the Marist Charism

The new era of the Marist charism implies many things: a true renewal of the Institute; a new way of being Brothers; a new relationship between laity and brothers; new and creative styles of education, evangelization, and defense of the rights of poor children and young people; new frontier fields for our mission; and the revitalization of our joint vocations ministry. In this new era, we will dance to the same Marist Symphony in so many corners of the world.

A dance uniting us

As we gathered this morning for prayer, beginning a new day of activity, a soft rain insinuated the freshness of the Spirit gently falling on the hearts of those gathered around the Lord. The "voices of fire" recited a poem telling the story of Naman:

The shepherds of the Peul Tribe, who guided their herds

playing flutes, had spent the night around the fire. Flames had danced like vultures. It had been a beautiful African evening, a night of drums and dancing.

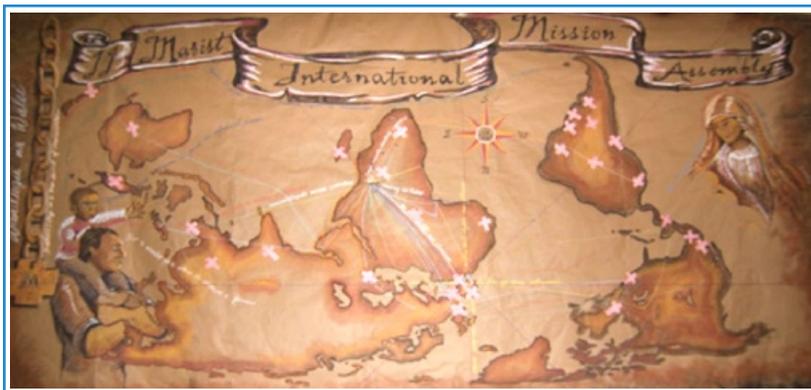
In the morning, Naman was working the land when suddenly a child came running with a message: "The elderly are waiting for you under the Tree of the Word!" Surprised by this message at such an early hour, Naman left his *daba*, a West African tool, and went to the Tree of the Word. Next to the elderly, he found a white man smoking pipe. He was an emissary recruiting men for the war. The elders spoke: "You are our chosen one, Naman. Go and prove the courage of the Mandinka people". The next day, the drums said goodbye to Naman as he left in a boat for the main port.

Time went by. The sorcerers consulted the stones and scrutinized the entrails of animals. They saw something, but did not speak about it. News of Naman arrived a few months later: "Naman is well". There was a party in the village that night.

But another letter arrived several months later: Naman had fallen prisoner. This news weighed heavily on the village. The elders decided that Naman was thereafter entitled to dance the *Douga*, or Sacred Dance of the Vulture, which no one could do without having accomplished an important deed.

Route Map

The day's work began with a contemplative moment before a map placed on the wall of the meeting room. Through this graphical exercise, Brother Tony Leon offered new insights on the routes for the Marist charism. It was a key journey for the work of the Assembly. The dance uniting the Assembly began by letting each participant bring rhythm to his or her own heart. The insights that people shared revealed this inner dance moving the group at that very moment.



Challenges and opportunities

The group worked on the challenges in the morning and on the opportunities in the afternoon, following the same methodology in both cases. To give an Institute-level approach to the Assembly's discussion, the work began by answering a question and reaching consensus about it: What are the challenges and opportunities the Institute

is facing nowadays that will enable us to live the Marist charism in 2030? The answer was not to exceed three challenges and three opportunities.

The reflection about challenges and opportunities gradually condensed around three central terms defining the core of the matter, which guided the discussion and facilitated the convergence of the Assembly's intuitions: communion, mysticism, and prophecy. People worked initially in small groups, which sent their contribution to a drafting commission in charge of summarizing the reflection and bringing a text with everybody's insights to the Assembly. A plenary session followed, in which the group commented the text and became aware of everybody's reflection. Finally, the group proceeded to define the Assembly's priorities.

Challenges

The summaries that the Assembly received as an input to define its priorities included the following challenges: "reviewing the structures" at all levels in order to guarantee that they respond to "the essence of our charism" and "the reality of brothers and laity"; developing "harmonious", unassuming, and open relationships between brothers and lay people, which should be "inclusive and respectful"; and finding ways to share human and financial resources at the international level, making efficient use of them.

Regarding communion, the Assembly envisioned the need for "new styles of community life" which may "enact and promote personal, community and institutional conversion". The group saw the importance of putting in place "the processes and structures that are necessary" in order to "promote and accompany the Marist vocation in its different expressions". It also proposed: to "recreate the Institute" by modifying its structures, so that

it can develop its internationality better, highlighting our distinctive missionary spirit; to emphasize the contemplative dimension of life as the root of our fraternity and mission; and to recreate the Institute through "new formation pathways" regarding the spirituality and identity of lay people and brothers.

On the subject of mysticism, the Assembly proposed the following considerations: "convey, through our personal, community and institutional witness", the "significant presence of God who inevitably gathers us". Put in place



"formation plans and projects" in a continuous and integrated way, in order to address the new challenges the Marist charism is facing. Develop and defend the rights of children in our "educational works and frontier missions", as a means for social transformation, participating in the "public forums" where children's rights are promoted.

With regard to prophecy, the Assembly called for a "firm determination" to defend the rights of children through an active commitment that may have real social and political impact. The group also spoke about the need for: "an itinerant attitude" enabling us to "move to the peripheries and incarnate ourselves in them"; a "transformative presence" in "situations where indifference prevails"; and an effort to foster "interreligious dialogue".

Opportunities

While discussing the opportunities for the Marist charism, the group highlighted that "our world is that of Gospel-based education" and that "we are experienced at it". Our charism is "very appealing" to people, which is a chance to "lead them to Jesus". In our Marist settings we find that "people are very open to Marist spirituality", to simplicity and family spirit, to Marcellin as a model, and to "compassion for young Montagne today". It is also a great opportunity to awaken the "sense of being Church" that is emerging among brothers and laity. The anniversary of the "promise of Fourvière" appears as a symbol of "unity among the Champagnat Marists" as we approach the 200th anniversary of the foundation. The Institute – and the Church as a whole – is living a moment in which we deeply treasure the "lay vocation", in quantity and quality, and its "growing sense of Marist identity".

Regarding communion, there are promising opportunities: the "different expressions" of "Marist identity and bonding" that are emerging; the call to communion and "joint formation" between brothers and laity; and the concrete experiences of "new styles of community" and "mission in the periphery of society" already underway across the Institute. In our "schools and Youth Ministry programs", we must keep favoring and promoting the opportunities of

inspiring young people to make a difference in our world. Technology certainly is an opportunity to be present in the world of young people today. We should take advantage of and enhance the structures and networks in place within the Marist Institute that are allowing us to give our faithful attention to those who are the reason for our mission: the new Montagnes of today. The following are other important opportunities: strengthening the networks connecting the Marists with different organizations and groups; opening our doors at the international level to share the existing "resources"; taking advantage of the "experience and potential" of an Institute which is present in 80 countries and is offering a rich variety of services (such as international volunteerism, international communities, educational exchange programs, and economic solidarity, among others); making the most of young people's great energy and eagerness at the service of our Gospelbased education; and relying on the spirituality network, which helps us deepen our identity and share our spirituality.

To facilitate our mystical dimension, we must take advantage of people's "thirst for spirituality" and desire to develop their "inner space"; the living testimony of many Marists (laity, brothers, young people), which will endure in the future; and the new technologies. Other opportunities are: making the most of the "the positive developments that have taken place in our present educational works" and in the field of "Youth Ministry"; keeping the energy that is coming from CMI and FMSI; appreciating our efforts to "evangelize through education", and the international Marist networks that are in place in the fields of education, pastoral ministry, and solidarity; appreciating the importance of our "human and material resources", and the fact that we are "present in different cultures", as well as our institutional experience and tradition.

Our prophetic attitude can leverage on "young people's leadership", on their "creativity and audacity" as evangelizers. Our foundation, history and reputation, our image, presence and experience educating in 80 countries, has an enormous potential, which we must put at the service of the Church and the Gospel. Our presence in the world of education can change the world.

The session concluded by asking each participant to express his or her priorities regarding the issues that were discussed, using a red label to indicate the first option and a yellow label for the second. In the photo album of the day, you will find images of the paper sheets indicating what the priorities look like.

Drafting the final document

Four members of the Assembly – from the Americas, Africa, Oceania and Europe – plus a member of the Central Commission, developed a synthesis of the inputs that have emerged during the day in order to include them in the final document.

26 September: igniting Lives

This poem motivated the day:
Igniting lives, dreaming together
of a better world for children and
young people.

Igniting lives with a vision full of hope.

Igniting lives with Champagnat's same
boldness and creativity.

Igniting lives as part of God's loving plan
for our world.

Igniting lives with respect for creation.

Igniting lives as part of a project of soli-
darity with all human beings, especially
the marginalized.

The legend of Bamako

We listened to an African narrative, The
Legend of Bamako, as part of the "voices
of fire":

Long, long time ago, when the night was
dark, gloomy and impenetrable, and the
moon was not shining, a young woman
named Bamako lived in the village of Ba-
mako. She was very beautiful and kind.

One day, some soldiers who came from
the north attacked the village of Bamako,
and all those nearby. They only fought at
night, hiding during the day. Bamako's
friends confronted them bravely, but
they did not know how to fight during
the night.

One night the god N'Togini appeared to
Bamako and said: 'Djambe, my son, who
lives in a cave by the river, has been in
love with you for a long time. If you agree
to marry him, he will take you to the sky,

where you will shine every night. Your
people will not have to fight in the dark,
as you will light up the night'.

Bamako, very bravely, followed the god's
instructions without hesitation. Djambé
took her to the sky, as his father had
promised. The brightness of her big eyes
illuminated the dark sky.

That night, the villagers achieved a deci-
sive victory and expelled their enemies.
Since then, the bright face of Bamako
has been on the sky every night.

The plenary session began by studying a
synthesis of the challenges and oppor-
tunities drafted by the group in charge,
which made a tremendous effort and
worked for hours. The final text was grad-
ually emerging.

Meeting by Regions

The Assembly was already looking for-
ward to the following day. Working in
regional groups, people discussed about
how to communicate the II MIMA expe-
rience to the Regions and Administrative
Units, and what to suggest in the Region-
al Assemblies. A picture of each regional
group was taken during this meeting, and
a general picture after lunch.

The Province of Southern Africa led Mari-
al prayer to start the afternoon. They
motivated the Assembly by using African
faces of Mary and texts from the Marist
documents.

Reading the II MIMA draft docu- ment

The text prepared by the drafting com-
mission was handed to the Assembly for

final analysis by Mary Luciana Citterio, a
young Argentinian who spoke in a way
that reminded Pope Francisco, her fellow
citizen. During the reading, the atmo-
sphere was full of a growing excitement
that exploded in a final applause, which
sealed the participants' endorsement.

The text was structured as follows: in-
troduction; presentation of the three
dreams; challenges and substantive
questions; a long statement about the
opportunities for a greater vitality of the
Marist charism and mission; and a few
closing lines.

Content of the message

The text opens with a reference to the
origin of the first humans "in this African
land", and how they set out from here
"heading towards new lands" and "gen-
erating a diversified humankind". "The
Creator Spirit decided, 150 thousand
years later, that some of them would
return to the African land for a new be-
ginning, and summoned us, as Marists of
Champagnat, to celebrate the II Marist
International Mission Assembly in Nai-
robi, Kenya".

This is a fragment of an extensive pream-
ble that refers to some of the attitudes
we lived during the preparatory phase,
guided by the example of Mary, and also
highlights the feelings prevailing among
the participants: "Like a new Pente-
cost, the Spirit ignited our hearts and
prompted us to dream new horizons for
a greater vitality of the Marist charism".
The text then underlines the dimension
of "communion with the local Churches
and the whole universal Church", re-
calling the invitation by Pope Francis to
"move forward on the path of pastoral



and missionary conversion, which cannot leave things as they are". It goes on developing the Assembly's reflection, in tune with the bicentennial of the Marist Foundation: "Together we have imagined a new story in which prophecy, mysticism and communion are the distinctive traits mirroring us, through which we are recognized as Marists of Champagnat". It states that, in order to be faithful "to the legacy of the I Marist International Mission Assembly held in Mendes (Brazil), we were called to be New Marists in Mission and tried to scrutinize the new expressions of the Marist charism, looking at the horizon of the third centennial". Then the text speaks of the dream that "the Marists of Champagnat may be recognized as prophets, mystics, and men and women who live in communion". After this statement, it explains the contents of the dream through a number of proposals for action.

The text then describes five challenges "in order to become more significant":

- Generating the necessary processes to promote and accompany the Marist vocation and communities in their different expressions.
- Cultivating the dimension of contemplation and interiority that sustains and feeds our life and mission.
- Recreating the structures we need to promote a greater vitality of the Marist charism.
- Overcoming the fears and resistances about moving to the peripheries and promoting the rights of children and young people.
- Promoting "inter" processes (international - intercultural - intercongregational - interecclesial), which favor the Marist Mission in new lands.

Each challenge includes a series of questions to help analyze reality and the attitudes when addressing the challenge. Then follows a long list of opportunities, which can foster greater vitality for the Marist charism and mission. And the document closes by "thanking our good God for granting us this experience of encounter and communion".

Evaluation

Another important moment of this day was the written evaluation of the Assembly. Thanks to an evaluation grid, the participants expressed their opinion about the organization of the Assembly and the different group dynamics that were part of the work method. After the evaluation, the group received some guidelines to organize their departure from Nairobi. And then the women participating in the II MIMA asked for a photo as a memento of their large group.

Celebrating fraternity

The representatives of Santa María de los Andes animated an intense celebration of the fraternity that united the participants throughout the Assembly. It started with a dance that created an atmosphere of contemplation and interiority. Then the 12 small communities in which the participants shared life and reflection during the Assembly gathered again. Each small community received a piece of bread and a glass of water. They broke the bread and shared it. Then the person who coordinated the work in each small community took the water and marked his or her companions with the sign of the cross on the front. These gestures of communion and blessing concluded with an embrace while praying the Our Father. They were moments of intense emotion and tears flowed with no shame.



"Asante Kwaheri"

With their hearts full of joy, all participants moved to an open space for a cold meal. During the "Asante Kwaheri" party ("thanks and see you soon!"), full of African rhythm, the group listened to the MIC musical band, and to a group of young participants who composed a song on the occasion of the II MIMA.

During the party, the organizers thanked the Sisters from the three houses that accommodated the participants for the care and services they kindly provided. They also expressed their gratitude to the Central Commission, the work teams, the MIC, the Province of Central-East Africa, and some guests, for contributing to the success of the Assembly.

This is how a historic day ended, a day in which the II MIMA handed to the "charismatic family" of the "Marists of Champagnat" a new contribution to enliven their charism and mission. The rich text that was made public at the II MIMA will go down in history as a turning point in the relationship between brothers and laity.



27 September: helping the dawn to be born

The time has arrived to spread throughout the world the wisdom found in this II IMMA, the riches of the hidden treasure which has been discovered among everyone. Guided by the wisdom of the Gospel, it is necessary to die in order to give life, to be broken in order to reach everyone. Because if the grain of wheat, once sown, does not die, it remains without fruit. But if it dies, it produces much fruit. The participants in the II IMMA return to the paths of the world in order to face together the future of the Marist charism as a challenge to help the dawning of a new Marist life and strengthen what exists, doing it with more creativity, fidelity and energy. Our time is a time of creativity.

Father Ananzi

One last story has been heard in the space "Voices of the fire". It was the African story of how wisdom was spread through the world. Once upon a time in the Cameroons there lived a man called Father Ananzi who possessed all the wisdom in the world. The fame of his wisdom extended throughout the whole land, even to its most remote corners, and everyone came to ask his advice and learn from him. But some people began to behave badly and Ananzi became angry with them. So he thought of a way to punish them. After lengthy and profound meditation, he decided to deprive them of wisdom, hiding it in such a distant and unknown place that no one could find it. And so putting all his secrets in a pitcher, he sought to hide it in the top of a tree. But when his son, Kweku Tsjin, saw his father going so mysteriously and cautiously from one place to another with his pitcher, he thought to himself: "This thing that my father is hiding must be something important". And he proposed to watch his movements carefully. One night, when everyone was asleep, the father came to a clump of palm trees, looked for the most slender of them and began to climb with the pitcher of

wisdom tied on top of his head. While he was climbing, the pitcher which contained all the wisdom in the world, did nothing but roll around. The ascent was becoming very complicated. His son, Kweku Tsjin, began to shout to him:

— "Father, why don't you hang this precious pitcher on your shoulder? Climbing like that, with the pitcher on your head, is going to be impossible!" When Ananzi heard these words, he looked down and said:

— "Son, I thought I had put all the wisdom in the world in this pitcher, but now I realize that my own son is giving me a lesson in wisdom". And disillusioned he dropped the pitcher of wisdom on a stone and it broke into a thousand pieces. And, as can be imagined, all the wisdom of the world spilled out and spread to all the ends of the earth.

Helping the dawn to be born

Brother Emili began his closing speech for the II IMMA by recalling the happy intuition of Brother Basilio in the post-conciliar period, when he proposed to the Institute the task of "awaking the dawn and helping it to be born". This Assembly is "one step more towards the dawn of a new beginning for the Institute", he affirmed, adding: "This Assembly, will make a significant contribution to this dawn of a new day for the Institute, especially through the commitment of the persons who are here".

And with his gaze fixed on the horizon, he offered those today leaving Nairobi the "image or parable of the swamp" to express where we are going. The space in which we are called to carry out our mission is similar to a swamp or marsh, which is found between land and ocean, in a marginal locality, where no one would



normally go to live. If someone is there, it is because he has been excluded, he goes there to find others who are sunk in the mire, without possibility of a future. A place of danger, disease, where you do not know what is beneath your feet. There are no tracks, but you have to move forward. It is hard to walk in the middle of the mud, it requires a particular strength not to give up, not to turn back. At the same time, it is a place of biodiversity, full of life. A mysterious place which recalls the creation of the world, with the Spirit moving over the chaos, offering the possibility of a new creation, a new beginning.

On the basis of the word "swamp", he made an acrostic which recalls 5 elements important for our journey: "S" for "spirituality" (because as Marists we can see ourselves as "evangelizers with the Spirit"); "W" for "we" (expressing the communion between all Marists) "A" for "at risk" (with reference to our mission among children and young people at risk, as well as the invitation to personally take risks for the Kingdom); "M" for "Mary" (seeing that we have the privilege of bearing her name and because "she inspires our way of being brothers and sisters in the Church"); "P" for "pledge" (promise, in connection with the promise of Fouvrière, which makes manifest the firm and coherent commitment of each one).

He concluded by quoting the words of Brother Francis Lukong who, in the name of the Marists of the African continent, had said some days earlier: "Thank you for coming to Africa. Fear did not make you stay home". "I too" –said Br Emili- "allow myself to repeat in the name of the Institute: thank you for accepting the invitation and taking risks. We sensed that coming to Africa was going to make the difference. We know today it was the correct decision".

This was followed by tributes of gratitude to the Central Commis-

sion for the hard work achieved, the General Council for the drive it had given to the II IMMA, and the participants themselves for their enthusiasm and efficiency. As a visual record, there was a projection of selected photos recording the major moments lived during these days. By way of colophon, Brother Tony Leon explained the significance of the map which adorned one of the walls of the room. At the beginning, he outlined a map with the poles reversed in comparison with the maps of the world which most were familiar with. This map gradually was converted into an expression of how much had been lived in the Assembly. Twenty-nine crosses indicated the twenty-nine administrative units of the Institute in which the fire of Africa had been enkindled through the Assembly. Today it is the map which all those at the assembly need to follow in order to find the treasure of the Marist charism. Br Tony concluded his presentation by inviting the participants to place their names on the lower part of the map, indicating that all were authors of the work.

The final gesture of this act of closing the meeting consisted in collecting the signatures of the participants on a card which each could take away as a souvenir.

The morning finished with the Eucharist of missioning. The first reading was the history of the promise



of Fouvrière. In the offertory procession there were twenty-nine posters, one for each province, district or sector announcing the beginning of the triduum, with the Montagne Year (2014-2015), which will lead the Institute to the celebration of its bicentenary.

After communion, Br Emili proceeded to send the participants out to carry the good news of the Assembly to the whole Institute. The gesture began with the reading of the anecdote in which Champagnat presented Br Jean Pi re Martinol with a roll of blessed bread to take with him on his journey. But Br Jean Pi re kept it in his bag in order to share it with the brothers. This roll of blessed bread is the message of the II IMMA which all the participants will take away in their suitcases to share with the communities. Together with the bread to share, they each received a decorated ceramic plate, the hand-craft of African women.

Thus closed days of intense fraternity and living together, which will be continued in all the parts of the Marist world.

And this chronicler takes his leave, grateful for the attention given to the graphic reports and the written communications with which we have intended to provide the best information about this event.

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