

## DO NOT BE AFRAID!

### CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 2015 OF SUPERIOR GENERAL BR EMILI TURÚ

We were at the train station in a Chinese city a long way from Beijing and relatively close to Mongolia. As three Europeans travelling together, we soon became the centre of attention for the people there, and they did not hide their curiosity. A child of about three or four years of age was standing in front of me, staring at me wide-eyed. It was probably the first time he had seen a foreigner with features so different from his own and with a beard! As soon as I smiled and waved at him, he started crying inconsolably, to the amusement those around him.

I have the impression that oftentimes some of us react like this child, fearing those who are different from us, probably because they disrupt our security.

Some industries and governments take advantage of this instinctive human reaction and foster what the philosopher Zygmunt Bauman calls liquid fear towards those who do not seem to be like us, especially foreigners who come as immigrants or refugees.

Ironically, it is those people who live in the greatest comfort and with the strongest security and protection measures in human history who are the ones feeling the most threatened, insecure and fearful, more prone to panic and anxiety than any other society past or present.

Fear is an emotion that protects us from danger. However, when it does not stem from genuine risk but from our own imagination or from other people's opinion, it blocks us and generates even more fear and anxiety. President Franklin D. Roosevelt said on the occasion of his inauguration: Let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.

But there are not only those people driven by fear. Fortunately many others are not so easily manipulated, and understand that people who are different are simply human beings seeking a better life and capable of enriching the local culture, rather than being an ongoing threat.

The phrase do not be afraid appears in the Bible more than 100 times literally and, according to some authors, more than 300 times if we include similar expressions. It would



seem that the Lord, in his profound knowledge of human nature, wants to encourage us not to be imprisoned by our fears, but to act with the holy freedom of the sons and daughters of God.

We find this phrase in the first pages of the Gospels, precisely in relation to the birth of Jesus: Do not be afraid. Look, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people (Lk 2:10).

Jesus, born on the outskirts of town because his parents were rebuffed when they asked for hospitality, was an example throughout his life in his welcoming everyone in a friendly and respectful way. His merciful heart led him to identify himself with every person: I was a stranger and you made me welcome (Mt 25:35).

May this Christmas celebration in memory of the One who was born and died on the peripheries enlarge our hearts until they encompass the world and help us to become fully human!

My best wishes to you and yours. Merry Christmas!



TO ACCEPT THE RISK OF WAITING...

## LETTER OF THE "BLUE MARISTS" OF SYRIA

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**Why am I losing the best years of my life? Why am I not like the rest of the girls in the world? Why do I not have the right to live fully my youth? Is this God's will? Why does he not answer our prayers and our pleas? In spite of our trust in him we do not see the end of this tunnel...**

This morning it is cold in Aleppo, it is an icy, bitter cold and we are not able to have heating because of lack of fuel... We are completely deprived of electricity for more than 50 days. But at least the water which we severely rationed came back after an interruption of several weeks. The only route or way that unites the city in the whole world has been reopened after being blocked for 13 days.

Yesterday afternoon. A.H., a 9 year old boy came to our house. It took him an hour to get here. He is the 10th child of a family that has 12 children. He wanted some bread. His mother sent him to us so that we could give him some. He ceaselessly repeated: "I hope not to return home with empty hands". He will not. He returned happy. Like him many children live in a precarious situation: cold, hungry, threatened health, insecurity...

On November 20 the whole world commemorated the International Day of the Rights of the Child. The children of Aleppo, like many children of the world, suffer because of the atrocity of the war at a moment when the great of the world only seek their own interests. What can we say? What to do? How to support so much and so many children in this situation of misery? How can we

give these children a psychical, human and spiritual support that would allow them to live fully their Infancy?

We have opted to guarantee a quality education, an education according to the purest Marist tradition, an education which, according to the desire of our Founder Saint Marcelin Champagnat, will assure the future "an honest citizen and a good believer".

In discussing, a young girl, a very active volunteer asked the following question: "Why am I losing the best years of my life? Why am I not like the rest of the girls in the world? Why do I not have the right to live fully my youth? Is this God's will? Why does he not answer our prayers and our pleas? In spite of our trust in him we do not see the end of this tunnel..."

What answer can I give her and to many other young persons? I listen to them, I support them, I try to seek to stutter words of trust and of faith. This is not always easy.

Our young people live anguished... They seek to leave... to get out of this hell without precedence... the parents come to ask for advice... What can we say? What answer can we give when the situation seems to be more threatening

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Aleppo, destroyed by war, and lit by the stars.

and of greater concern? In the sky of Aleppo like in the sky of the whole of Syria, a land of peace and of civilization, the great powers are fighting... Men of all races and of every nation, of arms, of weapons, of airplanes... Our country has become a land and a sky of confrontation, of conflict.

The parents are gravely tormented. Many members of their families and many friends are already settled in another place, in another country, in another city in Syria. What future awaits them?

The friends ask me: "You, Brother, do you want to stay here, do you not want to get out, to go and live in another community, in another place, far away from this dramatic situation?" My response is very simple: "for us Blue Marists, to



**For us Blue Marists, to live in Aleppo is to accept the risk of waiting... to wait for peace, to wait for the return of life; to wait for the birth of the civilization of love...**



live in Aleppo is to accept the risk of waiting... to wait for peace, to wait for the return of life; to wait for the birth of the civilization of love... During this time of waiting, in this time of Advent, for us, everything is similar to the waiting of 2000 years ago. A time of waiting filled with questions. A day that then does not arrive; we dare to remain together until the end.

It is true that many families around us abandon the place; they wander around, like the couple and their child of 2000 years ago. They were travelling the ways of the world searching I do not know what country for security. On the way they discover that the only guarantee that they had to live on was their faith in God".

To the young boy who asked me one day: "Brother, are we living the end of time", I responded: "I hope that we will live the end of the time of hatred".

To speak about fear is to speak about Aleppo or of any city of Syria... To speak of fear is to speak about anguished men and women at every rising of the sun.

We have opted to remain with the Syrian people who suffer, to serve them, and from them to witness the love of God, to be witnesses of light in a time of darkness, witnesses of peace in a time of violence without precedence.

Our activities continue...

The baskets with food are distributed every month without interruption. On the occasion of different feasts (al adha and noel), we have also distributed shoes and clothing to all the adults and all the children of the families of whom we are in charge. Our project "drop of

milk" continues: it consists in distributing to all children who are less than 10 years old, powdered milk or milk for babies. We respond positively to any petition for help for lodging. Our project helps completely over 100 displaced families.

Through our program of health assistance, we support several patients who come to us for medical treatment or for surgery. The project "Civilians wounded in war" continues to save the life of various persons who were wounded by the fragments of the mortars, which daily fall in the zone of Aleppo.

Our Formation Center, the M.I.T. which enjoys great success, has launched its new program for the next 2 months. The 3 educational projects and of development: "I want to learn", "learn to grow" and "Skill School" are about to finish the first semester with many activities that respond to the needs of the children or young adolescents.

I would like to end my letter with these words from Abbot Pierre:  
 I will continue to believe, even if the whole world loses hope,  
 I will continue loving, even if others are going to exude hatred.  
 I will continue to construct, even if others are destroying.  
 I will continue to speak about peace, even in the midst of a war.  
 I will continue to enlighten, even in the midst of darkness.  
 I will continue to sow, even if others step on the crops.  
 And I will continue to yell out, even if others keep quiet.  
 And I will draw smiles on the faces full of tears.  
 I will bring relief, when we will see pain.  
 And I will offer reasons for joy where there is only sadness.  
 I will invite to walk the one who decided to stop...  
 And I will extend my arms to those who feel tired".

Abbot Pierre

Wishing you a good journey toward Christmas. With you, we choose life.

Br Georges Sabe - 9 December 2015

## MARIST WORLD



Sri Lanka: Asian Mission Assembly



Uruguay: San Luis Marist School, Pando



Romania: Formation for leaders in the Marist Social Centers of Bucarest



New government of the Brasil Sul-Amazônia Province



Colombia: Perpetual profession of Br Héctor Xavier Colala Troya in Medellin



Madagascar: Ampahidrano postulancy in Fianarantsoa

## A NEW MODEL FOR COMMUNITY AND MISSION

### GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF SOLIDARITY WITH SOUTH SUDAN

The annual General Assembly of Solidarity with South Sudan took place in Rome, 10 December 2015. The project began in 2005 at the invitation to the Unions of Superiors General [USG and UISG] by the South Sudanese Bishops.

Representatives of twenty congregations attended the assembly and the brothers were represented by Brother Colin Chalmers and Brother Chris Wills who is a member of the Governing Board and Econome for the association.

Marists have three representatives in South Sudan, Brothers Christian, Longinus and Matthew Mary, all from the Province of Nigeria.

The brothers are members of three different inter-congregational communi-



ties composed of lay members, sisters, brothers and priests. There are 32 people from 20 congregations and 16 nationalities represented in the South Sudan.

This is a new model for community and mission which challenges its members to live inter-culturally.



## CREATING THE BRASIL-CONO SUR REGION

The team in charge of reflecting on the structure of the Brasil-Cono Sur region met to discuss future steps from Nov. 30 – Dec. 1 in Porto Alegre.

The team has begun work to define a regional strategy proposal to be presented at the Amplified General Council meeting to be held in Florianopolis, Brazil, from March 1 – 5.

The team is made up of Brothers and laity from the five provinces of the region. They are Br Wagner Cruz and Manuela Suassuna of Brasil Centro Norte, Br Jorge Gaio and Rony Ahlfeldt of Brasil Centro Sul, Br Deivis Fischer and Gustavo Balbinot of Rio Grande do Sul, Br Jesús Pérez and Ricardo Miño of Santa María de los Andes, Br Juan Fuentes, Br Horacio Bustos and Fernando Larrambebere of Cruz del Sur and the adviser of the New Models Project, Luca Olivari.

This has been the first meeting of the team, where its main work has been knowing the operating model of the five provinces, highlighting good practices that could be used at a regional level, and proposing a list of potential priorities to be developed in the future region.

After this initial phase of knowledge, the team continued its work in two groups: the 'green group,' which focused on people, and the 'blue group,' which focused on structures.

They had the tasks of 1) drawing the path / itinerary leading up to 2020 and 2) selecting and prioritising two or three strategic initiatives for the medium term.

Now the next task is to prepare the action plan (objectives, description, resources, time, those responsible, the final achievement expected ...) for each of the selected strategic initiatives and priorities.

This task will have to be taken to the second team meeting to be held in Buenos Aires, on Feb. 22 and 23.

This first meeting reached its objectives thanks to the intense and generous work of the participants. The presence of Luca Olivari as advisor to the New Models project, directed and facilitated the process.

The second meeting, in Buenos Aires, will have the task of completing the work and preparing a final proposal to be presented to the Expanded General Council which will meet in Florianopolis in March next year.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### VOCATIONAL ITINERARY

Eight laity from the "Cana" lay community in Chile expressed their commitment and took a step in deepening the lay vocational itinerary of the Santa María de los Andes Province on Dec. 5.

### ASIAN MISSION ASSEMBLY

The Asian Mission Assembly took place in Tudela, Sri Lanka, from Dec. 12 - 16. Br. Emili sent a video message, which is available at <http://goo.gl/dzR-d4a>

### FORMATION IN THE ARCO NORTE REGION

The Marist Formation Encounter FORMAR took place in Guatemala City in November, with 75 participants of the América Central, México Occidental and Norandina provinces. They met with the aim of living an experience of the lifestyle of St Marcellin Champagnat, our founder.

### BROTHERS IN IRELAND

They gathered in Moyle Park on Saturday, 28th November. Part of the programme covered child protection. Brother Brendan, the Provincial, spoke about the impact of discovering abuse and Brother P.J. McGowan explained the new safeguarding policy that has been set for Marist Brothers in Ireland.

### AUSTRALIAN STUDENTS IN INDIA

The Marist Primary School of Pudayapatti welcomed a group of students from Sacred Heart College in Australia on a two-week immersion experience. The Marist students of Australia went to India to learn and experience a culture quite different from their own.

## BRASIL CENTRO-NORTE HOLDS ASSEMBLY AND 5TH PROVINCIAL CHAPTER



Brother Ataíde José de Lima took up office as provincial of Brasil Centro-Norte on Dec. 8, the first day of the province's fifth chapter, which included the participation of 28 Brothers and five lay people.

Vicar general Brother Joe McKee, general councillor Brother Josep María Soter as participated from the general house in Rome. Also were present Br Alberto Aparicio provincial of Cruz del Sur and Br Benê Oliveira, vice provincial of Brasil Centro-Sul.

"You have the support of the entire general government in service to the Institute," Br Joe told Br Ataíde.

The new provincial invited the Brothers to reflect on the relationship with the laity.

"What can we do to provide the greatest participation in the mission within the Province, in our works and communities?" he questioned. "What we learn from them?"

The dimension of management, the brother mentioned the desire to undertake efforts to improve corporate governance model, in synergy with the Marist Institute.

"Let us move forward, together, towards a new beginning, where the future has a tent as the heart," stated Br Ataíde.

From Dec. 4 – 7, around 80 Brothers and laity gathered for an assembly to prepare for the chapter at Vila Champagnat Marist Formation Centre in Brazlândia.

On the last day of the assembly, the former provincial, Brother Wellington Medeiros, and Brother Leonardo Stoch, the youngest in the Institute aged 21, handed Br Ataíde a list of priorities for the province.

"This is a commitment from all of us," the new provincial remarked.

During the assembly, a letter from superior general was also read to the brothers of the Province.

According to the superior, some relevant issues include "animation and commitment to vocation ministry, a partnership between brothers and lay people, especially in the mission, the transparency of areas and the search for provincial unity."

Through video testimony, the eldest Brother of the province aged 95, underscored that "our congregation has become universal." "Who grows in God is not discouraged," added Brother Antônio Araújo Aguiar.

The chapter was held at the Centre from Dec. 8 – 10, during which Br Ataíde took up his position as provincial until 2018.

The new provincial council members are Brothers Rubens José Falquetto, Iranilson Correia de Lima, Adalberto Batista Amaral and José de Assis Elias de Brito.

For more information, visit: <http://marista.edu.br/capitulo/>



New Provincial Council: Rubens José Falquetto, Iranilson Correia de Lima, Ataíde José de Lima (Provincial), Adalberto Batista Amaral and José de Assis Elias de Brito

### Institute of the Marist Brothers - General House

Piazzale Marcellino Champagnat, 2 - Rome, Italy - [comunica@fms.it](mailto:comunica@fms.it)

Our site: <http://www.champagnat.org>

YouTube channel:

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