



ARCO NORTE TAKING STEPS TOGETHER AS A GLOBAL FAMILY

MEETING OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE AND OF THE PROVINCIALS

The Regional committee meeting was held at Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Canada, from October 30 to November 3.

Regional Committee

Over two days, 30 and 31 October, the members of the Regional committee of Arco Norte met with Brs. Jesús Sanchez and Alberto Aparicio, and Mr Luca Olivari to continue the process of regionalization in the Marist Region of Arco Norte.

The Regional committee is made up by Brs Gregorio Linacero (coordinator – Central America), Félix Roldán (Canada), Albert Rivera (United States), Alejandro González (Mexico Occidental), Justino Gómez (Mexico Central), Diego Antón (Norandina) and Mrs. Irma Zamarripa (Mexico Occidental), Mrs. María Socorro Álvarez (Mexico Central and Mr. Eric Pino (United States).

The task for this meeting was to identify the most significant programs in four areas of our Strategic Plan: Marist life, Marist mission, organizational model and finances.



We took advantage of the presence of Br Alberto Aparicio, secretary general of the Region of South America, to open a dialogue on the process of regionalization and initiatives happening in South America and on the connections pos-

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

- On November 11, the Marist Fraternities of Italy met in the General House and were welcomed by Brother Ernesto Sánchez, Superior General.
- Brothers Ken McDonald and João Carlos do Prado, General Councilors, during that week visit the Province of Canada.
- From November 12 to 16, a group of twenty European Marist Leaders will meet in the General House for the fifth and last stage of a formative itinerary of two years. The week organized by Brother Carlos Alberto Rojas Carvajal, Director of the Sec-

retariat of Education and Evangelization, counts with the collaboration of several Brothers and Laity of the General Administration.

- Between the 14 and 16 of November the General Councilors, Oscar Martin Vicario and Sylvain Ramandimbarisoa participate in the encounter of the Regional Council and of the Regional Committee of South America, in Sao Paulo, Brazil.
- During those same days, the Vicar General Br. Luis Carlos Gutierrez, participates in Madrid in the Assembly of representatives of the Spanish

Marist Conference.

- From November 14 to 22, Brothers Jeffrey Crowe and Angel Medina, Formators of Lavalla200>, visit the international community of Tabatingas, Brazil.
- From November 16 to 20, Brother Libardo Garzón, General Bursar, will participate in the meeting of the working group on the Marist International Center (MIC), in Nairobi, Kenya.
- From November 17 to 22, Brothers Sylvain Ramandimbarisoa and Óscar Martín Vicario, General Councilors, will visit the Province Cruz del Sur.

sible at a continental level, basically those that are related to the Spirituality Network and the 'Heart for Solidarity' of America.

On November 1 the Regional Committee met with the Provincials: Brs. Gerard Bachand (Provincial of Canada), Patrick McNamara (Provincial of the United States), José Sánchez (Provincial of Mexico Central), Miguel Santos (Provincial of Mexico Occidental), Hipólito Pérez (Provincial of Central America) and César Rojas (Provincial of Norandina), along with Br. João Carlos do Prado, General Councilor and link Councilor for the Region.

The purpose of the meeting was to present various initiatives for approval by the Provincials. These included:

- Marist Life: Spirituality, Marist formation of Brothers and Laypeople, Vocations promotion for Brothers and Laypeople, and formal bonding between Laypeople and the Brothers.
- Marist Mission: Good practices in mission; professional and leadership training; learning languages; management of volunteering; research and innovation; the model of collaborating in a network; child protection and their defense.
- Organizational model: Good practices in management; organizational model and the use of available experts, Indicators; models of financing operations.
- Finances: Block purchasing, Fundraising, Management of financial and property assets, good business prac-

tices, Planning and control systems and training in economics and finances.

Appreciation was expressed and sincere thanks for the work done, the sense of responsibility and generosity of the Regional Committee/

Meeting of Provincials

On November 2 and 3 the meeting of Provincials proceeded with a fraternal and honest sharing on the situation of each Province and with the approval of the proposed initiatives. Br João do Prado presented the greetings of Br Ernesto, Superior General, and of Br Ken McDonald, also a link Councilor for the Region. He passed on some news and directions being taken at the Institute level.

They discussed and took decisions on other topics of common current and future interest to the six Provinces: processes for the Lavalla200> communities of the Region; the program for Final Vows preparation in Guatemala from January 30 to June 8, in which 16 young Brothers from America and Europe, will take part; a study of the Statutes of the Interprovincial Novitiate of Lavalla (Medellin); and the calendar of other regional activities.

We showed our appreciation for the warm welcome and signs of brotherhood of the Brothers and Laypeople of Canada where Marist life continues to flourish in new situations and contexts. We renewed our commitment to continue our journey of creating together a framework for the Marist Global Family of Arco Norte.

PERU: WALKING TOGETHER, WE SHARE THE VITALITY OF THE CHARISM

1ST ASSEMBLY OF LAY MARISTS OF CHAMPAGNAT

On 26 and 27 of October there took place in Lima, the First Assembly of Lay Communities of the Peru Sector, in the Province of Santa María de los Andes, in an atmosphere of brotherhood, happiness and openness.

Taking part were 40 lay people who are following the growing path of the lay Marist vocation approved by the province. We were grateful for the presence of the Provincial, Brother Saturnino Alonso, and of the Director of the Secretariat for the Laity, Raúl Amaya, as well as the Marist Brothers of the Sector who accompany the lay processes.

This first assembly was a privileged time for us to meditate on the lay Marist vocation, the process which is growing in the regions and in the lay communities of Peru and of our Province as well as building growth and consolidation of the lay Marist movement in our Sector.

One of the outstanding aspects experienced in the Assembly was the promise of Linking to the Charism to which seven lay people dedicated themselves in the presence of the Brother Provincial in the Closing Mass. The lay people belong to the Community of Caná of the Movement of the Lay Marists of Champagnat and they have followed a nine-



year process guided by the Lay Vocational Itinerary of the Province.

We thank God for the time of grace that we experience during this assembly and we ask our Good Mother to accompany and encourage the lay communities in their journey.

NEWS IN BRIEF

GUATEMALA

On November 4, the XIV encounter of the Marist Fraternities of Guatemala took place. The central theme of the encounter was "shared life, around the same table, called to be lighthouses or beacons of light in the realities of our people".

UNITED STATES

Joe and Carla Hallak from Aleppo, Syria were the keynote speakers at the Marist High School - Chicago Faculty/Staff retreat on Monday, November 5. They spoke of their choice to live an intentional Marist life and how their association with the Marist Brothers and Blue Marists gave them the strength, courage, and energy to live through the challenging years of the siege of Aleppo. Now in the US, Joe and Carla and their family have connected with the US Marists of Champagnat.

FRANCE

During the year 2018, the Institution Sainte Marie de Beau-camps-Ligny celebrates 175 years of the arrival of the Marist Brothers. Today the teaching Institute has almost 3,000 pupils, where the Marist spirit is a point of reference.

I AM A MARIST OF CHAMPAGNAT

The Province of South-Central Brazil is promoting a digital action, which seeks to emphasize the belonging to the Marist Family. The gesture consists in placing in the image of profile of the account of Facebook a theme available in several languages with the phrase "I am a Marist of Champagnat". The indications for the users of Facebook are found in this link: <http://www.champagnat.org/401.php?a=6&id=5239>

MARIST INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

PERU: MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE NETWORK OF MARIST UNIVERSITIES



With renewed spirit for the presence of the Vicar General Br. Luis Carlos Gutiérrez Blanco, the members of the Executive Committee of the Network of Marist Universities meet in Lima Peru from October 29th to November 1st, 2018.

The goal of the meeting was to carry out the planning of our VIII International Meeting of Marist Universities, to be held from April 2 to 6, 2019, at the headquarters of the University Marcelino Champagnat in Lima Peru.

The participants were Brothers Luis Carlos Gutiérrez, Vicar General, and Carlos Alberto Rojas Carvajal, Director of the Secretariat of Education and Evangelization; Br. Pablo González Franco, Br. Roberto Méndez López and Mr. Fabiano Incerti.

In addition to the preparation of the VIII International Meeting, the purpose of the presence of Br. Luis Car-

los has been to invite the Institutions of Marist Higher Education to make life, from their real possibilities, some of the lines of work proposed by the General Chapter for the present mandate.

The definition of the theme of the next international meeting is based on the link between the Marist International Network of Institutions of Higher Education and the work that has been proposed since the General Chapter.

To achieve the stated objectives, in upcoming dates will be announced the official call for the meeting, with the necessary indications for the participation of all our affiliated institutions.

Grateful for the results obtained at the end of the planning, all the participants of the meeting put into the hands of Jesus and Mary the implementation of it.



MARIST WORLD



Italy
San Leone Magno, Rome



Ivory Coast
Bouaké



India
St. Marcellin High School, Mangamanothu



Guatemala
XIV National Meeting of Marist Fraternities



Spain
Badajoz



Brazil
Marista Lucia Mayvorne, Florianópolis

WITNESS OF THE CHURCH

19 MARTYRS OF THE CHURCH OF ALGERIA

Father Jean Marie Lassause, a priest of the Mission of France has lived in the monastery of Tibhirine for the past 15 years, giving testimony to his faith and living closely with the people there; following in the footsteps of the Trappist monks, he is convinced that the beatification of the 19 martyrs of the Church of Algeria (8 December of 2018) is "extraordinary, since it recognizes absolutely normal people: men and women who, like so many other members of the Church, have chosen to remain in Algeria in spite of knowing their lives are at risk."

The first to be murdered on the 8th of May 1994 in the library of the Casbah were Marist Brother Henri Vergès and Sister Paul Hélène de Saint Raymond, a Little Sister of the Assumption. Following on these protomartyrs were consecrated members of several congregations, and finally the Dominican Pierre Claverie bishop of Orán.

"The message of these 19 men and women religious is clear - adds Father Georgeon -: we have to strengthen our presence in the Church and demonstrate that fraternal coexistence and respect among religions is possible."

Therefore, the celebration of this beatification must continue to foment a great sense of ownership of the Church: a Church that "invites", that is small, humble, servant and loving. And this can describe each and every one of the 19 martyrs who have also experienced this so deeply, as well as many other members of the Church who still live. Their life and their death are an icon of the identity of the Church of Algeria. They have been examples until the end of their vocation as sacrament of Christ's charity for all his people.



SOLIDARITY WITH SOUTH SUDAN

BROTHER CHRISTIAN MBAM SHARES HIS EXPERIENCE IN AN INTERCONGREGACIONAL INITIATIVE

The project Solidarity with the South Sudan (SSS), born of a request from the Conference of Bishops of South Sudan, is currently supported by many congregations of women and men religious, members of the International Union of (women) Superiors General (UISG) and the Union of (men) Superiors General (USG).

The initiative, centred on the fields of health, agriculture and teacher training, expresses a new paradigm of collaboration between the congregations to respond in a more effective way to the immense and urgent needs of this country.

Down, Brother Christian Mbam, from Nigeria, shares his experience.

Before the congregation sent members to South Sudan, Br. Benito Arbués, some twelve years before or more, had directed the Marist African Region to study the prospects of opening a joint mission in South Sudan. When I became the Provincial of Nigeria, this issue which had been suspended, featured on the agenda of the regular meetings of the Provincials and District Superior of West Africa. There was very serious lack of clarity in the proposed mission that it was again suspended. These discussions prepared me to respond to an invitation of Br. Emili Turú extended me to join the Solidarity initiative. I have not regretted saying yes to the invitation. Thanks be to God.

Southern Sudan had intermittently engaged in armed struggle against the rest of Sudan, accusing it of marginalisation and calculated suppression of their culture and religion in order to enthrone Arabic culture and language, which went with it, subtly, Islamising the predominantly Christian South. These conflicts went on for decades leading to granting of independence to the south. South Sudan by race is African while the Northern Sudan was of Arabic.

The long period of war left Southern Sudan (now South Sudan) in a very sorry state. Road networks are virtually non-existent. What you have as roads are better described as death traps than otherwise. You cannot talk of electricity, running water, or worthwhile schools. Apart from Juba, the capital city, most of the others are masses of huts that stand like mushrooms, with grass roofs. In the rural areas, relatively few children that go to school study under trees with no seats. The few universities that operate in this

most impoverished country are Universities only by name. They have no infrastructure or facilities. Internet facilities in the country are for the privileged few. In the area where I am stationed, we do not have even telephone network. All these leave a country grossly impoverished, backward, predominantly illiterate; unprecedented ignorance rife etc. To worsen the already sorry state of South Sudan, the fratricidal wars among its ethnic groups, fueled by tussle for power and tribal animosities have driven a third of the population into refugee or internally displaced peoples' camps, who consequently depend on meager foods and materials handouts from different relief bodies. But happy to note that few changes are beginning to be noticed. Recently the city power was turned on in Juba after years out of action. More homes in the few major towns are beginning to wear better looks few even painted.

Choice of this Mission

Is this mission to be chosen for any reason, other than being propelled by faith? St. Pope John Paul II had urged the

Church, particularly the religious to go to the peripheries, to the marginalized people. The two unions of Superiors General of men and women responded to this timely call by considering going into South Sudan as one. It will entail a totally new initiative, and a shift of paradigm. They decided to work together not only in projects but also in communities. As may be expected, this will bring people of different congregations, women and men and from different cultural backgrounds together. But the mission is urgent that excessive fear and consideration for debil-



itating prudence had to be put aside. And it has not failed. I am in my seventh year in South Sudan being part of Solidarity with South Sudan initiative. I have lived in two different communities, spend time in a third. In all these the mix ranges from international, intercontinental, intercongregational and male and female. In many cases, especially with the dearth of vocations and the aging of many members in the West, and, with religious congregation closing houses even at home, talk less of opening new ones overseas. Sometime a congregation can only spare one or two members for a new mission but as this does not guarantee continuity they prefer not to venture into such mission. Solidarity with South Sudan initiative has resolved this drawback.

It gives an opportunity for a congregation to participate in a mission they feel strongly about without having to open a house. Hence in solidarity, some congregations have only one or two members some who have no members to spare, participate in other forms. Today over two hundred congregations and Orders are participating in this initiative.

One can rightly ask: What type of religious community could that be that has mixed membership from different congregations and even with lay, married people? The manual of Solidarity clearly specifies that the communities are religious communities but with a wide range of flexibility. Rather than a Superior, we have community co-ordinators who do not have the authority of Superiors but simply harmonises the living together of members. He organizes regular community meetings according to the life-plan of the community. He/she is the link between the community and outside and with the Executive Director. Members are required to develop strong maturity in living their religious commitments. The community chooses when to come together for prayer, meals and meetings. Religious spirit rather than the letters of religious obedience and poverty is required of members, who should be transparent in all their dealings.

The greatest joy I find in belonging to the Solidarity initiative is that we touch the lives of the people. We see how transformation is perceptibly taking place, even though very slowly. Seeing that now South Sudanese nurses and teachers who are trained in Solidarity institutions staff the labour force of the country gives irresistible joy. In our parish school, we now have four Solidarity Teachers Training College graduates as teachers. Until this time the teaching staff have been half illiterate teachers who gave only lip service to teaching. We equally enjoy community life, each member brings the best of herself or himself for community building.

Challenges

These and the wide mix of the communities present their challenges as well as their advantages. Members will have to let go some personal, cultural and congregational peculiarities. Food can be of very wide range, though members are usually sensitive to this. The watchwords or key to the successful Solidarity community is adaptation, flexibility and sensitivity, impelled by the charity of Christ and the need of the mission. Members try new ways and new things. Members of a community are allowed wide range of personal initiatives within the limits imposed by the life-manual of the organization or plan of life of the community. Members tolerate the mistakes of other members particularly when responsible initiatives or risks fail. But members are

totally responsible for risks and mistakes of decisions taken contrary to the Solidarity Manual. Each one takes care of one's personal health expenses, although each member is required to obtain health insurance cover.

I have engaged in the mission of teaching and agriculture at different times. The whole thrust of Solidarity is to help build capacity for the country and the Church. So it chose to train teachers and nurses who will then provide services for the country. Even the agricultural project has as one of its aims to educate the people in better methods of farming.



Solidarity pastoral team train the local clergy and catechists in better pastoral approaches and initiatives. The Initial contract with the Bishops' Conference of South Sudan was for ten years by which time the local Church would have sufficiently trained pastoral agents and Solidarity would handover to the local Church all its institutions and any assets held by Solidarity. This is the tenth year but this handover did not happen. The Archbishop of Juba asked: "Handover

to whom". Another ten year contract has again been drawn with clear lines and time table of transition.

It is a joy to mention that the Marist Congregation has been a backbone to the Solidarity initiative from its conception and in its ongoing. We have two Brothers presently, while we have had three. The congregation has committed so much in finance in keeping the mission of Solidarity going. The last donation about a year ago was sixty thousand USA dollars. But I think we can send more members. I have urged the African Region to take the bull by the horn in initiating a joint mission in South Sudan. Presently Solidarity is advertising for memberships in the Pastoral team as some members of the team are returning to their different congregations. We could recommend such Brothers who are qualified and can serve in this capacity. Also Solidarity is looking for an Associate Executive Director who will reside in Solidarity Central office in Rome. Specialised volunteers are preferable, teachers, nurses or agronomists.

In conclusion, I highly recommend this type of Solidarity initiative as the sign of the times. More new missions can be undertaken and discharged more professionally working in the model of Solidarity. The inter-congregational and gender mix could be scary. It is, no doubt, fraught with risks but the risk could be minimized by making sure that people sent to participate in Solidarity will have certain level of maturity and experience. Presently most members are largely retired men and women. The risk might be more when younger religious join Solidarity communities. It may become necessary that when such becomes the case, new form of living together could be initiated.

PERSEVERE

LETTER FROM ALEPPO No. 34 - 4 NOVEMBER 2018

In the past few weeks, we have seen the return of some friends who had left the country during the war. They were often on their own. To see the blinds up in their houses or meet them on the street gives us fresh hope; a long-awaited hope for their return since this points to the end of the war, an end to the nightmare of emigration, and especially life getting back to normal.

We took them on a tour of the city. We have become tourist guides of the destroyed souk and neighbourhoods devastated by hatred. We had to explain the suffering endured by those who had to stay. Many expressed their astonishment at the will to live of the survivors. And to our question "do you intend on staying?", their negative or disguised answers brought us back to the bitter reality of emigration.



How to heal the wounds of war?

It is true that December 2016 saw the end of the division of the city into two parts. It is true that, since then, reconstruction has become a priority for both the government and the general population. It is true that some families who had fled the eastern part of the city and whose homes are more or less habitable, have returned home. It is true that water and electricity services have improved.

But what is essential still needs attention: the human person. The ones who took a direct part in war and the ones who suffered it. What's happening inside such people, how do they feel right now? Have they come through it okay? How do you go about healing the wounds of war? How move towards reconciliation? How react to the violence, barely contained, of some people? What sort of education is appropriate for children who have lived in a warzone? What advice to give to young people of an age when they have to make decisions about their future? How support couples and households to remain together? And above all how to reignite the flame of hope?

Desire for peace

There is also a desire for the whole country to be at peace with no more pockets of war such as Idlib province and the campaign to the west of Aleppo and in North-Eastern Syria. Also, hundreds of thousands of families continue to live under tents in refugee camps within the country or in neighboring countries.

However, the West must decide to lift the sanctions that are penalising the population. Following his recent visit to Damascus, the special rapporteur on the negative effects

of one-sided, coercive measures on the exercise of human rights, said, "I am deeply concerned that unilateral coercive measures help to aggravate the suffering of the Syrian people. Given the economic and human suffering caused by these measures, it is difficult to believe that they exist to protect Syrians or to encourage democratic transition."

The exodus of families has not stopped

In fact, the flow of families or people who want to leave or have actually left the country has not stopped.

In September 2018, the Vatican dicastery for Integral Human Development published a report : "The response of Catholic institutions to the Humanitarian Crisis in Iraq and Syria 2017-2018".

Here are some extracts:

"In Syria, more than 13 million people need assistance: there are 6,6 million internally displaced persons and 5,6 million refugees registered in neighboring countries, mainly in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. (...) Education, health and psychosocial support remain priority areas of intervention, but the major challenge now lies in the response to an ever-increasing need for stability for the future of families through agricultural development programmes, improving the economic and social fabric, vocational training and the creation of job opportunities".

Blue Marists

We Blue Marists, without waiting for these recommendations, have been undertaking education, human development and job creation programmes over recent years. September this year was devoted to training the teachers of

our two educational programmes "I want to learn" and "Learning to grow". Soumayya Hallak, a Swiss national of Syrian origin, trained them in post traumatic therapy using body approaches and music. Bahjat Azrieh, a psychologist, worked with them on "life skills". Finally, Veronica Hurtubia of the Catholic University of Milan and in collaboration with the International Catholic Office for Children(BICE), led a first phase of training in resilience.

The 90 children of the "I want to learn" programme started their year in early October 2018. The 55 children of "Learning to grow" joined them towards the end of October. In every month of the summer, their teachers came up with new programmes adapted to the situations of our children.

A new team has come to strengthen our psycho-educational work. These are "SEEDS", five people to work with the different age groups: from preschool to young adolescents to adults.

The Women's development programme brings together some women around several weekly courses on important topics such as health, psychology, cooking ...

"Heartmade", our fabric and clothing recycling project, has progressed in leaps and bounds with the slogan: "Avoid waste, learn perfection to reach beauty". We have increased the number of women in this workshop to increase production. The Facebook page of the project gives an idea of their unique creations.

"Cutting and Sewing" provides the 16 women who have signed on for the fifth session with training in this area. In addition to the programme itself, courses on human and personal development are provided.

"How to create your own micro-project" is one of the objectives of MIT. We believe that as we move into the post-war stage we need to launch micro-projects that allow people, especially youth, to live with dignity and build a life for themselves in the country. In groups of 24, young people and those not so young, attend courses, get training, design their own project and present it to a jury for a thorough study. We offer those who qualify a generous donation to launch their project. They are accompanied by a mentor who helps them achieve their purpose and ensure continuity. So far, we have financed 70 such micro-projects.

The Medical program continues. It is a great service for sick peo-



ple. We Blue Marists, along with other charities, help the sick to get treatment or surgery, or buy the medicines they need.

"A drop of milk" remains a very successful project. Around three thousand children under the age of 11 are recipients each month. The parents are very grateful.

Volunteers in Al Shahba

Every Wednesday and Sunday, about 25 of our volunteers head to "Al Shahba", a camp for the displaced, located some 25 km from Aleppo. Here 120 families are housed in tents. Our presence and activities with all without distinction have led to better living conditions. The smaller ones have a time of physical exercise and play. Children of school age learn to read and write. Young adolescents are accompanied by a group of volunteers who help them reflect on topics touching their lives and their circumstances as displaced people. Finally, women are trained by a really good team. Sometimes doctors or people with one or other specialisations join us in providing quality training. Distributions of food, clothing, blankets and medicines go some way to addressing their enormous needs.

Peace and reconciliation

Christmas is on the horizon! It brings with it the hope of peace and reconciliation. For our city of Aleppo, for our country Syria, for our people, we hope that Christmas will be a time of coming together and not saying goodbye.

We are working for a civilization of love and peace to reign on our earth and in all hearts.

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