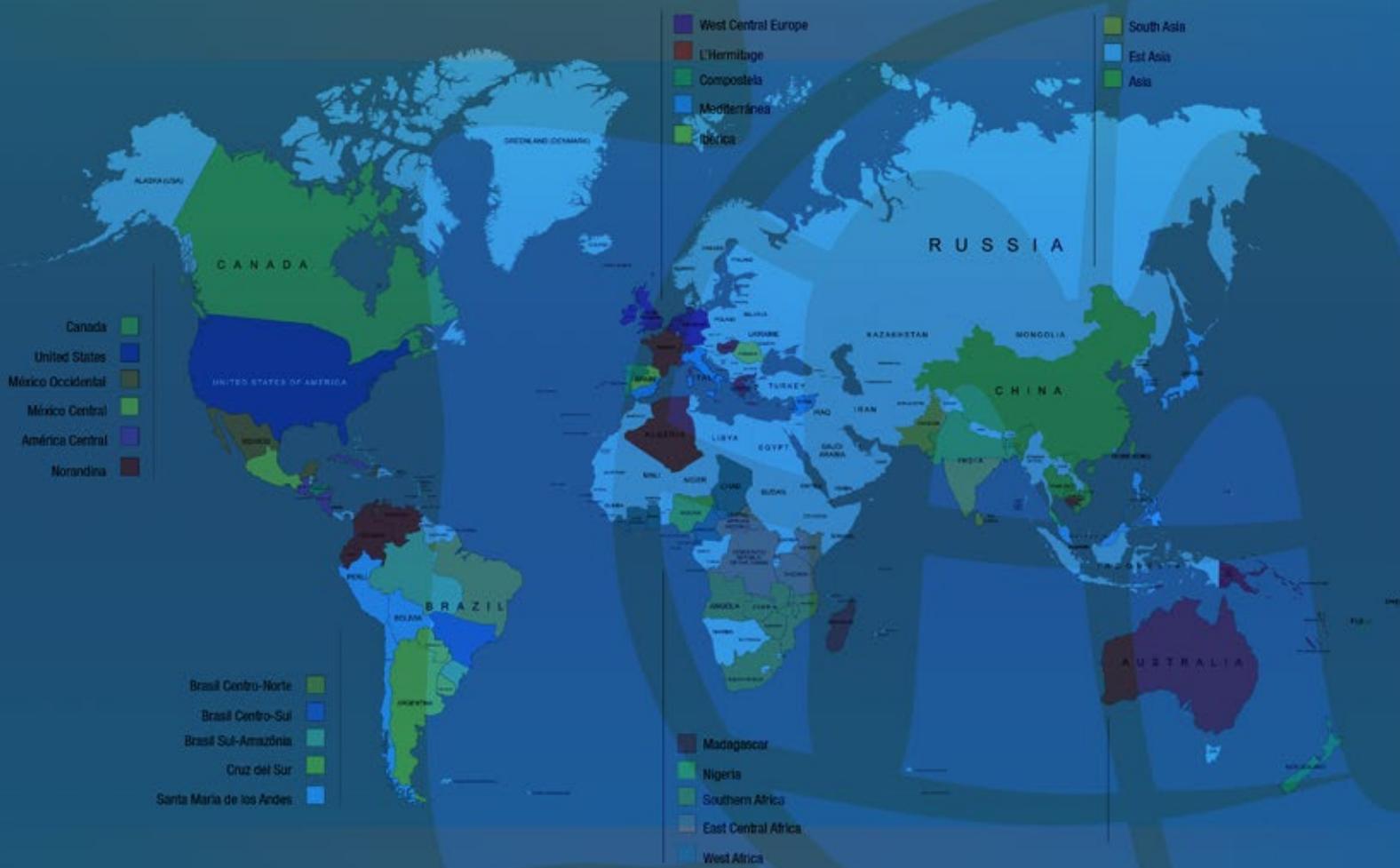


REGIONALIZATION AND CHAMPAGNAT MARIST MISSION A JOURNEY FOR OUR GLOBAL FAMILY



MESSAGE FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF MARIST MISSION



PREAMBLE

This message is the ninth in a series of on-going reflections from the International Mission Commission to all Marists of Champagnat. Each of these messages has reflected on an aspect of mission based on the projects in the strategic plan of the General Administration. The theme of this message is Regionalization and our Marist mission.

1. WHERE HAVE WE COME FROM?

The XXI General Chapter's challenge, "With Mary, go in haste of a new land!" recognised the need for the Institute to respond to the contemporary realities facing Marist life and mission. As a response to the Chapter call regarding animation and government, the New Models of Animation, Governance and Management project was developed.

The New Models project, which was launched in 2015, has helped us to look more closely at the heart of the Marist charism and to recognize ourselves as a global body, with a united vision and a single international identity. The importance on setting out on this journey was recognised by many leadership teams from across the Institute. While the New Models project has had its challenges it is part of an evolving process of building a global family which will generate more vitality for the whole Institute and especially for the welfare of children and young people.

One of the outcomes of the New Models project was to strengthen the regions across the Institute. The message of the XXII General Chapter called for the continuation of this process of regionalization and the promotion of inter-regional collaboration to continue building a stronger global family with struc-





tures, initiatives, and strategies which are agile, simple, and participative. Article 7 of the *Constitutions* (2020) sees strong regional collaboration as “a favoured form of nurturing the life and mission of the Institute.” Regionalization has occurred in the context of our growing understanding of the Institute as a global family. It sees the future of Marist life and mission as inter-relational and interdependent rather than one of isolation and independence. While we may know that we are an international congregation, we also need to think and act accordingly, allowing us to look forward with audacity and hope. The creation of regions is one way for us ‘to be’ and ‘to feel’ like a global family. The process of regionalization has been and continues to be for us a moment of grace. The Lord offers us ‘new wine’ at this time in our history and we need to develop ‘new wineskins’.

2. WHAT IS REGIONALIZATION?

Regions are established by a number of Administrative Units coming together to form a larger entity. The purpose of which is to take advantage of the synergy created by the bigger entity and identifying those projects which are best done collaboratively. The *Constitutions* (2020) describe regions thus,

The Administrative Units of a particular geographic area constitute a Region, officially approved by the Superior General with his



Council, along with its statutes. Within a Region, the Administrative Units establish close ties of collaboration, solidarity and interdependence. They extend their bonds of brotherhood to other regions of the Institute in order to fashion, along with the General Government, an Institute that lives and operates as a global body, while being present and engaged in each local context. (#96)

Across the Institute there are six Regions:

Africa – Provinces of: East-Central Africa, Southern Africa, West Africa, Madagascar, Nigeria with a presence in twenty-one countries.

America Sur – Provinces of: Brazil Sul-Amazônia, Brazil Centro-Norte, Brazil Centro-Sul, Cruz del Sur, Santa María de los Andes with a presence in seven countries.

Arco Norte – Provinces of: America Central, México Central, México Occidental, Norandina, United States of America, the District of Canada with a presence in fourteen countries.

Asia – Provinces of: East Asia, West Asia, the District of Asia with a presence in seventeen countries.

Europe – Provinces of: Compostela, Ibérica, L'Hermitage, Mediterránea, West-Central Europe with a presence in fifteen countries.

Oceania – Province of Australia, the District of the Pacific with a presence in ten countries.

3. ENHANCING MARIST LIFE AND MISSION

In many Administrative Units there is a sincere desire to journey together as a region as we explore the common challenges we face and to address these by working collaboratively. While this is an evolving process it also needs to be nurtured. The General Administration provides support and it works to ensure that the regionalization processes already established are further developed and strengthened. The Chapter Call, *To respond boldly to emerging needs*, challenges us to,

- abandon old paradigms and re-imagine ways of helping people see the love of God in today's world.
- undergo a change of heart and be flexible in our structures, with all the risks entailed, so as to move to the peripheries in defence of the poorest and most vulnerable.
- make a firm commitment to promote and defend the Rights of the Child.
- awaken in ourselves and those around us an ecological awareness that engages us in caring for “our common home”. (Message of the XXII General Chapter)



Brothers from America Sur Region in Florianópolis - 2019



Asia-Oceania Marist community Leaders - Philippines 2019

The movement from independent Provinces to operating as interdependent regions is a significant structural change for the Institute and is one way in which we can operate more effectively as a global family. In developing an interdependent model regionalization has created spaces for generative dialogue about broad strategic issues which can be held at a higher level without the complication of local interests. The first phase of regionalization led to the establishment of regions and regional councils with appropriate support structures. This has provided the leaders of the Administrative Units with a space in which to build trust and reciprocity, to plan and discuss the issues confronting Marist mission and life and to act in a spirit of collaborative cooperation. Perhaps above all it provides a space to dream, to imagine the possibilities of a global family of Champagnat Marists as a beacon of hope in our turbulent world.

For example, when the Oceania Council was formed in 2012 it comprised both Brother and Lay members appointed by their respective Administrative Units. From the outset, Lay Marists were appointed to participate as equal members of the various Commissions. This 'widening of the tent' brought different voices to the table and recognised the important role of Lay Marist of Champagnat in the life and mission of the Region.

An initial catalyst for a regional approach to some larger strategic issues was the initial formation of Brothers. The small number of candidates in many Administrative Units and the inability to find appropriate personnel for initial formation resulted in the establishment of regional formation centres to serve several Provinces.

Although the needs of initial formation led the way, the regional conversations have increasingly focused on mission. This may be described as the second phase of regionalization which looks at what projects can be undertaken collaboratively. In this phase a number of commissions were established which brought together Brothers and Lay in generative dialogue and built relationships across the region. The commissions have helped to develop a broader sense of mission by providing opportunities for training, analysis and action within the Administrative Units. Across the regions the number of commissions vary depending on the needs and priorities within each region.

In the Region of Europe, the European Council of the Marist Mission (ECM) has held several Assemblies of Mission Councils and has created two teams to focus on mission. The first, the European Solidarity Team, aims to define the framework of solidarity for Europe, in collaboration with the other Marist structures of solidarity, the rights of children, the protection of minors. The main objective of the second team, the European Pastoral Team, is to address the ministry issues in the region. In addition, the Council has also held a series of formation workshops for leaders of Marist mission. Currently, the Region has evolved to having an Assembly of Provincial Councils, an executive secretary, and is transforming its structures into a new Marist Region of Europe (MRE) that will be useful for mission's needs. This evolution can be seen also in the proactive development of similar regional structures in America Sur and Arco Norte.

While identifying areas of weaknesses and fragility, regionalization has also developed a broadening awareness of, and the possibilities for, local, regional and global articulation. It enables us to tackle mission challenges realistically, intelligently and creatively through collaboration. This has resulted in a number of regions engaging in regional strategic planning and the establishment of appropriate working groups to advance the various projects. In Oceania, the Education Network launched the *Southern Stars* leadership program which was designed to develop authentic and transformative leadership for Marist schools in Oceania. The program was based on the *New Horizons* leadership program, conducted in 2015 and 2016 with over 250 participants from 26 countries in Africa.

Regionalization recognises that mission occurs locally. It encourages global thinking which enhances and supports local action. One advantage of regionalization is that it helps to identify those activities which individual Adminis-



trative Units lack the capacity to undertake and to carry these out as a region. There has been an increasing realisation, when exploring the possibilities of establishing new mission on the margins that we need a wider pool of people, skills and resources across a number of areas than many Administrative Units can supply individually.

The creation of Mission Commissions in the regions has developed a greater awareness of the need for mutual support and networking across the region and between regions. That's the case of the Mission Commission for Africa, supported by the CSAC. The Commissions have provided a space for sharing and promoting best practice, mutual support, the development of regional strategic planning and provided a think-tank for future initiatives. It also provides a forum in which to discuss the sharing of resources including people, finance and expertise.

Regional mission commissions, comprised of Brothers and Lay Marists, should have responsibility to develop projects and submit them to the regional meeting of Administrative Unit leaders. It may be beneficial to generate some common criteria for mission and to strengthen methodological processes, so that they help to meet the established objectives. Through participation in the various re-



Arco Norte Regional Assembly - United States 2019



gional projects capacity will be freed up for vibrant local action by doing things collaboratively for mutual benefit. In this way, developing a growing sense of a global family and working towards the closer alignment of the Administrative Units vision with that of the region and Institute.

Initially regionalization has been geographic. This was due in part to the existing territorial Administrative Units and to accommodate our cultural diversity. The development of networks is another expression of regionalization. Networking favours a sense of relevance beyond localisms, providing an opportunity to share experience, contrast processes, to connect people with similar interests and passions and to provide mutual support.

We are generating diverse spaces for participation, dialogue and the exchange of ideas and best practice. There is greater integration and knowledge among the members, both Brothers and Lay Marists in the regional commissions, which creates a greater sense of team, family and commitment to mission in the local and regional context. One of the consequences of Regionalization is the increasing awareness of the intercultural nature of many regions which engage across several countries and cultures. In Asia, there is effective cross-cultural interaction between Marists both lay and brother involved in the different ministries and works of the Region. The richness of the cultures in this Region is shared in the spaces provided by regional formation initiatives.

Increasingly some issues such as Children's Rights, Solidarity and Spirituality are being addressed as Inter-regional initiatives. This development recognises that some of the challenges facing Marist life and mission need a wider global perspective. Arco Norte and America Sur Regions have a long tradition of collaboration in certain specific initiative. The Interregional Meeting of Provincials (with different historical names CLAP, CIAP, CAP) and the current active networks "Corazón Solidario/Solidarity Heart" and "Spirituality" are examples of this effective relationship, also expanded to other areas of mission and for educational leaders' formation.

In summary, regionalization has developed a path, established spaces for generative dialogue to creatively address the local and global challenges facing Champagnat life and mission today. This dialogue involves Brothers and Lay at many levels across the Institute. The regions are identifying and initiating concrete projects which seek to implement the calls of recent General Chapters.



4. LETTING GO, LETTING COME

Regionalization is an evolving process which has not been without its challenges. Reflecting on the experience of Regionalization, the members of the International Mission Commission have identified a number of challenges for us as Champagnat Marists.

A New Mindset: As with any change it is easier to set up new structures, such as regions, than it is to adopt a new mindset. Thinking, planning and acting as a region requires everyone at the table to work towards creating harmony between local and regional needs and interests. This is not an easy shift and it will, in some instances, require sacrifice. As we evolve in our understanding of the Institute as a global family we need a shift in our perspective. The General Chapter called us to, “set out immediately on pathways that lead to the future: that is, as Marists of Champagnat, to... promote and nourish Marist life in all its diversity, working towards our deeply-felt desire to act as ‘one global body.’” Recognising that, “Marists of Champagnat belong to a single body or a single charismatic family, and we are being called to act as such.”

Developing New Structures: Regionalization is a strategy for keeping mission vital. However, in consolidating regional structures, we need to be clear about what we want to achieve through them. Are we building them thinking of the past? Or, are we looking to the future? The structures which we establish must promote, rather than be at the expense of, ministry on the ground. By building



Madagascar

capacity and empowering Marists for mission this will assist each Administrative Unit to be viable and vital parts of a region. Conscious always, that unless the Lord builds the house, we labour in vain.

The structures we develop must also be able to effectively address the difficulties of dealing with in-depth change. Being able to think about and to develop a vision for the medium-term future rather than looking too much at the short term is a key task of leadership at the regional level.

We must also recognise that the path of regionalization is being constructed as we walk it. We will, over time, gain greater organisational clarity and clarification of the roles, delegations and functions of the various teams or commissions within the region.

Lay Marists: Mission is the shared setting in which Brothers and Lay come together. As *Gathered Around the Same Table* reminds us,

We Brothers and Lay people have received the gift of the charism from Marcellin. Therefore, we are partners in the Marist mission, and jointly responsible before God for carrying it out.

Joint responsibility involves all levels: decision making, planning, implementing and evaluation. We share whatever the diverse states of life are able to contribute to the shared mission. (#45-46)

How to give effective voice and genuine partnership to Lay Marists as co-creators and sharers in Marist mission challenges us Brothers to develop structures which will promote greater vitality of the Marist charism and its mission in our world.

Communication: Effective communication within Administrative Units, across a region and inter-regionally is vital if we are to think and act as a global family. The promotion of strong information sharing practices to help everyone see the big picture and feel motivated to participate collaboratively as members of a global family. Ease of communication across the Institute is critically important if we are to act globally to address issues such as, school improvement, spiritual development, leadership and the sustainability of Marist mission at the local level.



Another communication challenge is the provision of appropriate infrastructure to connect different parts of the Marist mission. In Oceania, Australian Marist Solidarity is in the process of securing funding in order to provide satellite internet connections to remote communities in Bougainville, East Timor, Kiribati and Vanuatu. This follows a successful pilot project at Mabiri, Bougainville.

Networks: Developing a range of networks across the Institute could strengthen communication and collaboration between regions. These can build on existing networks which are already working on a continental basis, for example, the Solidarity and Spirituality networks in the two American regions. Other networks related to specific projects, such as the Network of Schools, could provide a space focusing on exchange of ideas, best practice, experience and the sharing of resources and services.

Criteria for Marist Mission: The development of criteria for the discernment of future Marist mission would provide an opportunity to focus more intentionally on the Calls of the Chapter particularly where there are insufficient resources in individual Administrative Units. It will be important for the future



Mexico



of the Institute as a global family to seek creative ways to address the equity of resources. The ongoing challenge of how to share people, financial and other resources and services within the regions and across regions can be addressed by continued dialogue at regional level.

Regional Planning: Regions could develop their own regional strategic plan which is co-created by all Marists in the region. Engaging as many Brothers and Lay Marists in this process will be critical to the success of regionalization. It may be useful if regions followed a common process of reflection and operation considering equally the elements of Marist life and Marist mission. Developing regional strategic plans would help to clarify which projects are at global, regional and local levels.

Innovation: The challenge to creatively address the issues confronting us as Marists of Champagnat has been brought into sharp focus by the disruption caused by the global pandemic. Regional commissions and networks provide the structure in which innovation can occur. However, a tendency towards self-sufficiency can make it difficult for us to accept advice from professionals. We need to take advantage of the disruptive effect of the global pandemic to evaluate our Marist life and mission in light of the new realities confronting us as an Institute.

Leadership: The formation of leadership for both Brothers and Lay is emerging as a challenge across a number of areas for the Institute. This is of critical importance in the more fragile areas of mission. Strategies need to be developed at the global, regional and local levels to address this issue.

5. NEXT STEPS

The process of regional collaboration will continue across the Institute. By enhancing regionalization, present processes are ensured, especially in those Administrative Units which have fewer resources and people. In addressing the challenges which face the Institute, a number of next steps can be identified.

Global Perspective: Developing new Marist mission in marginal areas in response to the Chapter Calls would benefit from dialogue with a global perspective. The General Administration could identify suitable projects and then engage with the regions about realising viable ventures.

Stronger Structures: Where possible, as an Institute we could adopt a similar organizational model in all Administrative Units and regions. Developing simi-



lar structures would allow people involved in schools, universities, social works, evangelization and youth ministry to connect, network and to cooperate more effectively.

Inter-Regional Dialogue: A next step could see increased inter-regional dialogue and cooperation in areas other than initial formation. The establishment of regional commissions, if they do not exist, focused on issues such as, consecrated life, finance and lay partnership may assist in building the experience of a global family. The continued development of regional projects and initiatives at the service of the most vulnerable children and young people and the growth of networks, for example, schools, spirituality, and youth ministry, will hopefully allow inter-regional dialogue to occur in due course. Other common projects on ecology or children's rights, which can have an inter-regional perspective could be promoted by the Mission Secretariat. Linking people across regions who are engaged in mission will help us to feel, act and be a global family.

With Young People: As a global family we need to develop our intercultural and international dimensions, social and cultural skills. One way to achieve this could be to create and promote a network of children and young people, encouraging their participation as agents in their own human and spiritual formation and as important actors in our Marist mission. Projects such as art and



Maracaibo, Venezuela



culture, student councils, apostolic movements, social commitment and human rights could be developed.

Technology allows us to generate new connections with higher levels of interaction and participation of young people in Marist life and mission. Online platforms can help build relationships and in the move towards collaborative work. This would enable young people to recognise themselves as part of a global family. Supporting young people by giving them agency is part of the *Stand Up, Speak Up & Act* project. The aim of which is to develop initiatives to help young people to be listened to and to increase the participation and empowerment of children and young people in all the realities of mission.

6. CONCLUSION

Regionalization is at the service of mission. It aims to bring vitality to our mission as a global family which may become a beacon of hope in this turbulent world. As *Water from the Rock* reminds us, we are “called by Mary, we are sent on mission, announcing God’s Good News to those children and young people living on the margins of society” (p.11). We are conscious that Mary, who has done, and continues to do everything for us, is our model of mission as we continue to build a global Champagnat Marist family.

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