



Marist Brothers East Asia



Marists
of Champagnat

News Bits

Volume 4, Issue No. 13

March 21, 2022

UPDATES

“Have a vision, tell the truth and work as a team”

(Br. Allan J. de Castro, FMS, Philippines, East Asia Province)

We may recall that on the 14th day of August 1816, Saturday, Marcellin Champagnat arrived in La Valla-en-Gier to begin his priestly ministry. The following day, he said his first Mass during the Feast of the Assumption of our Good Mother. He then remained in this small country parish for the next eight years.

In La Valla, we saw the following episodes in Marcellin's life: his ministry that included visiting the sick, catechizing children, helping the poor, and helping families to live the Christian life. His simple, direct style of preaching, his deep devotion to Mary, and his apostolic zeal made a profound impression on his parishioners. His encounter with a dying 17-year-old boy who had absolutely no religious instruction was an experience that shook him to his depths and moved him not to delay any longer in putting his plans into action. We may say that he walked the very roads where he was sent. He cherished the terrain, respected the people who shaped him, suffered through the adversity that strengthened him, and towards the end he was seized by the God who was at the center of his life.

Finishing the first half of the General Conference as a newly elected leader of my province, I felt that I am empowered by the disposition of Marcelin when he first arrived in La Valla - his openness and availability to serve others and to look beyond in spite of the difficulties.

During the first two weeks, I felt excited and inspired to listen to and reflect on the topics presented: first, the re-reading of and dialogue on the calls of the XXII General Chapter in the current context; second, the review of the 5 important areas indicated by the General Chapter, namely, the style of governance, the Marists of Champagnat, the vocation of the Brothers, the Marist mission and the management and use of congregation's resources; and third, the reflection on the current reality of the Institute covering the journey as Administrative Units, as Regions, as Global Family looking towards the future. These topics led us to many occasions of dialogue with our fellow Marist leaders; thus, learning from one another.

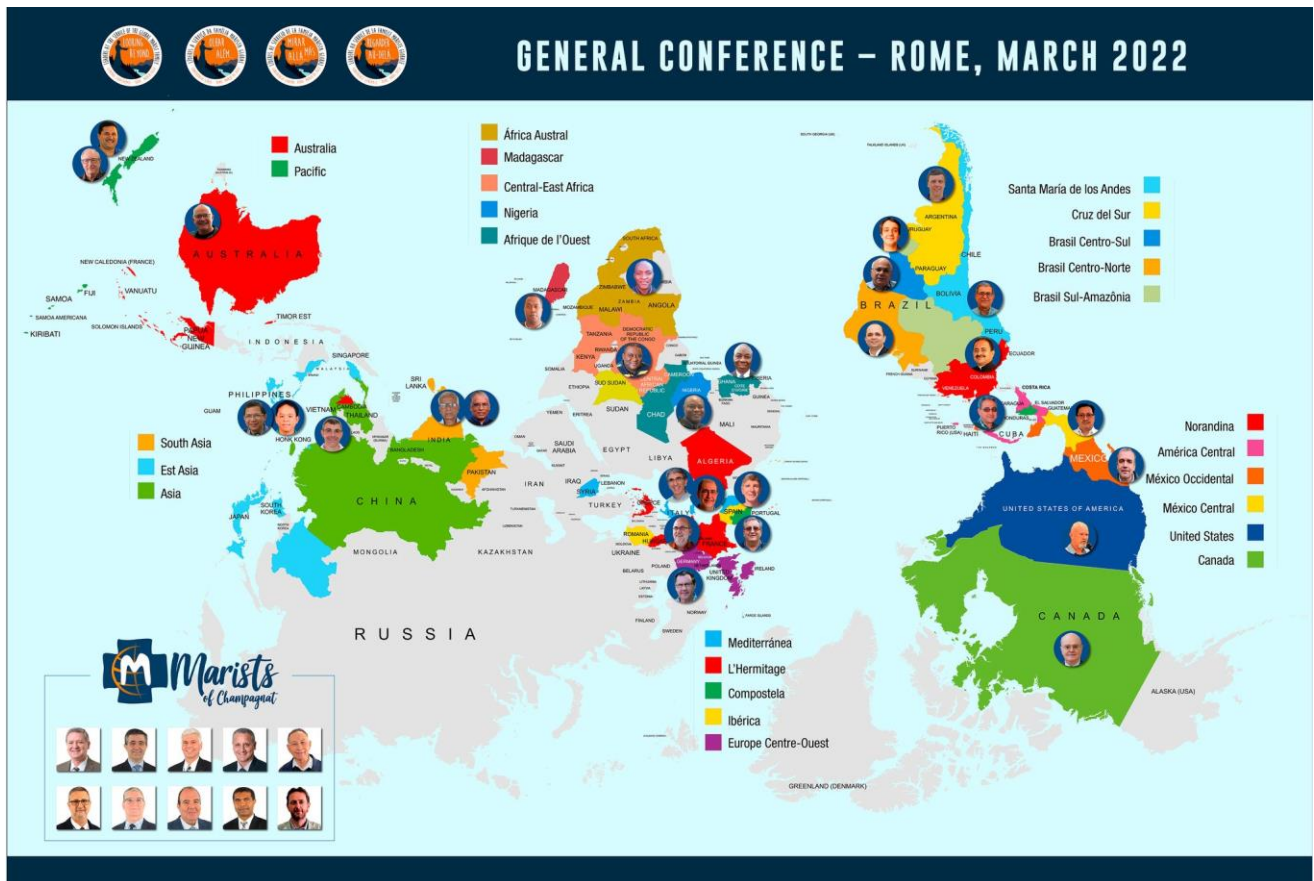
In the midst of all that has been accomplished so far at this General Conference, I could not help but reflect on the three important points that Br. Ernesto highlighted in his message when he welcomed the new provincials during the first week. He said, *“When I was a young provincial, the then Superior General Br. Sean Sammon, FMS encouraged us to lead our respective provinces by always having a vision, telling the truth and working as a team.”*

For me, these are keys as I journey with my brothers in the province during this new and challenging times. They are my guideposts as I live my vocation at the service of the global Marist family.

Some photos during the General Conference in Rome.



The Participants of the General Conference



**Brs. Ador and Allan welcome
Br. Jacobo Song at Manziana
as he starts the Mid-life
Renewal Formation Course.**



UPDATES FROM CU CHI COMMUNITY, VIETNAM

Last year, there was a period of time that only two people stayed in the community during the COVID-related city lockdown. But now, the situation has completely changed. We have 4 community members, plus 6 special members who are currently in the Cu Chi community. The special members are 1 Aspirant, 2 Novices preparing to move to the Tudella Novitiate, Sri Lanka, and 3 brothers preparing to be sent to other communities in MDA (1 brother to West Bengal, India, and 2 brothers to the La Valla Home, Thailand).



We attend the Mass as a choir. Whenever participating in the weekday Mass, we account for half of the number of Mass attendants. It is a significant role in the rural church.

Moreover, our Vietnamese young brothers teach English to the youth in the parish and to the children living around this community. Although the number of students is still small since the classes started very recently, it is expected that the student number will increase. We are also considering providing catechesis in the near future as little brothers of Mary.

Br. Anselmo Kim



21 MARCH: INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FORESTS

Birthday Celebrations

Br. Noel T. Fernandez



Br. Steve Vaea



ASIA-OCEANIA LAY LEADERS PREPARE FOR INTER-REGIONAL FORUM ON LAY VOCATION

Last March 14, the Asia laity leaders met with Nathan Ahearne, member of the Extended Secretariat of the Laity from Australia for a preliminary discussion and initial planning on the proposed Inter-Regional Forum on Lay Vocation.

The gathering intends to follow the process of reflection of the International Forum on the Vocation of the Laity whose aims are to deepen our understanding of the Marist vocation with particular emphasis on the lay Marist vocation, to review and offer



formation and mentoring pathways for laypeople to grow in their vocation, to reflect on and propose possible ways of making a formal commitment to the Marist charism and to know, reflect, explore and propose possibilities of juridical structures (civil and canonical) for Marist laypeople. A target of 25 participants from Oceania and 25 from Asia are expected and the proposed date to commence the process will be on the 26th of April. Succeeding sessions will be conducted as scheduled.

ADVOCACY ON KEEPING CYBERSPACE SAFE INTRODUCED TO NDEA

Br. Crispin Betita, FMS, Coordinator of the Child Protection Desk, met with Sr. Maria Fe Herodias, RVM, President of the Notre Dame Educational Association (NDEA) last March 17. The agenda of the meeting was to introduce the advocacy work on keeping children safe against all forms of threats in the cyberspace and to also explore the possibility of NDEA to be part of this nationwide network on cyber safety. Present in the meeting were Atty. Noel Ben, the NDEA Legal Adviser and Ms. Agnes Reyes, Cyberguardians partnership and networking coordinator.



CMMF Kidapawan Gather for Prayer and Reflection

The CMMF members gathered for prayer and reflection at Yoyo Tilapia Breeding and Farming on March 20. They shared on the theme Homes of Light, Care of the Common Home. The group appreciated the presence of Br. Dem and Br. Dave.

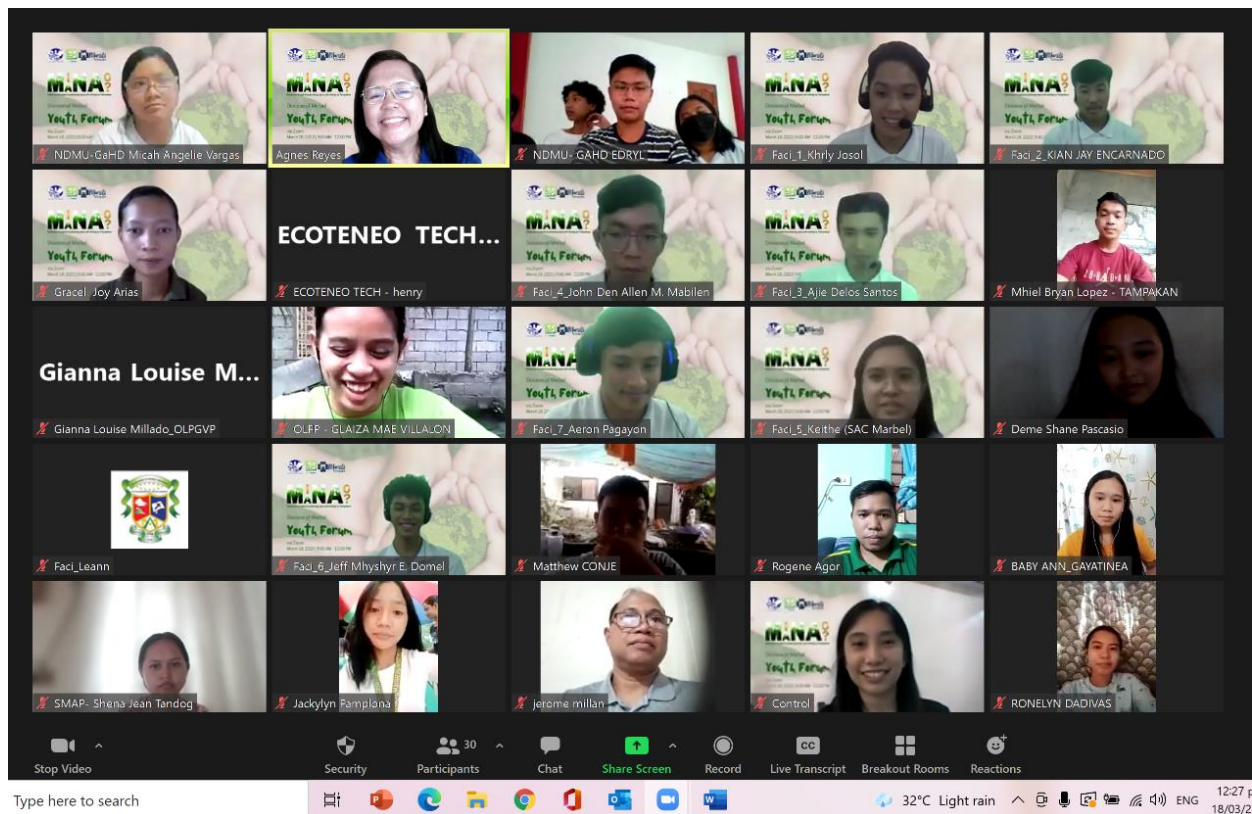
Champagnat Laity Gathering Prayer and Reflection on Homes of the Light - Care of the Common Home with Br. Demosthenes and Br. Dave. Thank

you very much for everything, CMMF, supportive Marist Brothers, and to the host, Puyos' family at Yoyo Tilapia Breeding and Farming.

MARIST ECOLOGY MINISTRY ASSISTS THE DIOCESE OF MARBEL

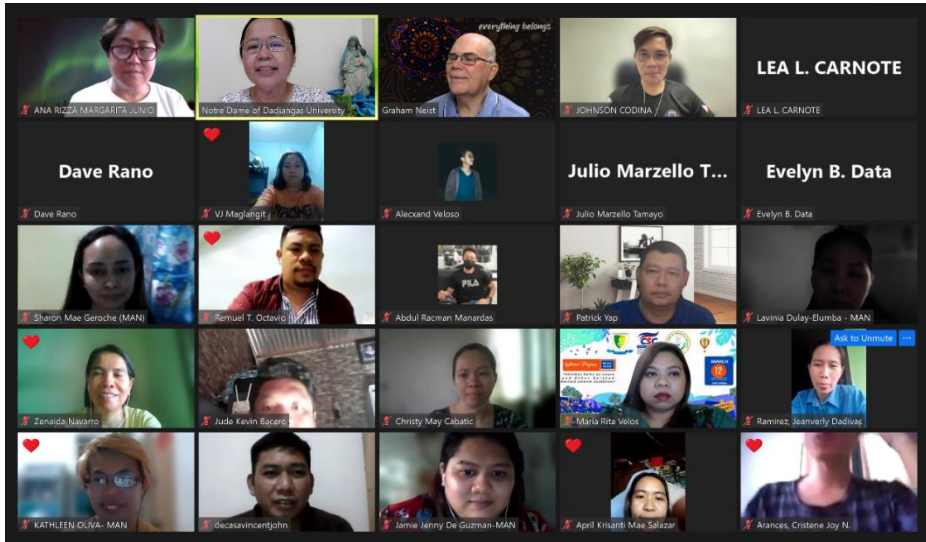
Last March 18, the Youth Forum: **Mina o Mana? Talakayan Tungkol sa Open-Pit Mining sa Tampakan** was conducted with more than 50 participants from among the Catholic Youth Ministry (CYM) leaders of the parishes in the Diocese of Marbel. Mrs. Leann Rosali, Senior High School Principal and actively involved in the Marist Ecology Ministry provided her guidance in the planning and implementation of the said activity. She worked in collaboration with the staff of Ecoteneo and the Social Action Center of the Diocese. The Forum was meant to provide a venue for the youth to be informed and share their opinion on the burning issues of open-pit mining.

Fr. Jerome Millan, Director of the Social Action Center expressed his appreciation for the event and looks forward to more opportunities of partnership with the Marist.



MARIST FORMATION FOR NDDU GRADUATE SCHOOL

March 19. NDDU Graduate School Marist Formation with the theme “Life Favors Life ...with Love!”. The resource person was Br. Graham Neist, FMS from Australia. Around 87 students of the Graduate School participated.



PRAYER EXPERIENCE FOR OVERSEAS FILIPINO WORKERS IN DOHA, QATAR



March 19. Ms. Rhonna dela Cruz, CMMF Member, currently in Doha Qatar organized members of the Lord's Choir for a time of prayer and reflection. Their Lenten experience had the theme: Experiencing the Sacred in the Other, Nurturing TLC's Faith Journey. Around 21 attended the said gathering.



THE ARCHIVIST'S CORNER

#74

Br. Romulo L. Porras, FMS



The following is a reprint of Chapter 16 of the book *Dawn of the Word in Silence, The Adventure of the Marist Brothers in China*, pages 148-153, published by New City Press Philippines (2017) by the responsible team composed of Mr. Spes Stanley Ku, Mr Ardiano Caballero, Ms. Nathalie A. Pasa (principal writer), Mr. Jonas B. Lardizabal and Mr. Romeo Pelayo Vital.

BRO. GREGOIRE-ANDRE

After the transition years to Communism, China's history went on with Mao Tse-tung's launching of a five-year economic plan in 1958. This was called the *Great Leap Forward*. Farming was collectivized and a labor-intensive industry was introduced. The said plan failed, leading to economic breakdown. Following poor harvests, millions of people starved to death. After two years, the plan was abandoned.

From 1961 to 1965, China attempted to stabilize its situation by initiating corrective measures, amidst internal disagreements within its leadership. In this period, Mao-Tse-tung, who had stepped down as chairman of the People's Republic after the failed of the *Great Leap Forward*, but had remained chairman of the CPC, started to feel uneasy about what he felt were capitalist and anti-socialist tendencies among the people. In 1966, Mao Tse-tung, who had regained political control, launched the *Cultural Revolution*, a ten-year political and ideological campaign aimed at reviving the revolutionary spirit. The period of the *Cultural Revolution* ended in 1976, upon the death of Mao-Tse-tung.

After a brief period of power struggle over the party's leadership, Deng Xiaoping took on the reigns in 1977. Under him, China began to undertake far-reaching reforms.

Only those who have lived through those times can say what it was truly like. One of this is Bro. Gregoire-Andre Su Ping Ching, a former teacher of St. Francis Xavier's College in Shanghai.

On September 15, 2014, Bro. Gregoire celebrated his 70th anniversary as a Marist Brother. For this occasion, a solemn celebration was held with a few close friends. Spes Stanley Ku, a Marist alumnus of St. Francis Xavier's College in Hong Kong and a friend, Yan Kin Sheung, had the fortune of joining Bro. Gregoire as he walked down memory lane, remembering his life as a Marist Brother in China.

Bro. Gregoire was born on March 31, 1921, the same year that the Communist Party was established in China. Originally from the small village of Qingyuan County, Hebei Province, Bro. Gregoire went to Beijing as a 13-year-old, entering fourth grade. Three years later, he began attending the Changyi Middle School in Heishanhu, near the *Yiheyuan* (Summer Palace). He recalls that it was a prosperous time for the Brothers. There were around 200 Chinese and foreign Brothers at that time.

Talking about the students during his time, he says:

Most of the students of Shangyi Primary School and Middle School were from rural areas. Coming from the countryside and going to Beijing, everyone was ignorant, not knowing anything, being very simple-minded. We had to talk regularly to the Superior, and he usually asked, "How do you like it here? How are your studies? Do you have any difficulty?"

There were about seven or eight children from Bro. Gregoire's village. They were all Catholics, but they did not really know much about the monastery in Heishanhu. But he remembers:

Back in our hometown, every time we saw someone from the monastery, with a nice-looking cassock, we felt very envious? In addition, there were some families in touch with the Church, who always talked about how good the life of the religious congregation was, how it enabled one to go to school, to go to college. It was for this reason that many of them joined the Congregation...

As for Bro. Gregoire, he was told that life there was tough, but that at lunch, there would always be a dish of beans. "I thought it would be nice to have some beans!" Apparently, he did not have the least notion of what the vocation of a Marist Brother meant! Although he had heard many religious teachings during his childhood, these were not things that he understood at once. But later on, he realized that it was a call of God, and from then on, he went ahead, persevering in his vocation.

He graduated from high school in 1942, during the period of the Second World War. Afterwards, he started his canonical novitiate, which was followed by his first profession two years later. He then went to teach in Sacred Heart Primary School for four years, then went to Shanghai in 1948, the year just before the Communists defeated the Nationalists.

Already 93 years old at the time of his 70th anniversary, there are certain things that Bro. Gregoire remembers perfectly. "It was on May 27, 1949 when Shanghai came under Communist control," he says. We look back to history and read that, after days of fighting between the Nationalists and the Communists, this was, in fact, the date in which Shanghai finally fell completely into the hands of the Communists!

At the time of the Communist takeover in 1949, Bro. Gregoire was teaching in St. Francis Xavier's College in Shanghai. "The Communist Party wanted to control all the private schools," he said. "In the summer of 1952, re-education was held for about a month... The teachers and principals of private schools had to change their mindset, learn [the new ideology]." They were also asked to examine themselves and their defects, and make a public confession in an auditorium. "For example, the principal had to say how he oppressed the teachers... or what unfair treatment was given to the students at school, etc."

He also remembers an accusation which was hurled against the Church:

In order to find faults with the Church, the Communists declared that the Church was hiding firearms... They asked Church members to sign their names on a prepared [sheet of paper] and to admit that the Church was hiding guns and explosives. But no one did.

There was another thing that changed in their schools. "Before the Communist Liberation, we taught Catechism to the students every day after school... After the Liberation, there were no Catechism classes at all.

He also remembers the mass exodus of priests and Brothers. There was, “for example, Fr. George Wang, from Guangdong. He studied in the English Department of St. Francis Xavier’s College in Shanghai for several years, and spoke English very well.” Fr. George Wang was a former student of the Brothers, who later became a Jesuit priest. Aside from Fr. Wang, Bro. Gregoire mentions a few more names, such as Bro. Bosco Wei and Bro. Adon Chow. “It was not easy for [them] to leave,” he says.

If it wasn’t easy to leave, apparently, it wasn’t easy to remain in China either.

On August 9, 1951, the Principal [of St. Francis Xavier College] Bro. Alexandre Bai was. Because he was the head of a Catholic School, the Communist Party wanted to get rid of him. Fr. Beda Tsang, S.J., Rector of [a Jesuit school] St. Ignatius Middle School in Shanghai, was also arrested.

These arrests were connected to accusation made against the Brothers and other religious who ran schools, accusations of being “stumbling blocks to the Democratic Education of Modern Youth.”

After 1952, St. Francis Xavier’s College in Shanghai became a public school. This also became the fate of the other schools under the Brothers. The names of the schools were changed, and the management was taken over by the Communists.

Br. Gregoire was one of those Chinese Brothers who remained in China in those years. He lived through the different periods of post-World War II China, experienced the beginnings of Communism, life during the *Cultural Revolution* and the reforms under Deng Xiaoping.

After having lived through all these experiences, what can he say now? His focus remains on what God wants. “We do not know the will of God. We should always pray.” His loyalty to the Holy See is evident when he asks us to always pray for the intentions of the Holy Father, and his zeal in keeping the light of the Catholic faith alive continues to shine bright even in his 90s. He has regular contact with alumni of the former St. Francis Xavier’s College in Shanghai, most of whom are in their 70s and 80s. “Since it is not possible to preach directly, I prepare some material for them.” In 2014, he prepared a book about the Catholic Church for these alumni to take back with them, so they could continue to study and be nurtured in their faith.

Simple and humble, but concrete and full of zeal, even at 95, Bro. Gregoire is a shining example of a Marist who has “that unquenchable fire that burns within, filling [him] with passion for the building of the Kingdom of God. # # #



Birthday Greetings to:



March 21
Br. Steve Vaea



March 21
Br. Noel T. Fernandez



March 21
Br. John Vianney Kim
(Chang-woon)



March 28
Br. Augustine Lee Hea-dong

March 22
Br. Petero Navuku



March 28
Br. Cho Min-kyu



Death Anniversaries:

- March 21, 1986 – Br. Carlo Kim Heung Soo died in Seoul, Korea.
- March 21, 1991 – Br. Marie Valentin died in Penang, Malaysia.
- March 21, 1967 – Br. Luc died in Tianjing, Beijing.
- March 22, 1944 – Br. Basile died in Beijing.
- March 23, 1953 – Francis Welmilage, a junior died in Beijing.
- March 24, 1975 – Br. Edward Muss (Jacobus) died in Germany.
- March 24, 1975 – Br. Andre Joseph died in Beijing.
- March 25, 1918 – Br. Charles in WW.I died in France.
- March 25, 1927 – Br. Archangelus died in Shanghai.
- March 25, 1968 – Br. Joseph Francois died in Xianxian.
- March 25, 1988 – Br. Joche Boniface died in Shanghai.
- March 26, 1921 – Br. Daniel Antonin died in Beijing.
- March 26, 1955 – Br. Louis Emilian died in St. Genis-Laval.
- March 27, 2020 – Br. Maurice Chang Fu Yang died in Hong Kong.
- March 28, 1960 – Br. Felix Prosper died in Malaysia.



Let us pray...

- *For the blessings of those affected by pandemic that may God continue to provide their needs.*
- *For end of war between Russia and Ukraine and for the people affected by the conflict.*
- *For all the children and young ones around the world.*
- *For the sick parents, brothers and sisters.*
- *For more blessings from God.*
- *For all birthday celebrants and for their own personal intentions.*

Disciples of Marcellin...together in mission, in the Church and in the world, among the young, especially the most neglected...in schools and in other pastoral and social ministries.

In the Footsteps of St Marcellin Champagnat

