

# CONCLUDING MY TIME IN ROME

While in Labrea, Amazonas, in July 2017, for a meeting of the Brothers of the Amazon Region, I was informed by the then Provincial, Brother Ignacio Etges, of the arrival of a letter of invitation from the then General Superior, Emili Turu. At the time, I did not know what to think or how to respond. In the following days, talking to a friend, I heard the following sentence: "The offer you are receiving has your face on it. Go, but when you get to Rome, don't forget to burn the boats". After a few days of discernment, I said yes to the invitation to be Director of the CMI Secretariat: Collaboration for Mission, International.

On January 30, 2018, I arrived at the General House in Rome. I could still see the smoke of burning ships in the distance. It was a moment of being welcomed home to a new continent. Little by little, I realized my new mission horizon and the challenges ahead. Today, after six and a half years serving the Institute in the General Administration, I would like to highlight the road I have travelled. And I do so by highlighting two significant experiences: life in an International and Intercultural Community and the mission life as a secondary agent in the mission of God and the accomplice of the Spirit.

## 1. An International and Intercultural Community

A central element of the time spent at the General House was living in an international and intercultural community, valuing the richness of the diversity of personalities and cultures (cf. RV 82). Here we learn every day in the encounter with the other, we grow with the differences, and we broaden our horizon of vision. I realize that the "community is the closest place where we live and grow in the universal love to which we are committed" (C 20). Of course, this requires daily openness and dedication.

I believe that the first mission we have is to be and to form community. From the experience of community life, we go on mis-

sion. In this sense, we are called to make visible the family spirit by cultivating openness and availability, both in community and in mission (cf. RV 55).

Another aspect that I value highly is the openness of the Community for Brothers, lay people, families, and other visitors. The General House is the mother house, open and welcoming. Many people from all over the world passed through here for meetings, formation programs, visits, tourism....

I would also like to highlight the lessons learned and experiences during the pandemic. COVID 19 came slowly and stealthily, without asking permission, it uncovered itself. I remember three different lessons: Healthy occupancy of time during the initial period of the pandemic since it was impossible to leave the house. As a Community, we cultivated family spirit and manual labour. Undoubtedly, this time helped to strengthen and consolidate the community spirit.

Cultivation of creative silence during the 72 days of quarantine at different times.

Creativity in the mission through the use of digital tools and the writing of basic documents for the mission. In my opinion, there was a visible leap in the quality of community life from the pre-pandemic to the post-pandemic period.

In short, having a community as a "safe haven" for comfort, personal growth, cultivation of spirituality and friendship are fundamental elements that I value highly. Thanks to the wonderful community partners I have had over the years.

## 2. Secondary agent in God's mission and accomplice of the Spirit

As I was saying above, at the end of January 2018 I arrived in Rome to work in the CMI Secretariat (Collabo-



ration for Mission, International) with the General Administration of the General House. Initially, I was privileged to go through a period of English language improvement in Ireland and to be able to have some transition time with the then Director, Brother Chris Wills, from whom I learned a lot and I am very grateful.

Once this time passed, it was time to “roll up our sleeves” knowing that “...we are sharers and partners in the accomplishment of God’s mission” (C.13) and that in order to offer a service to God’s mission, we only have to put on our aprons... (cf. RV 70).

On the occasion of the elaboration of the Strategic Plan of the General Administration in 2018, the CMI is transformed from a Secretariat into a Department with a transversal dimension, integrating the Areas of the Marist Life - Secretariats of Brothers Today and of the Laities, and the Area of Mission - Secretariats of Education and Evangelization, Solidarity and FMSI. As an objective, CMI promotes a better understanding and appreciation of internationality and intercultural life, living globalization in an alternative way and cultivating global availability for Marist life and mission. To this end, it accompanies and coordinates the Marist Volunteering, the International Communities for a New Beginning: Lavalla200>, the Fratelli Project, the Solidarity Initiative for South Sudan, among others. All of them are new Projects and Initiatives in the Institute and invite us to look beyond. The key word is the Inter dimension: intercongregational, international, intercultural, intergenerational, interreligious.

Here are some of these initiatives.

## 2.1. Marist Volunteering

Coordinating Marist Volunteering both delights and challenges at the same time. Let me explain:

It’s delightful to see so many people giving their time and talents as volunteers in the most different ways to build solidarity, transforming and helping to transform lives. It’s delightful to see how Marist Communities and other organizations open their doors to welcome volunteers and, together, make a journey of growth and building. It’s delightful to see the support of the Provinces and the commitment of the Coordinators of Provincial Volunteering (CPVs). Through volunteering, we are happy to develop fraternity through community experience, a spirituality that springs from the heart and from a solidarity service in a perspective of rights and empowerment of the volunteers and the beneficiaries of the mission.



It challenges us to be aware of so many emerging realities that are crying out for a Marist presence, the lack of resources and greater investment in people or the lack of formation for solidarity, it challenges communities that are often aging or are not open to receive volunteers. However, we have many open doors and many possibilities for growth to strengthen Marist volunteering, which calls for a strong and decisive choice in the field of solidarity.

I am very happy to go back to my Province, leaving the Marist Volunteering Network created and consolidated. It is a space for joining efforts in the field of volunteering (interprovincial and intraprovincial), sharing good practices, improving processes, and unifying languages and methodologies, both for sending and receiving volunteers. I am also pleased with the launch of the Volunteering Brand (logo), the update of the CPV mission guide, the volunteer guide, and the new volunteering management system: NEXUS.



## 2.2. Fratelli Project

Fratelli is an inter-congregational initiative that was born from the desire to live a common faith and a common commitment to fraternity, sharing life and mission, between the Marist and Lasallian Brothers. It allowed us (and allows us) to overcome self-referentiality and to live the Culture of Encounter which is

so desired by Pope Francis. In fact, Fratelli is more than an initiative. It is an experience of fraternity where, in a community formed by Brothers and Volunteers, dreams of life and mission are shared. As a member of the Fratelli Council, I can say today, and I am convinced of it, that Fratelli is a gift from God to discover together his will in this historical moment we are living. It makes us leave the comfort of our personal and institutional "own land" and launches us to walk together with the migrants who go beyond the borders of their "own land" in search of a more just, more dignified, and more human life. I am referring here to the migrants from Iraq, Syria



and Palestine living in Lebanon and to the Venezuelan and Colombian migrants who came back from Venezuela to settle in Maicao, Colombia.

Fratelli made me realize that, just as Marcellin Champagnat and John Baptist de La Salle creatively fought for their dreams of building a more fraternal world, today we are invited to build and live shared dreams and to be instruments of God in the construction of a more just and humane world. To do this, we must move, in collaboration, from a map of a fragmented Church and society to a map of "Fratelli Tutti", committing ourselves to get to know each other, to develop a culture of dialogue, of mutual collaboration and to build open, inclusive, and committed communities.

### 2.3. International Communities for a new beginning, Lavalla200>

As we know, these communities are an initiative of the Institute, assumed by the Regions. They promote global availability, interculturality, a significant and evangelizing presence among



children and young people in vulnerable situations, an emphasis on the spirituality of the heart and the construction of a Church with a Marian face. Brothers and lay people, following different vocational paths, share and discern services, decisions, and leadership in community, in co-responsibility. For this, we go beyond geographical or provincial boundaries, valuing diversity, interdependence, integrated in the social context, inserted in the local Church, and we are sent to a mission that promotes the culture of encounter.

Since I arrived in Rome, I have been collaborating progressively with the Coordination of the Lavalla200> Communities. This, like other initiatives, is still in its early stages and we are constantly learning from it. Today, in a total of five communities (Syracuse - Italy, Mount Druitt - Australia, Lilongwe - Malawi, Holguin - Cuba, Tabatinga - Brazil) I am convinced that it is possible for Brothers and Laities to share life and mission and that these communities, new for the Institute and the Church, play a prophetic role within the Institute and for the society. Undoubtedly, for this to happen, it is necessary to select the members, provide them with a specific formation and accompany them throughout the process.



Living internationally and interculturality is not always easy. They present themselves as a challenge. In response, since the inception of this initiative, the General Administration has offered the International and Intercultural Communities Formation Program each year. I had the pleasure of collaborating in 4 programs (2018 to 2021) and coordinating 3 of them (2022 to 2024). How meaningful the process of discernment and growth was for the participants. I was always moved to see that, at the end of the programs, Brothers and Lay people presented themselves with an attitude of Global availability, ready to be sent to different places and initiatives of the Institute. This is prophetic. That means being a global family.

## 2.4. Solidarity with South Sudan

In response to the bishops of South Sudan, the Union of General Superiors has been collaborating on an inter-congregational basis since 2018 in South Sudan, the newest country in the African continent, in the creation of more sustainable agriculture, the training of teachers and health agents, and pastoral initiatives.

As a Marist Institute, we are present in this inter-congregational Project. From the beginning, we have had Brothers who share life and mission in this territory. It's challenging, and this Project challenges us, by the need for more human resources (Brothers and Laities) to respond to the needs of these people. And the need to consolidate the peace processes in the country is always on the horizon.



## 2.5. Support for the Marist District of Asia

In collaboration with the Link Councillors and the Superior of the Marist District of Asia, we assist in the selection, formation and accompaniment of Brothers, Laities and Volunteers sent to the District.



It is pleasing to see how the District is gradually moving towards growth and autonomy. The emergence of new local vocations and the way the Brothers are taking

on mission areas and animating communities is commendable. However, we still need Brothers, Lay Missionaries and Volunteers to support them and make the journey together with the District at this moment in history.

## 2.6. Publication of Competences and Skills for Interculturality and Global Availability

I had the joy of participating as Coordinator of this publication in response to the "Strategic Plan of the General Administration of Animation, Leadership and Governance (2017-2025)". It covers training in Global Availability and Servant Leadership in the context of intercultural societies, where the development of social skills for collaborative work is required.

I can affirm that this document, as a collective construction, is not finished. It can and should be adapted to different realities and contexts. Let us hope that we continue to prepare ourselves and acquire the necessary competencies for intercultural living and Global Availability, so necessary and relevant today.



## Concluding and Starting over

At the end of my staying in the General Administration, I just want to say thank you:

To the General Superior, Brother Ernesto, and his Council for the confidence placed in me. I return to the Province with the certainty of having fulfilled my mission.

To my fellow Community Life members, a place to be a family.

To the Brothers and Lay people who work in the General House, for the exchanges, the socialization and the collaborative and synergetic construction of the Institute's mission of animation.

To the various Commissions and Teams in which I had the opportunity to participate. I would especially like to mention the International Commission on Marist Mission and the Commission for the Revision of the Marist Educational Mission Document, among others.

To the Marist Volunteering Network and its Management Council for the beautiful road built, made of collaboration and synergistic work for the good progress of the Marist Volunteering.

To the Marist Province of Amazonia Sur, which allowed me to fulfil my mission in the General Administration at the service of the Institute.

To all those who, in one way or another, were part of my life and contributed to my staying in Rome at the service of the Institute.

From now on, a new journey begins in the southern province of Amazonia. It is good to come back and reconnect with my people and my culture. I know that I return to Brazil different from when I left: I take with me the baggage of six and a half years of international and intercultural life, I take with me the experience of building bridges and connections in the Marist world. I wish a fruitful mission to Brothers Diego Zawadzky and Ángel Medina, who will continue the work already started by carrying out a fruitful mission. Some seeds have been sown, some trees are bearing fruit. It only remains to take care of them. And let us not forget that life is dynamic: other seeds are ready to be sown.