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LEADERS AT THE SERVICE OF THE GLOBAL MARIST FAMILY

LOOKING BEYOND...

SPECIAL GENERAL CONFERENCE 2022



From March 8 to 25 the X General Conference took place in Rome, a consultative assembly that brought together the General Government and the Superiors of the Administrative Units with a double objective: to consolidate unity within the Institute and to study matters of general interest and propose solutions (Constitutions 119.1).

During the three-week meeting at the General House, the participants focused on the following topics:

- Re-reading and evaluation of the Calls of the XXII General Chapter in the current context.
- Review of the 5 areas proposed by the General Chapter (Principles and Suggestions) and sharing on some ongoing institutional projects.
- Reflection on leadership at the service of the Global Marist Family, in new and challenging times.
- Reflection on the current reality of the Institute, the journey as Administrative Units, Regions, Global Family and looking towards the future.
- Child protection: current situation, the Marist experience and responses, ways of action.
- Evaluation of the animation and accompaniment by the General Administration.

The General Conference is traditionally a meeting held between two General Chapters, composed of the Superior General, the Vicar General, the General Councilors, the Provincials, and the District Superiors (Constitutions 119.1). Initially the General Conference organized by the current General Government was scheduled for September 2021 but, given the health crisis, the General Council preferred to postpone the meeting until March 2022.

The General Government, elected in 2017, chose to hold other meetings with the superiors of the AUs, in addition to the General Conference indicated by the Constitutions and Statutes of the Institute. In March 2019 the first meeting was held, which had as its theme: Called to live out prophetic and servant leadership: co-responsibly and interdependently. In the same period of the following year the second one was held, with the theme: Leadership that cares for life.

LOOKING BEYOND …
LEADERS AT THE SERVICE OF OUR GLOBAL MARIST FAMILY

MESSAGE OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL AT THE OPENING OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE



Dear Brother Provincials and District Leaders.

It is a pleasure and a grace to be able to meet in person. We did so with many of you two and three years ago, around the same time of year.

Thank you for your efforts in organising your travel, obtaining visas, arranging your schedule and carrying out the necessary protocols to be able to come to Italy. A good number of you have only recently started your service in leadership, many of you have already been on the journey for much longer, and others will soon begin... We are here to exchange, to learn from each other... This Conference provides an opportunity to create greater synergy between the General Administration and the Administrative Units. To feel that we are all in the same boat, in servant and prophetic leadership. If we take a first look at these past two years, with the Covid-19 pandemic, I am sure that all of us have experienced highs and lows, intense moments of pain (especially at the loss of our brothers - more than 40 - lay and family members) and we have also experienced times of uncertainty...

Each one of us has been on a journey in which we have learned a lot, and we have been sustained by hope, seeking to experience God's presence in the midst of all that we are living through. We have tried to be proactive and responsive both in our communities and ministries. There have been many concrete expressions of solidarity in response to the humanitarian emergency (including the Institute's fund for this). There have been creative responses in the field of education. You have provided accompaniment for the Brothers, in person and online, according to the possibilities. I am very grateful for all these efforts by brothers and lay people in these difficult times. We gather here, a little more than halfway between the two General Chapters - four and a half years - at the General Conference.

In 2019, we met the then Provincials and District Superiors under the slogan "Called to live a prophetic and servant leadership", in co-responsibility and interdependence, and in 2020, we were able to meet under the slogan " Leadership that cares for life". Two more meetings are planned before the 22nd General Chapter. We thought that, on this occasion, the slogan "Looking beyond... leaders at the service of our global Marist family", could be a motive for encouragement and launching anew, starting from the context that we have been living through during these past two years and that is ongoing...

On June 6th last year, in my message "With Marcellin, take a long view..." I recalled how our Founder, a practical man of action, in times that were not easy, was able to have a far-reaching vision, a vision that came from a heart that sought to be continually filled with the presence of God, of his

Spirit, with eyes that observed a set of circumstances and challenges resulting from a revolution, being able to respond in a bold and practical way. His energy, his passion, and his love for Mary attracted a good number of our first Marists to join his project. And this ability to "look beyond/ take the long view" led him to take bold and even surprising steps such as leaving his parish house to go and live with the Brothers, encouraging their vocation within a very clerical context, starting to build without first having all the financial means, and initiating new teaching methods, etc. Here we are in the year 2022, two hundred years after Marcellin and the first brothers experienced a time of vocational crisis and resurgence. Mary's constant and close presence gave Marcellin the energy and drive to not look back, but always forward, with a confident and hopeful perspective....

This was the context when Champagnat envisaged the construction of a sizeable structure that could accommodate a large number of brothers. What was it in Marcellin's heart that led him to think big? I think that fundamentally it was the deep conviction that it was not his personal project, but that of God and Mary.

Today we find ourselves as leaders facing new challenges: a world that seems to be increasingly connected and, yet, a world that also seems to be looking for ways to disconnect, to create walls and separation...

Just look at how in recent days this new war has broken out in Ukraine; there are new poverties, new situations of marginalisation... how many children have come into the world and who have only seen adults wearing masks... how many others have lost their parents, their grandparents, without even being able to say goodbye; how many families and even communities have been torn apart, with raw wounds and persistent fears; a greater individualism is on the rise, in the search for self-protection and self-defence...; how many people have been left without work, due to businesses or companies that have closed down or have made staffing cutbacks. I am grateful for the ways you have coped and are coping with such situations, in times that are far from easy.

As for the Institute, there is progress and growth in some parts of the world while elsewhere we continue to diminish and fragility is more evident. In some Regions, important steps are being taken, but in others we are perhaps slower to make a move.

Various authors have spoken of the fact that we are living in a change of epoch. Perhaps we find this difficult to understand because we find ourselves caught up in this movement? This is the context in which we want to be filled with the spirit of Marcellin and try to "look beyond" as leaders seeking to strengthen the global Marist family, in line with the invitation of the XXII General Chapter. On last 2nd February, the Day of Consecrated Life, Pope Francis said in an extraordinary homily: What do our eyes see? Simeon, moved by the Spirit, sees and recognizes Christ. And he prays, saying: "My eyes have seen your salvation" (v. 30). This is the great miracle of faith: it opens eyes, transforms gazes, changes perspectives.

As we know from Jesus' many encounters in the Gospel, faith is born of the compassionate gaze with which God looks upon us, softening the hardness of our hearts, healing our wounds and giving us new eyes to look at ourselves and at our world. New ways to see ourselves, others and all the situations that we experience, even those that are most painful. This gaze is not naïve but sapiential. A naïve gaze flees reality and refuses to see problems.

A sapiential gaze, however, can "look within" and "see beyond". It is a gaze that does not stop at appearances, but can enter into the very cracks of our weaknesses and failures, in order to discern God's presence even there (Homily of his Holiness Pope Francis – 2 February 2022).

Based on the legacy left to us by our Founder and encouraged by the repeated messages of hope offered to us by Pope Francis, I invite you to try to engage in our "looking beyond" at this Conference:

- **A sensitive gaze**. A gaze that discovers the needs of our brothers, our communities and the Province itself. A gaze capable of perceiving the needs of suffering, marginalisation and poverty around us, because we do not remain closed in on ourselves or our own egos... a sensitive and compassionate gaze, which seeks to understand without judging and to welcome with mercy, and is capable of leading to action.

- **A prophetic gaze**. Invited, as leaders, to "look beyond", from the vantagepoint of the Spirit, who seeks to read the signs of the times and to propose audacious and even radical responses. To live the gift of brotherhood with prophecy. To be prophetic signs walking side by side, brothers and lay people, valuing both vocations. We know that being a prophetic voice does not always lead to popularity or applause, but what moves us is our desire to be the voice of God for our times. How many times have ideas



or projects been initiated which at first seemed to have very little appeal or support, but which afterwards bore fruit and gained appreciation, even if not always by all? A gaze that also allows us to be self-critical of what we have not done well and where we have not been brave enough in our response.

• **A gaze that is global,** that takes in the whole. We are certainly here to support each other and to give each other space for reflection and formation, to better exercise our service of leadership in each of our Administrative Units. But above all we are here to "look" together at our Global Marist Family. The Chapter has been insistent that we "journey together as a global family", and I believe that we are taking steps in that direction.

At the same time, we want to give ourselves some space for reflection and dialogue to look together at the present and the future of our beloved global Marist family, the Institute as a whole.

May we be able to transcend our borders, seeking to offer support to one another, knowing that in such a movement there is always something to be gained and something to be sacrificed. We know that there are weak and fragile areas in the Institute, marginalised and poor areas... So, a gaze that feels for them as part of us, not just as faraway places, the domain of other Provincials; a gaze that invites us to greater sharing across the board.

• **A hopeful gaze**. In these days we would like to reread the calls, principles and suggestions offered to us by the XXII General Chapter and seek ways to update them and also to discover what other new things God is asking of us in our days. My invitation is that our vision for the future be based on hope. As leaders, we are invited to be prophets of hope. Hope that is born of faith, commitment and coherence, based on a deep spirituality. I think that we will succeed if we have that inner engine that encourages us and pushes us to move forward. Hence in the process of these days there will be moments of silence and spaces for reflection and dialogue, where we can try to listen to the voice of the Spirit and discern, doing this personally and in groups.

Our gathering is occurring in the context of a synodal process... It is helpful to feel part of this movement and to be an assembly that places a high value on participation, one that seeks, above all, to listen to the Spirit, as Pope Francis indicated at the synod's launch on 9th October As an Institute of Brothers, we have had many experiences of "synodality" in Chapters and Assemblies, so we can make an important contribution to the Church.

At the same time, it is important to realise that we still have some way to go. And this is a moment in time when the Church is inviting us to engage with one another in this way. Let us remember the experience of the XXII General Chapter, especially the contemplative dialogue and process of discernment that we undertook.

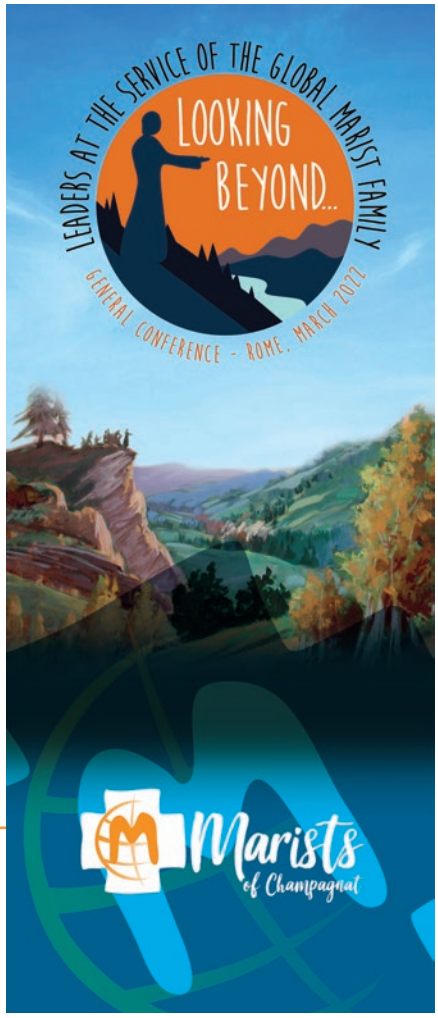
As a final thought for now, it might help us to call to mind Mary's way of looking at things... She was able to meditate and ponder in her heart and respond with a steady and comprehensive yes, without seeking to understand everything or all the time...

FIRST WEEK OF GENERAL CONFERENCE

The meetings of the first days of the Conference were marked by the reading and evaluation of the General Chapter's calls and the beginning of the work inherent to the 5 areas identified by the capitulants where the calls of the Chapter have concrete implications in Marist life: our vocation as Brothers; our mission; brother-laity relations as Marist of Champagnat; the government and the use of goods. This rereading will be the common denominator that will guide the entire Conference.

In relation to the activities of the first week, we can highlight:

- March 8 : reception of the participants, especially the superiors elected after the General Chapter (Br. Luis Carlos, Vicar General)
- March 9 : analysis of the current context, rereading and dialogue on the calls of the XII General Chapter (Brothers Ken, Josep Maria and Luis Carlos); Introduction to the 5 areas of interest proposed by the Chapter (H. Sylvain).
- March 10 : area "in our style of government" (Brothers Óscar and Sylvain); leaders in new and challenging times (Brothers Luis Carlos, Ken and Ben); Launch of the book "Marist Voices".
- March 11 : area "as Marists of Champagnat" (brothers Sylvain and João Carlos, together with the Secretariat of the Laity, Raúl Amaya); area "in our vocation as Brothers" (Brothers Óscar and João Carlos); formation, Formation Guide and young brothers (with the Brothers Today Secretariat: Ángel Medina and Lindley).



"I WANT TO GO BEYOND LA VALLA"

Br. Máximo Blanco Morán – Europe Region

The image of Marcellin climbing to the top of the mountain and looking at where to put the mother house of the Marist congregation accompanied and helped me throughout the Conference. Before arriving there and pointing out to the brothers "it will be there, next to the Gier", he had to do a search for places and had to say: "I want to go beyond La Valla". Several times I have asked myself if Marcellin had stopped before the construction of the Hermitage, if he had stopped without doing anything… In that case, perhaps the life that the Marist charism has given to the world and to the Church would not have flourished. In my heart I thanked him for his audacity and determination, his desire to "complicate" his life. I have visualized myself, faced with my decisions and I have been encouraged to go further.

I have felt during the days of the General Conference that we, as Marist of Champagnat, have to be more a global family and walk in communion as a Marist region and, at the same time, take care of the local, our own Province and each place where we are. I feel that life is played out at the local level, in the enthusiasm of each brother and lay marist person. Being Marist helps people to have a fuller and happier life. Each enthusiastic person will be a spotlight that radiates light, each community and house a home of light.

I leave the General Conference with a sensitive view of many aspects of Marist life and mission that have been presented to me and that we have discussed, and at the same time with a prophetic look at being significant in our places. I recognize the richness that we are and that we have, and I believe we should offer it to the world: fraternity, Marian sensitivity, knowing how to be with children and young people, Marist spirituality, simplicity. There is so much value in being Marist, opening our doors so that other people can come and know us, that we can go out and proclaiming it to everybody.

I feel that my service as a leader is challenging, but I am excited to make the journey with others and I know that, listening to the good people around me, I will do better.

Let's see together where we will put the energy and strength we have. I believe that dreams that are built together are better.


GENERAL CONFERENCE – ROME, MARCH 2022
Australia
Pacific
África Austral
Madagascar
Central-East Africa
Nigeria
Afrique de l'Ouest
Santa María de los Andes
Cruz del Sur
Brasil Centro-Sul
Brasil Centro-Norte
Brasil Sul-Amazônia
South Asia
Est Asia
Asia
Norandina
América Central
México Occidental
México Central
United States
Canada
Mediterránea
L'Hermitage
Compostela
Ibérica
Europe Centre-Ouest
Maristes of Champagnat
AUSTRALIA
INDONESIA
CHINA
RUSSIA
BRAZIL
CANADA
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
ALGERIA
GREENLAND (DENMARK)

PARTICIPANTS OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE 2022

REGION AFRICA

Cyprian Gandeebo (West Africa), Michel Maminiaina Razafimandimby (Madagascar), Norbert Mwila (Southern Africa), Venceslas Baindekely (Afrique Centre-Est), Vincent Abadom (Nigeria)

REGION AMÉRICA SUR

Benê de Oliveira (Brasil Centro-Sul), Deivis Alexandre Fischer (Brasil Sul-Amazônia), José de Assis Elias de Brito (Brasil Centro-Norte), Pablo González (Santa María de los Andes), Raúl Shönfeld (Cruz del Sur)

REGION ARCO NORTE

Daniel O'Riordan (United States), Gaston Robert (Canada), Hipólito Pérez (América Central), Luis Enrique Rodríguez (México Occidental), Luis Felipe González (México Central), Orlando Escobar (Norandina)

REGION ASIA

Ador Santiago (East Asia), Allan de Castro (East Asia)*, Canísio Willrich (Asia), Mervyn Perera (South Asia), Nicholas Fernando (South Asia)*

REGION EUROPE

Abel Muñoz (Ibérica), Aureliano Manzanal (Mediterránea), Gabriel Villa-Real (L'Hermitage)*, Máximo Blanco (Compostela), Pere Ferré (L'Hermitage), Robert Thunus (West Central Europe)

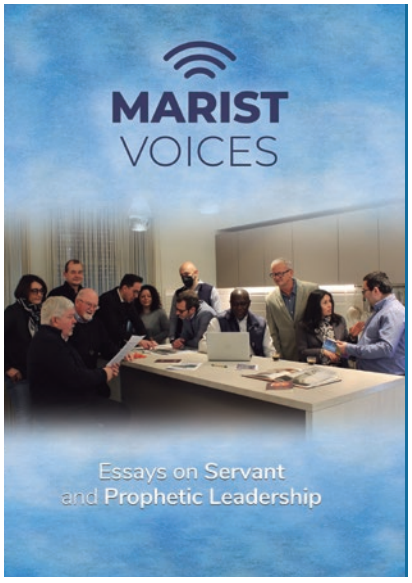
REGION OCEANIA

John Hazelman (Pacific)**, Peter Carroll (Australia), Peter Horide (Pacific)**

GENERAL COUNCIL

Ernesto Sánchez, Luis Carlos Gutiérres, Sylvain, Ben Consigli, João Carlos do Prado, Josep Maria Sotera, Óscar Matín, Ken McDonal, Jorge Gaio and Luis Daniel

* Elected Provincials who have not yet assumed office are
** Br John Hazelman, Pacific District Superior, is unable to attend and is following the meeting online. Brother Peter Horide is representing him in Rome.



LAUNCH OF THE BOOK "MARIST VOICES: ESSAYS ON SERVANT AND PROPHETIC LEADERSHIP"

On March 10, the book Marist Voices: Essays on Servant and Prophetic Leadership was published. The launch took place during the General Conference, which was on the theme of "Looking beyond… Leaders at the service of the Global Marist Family". The book talks specifically about the Marist leadership and seeks to reflect on the request of the last General Chapter that underlined that "For a new beginning, we believe in governance that favours prophetic servant leadership and closely accompanies Marist life and mission."

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MY EXPERIENCE OF THE FIRST WEEK OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE

Br. Vincent Uchenna Abadom – Region Africa

The gathering started on Monday evening 7th March with Holy Mass. The Mass was powerful and beautifully animated. The same can be said of the prayers throughout the week which demonstrated the deep reverence for all of life held by the General House community that welcomed us warmly with an open arms. There were feelings of joy and happiness meeting ourselves once more as the leaders of the institute. I felt belonged and connected with all the Administrative Units of the institute. There was no barrier, not even geographical differences nor was language able to be obstacle to the level of relationship I experienced during the week. The new appointed provincials were able to adapt so fast as if they have been part of the group. I mean, we formed a real global family and lived it out during the week.

The General Conference is almost a replica of the last General Chapter in Rio Negro. We found ourselves reliving the experience of the General Chapter. The two important questions we asked ourselves during the Chapter was posed once again as we continue to evaluate the calls of the Chapter: "Who is God calling us to be and what is God calling us to do". We started exploring these questions by trying to understand the current trends we are living which was not there or foresaw during the General Chapter but really have a lot of impact on the children and young people and the whole world. For instance, Coronavirus pandemic, Racism, the rise of political popularism and political polarisation, the angry internet (fake news), increase in technology, the ecological crisis, conflict in the world 2022 etc. it is quite good to understand the context we are working in because it is in these context that we meet children and young people. So we needed to ground ourselves in these context.

The program was carefully designed to give enough room for personal prayers, reflections and relaxation. For me I did not see the week as a conference rather a period of retreat. This is largely because there was always time to be on myself and listen to both my body and heart. All the presentations by the Superior General and the Councillors were touching and inspiring. There was this dynamics used was superb and supportive. We were divided into small table members in the conference hall where we most often share our experiences and thoughts both which gives room for everybody to have the opportunity of participating actively. It was very comfortable and engaging, being curious about the reality in other provinces and how they are dealing with a particular issue. This is to say that we were seriously engaged in a thoughtful conversation. Besides, we were shared in another small group known as fraternity. This will run throughout the conference. The main aim of the fraternity is to help us build a real community just as the General Chapter called us to be "Bridge builders". It offered us the opportunity to have closer relationship with one another as we created time to listen and share with each other.

In conclusion, throughout the Week, I felt so inspired, renewed and excited. It was an opportunity to deepen my knowledge on the calls of the General Chapter as well as Marist prophetic leadership styles and skills. I am so grateful to have been a part of this group, grateful to the Superior General and his Councillors, grateful to the various secretariats and the entire General House community that made the environment to be welcoming, supportive and more intimate.



"WE HAVE SAT AROUND THE TABLES TO DIALOGUE, SHARE, ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER, LISTEN, AND DISCERN"



Br. Hipólito Pérez – Arco Norte Region

We have met again as brothers, it has been a very deep, significant, and emotional moment. We have sat around the tables to dialogue, share, encourage each other, listen, and discern.

The General Conference invites us to "**look beyond**", almost 200 years later, in the same way that Marcellin Champagnat and the first community of brothers contemplated from the mountains the valley bathed by the Gier, and they intuited the living space where they would build L'Hermitage. Br. Ernesto Sánchez, S.G. in his opening words he challenged us to live this event developing **a sensitive, prophetic, global, integrating, and hopeful look**. That is, to intuit and generate, in tune with the breath of the Spirit and in response to our world, **the best possible future for Marist life and mission at this moment in our history**.
This American legend expresses in a symbolic way what we yearn for as Marist leaders, looking beyond…

It is about an Indian tribe camped since time immemorial at the foot of a great mountain. His chief, seriously ill, calling his three sons, tells them: «Go up to the holy mountain. Whoever brings me the most beautiful gift will succeed me as chief». One of the sons brought him a rare and beautiful flower. The other handed him a beautiful multicolored stone. The third tells the father: "I don't bring anything. From the top of the mountain, I could see wonderful meadows and a crystal-clear lake on the other side. I was so impressed that I couldn't bring anything; but I am obsessed with this new designation for our tribe." And the old chief replied: "You will be the chief because you have brought me as a gift the vision of a better future for our tribe."

The itinerary of these days has flowed with great authenticity, fraternity and passion. We have addressed the following contents: retaking the calls of the XXII General Chapter, reviewing our style of government and deepening the areas of the Marist laity and our vocation as brothers.
With a time for synthesis, silence and retreat, from the incitement of "**hands to be brothers**": *what is touching my heart, my vocation as a brother and at the service of the Province, the care of myself…*, we have concluded this first week of road.

SECOND WEEK OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE



The participants continued to reflect on the areas of the XXII General Chapter that concretely involve Marist life and mission. The first two days of the week dealt with two areas: “our mission” on Monday and “the use of goods” on Tuesday. On Monday, the Conference was attended by the secretariats of Education and Evangelization (Brothers Carlos Alberto Rojas and Mark Omede) and Solidarity (Brothers Ángel Diego and Francis Lukong). They reflected on the principles and suggestions of the Chapter, and discussed projects such as the Champagnat Global Network and the “Laudato Si’” project. Information was also given on other projects of the two secretariats and FMSI, through its director, Andrea Rossi, presented some of the services that the Foundation offers. That same day, in the afternoon, Brother Juan Miguel Anaya presented canonical themes that are sometimes dealt with in the Administrative Units. Tuesday’s work, reflecting on the use of goods, was coordinated by the General Economat’s Office, with Brothers Jorge Gaio, Econome General, and Gregorio Linacero, Assistant Econome General.

On Wednesday, work began on the theme of the Global Family. The dialogue began by mentioning the progress that has been made as an Institute on the journey as a Global Family. On this day Brothers Ben and Josep Maria, General Councilors presented the Institute’s statistical numbers, thinking about the future of Marist life and mission and how to generate more regional support. The dialogue continued on Thursday, reflecting on the future of the Administrative Units. That afternoon the legal entities, created at the beginning of the year, at the service of the Global Family were presented.

The last work of the week was dedicated to the presentation of 5 projects in which the journey of the Institute as Global Family is evident: Lavalla200>, International Volunteering, Marist District of Asia (Ad Gentes), Solidarity with South Sudan and the Fratelli Project. Brother Valdícer Fachi, CMI director, presented the theme, along with Brothers Luis Carlos Gutiérrez and Óscar Martín. Brother Goyo Linacero presented the results of the evaluation of the Ad Gentes Project, today the Marist District of Asia. The Provincials and District Superiors offered their contributions and suggestions for the topics presented.

It was clear that the global family comprises all that is lived in the Institute, but the international and intercultural projects make it more evident that we are moving forward as a global body, which is being built through concrete projects.

FIRST HALF OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE

Br. Allan J. de Castro – Region of Asia

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, 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.



GENERAL CONFERENCE WEEK 3






Br. Peter Carroll – Region of Oceania

Like the first two weeks there was rich variety in the topics and dynamics of the third and final week of the 2022 General Conference.

We started by exploring the crucial issue of child abuse and protection. Every region has had, and is still having challenges in this area. The abuse of children has caused incredible pain in the lives of too many people, and we face difficulties in responding compassionately and justly to them. The path is never clear and needs careful and sensitive consideration. The hours we spent on this topic were designed to help us in this. Australian MSC priest, Father Tim Brennan, led us in reflecting on our responses and giving us some advice based on his own extensive work with victim-survivors. The time in discussion was most helpful.

Our chief task over the following two days was to shape our deliberations into some conclusions. Luis Carlos and Ernesto asked us to discern what we, as an Institute, are being called to in the next three years. Through personal reflection, group discussion and plenary dialogue we formulated our 'Intuitions'. These are in keeping with the calls of the 22nd Chapter, and if anything, are focussed on taking those calls further, or "going beyond".

In summary the Conference concluded that we should:

- Continue to take concrete steps to build the global Marist family
- Promote re-configuration of Administrative Units for the vitality, viability and sustainability of the Institute
- Challenge ourselves more deeply with regard to Marist identity and vocations, both Brothers' and Lay Women and Men
- Work in solidarity to share our resources in support of our mission
- Enhance genuine co-responsibility between Brothers and Lay people.
- Identify emerging needs in mission, especially with young people at the margins and young adults
- Articulate further our understanding of Marist Spirituality and deepen its expression in our lives.

In the months ahead these ideas will be further developed by the General Council, and in due course be made available to the Marists of Champagnat.

Focus on Regional Level

The last stage of the Conference was to focus our attention on the Regional Level. In this last week time was given so that the representatives of each of the 6 Regions could meet. This was an opportunity to continue normal dialogue and planning, but also to start applying some of the intuitions to Regional collaboration and initiatives. Some regions will continue meeting after the Conference.

The final week also featured some special events.

- A visit and Mass celebrated by Father John Larson SM, Superior General of the Marist Fathers
- The Birthdays of Brothers Abel (Provincial of Ibérica) and Luis Carlos (Vicar General)
- An overview of the Pope's Global Compact on Education and the formal signing of it by all Members of the Conference
- Celebration of the Feast of the Annunciation with the Conference's closing Eucharist and celebratory lunch.

On a sombre note, on Thursday 24th the funeral of Brothers Marino Primiceri was held at the General House. Br Marino, a member of the Europe Central West Province, was visiting Rome when he died suddenly of heart failure. Italian born, it was decided that he would be buried with his family in his home village. Brother Robert Thunus, Provincial, gave a moving eulogy and travelled to the south of Italy to attend his burial.



Meeting with Pope Francis

By contrast, in the morning of the 24th the members of the Conference travelled to the Vatican for a private audience with Pope Francis. It was an extraordinary and memorable occasion for us all. The Pope was welcoming and down-to earth. He spoke to us together, then met each Brother personally and gave each a rosary. His address took up the Conference theme "Looking Beyond" and he offered warm encouragement in our life and mission. He asked us to make sure we help young people themselves to look beyond – the materialism, self-interest, isolation and limits of the age. He also asked us to 'pray for him – as his work can be difficult'.

Our General Conference has ended. All are grateful for the experience, and pray that it will help us continue to serve our Marist Family with energy and shared vision. We are most grateful to Br Patrick McNamara, the staff and community of the General House for the warmth of their hospitality, and to Brothers Ernesto, Luis-Carlos and the General Council and Administration for their creativity, hard work and careful planning that produced an engaging and beneficial 2022 General Conference.

MEETING WITH POPE FRANCIS LOOKING BEYOND AND TEACHING OTHERS TO LOOK BEYOND



Br. Óscar Martín, General Councilor

There could be no better conclusion to a General Conference, which took as its motto "going beyond", than a meeting with Pope Francis, always prophetic and always inviting us to be a Church of vision, a synodal Church, going forth.

Brother Superior General, the members of the General Council and all the Provincials and District Leaders had the privilege of being received in private audience by the Pope on 24th March 2022. As a happy coincidence, it was the feast day of the prophetic St. Oscar Romero. And it was the eve of the feast of the Annunciation, the closing day of our General Conference. For all these reasons, the call to be committed and courageous educators, and the Marian face of the Church, has become more eloquent and challenging than ever.

At 11 o'clock in the morning, we were waiting in the audience hall of the Apostolic Palace in a mood of expectation and affection. The Pope, punctual and fatherly as ever, came into the midst of our General Conference to reinforce our communion with the Church and our commitment to the charism of Saint Marcellin, which is a gift for the whole Church.

Brother Ernesto greeted the Pope on behalf of everyone, offering him our filial obedience and asking for his blessing for all Marists: brothers, laypeople, students, families… The Pope then addressed a word of hope to us, with great warmth and depth. He spoke to us about "the horizon of God", inviting us to "be border-crossers, not so much in a geographical sense, but in terms of our mentality", and to be "stewards of Creation" through education.

After the audience, we took two historic and significant photos: firstly, all the Marist Leaders with the Pope; then, all the members of the General Conference in front of the statue of Saint Marcellin outside Saint Peter's Basilica, directly in front of the papal residence.

Besides the emotion and symbolism of these two images, we now have in hand a number of challenges emanating from both this conference and the meeting with His Holiness: to build the global Marist family with fresh boldness; to renew our commitment to education in order to "look beyond and teach others to look beyond"; to become an Institute committed to "the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor"; and to commit ourselves to brotherhood, solidarity and service to children and young people in need, together, all of us, as the Marists of Champagnat.

In the Pope's words, this invitation combines fidelity and openness: "There is no contradiction between fidelity to one's own roots and universal openness. On the contrary, according to the model of Christ the Lord, it is precisely by remaining faithful until the end to the covenant of love with the people entrusted to us that our service becomes fruitful for all, by the power of God's grace".

Now is the time to "look beyond", like Champagnat, and to re-forge our Marist life and mission. And for that, we need brothers and lay people at the service of the global Marist Family who, with the courage of Pope Francis and the faith of Mary, dare to be truly prophetic and servant leaders. In the words of the Pope. "What a vocation, what a mission, Brothers: to cooperate with Christ and the Spirit as you accompany young people on this adventure!"

THANKS TO THE HOLY FATHER

Br. Ernesto Sánchez Barba, Superior General

Dear Holy Father, Pope Francis:

May I begin by thanking you from the bottom of my heart for the opportunity to meet with you today at this Audience. Thank you very much for your kind welcome.

The General Council is present here together with all the Provincials and District Leaders of our Marist Institute. During the General Conference we have taken time to dialogue and discern about our present and future, seeking to listen to the voice of the Spirit in order to respond to the reality of our times.

Saint Marcellin Champagnat, whose statue you no doubt frequently see outside St. Peter's Basilica, just in front of your house of Santa Marta, founded us as a Congregation of Religious Brothers, at the service of the education and evangelisation of children and young people, with special attention to those most in need.

Champagnat gave us the name of Mary, "Marists", to inspire us in our spiritual life, in our fraternal life and in our mission. Today we would like to offer you as a present, an image of "Our Good Mother", as Saint Marcellin called her, a replica of the statue he kept on his desk and which he often contemplated with love. It is an image that shows the tenderness of Mary, lovingly embracing Jesus, and that shows the total trust of the child in his mother's arms. For us Marists, it is a continuing invitation to be a Marian face in the Church and in the world.

Holy Father, we want to thank you for your witness of personal warmth to the Church and to the world, as well as for your prophetic voice encouraging us to be God's tender and merciful presence in the midst of a world in a state of continuous turbulence. Our educational mission among young people and those most in need is of fundamental value in these times. We carry it out in communion with you and with the whole Church, and very much in harmony with the principles of the Global Education Pact (I will give you a parchment with the signatures of all of us as a sign of our commitment) and of the synodal process that you are promoting. We are also aware of our fragility and vulnerability and of the need to act together, as Church, with other religious congregations and educational institutions. We are looking for ways to provide better accompaniment and formation for the many lay men and women committed to our Marist charism.

We come before you, in all simplicity, to ask your blessing for all the Brothers as well as the lay people involved in the life and mission of the Institute, and for all the young people in our educational and social works in 78 countries, and their families.

Thank you, Holy Father, for your personal witness, which I saw at firsthand when I participated in the Synod on Youth and the Meeting on the Protection of Minors. I have always been struck by your servant and prophetic leadership, like that of Jesus. We pray in communion with you. Thank you very much.



AUDIENCE OF THE HOLY FATHER, POPE FRANCIS, TO THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE MARIST BROTHERS



Dear brothers, good morning and welcome.

I thank the Superior General for his words and I greet all of you who are taking part in the General Conference of your Institute, a very important event that brings you together every eight years, between two General Chapters.

It is therefore a significant moment of reflection, of reading the signs of the times, and also of checking how the journey is going and how you are following through on the directions set by your last Chapter. Not to look backwards but always forward! Like those at the helm of a boat: they do not look at the wake behind them to see if they are on the right course, but look ahead, keeping an eye on two or three points of reference to orient themselves. I imagine that you too have checked your course using a few fixed points. The first such fixed point is the Word of God. We are in Lent, and Mother Church calls us to return things to their right order: God and God's Word come first. This is easy to say, but hard to do! Especially when the Word asks us to "look further ahead", to "look beyond", as the title of your Conference says. Beyond what? Beyond a worldly mentality, beyond short-term interests, beyond a partial perspective, in order to take in the horizon of universal brotherhood. Always beyond...

It seems to me that this is precisely the perspective you have chosen for your work over these days, for the sake of giving the best possible service to your family - that of the Marist Brothers - which is multicultural and multi-ethnic, and which therefore is asking you to cross boundaries, not so much geographical, but in terms of mentality. This does not mean detaching yourselves from your roots, absolutely not! There is no contradiction between fidelity to one's roots and universal openness, it is continuity, it is normal growth. On the contrary, according to the example of Christ the Lord, it is precisely by remaining faithful till the end to the commitment of love we have with the people entrusted to us that our service becomes fruitful for all, through the power of God's grace. It is for this fruitfulness that we look ahead with a strong sense of purpose.

For Marist Brothers, this means remaining faithful to the service of educating and evangelizing young people, according to the charism of Saint Marcellin Champagnat. He knew how to "look beyond", and to teach young people to "look beyond", to open themselves to God, to the horizons of Gospel love. He was guided by the example of the Virgin Mary, our "Good Mother", as he used to say: Mary was an insignificant woman from a remote





village, but her heart looked beyond; she looked forward to the Kingdom of God, she was open. And this shines through in the *Magnificat*, where God's plan of salvation resounds through the voice of this humble servant. What could be more beautiful and more effective than the *Magnificat* for educating a girl or boy to be open to God and God's plan of love? The Magnificat contains a vision of life and history; it is a school of faith and prayer, which frees people from being closed in on themselves and from any spiritualising. It shows the joy of believing, hoping and loving inspired by the Gospel of Christ.

All this, dear brothers, is your birthright, it is the essence of your roots and your heritage. It demands that you always combine it with a consciousness of the changing reality of the world and of the characteristics of today's generation. For example, young people are showing sensitivity and an interest in ecology. Here there is a great field for education, because unfortunately a worldly mentality - allow me the pun - also pollutes ecology, cheapens it, makes it ideological and superficial. Instead, God's horizon is that of an integral ecology, which always holds the environmental and social dimensions together, the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor. Children and young people are ready to become stewards of creation, but they need to learn that this is not just some slogan, it is not just about criticism. Rather, it is a way of life; it requires patience, strength of character, temperance, and justice. In short, no-one is born a steward of creation, but becomes one through formation in such values.

This is also your birthright. And the example I have just given regarding ecology can be applied to other fields, such as social and political commitment, the field of communication, or even more basically that of study and work, viewed from the perspective of integral human development. But above all, as religious, spiritual education, the basis for integral growth, is what you are good at. Spiritual education flows from who you are as religious. Jesus Christ is the Master of life and truth, the way to follow to become fully human, and the Holy Spirit is the interior Master who forms Christ in us. What a vocation, what a mission, brothers, to cooperate with Christ and the Spirit as you accompany young people on this adventure! It really asks too much of us, poor sinners that we are. But God, as our Mother reminds us, loves to do great things with the little ones and the poor, as long as they humbly welcome God into their lives and accept God's Word, ready for whatever may be asked of them. This is what I wish for you and for all your brothers and sisters throughout the world. To look beyond so as to educate others to look beyond, with Mary, in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus. Make no mistake, this is a powerful critique of the Enlightenment concept of education that emphasises rational ideas, ideas, ideas... No. Educating others to look beyond and teaching them how to look beyond runs counter to the whole fixed, "enlightened", ideological concept of education. Education, rather, encompasses the whole person: head, heart and hands. And this means 'looking beyond'.

On life's journey and in your service may the Holy Spirit always guide and comfort you. And may my blessing accompany you too. Please, do not forget to pray for me as well, because my work is not easy!

EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED... WE ARE GLOBAL FAMILY

Br. Pablo González Franco – Region of América Sur

The second week of the General Conference was marked by one of the strong calls of the General Chapter: to walk as a global family.

Today's world presents us with a turbulent time and space, with great challenges and deep crises that test the generosity and creativity of our responses. We feel that we are in the same boat, that we must look at each other, listen to each other and walk in the same direction.

Whether we are aware of it or not, everything is connected; whether we accept it or not, everybody is connected. Ours is the "inter" (interprovincial, international, intergenerational, intercongregational…). If everything is connected, a powerful metaphor of our connection will be the network that we weave among all of us. But for this it is necessary to maintain a lively and enthusiastic vision and a spirit of teamwork (collaborative and cooperative).

By reviewing the statistics on the number of Brothers and lay we get mixed feelings. The numbers are hard, but they urge us not to fall into flat, superficial and discouraging readings of the reality in which we live, but to look beyond and see the world "as God sees it": to maintain the illusion in the vocation, to always introduce the qualitative (quality of our response to the Lord and to the world), to privilege development (and not only growth) and to renew the ardor in arousing and caring for vocations.

We want to listen, understand, propose and move forward, for ours is not the rest but the way ("the way is always better than the inn"). The last three calls of the General Chapter use the verbs build, walk and respond.

The memory of our Brothers' causes invites us not only to look towards the holiness of those who preceded us (François, Basilio, Lycarion…) but to walk towards it, transforming ourselves into persons open to the action of God, and responding (even with the offer of our life) according to our time and context.

We want to rethink ourselves, to think of ourselves in a different way: to see where we are going and what we are going to pay attention to, how we are going to promote life… In this sense, the Brothers who preceded us are not so much models to be copied but a source of inspiration, always current, for our journey today as a global family.









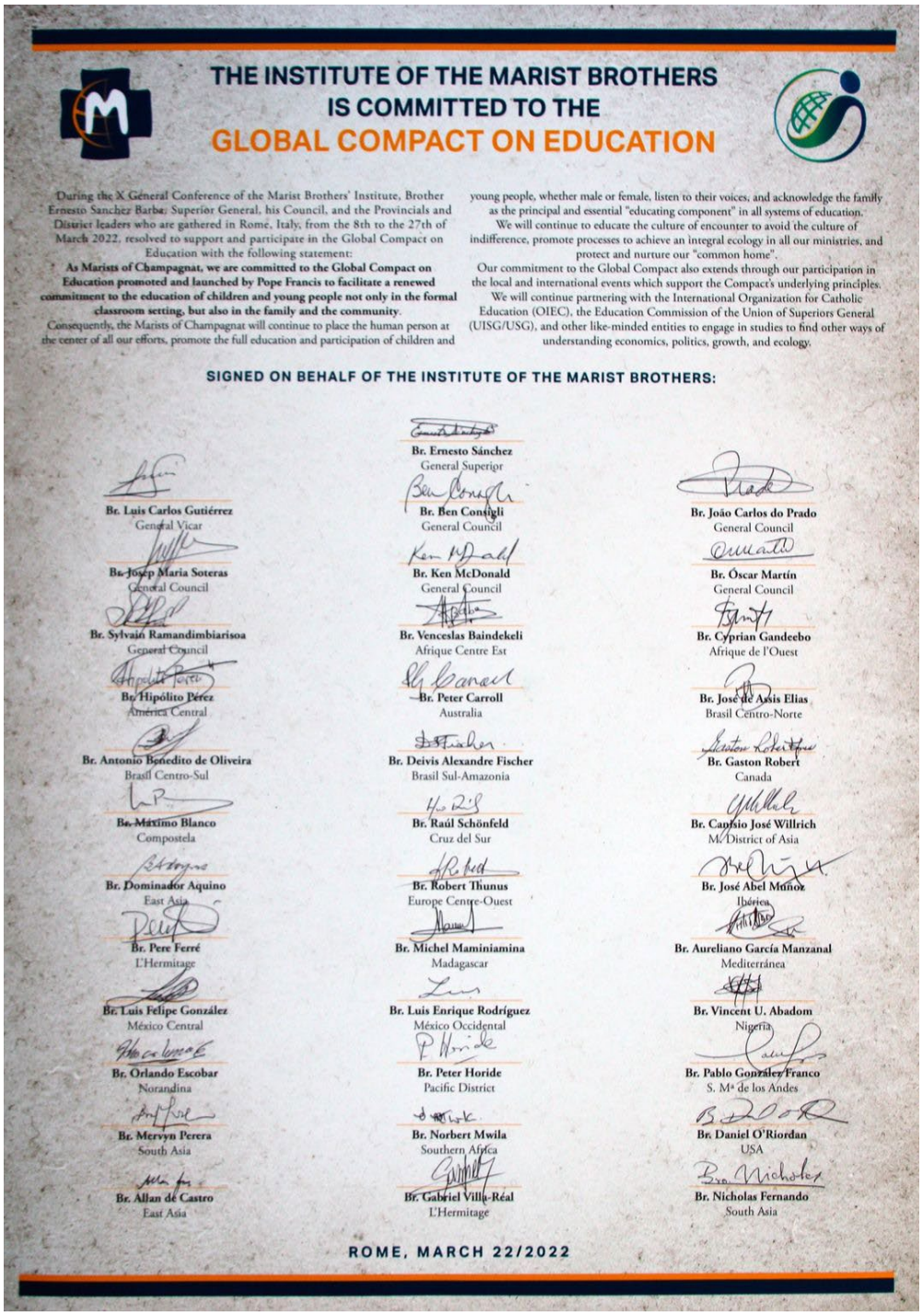


PARTICIPANTS OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE SIGN A COMMITMENT TO THE GLOBAL COMPACT EDUCATION

During the X General Conference of the Marist Brothers' Institute, Brother Ernesto Sanchez Barba, Superior General, his Council, and the Provincials and District leaders who are gathered in Rome, Italy, from the 8th to the 27th of March 2022, resolved to support and participate in the Global Compact on Education with the following statement:

As Marists of Champagnat, we are committed to the Global Compact on Education promoted and launched by Pope Francis to facilitate a renewed commitment to the education of children and young people not only in the formal classroom setting, but also in the family and the community.

Consequently, the Marists of Champagnat will continue to place the human person at the center of all our efforts, promote the full education and participation of children and young people, whether male or female, listen to their voices, and acknowledge the family as the principal and essential "educating component" in all systems of education.



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IS COMMITTED TO THE
GLOBAL COMPACT ON EDUCATION

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We will continue to educate the culture of encounter to avoid the culture of indifference, promote processes to achieve an integral ecology in all our ministries, and protect and nurture our "common home".

Our commitment to the Global Compact also extends through our participation in the local and international events which support the Compact's underlying principles. We will continue partnering with the International Organization for Catholic Education (OIEC), the Education Commission of the Union of Superiors General (UISG/USG), and other like-minded entities to engage in studies to find other ways of understanding economics, politics, growth, and ecology.

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Signed on behalf of the Institute of the Marist Brothers:

SIGNED ON BEHALF OF THE INSTITUTE OF THE MARIST BROTHERS:

Br. Ernesto Sánchez, General Superior
Br. Luis Carlos Gutiérrez, General Vicar
Br. Ben Consoli, General Council
Br. João Carlos do Prado, General Council
Br. Josep Maria Soteras, General Council
Br. Ken McDonald, General Council
Br. Óscar Martín, General Council
Br. Sylvain Ramandimbiarisoa, General Council
Br. Venceslas Baindekeli, Afrique Centre Est
Br. Cyprian Gandeebo, Afrique de l'Ouest
Br. Hipólito Pérez, América Central
Br. Peter Carroll, Australia
Br. José de Assis Elias, Brasil Centro-Norte
Br. Antonio Benedito de Oliveira, Brasil Centro-Sul
Br. Deivis Alexandre Fischer, Brasil Sul-Amazonia
Br. Gaston Robert, Canada
Br. Máximo Blanco, Compostela
Br. Raúl Schönfeld, Cruz del Sur
Br. Canisio José Willrich, M. District of Asia
Br. Dominador Aquino, East Asia
Br. Robert Thunus, Europe Centre-Ouest
Br. José Abel Muñoz, Ibérica
Br. Pere Ferré, L'Hermitage
Br. Michel Maminiamina, Madagascar
Br. Aureliano García Manzanal, Mediterránea
Br. Luis Felipe González, México Central
Br. Luis Enrique Rodríguez, México Occidental
Br. Vincent U. Abadom, Nigeria
Br. Orlando Escobar, Norandina
Br. Peter Horide, Pacific District
Br. Pablo González Franco, S. Mª de los Andes
Br. Mervyn Perera, South Asia
Br. Norbert Mwila, Southern Africa
Br. Daniel O'Riordan, USA
Br. Allan de Castro, East Asia
Br. Gabriel Villa-Real, L'Hermitage
Br. Nicholas Fernando, South Asia

ROME, MARCH 22/2022

DECLARATION OF SOLIDARITY OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE TO THE VICTIMS OF THE CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

The General Council and the Provincials and District Leaders of the Institute of the Marist Brothers, representing all the Marist Provinces and Districts, gathered in Rome at the Tenth General Conference (8-25 March) 2022, are deeply saddened and concerned over the war in Ukraine.

We wish to express our solidarity with all the victims of this conflict, particularly the families, children and the elderly, who are suffering the terrible consequences of this armed violence. We join Pope Francis' call for an end to this inhumane and sacrilegious war.

We invite all Marists of Champagnat to accompany, wherever possible, the refugees of this conflict, making explicit our call "to walk in the caravans of life". Let us commit ourselves so that people's lives and well-being are above any other type of interests or ideologies that generate division and violence.

As educators and evangelizers, we reaffirm our commitment to peace. Amid our responsibilities, we promote the culture of encounter and reconciliation, which promotes the resolution of conflicts based on respect among nations and between peoples. That is why we also condemn all the other silent wars that exist in our world today.

We raise our prayers for peace and for the cessation of this war. On this day, March 25, the Solemnity of the Incarnation of the Son of God and of the Annunciation, we implore Mary for her intercession to move consciences and hearts and to bring about the end of all hostilities.

Brother Ernesto Sánchez, Superior General,
and General Council
Provincials and District Leaders



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