

General Chapter 1967

Our General Chapter of 1967 had left us with an entirely different vision as to the manner of living as religious and to separate what was to remain sacred and think of what was to be adopted. The new Vatican II report had stirred the waters but left some unclear decisions. Much was left up to the Director to decide after consultation with the Brothers. Some of the directives of Vatican II went too far and some did not go far enough. The result was often enough troubled water, which made the ride bad and many individuals more disturbed. It then became an excuse for some individuals to follow their own personal preferences. They were soon pulling away from established practices and allowing more leeway for personal opinions rather than the traditional ways.

A good number of our Brothers left the congregation at this time to get married and continued as employees in our schools, which continued without very much disturbance. Some of these were faithful alumni and followed the modern Marist spirit rather than traditional ways. We seemed to move away from our sacred traditions of community first, and each one became his own individual type of Marist. Some took jobs away from the community, living their own version of the Vatican II Marist life. There was more freedom, and if someone did not like the community life, he would get other employment and begin a new way of life. We now have many kinds of new apostolates of small communities, with more individual preferences tolerated and allowed.

A good number of Marists at the college left to get married and continued as professors, so that the college itself did not suffer from this new situation. We still have a great number of Brothers who are working on personal projects, and some live alone. We get to see them mostly at the annual jubilee celebration of the profession of years of service. This is not at all a problem unique to the U.S.A., for there are similar situations all over the globe. In some ways it allows for flexibility. Our entrances into the Novitiate are only a couple each year, but they are already more mature, have been affiliated with the teaching of the Marist Brothers in some of our communities, and know what they are undertaking. Thus, there are a few new teaching Brothers each year, but there are usually more than that of the aged who pass away each year. We do hesitate to accept new apostolates due to the lack of teaching Brothers.

Most of these problems are the same worldwide. That was one of the reasons why the General Chapter of 1967 had two sessions to help solve as many of these problems as possible. This is a need of the Church of today, and is not a question of laissez-allez situation but a real problem that has to be faced now. The Holy Spirit is operating in our meetings, and we rely on Him to help to bring us back to our original spirit as much as possible as we also face the actual problems of the Church today. It stands to reason that the visitations of the Provinces in 1967/68 had to be flexible and at the same time be guided by the norms of Vatican II.

I remember the Holy Father, Pope John, who told me before one of the visitations that he would be so pleased if he could come along with me. He actually told me that when I visit the Chinese to please give them his blessing. As I reminded him that I was only a Brother and not a priest, he laughed and said, "I know what you are, but you are also my brother, and you can tell them that I have given you my permission to bless them for me!"

It was also Pope John XXIII who told me that when he was a delegate of the Holy See, he had next to his bed the life of Marcellin Champagnat. He read a chapter each night trying to serve the people of God in the way Marcellin did. Now in the late 1970s I am making a tour of my Assistancy to help them to adapt and at the same time to keep our Good Mother and our Founder, who will one day soon be declared a Saint in Heaven, in their hearts. We, too, must have the courage to serve the Lord and the people He places under our care not so much for the glory of me, mine and I, but rather for the we, and the our. We can only accomplish if we let the Lord operate within us.

All in all these changes were healthy, even if there was a drop in the family spirit. Perhaps we were too wrapped up in ourselves. We must be an example that others wish to follow, not for ourselves, but for the Lord and for the souls confided to us. We must be family. Vocations are down for all religious congregations. We are not to stop or slow down, but as Mother Teresa said, "Try harder and be an example that they will follow." Then it will be a real Brotherhood. We are all only a link of the chain that holds everything together. We are the piece of glass of the stained glass window, but our light is important; a candle in the dark; one instrument of the

orchestra; the violet in the bouquet; a little brother of Mary; a drop in the sea. But we can do all things in Him who strengthens us. We must first be little, if we plan to be great! A human working for God!

And as I will return to this after the next General Chapter, I will try to summarize what elements of my work in the field are continuing on, what progress was attempted, and what good is still being done in each of the countries and communities that the Lord had assigned to me eighteen years ago. It will be my last report, and it is the Good Lord who will do the rating of what our dear Brothers are now doing for Him. No matter where we go or where we are sent, when we get there, we will always find that the Lord has been there first, and that He will always be there to help us if we ask Him. We also can do all things in Him who strengthens us. The Founder of the Marist Brothers recommended to us that we should always live and work in the Presence of God. We are assured that we will always succeed and do our best if we are aware that we are doing it for the Lord. With purity of intention we offer up what we are doing to the Lord. If we live in God's presence, how could we ever go wrong? The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord!