



Year XIII - Number 660 | 13 JANUARY 2021

# MARIST NEWS

MARISTS OF CHAMPAGNAT | GENERAL HOUSE | ROME | WWW.CHAMPAGNAT.ORG

## PROVINCIAL CHAPTER OF MADAGASCAR

The Provincial Chapter of Madagascar took place from 04 to 07 January 2021 at the Centre Spirituel Ste Thérèse de L'Enfant Jésus, Antananarivo. Bro Maminiaina Michel Razafimandimby began a second 3-year term as Provincial at this Chapter. The Chapter community consisted of 26 members, 6 of whom were lay people.

The meeting lasted 4 days during which the capitulants exchanged and reflected on the following themes: mission, community life, formation and centralised management of finances. It was also an opportunity to review and make amendments to the norms of the Province.

At the beginning of the Chapter, Brothers Ken and Óscar, the Liaison Councillors for Madagascar sent a message of encouragement and support to the capitulants by means of a virtual meeting. And on the last day, Brother Ernesto, Superior General, joined them. In his speech, he invited the participants to become "beacons of hope in this turbulent world" and to "build centres of light". The three members of the General Council all



stressed the importance of turning the resolutions taken during this meeting into action.

The new provincial animation team elected is made up of Brothers Camille Marie Ramarosandratana (Vice Provincial), Toussaint Randriamanantena, Jean Albert Thomas Randrianantena and Maurice Juvence Heriniaina.

A Mass of thanksgiving brought together all the participants marking the closure of the Provincial Chapter.

## general administration

■ On Monday, the Link General Councillors of the Asia and Oceania regions (Ben, Josep Maria and Sylvain) met with the Superior General to discuss issues arising in initial formation in the two regions in these times of pandemic.

■ On the same day, Br. Libardo Garzón, General Bursar, and Brothers Ben and Goyo, participated in the meeting of the Finance Council.

■ On Tuesday a Regular Council was held

■ On Tuesday, Brother Luis Carlos, Vicar General and Broth-

ers Ken and Ben, Councillors, met to plan the next meeting of the Marist International Mission Commission.

■ We recall some recently deceased Brothers who helped build the global Marist family through their service at the General House: Yvon Bédard, Canada (Econome General, 1993-2003); Fernando Hinojal Citores, Méditerranée (Jesus Magister, 1988 - 1994); Javier Ocaranza Sainz, México Occidental (General House Administrator, 2008-2014) and Roque Ari Salet, Brasil Sul-Amazônia (Community Superior, 2002-2005).

## PROVINCE OF THE HERMITAGE

# THE MARISTS OF CATALONIA ARE GRATEFUL FOR THE COURAGE OF THE VICTIMS OF ABUSE

In January 2020, the Marist Brothers of Catalonia, Province of the Hermitage, signed an agreement with the association “Mans Petites” to create a commission to assess prescribed cases of abuse in Marist schools. The Commission for the Reception of Victims of Sexual Abuse of Prescribed Cases, financed by the Marists, has analysed 25 cases and announced its conclusions on the 10th December in Barcelona (see details in the video).

Motivated by the conviction affirmed at the last General Chapter that “abuse is the very antithesis of our Marist values, and undermines the very purpose of our Institute”, the Brothers are grateful for the courage of the victims for having spoken to the members of the Commission and for having expressed in words what they have experienced. The Marists consider that it is a process focused on reparation and that is why it is essential to give credibility to the victims’ word, and to recognise them in their dignity. Responding to victims of prescribed sexual abuse is a moral duty.

Once the conclusions have been published, Brothers Pere Ferré, Provincial, and Gabriel Villa-Real, Provincial Delegate for the Protection of Children, have published the note that we transcribe below.

## The courage of the word in the service of truth

The conclusions of the Commission on the response to the victims of sexual abuse of prescribed cases are already public. The will of the Marist Brothers and the “Mans Petites” Association established this Commission. We now want to explain to you the context and we want to present you our reflection.

## An independent commission: listening and acknowledgement

The Commission was established on the 30th of January 2020 and it is the result of an agreement between the Marist Brothers and the “Mans Petites” Association in order to assist all the persons who have not been able to go to court because the abuse that they denounced had been prescribed. The aim of the Commission has been to evaluate the plausibility of the denounced facts, evaluate the psychological damage and its consequences for these people, collect all the information they may present, and if applicable, establish financial repair for the damages.

The members of the Commission had been independent professionals with recognized standing, experts in the care of victims of sexual abuse of children and youth: Mr. Xavier Puigdollers, lawyer; Mrs. Dolors Petitbó, psychologist, and Mrs. Montserrat Bravo, psychologist.

The Commission has received 25 people. These interviews have taken place during March, July, and September of 2020. The work of the Commission has not been a legal process, with no process or trial; therefore, there have not been convictions or absolutions. The aim of the Commission has been to acknowledge the victims and listen to them.

## The legal prescription is not equivalent to forgetting or losing moral responsibility

Neither the Spanish judicial system nor the Spanish social

structures nor the Spanish Church has enough mechanisms to care for the victims of the prescribed cases or to provide global answers. And we believe that the legal prescription does not mean to forget or lose moral responsibility. It was necessary to create some room to listen to the people that cannot appeal to the justice because of the prescribed cases; and this is what we have done.

## The victims are the centre point

The victims are the priority, and the urgency has been to listen to them and acknowledge them. Taking the institutional responsibility supposes to take responsibility of our history (with its riches and poverty) in spite of our disapproval of certain ways of doing, of not doing or of not having known what to do. The existence of victims reminds us that we have failed as Institution. We can get the proper perspective when the look is directed at the victims of sexual abuse and they are placed in the focus of attention. A perspective that allows us to detect the suffering inflicted. If we have been the substantial part of the problem, we have to take on the task of being part of the solution after a transparent sincere acknowledgement.

## The courage of the word in the service of truth

The aim of the Commission has been to listen to the victims and give credibility to their word. It is a process focused on repair; therefore, it has been crucial to acknowledge the dignity of the victims. The Commission, as a neutral third party, has allowed that the victims may say their word and to be listened to. Professionals who have experience in cases of this typology have received the people who have decided to go to the Commission. We acknowledge the courage of the victims for putting words of their lived experience. We also acknowledge the pain and suffering caused to those people in the framework of the Marist Institution.



The Commission has established the resolutions in an individual way. Each of the 25 people received by the Commission has been given the Commission assessment and a personal letter from the Provincial of the Marist Brothers and the Provincial Delegate of the Protection of the Child. In this letter, we express the acknowledgement of the victims from the Marist Institution. In addition, we express our availability of meeting each of them if they want to do that.

### **Perspective of reparation**

Focusing the listening and the acknowledgement of the victims with a perspective of repair supposes to acknowledge the facts and that person as a victim; to acknowledge and take responsibilities that come from these facts; to acknowledge our failure as Institution; to ask forgiveness, and to set up all the necessary means to avoid the repetition of similar facts.

The Commission helps the financial repair to be a transparent process and it prevents that someone may think that it is an economic transaction aimed to close the issue behind the scenes as soon as possible.

After a process of listening, this individual repair allows to put in evidence each story taking into account each personal itinerary.

### **A change of institutional culture: which lessons we have learnt and what we are doing to avoid the repetition.**

We are immersed in a change of institutional culture long ago. In the Marist schools, we specifically work the rights of the child many years and every 20th November we celebrate as a net the anniversary of the Convention since 2009. In 2011, the Institute of the Marist Brothers calls up all the Marist provinces to have all the necessary tools to ensure the protection of the child and the youth. And, in 2013, the Marist

Province of L'Hermitage (which Catalonia belongs to) passes a policy and a protocol that you can find in the "Guía para la protección de los niños."

The policy and the protocols of protection and prevention have the aim, among others, to create sure surroundings. We know that you cannot get 100% of security in any place. In this framework, we work in a proactive way on the promotion, prevention and protection of the boys, girls, and the youngsters. The data from the last years shows that the work of prevention pays off. More and more we find boys, girls and youngsters that report situations of abuse, most of them in the family environment. From a rights perspective, we privilege the tools and resources needed to empower them.

From the last few years, at Marist schools and at Marist social works, we work pedagogical programs fitted to all ages in order to offer the children and the youth the knowledge and the appropriate awareness to be able to explain and denounce any abuse situation. The campaign "Break the silence" helps to awake this conscience. We offer specialized formation on child protection to all the educators in all the Marist educational works. We communicate our institutional policy of child protection in our web [www.maristes.cat](http://www.maristes.cat) and in various publications. In the same web, you can find a listening channel for explanations, suggestions, or questions. All the Marist educational works in Catalonia are in the process of getting a double certification on child protection with two international entities of recognized standings as UNICEF (recognition) and Keeping Children Safe (certification).

Br. Pere Ferré – Provincial of L'Hermitage  
Br. Gabriel Villa-Real – Provincial Delegate  
of the Protection of the Child  
Barcelona, 10th December 2020

MOZAMBIQUE

# FINAL PROFESSION OF BR. DIAS GEMUSSE



On 5 December, Brother Dias Gemusse, of the Southern Africa Province, made his profession as Marist Brother in Matola, Mozambique. At the same celebration, held at the college of the Franciscan Sisters Mother of the Divine Shepherd, five novices made their first profession in the Institute: James Masikiya, Cornelio Mulambiki, Eulalio Celestino, Thokozani Aubrick, and Evance Masangano. In the text which follows Brother Dias, who lives in the community of Nivava, Mozambique, tells of his vocational journey.

I first encountered the Marist Brothers on a pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Namaacha, Maputo, in 2007, thanks to a friend who introduced me to Brother António Armando Sanasana. I tried to interact with the Brothers and it was during this period that I met Brother António Pisco who played a vital part in my vocational discernment. During this initial phase I met other Brothers, among them Brother Felizardo Maceia who was my formator in the postulancy at Quelimane in 2008. Brother Evaristus Kasambwe who was my teacher in Malawi was also important. I remember very well, when I returned to Mozambique at the end of the Postulancy, when he told me: “it is worth dying as a Brother”. This phrase has encouraged me until today.

I did my novitiate in Matola from 2010 to 2011. I had the opportunity to have Brother Norbert Mwila, the present Provincial,

as my Novice Master. He was a great encouragement to my vocation through his wise words.

Finally, I received my religious and academic formation at MIC in Nairobi, Kenya from 2012 to 2016. In Kenya I met Brother Geraldo Medida, the present Provincial Councillor in Mozambique. His presence at MIC was encouraging.

After MIC I was sent to Angola, to the community of Ndalatando, and at present I am in the community of Nivava, Alto Molócuè, in Mozambique.

I made my perpetual profession as a Marist Brother because I have the desire to live only for Christ, confirming my baptismal promises.

marist world

KIRIBATI: 204 ANIVERSARY OF THE INSTITUTE

NEW ZEALAND: BROTHERS CELEBRATING JANUARY 2ND AT ONSLOW AVENUE, AUCKLAND

MADAGASCAR: NEW COUNCIL OF THE PROVINCE OF MADAGASCAR



10TH PROVINCIAL CHAPTER OF NIGERIA: 11TH - 16TH JANUARY

GUATEMALA: POSTULANCY OF CENTRAL AMERICA : CANDIDATES TO THE MARIST RELIGIOUS LIFE

PHILIPPINES: MAPAC COMMUNITY

CANADA  
“FAMILY DAY”

If there is one well-established tradition in Canada, it is that of the “Family day” organized, especially during Christmas and the New Year’s Eve celebrations. And when we say “Family day”, we mean “relatives” (parents, children and grandchildren) and often even cousins!... This year, we had to mourn them, because of the confinement, but they have multiplied thanks to Zoom and other digital platforms.

The Marist Family of Canada has not broken tradition! At the initiative of the AMDL (Marist Association of the Laity), brothers and laypeople met on Zoom for a meeting of more than three hours to “celebrate the Holiday Season” as we say here, in unity and fraternity, brothers and laypeople. The meeting was intended to be twofold: “Marist and those from Québec”.

Firstly, a reflection on the mystery of this time of the Nativity was offered to us by Monsignor Alain Faubert, Auxiliary Bishop of Montreal, always a Marist : former student of Laval College, instructor for several years at Camp Marist of Rawdon, a young volunteer for a year at the Marist mission of Haiti and spiritual animator of the Marist Family. Based on different accounts of childhood events



taken from the Gospels , he offered us a stimulating re-reading of the Gospel in the context in which we are currently living. Then, it was “time to celebrate” with news of different activities in Marist circles, presentation of voluntary work and the sharing of experiences, songs – despite the “doubtful quality” of the broadcast on Zoom and the cacophony of improvised choirs – and even magic tricks! All in an atmosphere of joy and fraternity.

All it took was a few sparks to light a fire that illuminated the dreariness of confinement and solitude. Thank you to the organisers: Jacques Boudrias, President of the AMDL, Claude Prigent, member of the Board and Mgr Alain Faubert, always available for the Marist Family.

COLOMBIA

# BR. JOSÉ MIGUEL CABALLERO HIERRO: 7 YEARS AS MASTER OF NOVICES IN MEDELLÍN

The novitiate in Colombia is a house of international formation, where young people from various provinces, especially from the Arco Norte Region, begin their journey in consecrated life; it is an expression of the Global Charismatic Family, putting into practice the call of the last General Chapter.

We asked Brother José Miguel Caballero Hierro, from the Province of Norandina, to tell us what it was like to live in this community for 7 years, as Master of Novices.

## MEMORIES OF THE JOURNEY

### Some of the experience of 7 years in the Interprovincial Novitiate La Valla in Medellin

It is good to look back at the landscape of the road travelled and, above all, to enjoy once again the encounter with so many faces, the passage through certain places and unforgettable experiences.

Today I would like to recall (to pass through my heart) this time at the Novitiate La Valla in Medellín, and to do so by looking at some unique experiences and faces.

Although I find my family roots and Marist origins in Spain, where I lived my initial formation until the novitiate, after my first profession in 1986 I began to be part of the Province of Venezuela. This was not the only land in which my life was planted and which I began to love as my own, since, after 17 years there, I moved to Colombia – already a Province of Norandina. After four years accompanying the scholastic brothers in Bogotá, I spent three years in the novitiate of Medellín, as administrator and sub-master of novices.

My journey in Medellín, to serve as Master of Novices, began in 2014 and ended this 8th December 2020, in both cases at the invitation of the Provincials of México Occidental, México Central, América Central and Norandina. The interprovincial novitiate project aims to open up to a greater number of provinces in our Arco Norte Region to make the journey together.

It is a real challenge because the novices come from diverse contexts and different styles of formation. These years have involved close dialogue with the postulancies, welcoming the diversity of opportunities that each place has and, at the same time, making a joint journey from certain common points of reference.

### Global charismatic family

Speaking of the global family, I have been able to see that, by situating ourselves from the heart of our being brothers, we can pass from multiculturalism, expressed in the cultures of those of whom we are part of the fraternity, to interculturality, in openness to others as a richness that is welcomed and enjoyed; diversity makes possible an incar-



nate face of our vocation as brothers for the varied mosaic of our nations. For this reason, it is more important than ever to strengthen communication, the knowledge of others, forgiveness and the appreciation of those who are different as part of myself.

Personally, I am convinced of internationality, because when it was not yet spoken in the language we have in the Institute today, I was able to live it in the first person, especially in my novitiate, which was interprovincial. To feel that we are brothers, called to be a compassionate presence in the wide range of places where we live, opened up for me a horizon of availability from the very beginning. But beyond this, I can say that the closeness to the stories of the novices that we accompanied during this time in Medellín and the day to day life of fraternal living together have also touched my life and made me ask myself what must die and be born in the vital stage in which I find myself as a religious brother.

### The challenges of initial formation

I believe that, in initial formation, today we need to listen to the new sensitivities of the present generations who are in formation, to make them participants in Marist life through decision making, to personalise formation, to accentuate an experience of fraternity as an ecosystem where the joy of meeting, faith, life and tenderness are shared, to stimulate us to be seekers of God in our own history, from the experience of the Father's love of mercy towards each one, to make us brothers of the smallest of our countries with new realities that cry out: migration, domestic violence, extreme poverty, child labour...

In the novitiate I discovered the need for a dual listening to the great intuitions of the Gospel and of our Marist origins, and, on the other hand, to the visions and perceptions of the novices, allowing them to transform the face of the brother into one that can dialogue more with the world of today and that lives an experience of faith that sustains life.

In this regard, I have much to thank the novices with whom I have shared life. The novitiate has changed a lot during these seven years, thanks in large part to them, their new perspectives and concerns.

Another thing that has evolved has been to consider formation as a team effort, a community effort, of the brothers who have accompanied the formation. For me it has been a motive for joy and support in the discernment to share these years with Brothers Rafael (from Norandina), Hugo Pablo and Quillo (from México Occidental), Juan Carlos and Alejandro (from América Central) and Enrique (from México Central).

Part of our mission has been to foresee the processes that were developing in the novitiate, involving the novices; but, above all, I emphasize the quiet and fraternal presence, the testimony of unity from our diversity as persons, sharing life

with the rest of the community from the simplest things. For us, something central has been the personal accompaniment and being close to what each novice might need, discerning, in some cases, itineraries appropriate to their moment.

We have already begun to experience that the Constitutions and the Rule of Life are becoming a very valuable reference in the task of initial formation; also the process, which is beginning, of revising the Formation Guide.

### Experiences that remain in the heart

From this time at La Valla Novitiate, I highlight five experiences that I carry in my heart:

- The openness and transparency of the novices to be accompanied and to welcome the challenges of growth that they were discovering. Their love for the charism and our vocation as religious brothers.
- The closeness of the provincial brothers of the Region, as well as of many brothers, from the provinces involved in the novitiate and others, who have supported us with their presence, animating retreats and workshops in our house, or welcoming the novices in theirs during the periods of regional apostolic experience.
- The opportunity to live, in 2017, in the forefront the General Chapter of Rionegro, which opened us as a community to the Institute, through the proximity and contact with the brother capitulants and the lay participants. The impact of the Chapter is reflected in the laity of Medellín and Colombia who lived it closely; also in the novitiate community which, every year, from the Community Project, has tried to energize its life from one of the Calls: to be a beacon of hope, face and hands of your tender mercy, builders of bridges
- The course in training which I was able to attend in Rome in 2018. In addition to a time of international fraternity, of renewal, and of promoting the work of formation, for me it was an authentic time of God that allowed me to re-launch my personal project of life.
- The joint journey that we have been making as Arco Norte Region in the initial and ongoing formation of the brothers.

### “In a spirit of availability”

It is incredible, but after seven years in the Novitiate, one gets used to it. Certainly, I have never been in a community for so long. Now I feel again that I must put myself back into “availability mode” because we are itinerant and the journey continues for me in other provincial horizons. With the certainty that the Lord and Mary are with us, I only ask them to allow me to arrive with “open eyes and bare feet”.

Br. José Miguel Caballero Hierro (Province of Norandina)  
December 2020

MEXICO

# BR. LUIS FELIPE APPOINTED PROVINCIAL OF MEXICO CENTRAL

Bro. Ernesto Sánchez, Superior General, with his Council, has appointed Br. Luis Felipe González Ruiz as the new Provincial of Central Mexico Central, for a preliminary period of three years. Br. Luis Felipe, from the Provincial Chapter, to be held in mid 2021, will replace Br. José Sánchez Bravo, Provincial for the last 6 years.

In his letter sent to the Province, Brother Ernesto thanked Brother Luis Felipe for his availability and the service of Brother José Sánchez. He also thanks all the Brothers and lay people of the Province “for continuing to keep alive Marcellin’s dream in Central Mexico”. And he made this appeal: “let us continue to build the global family together, as the XXII General Chapter has asked us to do”. Below, Br. Luis Felipe briefly describes his story.



I was born on 12 September ( the Holy Name of Mary, feast of the Marist family) in 1974, in Mexico City. I have the good fortune of having been born in a simple and hard-working family, in which my parents, Felipe and Maria Concepcion, educated us in life and in the faith. we were nine children, of whom I was the youngest of all. Seven of my brothers are married and one is a religious priest in the Order of Friars Minor.

I studied primary education at the Tabasco School, a Marist school, and from there I began the adventure of my vocation, entering the juniorate in 1986. I made my novitiate under the guidance of Brother Basilio Rueda. I took my first vows on 24 June 1995 and my perpetual vows on 19 April 2001.

I have spent the greater part of my Marist life in the houses of formation, having spent seven years in the Postulantship and nine more years in the Interprovincial Novitiate of Mexico, seven of them as Master of Novices. In addition, I spent a year in the Miravalles School, located on the outskirts of Mexico City, and a term in the mission of Guadalupe, in an indigenous area in the state of Chiapas, Mexico.

I had the good fortune to attend the course for formators in 2005 in Nairobi, and in the International Commission of

Brothers Today as well as in the Inter-American Subcommittee of Brothers Today, experiences that have left me with very enjoyable learning and excellent friendships.

For the last five years I have collaborated in the coordination of the structure of animation and government of the Mission of Central Mexico, from where I have been able to be close to all the apostolic works of the province, and to remember every day the mission of the Institute, to make Jesus Christ known and loved, from the point of view of education and mission, which, in the words of Pope Francis, “is always an act of hope that, from the present, looks to the future. I am also a member of the Provincial Council.

I also had the grace to participate in the XXII General Chapter held in Rionegro, Colombia in the year of the bicentenary of the foundation of the Institute.

I thank God for the abundant life that he bestows at all times, on the brothers and all the people with whom I have shared and who have helped me to be who I am. I ask Mary and Marcellin to continue to inspire my journey, to bring me the gifts necessary to carry out the service that is entrusted to me.



**ECUADOR**

The REMAR movement celebrated 40 years of its existence in the country in December. In the same month, the seventh national meeting of the CMMF was held. The members were accompanied by Br. Crescenciano Gonzalez, who took up the theme of “Homes of Light”.

**UMBRASIL**

The Marists of Brazil have launched an app with the Marist Religious Calendar, accessible to both Android and iOS devices, available on the respective platforms. This tool will constitute a spiritual resource for brothers, laypeople, communities, fraternities and Marist groups in general.

**MADAGASCAR**

Five young candidates for Marist life were officially received at the postulancy of Fianarantsoa recently. The candidates come from different regions of Madagascar. This year, the community of the postulancy has 14 members: 4 formators and 10 young people in formation: 5 are in the first year, 3 in the second year and 2 are waiting to go to the Novitiate.



ARCO NORTE REGION  
**YOUNG PEOPLE IN INITIAL FORMATION**



As part of the initiative “Get to know the young people of the Arco Norte Region” Brother Albert Rivera (United States), member of the Regional Committee, presented the directories of the postulants (12) and the novices (8), which together with the directory of the scholastics (24) make up a total of 44 young people who are discerning their Marist vocation as consecrated men, in the 3 stages of initial formation.

In the directories a photograph and a brief personal presentation are published, where each young person mentions who he is and where he comes from, how he came to know the Marist Brothers. And what inspired him to consider religious life?

In presenting the directories of postulants and novices, Brother Al Rivera said: “As Marists of Champagnat, we thank God and celebrate that there are young people responding to his call to be brothers. It is with great joy that I share this information so that all of us, as a global family, can support these young people, with our prayers”.

The Arco Norte region is made up of the provinces of Canada, the United States, Central Mexico, Western Mexico, Central America and Norandina.

**Download the directories:**  
 Scholastics: ([English](#) | [Español](#) | [Français](#))  
 Novices: ([English](#) | [Español](#) | [Français](#))  
 Applicants: ([English](#) | [Español](#) | [Français](#))

SOLIDARITY WITH SOUTH SUDAN

# BR. CHRISTIAN MBAM, 8 YEARS IN SOUTH SUDAN

Brother Christian Mban, from Nigeria, has been in South Sudan since January 2013. He finished his mission in the Inter-Congregational Project “Solidarity with South Sudan” on January 11. He spent the first year in the community of Malakak and 7 years in Riimenze. Here he shares with the Marist family his experience.



**What motivated you to join the project Solidarity with South Sudan?**

The need for presence in a country long locked in crises, where poverty and want were the hallmark the country motivated me to accept the mission when the Superior General, Emili Turú suggested that option to my Provincial. I was further encouraged by the fact that most people were unwilling to go to South Sudan because of general insecurity fallouts due to the crisis.

**Briefly describe some significant moments in your inter-congregational community life**

When I was moved from the teacher training community, in Malakal, in the northern part of this youngest country to an agriculture community of Riimenze in the South, I wondered what motivated the transfer. Was it that I was not needed or lagging in the requirements of the place or that the need in the other place was more? However, I accepted the transfer, trusting in the judgement and good will of the Solidarity administration. I only discovered the need once I settled in the new community.

Working within a system where insecurity was rife – many gun-carrying persons, and groups who were hostile to one another – roamed the villages and forests. These gun carriers looted the properties of the already deprived populations, raped women, abducted many school boys and girls, eventually forced whole villages to camp. Even it was threatening to drive to the nearby town, Yambio to buy food for the displaced people, as the gun people could stop and rob anyone known to be carrying money or other valuables at their own whims and caprices. The government was particularly unable to control the situation. In fact, at a certain point, the bishop ordered us briefly out, of the zone.

**What did it mean to you sharing your life and mission with community members from different cultures and congregations?**

I thank God, I had some preparation for intercultural living before joining these communities. I had worked in Ghana with Latin Americans, Europeans and other Africans from other cultures. I also worked in Liberia with Liberian brothers and Eu-

ropean. In one of the courses I had followed, participants lived in very close contacts with one another, men and women, from different congregations (even lay persons) from the five continents of the world. So I was already prepared, for any initial shock. However, the living now presented its own challenges. While my previous experiences were in formation community settings, here we are called to develop and shape new mission. As every human person is unique, you can never have same situations anywhere. In my seven years of life in Riimenze community, I have had to welcome a number of new members or say good bye to a number also. Each time we had to make adjustments, spatial or existential to accommodate everyone and give everyone the best living and working conditions. We had to be open enough to talk and listen to one another. We had to be faithful to our monthly community meetings and weekly sharing of faith. We also benefitted from the visits of Solidarity Community Coordinators and those of the Executive Director of Solidarity.

#### What key words best capture your experience?

I describe my experience as, fulfilling, exiting, challenging, pleasant, missionary and people-appreciative.

#### What is the most significant scenario in your time in South Sudan?

The most touching scenario came on the day when the parish organised a farewell for me. Youth had organised themselves in groups and performed to their arts. Even they had included fundraising as part of the activities of the function. Unexpectedly being led to come and show her appreciation was a woman whose age I would put at ninety years plus, bent twice, living far away in the forests. This woman had been home-bound for over five years. I could not believe what I saw. I had to be “manly” to resist breaking down out share emotion. That was the extent of the gratitude of the people for what we represented for them in the village of Riimenze, and elsewhere.

#### What has been your most important learning?

The “cross-fertilisation” that is a feature of Solidarity with South Sudan is a great enrichment of members and enhancement of the undertakings of the organisation. Each member brings what is unique to him or her of personal qualities, congregational charism, cultural heritage and spiritual values to life in community and to the apostolate. This is a factor in the success stories of Solidarity with South Sudan. Moreover, they give stability and credibility to the organisation. SSS enjoys much trust and respect with the local church. The inter-cultural, inter-congregational and internationality of SSS is a paradigm which Pope Francis recommends as a new face of the church in our time.

## RETREAT IN THE PROVINCES OF CENTRAL MEXICO AND WESTERN MEXICO



The Marists of México Occidental, based in Guadalajara, held a virtual retreat from 26 to 30 December. About 100 Brothers and about 20 lay people took part. During the retreat, encouraged by a number of Brothers, the main ideas of the Superior General's circular “Homes of Light” were developed. Br. Ernesto Sanchez was present through a message addressed to the participants (<https://youtu.be/l3M6hXNkn2c>).

The Marists of Central Mexico, based in Mexico City, made their retreat from the 2nd to the 5th January. The retreat began with the introduction of Br. José Sánchez, Provincial, and the Mass during which seven Brothers in temporary vows renewed their vows. The theme of the retreat was the Rule of Life, guided by Br. Aureliano Garcia, from the Province of Mediterránea, who participated in the Commission of writing the document. On the last day, the retired Brothers were celebrated.

#### How did the experience help you growing in your Marist vocation?

As I return to my home Province, Nigeria, I am very convinced that I am no longer the same person that I was eight years ago when I joined SSS. I have come to appreciate more the simple, Marist fraternal relationship, which is a result of our Family Spirit. I think also my way of community life as informed by my contact with other religious must wear a new approach while remaining Marist. Solidarity did not have Community Superiors but Coordinators. While serving the purpose of bring unity and harmony in the community and works, Coordinators do not

have the governing authority of a Superior. This brings a new face of leadership among religious.

**What were the biggest challenges you experienced during this time?**

The foremost challenge I faced in my mission in South Sudan was the language barrier. The country has transited from Arabic pattern to English. The old speak Arabic, which is no longer in use in Western Equatoria State, while the young because of the lack of committed teachers and consequent school dropout syndrome, do not speak either English or Arabic. So, communications must often be through translators.

Riimenze is made up of a rural, agrarian population still clung to traditions and cultures. Some of the cultures remain unacceptable to me. The widowhood practices remain to me oppressive. I was unable to marry this practice to what I was familiar with before coming to South Sudan.

The second was how to revitalised the people's faith practice. Re-evangelisation must continue with the time-tested gospel urgency. This speaks so much about the need for more missionaries in South Sudan.

**What would you like to say to those who would like to join Solidarity with South Sudan?**

Solidarity with South Sudan is a gathering of people who should be selfless in their self-gift. A new entrant should accept to work within an organisation that was there before one's arrival. Life setting of the members of SSS requires religious who have passed the crisis of identity and prepared to assume a new name, namely, solidarity with South Sudan, while remaining a member of one's own religious family. A person

must be mature enough to live and work with very much reduced supervision, being in practice, accountable to self for one's spiritual life. Solidarity encourages innovation in one's ministry provided it be subject to authentication by the leadership.

In conclusion a should congratulate the Province of Nigeria for and the General Administration in Rome for their sustained interest in the mission. The two administrative entities have committed personnel and supportive financial contributions to the life and work of the initiative. I can assure that their efforts have not been in vain and God will certainly not be outdone in generosity. To my confreres, especially in Africa, I urge to consider giving part of your life to this mission which so much fits into our description of "Mission to the Montagne's".

## MADAGASCAR: THE PERPETUAL VOWS OF BROTHER RANDRIAMIHAJA JEAN MICHEL



Br. Randriamihaja Jean Michel made his perpetual vows on 8 December 2020 during the celebration of the feast of the Immaculate Conception, at the Conception Immaculée College. Brothers, laypeople and young Marists of Madagascar (JMM) from the college were present. During the Mass, Brother Michel Maminiana Razafimandimby, Provincial, received, on behalf of the Superior General, the vows of Brother Jean Michel and during his speech he encouraged him in his Marist journey. For his part, Brother Michel thanked all those present for having accompanied and supported him. The celebration concluded after the vows had been made and the brothers had signed. At the end of the Mass, all those present shared a lunch of fellowship in the hall of the Conception Immaculée College. All those involved experienced a moment of joy and fraternity, truly Marist!



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