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CIRCULAR NO. 11

GENERAL LEADERSHIP ASSEMBLY
Quito, Ecuador - February 1-14, 2004

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Rome, February 18, 2004

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Dear Brothers,

Twenty-six members of the Society of Mary - members of the General Council, Provincials, Assistant-Provincials, and Regional Superiors - have just completed two weeks of fruitful work during a General Leadership Assembly of the Society in Quito, Ecuador. We were seconded by the expert assistance of eight Marianists who provided secretarial help and served as translators. In this circular I will share with you the main results of this meeting and try to give you a sense of the fraternal spirit that we experienced.

The Quito meeting was a Marianist “first”: the first time we have held a worldwide meeting of members of the Society of Mary in Latin America. We enjoyed the excellent hospitality and fine facilities of the “Bethany Center of Social Development” directed by the Catholic Bishops Conference of Ecuador on the outskirts of Quito, reserved for our use by Fr. Venancio Garagorri, Regional Superior of Colombia-Ecuador. We appreciated the warm, attentive hospitality and the efficient organization of all four branches of the Marianist Family, particularly of our Brothers from the Region of Colombia-Ecuador. Brother Giovanni Onore, Italian Marianist, professor of biology at the Catholic University of Ecuador, served as general coordinator of hospitality and helped us with all aspects of the organization of the meeting.

Reviewing Work since the General Chapter of 2001

Coming midway between General Chapters, the General Leadership Assembly was a chance to share accomplishments and difficulties in realizing the decisions of the last General Chapter, held at Rome in July of 2001. That Chapter had as its theme the need to “re-create Chaminade’s missionary dynamism in today’s world.” At Quito all the participants were convinced, as the Chapter told us, that we are called to creativity and courage in order to realize the “new things” which the Lord is doing among us (Isaiah 43, 19). The Assembly was also an occasion to deepen our understanding of the situation in each of our Units, their lights and shadows, and to grow in fraternal support and understanding.

A Leadership Assembly echoes and reviews the work of the preceding General Chapter, but it is quite different in character. It is a time of evaluation, reflection, and mutual support - not so much a time for charting new directions. The last Chapter reminded us that “good servant leaders are essential for the Marianist missionary project. We need religious with the ‘spirit of the Society,’ with the capacity for leadership, who willingly take up the service of accompanying other persons and communities” (*Sent by the Spirit*, 42). The Assembly once again revealed that our Units are blessed with a generous and harmonious group of such “servant leaders.” The meeting provided them an opportunity to share ideas for the good of the Society, to support and stimulate one another in their service to the rest of us.

On our first morning together, each Unit shared some key high and low points since 2001 and presented a symbol expressing its life. As we listened to one another, we were struck by many examples of missionary dynamism and creativity in our Units, even many times in those which are burdened with problems of aging and numerical decline. Bro. Peter Pontolillo, Secretary General, provided us with an accurate statistical picture of the Society today, showing a striking contrast between old and young Units. We cannot ignore the limits imposed by age and human weakness. Yet we noted that restructuring and the generous commitment of many religious are bringing new life and a new focus to the mission in many Units, whether the members are aging or youthful. We heard stories of disappointments and corporate fragility, while at the same time we were encouraged by reports of new vitality, both in our older Units and in our new, growing ones.

Interdependence, Networking and Solidarity

Interdependence, networking and solidarity emerged as key themes of the meeting. We are growing in the realization that we need to work together in order to fulfill our mission at this time. In today's world many of us are faced with similar challenges and opportunities. In what the Chapter called "an era of interdependence," when culture and communication flow quickly across political borders, few missionary challenges can be met in isolation. Each of our 18 Units, at work in 38 countries of the world, has its own particular needs and priorities. However, it is increasingly evident that "we must *move forward in a common direction*, personally and as a group, acting with renewed energy" (*Sent by the Spirit*, 42, emphasis added).

In my report to the members of the Assembly, I reflected on the new balance that needs to be struck in our time between the local and the global, between centralized, coordinated action and decentralized autonomy. The principle of subsidiarity calls for decisions to be made "at the level that is most competent and closest to those whom the decision will affect" (*Rule of Life* 7.5). This principle can be wholeheartedly respected only if we realize that today our decisions often affect many more people than we normally imagine. Collaboration - a "globalization of solidarity," to use the phrase coined by John Paul II - is essential for authentic missionary dynamism in our time.

We do not desire a hierarchical and bureaucratically centralized form of organization, but we do want to cooperate effectively, to coordinate our efforts. The concept of "networks" - groups of people freely working together with a high degree of autonomy but also with a strong sense of interdependence - points to the kind of organization that fits us at this time.

The Work of the Three Offices

The General Assistants for Religious Life, Education and Temporalities gave comprehensive reports on their activities, raised questions and sought advice from the Assembly.

For the *Office of Religious Life*, Father George Cerniglia focused on such ongoing issues for the Society as vocation ministry, study and communication of the Marianist charism, our role in the Marianist Family, devotion to our family saints, the international seminary program, and our programs for initial and ongoing formation. You will hear more about these topics in the months ahead.

The members of the Assembly were particularly encouraged by learning about the increase in the number of new members entering the Society: at present we have 85 novices, of whom 70 are in Africa and Asia, 11 in Latin America. Even though many Marianists in the rest of the world work hard and consistently at vocation ministry, the results are still scarce - a challenge to our faith, hope, and perseverance.

The many-faceted work of the International Center for Marianist Formation received special attention. The Assembly responded very favorably to the report of Bro. Thomas Giardino about his work in initiating the Center and giving it a creative focus. The participants offered Tom many practical suggestions for ongoing formation in the Society. They liked his threefold focus on "life-development concerns" (issues for young religious, for mid-life, and for senior religious), "role responsibilities" (programs for formators, young priests, directors of communities and works, advisors to lay communities), and "Marianist themes" (contemporary theology and Marianist spirituality, study and popularization of Marianist themes, emphasis on the role of Mary and on our Founder's methodology for formation in faith and spiritual growth). Distance-learning courses offered from the Center by Internet have already sparked a high level of interest, with more than 100 people participating in English. Similar courses in Spanish and French are soon to follow. As a result of a survey and set of proposals from this Center, we also made plans to improve programs of preparation for perpetual profession.

Office of Education: José María Alvira gave an interesting presentation of the work of his Office, focused on our schools, universities, and works of non-formal education for the poor. We are learning to share this ecclesial ministry in full partnership with the local Church and with the laity. We are inventing new ways to network our different institutions among themselves, and to pass on the Marianist style and spirit in education to the laypeople who form the backbone of the personnel in educational works which we sponsor. More of our religious are inventing ways to bring the blessings of a Christian and Marianist education to poor people who normally could not afford it. We can apply to this work what Pope John Paul II said about religious life in general: "You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also *a great history still to be accomplished!*" (*Vita Consecrata*, 110).

Challenges before us in the mission of education include further development of educational programs for poor youth; effective work for the evangelization of culture, integrated into the educational philosophy of our works; religious ministry to young people, within schools or beyond them; education for justice, peace, and respect for the earth, along the lines of the Church's social doctrine; fostering collaboration and exchanges among our schools.

Several members of the Assembly emphasized that the concerns of the Office of Education include a focus on high-quality, well integrated formation for all our religious. We also discussed the possibility of exchanges for limited periods between religious of developing Units and those of our traditionally strong areas, as a way of offering a lived experience of the Marianist educational tradition to young religious and of inserting some new Marianist life in our traditional works.

Office of Temporalities: Javier Anso gave two separate reports about the work of his Office. In the first report, covering social ministry and our work for solidarity (what the Rule of Life calls "justice, peace and the integrity of creation"), Javier emphasized the message sent to the entire Society in the autumn of 2003 after an international Marianist meeting on this topic. The participants in that meeting urged us to include matters of social justice in the ordinary agenda of

meetings of Regional and Provincial Councils, to integrate this concern into formation programs at all levels, to deal with it jointly with other branches of the Marianist Family, and to foster initiatives such as the Marianist Solidarity Fund, twinning among works in poorer and richer regions, volunteer programs for service among the poor, and a possible Marianist presence as a non-governmental organization at the United Nations..

The members of the Assembly responded positively to these suggestions, and many gave examples of efforts already made. Since violence and terror have greatly increased in the recent past, Javier and several other participants emphasized the urgent need to become peace-makers - not only people who pray for peace but also people who work for reconciliation and understanding and who address the root causes of violence. Perhaps this theme can be one focus of reflection at the next General Chapter.

Around the world many young people are deprived of their rights and of the chance for normal development because of poverty and exploitation. Some participants suggested that we take the person of the child and adolescent as our key focus of social commitment, seeking to commit the whole Society to work effectively for the rights and needs of children and youth. Direct ministry with such deprived young people is a major activity in several young Marianist Units. Could the rights and needs of young persons be a significant focus to unite many of our efforts for justice and peace?

An Economy of Solidarity

In the financial area, Bro. Javier explained the principal areas of income and expense in the budget of the General Administration, which covers the operations of our house in Rome at Via Latina 22, the visitations and meetings sponsored by the General Administration, the expenses of the Secretariat, the Archives, and the Postulator-Procurator, and a few communities which depend directly on the General Administration. Expenses in these areas are covered by the earnings from General Administration Investments (57.9%), by contributions from each Unit based on the number of its members (33.9%), and by income earned directly by members of the Via Latina community (8.2%).

In addition the General Council administers funds for Solidarity and Marianist Formation, derived from the interest on our investments and from free-will contributions from our Units. Since 2001 from the Solidarity Fund we have been able to distribute about US\$ 1,300,000, and from the Formation Fund close to US\$ 700,000. These funds go to Marianist Units around the world, mostly to those in developing countries.

In general, Marianists are generous with such financial aid. Javier suggested an expansion of the practice of twinning and economic solidarity between poor Units and those that have a surplus. We need to work together to build up endowments for younger, growing Units. Could Units lacking candidates for Marianist religious life, for example, “adopt” candidates in poor but growing Units?

Javier also reminded us of our need to prepare financial directories for each Unit and for the Society as a whole. This task will be the focus of special efforts by the Office of Temporalities between now and the next General Chapter.

Revising Book II, Chapter 7 of the Rule of Life, on Governance of the Society

Several afternoons of work at Quito were devoted to the finalizing of a new text for Chapter Seven of the second book of the Rule of Life, on the governance of the Society. This revision, requested by the last General Chapter, had been prepared by a Post-Chapter Governance Commission formed by Javier Anso (General Administration), Manuel Cortés (Zaragoza), Raymond Fitz (USA), and Léo Pauels (Congo-Ivory Coast). Fr. Frank Morrisey, canon lawyer and Oblate of Mary Immaculate from Canada, served as consultant to this Commission. The text they had prepared was twice reviewed by consultations around the Society, addressed especially but not exclusively to members of Provincial Councils and Chapters. The General Chapter of 2001 foresaw that this new text on governance would be studied and finalized by this General Leadership Assembly, and could then be applied *ad experimentum* until the next General Chapter, which must take a decisive vote on it.

The General Leadership Assembly was pleased with the text presented. The Assembly introduced numerous small changes and finally voted by much more than a two-thirds majority to accept each of the 140 articles of the new draft. Our work on this topic concluded with a final, unanimous vote to use the entire draft *ad experimentum* until the next Chapter. You will be receiving a copy in the near future.

The new text is a good deal longer than the current form of Book II, Chapter 7, but most members of the Society are unlikely to notice major changes. For the most part, the new text clarifies points that were missing, brings our governance into conformity with the new Code of Canon Law, introduces greater precision and uniformity in terminology, and introduces much fuller treatments of smaller divisions of the Society such as Regions, Districts, and Foundations.

Our previous text had only one brief article (7.38) devoted to Regions of the Society, which were generally presumed to be dependent on a province. In fact, today more than one-third of all Marianists live and work in a smaller Unit that is not a Province.

The new text reserves the term “Region” for Units which report immediately to the General Administration and act in most regards like Provinces, even though they are relatively small in number and can function with simplified administrative structures. At present we have eight such “Regions” in the Society: Argentina, Chile, Peru, Colombia-Ecuador, Canada, Japan, Austria-Germany, and Switzerland.

The new text uses the term “District” for what we have until now been calling “Dependent Regions,” that is, for Units which depend on a mother Province or Region. These Units are usually growing young groups in developing countries, which are moving toward greater autonomy but still need support from their founding Units: Congo-Ivory Coast, Eastern Africa, India, and Korea. Several of these Units expect to move to become autonomous “Regions” in the near future.

The new text defines a “Foundation” as “a missionary outreach” of the Society in a new area. It specifies that such a group should be comprised of at least three members and have a realistic plan for continuity. Formerly, we have used the word “Sector” for such Units. They presently include Togo, Brazil, and Mexico. The definition would also seem applicable to missionary groups composed of religious coming from various Units which report directly to the General

Administration (the two current examples are Poland and our nascent foundation in the Philippines).

General Chapters every Six Years?

On the recommendation of the Governance Commission, the Assembly also considered the frequency of General Chapters. Many find that our General Chapters are a bit too frequent and tend to repeat the same themes. Five years is a short period to allow the General Administration to make thorough visitations to all Units of the Society and also to implement the programs of action requested by a Chapter. The General Leadership Assembly asked the General Administration to prepare a petition to the Holy See to allow an exception to Book I of the Rule of Life, so that the next two General Chapters would be held at six-year intervals instead of five-year ones. If the next General Chapter votes in the same sense and the Holy See approves the request, this would mean that after 2006, our next General Chapters would be in 2012 and 2018. By that time, we should have enough experience to know whether we wish to make this system permanent and petition for a permanent change in Book I of the Rule of Life.

Zonal Conferences

The new text of Book II, Chapter 7, devotes four articles to “Zones,” continental groupings of Marianist leaders, which work closely together “to develop common approaches and to profit from their collective experience” (new text, article 7.118). In fact, three such groups have flourished in the past 30 years: the Marianist Conference in North America, CEM (Conference of European Marianists), and CLAMAR (Conference of Latin-American Marianists). Each one of these Zones is quite different, adapted to the realities of the area in which it functions. The Zonal Conferences are not government structures with juridical authority (except, here and there, by delegation from the Provincials and Regionals involved), but they are often important in providing for good initial and ongoing formation and for cooperation among Units in ministries such as schools and pastoral works.

At Quito, one day was devoted to reflection on these Zonal Conferences and to meetings by them. Bro. Charles-Henri Moulin (France) was elected President of CEM, while Bro. Stephen Glodek (USA) continues as President of the Marianist Conference, and Fr. Manuel Madueño (Argentina) as President of CLAMAR.

Five years ago Marianists from Asia and Africa had organized a common Zonal Conference, but it proved to be an unwieldy structure, too far-flung and divergent. Participants from Africa and Asia at Quito decided to form two separate Conferences. The Zonal Conference of Africa will be chaired by Bro Maximin Magnan, Coordinator of our communities and works in Togo. The Conference of Asia will be chaired by Fr. Ignase Arulappen, Regional Superior of India.

Foundations in New Countries

An important session was devoted to reflection on Marianist foundations in new countries which are beginning at the present time. These foundations include new Marianist presences in Cuba (dependent on the Province of Zaragoza), Haiti (from Canada), China (from Korea), and Albania

(from Italy). The General Administration is also directing new efforts in Poland and the Philippines, calling in each case on the collaboration of several Units.

Some other new Marianist presences offer valuable apostolic services to certain countries (the Czech Republic, Guatemala, Sudan, Bangladesh, the Solomon Islands), but so far have not developed plans for long-range continuity. Perhaps they will remain as specialized ministries by Marianists, without necessarily implying a permanent institutional presence. Some of them may eventually become permanent.

The General Chapter of 2001 spoke at length about such new foundations. In our review of this topic at Quito, we admired the creativity and commitment of the Marianists involved. A number of these new foundations seem to offer much hope for the future. They aim to work directly at formation in faith, or to serve people who suffer from poverty and marginalization. In some cases, we seem to be directed by God's Providence, responding to requests and opportunities that were unexpected. In general, these new foundations enhance the vitality and hopefulness of the sending Units. These new foundations have given rise to many acts of corporate generosity on the part of Provinces and Regions who contribute personnel and finances. At the same time, we realize that we are often extended to the limit of our capacities, and that we must take seriously the call for realistic plans for continuity.

The General Chapter of 2006

One of the tasks allotted to the General Leadership Assembly is "to foresee the preparation of the next General Chapter" (Rule of Life, Book II, Chapter 7, old text 7.34, new text 7.62). We devoted some time at Quito to reflecting on this topic. Final decisions in this area are still to be made by the General Council, but there was a general convergence of opinion on many matters concerning the Chapter of 2006.

The Chapter is planned for three weeks in July and will most probably be held at Villa Aurelia in Rome (where the Chapter of 2001 was also held). Other branches of the Marianist Family (the Sisters, Lay Communities, Marian Alliance) will probably be invited to designate one or the other observer to share with us for some part of the Chapter, especially at the time when key future thrusts are being contemplated. The General Council will appoint the nucleus of a Preparatory Commission. After the elections in the spring of 2005, this Commission will be completed by some members chosen by the capitulants. Motions or propositions will be welcome as always from all members of the Society; a deadline will be set for their submission, so that they can be efficiently studied and considered. One obligatory agenda item will be the finalizing of the text of the Rule of Life, Book II, Chapter 7.

In addition to this obligatory theme, several spoke at Quito in favor of a "monographic" Chapter, that is, one which attempts to give deeper treatment to a single theme, rather than to cover all aspects of our life. Two examples of such a theme were mentioned: Mary in our life and mission (the practical implications of living Marianist spirituality in community and exercising our mission in the spirit of Mary), or responding to the increasing violence in our world (becoming effective as reconcilers and peace-makers, working in the spirit of Mary to eradicate the causes that provoke violence).

The General Council will take this advice as a starting point and move ahead in planning for the next General Chapter. We will keep you informed as the meeting takes more definite shape.

Local Flavor

During the Assembly, we had the opportunity to meet the lively and active Marianist Family in Ecuador. It was evident that the local Marianist Brothers, Sisters, and laypeople were encouraged by our presence. They were eager to offer us the best of Ecuadorean hospitality.

Bro. Giovanni Onore, with the help of some of his graduate students, took care of details of transportation, renting and purchasing materials for the secretariat and the translation facilities, and organizing outings and entertainment. Drawing on his knowledge as a specialist in ecology, he regaled us at supper most nights with short lectures on many exotic tropical fruits.

We had several occasions during our meeting to hear presentations about Marianist religious life in the context of Latin America. Archbishop Ruiz from Portoviejo, former President of the Bishops' Conference, and Bishop Naranjo from Latacunga each paid us a visit and spoke warmly about the work of the Marianists in their country. On the second morning of the Assembly, Fr. Venancio Garagorri, Regional Superior of Colombia-Ecuador, gave us an overview of his Unit, which is young and growing, and raised a number of questions that proved to be significant in our reflections during the coming days. Toward the end of the first week, Fr. Cecilio de Lora, veteran Spanish missionary and specialist in Latin American theology, gave us a rich and comprehensive presentation, in which he explained the key emphases of theology on the continent since Vatican II and highlighted the role of Marianists in that period. Listening to Cecilio made us proud to be Marianists and to know that, few as we are, we have been able to play a positive role in the impassioned life of the Latin American Church. We plan to publish his eloquent presentation as an issue of *S.M. Three Offices* in the near future.

On Sunday, February 8, we were treated to a tour of the beautiful colonial center of Quito, which has been declared by UNESCO as a "World Heritage Site." We were charmed by the varied and exuberant art of the churches, plazas, and public buildings.

Later the same day, we met with more than 50 representatives of other branches of the Marianist Family - Sisters, candidates for the Marian Alliance, members of Marianist Lay Communities - converging from three cities at the community of the Marianist Sisters in Quito. Bro. Pedro José Castañeda had organized this meeting as President of the Marianist Family Council of Ecuador. In a small country where Marianist religious, men and women, have always been very few in number, it was encouraging to see so many people committed to spirituality and mission in the spirit of Blessed Father Chaminade.

Finally, on February 12, we were hosted by the S.M. community at Latacunga, which is currently composed of four Marianists, two from Italy and two from Spain. The thousand students of the Colegio Hermano Miguel, named after an Ecuadorean saint and educator who was a Lasallian Christian Brother, welcomed us with songs, dances and speeches. The principal, Fr. Remo Segalla, organized student guides to show us around the well equipped school, which specializes in electronics and mass media. Then, in the afternoon, we visited the Casa Campesina in Latacunga, which serves at night as a shelter for mountain peasants and during the day offers services to the poor in medicine, dentistry, and legal aid. Bro. Roberto Bordignon, director of the

Marianist community in Latacunga, is responsible for the work of this center, together with an impressive and committed group of volunteers.

It was striking to see in Latacunga how much can be accomplished by a small group of Marianists really committed to the service of the poor.

As we concluded the General Leadership Assembly, it was clear that the participants had deeply appreciated the opportunity to be together. The Assembly was a time for heightened reflection about Marianist religious life today and for genuine fraternal support. The warm hospitality of our Family in Ecuador greatly enriched the experience.

The liturgy, celebrated partly in language groups and partly in common, greatly enriched the life of the Assembly, incorporating the distinctive styles of different parts of the Marianist world. We frequently prayed together for each of you, asking that, together as committed Marianists, we might fulfill God's will and plan for our time.

I hope that this report on the General Leadership Assembly will help you understand the current realities of the Society, stimulating your hopes and creative commitment for its immediate future.

Fraternally,

David Joseph Fleming, S.M.
Superior General