

CIRCULAR N ° 4

**YOU ARE ALL MISSIONARIES:
CHAMINADE'S CHARISM TOWARDS
A NEW MILLENNIUM:**

Report on the General Leadership Assembly of 1999

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Rome

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DAVID JOSEPH FELMING, S.M.
Superior General of the Society of Mary,
Missionary Apostolic, to all his fellow
Marianists throughout the world.

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CHAMINADE'S CHARISM TOWARDS A NEW MILLENNIUM:
Report on the General Leadership Assembly of 1999**

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Dear Brothers,

Our recently concluded General Leadership Assembly mirrored the most recent developments and pressing challenges for the Society today, as we prepare for the beatification of our Founder, the 200th anniversary of the Marianist Family, and the Jubilee of the Year 2000. In this Circular I would like to share with you some news and some reflections about the life of the Society at the present time, drawing on the work of this Assembly, which was held at Deepahalli ("Village of Light"), the new Marianist Centre for student Brothers and for ministry to street children near Bangalore, India, from January 31 until February 14 of this year.

General Leadership Assemblies, as described in the *Rule of Life* 7.34, are quite different in character from General Chapters. They are much more informal and reflective. There are no official texts to produce or elections to hold. They are an opportunity for the Provincials, Regional Superiors, and Assistant Provincials of the Society to gather with the General Administration in order to evaluate the life of the Society, plan together for the future, and reflect on current questions and trends. They provide an opportunity for the General Administration to consult the key leadership of the Society about decisions that need to be made and to get a sense of directions that are emerging. The 34 participants from all Units of the Society present this year at Bangalore felt that these goals were achieved remarkably well, and appreciated the fraternal spirit, openness, collective humility, and frankness that characterized the Assembly. Our secretary and translators did an outstanding job of making the work smooth and easy.

For most participants, the General Leadership Assembly provided the opportunity for a first contact with our Region of India, which is characterized by its youth, vitality, its ministries to the poor, its concern for good Marianist formation, and its wholehearted integration of Indian culture with the Marianist heritage. Our hosts, particularly the two communities (scholasticate and aspirancy) at Deepahalli, spared no efforts to make the meeting interesting, comfortable, and enjoyable. With their warm smiles, their characteristically Indian hospitality, their undaunted efforts to overcome language barriers, their careful organization to provide for our needs and their hearty prayer life, they made a deep impact on everyone.

In the name of all participants and of the whole Society, I thank the members of the Region for all they did to make the meeting a real success.

I. A NEW MOMENT IN THE REVITALIZATION OF MARIANIST LIFE

The Assembly of this year came at a moment that marks some significant milestones in the history of the Society:

1. During the meeting itself, we received definitive written notice of the unanimous acceptance by the Vatican panel of medical experts of an extraordinary cure attributed to the intercession of Father Chaminade. Thus we can look ahead with full confidence to our Founder's beatification in the near future. After ninety years of praying and waiting (the Cause was first introduced in 1909), after great progress in research into the life and times and motivations of Fr. Chaminade, after the cumulative efforts of Marianists like Simler, Klobb, Subiger, Scherrer, Lebon, Ferree, Verrier, Totten, Humbertclaude, Vasey, Sánchez Vega, and Torres, this beatification will be an unrepeatable, historic moment for the entire Marianist Family. We desire our Founder's beatification, not for our own complacent self-satisfaction, but as an opportunity to make him much better known to the entire Church as a model who shows us a way for full lay partnership in the mission of the Church, for a solid and deep devotion to Mary, and for many other Christian attitudes that are of great importance today.

2. We stand at the threshold of a new millennium and are invited by the Church to observe the year 2000 as a time of Jubilee, of profound renewal in spirituality and mission. In the Old Testament, Jubilees were an occasion for making a new beginning, returning to the harmony of original justice and purity. Can this Jubilee not be the same for us?

3. The same year will mark the 150th anniversary of our Founder's death, an occasion which the Province of France is already planning to celebrate as a special "Chaminade Year," opening at Bordeaux on January 22, 2000, the actual anniversary of his death, and closing on February 2, 2001, the two-hundredth anniversary of the first commitment by members of the Madeleine Sodality. The Jubilee Year 2000 can be a "Chaminade Year" for all of us, and I recommend that each Province, Region and community plan ways to celebrate it.

4. The year 1999 already marks the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the first Marianists in the United States, and the year 2000 marks the sesquicentennial of their first major work, what has now become the University of Dayton. Several other Units of the Society are celebrating important anniversaries around this same time (Chile, Congo, Italy, Switzerland, Japan, France), most of them the golden jubilees of new foundations and of the last far-reaching restructuring of Marianist units during the Generalate of Fr. Juergens.

The convergence of these events invites all of us to commit ourselves more than ever to the revitalization of our Marianist life. We have passed through stages of updating, return to Marianist sources, and renewal. Repeatedly General Chapters and renewal seminars have called us to a deeper interiorization of the faith of the heart and of Fr. Chaminade's unique apostolic Marian spirituality. Pope John Paul II has invited the whole Church to participate in a "new evangelization," one that is new in its content, new in its language, and new in its methods. These calls and events suggest that we are arriving at a turning point in our history.

Some thinkers call today for a “refoundation” of religious congregations. Of course, we can lay no other foundation for our life than that which the Lord has providentially given us through our Founder. In using the term “refoundation,” contemporary writers on religious life wish to stress that our mission is not simply to maintain a heritage of customs, traditions, and works from the past, but to make the effort to incarnate our founding charism in courageous new ventures adapted to the cultures of our times. At least in some circumstances and situations, it is clear that bold and radical language is appropriate. In all cases, we are certainly called, as *Vita Consecrata* says, to “creative fidelity,” a deeply integrated adherence of the heart to the gifts we have received from God, combined with a readiness to take new initiatives in spirituality, community life and ministry. The aim of such new initiatives is to translate the ground intuitions of our Marianist life into a language and style of action that captures hearts today in a dynamic way, just as the Founder knew how to capture them in his time. We know by long experience that such creative fidelity will often require us to let go of much that is familiar and comfortable, call us forward into previously inexperienced paths, invite us to learn as we go, to repent and change often, and to remain open to unsuspected sources of grace.

During the General Leadership Assembly, many participants remarked on the new level of simplicity, fraternity, and openness that they felt. Even though these qualities have certainly been evident in Marianist international meetings over the years, there was a widely shared perception that they have grown. Perhaps our very weakness and fragility - the sense of aging and diminishment in the older Units of the Society, the youth, inexperience, and instability in our newer foundations - help us to listen better to one another, prevent us from thinking that we have all the answers, dispose us to collaborate. Individually and corporately, we are still passing through a long time of purification, and we know that our success and our very survival lie in the hands of the Lord, of Mary, of our beloved holy Founder, rather than in our own cleverness, insight, or sagacity.

It is my hope and prayer that these graces of humility, simplicity and brotherhood may be authentically present among all members of the Society. Many in the traditional strongholds of the Society are called at this time to a Holy Saturday kind of experience, living in faith and darkness, letting go, waiting upon an unknown future, kindling hope and apostolic fire among what seem to be ashes of the past. Others, in fragile centers of new Marianist vitality, are living an uncertain moment of birth and new beginnings, wondering what will become of the small and modest initiatives they see around them. In both cases, we have the example of Mary, showing us how to live in trust and faith, depending on the Lord and waiting for Him to let His plans be known. Together, like our Founder, we are invited to live by faith and by the indications of Providence much more than by any sense of individual or collective power. Such humble, trusting faith will dispose us to learn from one another, to listen, dialogue, to be ready to change, and to thank God for the gifts we recognize in others.

II. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SOCIETY ACROSS THE WORLD: OVERVIEW AND PROSPECT

Much of the General Leadership Assembly was devoted to evaluation and future planning along the lines of the major themes of the last General Chapter:

New Wine - Programs of renewal in the majority of our Units have focused on a deeper and richer commitment to our charism. These programs have helped many Marianists find the

courage and boldness necessary for new initiatives. Successful programs have touched not only the individual level, but also the renewal of community life as such, so that a creative environment will support and challenge us in living Marianist life together. Several important programs, particularly in Spain and France, have culminated in new perspectives on the mission of entire Provinces and Regions.

Provincials and Regionals are often preoccupied with the minority of those members who seem to stand apart from the revitalization process, showing little interest in the new wine of Marianist life, resisting all efforts at renewal or letting themselves be touched only by initiatives that flow from other sources. But it is important not to forget that these members are few and that we do experience much rich new wine. All agree that renewal and spiritual growth is an ongoing process, one that is never over and done with.

New Wineskins - Nearly every Province and Region has reexamined its communities, its ministries, and its governance structures. Some ministries and communities have been discontinued. In others, the Marianist presence has taken on a new mode or style. Partnership with laity is increasingly characteristic of our ministries and of our overall approach to Marianist life.

Six new Regions of the Society have been established (Congo-Ivory Coast, Argentina, Austria-Germany, Chile, Peru, and Switzerland-Togo), five of them after the suppression of previously existing provinces. Processes of further restructuring of Units are under consideration in the United States, in Colombia / Ecuador, and in Japan. Everywhere Marianist administrative units are searching for better ways of collaborating with one another in order to be more effective, particularly through the Zonal Conferences: CLAMAR for Latin America, the Marianist Conference for North America, CEM for Europe, and a new African-Asian Marianist Conference proposed by the participants in Bangalore.

It is a bit early to evaluate the many efforts at creating "new wineskins." Some of them seem to be providing an occasion for new creativity in mission, while others may be principally matters of administrative simplification. What is clear at this stage is that:

- mission must be the principal criterion for all restructuring,
- restructuring already began some years ago through closer collaboration among different Provinces and Regions,
- our heightened consciousness of the entire Marianist Family invites us to new ways of understanding and organizing our corporate life,
- we are still at midstream in the restructuring process,
- revitalization and restructuring are intimately linked and must move ahead hand in hand, since both reinforce each other,
- realism and practicality play a key role in all new arrangements,
- new wine requires new wineskins, but in the last analysis it is the new wine itself that is truly important.

Solidarity with the Poor and with Peacemakers was evaluated shortly after a moving visit by the Assembly participants to some of the projects for street children in the slums of Bangalore carried out by our Brothers and lay collaborators. The last General Chapter asked that we make such solidarity a "point of reference" for reflection and decisions at every level in the Society. In fact, we find that nearly all the new initiatives undertaken in the various Provinces and Regions aim at an effective solidarity with poor people. We also note many efforts at consciousness-raising and exposure-programs among the poor for ourselves and our more affluent clientele.

Many of our religious have developed a thoughtful and critical stance on social-justice issues. A good number work full-time among the poor, and many others dedicate a part of

their time and energy to activities in which they get to know and work directly with poor people. This has the effect of giving a non-ideological, human face to social problems, translating statistics and theories into palpable reality. Some are touched by the discovery of the face of Jesus in the needy and oppressed people they meet, so that their experience of solidarity becomes a new source of spiritual life. Many of those who go to the newer foundations of the Society are motivated by a desire to get closer to the poor. A few have chosen to live in Marianist communities inserted among the poor, in slums and villages, so that they get to know the daily realities of poor people in a more intimate way. Such “inserted” communities can become important centers of renewal and points of reference for their entire Provinces or Regions.

No doubt we still have a long way to go in solidarity with the poor and with peacemakers, but we do sense a greatly heightened consciousness and openness to this theme. Our commitment is often superficial and inconsistent. Yet the poor may be renewing us, from the margins of what is normally considered to be important and influential.

Collaboration within the Marianist Family was the object of a day of reflection which included presentations of the situation in a variety of Regions and Provinces. Such collaboration is also recommended by the General Chapter of 1996 as a “point of reference” for all activities and decisions in the Society. The reality of Marianist Lay Communities is still quite dynamic and varied across the world. Some notable tendencies:

- Marianist Family Councils exist at the international level and in about fifteen countries. These Councils provide an opportunity for all branches of the Marianist Family to reflect together about spiritual and apostolic development and plan for common activities. They are proving very helpful.
- In a number of countries, Marianist Lay Communities count numerous young adults among their members. This is an important group, which is not easily reached by other kinds of ministry.
- In some countries of Africa and Asia, adults who have recently completed their Christian initiation (baptism and confirmation) find Marianist Lay Communities to be an important help in solidifying and deepening their Christian identity.
- We still have to work at good collaboration and partnership among all branches of the Marianist Family. In some cultures, Marianist lay communities still seem to be overly dependent on the religious or overly deferential to them. In others, there may be too great a distance between most of the religious and the Marianist laity, lack of sufficient contact. Some religious seem to regard Marianist Lay Communities as merely the apostolate of a few. Some feel inadequate in sharing their own knowledge and appreciation of the Marianist charism. It is not easy for us to reach the desired level of interdependence and partnership.
- Increasingly, Marianist Lay Communities and Marianist religious are collaborating in mission. Working together - in a school, a parish, a retreat house, a summer mission experience or a project of service to the poor - is a great stimulus to the sharing of faith and community.
- The beatification of Father Chaminade will be an important opportunity for all branches of the Marianist Family to stand together and deepen their creative fidelity to our charism and heritage.

Vocations and formation were the objects of two days of corporate reflection in Bangalore. In North America and Europe the long drought of religious vocations still continues. In Latin America, we have a small but steady number of new members, and the very recent establishment of a new common novitiate for South America at Santiago, with eight novices

in the first group, is a sign of hope. In India and Africa, we have good numbers of new candidates; there the challenge is finding strong and willing formators and implementing good criteria for discernment. At present we have about 250 Marianists in formation (live-in aspirants, novices, temporary professed, and seminarians) and forty Marianists serve as formators.

In his presentation during the General Leadership Assembly, Father José María Arnaiz, Head of Religious Life, called for a “new proposal” of the Marianist vocation - a more dynamic, more convinced, better organized and more widely shared effort to invite young men to join our congregation. This proposal awakened many positive echoes among the participants. It will be the focus of two meetings of Marianist Vocation Directors: one at Rome in July of this year for Europe, Japan, Korea, North and South America; and another next year at Nairobi for India and Africa.

In our reflections on programs of initial formation, special attention was focused on the time of temporary profession. “Integration” seems to be the *leitmotif* for this period. Our young members today generally come to us with a certain richness of experience and from quite a variety of backgrounds. Yet we can no longer take for granted a general grounding in theological and catechetical matters or a broad range of general culture. Modern education in most countries has become more technical and specialized, and religious education programs have often been insufficient. We need to help our newer members integrate professional and religious studies. The time of temporary profession is a period for acquiring a solid humanistic education, for spiritual deepening, and for a realistic experience of ministry. Various Provinces and Regions have established and evaluated their programs with these principles in mind. Interprovincial collaboration may be helpful for some at this stage of formation.

Marianist Education continues to be a major focus for the life and mission of the entire Society. It gave rise to a lively series of discussions at Bangalore. The project on the “Characteristics of Marianist Education” has evoked very positive responses in nearly all Provinces and Regions and given rise to a variety of workshops, training programs, and exchanges among faculty and students on the national, continental, and global levels.

A key challenge at the present time is partnership with the laity in our educational ministries. Marianists today serve in about 135 schools with 110,000 students in 30 different countries. Only a small proportion of the 8000 professionals who work in this rather large educational network are religious. With different rhythms in the various cultures, lay people are taking up posts of educational leadership in our schools. Most of them show great interest in working out practical programs to implement the key traits of Marianist education. But it is not easy to create formation programs that are extensive enough to cover everyone or intensive enough to foster continuity in the long run. Increasingly we are recognizing that educational leadership is a pastoral role even more than a technical specialization. Under the leadership of Brother Thomas Giardino, Head of Education, and the Heads of Education in our different Provinces and Regions, we are grappling with this situation, which is at once a challenge and a great opportunity. We have a “window of opportunity” during the next decade or so to bring together our experienced religious educational leaders and committed lay educators to ensure the transmission of our rich educational heritage in the new millennium.

III. TOWARDS A MORE GLOBAL SENSE OF MARIANIST LIFE: CONSULTATIVE THEMES OF THE ASSEMBLY

The General Administration naturally chose to use the Assembly as an occasion to consult the leaders of our Provinces and Regions about a number of key decisions that need to be made by the General Council or the General Chapter in the near future .

Most of these consultations implied, in one way or another, a certain “globalization” in the thinking of the Society. Increasingly today, we need to work together and promote mutual knowledge, close contacts among our members, and a worldwide sense of family spirit.

In today’s world, “globalization” often signifies the domination of nations, economies, media and culture in the interest of profits for certain elite groups in the developed nations. The Holy See constantly urges us to counter this kind of oppressive globalization with a “globalization of solidarity and compassion,” a worldwide sense of understanding, dialogue, and shared responsibility for the building of God’s Kingdom. Any globalization within the Church must be particularly sensitive to the rights, traditions, and cultures of the poor and oppressed. Several themes of the General Leadership Assembly reflected a desire for this kind of globalization in the life of the Society.

Our reflections about the **seminary program** for future Marianist priests are a good example. At present we average at any given time 15-20 Marianist seminarians. During the year preceding the Bangalore meeting, all Provincial and Regional Councils were invited to discuss a proposal to return to the policy of a single international Marianist seminary. It is hoped that a single seminary will provide a strong Marianist community experience to accompany these years of study and offer a staff of several members with a well organized program for Marianist studies. Such a seminary can foster international understanding and family spirit among Marianists worldwide.

The commission of eleven assembly members appointed to study this question unanimously recommended that we adopt for the next decade or so the policy that all Marianist candidates for priestly ordination study together at a single international seminary during the three years required to complete the basic course in theology. This seminary should be under the responsibility of the General Administration (particularly the Head of Religious Life), which will create an advisory board or commission for the seminary, with representatives from various continents.

The commission also recommended, by a strong majority, that this international Marianist seminary be in Rome. Rome offers a variety of theological faculties, with emphases in a variety of areas, such as spirituality, Mariology, youth ministry, religious education, and academic theology. The Roman faculties bring together professors and students from all continents and permit students to write papers and take examinations in the major languages used by Marianists.

All recognize some drawbacks in Rome as well. Italian is not too widely used as an international language, at least not outside ecclesiastical circles. All other things being equal, we would have preferred a place where English, French, or Spanish predominates. The method and style of teaching in some Roman faculties is often found wanting. Sometimes the atmosphere in some Roman faculties may tend to be clericalist in a negative sense. Given the large number of our future seminarians coming from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, the affluent first-world lifestyle of Rome may cause some difficulties.

We hope that the formation received by our seminarians in their own countries and cultures both before and after the three years in Rome will allow them to serve in their respective Regions and Provinces with a real sensitivity to the local context. No place is ideal, but the members of the Assembly were not able to identify any location that offered greater advantages and fewer disadvantages than Rome. The challenge of the seminary will

be to maximize the advantages and minimize the disadvantages. We believe that the fine foundation already provided by the existing Seminario Chaminade will help us establish an excellent center for all our seminarians in Rome.

The General Administration has accepted the recommendations of the General Leadership Assembly on these points and decided that all Marianist seminarians who begin their programs from the autumn of 1999 onwards should be assigned to Rome.

The General Administration had proposed that an **International House of Studies** be established in conjunction with the seminary, to offer study sabbatical programs, workshops, and study resources for all Marianists. Sessions like “Horizons” aimed at religious of various age groups, seminars on Marianist topics, programs of preparation for perpetual vows, and guided-study programs for individuals were to be offered by the staff of this House of Studies, which was to be the same as the enlarged seminary staff. Members of the General Leadership Assembly felt that this proposal was still too vague. They wondered if it could burden the staff and community of the seminary with too diffuse a set of objectives. Of course, the seminary will normally be available, as in the past, for sabbatical years for all Marianists. Meanwhile, the project of an International House of Studies will continue to be studied by the General Administration.

Globalization is also reflected in a further initiative endorsed by participants in the General Leadership Assembly. The General Administration was encouraged to consult with all Provinces and Regions in view of establishing a **“Solidarity Fund”** to integrate several already existing funds for justice and peace, and to invite all Units of the Society to contribute to this fund according to their desires and resources. This fund will be used to strengthen our efforts across the world at standing with the poor.

Another initiative proposed by Brother Javier Anso, Head of Temporalities, and endorsed by the members of the Assembly, is the coordination by the General Administration of efforts to promote **“twinning,”** linking together our works, communities and Units in poor areas with those in richer ones, for the mutual benefit of both.

Obviously, the theme of globalization is preeminently reflected in the thinking of the General Leadership Assembly on **collaboration among Units** (see the comments on “new wineskins,” above) and on Marianist **foundations in new countries**, which will be the object of the last section of this circular.

A special commission of the General Leadership Assembly (Brothers Glodek, Valencia, Anso, and Father Boissonneault) evaluated the financial reports of the General Administration. Special attention was given to the projected audit of our financial operations and to our investment policies. The commission expressed great satisfaction with the clarity and completeness of the reports and with the sound financial health of the General Administration. The funds built up over the years by successive General Administrations are an instrument for mission on all continents. Of course, a complete report on all financial matters will be published before the next General Chapter. Meanwhile, these matters are shared in an ongoing way by Brother Javier in his regular meetings with Provincial and Regional Treasurers from the various continents.

Other commissions during the Assembly advised the General Administration concerning preparations for the General Chapter of 2001 and concerning the celebration of our Founder’s beatification. These matters will be communicated at the appropriate times.

IV. FOUNDATIONS IN NEW COUNTRIES?

The last section of this Circular will be devoted to one of the most challenging and far-reaching themes of the General Leadership Assembly: an encouragement over the next few years to make Marianist foundations in some new countries.

Addressing a plenary meeting of the Vatican Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples on November 20, 1998, Pope John Paul II said the following:

Today I would like to renew my heartfelt and grateful encouragement to men and women religious. Dear friends, the Pope and the whole Church count on you especially for the mission ad gentes, which is the primordial task and paradigm of the Church's entire mission....In the years since the Council, members of the institutes of consecrated life...have rediscovered the missionary dimension inherent in each one's constitution and practices....At the dawn of the new millennium, the mission ad gentes requires fresh enthusiasm and new missionaries, calling on consecrated persons themselves precisely because of their vocation....I therefore invite institutes of special consecration to be even more committed to the mission ad gentes, convinced as I am that this missionary zeal will attract genuine vocations and will be a leaven for their communities' authentic renewal.

Repeating what he wrote in his encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, the Pope added:

Today missionary activity still represents the greatest challenge for the Church. As the end of the second millennium of the Redemption draws near, it is clear that the peoples which have not yet received an initial proclamation of Christ constitute the majority of the human race...Our own time, with humanity on the move and in continual search, demands a resurgence of the Church's missionary activity. The horizons and possibilities for mission are growing ever wider, and we Christians are called to an apostolic courage based upon trust in the Spirit.

We are easily tempted to believe that such an exhortation is not aimed at us, because of our weakness and decline in numbers. We cannot do everything, and we must recognize our limits.

Yet the Pope was speaking precisely to religious congregations, nearly all of whom, like ourselves, are experiencing diminishment in the lands where they have traditionally been strongest. We are invited to contribute from the little we have, rather than from an abundance. Despite our fragility in comparison with the past, we still have about 400 young and healthy professed members, as well as a good cadre of generous men with experience and vision for international ministry. Not many of our Provinces and Regions feel able at this time to work alone in establishing a new missionary outreach, but through the collaboration of all the units of the Society it would seem possible to form, gradually over the next few years, two or three small teams who could lay the foundations for Marianist presence in some new countries and cultures. Such, at least, was the judgment of the members of the General Leadership Assembly. It is their hope that a new Marianist missionary thrust in our time, on the occasion of the Founder's beatification and in collaboration with the Church's program for the new millennium, would be for us a source of life, grace, and revitalization.

Throughout the history of the Society of Mary, new foundations have been decisive in charting the future. The first generations of Marianists saw moves first to Switzerland, then to the United States, Austria, Germany and Belgium. The time of Father Simler witnessed a great expansion into the Arab world of North Africa, into Canada, Hawaii, Japan, Spain, Italy, and even first probes into Mexico and China. The period between the two World Wars was marked by the beginnings of our presence in Latin America and a second outreach to China. After World War II we took up the Church's invitations to several countries in Africa and Latin America and made a long deferred start in Korea. More recently Brazil, Ecuador, India, Mexico, Poland, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have become centers of Marianist life. In every case these new foundations in their day represented a risk and a struggle. Yet each of these foundations unleashed channels of Marianist generosity and missionary creativity. Each has enriched the Society with the gifts of its culture and its people. Each has contributed to the spreading of our charism among a significant new group of people and given rise to Marianist Lay Communities, so that Marianist life is today a truly global ecclesial reality. Those who have made these new foundations have experienced their inadequacies as well as the special care of Jesus and Mary in a particularly poignant way.

Where might we make new foundations? The General Leadership Assembly particularly suggested three possibilities:

1. Bishop Adolfo Rodriguez of Camaguey, Cuba, recently elected President of the Bishops Conference of his country, has invited us to establish in his diocese a community aiming at the development of lay leaders, at youth ministry and formation in faith. This invitation has already been studied by CLAMAR and by the General Administration, and several Marianists have visited the island of Cuba. It seems to be a providential moment for ecclesial life in that country. Several Marianists have spontaneously offered themselves as volunteers already, even without any prompting to do so.
2. The Pope mentioned in the discourse quoted above that he felt a special need for strengthening the presence of the Church in Asia. The recent Synod on Asia asked for a focus in the coming century on that continent, which is the home of sixty percent of the world's population but where the Christian community is proportionately the smallest. Some of our Brothers already working in Asia have reflected on this matter and discussed several possibilities for foundations in new countries. As many Asian nations enter fully into a globalized economy and culture, often transforming their whole social systems, they need a presence of people who can communicate and dialogue about beliefs and values with a great respect for their rich and ancient cultures and reach out to their millions of poor and oppressed people. A fourfold dialogue with religions, cultures, spiritualities and with the poor must characterize any Asian foundation. At this point it may not be prudent to specify any particular country, but we will work with the Vatican Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and with the Marianists in Korea, Japan, and India in order to concretize this project.
3. We have already made a beginning in Poland and witnessed some interesting probes of Marianist life and service in the Czech Republic and in Albania. Our outreach to Eastern Europe must still be strengthened and better organized. New volunteers have already come forward and more are needed.

In most of these cases, it is interesting to note that we are dealing with countries that have a history of atheistic regimes. Today in numerous situations it seems possible for the Church to emerge from these regimes and make a new beginning. Surely our Founder would judge this challenge to be one of the *nova bella* in our age.

How can we go about preparing for these foundations? In one or the other case, it may still be possible for a single Province of the Society to take full responsibility for a new foundation, perhaps calling on the assistance of other units for certain personnel or for financial help. This mode of undertaking new missions has been normative in the Society since about 1930 and is still an excellent model where it is feasible.

Yet not too many units of the Society are able to work in this way at the present time. Therefore, the General Leadership Assembly invited the General Administration to be ready when necessary to take up a certain leadership in organizing new foundations, calling for volunteers, appointing personnel, organizing training programs so that the new foundations can begin with cohesive Marianist teams motivated by clear objectives. In some cases it may be best to call on groups of Provinces and Regions to work together in this matter, with further help from the General Administration. We may need to confide the work of visiting the new foundations, planning for them and guiding them during their early years, to a delegate of the Superior General. The General Administration will study each possibility and work out whatever mode of organization seems appropriate.

We must not deceive ourselves into imagining that these new foundations will be a smooth and easy adventure. It will not be possible to begin them without feeling a pinch in some of our older foundations. Strong personnel will be required - the kind of religious who make a rich contribution in their home units. Those who eventually go may sometimes feel that they are challenged beyond their capacities or that the work of enculturation and implantation is just too hard. Patient and understanding dialogue and discernment will be necessary at all levels in order to keep the right balance in the decisions that will be made on this important topic.

For the time being, I invite all Marianist religious, especially those under the age of 50, to think deeply and personally about participating in one of these new foundations. Those who feel attracted to participate are invited to write me by September 1, 1999, expressing their motivations and particular interests. Of course, the General Council, working with Provincial and Regional Administrations, will also need to invite other members to make such a missionary commitment; we will not merely wait on volunteers. But the process of knowing who feels an inner attraction for this work is a very helpful first step.

I ask all members and communities to pray in a particular way for this possibility of foundations in new countries. Pray that all of us may discern wisely, prudently, and with the kind of "apostolic courage" of which our *Rule of Life* speaks in article 75.

CONCLUSION

On the last day of the General Leadership Assembly, as we evaluated our experience at Bangalore, many participants stressed that the meeting - with its evaluation and prospect of current Marianist life, with its sense of a new providential moment in our revitalization and

its experience of our global brotherhood - gave them a new feeling of hope and courage. Such was certainly my own experience. I hope that I have been able to communicate something of this spirit in the present circular, so that all of you may be able to share it.

Together, we trust in Mary, the humble handmaid who modestly collaborated in God's plans. We follow the example of our Founder, Father Chaminade, who gave himself at each moment to the indications of Providence, and who experienced Marianist life and ministry both as a purification and as the realization of a vision. May the Lord and these our patrons guide us as we move together into the third century of Marianist life.

Fraternally,

David Joseph Fleming, S.M.
Superior General

Appendix I: Special Announcement

I was able to take the occasion of the General Leadership Assembly to announce one new appointment. After nearly 27 years of service as General Archivist and Director of CEMAR (the Center for Marianist Research), Brother Ambrogio Albano will be retiring toward the end of 1999. He will be replaced by Brother Dario Tucci, also of the Province of Italy.

Brother Ambrogio has provided an extraordinary service over all these years to the entire Society. Our Archives are now among the most extensive and best organized in Rome. They are a rich source for researchers in Marianist studies and in a variety of other topics. Brother Ambrogio and his staff have labored to make their contents well indexed and available to all qualified researchers.

In his capacity as Archivist and as Director of CEMAR, Brother Ambrogio has produced on his own or collaborated with others in a long series of significant publications, organized symposia, and generally labored to bring the riches of our Marianist heritage into dialogue with contemporary themes and problems. His work in directing and editing the *Commentary on the Rule of Life of the Society of Mary* and his collaboration with several French Marianists in a seven-volume critical edition of the complete works of the Founder (*Ecrits et Paroles*), of which several volumes have already appeared, deserve special appreciation. The entire Society owes Brother Ambrogio a great debt of gratitude for his capable and unremitting work.

Brother Dario Tucci is available to us through the generosity of his Province of Italy. Many of you know him as a classicist and specialist in art history, a genial guide to the riches of Italian culture. We are grateful to him and his province for the willingness to take up this important service to the whole Society.

Appendix II: Messages of the General Leadership Assembly

1. TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY OF MARY

The Provincials, Assistant Provincials, Regional Superiors, and members of the General Administration, meeting in Bangalore, India during the General Leadership Assembly of 1999, send greetings to all members of the Society of Mary throughout the world.

As we have reviewed our progress since the General Chapter of 1996, and previewed the actions still to be fulfilled as we approach the next Millennium and our General Chapter of 2001, we are mindful of the many blessings and challenges that God and Mary have given the Society in the service of the Church and all people. We are especially grateful for your prayers and expressions of fraternal support that have inspired us to discern, in a typically Marianist Spirit of Family, God's will for our beloved Society.

The General Administration has provided us with fifteen major themes as an outline for our work, and we are accomplishing the task at the beautiful Deepahalli Centre, surrounded by many young Indian Brothers and candidates. We pray that Jesus and Mary continue to bless your efforts in Their service and in the service of all, especially the poor.

2. TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE MARIANIST FAMILY

The Provincials, Assistant Provincials, Regional Superiors, and members of the General Administration of the Society of Mary, meeting in Bangalore, India during our

General Leadership Assembly of 1999, send greetings to all branches and members of the Marianist Family throughout the world.

As we have reviewed our own progress since our General Chapter of 1996, and previewed the actions still to be fulfilled as we approach the next Millennium and our General Chapter of 2001, we are mindful of the many blessings and challenges that God and Mary have bestowed upon the Marianist Family in our communal service of the Church, all people, and each other. We are especially grateful for your prayers and expressions of familial support that have inspired us to discern, in a typically Marianist Spirit of Family, God's will for our beloved Society.

The General Administration has provided us with fifteen major themes as an outline for our work, and we are accomplishing the task at the beautiful Deepahalli Centre, surrounded by many young Indian Brothers and candidates. We pray that Jesus and Mary continue to bless your efforts in Their service and in the service of all, especially the poor.

3. TO THE MARIANIST FAMILY OF ARGENTINA

The General Leadership Assembly of the Society of Mary met in Bangalore, India, from the 31st of January to the 14th of February. In it, the Superiors of the different Marianist Units in the world reflected about our present situation and about the best way to deal with our immediate future as we tried to respond to the consultations done by our General Administration.

We held this meeting just a few days after the official recognition of the cure of Elena Otero which leads, in a very near future, to the Beatification of our Ven. Father William Joseph Chaminade. We want to thank especially the Marianist Family of Argentina for its interest in promoting this process and for the collaboration given to obtain this official recognition.

We hope that this new grand event in the Marianist Family confirms our vocation to the service of the Church and society.

4. TO THE MARIANIST REGION OF COLOMBIA

The General Leadership Assembly of the Society of Mary met in Bangalore, India, from the 31st of January to the 14th of February. In it, the Superiors of the different Marianist Units in the world reflected about our present situation and about the best way to deal with our immediate future as we tried to respond to the consultations done by our General Administration.

The Marianists in Colombia have been present in our prayers. A few months ago, Michel was assassinated by paramilitary in an absurd response to his desires for the freedom and promotion of his people. During the past few days your country suffered an earthquake which devastated a good part of your territory with grave human loses and enormous material destruction.

Both are two different realities which undoubtedly have been difficult to live through and assimilate. We feel close to you in your sorrows and hope and, with this message, wish to let you know of our solidarity and support. The blood of the martyrs is the seed for new Christians. The death of Michel will certainly give life to many. God continues close to his people even when some external signs seem to tell us the opposite. May the Lord continue to give you the strength to continue in the service of the needy. Be assured of our prayers.

5. TO OUR BROTHERS IN THE CONGO

The General Leadership Assembly of the Society of Mary met in Bangalore, India, from the 31st of January to the 14th of February. In it, the Superiors of the different Marianist Units in the world reflected about our present situation and about the best way to deal with

our immediate future as we tried to respond to the consultations done by our General Administration.

Our thoughts and our prayers go out very specially to our Marianist Brothers and Sisters, and to their families, in the Sector of Congo, to the communities of Brazzaville and of Voka, without forgetting Kinshasa, put to the test by war, and to the victims of these fratricidal struggles.

We think particularly of our Brothers suffering deprivations and of those who have had to flee the places of their mission in order to take refuge in other countries. May peace quickly return to these areas, and may each of you be able once again to take up your work in peace and serenity.

6. TO FR. ENRIQUE TORRES

The General Leadership Assembly of the Society of Mary met in Bangalore, India, from the 31st of January to the 14th of February. In it, the Superiors of the different Marianist Units in the world reflected about our present situation and about the best way to deal with our immediate future as we tried to respond to the consultations done by our General Administration.

The members of the General Leadership Assembly address this message of gratitude to Fr. Torres for the conscientious work you have accomplished over the years for the beatification of Fr. Chaminade. Thanks to your competency and perseverance we will soon have the joy of numbering our Founder among the Blessed. May you, the principal artisan of this successful project, accept the gratitude of all of the Unit Superiors gathered in Bangalore.

7. TO OUR HOSTS, THE MEMBERS OF THE REGION OF INDIA

The members of the General Leadership Assembly, meeting in Bangalore, India, wish to thank, in a special way, all members of the Region of India, for your support during this Assembly. In particular, we commend Brothers Tony Pistone, Ed Violett, James Dungdung, T. Pragasam, Paul Galantowicz and Father Florian Royer-Chabot for organizing the very smoothly operating logistics of the meeting, as well as the Scholastics, Aspirants, all community members and lay auxiliary staff members at Deepahalli for your service before, during, and after the gathering. The efficient planning and selfless dedication and service of all were very evident and appreciated. We were edified by your example and your testimony of Marianist religious life.

8. TO BROTHER AMBROGIO ALBANO

The General Leadership Assembly of the Society of Mary met in Bangalore, India, from the 31st of January to the 14th of February. In it, the Superiors of the different Marianist Units in the world reflected about our present situation and about the best way to deal with our immediate future as we tried to respond to the consultations done by our General Administration.

Our thanks go out to you, Brother Ambrogio Albano. Throughout more than twenty years of working as the Archivist of the General Administration, you have accomplished a remarkable task judged to be of a high level of professionalism by experts in the field. The memory of our Founder and of our predecessors in the Society of Mary, as well as the history of our Family, have thus been kept alive both in our documents and in our hearts. Your many publications, among them "*Ecrits et Paroles*" as well as the "*Dictionary of the Marianist Rule of Life*" contribute greatly to the knowledge and implementation of the Marianist charism. For all of these reasons we offer you our expression of deep gratitude.