

**XXXIV GENERAL CHAPTER
SOCIETY OF MARY (MARIANISTS)**

**REPORT OF THE
SUPERIOR GENERAL**

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XXXIV GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE SOCIETY OF MARY (JULY 2012)

REPORT OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

This report aims to show the current situation in the Society and Mary, as seen from a global perspective. Leaving the analysis of the more specific aspects to the reports of the Assistants, I just point out those general features that delineate the "face" of the Society at this moment in its history, features that show our strengths and weaknesses, features that challenge us and make us think. It is, therefore, a sort of "overall picture" in which are framed the suggestions and reflections which, as a General Council, we present to the Chapter. It is not, without a doubt, the only way it could be done. As with any picture, it depends on both one's perspective and the type of "glance" that one gives it. In any case, this is ours. In it we base our evaluation of the present moment and our questions for the future. It is for the Chapter, logically, to judge their pertinence and determine how they are used.

As I write this report, I have before me what Fr. David Fleming wrote for the previous General Chapter. A great deal, if not all, of what he wrote about continues to be valid and relevant today. It would be good to keep it in mind, and even in some cases, include it verbatim. However, six years have passed and during this time some circumstances have changed, new features and aspects have appeared, and some already existing situations have either deteriorated or improved.

1. THE CONTEXT

In order to gain a better understanding of the current situation in the Society, we need to place it in the context in which it is developing here and now. Without forgetting that, given its universality, it might be more appropriate to speak in the plural, about “contexts,” it is fitting nevertheless, to point out the traits of what we could call a “global context.” To a greater or lesser degree, all of the particular contexts involve these traits, especially, in such an interconnected and globalized world like ours. I will simply point out a few – those which, in my judgment, are the most significant.

1.1. Perplexing and uncertain times.

Let’s start by recognizing that we have not yet emerged from a sort of cultural undercurrent proper to a new era in the history of humanity. It is now commonplace to speak about the rapid and profound transformations taking place in our time. In his report to the Chapter of 2006, Fr. David Fleming gave a summary and recalled how, over the last three decades, our General Chapters have tried to guide the Society in response to the challenges of this tide. We remained immersed in this current – and a proof of that is the pertinence and validity that the documents emerging from these Chapters continue to have – but not with the same “feel” as some years ago. We sense that something has changed in the “feel” of our world. The Promethean optimism of unlimited growth and development, characteristic of modernity, has collapsed. Forced by a series of circumstances and events, humanity has had to confront its limits, has become painfully aware of them, is powerless, and wonders where this socio-cultural turbulence, in which it finds itself engulfed, will eventually lead. This is, perhaps, something new.

Some of these events have appeared suddenly, like earthquakes, and they shake our certainties. These have included: the very recent natural earthquakes, especially serious because of their particular strength and the disastrous after-effects, such as those in Haiti, which had a profound impact on us, in Chile, or in Japan, with its subsequent nuclear disaster which brings into question the technological dream of dominating nature; the financial crisis, powerful enough to topple governments, cause unemployment and poverty to skyrocket, even in the so-called developed world, make monetary systems tremble, devalue currency, the basis of the economic system in which we are immersed; the general protests of those who are “fed up” by the course which our societies, and the institutions which govern them, seem to be taking; the popular revolts in North Africa and the Middle East, which have claimed a large number of victims and whose effects are still mostly unknown. In a less sudden manner, but no less perplexing, we have also been struck by the resounding

failures of “messianic” pretensions like putting an end to terrorism and “imposing” so-called “just” regimes based on military missions, or the more peaceful and just attempt to combat the growing inequalities of the world with policies of cooperation, which have been the first victims of the economic crisis. Violence persists and continues to cause death. The gap between the rich and the poor widens; extreme poverty and hunger remain stubbornly present. What has become of the solemn declaration of objectives for the Third Millennium? ...

There is a growing feeling that this, our world, finds itself at a kind of impasse. All of the events mentioned above can't help but raise a multitude of questions as to how to move beyond this quagmire. They are serious questions, for which there are no clear answers. As the Holy Father said to a group of bishops from the United States on their *ad limina* visit last November 26: *There is an increased sense of concern on the part of many men and women, whatever their religious or political views, for the future of our democratic societies. They see a troubling breakdown in the intellectual, cultural and moral foundations of social life, and a growing sense of dislocation and insecurity, especially among the young, in the face of wide-ranging societal changes.* In fact, the old balances, on which the world seemed stable, have been broken and it is difficult to predict what type of “new world” will emerge. It supposes, it would seem, a necessary change in social, economic and political paradigms, but it does not seem as if we humans, nowadays, have the clarity needed to perceive these changes. And, even if we should perceive them, do we have the capacity, the power or, ultimately, the will to do what is necessary? In this context, the words of the prophet, Daniel, which we recite in the Divine Office, ring true in our own time: “at this time, there is no prince, no prophet, no leader...” (Dn 3:38 *Morning Prayer, Tuesday IV*); or the words of Jeremiah, perhaps more difficult for us to hear: “for both prophet and priest ply their trade through the land and have no knowledge” (“at their wits end” in the translation of the New Jerusalem Bible; Jer 14:18. *Morning Prayer, Friday III*). These are perplexing and uncertain times.

The same is true within the Church. The sting of the sexual abuse scandals, previously limited to a few countries, has ultimately become universal, seriously undermining the Church's moral authority. This blow has also affected religious life in its totality. While not all religious institutes are affected to the same degree – which is certainly the case – we can't forget that “the world” does not understand the distinctions between us. Therefore, the case of the Legionaries of Christ has been particularly harmful for everyone, not just because it called into question something as sacred as the foundational origins of the institute, which is primarily an internal problem, but also, and above all, because it thus calls into question the responsibility that the Church itself had in its obligation to exercise discernment during the founder's life.

Other ecclesial events, whose effects in the short and long term we do not yet see clearly, have also left a certain trail of bewilderment and concern in recent years: stricter canonical penal processes and penalties following allegations of sexual abuse, new decrees and guidelines on the liturgy, the shift in the approach to the “Lefevrian schism,” the prelature for Anglican “converts,” the recent theological polemic, in which we continue to be immersed, as to what has been the interpretation and reception of Vatican II in the Church over the fifty years since its conclusion... These are all signs that, even in the Church, we are facing a new era. The era of post-conciliar certainty and optimism is over; yet we still do not have a clear picture of what is to come.

1.2. Road signs.

In the eyes of the believer and the apostle that all of us are, this situation that I just described, far from being discouraging, must be seen as an opportunity and a challenge for our mission. Awareness of our own limitations, as well as the need and desire for salvation, create fertile ground for cultivating faith. Are we not, perhaps, on the verge of a post-secular era? Secularization, about which we continue to speak so often and which, for that matter, is possibly water under the bridge, is the final fruit of the modern era in which humanity has finally abandoned the certainty of the “truths of faith” for those of reason. But, what we are living in our age is not the substitution of one certainty for another, rather the very crisis of certainties themselves, and our ability to acquire them.

In my view, it is in this context where we must place and interpret the call to new evangelization, which resounds with such great force in the Church over these last few years. The creation of a dicastery specifically dedicated to respond to this call, the initiative called “the Court of the Gentiles,” a place for dialogue with the estranged, the call to the continental mission in Aparecida, the catechetical commitment of World Youth Days, the convocation of the Synod on New Evangelization, the proclamation of the Year of Faith, etc., are road signs directed at all of us, calling us to become involved. They are especially provocative signs for those, like us, who have received a particular charismatic mission to educate in the faith.

New evangelization – “nova bella,” our Founder would say – because the times are new. The *Lineamenta* of the upcoming Synod puts it this way: *the Christian presence and the work of the Church’s institutions are not easily perceived and, at times, are even looked upon with great reservation. In the last decades, repeated criticism has been leveled at the Church, Christians and the God we proclaim. Consequently, evangelization is facing new*

*challenges which are putting accepted practices in question and are weakening customary, well-established ways of doing things. In a word, the situation is requiring the Church to consider, in an entirely new way, how she proclaims and transmits the faith. (#4) And, even force it to look for a new face for itself, a new way of presenting itself. Christian life and practice must guide this reflection, in a deliberative process of devising new models of "being Church," which avoids the dangers of sectarianism and a "civic religion," and allows the Church, in today's post-ideological era, to continue to maintain her identity as missionary. In other words, in the variety of her models, the Church must not fail to be seen as a "domestic Church" and "The People of God."(#9) This means that there are "customary and well established ways of doing things" that today are ineffective. It is new evangelization, therefore, because the "routes" and "methods of announcing and transmitting the faith" are new; the very model of being Church is new. What are the road signs that indicate these new pathways? Without wishing to be exhaustive, I would like to highlight three that, to me, seem particularly significant for the Church in today's world (cf *Lineamenta*, #9).*

- a. **The path of poverty and humility in the face of dominance and power.** To evangelize is not to proselytize, nor to conquer "spheres of influence." The Good News cannot be imposed, nor is it an instrument of power. It is offered as a gift, a gift of hope to the poverty of humankind (cf *Lineamenta*, #7). Only the poor are capable of grasping and receiving it. The door through which the Good News entered into the world was a manger. The bearer of the Good News, being who he was, emptied himself of his rank, passing for "one being born in the likeness of man," even assuming the condition of a slave and dying in the most ignoble of ways (cf. Phil 2:5-8). Fragility, weakness and insignificance are not obstacles to evangelization, but rather, they are the very conditions for evangelization. Although many do not believe it, the difficulty with evangelization in our world stems not from the lack of influence of the Church, nor is it based upon the percentage of its presence within population statistics (remember that only a sixth of humanity has heard the Gospel). Neither is the Church hampered in its mission when it recognizes its weakness, including its sin, but just the opposite. The very recognition of this weakness is the fruit of the evangelization of the Church itself. How else to proclaim the Good News if not by announcing the one who came, not for the healthy, but for the sick.

"Courage is needed to sustain initiatives of social justice and solidarity, which put the poor at the centre of the Church's concern. Joy needs to be more evident in the dedication of one's life to a vocation to the priesthood or the consecrated life. A Church which transmits her faith, a Church of the "new evangelization," is capable in every situation of demonstrating

that the Spirit guides her and transforms the history of the Church, of individual Christians and of entire peoples and their culture. Another fruit of transmitting the faith is the courage to speak out against infidelity and scandal which arise in Christian communities as a sign and consequence of moments of fatigue and weariness in the work of proclamation. Other fruits include: the courage to recognize and admit faults; the capacity to continue to witness to Jesus Christ, while recounting our continual need to be saved, knowing that - as St. Paul the Apostle teaches - we can look at our weakness so that in this way we can acknowledge the power of Christ who saves us (cf. 2 Cor 12:9; Rom 7:14ff.); the exercise of penance, a commitment to the work of purification and the will to make atonement for the consequences of our errors; and an unfailing trust that the hope which has been given us "does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rom 5:5). All these fruits result from the process of transmitting the faith and proclaiming the Gospel, a process which first brings renewal to Christians and their communities, as it brings to the world the Gospel of Jesus Christ." (Lineamenta #17)

- b. **The path of dialogue in the face of fundamentalism.** The complexity and uncertainty of our world prove to be an overwhelming problem for those who seek "assurances." This gives rise to the temptation of fundamentalism, which is none other than the denial of complexity and a reduction to dogmatic or normative univocity. In the face of fundamentalism, the Church has proposed and continues to propose dialogue. It was the path inaugurated by Paul VI with his first encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam*, ratified by the Second Vatican Council, whereby dialogue became the mode of relating to the world, to other confessions, or even with other religions which, at various times in history, were ignored or fought against. The dialogue flowed from a respect and loving understanding of the other, and manifested itself in a willingness to walk together beginning with that which unites us at the deepest level. A relationship based on dominance is left aside in favor of one that is based on respect of the other even in and their diversity, and where the power shifts from skillful argumentation to the powerful witness of one's life. *"Families need to become true and real signs of love and sharing, with a capacity to hope in virtue of their openness to life. Forces are needed in building communities which have a true ecumenical spirit and are capable of dialogue with other religions. Courage is needed to sustain initiatives of social justice and solidarity, which put the poor at the centre of the Church's concern. Joy needs to be more evident in the dedication of one's life to a vocation to the priesthood or the*

consecrated life. A Church which transmits her faith, a Church of the "new evangelization," is capable in every situation of demonstrating that the Spirit guides her and transforms the history of the Church, of individual Christians and of entire peoples and their culture."(Lineamenta, #17)

- c. **The path of a personal encounter with Christ.** At the foundation of our faith, beyond dogmas, rules and institutions, there is a personal encounter with the Lord. (cf. *Lineamenta*, #11). Without this fundamental personal relationship, nothing within the Christian faith has meaning. It is the rock on which all else is built, the root from which everything springs. If we really want to evangelize, we cannot do it without proceeding from the most basic place. During times when there is a crisis of certainty, evangelization, prior to being a transmission of what we believe, must be a witness to the one in whom we believe, in whom we trust. In transmitting the faith, the first question that needs to be answered when proclaiming the Gospel today is not the that of the doubtful Pilate "**what is truth?**" (Jn 18:38), but rather, that of the incipient believer, Peter: "Lord, **to whom** shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life." (Jn 6:68). With these words, the Apostle manifests where the root of his faith lies – not in understanding the mysterious words of the Lord's discourse on the Bread of Life, but in placing his trust in him who spoke them. Peter probably shared the feelings of confusion, surprise, and even scandal, with those who, because of these feelings, abandoned the Lord, but something radically distinguished him from them: his personal relationship with Jesus, from which sprang total confidence in him and, ultimately, his faith.

Clearly, our first objects of New Evangelization must be ourselves, if we wish to be true evangelizers. One cannot transmit what one does not live. "*The transmission of the faith is a very complex, dynamic process which totally involves the faith of Christians and the life of the Church. What is not believed or lived cannot be transmitted. The sign of a well-founded, mature faith is the natural way we communicate it to others. Christ "called to him those whom he desired; and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach" (Mk 3:13, 14). The Gospel can only be transmitted on the basis of "being" with Jesus and living with Jesus the experience of the Father, in the Spirit; and, in a corresponding way, of "feeling" compelled to proclaim and share what is lived as a good and something positive and beautiful.*" (*Lineamenta* #12). Along the same lines, the Pope exhorted the bishops of the United States in the discourse mentioned above: *The obstacles to Christian faith and practice raised by a secularized culture also affect the lives of believers, leading at times to that "quiet attrition" from the Church which you raised with me during my Pastoral Visit... Evangelization thus appears not simply a task to be undertaken ad extra; we ourselves are the first to need re-evangelization.*

2. THE SOCIETY OF MARY TODAY

2.1. Some statistics.

As the personnel statistics indicate, the Society, with its twelve hundred members, is a medium-small sized institute, in comparison with other religious institutes of men in the Church. Nevertheless, we have a rather extensive presence around the world.

DISTRIBUTION OF PERSONNEL (1 Jan 2012)

UNITS	TOT.	Av.	age		Priests	Av.	Lay Rel.	Av.	Temp. Prof.	Av.	Perp. Prof.	Av.
		age	Oldest	youngest		age		age		age		age
Argentina	15	68	98	32	6	60	9	73	0	0	15	68
Canada - Haïti	36	60	90	24	13	74	23	52	12	29	24	76
Chile	20	73	81	49	8	71	12	74	0	0	20	73
Colombia-Ecuador	31	51	82	21	14	60	17	43	7	28	24	57
Côte d'Ivoire	29	40	79	25	7	44	22	39	11	32	18	45
Eastern Africa	47	38	81	22	6	47	41	36	23	29	24	47
España	222	69	99	26	94	70	127	68	6	31	216	70
France - Congo	110	63	98	30	36	74	74	58	13	33	97	67
India	93	35	74	20	12	46	81	33	33	26	60	39
Italia	59	72	95	40	26	69	33	74	0	0	59	72
Japan	34	70	91	45	20	69	14	71	0	0	34	70
Korea	23	52	77	33	8	50	15	53	2	44	21	52
Meribah	35	57	76	27	6	64	29	56	0	0	35	57
Mexico	15	49	81	25	1	81	14	47	2	33	13	52
Österreich	19	72	87	51	8	73	11	72	0	0	19	72
Peru	15	67	93	40	7	67	8	66	2	41	13	70
Suisse	18	74	95	53	10	74	8	73	0	0	18	74
Togo	36	35	55	21	4	42	32	35	13	27	23	40
USA	343	71	103	25	115	73	228	71	5	34	337	72
TOTALS	1200	62			403	69	803	59	133	29	1073	66

If we keep in mind that Europe and the United States make up 62% of the total religious, we can see how our presence in the rest of the world is proportionally scarce and very spread out.

The proportion of priests and lay religious, as a whole, continues to be similar to what it has been in recent years, more or less 1/3 and 2/3 respectively. But, if we count only the perpetually professed members (the orientation of those with temporary vows not yet having been set) the proportion of priests rises to 37.5%. In some Units, it surpasses 50% (Canada, Colombia, Japan, Peru and Switzerland).

The median age, as a whole, is moderately high, but surpasses 70 years in Units with statistical weight and tradition: Canada (without Haiti), France (without Congo), Italy, Austria, Switzerland and the United States. Also, Chile, Argentina, Spain, Japan and Peru are approaching this threshold. Thus, we can clearly see aging in eleven of the nineteen Units. Africa, India and the Caribbean provide the youth.

Since the latter part of the 1960's, we have been decreasing in numbers. Since the last General Chapter until January 1, 2012, we have diminished by 152 religious, as the following table indicates.

Movement of Personnel (from July 29, 2006 until January 1, 2012)

UNITS	DECEASSED	WITHDRAWN	FIRST VOWS	PERP. VOWS	ORDINATIONS
Argentina	3	2		1	1
Canada - Haïti			12 (Haïti)		
Chile		3			
Colombia/Ecuador	3	6	6	3	2
Côte d'Ivoire		5	10	7	1
Eastern Africa	1	13	22	9	4
España	38	11	8	2	3
France - Congo	27	4 (Congo)	8 (Congo)	7	
India		38	35	24	5
Italia	5			1	
Japan	3				
Korea		5	2	3	1
Meribah	2	3		1	
México		3	7	6	
Österreich	5				
Perú		2	2		
Suisse	6				
Togo		8	12	6	2
USA	75	14	9	5	2
TOTAL	168	117	133	75	21

It is clear that first professions are far from replacing losses by death or departure. The only countries in which we are growing are those in Africa, Mexico and Haiti. In India, despite the great number of first professions, these do not surpass the number of departures, which is a significant fact to consider.

2.2. *Our weakness and our strength.*

As we are well aware, and the statistics surely confirm, our greatest weakness today is rooted in the area of personnel – in the reduction, the aging and the dispersion of

our religious. It is brought about because we have few vocations (it would be desirable that first professions would at least offset deaths), but also because there are many departures. Fr. André Fétis presents the perseverance statistics in his report. Using the data given in the table above as a reference, we see that we have had nearly a 10% rate of departures in the last six years. This is a large number. It is an evident sign that our principal weaknesses have to do with the consistency of our religious life, with all that influences it: the spiritual life, prayer, the quality of community life and, most definitely, formation, both initial and ongoing.

Despite the weakness caused by the decline in personnel, we find, however, that our apostolic presence and our missionary activity have not contracted in the same proportion as that of our personnel. Yes, we have closed communities, but we have also opened others and, in general, we can say that the Marianist mission remains strong in the world. If this has been possible, it is due to our collaboration with laypeople. In recent years, we have re-discovered the value of the laity in the Church and in the inspiration of our Founder. Following in his footsteps, we realize that we must walk with them in the mission, placing our confidence in them and giving them responsibilities. Our great success has been in dedicating a large part of our efforts and resources to their formation. Collaboration with the laity is, without a doubt, a gift of the Spirit and one of our greatest strengths today. We must not neglect it.

2.3. Challenges for the future.

From what I have already mentioned above, there clearly derives a series of challenges which affect our spiritual life, formation, community life, mission, shared mission with the laity, etc. Although these have been recurring themes of recent Chapters, they continue to be critical, and we cannot leave them aside. With the passage of time and changing historical and social circumstances they are manifested in various ways, but they always involve these same elements. In recent years, these challenges have emerged with more clarity and urgency in some situations which, therefore, become problematic. Allow me to point out those that have occupied and preoccupied the attention of the General Council during its term:

- a. **The consistency and maturity of young Units.** This is one of the most important challenges for the future. We must ensure that they become rooted in a “culture” of authentic religious life, and authentic Marianist life. They need formators and leaders who can guarantee this, and it is not easy to come across them, given the youth and lack of experience within the Unit. Nevertheless, it is the future of the Society that is at stake. Therefore, we have continued to remind the founding Units that, in spite of their own internal

difficulties, they have a grave responsibility to help and accompany the “daughter-units” in the path toward true maturity in every way. Also, when it comes to temporalities matters, it is critical that the young Unit’s initial total dependency give way to true, adult autonomy, without which there is no future for them. This is a very important and basic aspect, without which there can be neither life nor mission. John Paul II emphatically pointed this out in the document *Ecclesia in Africa*, fruit of the Synod of 1994 regarding the Church in that continent: *“the Synod Fathers emphasized how necessary it is for each Christian community to be organized so that as far as possible it can provide for its own needs. Besides qualified personnel, evangelization requires material and financial means, and Dioceses are often far from possessing them in sufficient measure. It is therefore urgent that the particular Churches in Africa have the objective of providing for their own needs as soon as possible, thereby assuring their self-sufficiency. Consequently, I earnestly invite the Episcopal Conferences, Dioceses and all the Christian communities of the Continent’s Churches, insofar as it is within their competence, to see to it that this self-sufficiency becomes increasingly evident.”* (#104)

- b. **The contraction and aging of the long-standing Units.** This problem is particularly dramatic in Europe, not only for us, but also for the whole of religious life, and it also affects other continents and zones throughout our planet. Besides hindering the accompaniment of the younger Units, it also generates very concrete internal challenges to which we must pay particular attention. Two of these seem especially urgent to me: the necessary restructuring of communities, along with our apostolic presence, and the need to attend to the growing number of aged and infirmed religious. It is clear that those Units that find themselves shrinking and aging cannot continue to maintain the same type of life and presence in their communities. It is necessary to change the style and shape, in such a way that, on the one hand, it assures the continuance of religious and community life; while on the other hand; it also fosters the support of the laity and collaboration with them in our mission. It also makes the closing of some communities and the abandonment of some works inevitable. In these cases, what communities should be closed? What works do we give up? How, and to whom, do we leave them? These questions require careful discernment as we respond to the reality of new circumstances.

Similarly, adequate attention, both spiritual and material, must be paid to the growing proportion of brothers who, for reasons of age or health, require such attention. This has opened up a new area of concern for us, obliging these Units to provide timely responses to the growing challenges in this area.

General Chapters have not addressed these issues and, therefore, we have no guidelines. The policies that are being adopted in various Units, both with regard to internal restructuring, as well as regarding the aged and infirmed, vary according to circumstances and, perhaps, it is best that way. Nevertheless, it would be good to reflect about these concerns and offer some general criteria as a reference.

- c. **Strengthening of new foundations.** Our recent foundations (Poland, Cuba, Haiti, Philippines) are still quite weak. With the exception of Haiti, we have difficulty recruiting vocations. One of the reasons for this difficulty (not the only one – but still a very important one) is the lack of concretization of Marianist identity or the mission in these foundations. The lack of typically Marianist apostolic works makes the meaning and function of our vocation appear unfocused to potential candidates. And, if they happen to join (as is the case in Haiti), their initial formation is devoid of the necessary preparation and orientation towards the mission, a fundamental element of formation, both in its objectives and its preparation, above all during the period of temporary profession. Some years ago, these foundations were begun because it was judged important to “be present” in these countries, owing to their circumstances and “strategic” value for the Church in the future, but we have to recognize that, perhaps, we did not pay sufficient attention to the “how” regarding that presence. Lacking that concern, as well as Marianist charismatic clarity, at the time of the creation of the community and the selection of a work or concrete apostolate, we have not been able to give clear witness to our identity, specifying our particular contribution to the life and mission of the Church. It is, therefore, a challenge that we need to face quickly and decisively so as to strengthen the recent foundations and, perhaps, “re-found” others, less new, that languish due to a similar void in their origins.
- d. **The medium-range and long term financial situation of the Society,** seriously affected by the growing shortage of our active personnel, by the new geographic distribution, and by the worldwide economic crisis in which we find ourselves. This is a very important challenge which merits attention, vigilance and foresight. I will limit myself to simply mentioning it here, as one element on the list of the four problematic situations that have most captured the attention of the General Council during these years. The Assistant for Temporalities will treat this issue in detail as part of his report.

3. THE WORK OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

3.1. *Its objectives and strategies.*

The first responsibility of the General Council, as the *Rule of Life* indicates, is to “carry out the policies and directives of the General Chapter.” (a. 7.48)

The General Chapter of 2006 left us two important normative texts: a new Chapter 7 for Book II of the *Rule of Life*, dealing with governance, and the *General Finance Directory*. Both have been a great help to the General Council by providing a clear legislative framework enabling us to make clear decisions or set standards for animation and governance in the Society. Making use of these in relation to the Units, we found, nevertheless, a certain unfamiliarity with the same documents on the part of the brothers. Fortunately, the incorporation of the new chapter about governance in the new editions of the *Rule* makes this information more readily accessible for consultation and this is helping to overcome this ignorance. The Assistant for Temporalities will report about the implementation of the *General Finance Directory*.

The Chapter also left us a series of reflections and orientations for the Society, under the title *In Mission with Mary*. With these, as I stated in my introductory letter for these documents, we are exhorted, in the first place, to face the era in which we are living “with conviction and hope based on the strengthening and revitalizing of our charismatic identity” (Document 1: *Toward a Marian Style of Church*) and, secondly, to progress along the road toward living in the Society as an international community (Document 2: *An International Community in a Globalized World*).

Following its reading and reflection on these guidelines, the General Council formulated and published concrete objectives and strategies for each one of the Three Offices for the six years of the term. As you will recall, they were grouped into two large general objectives, the two principal purposes that motivated and guided our actions throughout our mandate:

- a. **To increase the knowledge of, and living out of our charism.** It was evident to us that the Chapter of 2006 contained a strong call toward this objective. It was a call to “take care of the roots” that nurture our life, an important call in changing times, as I said in my homily during the Eucharist at the closing of the Chapter: “*In considering this call to a concern for our roots, the image of a gardener or a peasant who transplants a tree or a plant comes to mind. His major concern is the roots: that the tree or plant takes them with it, that they are not left behind in the previous soil, that they do not dry up but have sufficient space and*

moisture in the new ground. When he has transplanted it, he sees that it withers somewhat, that some leaves drop off, that some branches dry up. These are symptoms of "transplant stress." But he does not worry about it. He knows that if the roots are healthy, the plant or tree will recover the vigor that it had, the drooping leaves will revive, new shoots and leaves will come forth, and the fruit will return." I will leave it to the Assistants to relate how we have tried to take and promote concrete steps in this direction. It is the job of the Chapter to assess the path we have followed and, if it should judge it opportune, give orientations and suggestions for moving forward. As part of this general report, I just want to express my satisfaction with the welcome and resonance that this objective has had with the brothers. There is really a desire to deepen our awareness of the charism and a consciousness of the need to do so. The extraordinary response to the convocation of the "Chaminade Year" and its success, especially as regards the increase in appreciation and regard for our Founder, are proof of this. I believe we should continue to nurture and harness this momentum.

- b. **To assure and care for the conditions necessary to animate the Units.** In times of weakness and change, we need to pay special attention to the soundness of structures and their corresponding means of servicing our life and our mission. I refer to those structures and means instituted to shape our life and our mission: chapters, councils, programs and houses of formation, apostolic works, economic means for completing the mission..., all those things by which we animate and govern together; what we call a "Unit:" Provinces, Regions, Districts and Sectors. Continuing with the image of the plant or tree, it is like having to care for the trunk so that the sap reaches the branches and fruit. As I said in the homily previously cited: *"it isn't enough that the roots are healthy and strong. It is also necessary that the trunk be firm and healthy. If the trunk is split, damaged or splintered, the sap that comes from the roots will not circulate well and will not reach the branches attached to it. For that reason, the Chapter has talked about solidarity, understanding ourselves as a single international community, a Marianist Family. The trunk will be strong if we embrace one another, making our fraternal communion not only affective, but effective."* The era of completely self-sufficient Units in the Society has passed. Very few of them can, by themselves, ensure a minimum of support for the required institutional structures. The General Council has been attentive and vigilant in this regard, offering guidance and advice, not permitting premature autonomy, suggesting, accompanying or establishing collaboration and fusions.

3.2. Restructuring.

Flowing directly from the spirit of this second general objective, some Units and some novitiates have been restructured during these last six years.

As regards Units, the District of Eastern Africa, dependent upon the Province of the United States, became a Region; the foundation of the Philippines, originally dependent upon the General Council, became dependent upon the Province of the United States, according to the directives of the last General Chapter; and the Provinces of Madrid and Zaragoza united to form the new Province of Spain. We believe that, in all these cases, the processes that were followed, although different according to circumstances and objectives, have all been excellent. The results open new and good perspectives for the Units involved.

For its special character, and inasmuch as it is the first of its kind in the Society, the process of restructuring in the Region of Switzerland warrants special mention and particular reflection. This process began a year ago and is expected to be completed after the General Chapter. The situation in Switzerland is extremely weak. The diminution and aging of the membership has reached the point where it is necessary to leave the last apostolic commitment maintained by the Region. With no common apostolic work, and with the religious practically concentrated in a single community, it has become clear that their *status* within the Society of Mary needs to change. As we told them in the report following our last visitation, "Switzerland can no longer support the *Statutes* of a Region, with the corresponding institutional structures that are required of it... If it desires to maintain its own particular type of identity, and, consequently, a certain autonomy, it will have to choose between two possibilities that the *Rule* offers: transformation into a District or Sector (presupposing dependence upon another Unit) or, we add, the third possibility of becoming a community dependent upon the General Administration." We invited the Regional Council to lead an internal dialogue and reflection about these possibilities, and then let us know their wishes. Their inclination was toward the third option, which was also the one that the General Council considered best, given their concrete circumstances. With this premise, we have initiated a process for the development of statutes that will define them as a "zonal community" (*RL*, a.7.29), dependent upon the Superior General and his Council, and setting up their functioning as such. As I said, this type of restructuring is new in the Society, so we could not refer to any previous or existing model. In the end, we hope that we have come upon the best way to carry out this restructuring. The *Rule of Life* offers us adequate resources to do so. Only with regard to one matter have we had to stray into a normative vacuum: the matter of their representation at a General Chapter. I

have attached to this report a consultation that we present to this Chapter regarding this matter. (cf. Appendix I).

The realignment of novitiates, consequently creating international novitiates, is a universal tendency within religious life today. The scarcity of vocations and the growing need to generate a sense of belonging to a global community, have required it. The Society has maintained, for some years now, three international novitiates: one for Latin America and two for Africa. In the rest of the continents, each Unit has formed its own novices when they had them. Nowadays, not all Units are capable of offering sound formation to candidates, due, above all, to a lack of formators, proper context, or resources. For this reason, keeping in mind that the erection, transfer or suppression of a novitiate is the canonical responsibility of the Superior General, with the consent of the Council (*CIC*, c. 647 #1), we have proceeded to some restructuring in Europe and Asia. We made this move in order to better leverage our resources and better respond to the real formative needs, particularly in relation to specifically Marianist formation and to become better acquainted with the Society as a whole. Specifically, we have closed the novitiates of Italy and Korea, and the novices from these Units have been incorporated into the novitiates in Zaragoza (Spain) and Davao (Philippines), respectively. This arrangement would also be the intention should there be, God willing, other candidates from Europe or Eastern Asia. In both cases, the novitiates, which are receiving candidates from other Units, continue to belong to the Provinces of Spain and the United States, respectively. These Units maintain the responsibilities and faculties that Canon Law and the *Rule* grant them, both in the functioning of the novitiate, as well as with regard to the formation team. Therefore, the reception of the novices from other Units in these novitiates presupposes a previous dialogue and a formal agreement between the Unit that sends the persons and those who receive them. This dialogue concerns the type of collaboration with (or participation on) the formation team, as well as everything related to formation prior to this stage, according to the *Guide for Formation in the Society of Mary* (initial discernment, prenovitiate programs, prior preparation of the candidate, etc.). The agreement should also address, logically, the specific implications of economic collaboration.

3.3. Support of Unit Administrations.

The General Council has always considered that one of its most important tasks is to advise and support the various organs of government, personal and collegial, in their animation and orientation of the life and mission of the Units. The Council has sought to fulfill this responsibility using various means:

- a. The most common means is through **ordinary communication**, be it correspondence, telephone conversation or by computer. We believe that this communication is good. There is mutual trust and modern technology makes such communication quite fluid. We consider that the level of our familiarity with the apostolic works of the different Units is high. Save rare exceptions, we receive regular informative bulletins from the Units, as well as minutes of Councils. These permit us to be aware of what is happening in the particular Unit. If we need to clarify something, or we are interested in knowing more about a specific matter, we do not hesitate to make this known, and normally we receive a rapid and complete response from those responsible. And, vice versa. Both the superiors, as well as assistants in the Units, know that they can contact any member of the General Council, at any time, and we have tried to be available to respond as soon as possible to whatever is requested of us.

The response to our *Consultations* during the process of appointing provincial or regional superiors helps us to round out our view of the situation in a given Unit, from the perspective of those who are actually living there. The majority of brothers tend to respond, but we need to continue emphasizing the importance of these consultations. For us, they are a fundamental reference point when it comes to choosing the right people.

- b. **Ratification of the Acts of Chapters.** For the Council, this responsibility is also an opportunity to deepen our knowledge of the Units, by reading about how the Chapters unfolded, and the decisions that were approved following the deliberations. Our response, always written, is not limited to formal approval of the decisions, but we also try to express reactions and commentary that emerged during our review. The response is directed to the capitulants but, in general, it is common practice that the Councils decide to publish it for the knowledge of all the brothers of the Unit. We hope, therefore, that these serve as a stimulus and orientation for all.
- c. **Visitations.** These are, without any doubt, the most important means of communication and of mutual familiarity. Nothing can replace direct contact with the actual situation within our communities and the works of each Unit. It is a very exhausting, but essential task. It is also most gratifying, as we are able to enjoy the esteem and fraternal affection of the brothers. We have been welcomed everywhere and accompanied on our visits with exquisite attention from everyone. Through personal interviews with each religious, through gatherings and meetings with the communities and their works, we have been able to better understand the reality behind the reports and documents

to which I alluded in the preceding paragraphs. And, meanwhile, the brothers have been able to satisfy, at least in part, their interest in Marianist issues, as well as come to a broader knowledge of the Society through our presence. Scrupulously respecting the principle of subsidiarity, the objective of our visits has not been to intervene in the operation of the communities or of the works, but rather to assist the superior of the Unit and his Council in carrying out their responsibilities for governance. Therefore, at the conclusion of every visit, we have always presented a written report indicating our comments and guidance. These have been directed to the Unit administrations and are combined with dialogue during a final meeting with them. While the recipients, however, are the members of the Unit Council, in the majority of cases, these members tend to decide to publish the reports for all the brothers to see. What are the results or impact of these reports? This is a question that the General Council asks itself. The reports tend to contain precise guidance which, on plenty of occasions, falls by the wayside, never turning into concrete actions. Perhaps it would be good to think about some way of follow-up in order that there might be more results later on.

d. ***New Leaders Seminars.*** As has been done previously, the General Council organized two seminars for superiors during these six years: one from September 30 – October 13, 2007 and the other from November 14-27, 2010. These were two-week long gatherings, consisting of sharing, reflection and formation for superiors who had been recently appointed. The seminars had the following objectives:

1. To learn from one another – including the presenters – and to enable all to share thoughts and concerns about attitudes, feelings, qualities and skills related to the role of the superior;
2. To come to know one's self better, as a religious called to play a special role in taking on the responsibility of leadership and governance; to organize a formation plan that helps to develop the strengths of each one;
3. To dialogue with the General Administration about various problems, situations, processes, etc., which a superior is likely to face;
4. To reflect upon and discuss the personal objectives of the new Unit superiors.

The responses to the two meetings and the work undertaken by the participants have always been excellent. The final evaluations have been overwhelmingly positive. There are always things that can be improved, but we consider that this is something that ought to be continued.

3.4. *Communication with the entire Society.*

Besides communication with the Unit Councils, the General Administration has developed several other means of direct communication with the brothers and the communities. These include circulars, the monthly bulletin *Via Latina 22*, and the Marianist Family web page: www.marianist.org.

In line with what the General Council set forth in its first objective, mentioned above, both the circulars of the Superior General and the *SM 3 OFFICES* of the Assistants, have tried to promote reflection and zeal for the fundamentals of our charism, which affect our life and our mission. The feedback that comes to us about the reception of these communications, as well as about their use by communities is very rare, almost non-existent. Nevertheless, despite the absence of objective data which might permit us to better evaluate their impact, we believe these documents have been useful.

We feel that the informative monthly publication, *Via Latina 22*, is fulfilling its objective and is followed with interest. It is sent electronically to all Unit administrations with the directive that it be made available to all the communities. In general these methods work well, although we do not know if those who have no easy access to the Internet actually receive a printed copy.

4. THE MARIANIST FAMILY

The relationship among the four branches that comprise the Marianist Family: the Marianist Lay Communities, the Daughters of Mary Immaculate, the Society of Mary and the Marian Alliance, is a promising reality that continues to grow in all ways. It is a sign of the times and a clear gift of the Spirit, a providential opportunity to regain the original spirit of our Founder. Meetings together, mutual collaboration in formation and mission, and other joint ventures are brought to life in many places by the so-called "Family Councils."

At the world level as well, there exists the corresponding Council of the Marianist Family which brings together the Councils of the four branches once each year, normally during the first week in November, at our General Administration. These annual meetings allow us to share, pray and reflect together, deepen our knowledge of each other, and also promote joint ventures for the Marianist Family throughout the world. Initiatives such as the World Day of Marianist Prayer and the celebration of the "Chaminade Year" on the occasion of the 250th anniversary of his birth have had very positive responses and continue to be very fruitful. We hope that the same

can be said for the latest proposal, the annual celebration of the “World Day of Marianist Vocations” on March 25. Besides promoting and planning these initiatives, the World Council engaged in a reflection about our “shared mission,” about what this expression means to us, how we understand it on a practical level, and its implications. The results of the first reflections have been compiled in an initial document which was sent to the Family Councils throughout the world for feedback. With the reactions received, we will hone the document and then offer it as an important reference point to help us structure and empower our mutual communion in service of the Kingdom.

Communication is a major concern for the World Council. We have the impression that not enough information makes it to the “trenches.” As previously mentioned, we make a web page available, the content of which we decided, during our last meeting, to renew and reorganize. Is it consulted and used? Each year the World Council publishes a report about what it discussed during its meeting. This report is sent to all councils of the Family. Is it sufficiently distributed, after that? These are some of our questions. In any case, we believe that we should strengthen the role of the Family Councils around the world and appeal to the Society’s contribution to this effort.

5. DEEP QUESTIONS TO REFLECT UPON AS WE FACE THE FUTURE

I conclude my report with two profound questions that have to do with our future. These have emerged over and over in our discussions and deliberations within the General Council. They have to do with the changes that the Society is experiencing with its growing fragility. Our intuition is that, in these circumstances, its survival will depend upon a greater interaction among the different Units. It is here that the two important questions emerge:

- a. The first refers to the style of governance in the Society. We could say that our form of government since the 1981 *Rule of Life* is best described as a “federal” type. Each Province or Region is autonomous. Nevertheless, and owing precisely to the increasing general weakness, we speak more and more about the need for mutual assistance, about acting as a “global community.” But that also requires a more incisive global government. In that sense, within the General Council, we experience a growing pressure toward centralization, difficult to reconcile with the style that derives from our *Rule of Life*. Should we change our style of governance? To what? How so?... The new Chapter 7 of the Second Book of the *Rule* provides for “Zones” as places for coming together to promote the necessary mutual collaboration, but they hold no authority over the Units that compose them. Neither are we sure

that the current way of composing the Zones is adequate. With the purpose of reflection on these matters, the General Council sent a questionnaire, but we have not received responses. The question, therefore, about the style and forms of a more general government, remains in the air.

- b. Linked to the first question, comes a second. It refers to the consequences that all the preceding will have on formation. On the one hand, it is increasingly necessary to form our candidates for a “global community” that goes beyond the limits of a particular Unit; on the other hand, as I have already commented above, it is clear that in circumstances of uncertainty there is no future without a solid spiritual, religious and Marianist formation. Does each and every one of the Units have formators and adequate contexts suitable for a task of this nature? How do we provide for this deficiency? More “control” or coordination by the general government? As I have explained in the section on restructuring, the General Council has made some decisions in this regard, but they are merely structural and refer only to novitiates. The larger question remains open, just the same.

Leaving, of course, the decision to the Chapter itself, I consider these to be questions that should be reflected upon and acted upon. And, if it does, I believe that it would have to be grounded in concrete and practical decisions and orientations. In these matters, and in these times, the simple pronouncement of principles and mere exhortations serve very little purpose.

Here, I conclude this panoramic report of our situation and our challenges as the Society of Mary. Through the intercession of our Blessed Founder, I ask the Lord to grant the light of his Spirit to each one of us, and Mary, our Mother, to accompany us, so that the XXXIV General Chapter may enlighten and guide our life and our mission according to his will at this moment in our history.


Manuel J. Cortés, SM
Superior General

APPENDIX I

CONSULTATION ABOUT THE PARTICIPATION OF SWITZERLAND IN THE GENERAL CHAPTER ACCORDING TO ITS NEW *STATUTES*.

1. INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

As I have indicated above, the Region of Switzerland will be changing its status, becoming a “zonal community” dependent upon the Superior General and his Council. As mentioned, from this new arrangement raises the question about its participation in General Chapters, something not foreseen by the *Rule of Life*.

According to the *Rule of Life*, only Provinces, Regions and Districts have representation at the General Chapter. Sectors have active and passive voice through the Unit to which they pertain, and members of possible international communities dependent directly upon the General Administration, are represented by the Unit from which they proceed. Following these principles, the new *Statutes* of Switzerland would leave this group of religious in the margin of the General Chapter, given that they do not fit into any of these aforementioned structures. Certainly, as a dependent of the General Administration, the “zonal community” could be considered to be represented by the General Administration, by not by a democratic process.

2. PROPOSAL

Whereas, therefore, it is appropriate that the new zonal community not find itself isolated in this way, and looking for a solution that meets the provisions of the *Rule of Life*, the General Council proposes that *the religious who are in Switzerland elect a representative to the General Chapter who would participate in the Chapter, not as a delegate, but as a guest, that is to say, with voice, but without vote.*

We thought it important to submit this proposal as a consultation of the Chapter because it has to do with an invitation which, admittedly, would not be *ad personam* nor *ad casum*, as are foreseen as possible invitees to chapters, but rather, in a certain way, it would be institutionalized, “regular,” since it would be set in the *Statutes*.

APPENDIX II

THE MARIANIST FOUNDATION IN POLAND

The Marianist community in Poland, which depends directly upon the General Administration, is currently located in Piastów, near Warsaw, and includes two religious: Brother José Ignacio Iglesia and Father Emilio Cárdenas. Having come from the former Province of Zaragoza, they now belong to the Province of Spain.

Within the Society it is perceived as stagnant. They have spent 18 years there since its foundation and there has been no growth in the community. Looking just at the numerical data, many religious are asking themselves about the reasons for the apparent paralysis and about whether it is appropriate or not to continue under the current conditions. It is evident that there is need for an evaluation of it. Given that it originated from a General Chapter, it seems appropriate to us that it be the General Chapter to evaluate it again. To this end, we offer this report, in which the capitulants will find, first of all, a synthetic description of the stages along the road that, with its lights and shadows, the foundation has traveled in its history. This procedure seems essential for arriving at a more precise understanding of where we are at the current moment, how we are and what future possibilities might be foreseen, if any. We finish by setting out briefly the final opinion of the General Council.

1. ORIGINS (1991-1993)

After the fall of Communism, the General Chapter of Dayton (1991) charged the GA with the foundation of a community in one of the countries of “Eastern Europe.” In 1994 the community of Czestochowa was opened in Poland. Two Marianist religious were assigned there: Dariusz Purgal, a Polish lay religious of the Province of France, and Emilio Cárdenas, a priest of the Province of Zaragoza.

2. CZESTOCHOWA (1994-2007)

The community delayed for a few years in becoming stabilized. Finally, in 1995, Father Eddie Alexandre of the Province of France arrived, with the intention of being the formator of possible vocations. He remained for two years. In 1997 he returned to his province. Later, in 1998, Dariusz Purgal also returned to his province. In 1999 José Ignacio Iglesia, a brother from the Zaragoza Province, came to the community.

In 2005, Zbigniew Leszczyński, a Polish priest from the Province of Italy, joined the community, but stayed for only six months.

In Czestochowa, the two brothers who remained would spend important years in preparation: learning the language, getting into the Slavic and Polish culture, getting to understand the Polish church, becoming acquainted with the spirituality, the values and the needs of the Polish people. This experience was enhanced by the particular way in which they maintained contact and collaboration with the Marian sanctuary of Jasna Góra.

The time of learning was hard. They found that they had to spend many hours in study and prayer, to rethink our form of community life. Their apostolic activity had no defined mission, which meant searching and various try-outs for a mission field.

They relied upon a house that the diocese generously offered to them. They began in it with a small residence for university students. Then they opened a small spirituality center. This center gave them an entrée into contact with many Polish settings. People came from all over Poland to follow their programs and the brothers went out on mission to give retreats and conferences in many different places of the Polish territory. The direct results were poor. The constant search for vocations was unfruitful. Czestochowa was the “dam which held back the river” but, at the same time it forced us to gain greater depth, so as to get over the barrier. The brothers had to rethink and deepen the Marianist charism in that new situation. Emilio presented his doctorate on Father Chaminade in 2001 at the University of Lublin in Polish. In short, this period turned out to be necessary and also a very rich one, seen in hindsight. Throughout that time their discernment was on-going. The GA, being directly in charge of the foundation, closely followed the process. Our brothers came out of the long trial strengthened and decided to take a different turn for the mission and the community.

This experience allowed them to get more deeply into and better understand the directive of the Chapter “to found in a country of Eastern Europe.” Rather than a foundation in “Eastern Europe,” or in “a country that has come out of Communism,” a description that lends itself to a somewhat narrow vision, they think that it is better and more appropriate to speak of a Marianist foundation in “the Slavic culture.” The greater part of the Slavic peoples live the Christian faith within the Greco-Byzantine tradition. For the SM, it can be important to incorporate the Christian experience of the Slavic peoples. Poland is a key location that opens up for the Roman Catholic Church the Slavic spiritual experience, the most numerous Christian area, without a doubt, in Europe.

3. TRANSFER AND INSERTION INTO WARSAW (2007-2011)

Already in Czestochowa the brothers had made contact with the old Marian Sodalities of Poland that were of significant importance in the period between the wars. (For example, the young Karol Wojtyla had been an active sodalist in secondary school and in the university.) After long years of persecution and clandestinity, they were reactivated in 1981 (the epoch of Solidarity). Those that arose or re-arose since then are federated today. Their Federation is recognized by the Episcopal Conference of Poland and enjoys civil juridical status as well. Currently the said Federation is the titular owner of a co-ed school (pupils from 6 to 18) in the center of Warsaw, the first Catholic educational center founded after the fall of Communism.

Our brothers' contact with these Sodalities grew more intense and they began also to collaborate in diverse pastoral activities of the Warsaw school. Finally, the Sodalities themselves asked that this collaboration be intensified and they offered the brothers the possibility of being integrated into the school as teachers, with some class hours in religion and in Spanish. In August 2007 the Marianists left the house in Czestochowa and moved to Warsaw to begin work in the Sodality school. José Ignacio began to work also in a bi-lingual, Polish-Spanish public school.

In 2008, the SM bought a house for the community in Piastów, near Warsaw. It is a quiet place and well connected to the city (in fact, the brothers always use public transportation to go there, since it is more convenient and faster than by car).

As a consequence, they also began a period of little-by-little insertion into the local community and into the ministry of the local parish. The fruit of this has been the foundation of two MLC's in Piastów proper (2009).

In the Warsaw school, the brothers are progressively taking charge of the ministry to teachers, students and parents. The collaboration with the Sodality is becoming closer. Besides the classes in religion and Spanish, they organize retreats for students and collaborate in the preparation for the sacraments. They celebrate a Sunday Mass each month for the families of the school.

A sign of this "penetration" of the Marianist spirit in the school is the participation of the Administration of the school in the last two meetings of directors of Marianist centers of Europe, which is periodically organized by the CEM. Since the beginning, the Director has always shown a great interest in Marianist education and in

maintaining contact with the other educational institutions of the Society. There have already been student exchanges with some Marianist schools in Spain.

Since the beginning, the Archbishop of Warsaw, Cardinal Nycz, has been interested in the educational work of the Sodality school and in our participation in it, about which he had been informed upon our arrival in the capital. He is following with interest its development and appreciates our mission. The auxiliary bishops are closely acquainted with our work in the school.

On the other hand, the brothers, just as when they were in Czestochowa, continue to care for some pastoral activities in various parishes and Marian shrines in Poland, such as some youth ministry activities like, for example, the annual pilgrimage from Warsaw to Czestochowa. José Ignacio himself is continuing to broaden his formation by studying theology and Mariology at IMRI, concentrating above all in the Polish Greek Catholic religious art.

4. CURRENT PERSPECTIVES

At this time the school is growing and developing. It can offer a mission field for more Marianists, including candidates. For the next school year, the director, who is also the president of the Federation of the Marian Sodalities of Poland, has asked Emilio to be officially the council member for the Sodalities of Warsaw and, at the same time, in charge of ministry for the school, a responsibility that, up until now, had been assumed by a Pauline religious who has been transferred elsewhere.

In addition, the Director would like for José Ignacio to take on a greater dedication to the school, both during class hours and in formation of the teachers.

The house in Piastów has been remodeled so as to be open for retreats and group meetings, and the plan is to continue with more interior renovations in order to receive possible candidates. The retreats and meetings began this past academic year with students from the school and with the MLC. Supported by these and other pastoral duties, the brothers are continuing in their efforts with the hope of raising vocations.

The lay communities are growing and some of their members are committing themselves actively to the Marianist mission. But in the school and in the MLC they are aware that the future of our presence in Poland depends upon the emergence of native vocations and they are showing and expressing their willingness to collaborate in vocation ministry.

5. EVALUATION

As is evident, our presence in Poland has gone through various phases through the eighteen years since its foundation. Its journey has not been an entirely straight one and it has known times of uncertainty and searching. At this moment we can say that it has finally reached a certain maturity, greater clarity and consistency. The brothers have mastered the language, they understand well the situation of the country and its Church, they are integrated into the latter, they are known and appreciated, they have a stable ministry and their own house, which permits them to witness, live and spread the Marianist charism in its most genuine aspect, the educational. There are positive signs that dispel some of the uncertainties arisen in the past and that give more security for the future.

Given the present circumstances, and in spite of the reduced number of brothers, we believe then that we should continue to maintain this presence, at least for the short or medium term, while the brothers are in good health and excited about the mission. The reasons for this are two, in our judgment:

- a. They are offering – and can offer even more in the future – an excellent service to Catholic education in a country which, after having lost it during the long period of Communist rule, needs to recover it. In this sense, the position of the Sodalities' school is optimal.
- b. Their ministry has begun to leave a typically Marianist imprint on the Church: generation of MLC, promotion of the laity and collaboration with them in the mission, witness of fraternity (mixed composition), promotion of a solid Marian devotion, youth ministry....

It is evident that, in the long run, the future of our presence in Poland will depend upon the vocations that might arise in this country. This most recent period of its history has begun to present conditions more favorable to that possibility. We hope that, if the Society is really needed by the Polish Church, the Lord will grant us to them.

It would be desirable to enlarge the community, with at least one more brother in order to fulfill the minimum requirement of the *Rule*, but it is very difficult for us to find the person who might be able and who would be willing to join it. In the meantime, there is the alternative of "temporary assignments." In recent years some religious have lent themselves to spend a few weeks, accompanying and helping the community internally. All of them have returned very happy about the experience. For their part, the brothers of the community value and appreciate very much this type of companionship. They want to see it continue. We hope to have religious available to do it.