



MESSAGE TO THE

ARCO NORTE MARISTS

“A NEW PRESENT, A BETTER FUTURE”

MARISTS ALL FROM THE ARCO NORTE:

On the 26th and 27th October, about one hundred Marists coming from the six provinces of the Arco Norte gazed into the window of their Zoom platform to celebrate the first Regional Forum. The mosaic of faces represented the cultural pluralism of 14 countries, some of which being over 7000 kilometers apart. The first greeting and the first smiles brought us together at the sound of: Salut!, Hola!, Hello! Cordial proximity that we extended to the almost 600 brothers and sisters and more than 5000 laymen and women of the Region. You partook, together with the more than 100,000 students in our Centers, with this wonderful regional family we seek to strengthen.

The memory of number 96 of our Constitutions gave us the reason for the Forum: “Within the Region, Administrative Units establish closer ties of collaboration, solidarity and interdependence; and extend their bonds of fraternity to other regions so as to become, together with the General Government, architects of an Institute that lives and acts as a global entity, based on presence and commitment to each local reality”. The presence of Brother Ernesto and various members of the General Management, as well as representatives from South America made our understanding of the text easier. All of us, you included, sat around the same table of fraternity, imagining ourselves savoring, through dialogue bonding in the Forum, the Colombian tintico, the Salvadoran pupusas, maple honey from Canada, Venezuelan arepas, Mexican tacos, or American hamburgers.

The dialogues that were promoted led us to remember Acts 2, verse 17: “And it shall come to pass in the last days, said God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams”. We realized the importance of dreaming together and helping each other look ahead as a region. We asked ourselves: What do we need to live and do in order to frequent the future, to nurture enthusiasm, to make dreams bring fruit, to arouse prophecy, to harvest hope? And that has been our attempt at an answer during the days of the Forum: To discover what is God’s dream for our region, to look for ways to make that dream come true, and to discern which role each of us and our provinces play in carrying it out. Fraternally, that is what we wish to share with you.





OUR SHARED LAND

The space in our region is wide and diverse — It is part of our regional identity. It is our sacred land through which we seek to walk and discover God. In it, the urgency of the Kingdom for our Marist presence is evident. In this land that we share as a region, God reveals Himself to us. In it, God becomes history. In it, history takes place. In it, God becomes a mission. In this regional space, we listen to and contemplate the God of life.

The regional process brings us closer to the rich cultural diversity of the Region — diversity in landscapes, music, languages, and customs. Diversity that becomes communion, capable of harmonizing, in beautiful melody, the sound of marimba, guitar, cuatro, zampoña, güiro or charango. We turn the pluralism of our region into opportunity. In the diversity we add, we grow, and enrich our vision.

The era of the Marist pioneers in our land begins in 1886, with the arrival of the first brothers in the United States, followed, years later, by the Marist presence in Colombia (1889), Canada (1895), and Mexico (1899). A beautiful history of daring, missionary spirit, apostolic strength, and adherence to the gospel of Jesus. This missionary drive was continued by the Brothers in Colombia in 1923, when they started the Marist mission in El Salvador and Guatemala. What those Marist pioneers began back then is nowadays a vast reality in our Region, with 138 educational centers, more than 100,000 students, some 5,200 educators, and 600 brothers.

This common land that welcomes us is a land of martyrs and prophets. Our memory of Martin Luther King, defender of the civil rights of African Americans, who was assassinated in 1968. We highlight the figure of Monsignor Romero, voice of the voiceless and protector of the dignity of human beings, especially the most dispossessed, assassinated in 1980. We remember Brother Moses, also a victim of violence, in 1991. But the experience of martyrdom in several of our countries extends to many members of the Church who courageously gave testimony of the Gospel and gave up their lives for the truth. To all these martyrs who are an inspiration for our presence in the region, we must add the memory of Brother Basilio, a man of God, a prophet, and a saint, an expert in humanity; as well as Bishops Samuel Ruiz, builder of peace, and defender of the rights of the indigenous peoples of Mexico, and Leonidas Proaño, pastor for the poor in Ecuador. The martyrs and prophets of our region open for us paths of generous life to continue.

The vast space of Arco Norte has also been witness to social tensions, political strife, and revolutions, violence, corruption, and injustice. It has suffered, and continues to suffer, the devastation of hurricanes and earthquakes. Along its long roads and highways, migrant caravans continue to journey, fleeing and searching. Our region knows of the shadows of a close-minded world, about dreams that break into pieces, about people thrown to the side of the road. And questions arise: Will the regional process lead us to bend down to touch and heal the wounds of others? Will we bend down to carry each other on our shoulders? Will it lead to a Samaritan attitude?





WE NEED TO WALK TOGETHER

We have experienced the Forum during the pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic has reminded us that nobody can be saved alone, that it is only possible to be saved together. Facing the pandemic, responding to the challenges of Arco Norte, and building a regional identity: we can only do this together. This means common destiny and mutual belonging. We need each other despite the diversity of provinces, cultures, and ethnicities. To all of us Jesus says: “You are all brothers” (Matthew 23:8), and Pope Francis reaffirms: “No one matures or reaches his fullness by isolating himself”,

We are aware that we can walk together without losing our local identity. A healthy regional openness in which we are engaged means to look after the processes of each province but, at the same time, to provoke the dawn of a new synthesis that identifies us as a region in communion, communication, and co-responsibility. To be “polyhedrons”, Pope Francis will tell us, a figure that has many sides, but all forming a unity loaded with undertones, as “the whole is better than the sum of its part “. Shaping this polyhedron can represent the path of our region so that our differences promote the complementation, enrichment, and mutual enlightenment of our provinces.

Walking together means that all the Marists of the Arco Norte are ready to break down our walls, to build bridges, and to open up our borders. These walls, bridges, or borders are those that appear in our hearts, in our structures, in our attitudes, in our centers, in our minds, in our styles, in our houses. Contemplating these walls, we receive the call of the Pope and the Great Imam Ahmad in Abu Dhabi: “We assume the culture of dialogue as a path; common collaboration as behavior; and reciprocal knowledge as a method and criterion.

The history of our provinces in Arco Norte speaks to us of building bridges, of opening borders, from a solid culture of togetherness. What else did it mean for the Canadian brothers to build missionary bridges with Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, French Cameroon, and Haiti? Didn't the brothers from the United States open borders in the Philippines, Japan, and Liberia? Didn't the Mexican brothers in Korea and Tanzania break down walls of language and culture? Weren't the Colombian brothers building bridges with El Salvador and Guatemala? Weren't new borders opened by the Central American province in Puerto Rico, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama after they were expelled from Cuba? All of them were witnesses with their lives of that culture of togetherness — a culture that is today asked from us. An encounter with that which is different, an encounter with the peripheries, an encounter with the walls and borders of our world. We must be the continuators of those processes of encounter that they started.





ROAD SIGNS

Along the Arctic Circle in Canadian territory, there is a succession of sculptural figures called *Inukshuk*. These are mysterious figures made with unpolished stones that give them great meaning in those tremendous frozen lands: they serve to orient and protect the traveler who passes by. The Inukshuk seems to say: “you are on the right track”. Our dialogues at the Forum have provided us with some Inukshuk — some road signs for our regional process. We share them with you.

Continue to embrace our itinerant vocation.

Our provinces were born from the impulse of brothers who were not afraid to “row out to sea”, to “pass to the other shore”. They arrived by boat, train or horse. They felt the strength of God to go out. They were dreamers of paths beyond their borders, trackers of stars, illuminators of a new future. They tell us that, as Marists, our following of Jesus implies movement, itinerancy, turning out on the frontiers, going out. To continue to embrace our itinerant vocation in our region, we know that it will be difficult for those who shut themselves in their comfort zone or in their fears and routines.



Knowing how to face the new paradigms

During the Forum, we were able to hear: *We recognize that change is the permanent thing today. The pandemic puts us in a different perspective of what we are living. It is the world upside down. It is the end of a civilization.* This change of times places us in front of new paradigms that “lead us to changes and novelties previously unheard of”, Brother Ernesto told us. We perceive changes of paradigm in educational processes, in structures, in shared leadership, in spirituality, in management... And we ask ourselves: In our regional process, will we be able to think beyond the usual paradigms? Where are the roots that support us? Who does God want us to be in this emerging world? Will we be able to abandon old paradigms and creatively seek alternative models?

In the midst of our uncertainties, some signs of the path appeared: We are called to take care of life and to spring up new life in moments of great frailness and vulnerability in the world. We will succeed if we try together. The relational and community dimension will be more important than ever. Thinking and managing an open world. Encouraging us to make radical changes in our way of being and acting, in structures and systems, and seeking to build a renewed and different future.



Weaving a new Marist story

This is how Brother Ernesto defines it: “With regards to the Marist charism, we also need a new paradigm, both in the way of conceiving the Marist vocation, as well as in the way of making it known and accompanying those who feel the call to live it. How do we imagine that God dreams the Marist charism for our days and for the future? Have you started to think about it and to imagine it? Our attempt to answer these questions:

- The new Marist story is shaped by the Marists, *laypeople and brothers*. Together, we make possible new ways of understanding and embodying charism. The future of the Marist presence in the region is at stake in our capacity to share the same spiritual heritage, to develop co-responsibility in animation and government, to encourage dialogue and respect, and to allow ourselves to be mutually enriched. We take on the challenge of building a large house, an open-door home — a house of brothers and sisters.
- The center of our story are the favorites of Jesus and Champagnat: *children and young people* on the margins of our society. As a region, we believe in our committed, preferential, and consistent presence among children and young people on the geographic and existential peripheries of our countries. In the vast space of our region we find displaced people, migrants, refugees, the excluded... Our original identity and the path we are taking in Arco Norte impels us to defend their dignity and seek their inclusion.



- A frequent echo in our regional meeting was the concern for the *life of our communities*. It remains an unmistakable sign of the Marist story. Building homes of light and involving ourselves passionately in the creation of a lifestyle that is open to all. This dimension of our present story takes on a profound meaning with the challenges we have in the region of integrating cultures, provinces, social realities, generations, sensitivities, visions... which invite us to abandon our usual inertia, as well as our fears and securities, and become prophets of communion. The referenced communities, integrated by Marists of Champagnat, offer another way of living in community and promoting the Marist mission.
- A *new way of being brother* or a “new paradigm in the way of conceiving the Marist vocation” takes form in the challenge we have of weaving a new story, betting on adequate educational processes. The mobilization, both internal and structural, that the regional process is posing for each Marist of Arco Norte, is asking us to be men and women of God, prophets — more than agents of the Institution — “shepherds with the scent of sheep, and that this be made noticed” (Pope Francis), with the towel tightly woven and thrown on the ground as Jesus did. The profile for the new Marist story is a profile of contemplatives, that which provides us with a spirituality of the heart, which leads us to make a pilgrimage to the interior without respite and a pilgrimage to the exterior without excuse. Being contemplatives is an itinerary of openness, which mobilizes us and makes us inclusive.



- *Invited to work in a network.* Thousands of kilometers distance us geographically, but we are invited to seek a better future in our region through networking. The COVID-19 pandemic has made us value the technological possibilities. We have connected, through various platforms, to participate in workshops, commissions, and diverse meetings. These channels have made us close. We have heard the greetings, we have appreciated the smiles, we have identified names and we have been able to celebrate the Forum. To work in a network is to make it possible to create bonds of unity, strategies for change, proposals of novelty for our centers, to feel like family. Brother Luis Carlos challenged us: "If economic and political interests are associated in networks for power, why not do it intentionally and with vision in those who seek the Kingdom of God and his justice?"

Maintain a Samaritan attitude

Throughout the Forum we have remembered the parable of the Good Samaritan. Both the Pope in his encyclical and Brother Emili comment on it in a profound way. The story reveals an essential characteristic of the human being: we have been made for the fullness that can only be reached in love. A sign of the right path for our region is not to let anyone be left behind. The suffering of our people, especially children and young people, cannot leave us indifferent. We Marists of Arco Norte must be people of compassion, Samaritan people. Remembering the parable, when we draw up projects and programs, it can help us to ask ourselves: With whom do we identify? Which of the characters do we resemble?

A story committed to life

The time we live in is a time of uncertainty and profound change. During the Forum we heard that “we must understand the time in which we live, focus our energies on what is possible, and voluntarily step forward to serve the human spirit. The process that we are proposing as a region wants to be a song to hope, to a hope committed to life. And there is a lot of life in our region, and a lot of life to be promoted and made to emerge. We know that plans and strategies are not enough. It is time for courageous choices that touch our personal lives and those of our institutions.

The answer to the questions that Sister Liliana was directing at us, can indicate to us whether the commitment to life is a sign of the path that we are undertaking: Where do we want to be in these times? In the comfortable armchair of a spectator? In passive silence? Next to the fire, reviving the lamp for the community pot? Opening the houses to make room for others? Playing with life on the front lines? Participating in networks and chains of solidarity with others? Devising educational alternatives? Developing creativity and sustaining the mission? In the role of the victims?





WITH MARY OF THE ADVENT

Mary of Advent is Mary who goes out of the house, who accompanies the life that is about to be born, who sustains hope, who builds bridges, who sows reconciliation, who prepares a birth. With the help of Mary of Advent we send you this message: a message to be read against a background of Christmas music, which is music of the Gospel, of God's smile, of the Spirit's thrust, of exuberant creativity. A message wrapped in a typical fabric of our original ethnic groups, which in the beauty of their handmade work harmonize and integrate infinite colors. The multicolored fabric is a symbol of the pluralism of our region, which has become an opportunity and a beautiful gift for the Jesus of Christmas.

To Mary we entrust this whole process, started several years ago in our region and reaffirmed at our Forum, which impels us to recreate the Marist way of life, to embark on new projects, to generate illusions, to inject joy, to confront lives, to remove certainties. Mary extends her hand to us from the extreme north, at the shrine of Notre Dame du Cap, in Canada, passing through the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, in Mexico, and up to the southern limit of our region, the shrine of Our Lady of the Swan, in Ecuador. All of them places of pilgrimage for millions of faithful believers, beacons of light for the faith of our peoples.

As we wait, with Mary of the Advent, we share with all of you, Marists of Arco Norte, the fruit of our reflection in the Forum. It is here that hope is strong. We feel that God is at the root of this hope, where the seeds of a future for our regional process are being discovered everywhere. Hope makes us creators of a new present, as our motto states, that anticipates God's future — that of a better future. This hope is taught to us by Mary and Champagnat.

Fraternally, walking together with Mary of the Advent.

Marists of the Regional Forum

December 13, 2020

Third Sunday of Advent

