

## **Echoes from the Plenary Council - 28th November 2019**

### **Meeting with the president 27<sup>th</sup> November**

Just to say that yesterday Stan, Aloysius (the EAP provincial) and myself were received very cordially by the President of Uganda. We met in the afternoon sometime after 3 though we began the day by meeting with the Archbishop of Kampala in his residence in the morning then, along with members of other Churches (the new Anglican Archbishop, an orthodox vicar general, and other clerics), we waited for a couple of hours before heading off for Entebbe. Once there we were all invited for lunch at the State house (without the president being present). A very nice lunch followed by tea or coffee in one of the many lounges. It was only later, sometime after three, that the whole group was received by the President and each one was able to present himself. We three Missionaries stood out from among the others for we were wearing our habit and rosary. After some minutes the three of us, along with the Catholic Archbishop of Kampala were given a private audience with the president in another smaller meeting room.

The meeting must have lasted about 20 minutes or so. The president seemed very aware of the Missionaries of Africa (when we arrived in Uganda, Lourdel, Amans and the fact the first schools were set up by the White Fathers). Throughout the President seemed relaxed and very attentive to all that was being shared. Stan invited him to come to the shrine of the Martyrs on the 8<sup>th</sup> December for our closing ceremony of our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary and he said he would come if only for an hour.

Francis Barnes

### **The Mega-Provinces at the service of Mission - 28<sup>th</sup> November**

Today Ignatius introduced an important topic: *The Mega-Provinces at the service of Mission, communities and confreres*. The basic issue was to see whether these new structures have truly improved the quality of our service to Mission. It is not really a question of returning to the former structures that were in place though certainly some would hanker after the power and authority that was once theirs and has been taken away with the creation of sectors. Some would even say that some of these sectors have become peripheries, they no longer have the voice that was once theirs and the direct contact, especially with the General council, has been all but taken away. Yet, in some sectors it is as if nothing really ever changed, the sector house is there, the Provincial Delegate and the treasurer both have their large vehicles at their disposal and feel as though their task is a full time occupation. However, from the outset the whole thrust of the new structures was not to increase the number of those holding office but rather make more confreres available for pastoral ministry. Certainly there are differences in sectors as there are some, especially in Europe, where the Provincial Delegate is truly a full time job and the number of confreres in their care is high. Yet in others the number of confreres is rather low which would enable the delegate to be involved with ministry though some don't see that and still don't fully understand. Yes, there are some sectors where there is only one community. What is the answer? To regroup? In that sense it is up to the provinces to rethink, if necessary, the whole structure of governance even if it means revisiting and revising the presence of sectors. It has to be clear that as a general principle being the Provincial Delegate or sector treasurer is (though there can be exceptions) is not a full time job. They must be able to create that fine balance with the pastoral ministry that is theirs and the task of being there for the animation of the confreres in their care.

One of the issues was also what we might term a question of identity especially the question of belonging not merely to a given sector but to a province. In that sense one of the main concerns of the combined leadership of a province is to create that sense of belonging. The awareness of being part of the whole province is a spirit that has to be created and enhanced. When a provincial team works well together; when co-responsibility is understood and local communities become part of the communication process; when there is transparency from top down hopefully there will be always that sense of cohesion and fraternal communion.

Looking at the issues together in groups and in the plenary session it might well be said that there has been a certain lack of clarity and up to now no real evaluation of things. The Statutes of the province have to be clear and roles clearly defined. When a Delegate is elected, or a sector treasurer appointed he must clearly have a written mandate, in other words, a clear understanding of what his role is and what has been delegated to him. In the past this may not have always happened and it would cause confusion and frustration. In some provinces it is taken for granted that new delegates need to be initiated and some formation is necessary. Another aspect that clearly came out from responses given in preparation for the plenary council and from the floor today is the importance of internationality and this important aspect of our identity is of prime importance in order to avoid any form of nationalism which would disfigure the identity that is ours.

One other very important aspect of our leadership role is that of visits to communities for being on the ground with the confreres must never be underestimated. Some spoke about the importance of a canonical visit at least once a year with a report made. Provincials and their delegates must never be seen as remote for their presence is the major way of being in touch. Being close and allowing the confreres to feel that we in leadership are truly there for them is no doubt the most important aspect of our ministry and if we fail to be there for the confreres we fail in our leadership and the Society will suffer the consequences.

Francis Barnes