



So here we are in Rome, already well underway in the work of this two-week Intercapitular session; everything was well prepared in details. How many of us are we? Eighty-nine, with the translators, not far from a hundred. All the large group meetings come with simultaneous translation in English, French and Spanish. All of the signage in the Generalate is in Italian, as also are all the services.

Physically, the "Aula Magna," the great room, has been completely revamped. I remember that plans already existed in 2014 when the last General Chapter was held and renovations were waiting to begin. Changes are impressive, and it seems they were made necessary for safety reasons. So, the good old oak desks with hinged tops have disappeared and new tables, equipped with a modern wireless effective system of translation, were installed. The only little problem, it's that we're a bit tight to get to our places (no matter what size you are, I should specify); otherwise, it's okay. The room is clear and broad; translators are now located one floor above, near to the ceiling. And there are paintings of all the Superiors General on the walls (which reminds me of the gallery we have in the basement of the our retreat home in Laval).

Were these paintings there in the old layout? Frankly, I don't remember... But the effect is fantastic, it's a practical room, and we have to get used to the small inconveniences of the human traffic, nothing to complain about. I am sure that rooms offering 140 seats equipped with a system of simultaneous translation and voting are rare, in Rome as elsewhere. This is it for the indoor environment! As for the outside, it rained for two days straight, but the sun finally showed up.

The session began with a simple opening ceremony, which started in the corridor leading to the Chapel; the ritual was supposed to take place outside, but obviously, very wet weather conditions didn't allow that to happen. Once in the Chapel, which was a bit chilly, there were readings, songs and speeches; each has been given a pretty ceramic star done by students of a Lasallian school.

The meals are good, taken according to the following schedule: 8:00 for breakfast, for lunch 13:00 and 19:30 for dinner. The afternoon schedule resumes at 15:00 and goes until 30 minutes before Mass, set each night at 18:30. A drink after the Mass is offered each evening by linguistic groups; I usually choose the English group, especially, but not exclusively, American brothers. Last night, I joined the Francophone group, where, in addition to the French people, colleagues from various countries in Africa, the Middle East and the Poland.

I will not comment on the Institute statistics, but I want to say that the number of Brothers, present in 79 countries, decreases, and the number of students, thanks in good part to the Partners, increases every year: it is estimated currently at 1,040,000. I would also add that, according to the data received, women account for 56 percent of the staff of our works.

The theme that kept us busy Tuesday afternoon was on association. Even if the vow of association was first pronounced by the Founder and the first Brothers, the reality of the association is very different not only from one Region to another, but also from one country to the other. In fact, the differences are major. It would be interesting to see how and to what extent this is true, but my reflection today does not allow me this kind of explanation. Anyway, we'll have to get back to it, given the importance of this theme for us in Quebec.

Today, Wednesday, is about formation; a not very easy, but important subject. I was the spokesperson of the Francophone group, after two hours of discussions in workshops. It was about vocation ministry, but also the formation of formators, Partners and Brothers.

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