

# LETTER TO THE NATIONS



LETTER TO THE NATIONS Nº 22

Editorial

## THE FACE OF MERCY

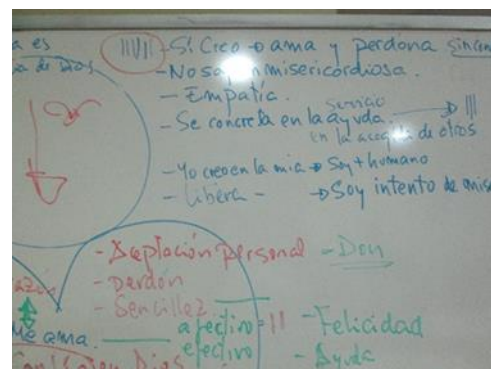
We end this year closing a time when Pope Francis invited us to stop, contemplate, and participate of the heart of God. In a symbolic way, it opened the doors to let us be touched by the love of God and encouraged us to lose ourselves in the great mystery of His love in this year of Mercy.

That was the Good News announced by Jesus. We know that the Gospel is written for the simple people and that Jesus uses direct words and deep gestures of love to show himself to those who feel poor and in need of him. No one like Jesus has identified himself so deeply with mankind. He speaks to our heart from the heart of God. He has enlightened life in our disabilities.

It is not easy to understand the intensity of God's love. But our life can understand that our smallness, disability, poverty, sickness or marginalization is accompanied and borne by the One who gives meaning to our life. Many times we do not know how to explain it to others, and almost not even to ourselves, but the experience we have is that we feel in God's hands, in His heart.

When we speak of the closeness of God, we lack words. It would almost be easier to bring our cheek to His or to let ourselves fall onto His chest to say everything we feel. The same thing happens to God. He wants to tell us and seeks the way to do it. Like telling us that we are the most important thing to Him. That our sadness, pain, poverty, hunger, illness, loneliness, etc., live with the intensity of a father or a mother, and that He is at the door calling and waiting for our response in love, trust, and encounter. God ... father and mother, who lives our life in the distance, and who looks for any excuse to make the encounter with us. He who respects our freedom and our lives, our projects and our failures. He who knows us because only love knows the truth. He would like to tell us so many things ... he would like to be able to help us in so many ways, he would like us to be real brothers and sisters, without abuse or domination, without poverty or marginalization, without manipulation or ignorance, without hunger ... with dignity, with opportunities, with justice, with equality, with respect ... for all humanity. Many times God comes on tiptoe, without noise and, without us knowing very well, He helps us. We do not know how it has been, but God is like that. Jesus is like that. Before the word comes to our tongue, he already has it in his heart. He can not help it, it's just Love.

That is why, although words only teach a part of what we want to say, God and humanity, there is one word that truly comes close to all this mystery: MERCY. It means that the heart of God and ours beat near the one in need. God has touched us, blown on us and his life must also flourish and manifest in everything and everyone. This was how Jesus of Nazareth, man and son lived, and taught us that living this way is possible, that it is true: to live as brothers and sisters, as **fraternity**.



In this way, he invites us to live at Frater, brothers and sisters, in the midst of a world that is often exclusive, which values, above all, the external and the useful and does not see the strength of the weak. Let us open the door, without fear, to the mercy of God; He will teach us how to do it.

## Meeting of the Intercontinental Team

Continuing with the work that has been taking place since 2014, we met from September 10 to 18 at the house of spirituality in San Frutos, in the city of Segovia-Spain.

Those who were present were: Claudia Padilla, Intercontinental coordinator; Miguel Ángel Arrasate, Intercontinental advisor; Carmencita Mazariegos, Intercontinental assistant coordinator; Jean de Dieu Habimana, coordinator of África; Salete Milan, coordinator of America; Marie Wang, invited guest responsible for Asia; Marisol García, representative for the European team. Albert Arrufat, former intercontinental advisor, collaborator of the French translation for Jean de Dieu and the English translation for Marie Wang. The Spanish national team, Basilisa Martin (Basi), coordinator of Frater Spain and José María López (Chema ), Adviser of Spain, making our work easier and more productive; Jose Manuel Pazos, Salete's husband; Perpe Garcia, Marisol's sister; José María Carlero, in charge of the reflection day; Celia and Paula, helping us with the translation.



We can not miss the team from Segovia, Juan Carlos and María José, as well as the members of the Frater in Segovia, who made of our long days of work, moments of rest, taking us to see the beautiful historical places of the city.

Each day of our working day began with a prayer prepared by some member of the team. The agenda of the meeting was approved and the previous report was sent in advance, helping us to remember what was pending and approved.

## Continental Reports

### Africa

Jean de Dieu reports that Africa's continental team could meet in 2016 and bring together developments in African countries such as: Madagascar, Burundi, Congo Brazzaville, West Congo, North Congo, East Congo, Guinea Conakry, Togo, Benin, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Uganda, Rwanda, Nigeria and Ivory Coast. The groups that have their activity in parishes are easier to develop, while the activity nationwide is difficult in some countries.

The Fraternity is the bond that holds them together and prevents them from entering into political confrontations. It also highlights that the Fraternity has attracted young people who remember the difficult moments of their childhood due to their disability and were welcomed by religious people. This situation led them to contact Frater.

The report of Africa helps us to discover the difficulty that some of the Fraternities of this continent find in order to be able to meet: political problems, wars, guerrillas, citizen insecurity, the lack of means of transportation,



difficulty in the transportation of members of Frater, and the development of the Fraternity itself are some of the difficulties presented by the African continent.

## America

As for the American continent, Salete reports on the existing countries: 19 countries, of which 14 are affiliated (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Puerto Rico Rico and Uruguay); there are 2 countries in cultivation (possibly future fraternity groups): El Salvador and Venezuela; and 4 countries in contact (they only have one or two contact people): Chicago, Cuba, Ecuador and Paraguay.



She shares that the annual meeting of the Intercontinental Team encourages to continue in the service; on the contrary, an individualism is being produced by the abuse of technical means. It also announces that the continental team is considering inviting a member of the French Fraternity to the next American continental assembly to strengthen ties, as the cradle of the Fraternity, and as one more act within the celebration of the 70th anniversary. This is about to be decided.

She also reports about the preponderance of the advisor in some countries. The advisor determines all the actions and decisions of the Fraternity, nothing is done without consulting him. It is answered that, in order to avoid this and that the advisor be one more member within the group, it is important that he participates in the formation group and knows the role that he must have within the Frater; the sick or disabled also have to be mature enough to be critical and assume their role (Get up and walk!).

## Asia

Marie Wang informs about the Fraternity groups in Taiwan, their activity, the bonds of friendship and mutual help. With photographs, she shows us and to the members of the groups the people who took the Fraternity to Taiwan.



One week before the intercontinental meeting, a continental Asia meeting was held in Taipei. The countries of Mainland China, India, Japan, the Philippines and Taiwan participated. For the intercontinental team, Claudia Padilla and Albert Arrufat were the participants.

Claudia completes the information on the participation of this meeting held from the 1st to the 7th of September, 2016. It was the first meeting at the continental level, thus fulfilling the commitment of the Intercontinental Committee of 2014. The principles and foundations of the Fraternity were presented, especially for the countries participating for the first time, and it was demonstrated the importance of the visit, the personal contact, to "free" the person with disabilities and to take their place within Frater. It has been a very positive and enriching experience. One of the most relevant facts is that Taiwan is expected to be able to join the Intercontinental Frater in the next Committee in 2018. An upcoming visit to Japan and the Philippines by Marie Wang and Father Fernando was also planned.



## Europe

Marisol presents the report of the European continent, highlighting the celebration of the European Assembly where the new European coordinator was chosen: Christine Balsan (of the Fraternity of France). Christine's willingness to serve the Fraternity in this continent was taken advantage of by the European Fraternity: with the participation of a counselor and representatives of the four linguistic areas (French, German, Spanish and Portuguese, and Eastern languages), even if it loses its effectiveness, the Fraternities are walking together.



During the Assembly there were dialogues that were very clear, from the respect, being well received, on fundamental aspects in the Fraternity. Miguel Ángel Arrasate, intercontinental consultant, participated.

She also reports on developments in European countries: Germany, Austria, Belgium, Slovenia, Spain, France, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Switzerland.

## Core Team report



The Core Team then reported on the team life: monthly meetings, in spite of difficulties for health reasons, supporting and completing the work by means of emails.

Of the visits made: accompanying activities of the national teams, visiting fraternists who, due to illness, can not participate in monthly or training meetings. Participating in meetings in America and Europe. Participating in the first encounter of Asian countries.

Of the Training: close monitoring, through the internet, of the training activities they have done in some countries and in the American continent. Participating in some working days in the

cores of different regions of the country.

With regard to communications: it is reported of the circular letters sent on the occasion of Christmas, the Day of the People with Disabilities, Lent, etc.

## Spain

As the host country for this meeting, we ask the Spanish National Team to provide us with a short report from the Spanish Frater.

Basi and Chema present the structure of the Fraternity in Spain: its organization, functions, life and formation groups, areas of participation and influence, and they highlight two activities carried out in recent years: the XL General Assembly (2015) and the Fraternity Week: "The kingdom of the Frutopia" (2016). They also shared achievements and difficulties experienced.



After the report, interest in life groups is shown, and the process of approach of members to the fraternity is explained; in some cases the incorporation of some of them, personal maturation and commitment acquired in a life group, and their evolution and participation within Frater is also explained. It is considered positive to have shared this group experience.



## Participation with other organizations

During the meeting, we had the presence of the national president of HOAC (Brotherhood of Catholic Action), José Fernando Almazán. His contact with FRATER España and now with the Intercontinental Fraternity, through the Solidarity Fund and the granting of a grant that helps to pay for part of this meeting, has facilitated this contact.

He shares his experience as a member of a movement of Catholic Action, the path traveled with the Frater and the common desire to be builders of a Church in the style of Jesus. Each movement of Catholic Action, each one in their specific field, we share a way of being and we are bearers of a heritage: evangelization.



## Follow-up to the agreements of the Committee 2014

### ▪ Reflection for the 70th anniversary of the Fraternity. Answered questions:

Africa: Thirteen countries.

America: From area I: 5 countries; from area II: 1 country; from area III: 2 countries.

Europe: Although significant work has been done in the countries, only 2 participated in the questionnaire.

### ▪ Work on the History of the Fraternity

In order to facilitate the work and to specify the information requested from the countries, a form to be completed by each country is prepared. These forms will be sent to the continental team and these to the Core Team. Each activity carried out by each country will not be revised, but they will be taken into account as a global overview, and only the most significant aspects of each point to be revised will be highlighted.

The objective of this specific compilation of each country is to update the Frater's development worldwide and to share this information with all fraternities.

### ▪ Document for the Pope introducing the Fraternity

With the contributions received from the countries, it is suggested that the Inter Team prepare a simple document, where the Pope is informed of the existence of Frater and its service to the Church as an element of evangelization to people with illness and / or disability. From there, there may be an interest on the part of the Pope, and we would propose a personal contact or send a larger document to provide more information.

That document revised by the Inter Team will be sent to a specific person or persons from each continent (continental team, etc.) to review it and return the contributions to the Core Team for the final writing.

Contacts are also being sought to ensure that the Pope receives this communication, either by sending the document to the Pope, or by receiving a representative of the Core Team in an audience with him. Galindo, a Spanish priest who is in Rome will facilitate this contact. The document must be presented to the Pope before the 2018 Committee.

## Training Intercontinental Team

**Subject of reflection: How to be or live the mercy from our condition of disability in a society that excludes us.**

We have invited José María Carlero (a member of FRATER National Team of Spain) to meditate on mercy, starting with the Pope's bulla written in 2015. Taking this document as a starting point, we reflect on the needs and the situation that the Fraternity is going through. The goal is that we can discover and share the presence of God, as mercy in our lives.

In a pleasant way, José Maria deepened into the term of mercy, as a human reality in a society that excludes difference, limitations, etc.



## Coexistence

Taking always into account our walking together, we remember the words of Father François: "only one can do something, but one can do much more when one does with others, in the Frater, we walk together", a meeting of the Intercontinental Team with the Team of the Regions of Castile and Leon and the Diocesan Fraternities of Avila, Burgos, Segovia and Valladolid. The objective is the encounter between the members of the Fraternity, at different levels, for getting to know each other, inform each other and have a day to share the evangelizing life that unites us as a single light in the world.

We shared prayer, dialogue, food and a visit to the Cathedral of Segovia. During the morning, the bishop of Segovia was present.



## **Preparation of the next committee 2018.**

- **Place of the celebration.**

We are still working on choosing the most appropriate place for the next committee.

### **Participants.**

Given the global economic constraints, we plan to reduce the participation in the Committee from three delegates per continent to only one, besides the continental teams and the Intercontinental Team.

In a circular letter, this proposal will be presented to the continents in order for them to choose, knowing that the country or continent that sends the delegate must assume the expenses of their participation. A profile of the ideal fraternity member will also be elaborated, who will assume this representation of his/her continent, inviting continental teams to make a responsible and objective election. This delegate must carry out a previous work with his/her continental team to clarify his/her role to play and to be aware that he/she is the voice of the Fraternity of the continent, and he/she must communicate all the information of the Committee to the Fraternity.

The number of members of each continental team must be taken into account in order for the representation to be fair.

If the national teams do not give a response, the continental teams will be the ones to make a decision and, ultimately, the Intercontinental Team.

In Europe, the Assembly of August 2016 has already chosen the three delegate countries, so this new query is sent, proposing the election of the European delegate based on the largest number of votes obtained.

FRATER Spain's solidarity with the Intercontinental Team is reported in different moments, without that collaboration the Core Team could not have carried out its program. We also appreciate that Africa has begun to assume its own expenses.

We are saddened to have to raise this proposal for a reduced participation to the Committee. We hope that the fraternities of the different countries will be supportive for the next Committee.

- **Candidates for the new Core Team.**

A circular letter will be sent to all countries through the continental teams so that candidates can be nominated for the new Intercontinental team.

- **Motto.**

Different ideas for a motto were proposed and in the end we have chosen:

***Get up and let's make together the path of the Fraternity.***

- **Theme and possible speakers.**

To develop the theme, let us take into account the idea that the Fraternity is not made one by one; it is just lived, discovered and developed ... together. As the first members of Fraternity, we must feel ourselves as light, salt, force that drive the movement and our fellows, together, to build a new path that leads us to a better world. Working together on common themes will take us all on the same path.

It is unanimously chosen: Open to the world, spreading life.

- **Country affiliations.**

Taiwan is so far the country that is starting the process of affiliation.

## **Archives of the intercontinental fraternity. Departmental archives.**

The Core Team considers that, in order to guarantee the preservation of the existing documents of the Fraternity, it is necessary to digitize them.

It is a task that must be done by continental teams. For this, the Intercontinental Team will draw up a scheme to facilitate the collection of data (by year, coordinators ...). It will be assessed which computer system is the most suitable to use to share the information.

The Core Team collects all digitized information from the continents and sends them to the Verdun archive (France). To do this, we must pay attention and select the material that reflects exactly what Frater is and does.

At the next meeting of the Intercontinental Team (2017), all the scanned material must be brought in.

Albert shares the testimony of his visit last year to Verdun, together with the Fraternity of Castellón, on the occasion of Frater's 70th anniversary. There is the file that has been formed with the contribution of different families of documents of Frater. Currently, no more paper documentation will be accepted, except for the digital one. During its first 30 years, it was a private archive, whose consultation was only possible by requesting it to the Intercontinental Team; later it became of public consultation and study of the Fraternity.



## **Training in the continents. Information on the development of training in the countries and at the continental level:**

**Africa.** With the material sent by the Fraternity of France and America, Africa is developing some records, adapted to the reality of the members of Africa.

Marisol will also contact Christine Balsan with Jean de Dieu Habimana for the French coordinator to send her more training materials.

**America.** It is working on a material of its own that adds, at specific moments, current issues. All countries have the training brochures that can be developed according to the needs of each country.

**Europe.** Training on the continent is the same as that of the last meeting: Several countries work with an annual theme; another country with a continuing training plan; other countries conduct one-day training sessions.

### **Statutes: coordination of changes and improvements to the Intercontinental Statutes to be carried out in the different continents:**

Jean de Dieu and Marisol, members of the Statutes Reform Commission, report on the people who make up the commission and the work done so far:

A circular letter was sent to the countries inviting them to participate. Subsequently, the base document was sent to begin making contributions:

**Africa.** Six countries have participated.

**America.** Eight countries have participated

**Europe.** Four countries have participated.



Now the members of the commission are synthesizing, by continent, the contributions received, while at the same time inviting those countries that have not done so. With the synthesis of the continents, they will produce a single document that will be sent to the countries for study. Once these new contributions have been received from the countries, a new document will be submitted to the 2018 Intercontinental Committee for approval.

So far the commission has met 7 times via skype. We value the initial animation that Dolores (Nicaragua) did for the commission to take enthusiasm in this work. It is being a process without haste, but without pause.

The dialogue indicates that we will continue to extend the deadline to facilitate the participation of countries in the process, involving the participation of all to develop legislation to encourage the life of the fraternity, not to void it, but, once the deadline has expired, countries that have not participated shall respect and accept the decisions made by the Committee.



## Agendas

The activities that the continents will carry out are consulted to see if any member of the Core Team wants to participate.

**Africa.** Meeting of the continental team in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Goma), in April 2017.  
Visit to Burundi in January 2017. This meeting has been suspended on several occasions due to the situation of insecurity in the country.

Visit to Madagascar in May 2017 to prepare the Continental Assembly (February 2018) and celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Fraternity of Madagascar.

**America.** Continental Assembly from February 5 to 12, 2017; the continental and Intercontinental team will arrive on February 2 and depart on February 15.

Motto: Frater, sowers of change.

*Theme: Let us awaken and fight together for dignity.*

Other visits: Panama Assembly (September 2016); Costa Rica (September 12-14, 2016), Puerto Rico (September 16-20, 2016), Cuba (September 20-27, 2016), Uruguay (November 30 – December 5, 2016), Trekking in Chile ( November 27, 2016; ), and National Assembly of Nicaragua (March 2017).

**Europe.** The relay is taking place in the European Team. Marisol will report to Christine on the European Assembly and the Intercontinental Team meeting. She will ask Christine to send the European calendar to the Core Team.

**Asia.**

There are 3 groups in Taiwan, and next year it is planned to visit these members to define the activities.

Visits to countries: China (November 2016), Philippines (February-17), Japan (May-17). This year, 2 or 3 visits to China are planned to boost the spirit of the Fraternity.

It is suggested to Taiwan to draw up a training schedule, etc. This can strengthen the groups and the participation of their members.

**Core Team:**

It will participate in the relevant activities of each continent.

Next Intercontinental meeting will be in September 2017.

**Final Eucharist**

Our meeting ends with a Eucharist, in which members of the Fraternity of Segovia participate. The table becomes full of colors when offered a Huipil (a colorful blouse from Central America) on a Guatemalan colorful tablecloth, which bring the life of the Mayan indigenous, reminding us that we are much more than that, we are also history, different cultures ... our Eucharist dresses up of brotherhood and fraternity. When finished, the national team of Spain is given the Huipil and the tablecloth in gratitude for all their support and reception.

