

Welcoming Remarks Bro. Jack Ventura, Province Assembly Chair

My brothers and sisters, good evening.

In the name of the Provincial Council and the Assembly Planning committee - please allow me a few minutes to extend our welcome.

To Fr. Manuel and the entire General Council from Rome; to all our brothers who have traveled from Southeast Asia, Eastern Africa and Mexico; to members of the province who traveled across the Pacific Islands and the Caribbean Sea; to all my brothers who are here – Welcome! ; to the representatives from the Marianist Sisters, the Province of Meribah and the Marianist Lay Network of North America; and to all members of the Marianist Family, our lay collaborators and our colleagues in ministry, our speakers, facilitators, liturgists, welcome and thank you for being with us this week.

And last, but not least to Bishop Kicanas, and Sr. Lois. Thank you for hosting us and taking the time to be with us tonight. Our warm Marianist welcome to you and the church of Tucson.

Almost three years ago, Bro. Stephen called me into his office and asked that I close the door behind me. Like a school boy who had done something wrong and had gotten caught, my palms started to sweat and as I always do when I get uncomfortable, I started to bite my lip. After putting me at ease, he got straight to the point and asked me, in the name of the Provincial Council, if I would be willing to chair the province assembly committee. I jokingly asked him how many other people he had asked and had said no. I even thought to myself, the council really must be desperate. But after discerning the question for a few days, I returned to his office and said “yes.” The next step was to put together the remaining members of the committee. By January 2005, the assembly committee was in place. Little did any of us know that this particular yes would be the beginning of a wonderful, marvelous and exciting journey!

As the committee began meeting, challenges such as the where to gather, the theme, format, structure of our time together, speakers, facilitators, who should be invited, free time vs. process time vs. prayer time, all these questions surfaced in many different ways. However, God intervened in a very powerful way. As we articulated our needs and we started the hotel site visits, this place, this very sacred and special location in the desert summoned us. (That and pure economics)

It is from this point that the committee realized, that as a province, we just might be able to experience what so many of our fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers in faith, had also experienced – namely: The journey into the desert; seeking God in a place not called home. Just like the prophets, the Israelites, the Mothers and Fathers of the Desert and many saints, we need to retreat to the peacefulness of the desert to hear the voice of God.

In coming to Tucson, we as a community have traveled to a place that is very unfamiliar to us. We have become guests to the native peoples allowing ourselves to be welcomed. This sojourn to the southwest, as limited as it might be, is an experience of migration-moving from the comfortableness of what we know – into the uncomfortableness of what we don't know. Simply, our journey together is a quest for the voice of God.

Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann speaks of the capacity of the Psalms to move us from orientation, through disorientation and return us to a reorientation. We experience times of equilibrium, but when God moves us into a space of dislocation and relocation, beautiful psalms are birthed.

In many ways, this experience is embodied in the life of our assembly. Together, we enter this dwelling from a place of orientation, through the disorientation of the desert, only to return to a place of reorientation and God willing, a place of renewal.

The Assembly committee has worked very hard over the past 2 ½ years to create an experience where we will be renewed; not only as brothers in a province, but also as brothers and sisters in the Marianist Family.

I would like to recognize the Task Force: Larry Doersching, John Haster, Frank O'Donnell, Jack Somerville, Pat Stephens, and Diane Guerra – thank you for helping create this journey of renewal. And if there is anything you need during your time here at the Starr Pass, please let one of us know and we will do everything we can to help you.

Again, a very warm welcome and may our journey together over the next week give birth to some beautiful psalms.