

Reflection from the Superior General

While in the USA recently I heard many people speaking enthusiastically of their experience of Marist life and mission. We Marists have generously served there for about one hundred and fifty years. While we will continue to serve for as long as we reasonably can, the demographics of the one remaining Province in the USA do not seem to suggest a long-term future there. Senior Marists in the States, as elsewhere, continue to be a source of inspiration for their life-long faithfulness in embracing the Marist way of life and ministry and also a source of continuing grace by their prayer and support.

The history of the Marists in the USA is part of the wider panorama of our Society. We are in a time of enormous change which could lead either to our demise or, in the spirit of the Paschal mystery, to new life, even if this life would look very different. After Easter, the disciples at first found it difficult to recognise the Lord. Only slowly they came to deeper faith in the New Life of Easter.

If this time of massive change in the Society of Mary is to lead to new life "in the Spirit" then we need to claim and proclaim boldly our purpose for life. Why should we continue? If more traditional forms of Marist life are no longer viable then what are the newer forms that are emerging that motivate us to thrive well into the future?



Within the Church, we Marists will always exist primarily to be converted to the Good News of Jesus Christ ourselves, like Mary before us, and to proclaim it boldly to the people of our own time. It is not enough to preach the Gospel only with our words. Our whole way of Marist life, as a seamless garment, proclaims the joy and peace of the Risen Lord. Our Marist decisions are based, not on our fears of irrelevance or death or just to "see us out", but rather on a dynamic faith in the living Gospel. Everything needs to be re-assessed in the searing light of the Gospel – the way of non-possessiveness, as we share everything together in our

communities and with the poor, modelled on the early Church; the interior freedom to transcend our own desires, always open to new challenges, like the Apostles sent out by Mary; and our loving and hospitable relationships among all people, as in the first communities.

One of the signs of new life for the future is that our communities and ministries are, as far as possible, inclusive of all sorts of people who are different from us. For example, Marist communities may often be more intentionally international in the future. When we can live together with the joy and peace of Easter, even though we may have had to learn to communicate in a new language or we are struggling to flourish within a different culture, we become a sign of hope for our fractured world. How many of us would be willing to offer to live in small, international Marist communities, praying together among the poor, the migrants and the young, bringing the Good News to people who are very different from us? These communities, called "omnes gentes", complement the existing lives of our Marist communities.

I think, for example, of an invitation we have recently received from a Jesuit Bishop in Anatolia in Turkey who is inviting a few Marists (and we could think of "Marist family") to learn to speak Arabic and come to live in his diocese among Christian refugees from North Africa struggling to live in Muslim Turkey. This is a rather unusual invitation! Do we Marists just say to the Bishop: "Sorry, Monsignor - we have no more energy or resources"? Or, do we say: "Monsignor. With your help we will do all we can to put a community in this land that is strange and foreign to us and to serve the people we find there in our Marist way" and then either offer ourselves for this mission or support others to go, with our prayers?

Some traditional forms of Marist life, wonderful as they have been in their day, seem to be coming to the end of their natural life. Easter of 2022 is calling on all Marists to rejoice in the signs of new life.

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