

AD MAJOREM DEI GLORIAM
ET DEI GENETRICIS HONOREM

**BE UNITED
WITH A COMMON PURPOSE**

Going forward into mission from CS2013

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CS2013 : Statement of Commitment

We, the Council of the Society of Mary, through reflecting, discerning and working together, are convinced that the Society will best carry out its mission in this world of profound change by embracing wholeheartedly the reality of our being a small congregation within the Church.

This challenges us to become

more *focussed*,

more *overtly Marist* in spirituality and community life, in our identity and our mission,

more *international*,

more *collegial*,

more *open to working in collaboration with the laity*,

and more *courageous*.

In the light of this reality,

we, Superior General and council and the major superiors,

commit ourselves to building a future together,

by exercising a leadership, globally and locally,

in which priority is given to animation, competent government,

increased collegiality at all levels, and appropriate structures.

In this way this little Society can realistically go forward into mission, open to the promptings of the Spirit and responsive, according to its capabilities, to the needs of God's people.

In this endeavour we place ourselves under the protection and guidance of Mary, our first and perpetual superior.

Dear Confreres,

1. I am happy to be in contact with you once again and above all to express, wherever you may be or whatever you may do, my heartfelt thanks for your dedicated service to the Society of Mary and the Church. Your Marist work is a guiding star which prompts my work and motivates me in my reflections and decisions. Without awareness of your commitment to your ministries we in the general house would be without compass or direction. Our consciousness of your mission and our response to your expressed needs are a major driving force in our lives and actions.
2. When I reflect on the visitations I have made now to almost all of the Society I am quite well aware of the challenges your work presents. I think of the many Marists I have met over the years and I am so grateful for your witness and the often extraordinary nature of your commitment.
3. I think for example of the confident little community working in El Callao in Peru. They are close to a disadvantaged people ministering to them in both a primary and secondary school and chapel ministry.
4. I think of the Marists in Oceania, today spread over ten dioceses of this vast province, bearing witness with the same generosity of the early missionaries from Europe, New Zealand, the US and Australia. There I think particularly of those Marist communities working in heroic situations in Bougainville and Kenosia for example doing so gladly with the same instincts of mercy, courage, compassion and devotion to the mystery of the Risen Christ and his mission.

5. I think of the Marist community in Bahia, Brazil, which gives itself tirelessly to the development of small Christian communities spread throughout a huge geographical area grouped into three large parishes. I also think of the Marists working close to the people in Chiapas in Mexico supporting forty basic communities enabling the voluntary lay leaders to catechise, teach and lead basic communities.
6. I think of the effective recruitment programmes for new Marists in Africa and other places of the Society.
7. I think of those confreres who work with the alienated from the Church. One of the great challenges for Marists working in a secularised environment is to courageously bear witness to the faith and, whilst respecting others' options, to invite them to search for meaning in the person of Christ. In particular, I think of the Marists in central London ministering to the well-to-do francophone communities whilst working closely with mostly foreigners who are clearly disadvantaged and in search of new beginning in London.
8. I think of Marists working in the developed world, who face the challenge of calling the better-off to be brothers and sisters to the poor and neglected.
9. I think of Marists who, working with people who are in very difficult and sometimes miserable social situations, do their utmost to dispense the healing mystery of Christ in an atmosphere of care and respect.
10. I am aware of the many Marists working in our educational institutions formal and informal, at the primary, secondary and tertiary level.

11. I am thinking of the Marists who work with the refugees: in Brownsville on the USA Mexican border and those on the Thai-Burmese border in Ranong working amongst the refugees educating and caring for them.
12. I think of Marists in Davao who work with street children and the real poor – through their loving action giving hope and a light to move forward in life.
13. There are so many other dynamic examples of good work that could be given here. What do we Marists working in so many and varied ministries have in common? I am confident we have the heart of Jean Claude Colin. We seek to know his mind and his mission intention. We have imbibed through our Marist training a way of being with people, walking with them, listening to them, supporting them, praying with them, all because we have integrated a personal love of Christ, a love for Mary and a burning desire that others too will come to value, adopt and deepen their commitment to the Lord through prayer, fidelity and service.
14. So it is with these thoughts in mind and the desire that the works that have inspired them may grow, strengthen and flourish that I wish to speak with you about the work of the Council of the Society held in Dublin in October of last year, 2013.

A few words on Mission

15. To progress in the work we take on it is important to be clear about what our mission is. We know it defines who

we are and why we exist. It shapes the way we live and work – what we want to be and do within our communities and chosen ministries.

16. Chapter I of the Constitutions presents the defining elements for any Marist mission. These are further enriched through the statements and decisions of the General Chapter of 2009, the various provincial and district chapters and, most recently, CS2013. Each individual ministry we undertake, while reflecting the charism and nature of our universal Society, will also address the demands of the local mission. In whatever endeavour we undertake we work from the basis of Constitution 8:

Because they bear the name of Mary, Marists desire to be like her and follow Jesus as she did... and to respond with promptness to the most urgent needs of God's people.

17. "Responding to the most urgent needs of God's people" is a great challenge for each generation of Marists, because what was once an urgent need may no longer be so today. The messages from Pope Francis are for us a further confirmation of our forever being careful that we don't become attached to the way we've always done things but rather to be ready to change, to "go to the periphery" conscious of the needs of the poorest and side-lined in our world. In our prioritisation of ministries we are aware that *need* takes precedence over *tradition*.
18. While the practical decisions determining what ministries we undertake are necessarily the responsibility of each province or district, we must be always open to asking ourselves why are we doing what we are doing, how does

it fit-in with the overall mission of the Society of Mary and how it reflects wise decision making.

A small Society in the heart of the Church

19. The Society will achieve its mission better in our world of today, a world marked by continuous and at times overwhelming change, if it realistically accepts the concrete reality of its own situation (its numbers, its distribution and its resources) and in the light of this makes the decisions and takes the subsequent necessary action.
20. We are a small Society and probably getting smaller. Strange as it may appear, the Council of the Society saw this as a possible grace. Becoming smaller gives us a chance to take stock of our perhaps more realistic concrete situation and as such could well be a positive thing. Diminishment, particularly among the older provinces, is a persistent force which obliges us to redefine our identity and re-orientate our forces in a clear and unambiguous way.
21. On the other hand, there are other units where there is apparently little or no diminishment and evidence of some, albeit fragile, signs of growth even in the short term. But when we look at all these different places we are also aware that change will be necessary in every area to support the growth of new Marist life wherever it may spring up.
22. Our focus is not pessimistic nor for that matter optimistic but realistic and hopeful. We must live our concrete reality in a positive way and take the necessary steps through

practical action in the current and ongoing choice of ministries. In this way, we may hope that as a result the Society will emerge stronger and better. This is a journey in hope. In the words of Pope Francis, the challenge is not whether we are optimists or pessimists; it is whether we are men of hope in order to face the reality that is ours.

23. The Council of the Society has taken the initiative and asks all of us to make tough choices in order that we might assure a future for our younger confreres and those who will join us into the future.
24. This serene acceptance of our being a little society may well be a grace enabling us to become stronger and more effective. Much depends on our clarity of purpose and our courage to make the necessary and oftentimes hard choices.

More focused

25. The first consequence of the fact that we are getting smaller is the call to become more focused in our vision and in the planning of the projects we undertake together. We are called to deepen our understanding of the Marist mission for today and to make it more relevant to the works we do and the way we do them. This will involve a redefinition at all levels: aiming to define clearer objectives and being able to work at them more efficiently.
26. One of Dr John Honner's first observations in the *Review of Government* is precisely that we are much dispersed. This dispersion manifests itself in different ways: in our geographic spread, in the number and size of Marist

communities, and in the dispersion of apostolic projects. Such diffusion becomes more apparent and its impact is more noticeable in times of fragility and so the call of CS2013 for us all to be more united assumes a particular importance at this moment of our history.

27. The Council of the Society did not see becoming more focused as synonymous with centralisation but rather with becoming more collegial. The expression "to be more focused" in the *Statement of Commitment* calls us to plan the way forward together and to make decisions that help us to be more faithful to our spirit and to act in keeping with the reality of a small congregation. The call to be focused is a call to address our fragilities and in overcoming them to realise our potential as a congregation.

More Collegial

28. Authority which bears the name of Christ and is exercised in a Marian way is a service. The superior general, the general council and the major superiors of the Society, individually and as a body, have committed themselves to assume more energetically their communal responsibility for the governance and pastoral care of the Society worldwide. They pledged themselves to shared authority and co-operative action.
29. Of such cooperation our Constitutions uses phrases like: “*a network of interchange and solidarity*” (c.158); a Society “*capable of fulfilling its universal mission to the extent it functions as a co-ordinated whole...in a spirit of co-responsibility*” (c.159/162); “*through structures of*

consultation and participation at the local, provincial and general levels” (c.160).

30. The dangers of federalism and centralism are more easily avoided when the general administration and the major superiors work in unison with a common purpose and commit to joint action on core issues - as St Paul says “If our life in Christ means anything to you, if love can persuade at all, or the Spirit that we have in common, or any tenderness and sympathy, then be united in your convictions and united in your love, with a common purpose and a common mind” (Phil 2.2).
31. In fact, collegiality invites everyone, no matter what he is doing or where he is working, to engage in the decision making processes. Resolute action is assured where there is consultation, exploration and enquiry followed by a commitment to collaborative action.

More Overtly Marist

32. The Council of the Society fell within the first year of Pope Francis’ pontificate, and there is no doubt that that a certain “Marist-ness” resonated in his messages and actions so much so that it stimulated the participants at the Council of the Society to want to be more overtly Marist in their spirituality, community life, identity and mission.
33. Knowing our identity is primary: from this base flow all other aspects of being Marist. We simply have to shape the limited mission we are capable of, according to the insights of our founder, our Constitutions, our traditions, and the way we do things as Marists. It is commendable that our

way of life, our way of doing things and our evangelising work reflects so beautifully the spirit of Mary.

34. Community for Marists is not accidental, not secondary. As Pope Francis points out in his apostolic exhortation *Gaudium Evangelii*, 177 “*at the very heart of the gospel is life in community and engagement with others*”.
35. And of course spirituality - here we return to the starting place of our community, our cherished contact with Christ through a life of prayer and fraternal interaction. And our relationship with Mary inspires us to really live well in community and love our brothers and to act in her way and share in her enthusiasm in our mission.

More International

36. Pioneers of the Society of Mary worldwide came from different national and cultural backgrounds. Today this is still happening in many provinces and districts where Marists go abroad to work to further implant or consolidate the mission of the Society of Mary. Internationality has always been an element of Marist life and mission. To own this and to develop it as a valuable attribute. In making *to be more international* one of the key elements of their *Statement of Commitment*, the major superiors and the general administration see this as indispensable if the whole Society is to prosper as we strive to live and work together beyond cultural differences.
37. How do we see internationality coming into play positively in the various units of our congregation scattered around the world today? One way is through developing new

ministries answering new needs, prioritised works where Marists can work together not only at unit level but also internationally. Another area with potential for international co-operation is the city-centre churches' ministry.

38. There are also interesting possibilities for international collaboration in the education field particularly in the developing districts and provinces. Here the practical and professional experience gained by senior Marists could be deployed short-term in providing assistance. The district of Africa, for example, would welcome such help in the development of a new educational project in Senegal, where they envisage the building and operating of a big school.
39. The growing internationalisation resulting from the reconfiguration of provinces and districts should provide added opportunities for international co-operative ventures of real worth.
40. Some of the significant success stories of internationality over the years can be found in the area of formation. The move towards international formation was encouraged by a number of superiors general since Vatican II. In the light of diminished resources and smaller numbers of students the need for collaboration between units has become even more vital. In the past there had been encouraging achievements: the combined novitiate that started off in Boston for the English-speakers in the Society, as well as the Spanish-speaking novitiate for Latin America. Collaborative ventures were also seen in the combined theologate for Spanish speaking professed students. The formation communities in Bomana, Fiji, Auckland have

been international for many years. More recently the members of MAP have cooperated in the ongoing formation, spirituality and lifestyle programme. We now have an international theologate in Rome and an English speaking novitiate in Davao operating successfully for the past three years. In the future, we hope that once sufficient numbers are on line novitiates in other language groups can be re-started.

41. But this is not all there is to becoming more international. It would be a blessing if we could co-operate more formally with a view to sharing our resources - personnel, formation, skills training and finance – in a more formal and sure manner. Many of our developing areas of the Society need skilled Marists to help them. Can these be tapped so that the best traditions and training are made more widely available?

Working in collaboration with the laity

42. Lay Marists are an integral part of the overall Marist project. At a time when the number of Marists is diminishing, promoting groups of committed lay co-workers is especially important. A significant matter discussed at CS 2013 concerned groups of lay Marists who are currently actively involved in the direct mission of the Society, cooperating with Marist Fathers or working as more autonomous groups.
43. The experience of some religious orders shows how formalised structures can sometimes help groups of lay people to flourish and grow, and to situate themselves in the legal framework of the church and civil society.

44. CS 2013 asked the superior general to consider the possibility amongst others of applying canonical structures (perhaps one structure, or perhaps several different structures) to some of our lay associations.
45. The Council also asked provinces and districts to give serious consideration to developing such lay associations from among those who are involved already alongside us in the active mission of the Society. Our hope is that the orientations of CS2013 will bear fruit so that Mary's work may continue well into the future.

The Government Review

46. It was the last general chapter that recommended to the incoming general council that an external review of all levels of government be carried out in time for CS 2013 with a view to continuing structural change. (SD 14). It was evident that, like many other religious institutes in the Catholic Church, the Society has come to a critical point in its history: despite the structure of governance codified in our present Constitutions, with its emphasis on co-responsibility, communion in mission and subsidiarity, in this critical time of diminishment and change we were in need of more appropriate systems and structures.
47. The *strategies for a positive future* of the Chapter gave indications of the directions to take:
 - The simplification of systems and structures of government to make decision-making more agile and effective A development of more collegial approaches to decision-making to break down local-global

- divisions, avoid centralisation, share resources, get subsidiarity right, and increase animation
- where diminishment is inevitable, the provision of good care and community for ageing Marists, the secure management of Marist patrimony and priority ministries, support the regeneration of Marist mission, and the consolidation of structures when necessary
 - where growth is likely, provide all resources possible to develop leadership, community and ministry, and provide both local and international formation to prepare younger Marists to meet emerging needs.
48. To address the above, CS2013 endorsed two kinds of changes: first, changes that can be made to leadership and administration immediately; and, secondly, changes that can come about to structures over a period of time. I refer you directly to the governance report itself to flesh out these interesting possibilities.
49. The recommendations for government give priority to the animation of the Society by its leadership: promoting life, spirit, direction and action through vision, clear purpose, the building up of relationships. For this the general administration, major superiors, in fact all leaders, are invited to have themselves a clear grasp of our mission and strategic direction at this time and to communicate it. To make this happen the Council called for the provision of effective communications and appropriate structures.
50. This emphasis on leadership calls for appropriate ways of choosing and forming leaders and the provision of continuing support and assistance for our leaders.

51. The Council of the Society agreed that in order to carry out its mission effectively into the future the Society of Mary will have to plan:

- the strengthening of the “growth areas” of the Society of Mary that show promise, the districts of Africa, Brazil, Peru, the Philippines and Oceania;
- the consolidation of the “established” provinces: the first through a constructive collegial process between Canada, Mexico and the United States, and between Australia and New Zealand, to develop plans that will include: priority ministries being collaboratively developed with the possibility of regeneration in these provinces;
- the ongoing care of an increasingly ageing Society;
- personnel and material resources continuing to be shared with other parts of the Society;
- a sensitive transition of care and authority when a province no longer has the capacity to govern itself, with great care being taken to safeguard our Marist patrimony; restructuring that develops from these collaborations and transitions.

The Financial Review and its possibilities

52. The acquisition and fair distribution of the finances of the Society are obviously very important for our mission. We want to work together towards the realisation of Jean-Claude Colin’s vision and mission. That requires the financial wherewithal to do the work. The needs of the Society are broad and varied, our resources are finite. The sentiments and the determinations of the *Statement of*

Commitment of CS 2013 apply also to the management of the Society's financial resources. Thus, on the financial field we are invited to work more and more as a cohesive body.

53. An important outcome of the Financial Review has been the setting up of the implementation committee to continue the collection of vital information on the finances and other assets of all the Society and to ensure the agreed proposals of CS2013 are put into effect. The next phase is to get a clearer picture of the property and financial portfolios of each province and district so that we can more effectively plan for and build our future "together". You will be kept informed of developments as they proceed by the implementation committee and your major superior.
54. The general administration is especially grateful to those who worked painstakingly in provision of the information to make the financial review possible and those who managed the process as it unfolded over the past couple of years.

Be courageous

55. The purpose of this letter has been to communicate with you my confreres as a global Marist community and share with you the major decisions which grew out of the work of the Council of the Society in 2013. It is important for you as co-workers in the vineyard of the Lord and shareholders in the Marist endeavour, to know something of what we are doing to put into effect the recommendations of the Council of the Society and also to thank you for your

important work as individuals and as a body in the realisation of our Marist call.

56. The core elements of what is written here have already been communicated through our video series – *More* - available through the GA website – www.maristsm.org. I invite you to look at these videos if you have not already done so.
57. My hope is that this letter will help you to deepen your understanding of the official documents of CS2013 which you have by now received. The much needed regeneration of our Society will be possible only if we work together each playing his part so that the common vocation of the Society becomes a dynamic reality in each and every community. I am confident the outcomes of the council of the Society if fully embraced coupled with the call of the general chapter in 2009 will enable us to achieve these desired goals.
58. I remind you once again that the work we do in Rome and the work of the major superiors within each one's province or district is to enable the mission of the Society of Mary globally and locally to progress and develop. At the most recent leadership workshop the general administration set as its goal:

to work closely with the major superiors in a collegial manner both individually and at ARC to engage the whole Society in understanding further and implementing the direction of the general chapter 2009 and CS2013 with the emphasis on effective leadership within the GA and the SM.

59. I hope that each one of you, within the context of your own responsibilities, will continue to be an active participant in this global team leadership endeavour. So often during my life I have experienced good initiatives which never took root because Marists did not carry them forward either because they, themselves, would have preferred another way of doing things or they simply preferred not to engage with what was being proposed. Corporate commitment is the lifeblood of regeneration. I urge you to commit yourself to this ongoing work with energy and hope. (Const. 33-34).
60. Finally, I wish to express my thanks to the members of the general administration who played an active role in writing this letter. It is a symbol of how we wish to work together until the end of our mandate in 2017.

May Mary, our Mother, watch over us and guide us so that what we do reflects the will of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Rome, 25 March 2014

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