

Marist Fathers Australia District Circular

April 2025

From the District Leader

Confreres,

What an extraordinary man was Pope Francis. He seemed to instinctively understand the importance and the power of gestures and symbols. From where he lived, to the car he was driven in, to whose feet he washed on Holy Thursday and to the places he visited. There are many memories and images that come to mind when I think back on his time as Pope. Our world and the Church are better for his presence and leadership.

As Cardinal Re said in his homily at the funeral:

With his characteristic vocabulary and language, rich in images and metaphors, he always sought to shed light on the problems of our time with the wisdom of the Gospel. He did so by offering a response guided by the light of faith and encouraging us to live as Christians amid the challenges and contradictions in recent years, which he loved to describe as an "epochal change."

His first apostolic exhortation – 'Evangelii Gaudium – The Joy of the Gospel' provided a template for much of his papacy. The peripheries, Laudato Si, mercy, synodality, and the church as a field hospital, were all phrases and concepts and images which showed the emphasis of much of his papacy.

Pope Francis always placed the Gospel of mercy at the centre, repeatedly emphasising that God never tires of forgiving us. He always forgives, whatever the situation might be of the person who asks for forgiveness and returns to the right path.

Not everyone in the Church agreed with his approach on all issues. Some thought he was too liberal, others that he was too conservative. At times he seemed struggled in his response to safeguarding issues. He did better than his predecessors in these matters, but as a Church we have still much more to do in responding to those people who have been harmed, in dealing with those who perpetuated the crimes, and those who covered things up.

Thoughts now turn to the future. The cardinals gathered in Rome these days are meeting to reflect on the papacy of Francis and to consider the needs of the Church at this time. They are also getting to know one another more deeply as they prepare for the conclave which begins next week.

Last week I was in Brisbane to visit the confreres. While there I took part in the first of our regional gatherings in preparation for the 2025 General Chapter. This is a time for the Society of Mary "to evaluate its fidelity to its spirit and mission, to resolve important questions concerning the Society as a whole, to decide on directions to be followed for

the future, and to elect the superior general and his council."
SM Const. n.163

Thank you for the sharings and insights that were freely shared. Present at the meeting were three capitulants: Gerard Hall, Ekuasi Manu from Tonga, and myself. An important part of our preparation for the chapter is prayerfully listening to confreres

The theme of the chapter – With Mary at Pentecost (Acts 1:14) gives us the image of the apostles with Mary gathered in prayer in the upper room. This is an appropriate image in these days not just for the Society of Mary but also for the whole Church.



Visitation to Japan

In March I was able to visit Oscar Ichiba in Kyoto. It was good to catch up with him after a few years. After Sunday Mass I met some people who recalled fondly those Marists who worked in Nara over the years. Bishop Paul Otsuka is very grateful for Ichiba's presence in the diocese and his ministry. The diocese has teams of pastoral workers and priests looking after a couple of churches. Ichiba is about to transfer to the Cathedral where he will be the moderator for the group that works out of the Cathedral and surrounding churches.



Retreat in Fiji

I will be in Fiji from 16 -26 May. I have been asked to give the annual retreat to the Marist College seminarians. There are 10 of them: 5 from Fiji, 4 from PNG and 1 from the Solomon Islands.

Tony Kennedy sm

District Leader's Diary

- **3 May** CRA meeting with Bishops
- **7 May** Pre Chapter meeting Villa Maria
- **8 May** Pre Chapter meeting Montbel
- **13 May** District Council meeting
- **16-26 May** Marist College Suva Fiji Retreat
- **10 Jun** District Council meeting
- **13-20 Jun** Davao – MAP
- **5-11 Jul** Visitation Perth

District Council

At its March and April meetings the Council treated the following:

- Professional Standards matters
- Villa Maria Complex update
- Report on visitation of St Patrick's and Japan
- Preparing for a review of Montbel / Maryvale.
- Preparation for the 2025 General Chapter

Appointments

- Kevin Stewart as Deputy Local Leader for Maryvale/Montbel for 3 years from 1st April 2025.
- Peter McMurrich to be the delegate for immigration matters with AMCRO.

Vietnamese Sisters

On Saturday 26 April the Sisters of St. Joseph held a celebration at Baulkham Hills to remember and celebrate the arrival of the Mary Queen Sisters in Australia from Vietnam. A special photo on display was the arrival of the sisters at Richmond airbase being guided from the Hercules plane to freedom by Marist Provincial Fr Peter Guiren – only a few days before the fall of Saigon. Fr Peter Guiren and especially Fr Tony King played a significant role in the arrival and on-going support of the Sisters.

The 'Day of Memories & Reflection' was divided into various activities. The morning session was a gathering of the original

Deaths

- **Fr 'Isilei Lino**, Oceania / Tonga
30 March.
- **Fr Siebo Leppen**, Oceania / Solomon Islands
7 April.

group of Mary Queen sisters and the Josephites who were novices at Baulkham Hills at that time. The gathering also included some Mary Queen sisters who joined the Josephites. A special memory was made of their Mary Queen sisters who later travelled from Australia to America to join their sisters who had originally escaped from Saigon to the USA. The afternoon session included other Josephites and as well as Josephites and Mary Queen sisters who may have left their respective congregations.

Andrew Murray and Paul Sullivan celebrated the Eucharist with the sisters to conclude the day. Paul acknowledged the significance of this event in the history of our church and nation and thanked all the women present for their on-going commitment and ministry. Note: Some of the Mary Queen sisters studied at CTU and expressed their gratitude to this experience.



JPICC Corner

District Committee for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation

Right: The Marist Family JPIC committee in Zoom session on Apr 03, from top left, **Lawrie McCane FMS**, **Ron Nissen**, **Grace Ellul SM**, **Paul Mahony**, **Margaret Tisch SMSM**, **Kevin Stewart**, **Andrew Dumas**, **Jim Carty** (not pictured, **Cathy Larkin**). The committee regularly meets at the District Office and on Zoom as needed.



Above: **Gerard Hall** with Paddington's Colin calendar. | **Garry Reynolds'** birthday at Montbel. | **Seamus McMahon** at Oxford Park. *Below:* **David Sanchez** sight-seeing with **Tony Kennedy**... | ... and new Aussie friend.



Above: **Pope Francis** remembered in Villa Maria's chapel. | **Kev Head** (NZ) visiting **Bernie McFadyen** and **Gerry Arbuckle** at Northbridge.



Above: **St Peter Chanel** celebrations with Maryvale/Montbel and parish confreres at Villa Maria: Evening Prayer... | ... and soirée.

International



Above: Profession of **Alex Tella Nembot** (Cameroon) and **Maciu Jimi Banicakau** (Fiji) at Eden, Davao. | New novices and formators, Eden, Davao. Below: Community of *Casa di Maria*, Rome. | Newest theologate students arriving in Rome. Further below: 'Marist gladiators', *Casa di Maria* runners in the Rome marathon. | At St Peter Chanel's formation community, Davao, **Chris Ganzon** celebrating his 50th birthday, with Marist aspirants.





Above: **Gavin Foster** with Marist Brothers' Star of the Sea province pilgrimage.



Above: Members of the General Administration In the hills south of Rome. Right and below: Attending the funeral of Pope Francis: **Cardinal Soane Patita Mafi** (Tonga), **Archbishop Peter Loy Chong** (Suva), **John Larsen**, **Ben McKenna**, **Pat Brophy**, **Ben D'Souza** and **Ricardo Navarrete**.



Gil Casio with Marist Sisters in Davao.