

Marist Fathers Australian Province Provincial Circular



No 4
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From the Provincial

Confreres,

At last! The Superior General with the consent of his council has agreed to our transition from a province to a district. It has been a long journey from the Chapters of 2018 and 2021, sometimes a rather tortuous path, but finally we are on the verge of the change.

It is good to recall the intention behind the changes, in the words of the 2021 Chapter: 'The diminishment of personnel, the ageing of our membership and the contraction of our works call us to develop a new governance structure which will meet our needs in the immediate future and which can be managed realistically and competently, a structure that can enable the Society of Mary to "flourish where we are planted", continuing our mission to witness to the joy of the gospel in fidelity, hopeful conviction, and fraternal love.'

The changes in our governance, although they do have significance, in many ways are not too great. They do ease the way to further changes in the future. There is no doubt that the next General Chapter will have to consider a reorganisation of the governance structures of the whole Society.

Most of the proposed changes to our governance structures and the statutes submitted by the 2021 Chapter have been accepted by Rome. As you know the Dicastery for Religious would not countenance our remaining a canonical province with the changes we wanted, the best we can do within the Society's rules is to be a district. The Dicastery also advised that the leader of the new entity be given the title of District Superior. The GA required that the District Superior be given the role of a major superior and that, as the other districts, we continue to have chapters and a Marist bursar.

The formal decrees of suppression of the Province and the erection of the District of Australia will be issued in time for us to mark the transition on September 23.

The reception of the decree of erection will take place during the Jubilarians' Mass on Friday, September 23. Hopefully, those who cannot attend the event at Hunters Hill might consider organising something fit for the occasion.

The approved Foundational Charter (concerning the governance of the unit) and the other statutes will be circulated the district members soon afterwards.

Let us put this venture of ours under the protection of Mary, who was present within the early Church as it too was faced with the challenges of community life, mission and its governance.

Council of the Society & Roman holiday

I will be leaving the country for Rome for the CS2022 and a break at the end of September and plan to return in early November. For the duration of my period away I have delegated Peter McMurrich to act as District Superior. I thank Peter for agreeing to taking on the role, for which, as you will all agree, he is highly experienced and competent.

Tony

The following is an attempt to draw together into a coherent summary the varied responses from communities and individuals of the Province to the questions of the Superior General. This will form the material for my report to the Council of the Society in October.

Preparing for the Council of the Society

Discernment of the Spirit working in the life of the Marists of Australia since 2017.

The work of the Holy Spirit was discerned within the following contexts:

1. In the Universal Church:
 - a. Pope Francis's leadership and inspiration is a sign of hope.
 - b. The Australian Church's Plenary Council.
2. In the universal Society of Mary:
 - a. The continuing validity of the Marist charism for today's Church and world
 - b. The emerging sense of the mission in the Society thanks to GA initiatives.
 - c. The commitment of the Society to international formation and the increase in candidates from Africa, Oceania and Latin America.
 - d. The establishment of *Omnes Gentes* communities, Marayong community in particular.
 - e. The growing body of material on the Founder and increasing appreciation of Fr Colin, through Justin Taylor's biographies, etc., and the Colnian Renewal.

3. In our Australian Community:

- a. The awareness that our present ministries and those of the past continue to bear fruit among those we serve and have served.
- b. The work of the 2021 Chapter and the resulting change in our government structures.
- c. Positive examples of confreres facing difficult and painful situations arising from life changes e.g. retirement, health issues, with faith and courage and good spirits
- d. Positive experience of life in community.
- e. Our realistically managing ministries in the context of diminishment.

4. In our personal lives:

- a. The blessings that have come with ageing, retirement.
- b. As the province has experienced diminishment and change, our focus has changed from works to our Marist life together.
- c. The positive experience of a shift from an autonomous life to belonging to a community while still being involved in various roles.

Signs of hope that could guide us, our communities, province, Society, into the future.

1. Community:

- a. Signs of hope: acceptance of each other and mutual support; joyful, prayerful, supportive community.
- b. The example of the faithfulness of confreres as they continue in mission according to their circumstances and age.

2. Provincial:

- a. The work of the Australian Chapter of 2021 in making a realistic response to diminishment, living in the real world, facing the reality of our circumstances is a sign of hope. "Stripping of false hopes is a sign of hope".
- b. The recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Sexual Abuse provided hope because it shone a spotlight on the grave shortcomings in the life of the local Church and religious congregations in Australia.

3. International SM:

- a. Appointment of younger and geographically diverse members to the General Council is a sign of hope.
- b. Interculturality reflected in our formation communities and the *Omnes Gentes* communities.
- c. JPIC and Laudato 'Si work throughout the SM.

The most challenging issues for us in our life and mission as local community, province, Society.

1. State of the world and Church:

- a. World-wide problems impinge on every area and level of our Society: pandemic, wars,

climate change, economic volatility, strategic realignment, Western cultural decay. Added to these each unit is affected by its national and local crises.

- b. To have the wisdom, the courage and the love to live and proclaim the Gospel within the midst of society, "in the marketplace participating in the conversation".

- c. In transition, how do we hand on our Marist legacy?

2. Governance:

- a. The decline in number of those in the Society willing and capable to lead.
- b. The doubling-up of roles in leadership teams can lessen the opportunities that come with diversity of experience and backgrounds,
- c. The diversity in the life-cycle of units (some diminishing, others are emerging). provides challenges for governance especially at the general level, as structures and expectations will vary according to circumstances while, at the same time maintaining those structures and attitudes essential to the Marist Mission. (Cf. DC 72)
- d. A structure that guarantees that leadership at the general level is assured for each and every unit of the Society.

3. Personnel:

- a. Diminishment and the lack of men willing and capable of leading.
- b. The personal and community management of retirement and ageing – addressing transition.

4. Leadership:

- a. Leadership training is essential as is the employment of competent lay professionals in key areas of our daily life and ministry e.g., aged care, finance and safeguarding.
- b. While there is much we have in common as Marists, leadership needs to recognise the many different contexts and challenges faced by Marists in order to respond accordingly.
- c. Learning to act in a synodal way at every level of our organisation.
- d. The need for leadership training at all levels and genuine team work. The induction program for new major superiors is of importance.
- e. Continual review of the operation of leadership teams is a requirement for their operation as cohesive groups. In particular. Leadership teams, including the general administration, can benefit from regular professional supervision/ consultancy at both the individual and group levels.

What has been learnt in addressing these challenges.

- a. Our current governance structures are ripe for an overhaul; governance structures need to be fit for purpose.

- b. Preparation for leadership is necessary.
- c. Timely preparation for all stages of our personal and professional development is necessary, from starting out on mission, through “mid-life”, to retirement and ageing.
- d. The value of synodality but the danger of it being “short-circuited” – the synodal process takes time and patience.

The main issues for the attention of CS2022 and for the Chapter of 2025.

1. Governance:
 - a. The whole Society needs to prepare for a governance structure appropriate for tomorrow. Preparatory review, research and discussion needs to begin immediately in time for an informed treatment at 2025 Chapter.
 - b. Report on the progress of research into the best location for the General House. (Cf. SD 18)
2. Mission:
 - a. To review the initiatives of the present administration.
 - b. As the Society faces major diminishment in the “west”, we need to foster the Society where it has a future – allow it to grow; offer material resources; avoid the temptation to use their men to prop up the “west”.
 - c. As an international Society to reimagine and adapt to emerging challenges of ethnicity, culture.
 - d. Need for understanding and support of people in intercultural communities.
3. Leadership:
 - a. Leadership training, cf. SD 9b, 86.
4. Professional Standards and Safeguarding:
 - a. Development of best practice for the management of sexual abuse throughout the SM. (Cf. SD 41-44, 89)
5. Health and Ageing:
 - a. While not becoming preoccupied with ageing, the number of aged members, is significant, care must be taken that adequate resources are available for the care of each and every one in all units.

Provincial Diary

Aug 29–Sep 1	CRA National Assembly, Melbourne
Sept 6	Provincial Finance Committee
Sept 8	Marist Day for staff and committees
Sept 13	Provincial Council
Sept 19-23	Retreat
Sept 23	Transition from Province to District
Sept 23	Jubilarians Mass & Luncheon
Sept 29	Professional Standards & Safeguarding Panel
Oct 8-21	Council of the Society, Rome

Provincial Council

At its July and August meetings the Council treated the following:

- Transition from Province to District
- Report on the Plenary Council
- Paddington house of welcome
- Provincial retreat
- Marist Retreat Day for administration staff and members of Provincial committees
- Villa Maria Complex
- Professional Standards matters
- Local Leader for Herston
- Report to CS2022
- St Patrick’s
- Planning for the Post-Transition era

Appointments

Pius Jones has been appointed Local Leader of the Herston community for three years as from Jan 1, 2023.

Personnel

Tony Kennedy

Tony returns to Rome to begin the new academic year after spending two months with family, during which he celebrated his 60th birthday and 30th anniversary of ordination. Tony’s term as superior of the International Theologate, Casa di Maria, has been extended, but we hope to have him back in Oz by the end of 2024.

Calendar

Sep 18-23: Provincial Retreat

Sep 23: Jubilarians’ Mass and Luncheon

Sep 23: Marking the Transition from Province to District

Information

Paddington Community

The designation of our house at Paddington as a House of Welcome has been withdrawn. In consequence, from the end of the year we will no longer be offering accommodation to overseas students in the adjoining house on Given Terrace. This does not mean that visitors will no longer be welcomed by Gerard!

St Patrick’s

Our intention to return the care of St Pat’s to the archdiocese has finally been made public.

On Sunday, Aug 24, the Archbishop of Sydney, Anthony Fisher, during the midday Eucharist at Church Hill, announced that the Marist Fathers will depart from the parish at the end of 2025. The St Pat’s community has set up a committee to provide a process for the transitioning.

Villa Maria Complex Committee

Work continues on a site strategy and feasible possibilities. Within the context of the vision of the 2021 Chapter it is intended to develop a site strategy and to identify feasible possibilities for the use for the site, from a town planning perspective, e.g. what buildings, for what uses; what's required for the heritage to be sustainable/usable into the future.

Site strategy and feasible possibilities will be usefully progressed by some preliminary work from a Town Planner, GAT & Associates. Following on from their investigations (already begun) including a review of relevant planning controls for the site, including broader strategic plans and statutory controls and meeting with HH Council authorities, GAT will prepare a paper outlining their preliminary findings and advice on the development options, which will include the following:

- The buildings/structures on site that are of heritage and the maintenance/upgrade/reuse potential or implications of these buildings;
- The buildings on site which could potentially be upgraded and reused;
- The buildings which could potentially be demolished; and
- Which land uses would be appropriate on the site.

JPICC Corner

Provincial Committee for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation

Thanks to some disorientation through Covid in 2020 and 2021, the Committee submitted a belated, two-year summary report in May this year for review by the Provincial Council. The report headings are:

- Membership
- Meetings & Agenda
- Province website
- Internal JPIC Blog
- International webinars
- Wilai Foundation
- Bridge Program (*now concluded*)
- Finances

Copies of the report are available from Ron Nissen for any confrere especially interested.



Deaths

Br Benedito Gonetabu SM (Oceania), Jul 18, 2022

Fr Brian Sigere SM (Oceania), Jul 20, 2022

Fr José Luís Chanfón SM (Mexico), Jul 28, 2022

Fr Gerard Demers SM (USA), Aug 13, 2022

Fr Walter Poppe SM (Europe), Aug 13, 2022

Fr James Ware SM, Aug 13, 2022



A tribute to James by a friend:

'Yesterday I and many other once "homeless" people have lost our spiritual father and life-long friend, Fr. James (Jim) Ware.

I met Fr. James after a lunch-time mass one day at St. Patrick's church while working for Bankers Trust Australia in the 90s. He asked me where I worked and when I told him, he promptly replied, "Oh the money factory".

He then began telling me of The Station a free and practical drop-in service for homeless people in Sydney, of which he was a Director. So I asked him "Do you need some money?". Again he promptly replied, "We don't take hand-outs only hand-ups".

I then set out to engage with Bankers Trust management for hand-ups and after a few years Fr. James and I had success...

At the time I didn't realise that Fr. James was also helping me with the 'homelessness' I found myself in, thus, I came to learn that the affliction of 'homelessness' was not only physical but it could also be emotional, psychological and spiritual. Hence, this led me to adopt the philosophy of hand-ups not hand-outs and apply it to my life and work...

Fr. James, I am eternally grateful for the many hand-ups, but most importantly I thank you for and will miss your friendship, love and support in this journey we call life.'

Francesco



Above, clockwise from top left: At the Catholic Biblical and Theological Conference in Melbourne, **Gerard Hall**, **Mika Tuimavave** and **Kevin Waldie** (NZ). | **Allan Connors** on his 70th anniversary of ordination, with **Paul Pidcock**. | **Paul** at Campion College, Toongabbie. | **Kevin Bates'** sisters, **Trish** and **Maree**, visiting for Kev's birthday. | Painter's touch-up at Villa Maria.

Below, from left: **Gavin Forster** with Mallard-looking ducks at Villa Maria. | **Kerrie Sanders** with **Chef Peter** and birthday cake, Montbel.

