

MARIST FATHERS AUSTRALIA DISTRICT CIRCULAR

DEC
2023

From the District Superior

Confreres,

As we come to the end of 2023, we can take the opportunity to look back on the past year with thanksgiving and hope for the coming year.

In this circular we report on some of the major projects that were set for the District by the Chapter of 2022: our withdrawal from St Patrick's, the refinement of the governance and structures of the Marist Mission Centre, the setting of a strategic plan for the future of the Villa Maria Complex.

We also look to some of the challenges we will have to face in the coming years.

There is no basis for expecting the number of civil abuse cases will lessen in the foreseeable future. Indications that in the present legal environment the size of the payments will increase.

Based on the uncertainty around Catholic Church Insurance and ongoing professional standards payments it is imperative to manage our finances wisely, utilising a "risk management approach", prudently utilising our funds in a context of such uncertainty.

The new year brings a complete turn-over in the District Council. We farewell **Kevin Bates** and **Gerry Hall** with thanks for their generous and wise advice and guidance; we welcome **Peter McMurrich** and **Ray Chapman**. There will be a third change in March, when **Brian Wilson** retires and we carry out a consultation for the third member of council.

An important moment for all of us in 2024 will be our Assembly. At that time we will have the opportunity to review our experience of being a district, of working according to our new statutes, to address important issues as the future of Villa Maria and preparing for the General Chapter of 2025.

The planning for the Assembly is in the good hands of Peter McMurrich, Ray Chapman and Pius Jones. I am sure they will be keen to involve communities and individuals in fruitful preparation. Please make sure your diaries permit you to be in attendance.

A blessed Christmas to everyone.

Tony

District Superior's Diary

Feb 20: District Council

District Council

At its November and December meetings the Council treated the following:

- Financial Risk Management
- Leichhardt property sale
- Setting-up Haberfield Community
- Villa Maria Complex Strategic Plan
- Professional Standards matters
- Revision of Marist Mission Centre structure
- District Assembly 2024
- 2024 Budget

St Patrick's, Church Hill

At the last Provincial Chapter, in February 2021, it was decided to relinquish the entrustment of the parish of St Patrick's as of 31 December 2025. Tony Corcoran met with the Archbishop soon after to convey this decision and Michael Whelan met via Zoom with the Archbishop on 8 September 2021. A formal announcement of the Marists' withdrawal from St Patrick's was made on 21 August 2022 by the Archbishop at the 12noon Mass at St Patrick's.



A Progress Report from Michael Whelan on the Marist Withdrawal from St Patrick's Church Hill

In the latter part of 2021, we set up a Process Group to assist with the transition. That Group consisted of **Sr Therese Carroll RSJ, Br Ian Cribb SJ, Mr Paul Bullen** and **Fr Gerry Gleeson VG**. We had our initial meeting Tuesday 14 December 2021.

In anticipation of the public announcement by the Archbishop, The Process Group set up a number of forums after the Sunday Masses – both at St Patrick's and St Brigid's – to enable the people to address with us their feelings and thoughts.

Paul Bullen conducted surveys through personal interviews, online and face-to-face. He developed a special survey for the people attending Sunday Masses. The responses were very high.

Paul subsequently gathered the results of his surveys and published a report in October 2023. Our intention in publishing this report is threefold:

1. Provide the Archdiocese with a good profile of the Parish so they can make a well-informed decision regarding the next step. Of course, they will be limited by the availability of priests to continue the work here.
2. Give the people a chance to express themselves, feel part of the transition, and honour their place in the life of St Patrick's.
3. Give the Marists a statement of record they can be proud of. We will have been here for 157 years at the end of 2025. I think there is an enormous amount of symbolism in St Patrick's for us as Marists.

A copy of that report is may be found at:

https://stpatschurchhill.org/wp-content/uploads/St_Patricks_Church_Hill_1817.Beyond_Oct2023-2.pdf

In 2024 and 2025, we will have a series of "spiritual conversations". The intention at the moment is to have one each month on Sunday morning in the crypt and one each month by Zoom.

The Process Group is yet to decide on the precise structure of those "spiritual conversations" and how we might facilitate them. However, they will be designed to help people to pray through the transition.

There are *not* going to be discussions in which participants can air their anxieties or particular expectations. If people want to do that they will be invited to approach me personally or Fr Gerry Gleeson.

From the outset, we have repeatedly made it clear that the shape of St Patrick's post-2025 is in the hands of the Archbishop.

Fr Gerry Gleeson and others from the Archdiocese have come to St Patrick's and been given a full tour of the parish buildings and associated commercial buildings. Paul Bullen has met with Fr Gerry Gleeson also and discussed the report with him.

Deaths

Fr Paul Shannahan (New Zealand)
who died on 18 Nov 18, 2023.

One suggestion coming from the Archdiocese is that they might appoint two diocesan clergy to live on-site and invite other clergy to assist with Masses and Reconciliation.

For a while after the Archbishop's announcement on 21 August 2022, I occasionally heard two false stories:

1. The Marist Fathers are leaving the city to concentrate their efforts in the Parramatta Diocese. This story was obviously related to the establishment of the Marayong Community. The Archbishop, Gerry Gleeson, and Bishop Terry Brady, all mentioned this. I think we have managed to deal with this fiction.
2. The second fiction that emerged quickly and disappeared quickly was that the Archbishop was expelling the Marists from St Patrick's.

Now and then, someone asks whether it is true that the Marists are leaving St Patrick's. But I think it would be fair to say that the truth is now well and truly out there, that people are sad but accepting of something that they appreciate is inevitable.

Marist personnel at St Pat's

We currently have a community of six Marists – **Bernie McFadyen SM** (82), **Peter McMurrich SM** (75), **Kevin Head SM** (74), **Paul Hachey SM** (67), **Michael Carroll SM** (70), and myself (76). Our average age is 74. In 2024 Kevin Head will return to New Zealand and **Paul Mahony SM** (72) will join the community.

Paul Hachey is the Acting Judicial Vicar in the Archdiocese while incumbent takes long-service leave. Paul Hachey will be back full-time in the community after January 2024.

Kevin Stewart SM (79) has been a member of the community until recently. He is now "in transition" with the possibility of working in Mandalay.

We gratefully receive assistance from several others – including **'Aisake Vaisima SM, Tom Ryan SM, Andrew Murray SM**.

There was a time when each member of the community at St Patrick's was expected to take two Masses and two sessions of Reconciliation each day. As aging men, this is proving too much. We therefore depend on those extra Marists coming to help.

I believe the community is coping well with the transition. The final days are going to be tough.

Marist Mission Centre

The 2022 Chapter called for an update of the governance and structures of MMC "such that the Marist Mission Centre is a fully independent trust/organisation in perpetuity to achieve the MMC purposes".



The intention was to ensure that, no matter what changes are in store for the Marists in Australia, the specific work of the MMC can continue, the funds held be wisely managed in accordance with government regulations, that they be used for the specific intentions of the donors who have generously contributed over many years, and that the inspiration and focus of MMC not be lost.

The MMC Administration and the Business Manager, together with our lawyers and others experienced in the field, have been working on a proposal to present to the District Administration early next year.

Villa Maria Complex Strategic Plan

The 2022 Chapter, in the light of our diminishment, called for a long-term strategic plan for the Hunters Hill Complex (initially to 2035), consistent with the site's spiritual heritage, and in accord with environmental values and a commitment to sustainability, be in place by Dec 2024.

At the instigation of the Villa Maria Complex Committee, Mr Paul Bullen was engaged to assist in developing a strategic plan for the Villa Maria property so that the future of the site and its heritage is guaranteed.

A significant report was delivered by GAT & Associates, town planner which contains a review of planning and heritage constraints and opportunities.

The local council is aware of our strategic planning process and has been briefed on it and the potential opportunities for new uses on the site – and is supportive of the process and approach taken.

We have now reached the stage where we are considering approaching potential partners to collaborate with us in ensuring the future for the site.

Very recently, we have initiated conversations with the Marist Brothers.

Financial Risk Management

To prepare to meet the future financial challenges to the District both expected and unexpected, it has been deemed prudent to have a critical examination of our portfolio of assets identifying those assets which can be drawn upon to fund upcoming liabilities.

There is a need to develop a plan that identifies those assets that can be used to fund future abuse claims and to be proactive in the process to minimise the risk of being forced to sell assets at a non-optimal valuation because of liquidity pressures.

We also need to avoid being in a position to use income-producing assets that cover the running costs of the Marist Fathers and rather than non-income producing assets, or even less appealing non-income producing assets, that require ongoing capital outlays to maintain.

The purpose of a financial risk management plan is to review all our assets in order to establish an order of sale to meet future financial obligations.

To achieve our objective the following steps will be taken:

1. Assess each **property** on the following criteria – current valuation, current use, cost to the district and future use. Properties would be ranked in order of being sold.
2. Compare and contrast **managed funds** by performance and withdrawal requirements to establish an order of sale.
3. Critically examine all the data on properties and managed funds to form a **combined order of sale**

Personnel

The beginning of 2024 sees a change of leadership at Maryvale/Montbel. **Paul Mahony**, after a significant period of generous service, relinquishes his role of local leader to **Pius Jones**.

Pius brings with him a considerable experience in health care, education and pastoral care, together with a deep appreciation of the Marist charism.

The District is most grateful to Paul for his generous, energetic and kindly exercise of this important ministry to his fellow Marists. He has been appointed an Assistant Priest at St Patrick's.

Calendar

Jan 1: Office closed for New Year's Day



JPICC Corner

District Committee for Justice, Peace
and Integrity of Creation

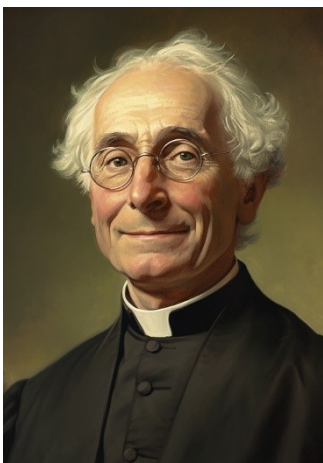
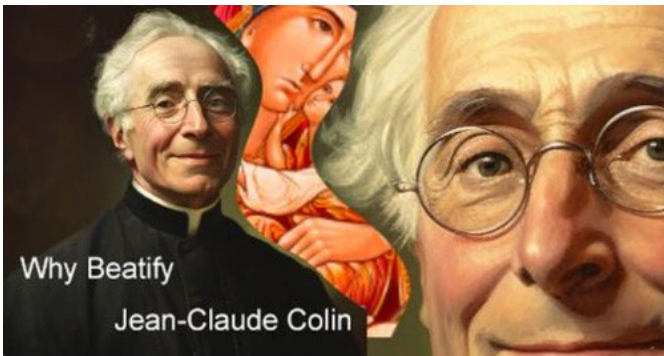
Marist Family JPICC planning

At its meeting on Nov 03 the Committee reviewed the September event, 'A conversation with Kerry O'Brien' and considered options for a 2024 focus.

The topic most favoured is 'domestic violence' with planning to continue at the Committee's next meeting, Feb 10, 2024.



Clockwise from top left: Montbel entertainment: **Aliki Langi** with Kevin Bates' sisters, **Maree** and **Trish**. | With **Paul Glynn** and confreres, Japanese dancers, **Kouya Mizuki** and **Jim Carty**. | Angels from the Brazilian Catholic community with **Paul Glynn** and **Kevin Bates**. | The Last Post? Final newspaper delivery at Montbel. | New images of **Jean-Claude Colin** generated by Marist Laity Australia's **Andrew Dumas** to provide a graphic for **Alois Greiler's** recent symposium paper, 'Why Beatify Fr Colin?'.



International



Clockwise from top left: Archbishop **Paul Martin** receives the Pallium in Wellington. | **Jaime Perez** ordained in Mexico. | **Donato Kivi** in Rome with **Ben McKenna** and **Paddy O'Hare**... | ... and receiving a blessing from **John Larsen** as he leaves for Turkey. | Symposium at FMS General House, Rome... **Ben McKenna** | **Alois Greiler**, **John Larsen** and **Br Ernesto** | **Br Michael Green**. | Receiving their 2024 Colin calendars, students at the International Theologate (Rome) and Novitiate (Davao) with novice master, **David Sanchez**. | Three former Oceania provincials in Rome: **Setafano Mataele**, **Bishop Paul Donoghue**, **Ben McKenna**.



Clockwise from right: The original Montbel, near Toulon, France, now with modern apartments. | Students barbecuing at *Casa di Maria*, International Theologate, Rome. | **Ron Nissen** with Colin Cause postulator, **Carlo-Maria Schianchi**, at the General Archives, Rome.

