

LEADERSHIP
FOR MISSION MARK 2
2015–2017

**Letter to the Major Superiors
and Provincial and District Councils
of the Society of Mary**

Dear confreres

1. In our evaluations of our time together for ARC 2015 in La Neylière, there was unanimous agreement that the location had a deep effect upon the atmosphere and spirit of this collegial exercise of leadership in the Society. We were all the time in contact with Fr Colin's spiritual patrimony and indeed with our common Marist vocation. One of the highlights of our time together proved to be the visit to the *Espace Colin* guided by members of the Marist community. There we came to strengthen our bonds with many of the elements of Marist history and spirituality and with the many Marists who since our foundation's time until now have been faithful and fruitful in their life and ministry.
2. In this context, La Neylière's renovation, linked with the Fourvière Bicentenary and the Year of Consecrated Life have given to all of us a golden opportunity to reflect on our Marist Vocation, not only as a personal matter, but also in relation with the Society as a body. The Society of Mary is experiencing so many changes in its demographics and linked with this, of course, in its community life and mission.
3. Seán Sammon former Superior General of the Marist Brothers and a well-known authority on modern religious life wrote recently an interesting article entitled "*Looking for Opportunity in a Misunderstood Vocation Crisis*" in which he talks about crises in the Church and religious life as integral elements for future development. "*As congregations grew smaller in size and older in age, with few, if any, candidates entering and their place and purpose in the church less clear, a number of groups*

began to wonder if their way of life was dying. It may come as a surprise to some to learn that this is exactly where religious life should be today in the process of renewal. Like it or not, breakdown and disintegration appear to be the means God uses to prepare congregations and their members for deep and thorough transformation". Seán confronts his readers with three possibilities that religious congregations in history have had to choose in time of crisis: extinction, minimal survival or renewal. Certainly we don't think that our congregation has accomplished its purpose and is ready to cease to exist - an integral part of our mission is to be a support for the Church at the end of time!

4. Our option then is really between minimal survival and renewal. It is true that we are a small congregation. The total of our membership at the beginning of this generalate has dropped by approximately 20%. In some units the aging profile and our demographics make it difficult to staff apostolic works or find suitable leaders, etc. In other words our numbers have not reached expectations. The general picture is one of a small dispersed group as John Honner's report described to us. In this context we can opt either to live out in peace our minimal survival or to enter into a committed renewal.
5. At the CS2013 we saw our diminishment as an opportunity for renewal as the *Statement of Commitment* expressed. At ARC 2014 and 2015 we have continued to follow up this commitment and we can see the fruits in our exercising a more united leadership in the Society of Mary, in a more intensive and generous sharing of our human and financial resources, in our common projects, formation both initial and ongoing, etc. In this letter I will present what we have agreed to do in order to go further in the various fields of our work together.
6. In the light of what we experienced in La Neylière I wish, in

42. In sending you this letter I wish to emphasise once again my gratitude for your leadership in this critical time in the life of the Society of Mary. We have only to look at the world and current turmoil borne of fearsome ideologies and culminating in extreme violence to know that our Marist way is more pertinent than ever. Let us be confident in this truth.
43. On this feast of the presentation of the Virgin Mary, let us take comfort from her capacity to listen, her openness to the Word of God and her vocational commitment. Through Christ we can like her accomplish the Lord's work because being rooted in Him we commit ourselves confidently and in solidarity with one another.

Fraternally,



John Hannan

November 21st 2015

and make concrete proposals at the next ARC meeting with regard to admission procedures, pre-novitiate formation programs and the possibility of an additional year's study in the international theologate.

Financial Review Implementation and other Financial Matters

40. During ARC the latest report from the **Financial Review Implementation Committee** was presented with information on property utilisation, pensions, health care matters, and the use of contracts for Marists working for dioceses or other organisations.
41. Discussion continued on the proposed **Endowment Fund** for International Formation. News of a promised substantial contribution from the Province of Europe was shared. The long-term financial planning report covering the whole Society is yet to be completed by PriceWaterhouseCoopers.

Action Plan

- ✓ Units will be asked to contribute to the Endowment Fund for International Formation once it has been formally established and its guidelines finalized. The International Formation Levy will continue for one more year to allow the Endowment Fund to be established and begin to grow.
- ✓ Responses to the proposed Roman Contribution and Mission Solidarity amounts for 2016 are to be received by the end of 2015.

particular, to call for a notable Marist vocation renewal. To do so, I quote Seán Sammon again, we "must: one, be courageous in responding to the real challenges facing our world and church today; two, have a membership willing to allow itself the experience of personal and congregational conversion; and, three, rediscover the spirit of (our) founding charism".

7. Pope Francis's teaching comes to help us. The experience of vocation has two directions: centrifugal and centripetal. The *centrifugal* movement is symbolised by Francis with the *Exodus* image. To offer one's life in mission, personally and as a congregation, is possible only if we are able to transcend ourselves; to leave our comfort zone and the inflexibility of our ego in order to centre our life in Jesus Christ. Christians, and particularly religious, are called to go out and serve others, not to live sheltered, comfortable lives just serving themselves. This passover is a genuine "exodus"; it is the journey of each Christian soul and the entire Church, the decisive turning of our lives towards the Father. Each one of us knows what movement we are called to make as a sign of our ongoing personal conversion. And also as communities, districts, provinces and international Society we must make this discernment. "Go out!" says the pope.
8. Only in doing so, can we enter in the second dimension - the *centripetal* attraction of our Christian and Marist vocation. Once we are out on a joyful mission we can re-grow by attraction. This is what the pope says in *Evangelii Gaudium*: "It is not by proselytising that the Church grows, but 'by attraction'." Francis uses a very familiar term for us Marists - our Constitutions when treating of the fostering of vocations highlight: the importance of prayer which is essentially the work of the Holy Spirit (Const 36); it is to be based, by attraction, in our life and work (37); we must scrupulously respect the freedom of prospective candidates (38).

These numbers of our Constitutions are under the title of "Invitation to enter the Society"; they are only three in number but they contain a full program for an attractive Marist life and mission.

9. Before we proceed further, could we not pause and reflect:
 - ✓ Can we have this essential element for our future present in our personal and community prayer and reflection?
 - ✓ What can we do to make our diminishment a *Kairos* moment enabling us to more deeply immerse ourselves in the pursuit of grace and our shared Marist life and mission?
 - ✓ Reflect on what is possible for us as a religious congregation with our Marist charism to come out of ourselves, to free ourselves from what restrains us from creatively going forth, living more fully the Joy of the Gospel?
10. As a final point in these opening paragraphs, I do not intend this document **Leadership for Mission - mark 2** to replace the previous **Leadership for Mission 2014-2017** document. It is meant to be a companion to it since it raises some important issues which have developed since our ARC meeting of 2014. Both are reference documents for work to be done by our leadership teams in the Society of Mary for the coming year or more.

Vocations

11. The promotion and recruitment of vocations was emphasised at La Neylière. There were reports of various activities engaged in with some energy among the units. The wide range of activities included the establishment of welcoming communities, the prioritisation of ministries with vocation opportunities, appointment of vocation directors, best practice on the planning

on the outcomes of the *Review of Marist International Formation* have been sent to the major superiors, the international novitiate staff and the international theologate staff. There I have highlighted those specific elements which need further study and implementation, should this be deemed necessary, by the formation staff directly concerned in collaboration with the major superiors and the general administration. This is an important and immediate ongoing work.

39. During the coming year the general council will put forward some concrete suggestions with regard to particular issues such as (a) the need for more thoroughgoing admission procedures, (b) pre-novitiate formation programs and (c) the possibility of a fourth year in the international theologate incorporating focused pastoral formation prior to ordination or entry into fulltime active ministry. The fundamental concerns are already clearly presented in the *Review for International Marist Formation* but need ongoing action.

Action Plan

- ✓ The provincial and council to study the Review of Marist International Formation under the guidance of the letter of 19 November 2015 as a guide.
- ✓ The International Novitiate staff to study the Review of Marist International Formation following the guidelines of the letter of 19 November 2015.
- ✓ The International Theologate staff to study the Review of Marist International Formation taking their cue from letter of 19 November 2015.
- ✓ The general council to consult with the major superiors

Action Plan

- ✓ Major superiors and Councils are invited to inform themselves of the European "Directory for relations between Religious and Lay Marists" and to explore possibilities to adopt it (totally or in part) for their own units. (English : <http://bit.ly/DirectoryEng> ; French : <http://bit.ly/DirectoryFR> ; Spanish: <http://bit.ly/DirctoryEsp> .)
- ✓ That each unit through its responsible person for relations with the Lay Marists will be well informed and will respectfully accompany the process in which the laity are seeking ways of engaging with the preparations for the General Chapter 2017.

Formation

35. It was with satisfaction and hope for the future that our international formation structures received the endorsement of the reviewers for the International Novitiate in Davao and the Theologate in Rome.
36. The **Review of Marist International Formation** was discussed at our meeting in La Neylière and has been worked on further by the general council in its recent plenary meeting.
37. In accordance with the terms of reference, the review ranged broadly, covering *"the quality, consistency and continuity of the whole of initial formation in the Society and the Society's human and financial ability to sustain these programs"*.
38. To facilitate the necessary ongoing work at unit level letters based

and development of protocols, working in teams particularly with the Marist camps, workshops, retreats, use of mass media, etc. There is also the recognition that more work has to be done. Some work will best be carried out in collaboration among units by sharing ideas, and most importantly resources and personnel.

Action Plan

ARC proposed the following for future action:

- ✓ Further work in articulating and owning our own Marist identity among confreres in the units, whilst advancing our personal call to conversion.
- ✓ More intensive prayer for vocations.
- ✓ More investment in our Social Media presence - e.g. International houses of formation with good and updated websites,
- ✓ The further engagement of volunteers in some of our works.

The international coordinator / vocation promotor has set for himself the following tasks:

- ✓ to work more closely with units' vocation directors sharing information and reflection;
- ✓ to update and upgrade Marist Youth International's Social Media;
- ✓ to share the material of the Marist Youth International Encounter, Lyon 2016, for use as a resource for the wider Society.

Each major superior is asked to:

- ✓ dedicate time to making vocation promotion a

priority;

- ✓ ensure that the provincial council and regional group meetings will improve concrete ways of fostering vocations;
- ✓ urge formation houses to develop good and updated webpages.

Local superiors are invited to:

- ✓ foster a growing confidence in the richness of our vocation and generate enthusiasm for our "Little Society" in our communities, places of ministry and indeed through individual contacts;
- ✓ intensify prayer for vocations, keeping in mind the intuition of our founder and his companions when they made the pledge at Fourvière on July 23rd, 1816.

Strengthening Districts

12. **Leadership for Mission 2014-2017** took up from CS2013 a series of actions to be kept in mind by the major superiors of the districts and their councils to advance the strengthening of the districts. Included among them were: strengthening religious apostolic community life (SD26), advancing the mission and strategic direction of the Society in a way that is relevant to present times, and to safeguard our spiritual and apostolic patrimony. In achieving these actions the desire is that there will be closer communication and collaboration among units, cultivating collegiality and collaboration in government and establishing systems and structures that will meet the needs of the SM into the future.

Marist Laity

31. At La Neylière, members of ARC received a report regarding this important element of the life and mission of the Society of Mary - our relationship with the lay members of the Marist Family. Of particular interest was the initiative of Marist Laity Europe, when in the European summer of 2015 they linked with their own *Encounter*, a worldwide gathering of representatives from almost all of the national groupings of Lay Marists (except Africa, unfortunately because visa problems).
32. The outgoing European coordinator of the laity led this experience and discussions exploring ways in which Lay Marist groups can have more communication, sharing resources mainly with ourselves, but also with the SM Sisters and the SMSM, with a view to establishing a kind of structure or body to animate this endeavour.
33. It was a very good experience which showed both an authentic Marist identity and their desire to be an independent branch of the Marist family while at the same time preserving a warm and healthy interdependence with the religious branches.
34. The Superior General sent an invitation to the meeting in Spain to explore ways in which the Marist Laity may be engaged in preparing for the General Chapter 2017. The answer of the group was positive and they will work geographically (MAP, Europe-Africa and the Americas) to develop a process to respond the Superior General's invitation.

forward through more spirited dialogue between the general administration and the major superiors leading to some 'time bound' concrete decisions.

30. As the Society diminishes, units and the Society at the wider level have specific needs in terms of prioritised ministries, formation, city centre churches, and important works. All units are called to be involved in the redistribution of personnel. Normally the planning to release or exchange men needs to take place well in advance (at least 12 months up to two years) of the actual time of the taking up their new roles.

Action Plan

- ✓ The general council link persons with the various units will invite major superiors and councils to (a) state the needs of their unit, (b) to give names of possible men who could be released for work in another province/district and their area of ministry, and (c) the names of men who could be trained and in what field.
- ✓ This confidential information will then be circulated by the GA to the other major superiors and councils requesting them to respond to the above: asking them (a) if they can supply any of these needs from their unit or (b) whether they are interested in receiving someone. The GA can make the needs of the wider Society known also, and the link persons engage with the major superiors regarding (c) the selection of men for further training in the areas of formation, finance, and Marist studies.

13. ARC 2015 heard from the various units on how these actions have been put into effect. There has been serious and committed work done toward building more suitable structures in some geographic areas following the action plan set out in *Leadership for Mission*: the District of Asia has entered into the process of restructuring between Australia and New Zealand; Africa and Europe are building bridges which will allow them to have more communication and collaboration; Brazil and Peru-Venezuela are also collaborating in sharing the same major superior and exchange of personnel.

Action Plan

- ✓ Major superiors and councils will take into account the ***Leadership for Mission 2014-2017*** list for their ongoing work of looking for renewal and strength, both in Marist religious life and mission.
- ✓ Even if ***Leadership for Mission 2014-2017*** doesn't call for a way of restructuring among the districts in South America, the Superior General encourages these two units to start a dialogue in order to explore further possible structures which would enhance the Marist mission in this area of the world.
- ✓ Africa is a unit with promise in terms of vocation development. The hope is that a coordinated investment in vocational promotion will eventually bear fruit, and that the district will make steady progress towards greater self-sufficiency.
- ✓ Also, if the African project to educate Muslim and Christian children in a new Catholic school in Senegal

materialises, despite the logistical obstacles it has faced, it could be a significant step forward in the Society's efforts to respond to the needs of the world today, so painfully evidenced in the chaos wrought by ruthless wars, chaos and homelessness and the consequent influx of refugees.

Consolidation of Provinces

Restructuring of Australia, New Zealand together with Asia

14. So far there is an agreement in principle by major superiors and councils to go forward with the proposal of a single one province of Asia, Australia and New Zealand. A plan of implementation has been developed and a process of consultation is actively operative in the two provinces. Regional meetings were held in NZ during the week of 19 -23 of October, and an assembly in Australia on the 27 – 28. The process is moving on with more meetings of both councils to be held again and further consultation and then at their chapters. A meeting of the council of the District of Asia has unanimously supported the involvement of the district in a new structure. Progress seems to be good.

Restructuring of the Provinces of North America

15. The provinces of Canada, Mexico and the US have struggled to arrive at a deeper collaboration for years. In more recent times particularly at the Council of the Society in 2013, Brownsville 2014 and La Neylière 2015 efforts focused on developing a more effective way of being together for the sake of the wider mission of the three provinces. It was agreed after ARC 2014 that the three provinces would work more intensively with their respective

London

- develop collaboration with the SMSM sisters, and with the district of Africa
- continue to improve the conditions for community living (SD 26).

Sydney

- develop synergy with the Aquinas Academy.
- implement the report A Church for the City
- address longer-term staffing needs

Wellington

- exploit the hiatus occasioned by the seismic strengthening work on the church as an opportunity for a creative relaunch of urban evangelisation in Wellington.
- develop a synergy between St Mary of the Angels, Wellintown, and Pa Maria.

Sharing of Men and Further Training

28. There was general agreement at the ARC meeting on a greater commitment to sharing men between units and further training of others. Some discussion with regard to the availability of individuals took place between major superiors and also with members of the general administration.
29. Strengthened by the outcomes from the general chapter 2009, CS 2013, **the Leadership for Mission 2014-2017** document and the ARC 2015 discussions, these two matters need to be taken

City Centre Churches

26. The four provinces having direct responsibility for designated city centre church ministries are Australia, Europe, New Zealand and the USA. The provincials met at ARC 2015 as they had done at ARC 2014.
27. A workshop in San Francisco in August 2015 was successful in promoting a communion for mission among the participants from the four locations.

Action Plan

- ✓ The blog started after CS 2013 is to continue.
- ✓ A new forum for the personnel in these ministries to be in contact is to be launched before Christmas 2015.
- ✓ A follow-up workshop is planned, probably in Wellington, NZ, in August 2016. My hope is that this second workshop can be organised in such a way that it issues in concrete initiatives on the ground at the service of creative urban evangelisation which the general chapter 2009 asked for (SD 21).

San Francisco

- strengthen the active community presence in order to develop work with the neglected and the poor, and different forms of evangelisation
- develop concrete proposals for SF as an evangelisation community in the future province of Our Lady of the Americas

councils to pursue a process of restructuring in the Americas along the lines suggested in CS2013 n. 12b where *"the superior general is to animate a constructive collegial process between Canada, Mexico and the United States..."*

16. The three provincials, their councils and the superior general met in Washington from November 2nd-6th. People came with their doubts and fears, hopes and resistances. Through respectful dialogue all came to realise that we are called to something new, beyond our boundaries, and open to prepare for the future with a broadened Marist perspective.
17. A committee is already at work starting the process of developing a more detailed framework aimed at incorporating the three existing provinces into one province with three semi-autonomous regions with actual delegated authority.
18. It was agreed in principle to go this route. Much work needs to be done to describe what this involves. The membership of the three units will be consulted when there is a draft framework developed and prior to decisions being made. The goal is to have a new province up and running by January 1st 2018.

Prioritisation and Strengthening of Ministries

19. This project has proved difficult to achieve. ARC recognised the need for this work to continue in spite of the difficulties involved and the challenges it brings. The issues involved are the discrepancy between the perceived need to make choices between ministries and the reluctance to take practical action to withdraw from some ministries and to put our combined energies and resources into strengthening those works given priority.
20. For most units this decision of the general chapter still requires a twofold action: The prioritisation process needs to be completed,

followed by the strengthening of the ministries/communities. The major superiors and councils are called to evaluate where their unit is at regarding these actions, and plan and implement further decisions.

21. As units seeking to bring this project to a suitable conclusion, we need to keep to the fore the criteria laid out in **Leadership for Mission 2014-2017** for the ministries that ought to be prioritized before others.

Action Plan

- ✓ The major superiors and councils are asked to evaluate how far their unit has gone in the prioritisation process and what concrete decisions need to be made to move forward.
- ✓ The general administration link person for the province will collaborate with the major superior in this work.

Important Works

22. The General Chapter of 2009 in the context of *the sharing of human resources for mission* decided that: *Prior to the next Council of the Society, the general administration, in consultation with major superiors will name the important works that the Society wants to see continuing in the foreseeable future (e.g. 10 to 15 years) and then develop plans for international teams to staff these (SD 55).*
23. There remains an ambiguity on what is an "important work". Indeed, at ARC lack of clarity was evident from the conversations:

ranging from 'patrimony works' e.g. an institute in education, to works of historical/foundational significance e.g. La Neylière, to works that express a contemporary commitment to the marginalised e.g. Ranong.

24. Apart from the Ranong project in Thailand, as part of the Asia District's mission, there has been no precise nomination for any important works from which the superior general may select. It is clear that La Neylière is "*a place of great significance for the whole Society of Mary*" (SD 61) – This work could well be considered among the important works we wish to see continue into the future.
25. The following proposition was approved by the ARC: "The superior general will choose some ministries in dialogue with the major superiors and also having consulted the major superiors concerned will select the staff." All of this hinges on the availability of men throughout the Society who would be readily available to engage in these works, something that is not evident at present.

Action Plan

- ✓ The superior general will actively seek to implement this recommendation of ARC.
- ✓ The major superiors and their councils are invited to assist the general administration by means of a serious consideration of what might be named an important work within the Society; one which they are willing to support with men and finances.