

# Reflection from the Superior General

The Feast of Mary, the Mother of God, welcomes us each New Year. The celebration speaks to us of new life. Mary was called to be the Mother of God. She responded with total faith and generosity. New life!

Like Mary and with Mary, Marists are also called to new life. It is a divine call to fecundity. We respond as best we can, even with all our fragility. Mary's call to bring new life into the world invites us to contemplate our own call as those who bear her Name and invites us to pray and work for more young people to respond to the call of Christ as Marists.



Vocation is a mystery which can seem incomprehensible. We wonder why, in some parts of our Marist world, where many Marists have lived their vocation so faithfully and generously – even heroically - there seem to be very few, if any, young men willing to follow in their footsteps. Our confreres can truly say: "We have done our duty." (Lk. 17:10). In our times there are many factors militating against even the most generous young people being able to hear a call to Religious Life and Priesthood.

We may also detect within ourselves some disturbing doubts. We may fear that a new breed of young Marists could be too demanding on us and upset our established way of life. We could be so tired or frustrated that we have simply given up hope. While these attitudes would be humanly understandable they are not of the Spirit of God.

However, we can be encouraged when we do see new signs of life. This month ten young men are beginning their novitiate in Davao, in the Philippines. We pray for and with each one of them and the formation team of Frs. Fernando, Jacob and Joaquin.

The mystery of God's call was the theme of the recent Synod of Bishops in Rome. (October, 2018). The Bishops discussed, along with some young people, questions around Youth, Vocation and Discernment. These themes were taken up at the recent gathering of Superiors General and applied especially to Religious Life. The helpful inputs and discussions among the Superiors General challenged me to consider some of the factors that may nourish the grace of vocation to Marist Life.

It is Christ who calls. The call can be more clearly discerned the more clearly people can hear the voice of Christ. Samuel in the Old Testament needed the help of the old priest Eli to understand the call of the Lord (I Sam. 3: 1-21). "Accompaniment" and "discernment" are a recurring themes. Many young people are seeking accompaniment to develop a deeper prayer life, sometimes in forms that may surprise us, such as Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, the Rosary and the Office.

When young people encounter Religious and Priests who are clearly happy in their vocation and within their community lives they will naturally be attracted to reflect upon the source of this happiness.

Christ identifies himself with the poor and forgotten people. When young people are introduced to our sisters and brothers "at the peripheries" they also meet Christ who lives among the people there.

From the discussions about the Synod at the Superiors' General gathering I was reminded of the essentials of prayer and accompaniment, community life and service among the poorest as important elements in creating what was referred to as "a culture of vocations".

Each age is different but God's grace is always abundant, including the mysterious grace of vocation. All is grace. Let's be untiring in our prayer for the grace of vocation – that our own vocation may grow stronger each day and that many more young people may be blessed by responding generously to the call to embrace our beautiful Marist Way of living and preaching the Gospel with joy.

A blessed and happy New Year!

*John Larsen s.m.*