

Reflection from the Superior General

"We too must gather together everyone..."

(Fr. Jean-Claude, 1846)

The Youth Gathering in Guatemala last week was a wonderful Marist celebration. The theme was "weaving life". The theme of "weaving" fits naturally in Central America where the Indigenous Amerindian people, mostly Mayan, still weave together diverse strands of thread to create beautiful new fabric. Weaving was a rich symbol for the activity of the gathering – community, diversity and beauty, new beginnings. "Life" was the other theme. We rejoiced in the exuberance of Marist life as nearly two hundred young people, aged between about 20 and 30, from all over the Marist world, the majority from Latin America, celebrated together our Marist Way of living the Gospel.

The four branches of the Marist Religious family worked together closely. We especially appreciated the Brothers who generously welcomed us to share their vast experience of working with youth. Their formation house in Guatemala City was an ideal venue. Each of the four Superiors General took a turn at leading one day of reflection around the themes of community, interiority, solidarity and mission. The close co-operation is a challenge for a more co-operative future.

As our Chapter proclaims: *"We are to seek "partners in mission", most obviously from within the Marist family".* (GC, 2017, 9d.)

The richness of working together as Marist family especially focused on Lay Marists. It quickly dawned on people that Lay Partnership in mission is a promising and challenging way into the future. Some Of the Lay People there are already formally committed as Marists; others are more loosely affiliated into the family. Within the gathering it was unimportant as to which branch of the Marist family had invited people to come. We were celebrating Marist life as one family.

Our last General Chapter invited us *"to engage in a process to help Marists to recognize the Marist laity as integral to the Marist family."* (GC, 2017, 98)

The young Marists in Guatemala were on fire with enthusiasm about the Marist charism. Of course, it was an especially graced moment. We hope and pray it will bear fruit into the future when we return to our home countries. The question of a life-long commitment as a Marist Religious was in the air. Clearly many young people were already committed in various ways as young Lay Marists. A significant number spoke of volunteering to work along-side a Marist Religious Community for an extended period of time. Would your community be willing and able to welcome young people to come and share our Marist life and mission for a year or more?

Marists are invited to *"respond positively to young adults for whom the Marist charism speaks powerfully and who are interested to work alongside us."* (GC, 2017,103.)

The gathering was a time of prayer, sharing, activity and enthusiasm for Marist life and mission today. It was joyous and sometimes boisterous. There was a seriousness of purpose, too. The one day that focused on "interiority" was a retreat day and the young people entered generously into the silence and prayer. There seemed to be a real search for a more profound and authentic prayer life.

Some of the young people were commissioned from Guatemala to go onto the World Youth Day in Panama. There Pope Francis would say: *"Brothers and sisters: you are all part of one family; you have a lot to share with others. Help us to discern how best to live and to accompany one another along the path of change that we, as family, all need."*

John Larsen s.m.

