



Dear Confreres,

Greetings from Villa Santa Maria, in Rome, as we all try to come to terms with what the virus may mean for our communities and the people around us.

Our 2017 Marist Chapter showed a way forward that is both prophetic and practical for these times. The Chapter includes a strong call for a more contemplative life among us:

*“To form a communion for mission, we need to deepen the contemplative dimension of our lives. Marists are recommended to spend one hour in private prayer each day”. (# 30, 32)*

There is also the clear call of the Chapter to “ecological conversion”.

*“An ecologically sustainable style of living is an intrinsic part of living the Gospel today. Care for the planet and care for the poor are intrinsically linked”. (#44)*

This pandemic can challenge all of us to take these two special calls of our 2017 Chapter more to heart – to be more contemplative and to be ever more committed to ecological conversion.

One way of responding to the call to live more contemplatively is to set aside one quiet, contemplative hour every day, with the Word of God, as a good first step in a life-giving direction.

To help us to respond to *Laudato Si’*, five years after it was originally published, the Roman Dicastery for Integral Human Development has given us the outline of a programme to implement over the next seven years. This programme offers all of us, post-Covid-19, a way forward.

<http://www.humandevlopment.va/content/dam/sviluppoumano/documenti/LAUDATO%20SI'%20Special%20Anniversary%20Year%20Plans.pdf>

Page 8 outlines the goals of *Laudato Si’*. This is a good place for us to start our work with it.

A blessed Feast of Pentecost this Sunday!

Pray for each other,

*John Larsen s.m.*

We are the closest unit of the Society of Mary to the place where CoViD-19 started. We are truly grateful to the Almighty that all members of the District of Asia present both in Philippines and in Thailand are safe and well.

In **Davao**, senior confreres are obliged to stay at home. One confrere does business outside of the compound and one other confrere works to sustain and manage the ministry to the street children. Our students in formation were sent back to their families for an early school break. Church's celebrations are suspended. One of the communities in Davao where our friend Nor Asiah Adilao and her family reside was locked down. Most of the residents depended on government food assistance. Through Nor Asiah the Marists shared some help to several indigenous families and other Muslims in that quarantined community. Because the Muslims were not able to pray at their mosque we lent them a carpet and an electric fan for their worship at home during Ramadhan and shared a food basket during Eid'l Fitr. She and her family were grateful for the help received from the Marists.



*The Marist community in Davao prepared a food basket to be shared to Moslem friends during the Eid'l Fitr.*

In **Digos**, the parish suspended public celebration of the Eucharist from 15 March. During the novena in preparation for the parish patronal feast of Our Lady of Fatima, the community started with live streaming of the novena and Mass on Facebook. The fiesta Mass on May 13 was presided over by the bishop who, with the others present, wore a face mask, used hand sanitizers and respected the social distancing. Funeral blessings are being done at home and funeral Masses have not been encouraged. Amazingly, people sent their Mass intentions and offerings to the Marist community in request for prayers. Even with the imposed Community Quarantine Fr. Patrick Muckian and team continue serving the provincial jail which so far has not been infected.

Despite the covid-19 restrictions, the community in **Ranong** continues to function normally. Frs Frank Bird and Larry Sabud continue their tasks at the Marist Asia Foundation. Frank as Director holds meetings with the management team through an online platform. Larry manages the Health Program through online and physical face to face meetings. The Health program has been responding to the needs of HIV/AIDS patients. They visit the patients to facilitate their hospital appointments. Burmese migrants who cannot work or have lost their jobs because of the covid-19 situation were given food and other assistance like medicines and medical care.



The District Council Meeting finally took place last 28 May, after it was postponed twice. At the meeting communities reported that during this present pandemic communities have more time for prayer, more time for another, and more time to nurture what we like doing but often cannot do because we are too busy.

On the 18th of May, Davao region lifted the enhanced community quarantine. The situation now seems better but we are aware that Covid is still around.

## Comunidad de Morro Alto – Parróquia Nossa Senhora Aparecida



In the Morro Alto community, due to the fact that Fr Roberto was involved in external ministry, we decided that in this most critical moment, it was better to live in separate houses. This way we could guarantee health security for Brother Aildo, who needs some special attention as he belongs to the group at risk. However, we are in contact frequently through messages to talk about

how our days have been and we meet at the weekend for the celebration and transmission of Masses. Masses are broadcast on parish social media and have been accompanied by parishioners and lay Marists. The city council decreed that we had to close the nursery and we are now waiting for new measures for a possible reopening in August.

## Comunidad de Bahia

In this time of pandemic, the community dedicated a lot of time to prayer, taking care of the organization of the house and also taking care of the faithful, guiding them through social networks and transmitting prayers and celebrations. In this way we could accompany people, offering them time for spirituality, and easing the tension coming from social isolation. In this month of May, we also recited the rosary together, a Marian devotion for families.



## Seminario San Pedro Chanel – Belo Horizonte



At the São Pedro Chanel seminary, parents and students are very well, and they have experienced isolation with lightness and tranquillity. The young people are having an intense study routine via the Internet. The virtual philosophy classes are much more demanding than the classroom ones. Our community life is very intense and pleasant. We celebrated the Feast of our Patron Saint - São Pedro Chanel – with a novena, a solemn Mass and a festive dinner. There were moments of great joy.



# South America (2)

## Comunidad de Callao (Peru)

The community has a more intense and face-to-face life in all aspects: personal, liturgical, celebratory, and also in the care for the other and even domestic activities. The community has two ministries:

**Education.** The San José school continues functioning without the physical presence of students and staff, because the classes are held virtually. The government has announced that this will be so until December 2020. There are a lot of economical difficulties. The parents are not able to pay school fees, because the majority of them are independent workers and due to quarantine, they have not been able to work. This makes it difficult also for the school to pay the working staff.



**Parroquia Virgen Misionera.** It is not possible to have celebrations or other activities with the parishioners. The community celebrates every day in the community chapel and broadcasts weekend Masses by Facebook Live (Virgin missionary-official parish). Many families live in difficult circumstances, and we try to answer their need for food and medicine through the parish caritas services.

When the government will approve the protocol allowing the reopening of the churches, we will resume activities in the presence of the faithful.



The lockdown was set in Spain on March 14th and, from that day, the Camino de Santiago is closed. It was just before starting the new season as we were still closed due to some refurbishment. This means that the only pilgrims we have welcomed this year so far are those from some Marist schools in Ireland who are doing a virtual pilgrimage. One of the members of our community had to go to help the Marist community in Madrid, as 3 of our confreres got infected of Covid-19.

The rest of the community has focused on preparing other materials, improving some skills and developing other pastoral initiatives that we could do when the pilgrims come back. It will be interesting to welcome the pilgrims post-Coronavirus and see their spiritual and human situation, because this pandemic has shaken our foundations and certainties, especially in the all-powerful Western countries. And, of course, we have time to look after those who are suffering the most: we are helping Caritas in this rural area of Spain where there are many hidden forms of poverty. This pandemic has brought some uncertainty to our agendas but for many other people, it is a very tough situation.



# Covid-19 and Ecology

from Peter Healey



Peter Healey, *Ōtaki river*

This painting is a lovely peaceful spot on the Ōtaki river looking up the river to the mountain range called Tararua near our community.

I recently came across the word “geophany”, it’s an appropriate word for lockdown given the renewed sense of silence many of us fell into, and in this silence we heard nature again. Birdsong was with us in a new way, also the voice of rivers, seas and oceans. I say “was” because here in Aotearoa/NZ we are coming out of lockdown and once again our roads are busy and filling up as they

were before. A vehicle of choice here now is the hi-ace cab, we have thousands of them on our roads and I often wonder why fashion has made these vehicles so popular?

From an ecological point of view the main learning from the global Covid-19 crisis has been that the human community can make significant and immediate changes when the political will is there. We have seen that a re-set of behavior is possible. It seems to me we need to take our re-set lessons and put them at the service of a sustainable future and a life-sustaining society. The re-set has to engage with reducing our carbon footprints and preparing for more climate crisis impacts. It also invites us to restore natural systems, to build local resilience and self-sufficiency, to learn about circular economy, the common good and working together.

It is good to see that the Roman Dicastery for Integral Human Development has declared an anniversary year for *Laudato si’* and is inviting religious orders and provinces to embark on a seven year journey towards integral ecology.

I finished my lockdown by writing a contemporary Lamentation. In the final stanza I address God saying:

*Rescue us, help us turn towards you,  
towards all that is good and gracious.  
Restore us by your regenerative hand.  
Return us to the task of co-creation.  
Set us on the path of reinvention.*

*By the wholeness of creation, restore us.  
In the infinite span of your compassion, revive us.  
Gather us home, to the gift and promise of all that is.*

Fr Peter Healey (NZ) is a member of the Marist Commission for Ecology.