

# Today's Marists

Spring 2019  
Volume 5 | Issue 1

Society of Mary in the U.S.



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Spring 2019 | Volume 5 | Issue 1

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## from the Provincial

Fr. Paul Frechette, SM



# Annual Meeting of Marist Family Provincials

The provincials of the four branches of the Marist Family (Marist Brothers, Marist Sisters, Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary, Marist Fathers and Brothers) met in Washington, DC from April 30-May 1, 2019 at the Provincial headquarters of the Marist Fathers and Brothers for our annual meeting. We shared ways of how to continue to build bridges between our Marist Family here in the USA. One example of this is our annual joint Marist Vocation directors' presentation to the students at Marist School in Atlanta, Georgia which occurs for one week every January. As always in our dialogue, we shared the successes and challenges that we face in each of our branches. New religious vocations to our way of life is always a challenge. In discussing these challenges our focus is always centered on the original dream of our founders to make 'the whole world Marist.'

The original dream in the 1800s for the Marist Family aimed at the formation of one religious congregation (both men and women under the leadership of one superior general) and a lay branch. That dream, however, was unrealizable. Today the Marist Family refers to four separate religious congregations as well as the laity branch. Each branch has its own founder "whose personality and temperament shaped and colored the original insight." (Craig Larkin, *A Certain Way*)

### Marist Brothers (FMS)

The Marist Brothers were founded in 1817 by a young French Marist Father, Saint Marcellin Champagnat, in response to the spiritual, educational, and physical needs of the young and poor. Champagnat's energy and spirit is present everywhere throughout the congregation's dedication to preparing men to educate the young and exemplify in their lives the love of Jesus through Mary.

### Marist Sisters (SM)

Establishing the Marist Sisters came about from the strength, humility, insight, and zeal of Jeanne-Marie Chavoin. She along with two others began the first community of Marist Sisters in 1823. This congregation of religious women is characterized "by the desire to make the mystery of Mary in the church the daily inspiration of its life and action, not by any special work nor by the promotion of any particular form of Marian devotion." (*Marist Sisters' Constitutions*)

### Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary (SMSM)

The beginnings of the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary can be traced back to Marie Françoise Perroton along with ten other female pioneers who left France from 1845 to 1860 to respond to the request from the missions of

Oceania to "send us some devout women to teach the women." The SMSM were approved as a religious congregation in 1931. Despite the challenges they face, the Missionary Sisters "wish to respond to the calls of today with the daring and zeal of the pioneers. We want to keep alive this daring – simple, joyful, and prudent – based solely on the love and power of God in order to announce the Gospel in its force and integrity, learning to adapt ourselves to different cultures and conditions of life." (*Missionary Sisters' Constitutions*)

### Marist Fathers and Brothers (SM)

The Society of Mary (Fathers and Brothers) was founded in 1836 by Fr. Jean-Claude Colin. The priests and brothers of this international religious congregation vow to live the spirit of Mary and serve the Church and world under her name. As Colin said, "Mary supported the Church as it came to birth; she will do so again at the end of time."

### Marist Laity

The lay branch of the Marist Family was canonically established in 1850 as the Third Order of Mary and has since developed into a variety of Marist lay groups, formal and informal, around the world. Together with consecrated Marist religious, the Marist laity work together to express the Marist spirit and mission of the Marian Church first envisioned by Fr. Colin.

At our next annual meeting we hope to continue our Marist Family dialogue about the challenges we face in order to continue to share our Marist founders' dream of living the spirit of Mary in our communities, manifesting the one concern to think, judge, feel, and act in every way as Mary would.

### History Source:

[www.maristsm.org/en/marist-family.aspx](http://www.maristsm.org/en/marist-family.aspx)

## Cover Explanation

*Lord our God, the whole world tells the greatness of your name,  
Your Glory reaches beyond the stars  
I see Your handiwork in the heavens;  
the moon and the stars you set in place.  
What is humankind that You remember them,  
the human race that You care for them.  
You treat them like gods dressing them in glory and splendor  
You give them charge of the earth, laying all at their feet.  
(Ps. 8:2, 4-7)*

Our cover presents a young person deep in discernment over where the boundless creation calls in the stark and awesome magnificence of what it means to be human.



# Contemplation Meeting Action in Discernment

by Ted Keating, SM

The theme of the past year's *Today's Marists* threaded and woven through several articles has been "the Marist Way, a Contemplative Way." This theme emerged out of deep concerns from the 2017 Society of Mary General Chapter (an international meeting of the Marists that convenes every eight years) to deepen the contemplative dimension of our lives. It became even more relevant with the publication of *Jean-Claude Colin: Reluctant Founder* by Justin Taylor, SM, an exhaustively researched biography of our Founder. One of the book's key areas of exploration is the spirituality of Father Colin – his principal spiritual influences, how he responded to them in his own life, and what he asked from Marists by way of a life of prayer and conversion as a foundation for and an exercise of mission and pastoral ministry. In this year's *Today's Marists* we will focus on the theme of discernment described by Thomas Green, SJ, in his classic on the topic, *Weeds Among the Wheat* (Ave Maria Press, 1984) as "the meeting point of prayer and action." The title of Green's book comes from the Gospel parable, as you will no doubt recognize, of the farmhand who asks the farmer what to do when he discovers that someone has sown destructive weeds abundantly in the field of good wheat. (Matthew 13:24)

Before we move on to that theme, however, we have to note that it is not clear that Jean-Claude Colin actually used the word "contemplative" to describe his prayer and spirituality. But, now in recent decades of intense studies of two famous American Trappist authors, Thomas Merton, OCSO, and Thomas Keating, OCSO, we find many close connections between Colin's way of seeing prayer and spirituality and the current use of the word "contemplation." For example, contemporary Jesuits describe themselves these days as *contemplatives in action*, based on years of multiple new studies about the spirituality of their own founder, St. Ignatius of Loyola. Several of the approaches in this past year's issues of *Today's Marists* have similarly presented this spiritual reality as

the "Marist Way, a Contemplative Way," to follow the wording of Michael Whelan, SM, a Marist theologian from Australia.

The General Chapter of 2017 placed deep prayer in this contemplative sense at the heart of *mission* for Marists. The Catholic understanding of *mission* flows out of the *Mission of God* among us, especially the *Missioning of Jesus*, which refers to His being sent by the Father, as Jesus mentions frequently in the Gospels. This Mission of Jesus is none other than the mystery of the **Incarnation**, Jesus among us as both God and Human. Jesus, in turn, tells us that "he will not leave us orphans but will send us the Spirit" whose own Mission is to remind us of all that Jesus taught. Therefore, Mission is first the action of God among us, and our mission is only authentic when it is exercised in the God "in whom we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17:28) It begins and ends as the grace of God. We can live out our ministry only as it comes from the grace of God in the light of the mystery of God. Prayer, contemplation, and dwelling in the mystery of God must somehow pour out into our ministries if they are not to become secularized activities of "good works" rather than the work of God among us in grace. Ideally, contemplation, mission, and ministry are one.

Discernment is what unites all this. The world of mystery, faith, and prayer has to "hit the ground" in action. Decisions must be made using the best techniques involved in discernment. Our human decision-making faculties, however, have to be forged, tempered, and shaped by faith in the will of God for the world, 'not just by our own best strategic analysis' using only secular methods of decision-making. When 'prayer meets action', transformation of even the best secular decision-making methods help to shape our lives of prayer into actions that will deepen our contemplative Marist Way, whether we be vowed or lay Marists. We have to leave space for the Spirit in our understanding and practice of mission in a manner

that infuses our decisions with the gifts and fruits of the Spirit as we “become Mary” for the Church and the world. Without Spirit’s prompting, we can gradually grow unconsciously “secularized” in our efforts to serve the Church. Therefore, discernment is inseparable from contemplation. It is where and how our contemplation truly becomes “the energy source, the mystical heart of Marist mission” as the General Chapter expresses it. (2017 General Chapter, 30) This is how the clarity of Colin’s vision of “thinking, judging, feeling, and acting as Mary” becomes a reality in our spiritual lives as well as in our everyday life and ministry, as individuals and as a group. As Mary, we too become more like “icons” of the Holy Spirit. We bring Mary as the Icon of the Spirit into the world through our pursuit of contemplation.

The great gift St. Ignatius of Loyola and the Jesuits have given to the Church is this “gracious” work referred to as discernment. It is the principal focus of the book St. Ignatius wrote, *Spiritual Exercises*, a classic in Western spirituality. It is rooted deeply in the imagination, which was rather new at the time. The aim is to search in our hearts through prayer and in the midst of desires, consolations, and desolations, for clarity about where God is calling us (drawing us by desire), while also helping us to become conscious of the false desires that tend to lead us away from God.

The very title of Thomas Green’s classic on discernment, *Weeds Among the Wheat*, (a book designed to be read and discussed with others in small groups) shows how challenging the work of sifting the “wheat and weeds” of inner experience can be, because false and destructive desires are often mixed together with our greatest hopes for purity. This sifting can only be done effectively when others are ready to help “keep us clear.” It involves a boundless humility in our path to God of which Ignatius himself spoke so frequently. Thus, we hope that you will appreciate this year’s theme of discernment as the natural next step flowing out of a life of contemplation moving into action and service to our world.

Let me leave you with an excellent analogy used by Thomas Green, SJ, that helps us understand how loving knowledge shapes our way of making decisions even when we may not know we are doing so. Discernment may be much more common in our lives of love than we realize. Green imagines a woman married for fifty years to her husband. She is shopping for a necktie for his birthday. She looks at the neckwear selection in the men’s store and immediately dismisses whole racks of ties as not being what she is looking for. She zeroes in on another rack and perceives that these might provide the gift she wants. Finally, she spots the perfect tie for her husband. She has lived with him lovingly for fifty years and knows exactly what he likes. She goes home confident that he will love the tie she has chosen. Similarly, knowledge flowing from our love of God over many years gradually helps us to love what He loves and helps us know how to make choices based on that long relationship.

You will probably also enjoy reading in this issue the movie review Brian Cummings, SM writes of the film *Of Gods and Men*. It helps concretize how “knowledge born of love” shows itself in action in community.

# BOOK CORNER

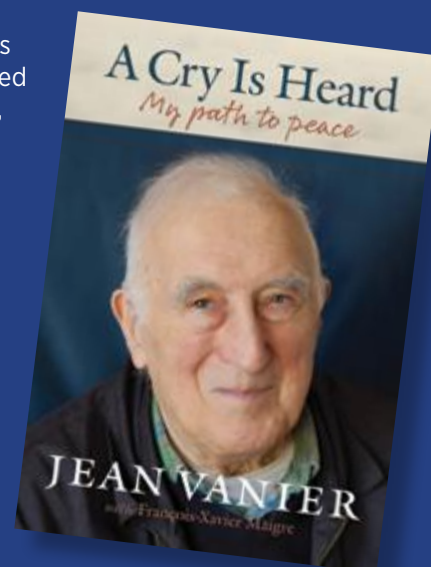
by Ted Keating, SM

As this issue of *Today’s Marists* was being assembled, the news reported the death of Jean Vanier on May 7, 2019 in Paris at the age of 90. He was one of the great lay voices of mysticism and prophetic action in the post-Vatican II era. His death was described as the death of a “living saint,” like that of Mother Teresa, a good friend of his.

Vanier radiated a holiness manifest in profound and persistent love to the intellectually handicapped. His death came as the end of a long search to discern what God wanted him to do with his life.

In his youth he had been a naval officer in the Canadian navy, earned a doctorate in Catholic philosophy, and finally his calling “found him” in the horrendous experience of witnessing how the intellectually handicapped were treated in society. He saw his call, however, as not to serve them in any traditional sense, but to befriend them, to learn from them, and to discover Christ in these thoroughly marginalized people. Vanier began a significant lay movement called L’Arche (the Ark). He started with a small residence and two intellectually challenged men. The Arche Communities spread rapidly all over the world, even in Buddhist and Muslim nations. He attracted and still attracts large numbers of young people to these communities not to serve the people, but to live with them, “encounter” them, and learn from them the truth about the practice of love in Jesus’s final command to live His “new Commandment.”

Jean Vanier published more than thirty books over the years, many of them still in print, calling forth a life of love rooted in engaging our own brokenness before and while we would dare move forward to “serve others.” Henri Nouwen, another great post-Vatican II mystical writer, lived several years in a L’Arche Community. Both men made enormous contributions to the nature of Christian ministry as “wounded healers” who move not out of power to serve others benevolently, but to bring one’s own “broken places” into ministries of compassion, recognizing one’s own limits while at the same time engaging the brokenness of others. Vanier wrote a testament of his spiritual search and the surprising growth of L’Arche in a book titled *A Cry Is Heard: My Path to Peace*, published by Twenty-Third Publications in 2018.



# Nurturing Life in All Its Forms

by John Larsen, SM, Superior General

In February, the presidents of the Bishops' Conferences from around the Catholic world responded to Pope Francis' invitation to gather as shepherds in the Church to consider a more just and honest ecclesial response to the scandalous tragedy of sexual abuse. Our own Marist Bishop Paul Donoghue S.M., President of the Pacific Bishops' Conference, (CEPAC), stayed with us here in Villa Santa Maria, Monteverde, Rome, while he attended the gathering.

Now is an opportune time for all of us as Marists to examine our own lives searching out any form of abuse, however subtle they may be. We pray and discern with great honesty, confronting our own sinfulness, always aware of God's grace. Our penance can be designed, either individually or as a community, as a way of repentance and conversion toward the true light of the Gospel and against the darkness of any abusive attitudes.

The child abuse crisis is an abuse of power. Our Marist charism clearly opposes all over-reaching forms of power, challenging us to humble service of the poor. Sometimes our structures keep us far away from the dreary, grinding, anxious lives of the very poor. It is important for us to make a conscious effort to undertake some activity which brings us personally to encounter in friendship some of the poorest people around us and to share with them what they understand as "Good News." Our penance may also involve employing our talents to confront unjust structures which oppress and abuse those who are powerless.

The Gospel and the charism of Marist Religious Life, especially the vow of poverty, demand a simple lifestyle where everything is shared in common and in a transparent way. For Marists, there is no such thing as "my" money or car, "my" time or bank balance. We live very simply and share openly our lives and



our possessions with each other and with the poor. We can consider a penance that leads us toward repentance and conversion to a more simple, transparent, and generous lifestyle, sharing all things in common. (*Constitutions* 106-113)

By our way of life, we can easily abuse the created world around us. As Pope Francis writes: "What is needed is an 'ecological conversion' whereby the effects of our encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in our relationship with the world around us. Living our vocation as protectors of God's handiwork is essential to the life of virtue." (*Laudato Si'*, 217) The Marist General Chapter of 2017 echoes this: "An ecologically sustainable style of living is an intrinsic part of living the Gospel today." (2017 General Chapter, 44) In Fiji, Marists are developing an Ecological Center, while in New Zealand some Marists are calling for greater accountability for our harmful carbon footprint.<sup>1</sup> With these initiatives the work of the new Marist Ecological Commission is gaining momentum. A penance might involve for all of us some work of protection and healing of a particularly abused corner of the world where we live.

The terrible story of abuse and cover-up in the Church and elsewhere cries out for repentance and a profound conversion of heart and lifestyle. May each of us individually and all of us in our communities, undertake focused penances that affect a Gospel conversion from any form of abuse towards more just and compassionate communities, ministries and environments.

The 2017 General Chapter gave us a direction for deciding upon an appropriate penance this year:

*From our communities, where we care for our Marist brothers as we care for all those who are struggling to be faithful disciples, Mary, the mother of the New Creation, calls us to nurture life in all its forms, especially among our most vulnerable brothers and sisters and in our damaged planet.* (Declaration on Mission, 5)

#### Endnote

<sup>1</sup> A new Marist justice and peace blog, well worth following!

<http://jpicblog.maristsm.org>

# The Marist in Solitude

by Tom Ellerman, SM

Over the years much time and energy have been devoted to explaining the meaning of the expression, “unknown and indeed even hidden in this world,” used to describe the Marist. How can someone who spends a great deal of time in public ministry and community life be “unknown” and “hidden” even if they have combined “a love of solitude and silence ... with works of zeal.” (*Constitutions*) The answer to this difficulty lies in the kind of solitary life that Father Colin expects the Marist to live in the solitude and silence of his room. There he is truly unknown and hidden.

Unlike some religious who are expected to spend most of their day in the presence of others and use their rooms only for sleeping, the Marist is expected to spend a good amount of his day alone in his room. How do we know this?

In numbers 231 and 232 of the 1872 *Constitutions*, Fr. Colin describes in some detail the bedroom of the Marist religious. It is not the tiny cell that many religious traditionally have inhabited. Its description, however, does sound as if Fr. Colin had anticipated by 150 years the Japanese minimalist movement of Marie Kondo and Fumio Sasaki. Although the Marist room is spacious, it is the essence of minimalist simplicity. Let us take inventory of the Marist room:

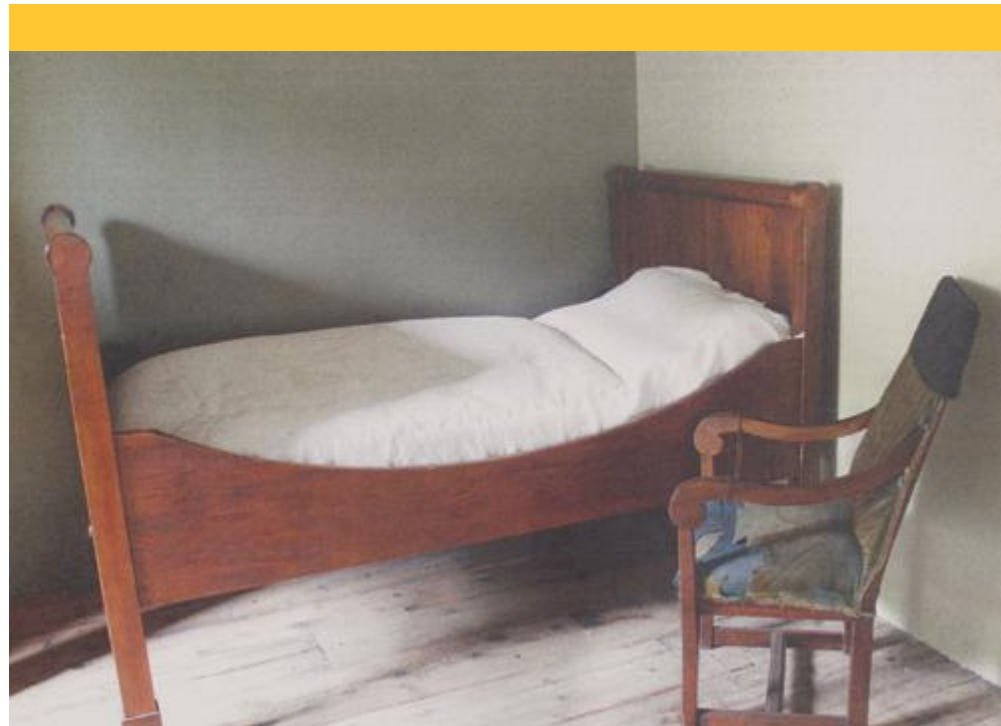
- A bed
- A straw mattress
- A woolen quilt
- Bed linens and blankets
- One table topped with three bookshelves
- Two chairs
- A kneeler (Prie-Dieu)
- One wardrobe
- A few devout pictures
- An armchair that gives evidence to poverty
- No covering on the walls (referring to what at the time could be expensive elaborate wallpaper)

This list of furnishings reveals to us what the founder wanted to take place in the Marist room. The room is a dormitory, a private chapel, and a study with a small library. The Marist sleeps, rests, reads, studies, and prays in his room. It is a place of peace and quiet, where the religious engages in spiritual reading, sermon or class preparation, ongoing professional education, letter writing, personal prayers, meditation, his examinations of conscience and God-consciousness. It is a place of inspiration, creativity, and spiritual struggle. It is the place where the Marist is alone with the Alone.

While the Marist room has an air of poverty and simplicity, it provides for the necessities of its occupant. Father Colin presupposes that every Marist house has an adequate common library. Nevertheless, the Marist religious may keep up to three shelves of books in his room for his personal and immediate use.

In number 42 of the *Constitutions* Colin writes: “To enable the Society to attain its goal, it is absolutely essential that those academic studies which can serve the salvation of souls be cultivated within it.”

Even in the privacy of his bedroom, a Marist’s furnishings are a constant reminder to him to spend time developing his personal relationship with Jesus Christ and working for the salvation of his neighbor. He seeks to understand more deeply his Catholic Faith so that, with God’s grace, he may give an account of the hope that is within him and thus attain more fruitfully the purpose of the Society of Mary.



Fr. Colin's room in Lyons, France

*“The Marist sleeps, rests, reads, studies, and prays in his room. It is a place of peace and quiet... It is a place of inspiration, creativity, and spiritual struggle.”*

# Servant Leadership and Marist Values

by Mary Ghisolfo, Former President of Marist Laity

*“Have one ambition. While doing great things for the Lord, be unknown and even hidden in the world. The aim is to make the school a family.”* (Jean-Claude Colin)

I served at École Notre Dame des Victoires (NDV), a Marist K-8 elementary school in downtown San Francisco, California for 37 years beginning as the sixth-grade teacher followed by 31 years as principal. For me, the concept of “servant leader” was always a way of being in the classroom or as principal. Responding to the needs of others was my focus, especially to those who struggled with life’s challenges whether they came from students, parents, or faculty and staff. Creating a sense of community was also a major goal for me in both of my roles. Listening to the needs of students, academic and social, or being present to the needs of the faculty, staff, and parent community, I considered of paramount importance. We are all in this together, I thought.

## Being Present

*“Let us show one another not only charity, but also respect and honor.”*  
(Jean-Claude Colin)

I have always considered presence to be significant. As a teacher, I was compelled to move around the classroom observing students as they worked, encouraging and praising them for thoughtful choices, or alerting them to an aspect of their work that may need to be reworked, all of this in an effort to help them succeed. Giving positive feedback, along with caring and constructive criticism was vital. With the staff, I made it a priority to be where the action was, which could range from informal classroom walkthroughs to being present in the hallways, on the playground, gym, or cafeteria. I wanted them to know that I was there with them to ensure that “all was well.” Formal teacher meetings were scheduled once a month to discuss curriculum, student needs, or other issues. It was a good opportunity for teachers to share with me what they were excited about that was working in the classroom, and what posed challenges to them. They also created a list of questions, concerns, and comments to share with me during these meetings.



## Service

Embracing the spirit of service was not only reflected in working with the teachers in planning student service projects, but also working alongside them. One example of this was when the art department sponsored an “Empty Bowls Dinner” during the Lenten season. To prepare for this special dinner, the faculty painted bisque ware bowls which were later used for the simple soup-and-salad meal that the school and parish families attended. Local eateries donated the food and funds raised helped to support the Gubbio Project, a ministry at a nearby Franciscan church where the homeless slept in the pews during the day and then offered a meal as well as various support services. ([www.thegubbioproject.org](http://www.thegubbioproject.org))

## Faith and Prayer

Creating opportunities for teachers’ personal growth in faith and prayer was continuous. All faculty meetings opened with a prayer, and during Advent and Lent teachers were called to pray together in the St. Peter Chanel Chapel on the first floor of the school before faculty meetings. These opportunities for prayer provided them time to reflect upon and hear more clearly the Good News of

Jesus. Faculty and staff also participated in retreats each January prior to the start of school. This gave everyone an opportunity to learn more about Marist spirituality and to reflect on ways to implement it both within and outside of school. For parents, “Coffee with the Principal,” informal meetings, were held twice a year to enhance home & school communication. Each gathering opened with a prayer that focused on a theme (e.g., Peace, The Work of Mary, Patience and Parenting).

## Hospitality

Hospitality is the welcoming spirit that makes people feel appreciated and included, indeed a part of a community. This spirit was extended to new students through the “buddy” program. New students were paired with a classmate who helped answer questions and who showed them around. A similar arrangement was made for the new parents whereby a “buddy family” was assigned to help them navigate school life and to provide guidance and support. Hospitality was also extended to staff members. Knowing that many mornings teachers arrived without eating breakfast, I would bring in bagels, cookies, fruit,



etc. They were most grateful and felt appreciated. In addition, brief personal notes of gratitude to faculty and staff thanking them for their fine work encouraged and supported them.

### Compassion

*“Set aside their own interests and plans in favor of those of Jesus and Mary, and put themselves in the shoes of the other person.”*  
(*The Work of Mary: Marist Laity in the Society of Mary*)

As educators, we are called to be compassionate in our interactions with members of the community. One memorable situation occurred when a seventh grader was asked, in the third quarter, to leave the school due to poor behavioral choices coupled with low academic achievement. The student’s teachers and I got together to discuss the Marist value of “Being an Instrument of Divine Mercy.” Since it was too late in the school year for him to transfer to another Catholic school, this was a challenge for his family. The middle school teachers and I worked together to create a curriculum for the remaining 10 weeks of seventh grade so that the student could complete that grade with a licensed learning specialist outside NDV. Additionally, after the school day, several middle school teachers volunteered to work with him on the assigned curriculum at a youth center near his

home. I also worked with his parents to ensure he was enrolled in another Catholic school in the fall for eighth grade.

### Collaboration

Collaborating with the faculty to problem-solve and to create new programs further enriched the learning program. Sharing ideas, identifying issues and concerns and working together to rectify a problem, or create something new helped to build community. At a faculty meeting near the end of one school year, many teachers were speaking negatively about the students and their poor behavior. The complaints concerned students’ excessively disparaging or insulting classmates, and it included bullying others. Out of that discussion came the idea to create a program that reminded the students that the Christian community we were a part of called us to be respectful and kind. The RISE Program (Respect, Include, Safety (emotional and physical), and Effective Communication) came about through the collaboration of several teachers who volunteered their time over the summer. We gave each letter in the title (R, I, S, E) a description of appropriate actions, and the program helped the entire school community to know what behaviors were appropriate and what they looked like when put into action. The program gave students

new vocabulary to speak about their experiences, i.e., “I am not being included in the game, I am being excluded.” The program still helps students manage conflict they may encounter at school, at home, and in the community.

### Concluding Thoughts

It took me a long time to grow comfortable in the leadership position at NDV. It was a slow process with many ups and downs. Keeping my ears and heart open to the call to serve was constant. Stepping back and reflecting on all aspects of school life was crucial. I frequently found myself in a state of prayer as I knew I would need the strength, courage, and guidance that God would provide me to keep moving forward in a positive and productive manner. Jean-Claude Colin certainly had his challenges with his work in education, and he accurately observed, “A tree that must bear much fruit over a long period must have good roots, whether it is tested by wind or by storm to ensure that its roots are deeply planted in the soil. See how slow it is to grow, to develop. Time strengthens it.” (*A Founder Speaks* 174, 20) I was able to put down those roots in a Society of Mary elementary school over a period of time. It was a rich and life-giving experience in so many ways.

## News Briefs



### A Marist Lives Follow Up from Fall 2018

On April 24, 2019 the cremated remains of Fr. Frank Brett, brother of Fr. Robert Brett, SM were borne to Chaplains’ Hill in a beautiful funeral cortege at Arlington National Cemetery near Washington, DC. His remains were buried in the grave of our own Fr. Robert Brett, who was re-interred at Arlington in 1998. A significant crowd of the extended Brett family along with veterans and military officers attended, including veteran Larry McCarthy who drove in from Ohio. It is the first known instance of two Military Chaplain brothers buried together at the site. Randy Hoover, SM and Ted Keating, SM attended the service on behalf of the Marist U.S. Province.



### Bishop Konzen Elected Interim Administrator of Archdiocese of Atlanta, Georgia

On May 24, 2019 Auxiliary Bishop Joel Konzen, SM was elected by the College of Consultors (group of priests who advise the archbishop) as the interim administrator for the Archdiocese of Atlanta, Georgia. He will fill the vacant role left by Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory who was installed on May 21, 2019 as leader of the Archdiocese of Washington, DC. The news concerning Bishop Konzen came via a letter that was sent to Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Christophe Pierre, the Vatican ambassador to the United States. In response to his new role Bishop Konzen said, “I ask for your prayers and support as I carry out these responsibilities on behalf of the people of God in this local church.”

Bishop Konzen has served as auxiliary bishop of the Atlanta Archdiocese since he was ordained a bishop on April 3, 2018. He will serve as administrator of the Archdiocese until Pope Francis appoints a new archbishop to this role.

# Oceania - Some Impacts of the ‘Anthropocene’ – More Than ‘Climate Change’

by Ben McKenna, SM, Assistant General to the Superior General

*“Anthropocene” is a widely proposed name for the geological epoch which refers to how human beings impact the planet earth. It is not synonymous with ‘climate change,’ nor does it simply mean ‘environmental problems.’ It is bigger and more shocking, because it encapsulates evidence that human pressures became so profound around the middle of the 20th century that we blew a planetary gasket. Hello, new Earth System. Hello, Anthropocene.<sup>1</sup>*



The focus of this article is to describe some of the impacts of the changing Earth systems, which include land, fresh water, oceans, air, related food sources, and people, in Oceania. The Marist Province of Oceania is present in eight South Pacific countries: Bougainville-Papua New Guinea, Fiji, New Caledonia, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu, and Wallis & Futuna and has 104 ordained members, 18 brothers, 29 seminarians, and 2 novices.

The fact that the Earth Systems are rapidly changing due to human impact, was significantly addressed by Pope Francis in Chapter One of the encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015) where, along with Climate Change, he also addresses Pollution, Water, Loss of Biodiversity, Decline in the Quality of Human Life and the Breakdown of Society, and Global Inequality. This is the world in which we are called to minister.

The Marist General Chapter 2017 acknowledged that *we are in a time of global change, in a world all too often scarred by fragmentation and by the degradation of the poor and the earth - and that - Mary, the mother of the New Creation, calls us to nurture life in all its forms, especially among our most vulnerable brothers and sisters on our damaged planet.<sup>2</sup>*

Caritas International is a confederation of over 160 members that work at the grassroots level with compassion and professionalism to respond to emergencies, promote development, and advocate for a fair and just world. The 2018 Caritas State of the Environment for Oceania Report: Waters of Life, Oceans of Mercy<sup>3</sup> assesses the following five areas of impact on people and communities that are monitored by

Caritas: Coastal erosion, flooding and sea level rise; Extreme weather; Food and water; Offshore mining and drilling; and Climate finance. This report also includes recommendations in response to its assessments. The following is a summary of the key findings in the report.

## 1. Impact of coastal erosion, coastal flooding, and rising seas - HIGH ASSESSMENT

This considers the number of people affected by relocation of houses, or displacement to other centers; loss of food or water sources; and scale and frequency of disruption from high tides and storm surges that flood roads, houses, or surroundings.

### Recommendations:

- The global community must create legal protections for people who are forced to relocate because of climate change or other environmental degradation.
- Oceania governments need to identify populations most at risk from sea level rise and identify options, strategies, and solutions with those populations.

## 2. Impact of extreme weather - MODERATE ASSESSMENT

This considers the number of deaths, displacement, and illness due to drought, heavy rain, floods, extreme winds, and cyclones.

### Recommendations:

- Government and non-government agencies need to build resilience for extreme weather events through programs for food security, income generation, mapping areas most at risk, improved construction techniques, water management, and other preparedness measures.

- Local, regional, and central government need to support local, village, and community-level groups who can provide immediate practical assistance in case of emergency.

### 3. Impact on people's access to safe food and drinking water - HIGH ASSESSMENT

This includes factors such as forestry, palm oil production that results in deforestation, mining, and super-cyclones that affect access to safe and healthy locally sourced food and water.

#### Recommendations:

- Oceania governments must prioritize activities, policy, and budget to meet the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.
- Oceania governments and community organizations as well as all Pacific Island governments must continue to enhance food and water security for the most vulnerable.

### 4. Offshore mining and drilling - MODERATE ASSESSMENT

This considers the number of people and communities affected by offshore activities; the impact on food sources; the impact on traditional and cultural connection to the sea; and the indigenous peoples most likely to be affected by offshore activities.

#### Recommendations:

- The International Seabed Authority and national governments must stop issuing both mining and exploration licenses for seabed mining until more is known about the impacts.
- Oceania governments and others implementing legislative frameworks for seabed mining need to ensure they give proper recognition to human and environmental rights.

### 5. Climate finance - WOEFULLY INADEQUATE ASSESSMENT

The primary focus of this area is the adequacy of support which includes the amount and quality of climate finance which offers tangible and practical support to those most affected, including women, children, indigenous peoples, and isolated communities.

#### Recommendations:

The global community, through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change needs to:



- increase nationally determined contributions and climate finance contributions to keep global warming below 1.5°C;
- ensure sufficient finances and other resources to support adaptation and resilience-building for small island states and other vulnerable countries.

#### A Marist Response: Communities as Living Parables

Br. Roger of Taizé saw his mission as forming a 'living parable of communion on earth.'<sup>4</sup> In our new era of the Anthropocene we are called, as St Francis was, to see all creatures as our brothers and sisters in a vast web of life. 'All is inter-related' as Pope Francis spells out so clearly in *Laudato Si'*. We are called to move from *steward-ship* of creation to *kinship with* creation.

In Oceania, one place the Marists are living this out is at Marist College, Pacific Regional Seminary, Fiji. Under the guidance of Fr. Donato Kivi, SM, who recently earned his Doctorate and wrote his doctoral dissertation *Towards a Marian Ecological Spirituality for the Re-evangelization of the Vanua: The People and the Land of Fiji*, our community is engaged in applying Marian Ecological Spirituality in practical and formative ways.<sup>5</sup>

Another living parable of Marian Ecological Living in Oceania is at Marist Tutu Rural Training Center, Fiji. Under the guidance of Fr. Michael McVerry, SM, this project has enabled subsistence farmers, young men and women, to learn skills for self-employment in farming, through

time management, budgeting, planning, human development, and spiritual development for at least 40 years. The Director of Caritas NZ, Julianne Hickey, described this project as an "amazing example for the Pacific." Tutu has been prioritized by the Oceania Province as a key Marist mission.<sup>6</sup>

#### Conclusion

The work of Caritas enables us to see the factors at work in the changing face of life in Oceania. As Marist we can respond in small, but significant 'living parable' ways to provide hope and direction for the People of Oceania. Our confreres there are living out the Call of Jesus to read the 'signs of the times', the Call of *Laudato Si'*, and the Call of our own Marist General Chapter of 2017. Many more 'living parable' stories remain to be told.

#### Endnotes

- 1 Thomas, Julia A. "Why the Anthropocene is not 'climate change' - and why that matters." *Climate and Capitalism*, 2019-01-31.
- 2 SM 2017 General Chapter. *Declaration on the Mission of the Society of Mary Today*, nos. 3 & 5.
- 3 <https://caritas.org.nz/state-environment>
- 4 [https://www.taize.fr/en\\_article19581.html](https://www.taize.fr/en_article19581.html)
- 5 <https://jpicblog.maristsm.org/marian-ecological-centre-suva>
- 6 <https://www.pacificfarmers.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Tutu-Book.pdf>



# Preparing for a Life of Compassion and Mercy

## Introduction

by Tony Kennedy, SM, Rector, International Major Marist Seminary, Rome, Italy

*A cold coming we had of it,  
Just the worst time of the year  
For a journey, and such a long journey:  
The ways deep and the weather sharp,  
The very dead of winter.*

(T.S. Eliot, Journey of the Magi)

When I was a high school student many years ago in Australia, one of the poets that my English teacher, Gerard Hall, SM tried to teach my classmates and me about was T.S. Eliot. One of the poems we read was Journey of the Magi. Gerry would be surprised to know that I have been thinking about that poem recently.

In reflecting on the poem, I thought about the similarities between the journey of the Magi and the journey of the seminarians in formation. At times the three Magi were together, and sometimes they were apart, going different places and sometimes different directions.

This year our community of 19 religious at Casa di Maria (CDM), the Marist International Theologate in Rome, Italy, began in the fall when we gathered after our summer break. We spent time before university classes began by reflecting on

the summer and the different pastoral activities we had experienced.

The full journey of formation is a long one for our seminarians. It starts with an initial interest in the Society of Mary and their request to be accepted into formation house for a propaedeutic (or preparatory) period, studying philosophy, perhaps learning English, proceeding on to the novitiate, and the first profession of their vows. All this before they arrive at Casa di Maria. This whole process takes at least four years. They then stay in Rome for four years of theology before returning to their home units as perpetually professed members of the Society and as deacons.

Learning to cope with a new climate, language, food, culture, and education system are some of the challenges we all face as we try to respond faithfully to the call we have heard.

The long journey that the Magi undertook changed them. They did not return to their homes as the same people who had set out on that journey. They had witnessed a newly born Child and realized that the world had changed.

Some things, in fact, had died. As the poem concludes:

*We returned to our places, these  
Kingdoms,  
But no longer at ease here, in the old  
dispensation,  
With an alien people clutching their gods.  
I should be glad of another death.*

Formation challenges us to be the best we can be. Some new attitudes and skills need to be born in us, and some old ones may need to be put aside to die, as it were.

We pray that the experience of Marist formation provides each of us with the necessary skills and attitudes to enable our active participation in the mission of the Society. We pray that it prepare us well for the ministry of service which lies at the heart of the Gospel.

Thank you for the support you give us in so many ways and the interest you have in our community. Your prayers are always greatly appreciated. The following are reflections from some of the seminarians on their time in formation as each one prepares for a life of compassion and mercy.