

Another Way for an Ecological Conversion at Marist College Suva

On the 23rd of May, we cleared a shed that contained old furniture and turned it into a Compost House. All out kitchen refuse was taken to this house together with cardboard boxes and old newspapers.



Fr. Jacob Aba was instrumental in getting it ready.

By the 16th of June, the compost was ready to be used. Pictured below is Jamie Canisius turning the Compost before it is packed into



sacks.

On the 17th of June, we began with the three-part series of our Community Recollection on a Marian-Ecological spirituality.¹ The first part focused on Mary's humility, the *humus*, Mary as the "good soil" and our Marist constitution 228. I also gave the spiritual and practical aspect of the compost house ... "The throwaway culture," mercy and giving a chance to kitchen refuse and discarded organic material to redeem itself and give life again through decomposition.

From 22nd June we also began a trial block on using raised garden beds for our vegetables and flowers. We also integrated the use of "hügelkultur"² using decaying logs from trees around the property.



The seminarians helped out in setting up the raised beds and covering the grass around the boxes with cardboard and newspapers with a

¹ The talks were taken from the my Doctoral Dissertation which was defended at the Angelicum on the 27th of April 2018.

² Hügelkultur is a horticultural technique where a mound constructed from decaying wood debris and other compostable biomass plant materials is later planted as a raised bed.

layer of mulch on top this was our way of healing the soil by mimicking the decomposition that happens on a forest floor.



Halfway into July all of our raised beds were ready and planted.

By the end of July, we had already harvested our lettuce, garden rocket, and cucumber.

On the 22nd of July, we had the second part of our (three-series) recollection centered on Mary as the perfect garden or garden paradise and her Motherhood role. We also had a look at themes relating to beauty and how to create the inner beauty of the soul,

the inner garden which should be reflected in the outer garden of our home. The third part of this recollection was given on, August 26th, which focused on Mary as the Virgin earth and the Queen of all creation. Themes addressed was leadership, governance, and management. It is a mission of service beyond the usual village understanding. It is a mission that should influence institutions: the school, the parish, the government, the natural environment – the world, in the context of Mary's Queenship. It is a life of service that offers hope to people and all creation. We are invited to think grandly in offering advice, help, teaching, and co-creating with God in rebuilding the world.



At the end of July we also started a small building project of our grotto by using "earth-bags."³ This type of building was promoted by Nader Khalili, an Iranian born American architect responsible for promoting the idea of making buildings by stacking bags, or tubes, filled with soil.

³ In promoting this form of ecological building Nader Khalili said, "My main concern is architecture and the people who cannot afford an architect, cannot afford manufactured building materials, cannot afford anything but their own hands and the earth beneath their feet. Anybody in this world should be able to build a shelter for should his or her family with the simplest of materials, available to all: the Elements—Earth, Water, Air, and Fire. A family should be able to learn the techniques, move to a piece of empty land, and then—with some water and simple tools—build themselves a house using the earth under their feet."³ To build a simple house we need not cut trees, weld steel, or buy cement and plastic; in a great many cases the earth alone can suffice."³

The plan in promoting this project at Marist College were for two reasons. First, is for the Marist College Community to learn first-hand and replicate this skill in earth-bag building for the Chapel at the Ecological Centre. The second, is the need for hurricane prone countries like most Pacific Islands to change their way of building. Nader Khalili in speaking about home that can withstand natural disasters said:

“After a fire, hurricane, flood, or earthquake we immediately call it an "act of God" or Nature's disaster. Then we ask if we have insurance, or how soon will the government or U.N. come to help? And these are repeated and echoed in the media around the globe over and over again. But are these the right questions to ask? Shouldn't we be asking, "Why did our house burn, fall apart, or get swept away?", and when we have the chance to rebuild it why should we build it in the same way and in the same place? The human impact on nature and its effects: pollution, deforestation, land mismanagement, the greenhouse effect, global warming and more, will undoubtedly accelerate the rate of disasters in the future. Added to that are man-made disasters: millions of displaced humans, wars and human aggression and terror with its incalculable damage to human life and property which must awaken us to a new set of questions. It is a dire necessity to educate ourselves and our children to act more in harmony with nature, rather than insisting on dominating and interrupting the environmental process. To build a simple emergency shelter that will give us maximum safety with minimum environmental impact, we must choose natural materials and, like nature itself, build with minimum materials to create maximum space, like a beehive or a seashell. The strongest structures in nature which work in tune with gravity, friction, minimum exposure and maximum compression, are arches, domes, vaults, apses and organic free forms. And they can be easily learned and utilize the most available material on earth: EARTH.⁴

Marist College, through the Ecological Center, can also help people build differently and ecologically, homes that can withstand adverse weather especially tropical cyclones. The picture below shows the students loading soil for our grotto while two other students wait for unloading the soil at the work site.



⁴ Khalili, Nader. Emergency Sandbag Shelter: How to Build Your Own (Page 13). Cal-Earth Press. Kindle Edition.

Last week I was away at the proposed Ecological Centre planning out how we are going to develop the place. The need at this time is a small Chapel that can fit 30 people. The accommodation now is a new house after the hurricane destroyed the old one. But still, proper dormitory accommodations need to be built to cater for groups. The plan is to make it out of earth-bags. Below are some photos from Dawasamu, the Marist land where we propose to establish the Marist Ecological Centre.



Apart from these small projects I have given talks with the Archbishops invitation for our Synod preparation. One was to the Priests and Religious and one for the Central Eastern Laity. On the 6th of August, I was also invited by the Major Superiors around the Pacific to speak on Theology and Ecology. I have also given recollection on Marian- Ecological Spirituality to the SM sisters and talk to the Fiji Sector of the Province of Oceania and for the Council of the Province. Some of these talks ended in Marist College with a tour on the backyard gardening and landscaping the community are doing.



Apart from having an energetic community that is enthusiastic about the projects, having a



truck to ease the workload was a big help. We had to sell our new Hyundai SUV last month in exchange for this truck. Two weeks ago we used the truck in helping the Suva City council in their waste management. Root crops and vegetable waste from the Suva Market were taken to Marist College for our compost; these were piled lengthwise in a shape of a plot that will become a vegetable garden.



These are some of the little projects we believe are geared towards an Ecological Conversion.