



**MISIONEROS MARISTAS, BOLIVIA**  
**CEMFRAT –CENTRO MARISTA “FRATELLI TUTTI”**

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Dear Friends,

Over the years on the occasion of our Marist Feast Day we have endeavoured to share with you by means of our Circular Letter the latest as regards to our Marist life and mission here in Bolivia. Our last letter we sent out was related to Juan's 80<sup>th</sup> on June 25<sup>th</sup>. So here we are again! Although we as a Marist Team tend to be slowing up in our pastoral activities here and there, we realize that there is still much to tell every time we sit down to compose our Circular Letters.

As mentioned in the previous letter, general elections for president, senate and lower house were scheduled for August 17<sup>th</sup>. Originally 17 political groups indicated their intention to contest; finally, 9 got on the ballot paper -6 representing Right-wing affiliations and 3 Left-wing. Serious internal problems resulted in the Left being divided into 3 camps, and thus unable to put up a united front against the Right. Neither of the candidates received an absolute majority so there is now a 2<sup>nd</sup> Round scheduled for October 19<sup>th</sup> with a run-off between the first two who come from the Right. So, we still have a daily dose of politicking and attacking of each other, while the country continues in a severe economic crisis and lack of petroleum products. In short, to do any bank transaction to withdraw funds is a trauma and so limited, one cannot access dollars... [only on the black market at more than double the official rate] and inflation in some case is 100%. This has been going on since last October. To fill up your vehicle at the service station may have one waiting in long lines for days. In the electoral process, we have heard candidates who are going to fix things in the first 100 days and others who are willing to sell off the country's natural resources or to have us rescued by loans from the International Monetary Fund/World Bank and thus have Bolivia subjected to their demands until the end of time. One might say: "*We have reached rock bottom!*" In the midst of this chaos and suffering, the institutional church has yet to find and be a prophetic voice.

Having said all that as regards to the state of the nations, there are good things to relate – Good News! Although Juan is presumed retired and as of 2 years ago presented his resignation concerning his services in the dioceses, he continues to be pretty active in different ways as are both Gilberto and Javier who too are close to reaching the official retirement status here in Bolivia. Our "*Refugio Yanacachi*" or farm retreat outside of Tarija City has become more and more a centre of activity and presence. Juan, in particular, gets to stay and work there now on a regular basis. He refers to it as "*Our Paradise*"! and well received and integrated in the local community of *campesinos*. In spite of some heavy frosts over the winter months and crops in the area ruined, we are once again hard at work in sowing for the summer. Hopefully our vegetable plot will flourish and our fruit trees this year produce for the first time. *Refugio Yanacachi* has become for us our community place for contemplation, prayer and relaxation together.

Our missionary life continues to be centred on our involvement with the CEBs [Base Church Communities]. For Juan since his first days in Mexico some 48 years ago, this is his *passion* – promoting, forming and accompanying of this model of *being Church from below*. For the 3 of us as a Marist Missionary Team in Bolivia this has always been and continues to be our *passion* over the past 35 years.

In that process, not only have we been involved with the CEBs on the local level, but on the national and Latin American levels. We have traversed the country and the continent. On occasions, Juan has been asked how many countries of the Americas he knows. In an effort to respond, he begins by saying: "*Well first there is México, then the United States, then Bolivia and from there Perú, Ecuador, Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Chile, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras....*" In some of these he has gone there alone and others as a Marist Team with Gilberto and Javier where they have conducted courses or workshops related to the CEBs or been participants in CEBs encounters/meetings and instances of formation. All this resulting in a very broad and coherent experience. Juan for his part in his retirement years was asked to be one of the 5 members of the newly-formed *Consejo de Ancianos [Counsel of Elders]* for the Continental Articulation of the CEBs. The Articulation of which Juan is a founding member has recently embarked upon a project in which to define the *Identity of the*

*CEBs*. In a meeting with us of the assessors of CEBs of the distinct Latin American countries in Bogotá, Colombia in 2020 we identified 6 *rasgos [essential traits]*. Of these 6 traits, the Marist Team was asked to contribute to that relating to the CEBs being a Ministerial Church. Consequently, the three of us over several weeks developed the content for this trait and presented its work for inclusion in the project. We are very happy with the result that has now been well received by the Articulation.

On the local level of the CEBs in this 2nd Period of our pastoral year, there are 2 happenings worth sharing with you here. The first is that of our accompaniment of the Guarani Indigenous Community of Yukimbia in the celebration of the anniversary of their founding as an organization. The community particularly wanted us to be present and celebrate with them. We started accompanying the community some 13 years ago. Over the time we have won their deep affection and confidence where other groups have been unable. So, on August 15th the 3 of us set off at 5 a.m. to be there at 9 a.m. to celebrate a memorable day together with them as in previous years.

The 2nd significant happening was the Annual CEBs Encounter of the La Mamora Zone on the last weekend of August. La Mamora was our previous mission here in the Diocese of Tarija. Upon our arrival in La Mamora some 25 years ago we set about as our pastoral priority the promotion and formation of the CEBs in the surrounding village communities. Now some 25 years later the CEBs of this zone once again came together to celebrate their annual Encounter. But this year there was something special to celebrate -our Silver Jubilee. Over 100 representatives from 8 communities gathered together for the occasion in the village of Cachimayo. In addition, there were representatives as guests from the CEBs of the Archdiocese of Sucre and the Diocese of Potosí. The theme for this Encounter was *"25 Years of Memory and Walking with Mary, Mother of the Community"*. The Encounter concluded with the presentation of a Certificate of Recognition to each of the animators of the distinct communities and the Presentation to each participant of a Letter entitled *"Carta de María -Nuestra Compañera del Camino/ Letter from Mary - Our Companion on the Journey"* that was Juan's inspiration. [An English copy you will find at the end of this sharing]. It too certainly was a memorable occasion and fiesta.

As is our custom, at the end of each term and the start of a new term we have 2 days of evaluation and planning and 3 days of contemplative retreat. The content of our recent retreat was prepared by Gilberto who this year serves our community in the capacity of Marist formator. The theme chosen by him was *"Home of Light - We care for life and generate new life"* that was based on a retreat given by the Superior General of the Marist Brothers [Br. Ernesto] to his confreres. An excellent time of reflection together before we entered the last term of 2025!

From the beginning of our coming together we have always seen the importance of celebrating together the different moments in the lives of each of the members of our Marist community. Gilbert's youngest boy Gilberto whom we affectionately call *"Chiqui"* turned 27 on August 25<sup>th</sup> and is in his final year of physiotherapy at the San Francisco Javier Pontifical University in Sucre. His wife Paola previously had finished her nursing career there in Sucre and live there together with their first-born who they named John in honour of Juan whom all the Marist family call affectionately *"Abuelito Juanito /Johnny Grand-dad"*. So as not to celebrate alone this occasion, Gilberto and Juan took the overnight bus from Tarija City to Sucre to be with them. An 11-hour trip each way. It was a joy to be with them, especially as we were entertained by Little John who now is growing fast as a 3-year-old and full of energy and mischief.

Today we find ourselves here at home in Tarija celebrating our Marist Feast Day. In the evening we come together for our Eucharistic Celebration followed by supper. This year we decided to roast a leg of lamb Bolivian-style to be accompanied by some good wine for which Tarija is famous.

Next week we are on the road again! Our 2<sup>nd</sup> Mission of Palma Flor in the Amazonian Region of Bolivia has its traditional feast day [that of our Lady of Mercy] on September 24<sup>th</sup>. We have planned to be there with the community. Palma Flor Mission was established by us in 1995 and where both Gilberto and Javier married and were born the first 3 boys of our Marist Community. Their wives [Arminda and Nair] are from there. Thus, we are to set off from Tarija for La Paz at 3 a.m. next Saturday morning in our 2011 Ford Ranger [called the *Cangurito/Little Kangaroo*]. We will sleep the night there in La Paz and next morning continue on from there to Palma Flor. Roughly it is 1000kms from Tarija to La Paz and another 900kms from La Paz to Palma Flor. Hopefully we will get there to Palma Flor to sleep on Monday the 22<sup>nd</sup> and stay there until the 26<sup>th</sup>. A good number of the surrounding 10 villages that comprised our Palma Flor Mission will be there for the occasion. In which case, we expect to have a great renewal. The year is quickly coming to an end, but before that occurs, we still have our anniversary of foundation as Misioneros Maristas, Bolivia to celebrate on November 22<sup>nd</sup>. For the 3 of us it will be our 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary! We conclude our present sharing with photos of our recent visit to the Guarani Village of Yukimbia.

With all our love: Gilberto/Arminda/Juan José/Chiqui, Paola & Little John/Marian - Javier/Nair/Lupo/Paco - Juan

## **LETTER FROM MARY – OUR COMPANION ON THE JOURNEY**

My dear daughters and sons of the Base Church Communities:

I realize now that in previous letters I spoke a lot about the past and little about what my life is now. I am already an old woman, a senior citizen (I think that's what they say now). And something tells me that this will be the last letter I write to you. I no longer have much strength.

I live in a small Christian community in Asia Minor. I arrived here with my son John, whom Jesus gave me from the Cross. But I feel a bit like a mother to all of you. That's why I have been writing these letters to you. In case I can help you live your faith a little better.

I'm a little afraid to think whether with these letters I have put myself too much in the spotlight. I simply wanted to draw attention to the one who has been the center of my life and the reason for my existence: my son Jesus, the Messiah, who has risen to give us a new life and a hope with which to live and fight daily.

He always dreamed of and worked for his Father's Kingdom. We can do no less. He is the one who continues to work in each one of us and in our community. And I have seen this throughout these years.

I remember when I was with the disciples in Jerusalem after the resurrection. Those were not easy times. They were afraid to go out on the streets because the other Jews looked at us with disdain. Many times I had to encourage them and pray with them so that the Spirit would give us the necessary strength.

Later, I saw how the Church has grown in various places. Many Jews and also many pagans entered our communities. At first, we found it difficult to accept them, but we realized that the good news of Jesus was for all men and women, without distinction. Now, as the years have passed, I see clearly how the Spirit has been guiding the Church, beyond what we could have imagined.

Therefore, in my community, I have always wanted to be just one of them. I have wanted to shun all privileges. There were some who tried to give me special honours. They said I was the mother of the Messiah and that I deserved to be worshipped as the Messiah. They have even said that through me, Jesus and the Father could be more easily accessed. As if Jesus and his Father were some kind of vengeful gods who only wanted to find fault with human beings and send them to eternal punishment. Those who speak like this do not know my Son, nor do they know the one my Son called his Abba, his daddy.

If my son Jesus made one thing clear to us, it was that God is Love, unconditional love for all men and women. Don't you remember that parable my Son once told, where He spoke of the prodigal son? When He told it to us, one beautiful spring afternoon, those of us who were listening were able to understand how much love God has for human beings.

In some of his letters, my dear John has spoken a lot about God in this sense. In one of them, he says: *"See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, and so we are!"* And on another occasion, he says: *"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brothers and sisters. Whoever does not love remains in death."*

That is, God loves us totally, and the sign that we accept Him and believe in Him is that we are capable of loving those around us. This is the great sign we Christians must give in the midst of this world. And we must do this through ordinary, everyday life.

But this love must be effective; it compels us to share everything. On another occasion, my son John says: *"If someone who possesses earthly goods sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how can the love of God remain in him?"*

And I conclude. I spend my days peacefully in this community. I can do nothing but pray for you. I keep you very much in my prayers. I don't want privileged positions. I simply want you to feel me close when you gather to pray. Not to preside, but to be one of you, who raises her prayer to the Father to praise, to give thanks, and to invoke His help in times of tribulation.

In any case, I remind you of those words I already spoke to those who served at the wedding at Cana: *"Do whatever he tells you."* And you will discover how life is transformed, filled with light and joy, and you become more like brothers and sisters to your brothers. Therefore, I only repeat to you: *"Do whatever he tells you."*

I can no longer do many things, but I pray insistently before my Son that there may be more and more men and women willing to bring the Good News to those who have not yet received it.

These are my last words. Open your hearts to the Good News, let the joy of our liberation reach deep within you, and you will inevitably be evangelizers. My prayer, from this community where I live with my son Juan or from the house of our Abba, will always be with you.

I loves you and do not forget you – I continue to walk alongside you in your Base Church Communities.

*María*





**Juan [Fr. Hoppy] with the children of the Guarani Indigenous village of Yukimbia on the occasion of the anniversary of their local organization -APG.**

**Juan [Fr. Hoppy] with Marcia, the animator/lay minister of the Yukimbia CEBs.**

(Her daughter Jessie is in 3<sup>rd</sup> -year of nursing at the university in Tarija and as a gesture of solidarity the Marist Community has provided the funds for her accommodation.)



**Entrance Procession of the annual CEBs Encounter of the La Mamora Zone  
-Cachimayo Village**

**Juan [Fr. Hoppy] enjoying lunch with a group of participants during the zonal CEBs Encounter.**

**-The Cachimayo community worked very hard for all to have a memorable celebration.**

