



## MISIONEROS MARISTAS, BOLIVIA

“CEMPAC”: Calle Cobija s/n  
Casilla 345, Tarija - Bolivia

Christmas 2018

Dear Friends of Misioneros Maristas,

Saint Francis is said to have created the first nativity scene to help others celebrate the profound meaning of Christmas. For us, Christmas is an even bigger celebration than Easter, because for God to be born as one of us in this world among the animals and in a poor family shows that humanity is good, flesh is good, nature is good, and this world is good! Thus, the trajectory of history is positive. God is saving history, not just individuals. Instead of dreading eternal punishment, we live in faith that the whole map of reality is summed up and revealed in one human life, so we can see it from beginning to end.

Why did Jesus come? Jesus did not come to change the mind of God about humanity. It did not need changing. God has organically, inherently loved what God created from the moment God created it. Jesus came to change the mind of humanity about God. As our image of God changes, our image of God's creation, including ourselves, changes as well. Jesus shows us what it looks like for God to be incarnate in humanity. He holds together the human and the divine so that we might follow him and do the same.

This sets everything on an utterly positive foundation. Rather than being an ogre, God is Love. Rather than being sinners in the hands of an angry God, we are inherently and forever loved by God, no matter what we do or do not do. This is such an essential and foundational element in healthy Christianity. Hopefully as our Church communities are in search of being a prophetic and hopeful sign in today's society and culture, we, for our part, manifest in this Christmas Season and throughout the New Year that positive image of God who is Love and who has come among us "so that all may have life and have it to the full".

As 2018 draws to a close, we in our Marist Community are conscious that this year has been somewhat very different from recent ones. As 2018 got underway, we saw three of our four boys set off from home in Tarija for university studies; Juan José to continue his career of Mechanical Engineering in Córdoba, Argentina; Lupo to start biology and Chiqui (Gilberto) to start physiotherapy in Sucre, Bolivia. So the mums and dads...and granddad Juan found that they had to adjust to a reduced family presence for several months of the year. Then Juan took off at the beginning of June to fulfill his commitment to the Mission Awareness Programme in three of the U.S. dioceses. From there, he arrived in Australia later in July to start a six-month mini-sabbatical [long-service leave] after some 30 years here in our Bolivian Mission. Nonetheless we have maintained constant contact thanks to modern communications. As is our custom from our origins as a Marist Community on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1990, we always finish each of the three terms of our pastoral together with a Marist Contemplative Retreat; however due to Juan's presence in his native Australia, our recent November retreat was the first of the 84 consecutive retreats that anyone of us was physically missing. We now look forward to soon being all together again in Tarija ready to celebrate on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February [Solemnity of the Presentation] our 28<sup>th</sup> anniversary of commissioning as a Marist Missionary Team here in Bolivia and also Juan's 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Religious Profession as a Marist.

Although Christmas 2018 finds us as a community dispersed, we have made a joint effort through internet communication to share with you this Christmas: Gilberto has seen to the production of our Christmas Card, Juan to the opening reflection of this letter and now Javier will finish reflecting upon our journey together with our people.

How quickly the year has passed as we advance towards its end. Many find themselves saying that there is not enough time to do all we hope to achieve. It seems that we are living in a world where everyone is just running from here to there. With this logic, we lose the opportunity to know, appreciate and enjoy the profoundness of so many beautiful things that surround us. From time to time, we need to stop and to take stock, evaluating the path along which we are travelling. And in so doing what is of importance is not the finished product, but the process and the efforts that we employ in achieving the objective.

For us who have undertaken a mission we are committed to seek alternatives that animate other to enter the circle. We do not imply that we will do great things, but rather small ones that apparently in the world's eyes are insignificant. In this spirit we wish to share with you some highlight of our journey in recent months. To announce today God as being "Good News" we must be conscious of finding Him present there in this historical moment –in the reality that we are experiencing. We unfortunately find that some of our religious leaders here today are more preoccupied with opposing the secular institutions and *popular* governments than walking together with their people and together discern that path ahead in a complex and confused social context. We would therefore hope that they could seize this opportunity to participate in the construction of a new society that is inclusive, diverse, fraternal and tolerant. When one's options are clearly there with the poor and outcasts of society, this would be the case; but unfortunately it is not so.

In this service of announcing today a God who is Good News, we are conscious that for the past 28 years of journeying together with our people we have fully identified with them in their dreams and utopias, their joys and failures. Together we have come to know the biblical God, revealed in Jesus of Nazareth and who accompanies us. So we try to recuperate with our people that manner of living together in community that the first followers of Jesus experienced, being fascinated with the movement He inaugurated and the love and friendship encountered. Today our little Marist Community feels honoured as we live among and accompany our people who, for their part, show their confidence in dialogue with us as in true friendship. This reciprocal adventure in friendship is the gift that we now share in this Christmas Season as we contemplate the Crib. Our Country and Church needs to cultivate this virtue of friendship and closeness.

The promptings of the Spirit to which we have tried to respond as Misioneros Maristas have seen that we finished another pastoral year where we have truly been graced by God and by our people.

May the Joy of His coming among us fill our hearts in this Christmas Season and in 2019.

With all our love:

**Gilberto/Arminda/Juan José/Gilberto/Marian –Javier/Nair/Lupo/Paco - Juan**

**"Todo a Jesús por María, todo a María para Jesús"**

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