



CEMFRAT –CENTRO MARISTA “FRATELLI TUTTI”
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Christmas 2025 – New Year 2026

Dear Friends,

As we come to the end of another year, we have become aware of the fact that our world has dramatically changed in recent years, especially as we are now in an era of Artificial Intelligence [AI]. As Misioneros Maristas here in Bolivia it is hard for us to believe that when we recently celebrated at our residence “Casa Colin” our anniversary of foundation on November 22nd it was our 35th anniversary. On that day in 1990, Gilberto [23], Javier [21] and Juan [45] during the closing Eucharist of our initial retreat in the village church of Yanacachi in the Bolivian Sud Yungas the three of us signed our Promise to become a missionary community and team and to open a mission in a new colonization known as San Pablo in jungle at the side of the Boopi River - the first of the rivers that comprise the region known as “La Amazonia Boliviana”.

Our first Christmas [1991] at our newly established San Pablo Mission was truly a memorable occasion. In the previous months the three of us had literally built ourselves our mission residence and a small meeting hut. In the meantime, we had reached out to some 13 new villages on either side of the Boopi River comprised of young families that had come to colonize the region from the high plains of the Andean mountains or relocated miners. We introduced the people to that model of being Church that in Latin America we know as Base Church Communities/Comunidades Eclesiales de Base – [CEBs] and started the formation of their animators [Lay Ministers]. As Christmas approached, we learnt from the people that since their arrival they had never had a Christmas celebration; normally that just went about their daily work in their fields cultivating rice and bananas. So, we proposed to them that we could have a common celebration of Christmas at the mission where we could have the Eucharist, followed by a community luncheon where by each family brought a prepared pot [*olla común*]. (We have attached to this letter a photo we have dearly preserved of that occasion.)

In recent years our mission has gone into recess as of December 23rd through to the end of January and each unit is able to have time to visit their own family or close friends. As a Marist community this year we are to celebrate in anticipation our traditional Christmas at home on Sunday December 21st when our boys will have arrived in Tarija from their university studies for holidays. For his part, this year Juan will spend his annual vacation in Mexico with his friends of now some 48 years when he first arrived there from Australia and appointed to our then Marist community of San Mateo on the outskirts of Mexico City. At the same time, he hopes to catch up with some of his Marist confreres there.

Our previous Circular Letter was in September, commemorating our Marist Patronal Feast of the Holy Name of Mary on the 12th. Since then, we have been engaged in various activities according to our agenda for our 3rd and last term of 2025. At our rural property “Refugio Yanacachi” outside of Tarija City during this period we have tended to the cultivation of our family garden where we had sown potatoes, onions, lettuces, tomatoes, zucchines, pumpkins, peas and beans. We have had to battle with frosts and hail, as well as dry and then wet weather. Our fruit trees are growing well but need a further year and good weather to produce well. The grounds are looking glorious and the roses in full bloom. Juan for his part now tries to spend maximum time there and enjoys a close friendship with the local campesinos and the young men of the local soccer team of which he is the honorary president.

There too we have conducted our monthly Day-In-The -Desert and our Retreats at the end of each of our three terms throughout the year. “*DRINK FROM ONE'S OWN WELL*”-OUR MARIST LEGACY YESTERDAY & TODAY was the theme of our recent retreat to finish the current year. We were able to reflect on the original Marist Project at this time when Marists throughout the world are celebrating the 150th anniversary of its founder's death -Fr. Jean Claude Colin and our own “Proyecto de Los Misioneros Maristas, Bolivia” as we celebrate 35 years of our founding.

A pastoral highlight of this term was the Workshop that we conducted for animators of the CEBs here at our Centro Marista “Fratelli Tutti” -CEMFRAT in which we challenged them to become ever more protagonists in today's society and church.

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

[PHOTO OF CHRISTMAS 1991

AT SAN PABLO MISSION,

BOLIVIA]



[As the Bolivian Postal Service is no longer operative, we asked Gilberto's brother Prudencio who now lives with his family in Sydney to send you our Christmas Greetings by Australia Post]