

Society of Mary District of Asia

MARIST
มูลนิธิ มารีสต์ เอเชีย

July Newsletter, 2021



Fr Chris Ganzon, Superior District of Asia, Davao, Philippines.

Fr Chris Ganzon District Superior Asia *Living in Uncertain Times* - with hope and courage

What does it mean to live in this time of pandemic? A time when everything seems uncertain. A time when so many questions are asked. When does this pandemic end? How long do we need to endure and suffer the devastating effect of the virus? How many lives need to end and families be broken and hurt?

We don't really know how to answer these questions. I guess we just continue to ask and maybe someday answers will come our way. I am sure the omnipotent and omniscient God has something better in store for us!

In spite of these uncertain and troubled times, we Marists are in the same boat like many others. We too are affected and ask these same questions. Though we have studied theology or done further studies, we admit that there are still many mysterious things that our experience and intelligence can never give an easy or exact answer. Somehow, we are in the same predicament like the others who in the same way are struggling and finding ways to survive in this uncertain times. We face it and we strive to do what we need to do. Life goes on with hope and courage!

In our District, this first 6 months was a mixture of moments of joy and pain. We saw the return of Bro. Denis O'brien, SM to New Zealand after 18 months of living and helping our mission in Ranong and Davao.

He was instrumental to the completion of the community house in Ranong. In the same way, the return of Fr. Kevin Redmond, SM back to Australia after his extended time in the District due to covid. Both of them were very generous in sharing their life and gifts. We are deeply grateful to each of them.

“ *A sign of joy in the District is the on-going construction of the District chapel in Davao* ”

Furthermore, we sent Fr. Lionel Mechavez, SM to do some studies in Rome. And by mid this year, Fr. Frank Bird will get his chance to do further studies as well.

On the 1st of January this year, the mission in Ranong officially became an Omnes Gentes International Mission. We will soon welcome Fr. Ricardo Navarrete Gutierrez, SM from Mexico as a member of this international community. We thank the General Administration for their support for this new initiative of the Society.

A sign of joy in the District is the on-going construction of the District chapel in Davao. It has been our humble dream to have our own Chapel to be used by the community and formation.

Despite the challenges of doing physical vocation promotion, Fr. Roque found ways to promote and invite young men to join our formation program. God willing, the three young men will enter our college formation this month. We thank Fr. Roque for his effort and sacrifice. Let us continue to pray for and promote vocations wherever we are.

Marist Mission in Ranong, Thailand

A chance for Higher Education - Fr Frank Bird

It has been a few years in the dreaming, but now the Marist Mission in Ranong has been able to provide a Bachelor of Education University Scholarship for 2 Young Burmese Migrant Teachers.

Pictured with Fr Frank Bird are May Thazin Oo (left) and Yoon Thiri (right) departing from Ranong to travel to Bangkok and attend Asia Pacific International University to begin 4 years of University Study.

Thanks to a Scholarship Partnership with Marist Mission Centre (Australia), Society of Mary (NZ), Society of Mary (USA) and Marist Asia Foundation, the Marist Mission in Ranong aims to ensure both quality and sustainability in its education programmes for Burmese Migrants.

Both Fr Frank, Fr Hermes, Sr Annie (RNDM), our Marist Volunteer from New Zealand (Teacher Katie), and many other Marists and Teacher Volunteers have mentored and supported a number of Young Burmese Teachers over the years.

With Primary, Secondary and Online University Education Programmes, it has become increasingly important to ensure local Burmese leaders are trained and capable to support the future education needs of their Migrant community.

Following their study, both May Thazin Oo and Yoon Thiri have signed a Learning and Service Agreement to give 4 Years support in education leadership positions in Marist Asia Foundation.

As Myanmar struggles with the effects of a Military Coup, many Burmese Migrants in Ranong are contemplating a very uncertain future.

Perhaps the most important gift we can continue to offer is supporting education for children and young adults. The Marist Community believes Trained Burmese Migrant Teachers will in fact 'double the gift'.



Fr Frank pictured with University Scholarship recipients May Thazin Oo and Yoon Thiri departing for Bachelor of Education studies.

Mary has truly blessed the Ranong Mission since the beginning days of 2006.

From humble beginnings 15 years ago of daily walking around the Burmese Migrant Community to the building of a Marist Centre for over 250 students, 100 HIV Patients and a Marist Team of 35 Burmese, Thai and International Volunteers, our graduates and staff are now significant educators and health workers in the migrant community in Ranong.

We are looking forward to Fr Arnold (Philippines) arriving soon to be the new Director for Marist Asia Foundation.

We hope also to welcome before the end of the year Fr Richi (Mexico) and Sr Angela RNDM (Myanmar) who will join with Fr Hermes Sabud (Philippines).

I'm very excited to have the opportunity to return to New Zealand and begin studies in Masters of Education. Hopefully I can learn new insights in educational leadership and how to support Migrant Education better for the future.



The Digos Community and Parish enjoy birthday celebrations with Fr Chris.

Digos Community

Fr Roque Rebito SM

Our Marist Community and our Parish Ministry have stood still despite some of the challenges that are brought by the pandemic. There are uncertainties that we have to face and deal with so that our presence in our Christian community will remain relevant; first to our personal Marist vocation and second to the people we serve.

Our Marist presence will hopefully remind our parish family that this pandemic is also a spiritual battle. That they have to be spiritually ready in facing life's hurdles everyday.

Our community has to adjust to many occasions when there are threats of lockdowns. The parish has had to think creatively how to continue its programs and engagements with the parishioners.

The Four Sundays of June had been a “no movement Sunday” because of the increasing cases of COVID in Digos City. The Diocese of Digos had to answer this restriction which affected our Sunday Eucharistic Celebrations. There had been discussion that the government cannot stop people attending Eucharist, but in the end, the church has to follow the rules to protect the many.

In the end we showed our parishioners that yes there are challenges, but as a community we can always get through and respond actively without undermining every sector's action to lessen the bad effects of this pandemic.

As ministers who break the Word and Bread, we are challenged to inspire our parishioners to see the light despite the darkness. Luckily, we did not experience the worst case-scenario that other communities in other parts of the world have had to experience.

Even before the pandemic, our community has been the refuge of those who seek to meet the basic needs of the day. Our community has had a pantry of food for those who knew that they could not go home empty every day. They needed assistance just to survive the day. The words “give us today our daily bread” has become a real experience for us.

Despite the challenges, our community and the parish have had many celebrations that highlight our gratitude to God, our support for each other, and our commitment to serve God and His people regardless of the circumstances.

“ Our community has had a pantry of food for those who knew that they could not go home empty every day. ”

There were joys when we were permitted to celebrate Eucharist in the GKK (Basic Christian Community) chapels. We also celebrated the Easter Triduum in different communities which became a success with a big number in attendance. It was their first experience and the members really put great effort into making the celebrations a memorable one. There were Easter baptisms which became a very important community celebration.



(left) Parish Celebration of St Peter Chanel, (right) Parish Celebration of Mary's Market to support the Parish Food Pantry in Digos

The administration of Sacraments has continued despite the strict health protocols, and has given life to our parish. Bishop Afable confirmed a big number of young adults who have been waiting since last year.

The two big celebrations in the Catholic Church in the Philippines; the 500 years of the birth of Christianity, and the Year of St. Joseph were well-received by our parishioners.

These two celebrations are opportunities for the church community to deepen our appreciation of the faith that we profess and actively respond to the challenges it poses to us.

Our community has welcomed guests and other Marists. The parish has celebrated its 2nd Patronal Fiesta in honour of the Our Lady of Fatima.

The parish prepared a community pantry for three days and was able to help those in need around the parish.

The parish has managed to continue its fund raising through “cycling for a cause” which was well participated in by the parishioners and other cycling enthusiasts from Digos City.

There is an unspoken excitement when parishioners can witness the commencement of the construction. The design was changed in consideration of the costs and practicalities. The construction committee is preparing the details so that foundations will be laid properly.

It is a good reminder that this undertaking must be solely guided by the Holy Spirit. *Unless the Lord builds the house those who build it labour in vain. Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain. Psalm 127:1*

Studies in Rome & Waiting for the New Mission in Sydney

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Fr Kevin Medilo, SM

The Marist community was supposed to start the new parish ministry in Parramatta Diocese in Australia last year. But due to the Covid-19 pandemic, visas and international travel has been quite difficult or almost impossible to obtain. The travel plans and starting of this new ministry is being delayed.

The Bishop of Parramatta Diocese has invited the Marist community to take care of the pastoral needs of a parish community of very diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Many of the parishioners come from Asian backgrounds like Filipinos and Indians.

While waiting to enter Australia, I did some studies in Rome. The last six months were focused on studies with Jesuit / Ignatian Spirituality at the Gregorian University. I also enrolled in some short courses like Church Financial Management with Santa Croce University and Qur'an and Islamic studies with Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI).

At the end of the semester, the PISAI students, professors and other Christian friends visited the grand mosque of Rome.

Islam is becoming a significant and growing religion in Italy as well as in Europe. According to the *Pew Research Center*, Italy has 2.8 million Muslims (4.8% of the Italian population in 2016). While in Europe, Muslims make up almost 5% of the population (roughly 25.7 million Muslims in 2016).

Fr Kevin Medilo pictured at the Grand Mosque of Rome while undertaking studies with the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies





Tulip Drive Community - Davao

Fr Lauro Arcede SM

After a year of waiting for the building permit for the construction of the Marist Asia District Chapel, the envisioned place of communal prayer and worship is beginning to rise.

Now midway in the construction, the community in Davao City is looking forward to celebrate the Advent season of 2022 in this chapel.

The completion of the project is expected on the 05 October of this year. The chapel construction is contracted by Aperion Construction Solutions, Inc. The building is designed by Architect James Alister Barcelona and supervised by Engineer Rafael Rodrigues.

The Marists in Davao are looking forward to the easing of health restrictions due to Covid 19. For more than a year mass public gatherings and celebrations are restricted to 30% attendance only. Intimate celebrations like weddings and funerals and is limited to 25 persons only.

For Asians, and particularly Filipinos, a gathering of 25 persons is not a celebration. Celebration means a gathering of the whole village. The arrival of the Covid vaccines in Davao is a ray of hope that things will be better soon.

The MICS (Marist Interested College Students) managed to see their family after one year of confinement in the compound of the Marist formation house. After the end of the school year 2019-2020 in June this year they had the chance to travel to their home places. They celebrated their survival from the one year quarantine. They emerged safe and equipped from the formation program last year. They look forward to resuming their studies on the 07 August 2021.



Supporting Burmese Migrant Children

Fr Hermes Sabud SM - HIV Programme Manager



Imagine being a young Burmese Migrant child, without a Mum or Dad, no documents, no family, no country. This is a story of the journey of 2 Young Burmese Children we have been supporting recently.

Journeying with the two Burmese children, Tha (11 years old) and Tho (7 years old - not their real name) has been a long challenge for the Marist Asia Foundation Health Team.

Their mother had been living with HIV/AIDS for many years, and became part of the Marist Asia Foundation Health Program.

As a migrant from Myanmar, she had no stable resources to provide for the daily needs of the family, no decent and permanent work, no money, no house; and her documents to stay in the Kingdom of Thailand was always questionable. Life was so difficult for her.

The mother died about three months ago, and the Health Team was grateful that we had the opportunity to help her die with dignity, with the collaboration of the Community Based Organization (CBO) in Ranong and the Diocesan Social Action Center (DISAC) of the Diocese of Surat Thani.

Tha and Tho were left orphaned and had nowhere to go because they had no relatives in Ranong. It was also not safe for them to live with their foster father. We tried to contact the Social Development and Human Security (SDHS) to see if it was possible for the children to stay temporarily at their institution.

The SDHS did not allow the children to stay at their children's home because one of the boys was HIV positive. We had no choice but to ask one of the members of our Health team to offer a temporary accommodation in their family for the 2 boys until they can settle into one of the shelters for abandoned children in Kawthaung, Myanmar.

Due to the Covid 19 pandemic situation, the border has remained closed for the past 16 months and no one is allowed to leave or enter Thailand across the sea border. We had to look for other alternative institutions that can accommodate Tha and Tho.

For the last two months, Tha and Tho have been looked after by the monks in the local Buddhist Monastery but with close monitoring by the MAF Health Team and the Officer-in-charge of DISAC Ranong. DISAC and MAF. We have been collaborating with Government Agencies who have been preparing all the necessary documents for the permanent transfer of the 2 boys to the Camillian Social Center in Rayong.

We hope that Tha and Tho will finally reach their destination of a safe orphanage so that they can start a new chapter of their life, settle down in safety, and begin education and a brighter future.

What a long journey for Tha and Tho at this early stage of their life. This is just one of the many stories and journeys of the migrant people on the border of Thailand and Myanmar.

General House Mission

Fr Pat Devlin SM- General Administration Secretary & Community Superior (General House)

The two main ministries of the community in the General House are Administration and Academic Study. The Superior General and council are involved in serving the whole Society of Mary to promote its unity and mission.

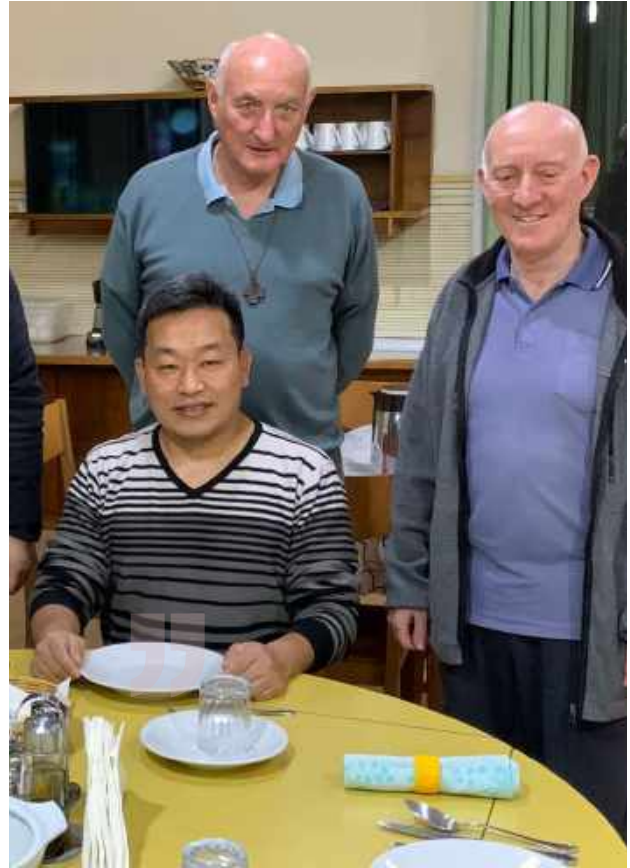
There are also currently five Marist priests who are at various stages of their studies for a STL degree. Both of these ministries are, by their nature, somewhat individual and behind the scenes and not what would normally be called “mission to the periphery” even though they are essential and important. But both promote professional and integrated Marists to ministries which are the Work of Mary.

The structure of the General House in Rome is large with plenty of accommodation. This enables the community to also offer hospitality to visitors. The house has the official name “Villa Santa Maria” (The House of Mary) and we believe that Mary not only welcomed Jesus into the world and assisted Elizabeth in her need but also had an open heart for all.

So in the spirit of her house in Nazareth the community provides a welcome to visitors. Before the pandemic there was an average of 3 visitors each night throughout the year, mostly confreres. Then the pandemic grounded most travellers but there were priests who could not return home.

We also coordinate with the refugee settlement work of the Sant’Egidio community in Rome. That community facilitates the arrival of refugees under the Humanitarian Corridor agreement of the EU.

We usually provide accommodation for two young refugee men each year who are transitioning from their settlement programs to independent living. This normally happens after they have been in Italy for about two years.



Fr Peter (Myanmar) with Superior General John Larsen and Fr Pat Devlin, enjoying the hospitality of the General House while studying in Rome.

In previous years most of them were from Syria but this year we also had one from Eritrea.

There are three confreres in the community at present who are “Filipino” at heart, John Larsen, Pat Devlin and Kevin Medilo.

We hope that the spirit of hospitality so evident in the Asia District enhances the welcome provided at Villa Santa Maria and enriches the other ministries of Administration and Academic Study.

“ In the Spirit of her house in Nazareth the community provides a welcome to visitors ”



The Harmony Centre under development in Ranong to promote the IRIC Programme at Marist Asia Foundation

Harmony Centre

Inter Religious & Inter Cultural Dialogue (IRICD)

The Marist Community in Ranong, Thailand is in the process of establishing a Harmony Centre. This centre is a space where everyone is welcomed regardless of cultural differences, religious affiliations, and ideology. It provides a venue for people to build up friendships grounded in compassion, reconciliation, justice, mutual respect, peace and harmony. It is a place where people can be comfortable without fear of being watched and judged -- a space where trust is nourished harmoniously.

For the last three months, Larry Sabud has been trying to do some initial development at the Marist Harmony Centre (Prayer House) and it is shaping up slowly.

The next stage of development is the construction of a multi-purpose structure that can accommodate Inter-Religious and Inter-Cultural Dialogue conferences, meetings, meditation, seminar – workshops, training, and other small group sessions for Marist Asia Foundation (MAF) teachers, staff and students.

We are also planning to renovate the existing house: replace the roof, and construct 2 rooms with a veranda beside the stream. In addition, we will also attach a space in the existing house that could be used for a dining hall and meetings.



Where do we get the money from to fund the construction of the Harmony Centre?

Recently, the Marist Community Ranong sent a proposal through the General Administration for funding of the development of the Harmony Centre.

Let us hope that our benefactors will give consideration to our humble project proposal as we seek to build a spirit of encounter and respect across religions and cultures here on the Thai Burma Border.



Fr Gil and Staff with 33 boys who are supported off the streets into a safe shelter, education and skills for their future.

Balay Pasilungan Home for Street Children - Davao

Fr Gil Casio - Director

This year, the Marist District of Asia celebrates the 32 years Anniversary of the Foundation of Balay Pasilungan (“Home for Shelter”).

In 4 May 1989, our confrere Pat Devlin founded the Balay Pasilungan in order to help the street children in Davao City. It was started as a drop-in centre and later when it was turned over to the Marist Sisters in 1999, became a residential shelter for street boys.

The administration of Balay Pasilungan was given to the Marianist Fathers in 2005 and they strengthened the educational approach for the children.

The Marists in Asia took over again the administration of Balay Pasilungan in 2013 and appointed Fr Lionel Mechavez as Executive Director in collaboration with the Marist Laity. He reinstalled the drop-in centre, known as Pope Francis Drop-in Centre and the ‘After-Care’ program was also developed.

In the beginning of 2021, Fr Lionel turned over his role as Executive Director to his confrere Fr Gil Casio. Fr Gil continues on the mission of the Marists among the most abandoned and vulnerable children.

This year, the project of Balay Pasilungan will be extending its support to the boys who will reach the age of 15. (The Balay Pasilungan has been a home to street boys from 5 to 14 years of age.)



Balay Pasilungan Staff receiving input and training and bonding together as a team. Staff and Volunteers support 33 children in the Programme.

The Balay Kalambuan Project (“Home for Development”) will be established to provide shelter and education to the boys who seek to finish their studies and who are not ready to return to their families or do not have any family to return to. The young adolescents will be supported to build capacity, life skills and independent living.