



CONCH

Quarterly

Messages of
synodality,
hope
and
positivity



MARCH 2024

Synodality from within

Reflection from the Provincial—Fr Milikiade Rayalu SM



Towards the end of last month, I attended the Federation of Religious Annual general meeting where some sessions were also put in place. One such of these was about Synodality that was presented to us by Bishop Darius of the Diocese of Bougainville. I am aware that this is no longer a new topic of discussion as most of us would already be familiar with it. What caught my attention is what he pointed out that well before this idea of synodality was brought to our attention it has already been exercised in some ways by the presence of the Religious communities who brought the Christian faith to our shores in Oceania in particular. They brought this idea of doing things and supporting one another while on mission.

The call to bring about the idea of inclusivity and be counted in what they can do as members

I am very much aware that while this idea of community was such to an extent lived out in the missions there was at the same time the idea of priesthood as the authority in a community of believers where one is serving. People look up to the priest as the one with the knowledge and the influence to bring about change and implement new ideas about education, getting projects done and communicating with others in businesses or government departments. I have seen certain priests with such capability, but it does not affect his relationship in community life while others tend to bring that authority too in community. While this may have been true in the past twenty to thirty years this is no longer so much the case in today's understanding.

What synodality for me has brought is the awareness to strengthen our community life and help others we serve to a deeper understanding and awareness on how they as baptized persons can also be counted to make their contribution. The call to bring about the idea of inclusivity and be counted in what they can do as members of the Body of Christ.

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My fear as I go about my visits, the emails I received in my communications indicate that there is still much to be done with certain individuals to realize this. I know the tempo of each one of us is different, it is why there is a call to a deeper reflection in this Lenten season to honestly see where in me is this call to conversion challenging me. In the Office of Reading recently explained that the Israelites could have taken a shorter way to the Promised Land but

Synodality from within

God wanted to lead the his Chosen people to the desert in order that they realize their weaknesses to be worthy of the place given to them.

Confreres, as we journey deep into our desert time let us become conscious of our need of healing within. We have so much to offer to each other and to the people we serve by realizing first of all our needs to become a little bit better than yesterday. There is the danger that we may try to serve others to meet our own needs, which of course defeats the purpose of our mission. As

we look forward to Easter let us make this time a meaningful experience to a new life in our Easter journey.

Let us pray for one another in this time of grace that we can grow a little bit better from who we were yesterday.

MAY ALL HAVE A MEANINGFUL AND GRACE-FILLED EASTER SEASON

“No harm to dance a little” from Dala to Wainoni



Dala Parish was our last Marist presence in the island of Malaita. It was on the 19th November, 2023 that our community had been asked to officially handover the parish back to the Diocese of Auki. Only having spent 8 months in this mission, seems too short with the feeling that I have not offered much to this vibrant parish where our Marists confreres have served faithfully over the years.

Our Marist community consisted of Fr. Lutoviko Olie and I, who has served this parish in a short span of 8-10 months. We had to finish on a high note preparing the local Diocesan priests to take over the parish program and assets for a smooth transition at the official handover. There were mixed feelings among the parishioners, resenting and wishing we could stay a bit longer than expected. As I reflected upon these reactions from the parishioners, I remembered “The Founder Speaks” Article 50, there is no harm to ‘dance a little’. It was a proud moment to dance a little because it speaks volumes of our Marist presence and mission, we’ve done which has touched the lives of the people. Despite this hustle, the focus of letting go must be executed to free our community to take up a more needed mission at Wainoni in the island of Makira.

There is no harm to ‘dance a little’ [FS #50]

and I are heavily involved with the new school and the parish. The comfort of Dala to the difficult mission at Wainoni is a new chapter for our community whereby the only means to visit different communities in the parish is via foot patrol which Fr. Lutoviko is currently doing at the moment.

A lot of the infrastructures in the parish has been left to deteriorate for a long time and will be part of our goals to repair and renovate in order to bring back life to the parish.

The greatest joy in this part of the mission is the school, still in its infant stage, students are flocking in to enroll from all over the island since they have heard the Marists are coming to run the school. With the number of students increasing, they have motivated our mission with renewed energy and enthusiasm to carry out the work of the Society at Wainoni for the Greater Glory of God and the Honour of our Mother, Mary.

The transitional part to Wainoni took up another greater challenge, now that Fr. Lutoviko, Br. Andrew





Children of Toromako mission

Marist Community Experience—Vanuatu Pouono Ve'a

On the 13th of December, 2023 I departed Fiji for Vanuatu. The purpose of my trip was to have an experience of how to live in a Marist Community together with the confreres in Vanuatu and have a taste of the challenges and joys they encountered in their mission. It was also to experience the culture of the people.

After being welcomed by the Sector Leader, Fr. Lolesio Tupa together with Frs. Morlini and Louis Maite at Port Vila I flew to the big island of Espiritu Santo. From the airport I was taken to the Marist community at Port Orly and there met Frs Benedict and Raymond. From there the members of the Marist community at Big Bay, Fr. Kolio Misiloi and Bro. Berenado on a boat trip took me to Big Bay where I stayed for the rest of my Marist community experience.

I noticed that the organization of the village is mostly done by the Chief, Catechist, Eucharist Minister, Prayer-Leader and The Chairman – these people are like the council of the village. They call meetings and discuss issues pertaining to the lives of the people. I also noticed that when it comes to which denomination they belong, the whole village will choose only one. So, if its Catholic, the whole village will join the Catholic faith and if its Seventh Day Adventist, the whole village join the SDA.

My experience of the life and mission of our confreres was very inspiring. The most fruitful experience was being there with them and witness their support for each other in community life and their availability for mission. It was a memorable experience since this was my first time to meet most of them.

Although the mission in Big Bay is huge and for me it was tough to climb mountains and to walk long distances to visit communities, but what captured my attention was the joy and faithfulness of the confreres no matter the circumstances.

I also enjoyed the moments we spent time sharing stories of their formation years in the seminary. I was struck by something one of confreres said: “There are two ways of journeying to priesthood, there is the easy way and the hard way. It is a lifetime calling so, if your journey to priesthood is an easy one, may be one day it will be also easy to leave the priesthood. However, if your journey to priesthood is the hard way, then it will be hard to leave the priesthood.”

This has motivated and strengthened me in my discernment recently especially in my

times of struggles during this formation year and I count it as blessing for my journey.

I have heard seminarians and priests talking about malaria, the disease that is rife in Melanesian countries. Well, while there at Big Bay I had my baptism of fire. The mosquitoes probably like my Tongan blood and not long malaria struck. I survived and lost a bit of weight which was good for me anyway.

It was time to return to Fiji and it was one of the worst times, saying goodbye to the people and the Marist confreres of Vanuatu. On my last day in the island, I shared that in the history of Tonga, the explorer call Tonga, “The Friendly Islands”. It might be the hospitality of the Tongan people that the explorer called them friendly. After my community experiences at Big Bay, I consider these people my ‘Friendly Island’. It is because of the way they live their simple lives which makes me feel at home and not feeling like a foreigner.

Thank you very much indeed Frs. Lolesio, Kolio, Raymond, Benedict, Bill, Morini, Lui, and Brs. Bernando and Leonard and also to all people of Big Bay mission for a memorable experience living in your midst.

Tenkyu tumas olgeta.

