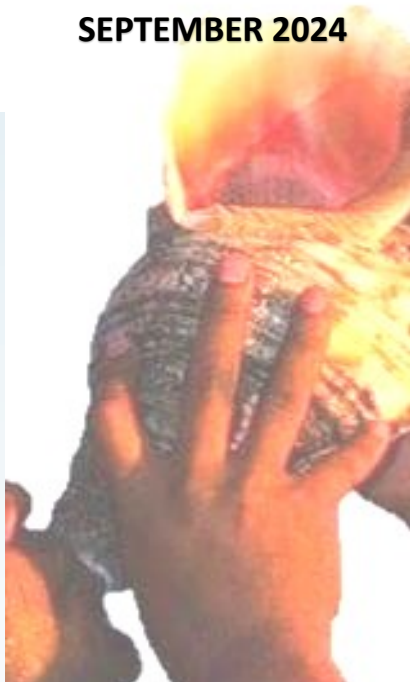




# CONCH

## Quarterly

Messages of  
synodality,  
hope  
and  
positivity



### A PROPHETIC CHALLENGE

**R**electing on the current situation in New Caledonia and the difficulties faced by our men one wonders how do we bring conviction if not peace to a people who for many years have enjoyed the prosperity of development and the luxury of living side by side with a people who all of a sudden see us as enemy. I am pretty sure not all local New Caledonians see it this way, but it seems that this is a strong reason that arose out from the burning of church buildings, presbyteries and convents. All this time there must be this lingering dissatisfaction in the way we have built and supported the Church and to be falsely accused of our support of the colonial government by what I believe as limiting their rights to their land. I do not have any clear argument to prove my point but I can only

express the Marist attitude to gather all the people of the world under the mantle of Our Blessed Mother for their salvation.

This may be shocking to us in our time and in the Pacific but we know from our history that it was in the midst of such turmoil that our foundation as a Religious Congregation was born. In fact, it was a far worse situation at that time. Those founders remain sources of inspiration for us today in the way they started their first mission in the Bugey mountains.



Delphine Mayeur via Reuters 14/5/24

What I'm trying to say here is that each era seemed to have its difficulties and messengers are sent forward to become the instruments of Gods mercy and peace. This came strongly to me as I reflect on the Office of Readings about the prophet Jeremiaiah who wrote, "I hear so many disparaging me, "Terror from every side". All who used to be my friends watched for my downfall..." (Jer. 20: 12-13). There will always be the tendency for evil to try and weaken and disrupt any attempts to let the Spirit of God work in people's lives. The biggest challenge in this kind of situation is to ask, 'God where are you? The prayer of the prophet again echoes across saying, "But you Lord of Hosts, you who probe with justice, who scrutinize the loins and heart, let me see the vengeance you will take on them, for I have com-



Photo: Thomas Padilla/AP, 14/6/24.

### This issue:

**A Prophetic Challenge**  
Fr Milikiade Rayalu SM

**The Marist Studies Experience**  
Fr Ambrose Kakatai SM

**The EAPI Renewal**  
Fr Patelisio Kiutau Taufa SM

mitted my cause to you". While this can be the end result to a long struggle however, to remain firm and steadfast can also be a long dark night of challenge.

On a much lighter note, in my visitations I find this is true to some of the sharing from some confreres in their encounter in the pastoral field. At the same time, I also noticed in the superiors in some of our communities the difficulties they face from their own communities. This is especially when they are still young and trying to find their footing on how to remain courageous and peaceful while trying to bring a certain spirit of unity in our common life.

Constitution 127 continues to be a stark reminder of what we are primarily called even in difficult circumstances. I must say I do admire not only superiors but members of the of the community who know the difficulty in community life but at the same time remain open to accept the differences that do exist in our lives.

Such experiences also help us to understand what Jesus actually went through in his own time, and from his own people. He was not deterred by the people's rejection of

him and his teachings because he knew and strongly believe in the ever presence of God who is Father. And he actually told his disciples, "A slave is not greater than his master, if they persecuted me, they will do it to you too" (Jn. 15:20). And that has been the story of the work

of evangelization up until now.

Any attempt to bring about the good, will often be met with obstacles and difficulties.

What I am trying to say is that as a prophet that it is the very nature of our calling is the challenges we will have to face. Anyone thinking about avoiding or hoping not to go through hardship and problems will have a hard time

living the call. What is really important is to see and know what these hardships and difficulties can do to our lives. In fact, it's all about our experiences. The prophet Jeremiah puts it very well (18: 3-6) that we are like clay in the potter's hand. We are shaped and re-shaped to a new person and can see things differently because our journey is not alone. This is why following in the footsteps of Mary can so often be misty, unclear and foggy but they can bring a lot of good out of us.



Photo: Nouvelle Calédonie La 1ere, May 2024

## MARIST STUDIES EXPERIENCE - Fr Ambrose Kakatai SM



To be given the opportunity to take time off from everything and relook back at our Marist history and its aspirations for the future was the highlight of my Marist studies experience. It was a blessing to be part of this Marist Studies program as it not only included other Marists confreres but also members from the other

branches of the Marist family.

In total there were three Marist Fathers, two Marist Missionary Sisters, one Marist Brother and three lay Marists all coming from the many different regions that we serve, namely from the United States of America, New Zealand; Solomon Islands, Philippines, Bougainville, Fiji, Canada and lastly one from as far north as Norway.

At the beginning, the program was centered on getting to know one another and the different fields of work we involved ourselves in the mission of the Society of Mary. Later it was a time of relearning and reliving our Marist heritage and the greater

lengths our Founder had gone to establish the Society of Mary. This was done through the Colonian walk around Rome and the different presentation on the four different branches of the Society. It was also a time of re-educating ourselves on the realities and challenges of our time especially the challenges to the call of religious life.

One of the important themes highlighted in the talks and the presentation from this year's Marist studies coordinator Fr Tony was the need to appreciate our history and using it as a tool to steer us forward into the future.

The evolution of time has seen a drastic shift in the appreciation of the importance of the vocation to religious life and from the shared experiences of the participants one could easily sense the greater need to address it more now than ever to the faithful especially to

the people we come into contact with every day. It is not only a Marist plight but also the plight of many other different religious and Diocesan congregations today.

The program ended with different presentations from each participant on the different topic of our

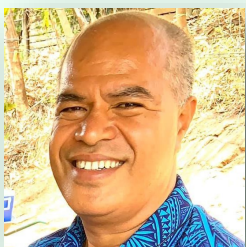




own choosing mainly on the different aspects of Marist life, the mission and the stories of the people who have helped shaped this dream of Fr Colin into a reality.

Finally, I would like to sincerely thank Father Tony Kennedy for co-ordinating this program well and instilling in me a desire to know more about Founder. And to all of you the participants in this Marist Studies I would like to thank you for being part of my own journey of discovery and learning. May God bless you all in your ministry.

## EAPI RENEWAL, MANILA - Fr Patelisio Kiutau Taufa SM



**W**hen I was approached to go to EAPI for renewal in August 2023, I was filled with mixed feelings. I thought renewal is for those who have been working in the pastoral field for years, those who feel burned out and those who need to let go and perhaps its time to have a break and a complete rest. I was not in any of this category. I was confused and reluctant to go. Eventually, I had to accept the invitation and go.

As I arrived at EAPI and meeting participants from all parts of Asia including participants from the United States and Africa it changed my perception. Meeting these new people was already an excitement. There were priests, religious, and Laity. It was a new experience altogether. I could not wait for the program to begin.

The program enabled deep sharing and learning. Each one realized the need for renewal. The assumption that I had before arriving at EAPI was challenged. I embraced every opportunity as I came to term with my own vulnerability. I was burned out and not aware of it. I was exhausted but the busyness in the mission field blinded me to see the need to take time to rest, to recharge the battery and acquire new pastoral skills and approach. It dawned on me that I was no longer life giving to the people I serve. I was a man dead walking. Fortunately, I was not alone. Most of the participants had the same experiences as I did. It was a privilege to journey together to find ourselves again. The Synodal Church that Pope Francis encouraged us to participate in challenged us to listen to each other's stories of lived experiences and to discern where the Spirit is leading us.

In the weekend I continued to learn from one another in our different cultural activities. The cultural diversity was enriching. The different modules were enlightening. My whole life was renewed.

At the end of the program, I could not stop thanking God for the opportunity to go and be renewed. I am grateful for the Provincial for giving me the opportunity to renew my life so as to be more effective in my ministry.



## An Experience of Marist Formation work today.

Fr Denis Revi SM

There were still four French Marists, one Irishman, one American, one English Marist, one Italian and other Oceanians making up the Marist Region of Vanuatu. Today only one Italian and every other member of the Vanuatu Sector are Oceanians. The Marist culture there at that time was predominantly French or western European and I grew to understanding it that way. In my formation years other cultures, often Anglophone influenced and complemented my initial French impressions of Marist life. I began to understand that Marist life is lived within a particular culture.



To  
be

honest this life has been both challenging and rewarding on many levels. One thing for certain is that I had to embrace the ways that English speaking and Francophone cultures lived Marist culture in every place that I have been asked to go. I knew I could not go with preconceived ideas of the way I live or have lived in one particular cultural context. I have to go with an open mind and heart. I have to help create a new culture where we all respect our differences.

However, experience has shown me that often what happens is that I either start drowning, when I can't handle it anymore, or I keep treading water with some desperate swimming strokes until I eventually struggle through and arrive at the shore. Then life begins and things settle down for a while. However, that doesn't necessarily last too long as one must be ready to be uprooted again.

My journey is much easier than those of the heroic early Marists who had very limited resources at hand. I know I cannot stand by idly full of self-pity because that shows lack of faith in the good Lord and his Blessed Mother.

Last year when I accepted to come to Brazil, many people asked me how long I would be here. To most I responded, I don't know. Then I realized that if I knew how long or settled in for a limited time, I would end up not fully living the experience. I would just get by, passing days as I awaited the lapse of time.

I realize each time I enter a new culture I have to fight my own nostalgia for the comfortable places, cultures and



## MY EXPERIENCE IN AFRICA

Fr Kosema Masei SM

**“A small hill leads you to a big mountain”**

Nelson MANDELA once said: « Faith is the ability to see the invisible, to believe in the impossible and to trust in the unknown. »

When everything was concluded in Rome in 2020, I was so excited to go out for mission; trying things I have learnt, learning new things, meeting new people, and discovering new cultures and horizons. But once alone in my room, a lot of unanswered questions raised themselves in my mind, and I started to wonder if I made the right choice to ask for an experience outside of my home Province or not. One of the questions that bothered me was about the presence in that new mission land; will I be able to give my own contribution? When I landed on the African continent, strangely, most of



those worries disappeared, maybe because I knew it was too late to turn back, I am here now. Or perhaps I was too worried about how I was going to find my way in the Marist community in Yaoundé, since this was to be my first time here.

This is my fourth year now in the Marist District of Africa, and I can confidently say that I do not regret my choice. It is really a wonderful experience; an experience that help me to discover new things and even learn more about myself, especially with regards to my own limitations and coming out of my own comfort zone, but this does not mean that it was 'honey from the rock' every single day. As in everyone's journey, it had ups and downs. I faced some culture shock like most people in a foreign land. Even though I was prepared already for changes, I was caught by some of the things such as the way they dance during Mass, the food and so on. I was introduced to many traditional dishes, and they are delicious, but for some of them

country has its own language, Kirundi, and not everyone can speak French. So I tried to learn the language. Unfortunately, it was not enough to converse with the people. The frustration from not understanding and not being understood, took over and I started to close in on myself, something I am not proud of. And perhaps that is the darkest point in my experience here in Africa.

Now I am in Senegal, giving moral classes to the non-Catholic students in our school. Teaching and I are two different things, but the prophet Isaiah reminds us: "our ways are not God's ways." It is a new experience because 99 percent of my students are Muslims. Spending time in the classroom with these students and trying to help them to be good persons in the future is our little contribution, I guess, to that the part of the Dialogue that the Church has been calling us to build with our brothers and sisters from other Religions. One of my favorite



I needed courage to eat them because of the meat they cooked. From time to time, I would just step back and prepare some Futunian food as it is quite easy to get some yams, coconuts and pork. This culture shock was quite hard, but as we often say in the formation house, I must observe and learn first to understand the people and their cultures in order to understand why they are acting this way.

During my first three years, I worked in two different countries, but one of the common points is the fact I was often mistaken for either a Chinese person, an Indian, an Arab, or even a "white" man. Sometimes, it sounds funny, other times it is not, but those were opportunities for me to talk about the beauty of Oceania and my home island.

I started in Yaoundé, and after one year, I went to Burundi with two other confreres to re-open the Marist community in Bujumbura and build a new school. To live in two different countries means different contexts and experiences. In Yaoundé, I was in a Parish, and despite the crises in the Anglophone side of Cameroon, I enjoyed myself due to the work at the parish in which I was able to meet a lot of people, and to get to know them. I was fortunate enough to have both French and English to be able to communicate with everyone. And different responsibilities in both community and the parish were opportunities for me to give my own contribution.

In Burundi, the context was different. The country has a very strong history, and sometimes, we can see some of the consequences today. The main barrier for me was the language. The

African proverbs, 'a small hill leads you to a big mountain', means that every little thing, every step on the way, can help you achieving greatness, but I prefer to look at it in the sense that every little thing during these 4 years counts.

My presence in this Marist District is, of course, insignificant. The people did not become holier with or through my presence. For that, I leave it to God, and to God alone for He has done it perfectly. But as for me, I give thanks to the Lord for giving me this opportunity, for even though there were difficult times, beyond those difficulties lays the joy of serving the people of God in more than 15 000km away from home. I know that I have gained a lot from this experience, and sincerely hope that I will be able to use and to share it with people that I will come across in the future.

