

SEE YOU IN HULST!



When our apostolic school (minor seminary) was transferred to the secondary school in Hulst, 25 years ago, there was a "swap" with a nearby school building that was converted into an apartment complex with eight comfortable senior homes and all the space needed for a religious community.

Four of us now live there: Father Siebo Leppen (96), Father Wim van Broekhoven (81), Father Tonny Verbraeken (80) and Father Ad Blommerde (79). Until recently, we were five. Brother Paulus Tanghe (102) died on Christmas Eve. We experience here how true it is what is said (in Dutch): Old age comes with ailments! It means that we can only be available for pastoral services to a very limited extent. Our lives are now mainly coloured by praying together, sharing everyday life together, and caring for each other.



We especially experience how rich we are by letting others share in the life of the community. For example, there is Jacqueline Mahu: she is the heart of our community, she ensures that we lack nothing in everyday life, she makes sure that we take our pills on time and takes us in her car for a visit to the doctor or family, takes care of socializing, etc. And with her there a circle of helpers: a nurse comes every day for those who need it, the rooms and the big house are cleaned, friends come to cook, etc.



The bursar for the Dutch Marists, Mr Mischa de Vliegere, has his office here in the house and is part of our daily lives. Without all those lovely people we wouldn't survive. If you want to experience something of what this "***extended community***" means, it is best to pop in just after ten o'clock in the morning when we are all together over coffee and – often freshly baked – cake. Or, even better, come and stay for a while. We have plenty of room for guests to join in this community of religious and laity (and to enjoy the pretty town of Hulst with its medieval ramparts and beautiful Gothic Basilica).

In short: see you in Hulst!

Ad Blommerde, sm

DEAR MARIST FRIENDS

With his reflections on the Solemnity of the Mother of God, Faustino Ferrari has, as we say in English, stolen my thunder.

As we begin the New Year, we naturally entrust the coming months to the protection of Mary. We live in a time of geopolitical turmoil and uncertainty.

Personally, and in our communities, challenges abound. Still, the beginning of the New Year is, above all, a time of hope and aspiration.

Happy New Year!

Kevin Duffy, sm

PRAYER INTENTION:

Let us pray the Holy Spirit for guidance in the forthcoming process of discernment taking place in France regarding our communities and ministries

ITALIAN VISITS



In recent months, Kevin Duffy and Declan Marmion visited the unit of Italy. Kevin visited the Italian confreres in the two communities in Turin: **Moncalieri** and **Corso Francia**. One third of Italian confreres live in these two communities. They are about 30 minutes apart by car. Usually, it is straightforward to travel from Paris to Turin by train. However, train lines were disrupted by a mudslide and Kevin and François Chauvet travelled by plane. François accompanied both visitors who benefited from his

skills in interpretation. Declan visited the three communities in **Rome, Castiglion Fiorentino and Pratola Peligna**. Both Castiglion Fiorentino and Pratola Peligna are a few hours by car from Rome. In all the communities, the visitors benefited from the warm hospitality of the Italian confreres.

When we pray for the different communities in the province, month by month, often we know little about the ministries there. Confreres in Pratola Peligna, Rome and Castiglion Fiorentino engage in a variety of parish ministries and other more diverse activities such as chaplaincies in schools and a prison. The confreres in Corso Francia staff a public chapel which hosts several activities such as work with the poor. Like some other communities in the province such as Meppen or Hull or Hulst, Moncalieri has a body of confreres engaged in different ministries without a single shared institutional commitment.



Kevin Duffy, sm

REFLECTION ON THE NEW YEAR WITH MARY

The new year opens with a feast dedicated to the Mother of God. As Christians we want to place the beginning (and the passing) of the year under Mary's protection. The idea of protection dates back to the very beginnings of Christianity. In fact, the oldest prayer addressed to the Mother of God, the *Sub tuum* that we Marists recite in the morning and in the evening, is a plea for protection: **'We fly to your protection, O Holy Mother of God'**. Later, in both the Christian East and the West, this idea was expressed through images like the broad mantle (or veil) of the Mother of God who takes care of the Christian people. Mary who protects, accompanies and saves from dangers is among the most cherished images throughout the centuries.

On Golgotha, Mary's motherhood then takes on a new dimension, where the Son gives her as mother to the beloved disciple. In the figure of the disciple, Mary's motherhood extends to the entire people of God. There are many ways to express in our lives this protection of the Mother of God. As Marists we do this by recognising her as our first and perpetual superior. We entrust to her our common life, with its various needs, and our mission - a participation in her work. And in the light of Christmas, enlightened by the coming of the Son, we celebrate our common Mother, pleading with her to **'Deliver us from all dangers, O glorious and blessed Virgin.'**



Faustino Ferrari, sm