



DECEMBER 2021 | NEWSLETTER

# MARIST ASIA

Society of Mary | District of Asia

## Celebrating the Grace of 40 Years of Marist Presence and Mission in Asia

It was during the Generalate of Fr. Bernard Ryan, SM that the Society of Mary expanded to other parts of the world by founding the mission Districts. Thus, the Districts of Brazil and the Philippines commenced in 1981 composed of Marists coming from different units of the Society.

Four Marists set out to the Philippines to start the Marist mission: Fr. Kevin Mowbray (NZ), Fr. Kevin Stewart (NZ), Fr. Nisi Oto'ota (Tonga), and Fr. Brian Keenan, (Ireland). They arrived in Manila on a flight from Hongkong at the tail end of a typhoon. They landed safely at Manila International Airport on the 24th of November 1981. Even the bad weather could not stop their coming. At this point, they knew the risks and challenges of the mission and implantation of the Society in Asia.

The Marist pioneers lived for a few months in Manila and studied Tagalog and then moved to the southern part of the Philippines, to Mindanao. They lived in Cotabato City and were welcomed by the Marist Brothers. Arch. Philip Smith, OMI, DD, the Archbishop of Cotabato assigned them to look after the coastal Parishes of Lebak and Kalamansig. And from there, the Marists had worked in Kabacan, Diwalwal, Bukidnon, Davao, Digos and Ranong, Thailand. Ministries were also established over the years with Balay Pasilungan, Prison Ministry, Indigenous People apostolate, Chaplaincy, Campus Ministry, Parishes, Education, Health and Inter-Cultural Dialogue.



*The Marist District of Asia is truly blessed with so many Marists who continue to carry in their hearts the Spirit of Mary.*

**"Whatever the District now is not only the work of a single Marist but of everybody to enable the Society of Mary to do what is required by the Lord "to go and proclaim the good news to the ends of the earth".**

**- Fr. Chris Ganzon, SM**

The District Thrives and Grinds to Do the Work of Mary

# Marist Asia at 40



**Many more Marists arrived to work in the mission.** Michael John Ryan (England), Philip Callaghan (Australia), Michael Donnelly (NZ), Pat Devlin (NZ), Rob Devlin (NZ), Chris Carlile (Australia), Joe Mclaughlin (USA), Aliko Langi (Tonga), Gavin Foster (NZ), Paul Bergin (NZ), John Larsen (NZ), Larry Duffy (Ireland), Fred Kado (Fiji), Peter Conaghan (NZ), Damian Dempsey, (NZ), Andrew Nee (NZ), Denis O'Brien (NZ), Kevin Redmond (Australia), and Fr. John Pereira, (Samoa). Their lives and contributions to the District are never forgotten. Each of this Marist left an imprint of their lives and service in the hearts of many people they encountered and ministered. The District is forever and truly indebted to them!

I recognize our fellow Marist priests who were part of our community but now belonging to the Diocesan clergy: Frs. Joel Aliligay, Darwin Alcontin and Michael Ty. I also recognize the "many Marist seminarians" who have joined our formation program; learn about the life and Charism of the Society and yet were called to another way of life. I also recognize our Lay Marists, Lay Missionaries, and Mission partners. The Marist District of Asia is truly blessed with so many Marists who continue to carry in their hearts the spirit of Mary.

It is with great joy that I acknowledge and commend the commitment and great work of the current members of the District of Asia: Pat Muckian (Ireland), Frank Bird (NZ), John Larsen (NZ), Pat Devlin (NZ), John Guo (China), and Ricardo Navarrete (Mexico). Filipino priests: Kevin Medilo, Lionel Mechavez, Gil Casio, Arnold Garferio, Lauro Arcede, Fernando Ingente, Roque Rebito and Larry Sabud.

The District thrives and grinds to do the Lord's mission and the Work of Mary in spite of the trials and challenges. We are always inspired by the zeal and sacrifices of the early Marists who shared their lives and gifts to shape this District in the vision of Fr. Jean Claude Colin. The District may have changed now, and yet we continue to live the foundational spirit and character of the Society of Mary by a life of prayer and community, simplicity, working for the marginalized, internationality, working with laypeople, and close to the lives of ordinary people. Whatever the District now is not only the work of a single Marist but of everybody to enable the Society of Mary to do what is required by the Lord "to go and proclaim the good news to the ends of the earth". And guided and inspired always by the words of Mary, our first and perpetual superior address to the servants, "do whatever He tells you".

We are grateful and inspired by the work of the Marist missionaries who came to our shore. The call however is for us, the local Marists to be missionaries to Asia or to other parts of the world. I think of the time when Larry Sabud volunteered to Peru or Ronald Lida or Joel Aliligay going to Burma or Gil Casio and Arnold Garferio going to Ranong, Thailand or Kevin Medilo to Marayong, Australia. Am I willing to follow in their footsteps? Missionaries are more urgently needed nowadays as it was in the past.

We are truly blessed by God as we celebrate the grace of 40th years of Marist presence and mission in Asia. And to mark this special year, on 6th December 2021, the former and current members of the District had a zoom meeting to connect and catch up with one another. It was a wonderful historic moment to see each other and to listen to one another once again. It brings back good and happy memories. We are truly grateful for each other and to the many people whom we minister over the last 40 years and those who supported us until the present. The District continues to exist in Asia because of God's grace and the generosity of Marist missionaries and many generous-supportive people.

As year 2021 ends, on behalf of the Marists of the District of Asia, in our celebration of 40 years of Marist presence and mission, I would like to say a huge thank you to each of you who have journeyed, prayed and supported us and our ministries over the last 40 years. Your constant help and generosity give us strength and encouragement to continue bringing God's love and mercy to the people of Asia (Philippines-Thailand-beyond) in Mary's hidden and unknown way. May you continue to support us and our mission in the years ahead!

Happy 40 years anniversary to all Marists in Asia! I wish you a joyful Christmas and a healthy and grace-filled New Year 2022.



Prayers and Blessings,

**Fr. Christopher Thadeos R. Ganzon, SM**  
**District Superior**



Marist Ministries in Our Lady of Fatima Parish Continue to Welcome Families

# Matti Community



**It seems that the COVID protocols are well bedded into our way of life.** People are accustomed to living with the virus, gone are the uncertainties of previous times. Many people are vaccinated and there are less emergency centers around the community. The vaccination rate in Davao is the highest in the country at 70% and its 30 % here in Digos.

There has been a huge drive locally to recruit people at the local Barangay level for vaccination. This has resulted in more people attending Church's activities especially the incoming "misa de gallo." People are very confident about going about their daily tasks. Next week we begin the traditional Misa de Gallo Novena with Masses beginning at 4.30 am. The local government unit has dispensed the last hour of the early morning curfew to allow people to attend mass. Thankfully there has been no recent surges across the community. It is not now difficult to move from one province to another. So far we have not been affected by the new Omicron variant.

Some people are worried about taking the vaccine, including some members of our staff. In the past few months a new Olympic swimming pool has reopened, it had been closed for 4 years. It is noticeable to that many more people have taken up cycling, indeed it's the number one fundraising project of the parish. School children are still attending modular classes and there is a possibility that children who are vaccinated may have face to face classes.

The synodal process begun by Pope Francis in worldwide Church has begun locally with communities choosing delegates to participate. This was preceded by a mission congress for the leaders and for the youth. It was arranged two years ago. It was held virtually and was greatly appreciated by the Youth. Finally, national and local elections are taking place next May and already election posters can be seen everywhere. Our ministries in Our Lady of Fatima Parish continue and we are happy to welcome families with their kids who had been not allowed to attend the Holy Mass for 2 years.

The Marist Vocation Year was also launched in the parish. It was attended by some youth leaders and those who are working in the vocation ministry.

The two Kevin's Begin a New Chapter in Marayong's History

# Marayong Community!



**After a long delay, Omnes Gentes - Marayong community has finally landed in Parramatta Diocese and has started with the parish ministry in Saint Andrew Parish in Marayong, West of Sydney. On November 2nd, Kevin Redmond joined Kevin Medilo to form the Marist community and be part of the wider parish community. Floyd Gatana from Oceania Province will hopefully join the community in the next few months.**

The parish is busy catching up with the sacramental needs (baptism, confirmation, wedding etc.) of the parish community due to the backlog caused by the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown.

The parish community is primarily composed of Australians, Filipinos, Indians, Sri Lankans, Maltese, South Americans and many of central European heritage.

The parish team supports the sacramental and spiritual needs of the Saint Andrew primary and secondary schools which have around 1,800 students.

The parish community through its various groups like the Vinnies, Social Justice group, have responded to the social and material needs of the people in the area especially during the trying times of Covid-19 pandemic.



**- Kevin Medilo and Kevin Redmond**



We look forward to even bigger and better things

# Ranong Community



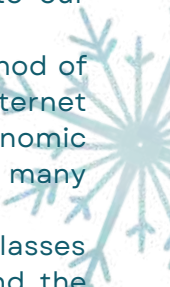
**Impact of Covid-19 to MAF Education Programme.** As of January 4, 2021, the Ministry of Education has closed all schools in Covid affected zones for the month of January. As the pandemic situation gets worse the government has ordered indefinite closure of all schools in Thailand. MAF education centre has been closed since then. Thailand experiences a high rate of Covid - 19 infections in the middle of 2021. In order to control the rising number of infections, the government imposed strict restrictions on people's movements. Following the government order and for the safety of MAF staff, volunteer teachers are no longer allowed to deliver educational materials to our students. Since then, all learning activities are solely conducted online.

It is not easy for teachers, students and parents to adapt to the new method of teaching and learning. Difficulties of accessing internet services, unstable internet connections, relocations of migrant families to other places because of economic reasons and some students having no access to smartphones are among the many challenges faced by MAF education programme.

Some students too either have to be absent or stop from attending online classes in order to help the family earn money. The current Covid - 19 situation and the challenges of adapting to the new way of teaching and learning has affected the school online class attendance and learning performance of the students.

**Vaccination Against COVID-19 Virus.** All MAF staff are fully vaccinated. The BMSP and PP students have received Covid-19 vaccines from Ranong Government Hospital. A total of 98 % are fully vaccinated or 159 students. One student was not allowed to have the vaccine because of health conditions and two are below the required age.

**MAF Learning Centre Reopens.** MAF learning centre hopes to reopen this coming January 2022. In accordance with the Thai government's directives for reopening of schools, MAF drafted safety guidelines and health protocols to be submitted to concerned government agencies for approval.



Celebrating the Year with Gratitude

# St. Peter Chanel Community



**At the onset of Covid 19 pandemic**, the Marist Community in Tulip Drive, Davao City is the biggest community in the district with 6 perpetually professed members and 12 Marist students. Since the travel restrictions eased out more than half of the members of the community eventually moved out to their new assignments. Covid pandemic has gifted us to experience an almost monastic life: having more members living under one roof, uninterrupted prayer times and celebration of liturgies, manual work, and household chores as a must to break the routinely daily schedules, and most of all early beads and late rising.

Even with the Covid guidelines and careful observance of health protocols Covid 19 virus managed to break the security of the house in the middle of this year. The whole community including one staff experienced imposed quarantine when a member of the community got tested and turned positive, and several members of the community manifested Covid symptoms. Most expressed that it was a scary experience but the support and lively spirit of the community encouraged everyone. Nobody died.

Fr. John Guo joined Fr. Fernando Ingente to form a community in the International Novitiate in Eden, Toril at the last quarter of this year while there is no novitiate due to travel restrictions that hindered the coming of new novices to the Philippines.

At the end of the year, we were saddened by the death of Fr. John Pereira at the age of 92. For most of us including all Marist students who have been to Davao, Fr. John is a spiritual figure who accompanied us to get reconciled with God. He was a tender and gentle dispenser of God's forgiveness not only to Marists but also to many priests, religious, and lay faithful in Davao. He will be remembered as the father of the Shrine of the Holy Infant Jesus in Matina.

This year was challenging. We have a mixture of departures, fear and anxiety due to illness, and sadness because of death. Even with all of these, the community continues to persevere in attending to the mission. We continue to serve as chaplain to the Carmelite Nuns, we help in the Shrine by saying masses, we also visit the aged and sick at the Missionary of Charity every weekend, the parish priest also asked us to take up a regular Sunday mass schedule in the parish, and we continue to serve and minister to the children of Balay Pasilungan. We are grateful to many conferees, friends, fellow ministry workers, mission supporters and benefactors, and constituents for the encouragement, prayers and supports that helped us keep going. This year was challenging and we are grateful for we have overcome it with the grace of God.

"Enriching, Encouraging and Assisting Marist Vocation"

# Marist Vocation Year



**The official launching of Marist Vocation Year** was on November 15, 2021 on the 146th Death Anniversary of Ven. Jean-Claude Colin- Founder of the Society of Mary in St. Peter Chanel Formation Community. The general theme of the year of Marist vocation is "Enriching, encouraging and assisting Marist vocation". It was attended by the Marist Interested College Students, lay Marists, few visitors, Marist Sisters and Marist Fathers from Digos and Davao communities. The Holy Mass was celebrated and Fr. Lauro Arcede beautifully preached on the treasures left to the Marists by Fr. Founder Jean-Claude Colin specifically the importance of community living; how it challenges Marists but at the same time how it protects Marists from the things that could swallow them and make them far from what Fr. Colin envisioned of a "living a Marist life".

After the mass, Marists and visitors gathered in the garage for the launching. Fr. Roque Rebito, the vocation director gave the short rationale about Marist Vocation Year. Then, they all watched and listened to the video presentation of Fr. John Larsen, SM- Superior General. Fr. Christopher Thadeos Ganzon, SM- District Superior and Fr. Lauro Arcede, SM- Vicar unveiled the logo, signalling for the start of the celebration of Marist Vocation Year in the District of Asia.

The second event happened in Our Lady of Fatima Parish in Digos City on November 21, 2021- the Solemnity of Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. It is a mission parish administered by the Society of Mary. The launching was done after the 9 am mass. It was well participated by over 90 participants- a combination of the ministry of the Altar Servers, Social Communication volunteers, youth from different chapels, Vocation Apostolate coordinators, parish staff and volunteers and lay Marists. The participants enjoyed the dynamics which involved animation, dance presentations, talks and testimonies about living "Marist life". The goal of the launching in the parish is to introduce Marist Vocation especially to the youth. It was well accepted and hopefully it would bear fruits in this whole year of celebration. Fr. Christopher Thadeos Ganzon, SM- parish priest and Fr. Roque Rebito - vocation director unveiled the logo and it created a loud cheer from the participants. "For the greater glory of God and the honour of the mother of God!