

# Reflection from the Superior General

The Feasts of the Epiphany and the Baptism of the Lord mark the end of the Christmas Season and we return to Ordinary Time. We may store away our crib for another year, but we take to heart the learnings from Christmas Season into 2025, especially as we Marists prepare for our General Chapter.

Mary, in the nativity scene, points us to Jesus Christ, as front and centre of our faith. We Marists can easily get distracted from our focus on Christ even as we are busy doing many good things among good people. Jesus Christ is so much more than merely an "idea", or an aspiration, or a nebulous "spirituality". No matter how well-intentioned our undertakings, unless they remain rooted in the real person of Jesus Christ, the Revelation of the Father's love, they will wither from lack of nourishment.

The crib vividly expresses the vulnerability of the Holy Family, fearful and insecure for their future and oppressed by violence and rejection. As we move into 2025, we can be overwhelmed by our own Marist vulnerability or by our personal frailty, even by our sinfulness. Our very vulnerability, personal and institutional, is no reason for discouragement but rather an invitation to trust in God's saving grace as we

move into a new year. Even if we are house-bound, for whatever reason, we are always united as one Society committed fraternally to the Work of Mary in whatever manner we can contribute.

Bethlehem was situated on the distant peripheries of Empire, far from the centres of power and commerce. We Marists, too, will find the new life of Christ when we take the risk of going out to "the peripheries", broadly understood. Pope Francis is always reminding us that as Religious we "belong" on the peripheries. Sometimes we Marists begin on the peripheries and before long we find ourselves gravitating back towards the centre, so we need to continue to re-orient our compasses back to the peripheries. Some of our most dynamic Marist communities and missions find themselves, hidden and unknown, far from the centres of power and finance within our world.

The shepherds also help us as we approach 2025. These shepherds were among the poorest peoples of their time. We find Jesus Christ at home among the poorest. The shepherds invite us to journey with the poor of our world over 2025 believing that Christ is at home among us. When we come to know more poor people by their own names, and as our friends, it is only natural that we will search with them for creative ways to build a more just world.

The Wise Men from the East are welcomed by Mary and Joseph, bringing their different perspectives, different languages and experiences. They ask awkward questions to those in power and are unpredictable when it comes to planning. They bear strange gifts and we are not sure what to make of them. We can find it hard to welcome strangers and much easier to ignore or reject them. Our Marist communities are also called to welcome the foreigner, who may even be a Marist from elsewhere, and appreciate their gifts. When we turn into ourselves we can easily become "self-referential" (another favorite Pope Francis word). At present, our General House community in Rome is welcoming one young Muslim man from war-torn Sudan. We are all having to learn new things and make allowances for each other. It's not always easy for him or for us, but it is enlightening.

Mary and Joseph, in a faith-filled response to the injustice and horrific violence of their times, are prepared to take the risk of moving onto new places as they migrate to Egypt. The learning of Christmas could be that we too may be called to move on, leaving behind familiar languages, places and families, and bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to places and situations previously unknown. Let's see!

We may put the crib away for another year, but the learnings of the Season challenge us into 2025.

Blessed Fiestas of the Epiphany and of the Baptism of the Lord, and a Blessed 2025!

*John Larsen s.m.*

