



Reflection from the Superior General

January 2026

Dear Confreres,

Greetings! On behalf of the General Administration, I want to wish each of you a fruitful and happy 2026. May it bring to our Society abundant blessings – both on a personal level, in community, and in our various ministries.

Last November I was fortunate to participate in the bi-annual assembly of male superiors general in Rome. The theme of the meeting was: “Connected Faith: Living Prayer in the Digital Age.” The highlight was an audience with Pope Leo. He gave us a short address and participated in a question-and-answer session. I attach both here for your personal and communal reflection.

What struck me in his address and in the subsequent discussion was how many of the emphases of Pope Leo resonate with the Statements and Decisions of our recent General Chapter. For example, just as the Chapter highlighted the importance of our engagement with the “Digital Mission Field” (Statements and Decisions, 6) Pope Leo speaks of the digital world and information technology as offering “immense opportunities for good, both for community life and for the apostolate. It would be shortsighted to ignore the extraordinary opportunities it provides to communion and the mission, allowing us to reach faraway people, to share faith through new languages, and to reach even those who, through ordinary means, find it difficult to approach our communities.” We should avoid any form of technophobia because technological progress can also be part of God’s plan for creation. At the same time Leo is aware of the risks posed by artificial intelligence: artificial intelligence should serve humanity not the other way around. “Virtual connections,” he maintains, can never replace “the place of real relationships between people, where presence, prolonged and patient listening, and the deep sharing of ideas and feelings are indispensable.”

The importance of human relationships leads Leo to speak of “the witness of community life” where we search together “for solutions to the challenges that are before us.” Our Chapter too, in its section “Community Life for Mission,” called all Marists to ongoing personal and community conversion (cf. Const. 118, 127, 228) by committing ourselves to a life centred on the Eucharist and regular personal and community prayer (Statements and Decisions, 14 & 15).

The Chapter also promoted international, intercultural and intergenerational communities for mission (Statements and Decisions, 13) while Leo, for his part, links communities “of fraternal life and communion” with the search for peace and justice: “One of the gifts that religious life can offer, in terms of meaning, is to bear witness that we can live together and show that it is possible to overcome divisions and differences, and bring people together to live a peaceful and harmonious life, particularly in those congregations or orders that are able to bring together international communities made up of people of different cultures, mentalities and languages.” Is this not what our confreres are engaged in, for example, in Turkey, Thailand, Senegal, and elsewhere?

Probably referring to his time as superior general of the Augustinians, Leo continues: “I have been blessed to know the witness of Christian communities in countries where the vast majority are of another religion and the Christian community is not there to proselytize. ... In these contexts, the witness of the community is the most important step in building bridges based on respect for the dignity of others, on the willingness to listen, to receive, to accompany, and to walk together. Communities that offer support for health, schooling, education, or other forms of charity and hospitality: their presence and their service are already a very important witness.” Our Chapter document (Statements and Decisions, 12) expresses similar sentiments when it declares: “It is through the quality of our communion with each other, expressed in our community life, that we must begin to respond creatively to this wounded world. For Marists, community life is a primary apostolate (Const. 127).”

When it comes to formation Leo is equally forthright: “We can't accept everyone who knocks at the door. And we have to be very serious about that.” Already I have picked up a tension regarding the admission of candidates to our congregation. For example, a Province might recommend a candidate to novitiate while we, at General Council level, having read the reports, might not share that recommendation.

In its section on Formation, the Chapter spoke in terms of forming “candidates and members with a Marian mind and heart, who can respond creatively to our fractured world with a spirit of unity, mercy, and healing” and recommended an updating and review of our comprehensive Marist International Formation Directory (2022) (Statements and Decisions, 32 & 33). Regarding the question of vocational discernment, the Formation Directory puts it well: “Father Colin looked for people who would be “useful” to the Society’s aims. The time of formation is a time for discerning and choosing, of testing and forming, so that a man can usefully and responsibly take his place in the Society and play his part in its mission” (Marist International Formation Directory, 2.3.1).

For Pope Leo our candidates must “first become healthy human beings.” He calls it “formation in freedom or liberty” rather than trying to force our candidates into a straitjacket of our own making: “Our formation, especially in the first stages, really needs to be to form people to become true human beings with the gifts that God has given them and to see how the Lord is calling them through those gifts, not through the mould that we're forcing them to fit into.”

No doubt there will be other aspects of Pope Leo’s reflections on our life and apostolate that will resonate with you. Perhaps his address and subsequent reflections might serve as a springboard for discussion at local Marist level (unit, district, community) offering us, in Leo’s words, “a valuable opportunity to return to what matters.”

Fraternally, and in the spirit of Mary,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Declan Marmion". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Declan Marmion, S.M.