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# Today's Marists

Society of Mary in the U.S.

# Today's Marists

Spring 2018 | Volume 4 | Issue 1

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Cover: *Mary on the Way* by Sister Maria Van Galen, fmm

We imagine this art work being the movement of Mary from the contemplative moment of the Annunciation on the way to being of service to her cousin Elizabeth.





*from the Provincial*

Fr. Paul Frechette, SM

## Reflections on the Marist International General Chapter of 2017, Nemi, Italy

The 19th General Chapter of the Society of Mary took place at the Society of the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) Center in Nemi (Rome) from September 17 until October 12, 2017. These Chapters of the International Chapter occur every eight years.

There were 38 delegates from all over the world representing the 763 Marist confreres in the seven provinces and three districts of the Society. It was a great delight to see our younger Marists from the mission districts of Africa, Brazil, Peru, and Oceania.

Our Superior General John Hannan delivered his report, a survey of the Society of Mary. Then there was a financial report of the whole Society by the General Bursar, followed by reports of the major superiors on their provinces or districts. A growing realization among Chapter members emerged concerning the continuing if not accelerating impact of secularization on our Catholic world. It seems to cause the fracturing of families, communities, neighborhoods, etc., so that a strong sense of individualism overtakes the rich layers of communion, relationships, commonly held values and beliefs previously embraced. The Chapter reawakened the necessity of assuring that our communities and Marists in General live up to the call for a more contemplative life among us in the faces of these forces of secularization.

Following a profound discernment process, the Chapter chose an experienced leader and his team who will now lead us for the next eight years. Father John Larsen, SM (originally from New Zealand), is our new Superior General; John Harhager, SM (USA), is the Vicar General, and completing the team are Ben McKenna, SM (Oceania), Juan-Carlos Piña, SM (Mexico), and Paul Walsh, SM, (Ireland) The team has received a clear mandate, with the

Chapter's strong support, to lead us and to make tough decisions for the Society's future.

About that future, the outgoing Superior General, John Hannan, SM, had acknowledged that the Society was in a critical state. All provinces and districts are experiencing difficulties especially with vocations and diminishment and aging of our membership continues. He posed the question of whether or not we have a long-term future as a religious congregation. Simply maintaining the status quo will not help us move forward.

One of the themes that came from the Chapter was "*Safeguarding*," a word now universally used to cover what we once called "professional standards" for the protection of children. *Safeguarding* was explicitly acknowledged in every group discussion at the Chapter, and it occupies a separate section in the Chapter documents. This past year our own USA province was accredited for another five years by Praesidium, an organization that does an extensive accreditation process to assure our operations as religious congregation adhere to all the Standards for child protection set by the Conference of Major Superiors of Men and Praesidium. They are the Standards used to accredit child care agencies in the United States.

In recognition of our aging membership throughout the Society, the Chapter recognized our Elderly Marists. These confreres are a treasure to our communities and add a unique contribution to the life and ministry of our provinces.

The chapter document, "2017 General Chapter Statements and Decisions", dedicates a whole section to our Brothers. As a province we presented two propositions to the Chapter on Brothers, and they were accepted. All Marists,

in fact, profess the same religious vows according to the Constitutions, and everyone share one common call. We are all brothers, who happen to have differing ministerial roles. Brothers contribute to the mission in their distinctive way. When we uncritically refer to ourselves as the "Marist Fathers," we need to remember that this renders the Brothers among us invisible. Our formal title "The Society of Mary" is inclusive.

Moreover, one of the largest sections of chapter documentation covered vocations and formation. We recognized the role the laity plays and will continue to play in fostering vocations to the Society of Mary. Vocation promotion is the responsibility of each Marist. The Chapter commended the work of communities that maintain a "Community of Welcome" so as to ensure the cordial welcome toward all possible candidates.

The section titled "Dialogue and Communion with Lay Marists" proved challenging to Chapter members. Our Marist charism has always included the laity. This Chapter welcomed the presence of lay Marists "at the table" with us where they made a real and vital contribution to the Chapter. The chapter called for the general and local levels to appoint a Marist religious as promoter for the lay Marist movement.

I will finish with a few words on "The Declaration on the Mission of the Society of Mary Today," where we read, "Like Mary, we are called to be missionary disciples, bridge builders, instruments of reconciliation, bearers of the Good News, especially to the poor and young." The Chapter called on each province and district of the Society to search for creative ways to grow constantly in lives of contemplation and to lead others along the path of discipleship and mission rooted in deep prayer.

# Theme of *Today's Marists* for This Coming Year

by Very Rev. John Larsen SM, Superior General of the Society of Mary

It is best stated in these excerpts from a *Reflection on the 2017 General Chapter* by the new Superior General of the Marists, Fr. John Larsen, SM for Advent of 2017. Our *Today's Marists* theme for this coming year will be "Marists as Contemplatives in Action":

"One of the remarkable (and perhaps unexpected) challenges that arose from our recent General Chapter was the clarion call for all Marists to live a life of contemplation.

*"Contemplation as the energy source, the mystical heart of Marist mission, is intimately linked with our identity as Marist religious. To form a communion for mission, we need to deepen the contemplative dimension of our lives. With Jesus at the centre we can, like Mary, be missionaries of hope. (2017 General Chapter, 30).*

"Ours is not a monastic vocation but a call to a deeply contemplative life bearing fruit in mission. Whether Marists are feeling the aches and pains of ageing or,

like Fr. Orlando Rojas, SM, in Peru just ordained, or like the novices presently preparing for First Profession in January in Davao, we share this same Marist vocation.

*"As Mary pondered the Word, so are we called to a life of contemplation, centered on the Eucharist, bearing fruit in service within the Church and beyond. (General Chapter, 4)*

"One of the especially challenging decisions of this Chapter was:

*Marists are recommended to spend one hour in private prayer each day. (General Chapter, 32)*

This is a welcome challenge that can lead to a renewal of our vocation to be Marist

missionaries of the light and joy of the Christ child, both in this Season and throughout the year.

"Long ago our own Craig Larkin introduced me to this story from the desert. It speaks of light and contemplative prayer:

*Abba Lot went to see Abba Joseph and said to him: "Abba, as far as I can I say my little Office, I fast a little, I pray and meditate, I live in peace as far as I can, I purify my thoughts. What else can I do?" Then the old man stood up and stretched out his hands towards heaven. His fingers became like ten lamps of fire and he said to him: "If you will, you can become all flame."*

## BOOK CORNER

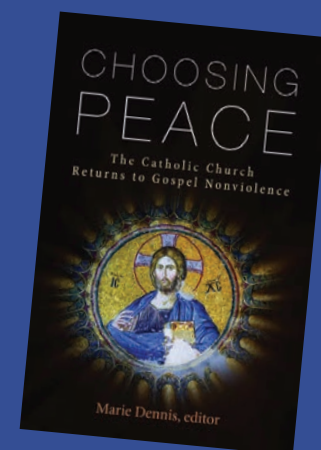
by Ted Keating, SM

Our three previous issues of *Today's Marists* picked up on Pope Francis' *World Day of Peace Message of 2017* and explored the newness of the message calling forth non-violence as a *Style of Politics for Peace* in the Church's response to war and conflict in the contemporary world. His analysis of world conflict in our present world is summed up in his phrase as: a unique and terrible world "war in installments". The largest refugee crisis in world history was not in World War I or II. It is now with nearly 60 million people on the move caused by a number of local wars around the world. He sees this as a unique moment in history when creative approaches to non-violent strategies that clear the head from the gripping "logic of violence" is seen as essential.

The Church has moved from an unsettled relationship with non-violence (look on the internet for the stories of Ben Salmon in World War I in the US, and Franz Jägerstätter in World War II Germany). Vatican II spoke clearly and respectfully for the first time about the option of non-violence in warfare. The US Bishops' *Peace Pastoral* held it up as a worthy alternative in our time. Pope Francis' Message of January 1, 2017 laid out the logic and strategies of non-violence as a preferred option for the Church never ignoring that ethical approaches to war that may still require a limited type of warfare strictly controlled by the traditional ethics of

war articulated by the Church. Diplomacy itself is a refined approach to the avoidance of war and strongly praised by Pope Francis. We are living in a time when it is maligned, and the false path of the "logic of violence" is seen as the first option.

Marie Dennis, the co-president of Pax Christi International that emerged out of the horror of World War II, is the editor of a small book just published by Orbis Press. It brings a number of Catholic thinkers from around the world who attended a joint conference between the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and Pax Christi from April 11-13, 2016 just in advance of Pope Francis World Day of Peace Message of January 1, 2017. There are chapters from some of the speakers at the Conference and other chapters that capture much of the discussion and analysis from the conference. There are also responses to the Pope's Message as well. If you want to catch a moment of significant change emerging in the paradigm of the Church's approach to peace issues, this would be an excellent read. *Choosing Peace: The Catholic Church Returns to Gospel Nonviolence*.





# The Marist Way, a Contemplative Way

Notes by Michael Whelan SM, Pastor of St. Patrick's in Sydney



"If I were in charge, I would see the novices individually twice a week. For the first two or three months, I would not take the initiative in making any observations to them. The Rule says that in the beginning they must be

treated *consideratius et attentius* ('with greater care and attention'). I would just let them speak, replying to what they said, and indicating the way they might correct the faults they have noticed in themselves and pointed out to me. I would try simply to unite them to God, to bring them to a spirit of prayer. Once they were united to God, everything else would take care of itself; no matter how you plant the seed and tire yourself out, the life-giving principle is still lacking. But having once tasted God, a novice will turn to him again and again. It is a treasure in his soul, something to which he is constantly brought back as to his own center. There he will love to converse with God." [Father Jean-Claude Colin (1790-1875), Founder of the Society of Mary in *A Founder Speaks*.]

Father Claude Mayet, SM, who faithfully transmitted many of Colin's impromptu talks and conversations, has given us here an invaluable look at the Founder's vision. Both the content and the way in which it is recorded reveal the mystical heart of our Marist charism. It is an unambiguous reminder, if we needed any, that the Marist way is a contemplative way.

We know that the Founder did not want us to be a "contemplative order" in the accepted sense of that term. (See, for example, *A Founder Speaks*, 132:12-15.) In fact, in the text I cite above, the Founder does not use the word "contemplation." So what do I see and hear in the Founder's words that prompts me to say that his vision calls us to be contemplative?

I am reminded of the call at the very heart of Biblical revelation. It is revealed, for example, in Samuel's "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening!" (1 Samuel 3:11) and Mary's "Here I am, the Lord's

servant. Let it happen according to your word!" (Luke 1:38)

The great spiritual guides have repeatedly, and in various ways, articulated the same call. Meister Eckhart for example: "This above all else is needful: you must lay claim to nothing! Let go of yourself, and let God act with you and in you as He will." (*Meister Eckhart: Sermons and Treatises – Volume I*) To put it more bluntly: "Get out of the way and let God be God in you!" Thomas Merton put the same truth in a slightly different way: "We exist solely for this, to be the place He has chosen for His presence, His manifestation in the world, His epiphany." ("A Letter on the Contemplative Life" in *Thomas Merton: Spiritual Master – The Essential Writings*. Merton wrote this letter August 21, 1967.) I believe the Founder is pointing to the same truth when he speaks of the "life-giving principle." Despite our rhetoric to the contrary, the "life-giving principle" too often means simply human will. This is the very antithesis of the contemplative way. The contemplative way, if it means anything, means that we allow God to work in us and through us – as God wills.

This raises a second crucial aspect of the contemplative way: We are drawn by delight rather than driven by duty. A sure sign of the contemplative is a certain grace and freedom. (2 Corinthians 3:17) Once we have "tasted God everything else will look after itself." This is a remarkable insight for someone of Colin's time and culture! It is reminiscent of St. Augustine at his best. Peter Brown writes in his brilliant biography of Augustine, the conviction Augustine had come to when he wrote his *Confessions*: "Delight is the only possible source of action, nothing else can move the will." (Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*) "No matter how you plant the seed and tire yourself out, the life-giving principle is still lacking. You have to learn to taste God. To taste God is to feel your heart wounded." (*A Founder Speaks*, 65.)

God's action in us and our taste for God – here is the wellspring of the contemplative way. We are set in motion, not by duty

or the desire to be holy or virtuous, or to please God. We are taken hold of by Christ. (Philippians 3:12)

This all begins in our daily lives. Human experience, in the light of faith, is the ground from which the contemplative way emerges and to which the contemplative way returns. Contemplation is not born of techniques or deliberate effort. It does not come to us as conquest but as gift. It therefore requires a capacity and commitment to listen to what is happening, to face the truth of our experiences and to submit to that truth. Jesus identified himself with truth. (John 14:5) Saint Paul reminds us that "the Spirit himself and our spirit bear united witness that we are children of God." (Romans 8:16) Contemplation emerges with an awakened life.

"Jesus went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart." (Luke 2:51) Effective listening in the minutiae of our days and a genuine desire to face the truth of what is actually going on is absolutely fundamental. Without it, we are building our spiritual house on sand. (Matthew 7:24-27) With it, we are disposing ourselves to "taste God" and to liberate "the life-giving principle" that slowly becomes the contemplative way.



St. Patrick Church, Sydney, Australia

# Mary, Model of Contemplation in Action

by Ted Keating, SM

## Being Mary

At a recent retreat for the US Province of the Society, one of our Marist historians, Fr. Alois Greiler, SM, described for us a study done by Fr. Monnier-Vinard, SJ, in 1931, called *Mary, Queen of Religious Life*. The study examined the manner in which a large number of Catholic religious orders describe and live out their relationship with Mary. It found a perplexing paradox in the Marists: of nearly any religious order, Marists are both the most and the least centered on Mary. This paradox leads to the central reality of Marist life: while no particular Marian devotion captures the heart of the Marist spirit, the Marist charism calls us simply to *be* Mary in the Church. That can be hard to comprehend without a mystical dimension to Marist life. One Marist, Fr. Ed Keel, SM, explains a way of perceiving Marian devotions in our Marist life: without dismissing or putting down Marian devotions, we realize that we are called to something much deeper as Marists; more than committing ourselves to specific devotions, we are called to become Mary's devotion in the midst of the Church.

How does a male Marist live out his life as Mary? That was one conversation at the retreat, but not “deep enough.” In one of the most lyrical and beloved paragraphs of the original *Constitutions* (49), Fr. Colin paints a magnificent picture of what a Marist would look like if he or she became Mary to the Church. Yet the paragraph uses the language of values and virtues which one could, perhaps, “slavishly” try to imitate, but such imitation would still not lead us to the fullness of “becoming Mary to the Church” and thus cannot be the path of Marist life.

## Being Mary and Marist Spirituality

Leaving behind the question of imitation, we turn to look at another dimension of “being Mary” by another Marist scholar, Fr. Justin Taylor, SM, author of the new biography of Jean-Claude Colin, now in the process of publication. A number of years ago he did some of the finest research on the origins of Colin's spirituality ever done. Many would say that the genius of Jean-Claude Colin was not in inventing a new spirituality, but rather in applying a contemplative and mystical spirituality already in the air to a profoundly new pastoral vision that pulls together an integration of Mary in the Church (quite like the approach of Vatican II). This vision results in a changing interpretation of the “signs of the times,” and moves from a triumphalist vision of the Church into one of a Church rooted in humility and mercy. Such a Church would be better able to engage the “people of this time with their love for justice.” Secularism was rampant in France during Fr. Colin's time as in our own, and the Church was losing touch with both the elites and the common people. Marists, in “becoming Mary to and in the Church” would -- by their very presence and mode of acting -- be agents of Mary, bringing about a renewed Church (or even, as Fr. Colin boldly asserted at one point, a “new” Church).



Mary by Henry Ossawa Tanner

In that same study, Fr. Taylor explores two very well-known schools of spirituality spinning in the air around Fr. Colin: the French School of the Sulpicians and a school of contemplative, mystical Jesuits who were prominent in the two centuries before Colin. These Jesuit mystics saw a melding of apostolic activity and mysticism that sounds much like the contemporary Jesuit way of naming themselves: “Contemplatives in Action”. It is clear since Vatican II that all of us – not just monks and cloistered nuns – are called to the holiness of a contemplative life, but within the context of our own personal call in life. A study done many years ago showed that a majority of people in the US have had what they considered mystical experiences of being taken up into an inner experience, beyond the usual, everyday experiences of life. But at this point, digging any further into Fr. Taylor's extraordinary insights into Colin's spirituality would turn us too deeply toward historical scholarship. Suffice it to say that Fr. Taylor's work shows the contemplative, if not mystical, origins (roots?) of Colin's spirituality.

## Thinking, Judging, Feeling and Acting as Mary

Returning to Colin's lyrical words in paragraph (49-50) of the original *Constitutions*, we are given a hint of how to proceed from this sense of mysticism: “...and so they must think as Mary, judge as Mary, feel and act as Mary in all things, otherwise they will be unworthy and degenerate sons.” How can we really know how Mary thinks, judges, or feels? It is not behavior that we can honestly say we readily understand. These movements are interior to Mary.



We could conclude that the statement is only an aspiration and weaken it into only a metaphor. We already question whether a mere slavish imitation of Mary is even possible or enough, but Colin was not a man for empty metaphors: he meant this as written. We can – and must – work towards an internalization of Mary herself into our lives, so that we unthinkingly and spontaneously exhibit the qualities, values, and virtues of Mary set out in *Constitutions* 49-50. We must “become Mary,” otherwise we are grasping in vain, trying to imitate her moment by moment and step by step, in a way that is not the least bit spontaneous, peaceful, or healing for us or others that we engage in our lives.

It should be no surprise then that a General Chapter – intensely aware of our fragility as a group and even more taken with the power of secularizing individualism in tearing apart communities and Church congregations, even sending society itself spinning into fragmentation and polarization across the world– would be drawn back to our origins and recall the fullness of our vocation as Colin envisioned it. We hope that the cover of our current *Today's Marist* might help exemplify for us the movement of Mary from the mystical moment of the Annunciation, through and over the mountains, going forth to serve her elderly cousin, responding to her cousin's needs as best she could. These two moments meet in the magnificent canticle of the *Magnificat*, prophetically seeing a world turned upside down by the power of the Spirit--the proud and conceited are being scattered, the mighty are being pulled down from their thrones, the humble are being exalted, the poor are being fed. So from mysticism into mission but not so quiet and peaceful a mission in the eyes of the world seen through the prophetic eyes of Mary.

Let me close with the *Identity Statement of the US Province*, written collaboratively by the whole province as a body in 2013. It may help show how the gift of Vatican II and its aftermath has brought the Holy Spirit and Mary closer together in the Church's consciousness, and helped us Marists to move ever deeper into our own call to become Mary in the Church in our own times unburdened with the ideology of secularism.



## Statement of Identity

Mary of Nazareth, the first disciple of the Lord and Mother of the Church, is the heart of our identity as Marists. This remarkable woman of faith has called us to this way of life. We believe that we have been called by a “gracious choice” into the family of Mary. It is her work that we do and so we commit ourselves to think, judge, feel and act as she did.

As a consequence, these qualities mark us as Marists: mercy and compassion, availability, welcome and hospitality, simplicity manifest in everyday ordinariness and a common touch. We are self-effacing apostles who demonstrate a spirit of joy and respect for others; we are called to be humble and hidden and unknown in the world.


Our spirituality, which is both mystical and practical, responds to the reality and circumstances of today's world. Jean-Claude Colin, acting on what he believed to be Mary's desire, encouraged us to establish a Marian Church, a Church with the heart of a mother beating at its center.

At our best, we are instruments of God's mercy working to help others taste the boundless love of the Lord, especially those who find themselves on the margins. As Marists, we seek to go where the Church is not. We should enable all with whom we come into contact to experience the gift of reconciliation as well as peace of heart and mind.

Mary is the icon of God's Spirit. As her fellow disciples, we pray that with God's grace we become the same.

Statement of Identity  
US Province of the Society of Mary (the Marists)  
Assembly and Chapter of June 2013





# Marist Schools *Walkout* to Protest Gun Violence

## School Walkout in Atlanta

by Fr. Bill Rowland, SM, Marist School President

On March 14, 2018, Marist School in Atlanta joined the National School Walkout to protest gun violence in America's schools and to remember the 17 victims of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida one month earlier. Fourteen students and three faculty members, stood at different stations in Marist School's Alumni Plaza holding posters with photographs of the victims. For 17 minutes, hundreds of students and faculty walked in silence by each photograph.

Some of the juniors and seniors, motivated by the principles of the Society of Mary and Catholic social teachings, approached the administration with ideas about how Marist could participate in the National School Walkout. Mr. Kevin Mullally, the principal, and Fr. Bill Rowland, S.M., president, listened and set some boundaries. The students then organized the walkout.

Mr. Mullally emailed the Marist School community beforehand to explain what would be happening on March 14 and why: "Because of our Catholic faith and of our Marist charism, our response will be grounded in prayer, reflection, and the perspective of the Church. As a Catholic school, we are committed to peace and non-violence and are glad to join in solidarity with other Catholic, independent, and public schools around the country as we hope to bring peace to all of our schools."



Fr. Rowland, S.M., when speaking to the entire school community at Schola Brevis on March 12, said, "Whatever we will do on March 14 will be rooted in Christ, expressive of our faith and the values that flow from it and influenced by the tradition of the Society of Mary. We will try to do that the best we can. Lest the students at Marjory Douglas High School fear they will stand alone on March 14, Marist School will stand with them. We will add our voices to theirs and with them, cry out: "Never again!"

Eliza Griffin, a junior and lead organizer of the Walkout, spoke to the school at 10:00 a.m. She said, "No more kids should have to feel unsafe at school, where they come to learn and grow with their friends and teachers. No more kids should have to lose their lives at the hands of a deranged shooter. Jesus' one rule was to love your neighbor, and we should do everything in our power to adhere to that. By walking out, you are acknowledging the life and dignity of the 17 lives lost, and also every life that's ever been taken by a gun — every life taken at Columbine, Marshall County, Reynolds, Chardon, Sandy Hook,

and so many more — and you're doing the work of Mary. As the USCCB says: 'More than ever, the Church and all people of good will must work together to confront the pervasive culture of violence.' So I say, never again."

Fr. Martin McAnaney, S.M., provincial superior of the Marist Province of Europe took notice of what was happening in the United States and wrote to Fr. Rowland, S.M.: "We have circulated a solidarity petition to the education centers which are part of our European Marist Education Network."

In addition to circulating a solidarity petition, the "european- marist-eduation blog" posted the following: "The Maristengymnasium in Fürstzell, Germany gathered hundreds of students in the playground in order to demonstrate solidarity with its Marist partner school in Atlanta and with the actions of American students to promote stricter gun controls in the United States."

"One of the wonderful delights of belonging to an international religious congregation," replied Fr. Rowland, SM,



“is that it allows our students to connect with each other and to celebrate the Marist bond that unites us. This expression of solidarity is a beautiful example of what makes a Marist education so special.”

*“Please pass on to your students how all of us at Marist have been deeply touched by their thoughtfulness and compassion. We stand united with them to continue to work to make this world more just and peaceful. We will do our part in the United States knowing we are not alone: that our Marist schools in Europe are committed to doing the same.”*

## School Walkout in Pontiac

by Fr. Joe Hindelang, SM, Notre Dame Principal

When the tragic school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida took place February 14, 2018, students across the United States planned events to honor the 17 victims and to call for an end to gun violence in schools everywhere. A national school “Walk Out” took place on March 14, 2018, one month after the shooting.

A number of students at Notre Dame Prep in Pontiac, Michigan approached administrators to talk about participating in this event, but they also wanted to respect our school day. They liked the idea that as a Catholic school community we could bring prayer into such an event. While Notre Dame Prep did not officially promote this student event, we did set some guidelines for the students who chose to participate. Part of the mission of our school is to work with God to help our students become good citizens. The student leaders saw this event as one

way for students to grow in their sense of citizenship by thoughtfully choosing whether to participate or not.

Although the school includes junior kindergarten through to twelfth grade, this civil action was intended for high school students. Rather than walk out of the building, which could have posed a safety issue, not to mention the cold that day, Notre Dame made one of the gyms available for the students to assemble. At 10:00 a.m., those who wanted to participate walked out of class quietly to the gym. Students sat on the floor around 17 candles representing the students and staff members killed in Florida.

Our students prayed together. There were several short speeches calling for an end to gun violence in our schools and in our country. A poem was read. And then the names of the 17 victims were read aloud, followed by a long period of silence. At the end of 17 minutes the students quietly returned to class.

About half of our students participated, while the other half chose to remain in class. Teachers supervised each area. This event came halfway through our spirit week, called “Irish Week,” which is usually accompanied by fun events and high spirits. But for the walkout students decided to participate very seriously. They appreciated the freedom to choose and to express their concerns.

Amelia Cumming, a sophomore at NDP and an organizer of the event, said, “We walked

out to protest gun violence in schools. Without a change, this horror will continue in our classrooms.” Matt Wood, a junior and another organizer added, “We are the generation of today as well as of tomorrow. As we remember the 17 lives lost in Parkland, Florida, one month ago today, let us not forget that violence is never the answer.”

Our Marist theme for this school year is **ardent love of neighbor**. In keeping with that theme another reaction to school violence is called: **#WalkUpNotOut**. It is an invitation to students (and adults) to commemorate lost lives by doing something positive: **Walk up** to another student who may feel lonely and extend an invitation to join you. **Walk up** to someone in need of a positive word or support. **Walk up** to a teacher or another adult to thank them for (fill in the blank). This movement has also appealed to our students, and many are already putting it into practice.

Please join us in prayer and positive action for the safety and wellbeing of all our own students as well as all students everywhere in our country.





# Marist Mission: A Participation in God's Creative Action in Thailand

by Fr. Hermes Bajao Sabud, SM, Ranong, Thailand

## Participation

Our Marist ministry in Ranong, Thailand is a participation in God's mission. The Constitutions of the Society of Mary specify: "Their call is to be truly missionary. They attend especially to the most neglected, the poor, and those who suffer injustice. They are ready to carry out these tasks anywhere and at any time" (Const. 12). Yes, the Marist response to the call is our participation in God's creative action here in Ranong. What a privilege to participate in the mission God has entrusted to the Society of Mary!

I would like to tell you about the mission of the Marist District of Asia here in the Southern part of Thailand. The original mandate from the Marist General Administration in 2004 was to establish a Marist community in Myanmar (formerly Burma). But, after a few months of investigating the possibility of doing so, our confreres were told to leave the country. They could not renew their visas, and they had to withdraw immediately. They retreated to Bangkok, Thailand, where they found a warm welcome and temporary accommodations from the Redemptorists.

During their time in Bangkok, the team headed by Fr. John Larsen (now Superior general of the Society of Mary) with another Marist priest, a seminarian and a lay Marist missionary had to discern whether to look for another ministry in Thailand or go back to the Philippines. They decided to stay in Thailand. Surprisingly, they ended up serving the vulnerable people from Myanmar after all, Burmese refugees who work and live in Ranong. This place is a little province in the southern part of Thailand bordering on the southernmost point of Myanmar.

You might ask, "Why Ranong? Why this place?" I believe that this is the work of the Holy Spirit, the main agent of all mission. As the 1990 Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* ("On the permanent validity of the Church's missionary mandate") by John



Paul II states, "the Holy Spirit is indeed the principal agent of the whole of the Church's mission." The Marist mission, led principally by the same Spirit, is our participation in God's creative action of love and compassion in Ranong.

## What a place!

According to 2014 statistics, Ranong, Thailand has a population of 177,089 and about 57% of the population come from Myanmar. Burmese is the language most of them speak, while others speak the language of their tribes. In Ranong, most of the people from Myanmar are identified as Burmese migrant workers. Some of them have been in Thailand for many years; they have worked and settled down in Ranong. Economic and political realities are the obvious reasons why people leave Myanmar and decide to come and settle in Thailand, especially during the recent difficult political situation known as the "Military rule."

Myanmar migrant workers in Ranong, struggle to get legal documents to stay in Thailand. Some of them are undocumented even in their own country, lacking a proper passport, for instance,

and other identification papers. That is why it is so difficult to get a visa or other documentation that assures them a safe stay in the Kingdom of Thailand. Furthermore, Thai immigration policies can be quite rigid for some migrants trying to settle in the country. Having no proper documents exposes migrants to all sorts of grievous abuses, like human trafficking and unfair labor practices.

There are more than 100,000 Myanmar migrants in Ranong. Most of them work in fish factories. A few of them are fishermen, while others work in restaurants, hotels and shops throughout the city. Those who live in Ranong normally rent houses with only basic facilities like water and electricity. Many live in houses with other families and share the rent. Most of these houses are simply not suitable for human habitation.

The families of migrants also share in these intolerable conditions. Most of the children cannot go to Thai schools because they lack the proper documents. Thus, many children grow up without any formal education. There are, however, small migrant learning centers around Ranong that offer basic primary school