

Society of Mary

Marist Vocation News

January 2022



Introduction

by Fr. Ted Keating, SM, Director for Vocation and Formation U.S Province,
Marist College Washington, DC

As we continue our series on vocation for the Marist Vocation Year reflecting on the question “*Why is Marist vocation critical for our world today?*” we invite you to read the following reflections from Kevin Mullally, Principal, Marist School, Atlanta, Georgia; Andy Guest, head of School at Notre Dame Preparatory School and Marist Academy in Pontiac, Michigan; and Elizabeth Piper, A Marist Laity Catechist and Director of Faith Formation at Our Lady of the Assumption Catholic Church, a Marist parish, in Atlanta, Georgia. It is our hope that our series on the critical need for a Marist vocation for the Marist Vocation Year will inspire us all to rediscover the mystery of our own vocational call and support young people in the discernment of their vocation.

In placing these reflections in context with our efforts of vocational outreach to America’s young people, I would like to share the following findings on American youth.

With so much reference in our essays to help awaken the personal call to vocation for young people today, it might be helpful to hear about some new studies of these young people and their attitudes to religion and spirituality. The *Washington Post* in its [Saturday religion column](#) on January 14, 2022 [summarized](#) a number of recent studies. The headline was hardly accurate about the substance of the article (“American secularism is growing - and growing more complicated”). It usefully distinguished the majority of American young people, who are seen as “ambivalent” about belief and attitudes toward religion, doing “fewer religious things” (i.e. belonging to a congregation, attending worship services, feeling certain that God exists). Is secularism or being secularist the correct term for these ambivalent young people? It might be better to see them as “searching” or “open” to searching for something higher than themselves. Perhaps it is too easy a dismissal of them.

Are these young people secularists: people characterized by “indifference to or rejection of religion and religious considerations” as the Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines that term? Hardly.

One author some years ago distilled three such studies and graphed them together to show their conclusions after paying attention to the subtleties of attitude and leanings. He found that as many as 78%, 60%, and 71% (depending on the studies) were still open or potentially open to religious values. Others were atheists, religiously disconnected, irreligious down at about 22%. Among even those who were religiously open, large numbers would be “None’s” with interest in spirituality but not interested in being part of any denominations. That is the category in US studies for all Americans (young and older) that has been increasing rapidly and is now at 29% of Americans up from 19% just 15 years ago.

The question about why so many young people are ambivalent about denominations and institutional religion is critically important. Especially when they show interest in spirituality but are searching for it elsewhere than institutional religion. But is it really useful to justify opening that dialogue with them with assumptions that they are afflicted with secularism, or dismissing them with negative labels about “being spiritual but not religious”? These young people may have a “vocation” that we don’t know about that can be touched more deeply by “beginning relationally where they are” - a revered aspect of the Marist charism as articulated by Kevin Mullally in his reflection. A favorite quote of St. Marcellin Champagnat, Founder of the Marist Brothers helps: “We don’t have any bad children in our schools - only children that are not yet good.” The Marist personal and relational approach is core to dealing with the young for us today - as it was in the time of Fr Colin.



Why is Marist Vocation Critical for Our World Today? - *A School Principal's Perspective*

by Kevin Mullally, Principal, Marist School, Atlanta, Georgia

Working in a school provides some insight into the next generation, its character and quirks, its promise and potential, and working in a Catholic school gives some additional insight into the next generation as believers, as those who will carry on the faith. Two persistent and urgent questions Catholic schools take up with each generation are *How will we invite them into the Church?* and *How will we evangelize?* To answer this, we must take stock of today's world and the characteristics that define the current age.

This is particularly effective in a school. Befriending and showing confidence in young people, both central educational tenets at Marist School are important means by which we allow youth to know our mother Mary's compassion and concern as an expression of the Father's love for them.



Kevin Mullally speaking at school assembly

This is what it is to push out past the boundary of ourselves to where we see and meet the needs of others, and it is this instinct that animates the missionary spirit of the Marists and instills a call to serve God by serving others, seeking to bring all into Christ's Church as Mary did. Recognizing service as fundamental and rewarding reminds us of the dignity of all people and helps us to find and be bound by that which is common among us all as children of God. This provides a foundation for unity, even when faced with political or social division.

Thinking of and serving others provide a good start to getting today's students to see there is a truth beyond this world and their secular conception of it, that there is a fundamental reality that is fulfilled by the Mystery of the Incarnation.

It is precisely a world troubled by the things of this age that needs our Blessed Mother, that needs the Marists to be her presence in the world today to call all out of themselves and to her Son and His Church.



Why is Marist Vocation Critical for Our World Today? - *A School President's Perspective*

by Andy Guest, Head of School, Notre Dame Preparatory School and Marist Academy, Pontiac, Michigan

Recently the U.S. Surgeon General declared a national mental health crisis among youth in America. It is estimated that one in five children between the ages of 3-17 suffer from mental, emotional, developmental or behavioral issues, and one in three high school students have seriously considered suicide. The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the feelings of helplessness, isolation and depression in our children these past two years, making the need for Marist vocations more important than ever.

A colleague of mine who is a public middle school counselor and strong, practicing Catholic talks about children experimenting with alcohol, marijuana, prescription drugs and sex at ages as young as 12-14. I asked him once how he can counsel these kids without bringing religion into the conversation. He told me it is tough, but that he would lose his job if he told kids that there is a loving creator that they can turn to in times of despair.



Andy Guest

At a Marist Catholic school, it is so much different. I recall fondly my time as a student at Notre Dame High School in Harper Woods, Michigan. Marist priests like Jim Strasz, Juan Gonzales, Leon Olszamowski, Jerry Demers, John Sajdak, John Bryon, Ray Coolong, Ron DesRosiers and Brother Louie Plourde had a life-long impact on me and so many other students who looked up to them for spiritual, academic and moral guidance. They were role models and we would not be the men we are today without their influence.

As an example, one of the recruiting strategies that the Marists used was to invite young men to a barbecue at the rectory to witness first-hand what religious community life looked like. While my class group did not result in any religious vocations, the Marists had an impact on our lives. One of my classmates entered the seminary briefly but left and became a successful businessman who recently led a major capital campaign for his local parish in Texas. Another classmate married and raised three kids in Chicago and is now considering becoming a deacon. A third married late and adopted a son that he loves and sends to a Catholic school in Cleveland. And I came back to serve the Marist mission in my current capacity. While these may not seem like extraordinary vocations, all of us are trying to be positive Catholic role models for our families and in our current professions. In essence, we are all lay Marists.

As a Catholic Marist school, we have an enormous opportunity (and responsibility) to impact youth in a positive way. Youth are struggling because they have a void in their life. A void that can only be filled by a knowledge and love of Jesus Christ. At Notre Dame, we teach students how to feel, think, act, and judge as Mary. Mary shows us the way to Jesus through Her example.

The Marist mission today is more important than ever. Young people need both religious and lay role models to navigate the tumultuous world in which they live. Our school would benefit from new Marists who can carry the torch from the current generation into the future.

My prayer to Mary, as a leader at a Catholic Marist school, is that more men and women will be called to the order to serve as priests, brothers, sisters, or lay Marists. Fr. Colin reminds us to be “possessed by joy” and today’s youth could use a little more of the joy that Marists have brought to students in the U.S. for the past several generations.



Why is Marist Vocation Critical for Our World Today? - *A Marist Laity Catechist's Perspective*

by Elizabeth Piper, National Formation Leader for Catechesis of the Good Shepherd; Co-Leader of World Lay Marist; Director of Faith Formation, Our Lady of the Assumption Catholic Church, Atlanta, Georgia

"What if we discovered the Gospel together, and lived it as Mary Lived it?" (A Certain Way, p. 9)

The founders of the Marist pondered this question while forming the many communities of the Society of Mary. This question leads us to formation. As a catechist for most of my life, discovering the gospel is the way that I have lived my life. This understanding of God's message is to be understood through study within community. The community of the Marists by their certain way became a community that provided nourishment and support through formation and developed my skills as a catechist.

The Gospels allow us to look at how Mary's presence provided comfort and support to the apostles. This presence we provide in the "church in such a way that the more hidden it was the more effective it would be." (*Marist Constitutions*, Article I, #4) As a catechist, this is expressed by putting people before you. Supporting others by giving them the knowledge, strength and wisdom to help others build their relationship with God and from behind or in a hidden and unknown way. This will build a community of believers with "one mind and one heart." (*Marist Constitutions*, Article I, #3)



Elizabeth Piper

Marist Laity is open to all gathering believers under the name of Mary. The Laity have the unique ability to live both as a Marist and in the world. The laity go to work each morning, take kids to school or provide care for others along with so much more. We take the knowledge and formation of the Marist out into the world to show through our actions how to make the whole world Marist.

The *Spirit of Mary* is a program that, as a catechist, helps women reflect on the Gospel as it pertains to Mary along with formation on what it means to be a Marist. Through the *Spirit of Mary* there is reflection to live, act and pray as a Marist. To dive deeper into the Marist charisma, 15 days of Prayer with Jean-Claude Colin by Francois Drouilly, SM provides a deeper look at life as a Marist. This can be used in small groups meeting monthly taking a chapter a month for reflection and discussion. Being a lay Marist is so much more than study. It is about understanding the life of service by putting others before you. This work leads us to working with people living on the margins of society. Marists show to others the ardent love of neighbor.

The Marist Laity as catechists bring to the world the nurturing mother who is inclusive, and acts lead by the Gospel of Jesus. This great love will spread through our mission to all.



Marist Laity

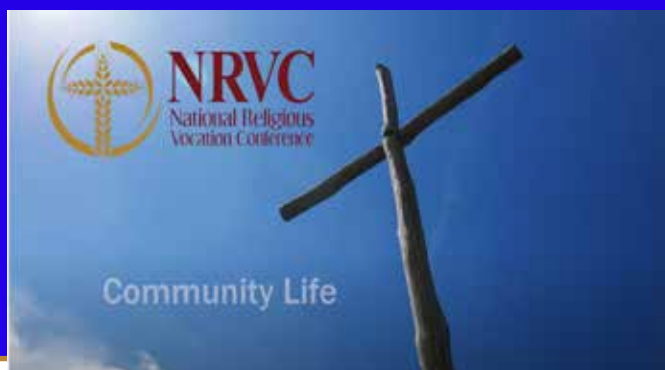
Vocation Resources



What it Means to Be Marist:

Principal Kevin Mullally Featured on Inspiring Schools Podcast

In Fall 2021, Marist School Principal Mr. Kevin Mullally was featured on the Inspiring Schools podcast. Hosted by Simon Noakes of Interactive Schools, the show welcomes the world's leading educators to talk about the future of education. In this episode, Mr. Mullally discusses what it means to be "Marist" and how Marist School is delivering on its mission to form the faith-filled, global-ready servant leaders of tomorrow. Click [HERE](#) to listen to the podcast.



In our [December 2021 Marist vocational newsletter](#), we presented some key findings from the 2009 Center for Applied Research for Apostolate ([CARA](#)), a Catholic Research Organization at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. The CARA Report, provides readers with the most important and up-to-date research on American Catholic and the Catholic Church in the United States.

One of the key findings from the study is that *"When the candidates visit communities they find places of prayer and shared faith different from the secularized locations they encounter in the rest of their lives."*

We invite you to watch the following video which describes [Characteristics of Newer Entrants](#).

Society of Mary (Marists) Vocation News



Novitiate Program Begins in Italy

During the week of January 3rd, the 11 novices arrived at the house of the International Novitiate “Cerdon”, in Montauto, Tuscany. On the feast of Epiphany, the Superior General of the Society of Mary, Fr John Larsen, joined the novices and their formators to officially open the International Novitiate 2022 with the celebration of the Eucharist.

As they began this recollection time they even encountered some snowfall! Let us keep them in prayer as they move forward in their discernment journey hand in hand with Mary.



Celebration of First Profession in District of Africa

On January 5th five young men in the Marist District of Africa made their first profession before the District Superior, Fr Albert Kabala, SM in the novitiate house in Yaounde, Cameroon. The newly professed confreres will have a break home before travelling to Casa di Maria for their Theology studies in Rome, Italy.



Marist Vocation Year Prayer (2021-2022)

Jesus, Good Shepherd, we ask you to look on this family of Mary, your Mother, with eyes of mercy. Throughout this year of vocations, we ask you, Lord, to enrich the Marist world with the fire of your Holy Spirit.

**May Mary's subtle and delicate presence enable us to breathe her spirit.
So that, committed to our own vocation,
we will be credible witnesses of your Gospel.**

And, renewed and strengthened with the fire of your Spirit, we may help bring to life the seed of a vocation which you have implanted in the hearts of the young.

**Enable us to accompany them in the fulfillment of their personal vocation.
Lord Jesus, give us vocations according
to your heart. Amen.**

**Jean Claude Colin
– Pray for us.**

