

Society of Mary

Marist Vocation News



June 2022

Introduction

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

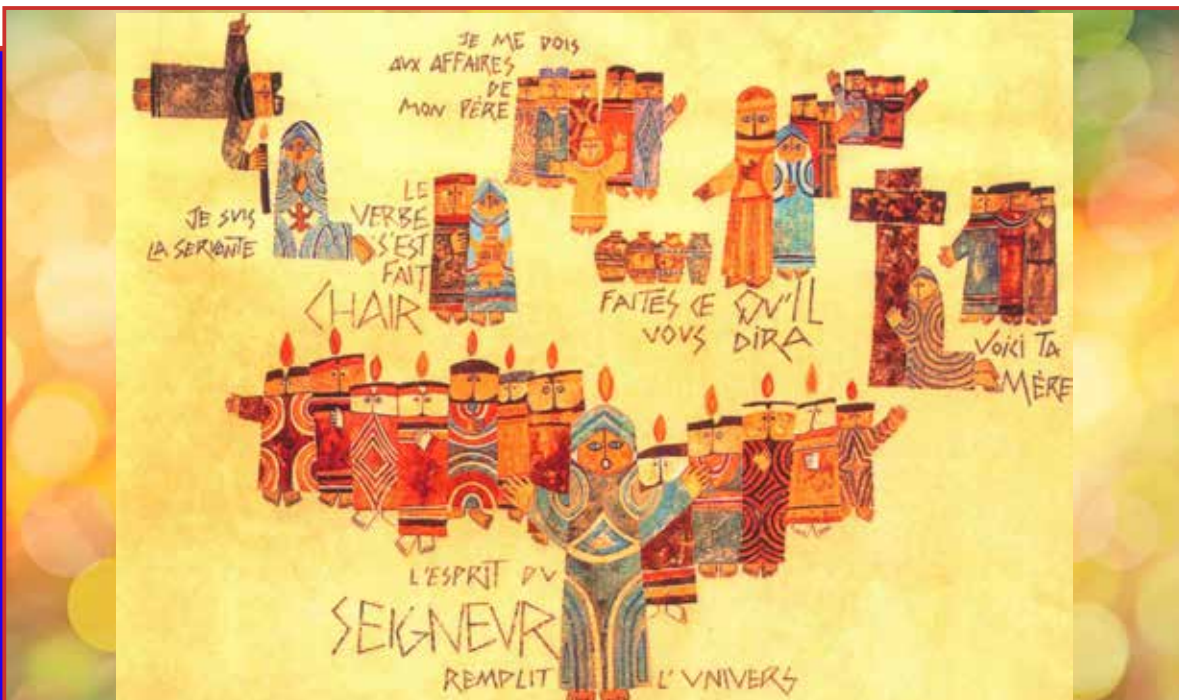
We are coming towards the end of our series of essays on the critical role of a Marist vocation in the contemporary Church and surrounding world. The final vocation newsletter in this series will be published in September.

As we mentioned in the first Newsletter of these essays, excellent studies of religious congregations that are receiving vocations show that three key factors are evident: 1) they have a crystal clear sense of their identity and mission and are passionate about its critical role in the Church and society; 2) they have noticeably faith-based communities that are places of shared faith and hope; 3) the groups have developed culture of vocations where everyone is involved in seeking vocations and inviting young men into their communities.

The writers of the essays in our series convey the passion they have for their own Marist vocations shown in concrete ways through many different types of ministerial settings. I think they also show what Pope John Paul II said as early as the 1980's: There really is no "here" and "over there" in the Church's mission anymore.

Given that many people from "over there" are moving "here" in refugee and immigration movements in our fast-connecting world, media carries all of "the over there over here." Globalization is transforming life on our earth and we are all confronted with a new missionary world where every minister in the US needs to face the graces of engaging other cultures and languages.

The short essays in this newsletter show that to be true. In a sense, every Marist vocation is a missionary vocation these days.



Because they bear the name of Mary, Marists desire to be like her and follow Jesus as she did. Contemplating Mary in the mysteries of Nazareth and Pentecost and her role at the end of time, they come to share her zeal for her Son's mission in his struggle against evil, and to respond with promptness to the most urgent needs of God's people. (Marist Constitutions n.8)

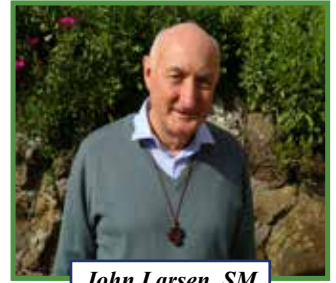
Why is a Marist Vocation Critical to the Church Today? - *A missionary perspective*

by Fr. John Larsen, SM, Superior General of the Society of Mary, Rome, Italy

Isn't it "passé" to think of being a missionary these days?

We sometimes used to think of missionaries as exotic men or women who left home and country to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to very foreign lands. Maryknollers in China. Marists in the Pacific. White Fathers in Africa. Many men and women all over the globe. Often there was something heroic in our picture of them. At least that is how it used to be for me, long ago.

Later on, we came to hear that some missionaries brought not only the Gospel but also rather too much of their home cultures and personalities which could sometimes almost overtake the Gospel message.



John Larsen, SM

Then the whole understanding of mission changed. Now we were all called to be missionaries. We remembered that God himself is essentially and actively a loving-mission and that we all share in his mission by our Baptism. However, if everyone is a missionary is anyone specifically a missionary? The Christian world that had traditionally sent the missionaries was only questionably Christian any longer. Perhaps "the mission" to bring the Gospel was now primarily at home? Some of the places where missionaries were traditionally sent now rejoiced in more vibrant local churches than the sending communities. In fact, a phenomenon of "reverse mission" has developed so that these receiving countries are often now the new sending churches. Also, in the economically developed world there are less people putting up their hands to volunteer for full-time mission abroad.

Among a possible ambivalence towards mission and missionaries, Mary offers us a sure way into the future.

Mary speaks to us from Nazareth saying that the first mission is indeed at home, recognizing Christ in the insignificance of our ordinary lives and work. Being a missionary like Mary is not necessarily first and foremost about travelling to a remote foreign land, but forming a missionary heart right where we are, our own "Nazareths", working alongside the presence of Christ among us, to nourish our local families and communities.

Mission, as much as charity, may indeed begin at home. However, Mary heading off into the hill country of Judah to visit her cousin Elizabeth in her challenging situation, is a call to be flexible enough to leave the comfort of home going "in haste" to wherever there is a need. Or the comfort of our own limited plans and dreams. Mary takes with her the Word in her womb and Elizabeth's baby jumps for joy. The missionary call is rooted in contemplative prayer as we celebrate every time we pray the Magnificat with Mary and Elizabeth, the prayer which they first prayed together joyfully in that remote Judean hill country.

Mary at Golgotha reminds us that mission includes staying alongside those who are suffering at the margins of society. Marist missionaries will be the presence of Mary alongside those who are oppressed and rejected, seeing in them the tortured body of her Son.

The days of the isolated missionaries, lone-ranger boundary riders, are gone. We see Mary at her missionary best among the community of the early disciples, sent forth on mission with the fire of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Marist missionary life involves dynamic, welcoming, out-going communities, united in the Holy Spirit.

One of the famous spiritual guidelines of our Marist Founder, Fr. Jean-Claude Colin, is that Marists are called to be "hidden and unknown in the world". This is not only a call to a discreet personal spirituality. It is also, and much more, a missionary call. Who are the "hidden and unknown" of this world? They are people who are nameless because they are forgotten. They are unknown because no-one cares. A Marist missionary, like Mary, stands in solidarity with the "hidden and unknown of this world" and accompanies them to develop their ability to make their own voices sing confidently, voices of justice and peace and joy in the Kingdom of God.

Old-world ways of understanding missionaries and "mission" have changed. Mary in the New Testament shows us the way forward. She is never a mere plaster statue. She is a dynamic missionary woman whose spirit we Marist missionaries live and breathe. We are all called to be missionaries in the Spirit of Mary wherever we find ourselves. This mission is perennial.



Fr. Larsen, SM working in the mission in Ranong, Thailand

Why is a Marist Vocation Critical to the Church Today? - *A missionary perspective*

by Sister Michelle de Silva, smsm, Marist Missionary Sisters Liaison to Initial Formation/Vocation, Waltham, Massachusetts

When Pope Francis launched the synod on synodality last year, I immediately thought of Fr. Colin's prophetic intuition of the action of Marists in the Church, inspired by the short phrase; "all these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus..." (Acts 1:14) Like Mary, Marists of all branches are invited to be present and actively engaged with the whole Church in prayer, listening to the Holy Spirit, the world and each other as we seek a new way to reveal the Reign of God today.



Sr. Michelle de Silva, smsm

Mary's presence in the newborn Church reveals the human complexity which comforts and challenges. While she has pride of place as mother of the Founder - having first hand memory of Jesus' life, words and works; she also shares the lot of those who find themselves "outside of the law," as a woman, a widow and mother of an executed 'criminal.' As "spouse" of the Holy Spirit, Mary had learned all her life to listen and be open to the surprises of God even when she remained unsure of what was to come. Hers was a quiet presence but as Fr. Colin remarked, "...she seemed to be doing nothing, although she did more by her prayers than the Apostles by their preaching." (A Founder Speaks, Doc. 140, para 4)

Whether it was pastoral service to the people of Belley, educating the youth or setting out to Oceania to educate women and children in the faith, Mary inspired our Marist ancestors to make Jesus known. Through a diversity of charisms, the Society of Mary continues to respond to Mary's desire to continue the mission of Christ today as a hidden but active presence in the Church and world. We ask ourselves though what does this mean to us today?

Following in the footsteps of our Marist ancestors and through our daily encounters, we hear to the voices of those who find themselves on the margins of the world and Church today. Do we listen to them? How are we listening to them? Whose voices still need to be heard? The synod on synodality is a blessing to us Marists as we return to a fundamental dimension of our vocation- that of listening. We are invited to listen to the voices of those who are poor, prisoners, refugees and homeless. To hear the cries for pastoral and sacramental support from the diversity of families who live "outside our ecclesial laws". To share our spiritual heritage with those whom we serve, to make Jesus known and loved like Mary. And with the wider Church to pray and wait for the grace to participate in the new Pentecost for our time. So let us ask ourselves, "how am I/are we participating in this synod? Who are the person/s God is inviting me to give my attention? What impedes my ability to listen?"

Mary, our first and perpetual Superior, pray for us.



Why is a Marist Vocation Critical to the Church Today? - A missionary perspective

by Fr. Patrick Francis O'Neil, SM, Palmas de Monte Alto, Bahia, Brazil



Fr. Patrick O'Neil, SM

When I was a boarder at our Marist school, St. Patrick's College, Silverstream, Wellington, New Zealand (1969-1973) I read a book "Blazing the Trail" that contained edited letters from Fr. Emmet McHardy, a Marist Missionary priest who worked in the Solomon Islands and died in 1933 at the tragically young age of 29 from tuberculosis. I remember being struck by his dedication to the mission and his courage in facing so many difficulties and challenges that were part of his life. His letters revealed a deep faith in the Lord and his love for Mary.

When I completed High School, I spent a year in Tonga as a government VSA volunteer (the New Zealand equivalent of the Peace Corps) teaching at St. John's College ('Api Fo'ou, Nuku'alofa), another Marist school. It was a chance to see Marist missionaries in action and through education making a difference in a country in the process of development.

I recall that at the seminary in Mt. St. Mary's, Napier where we studied for the Marist priesthood there was a large statue of St. Peter Chanel at the entrance to the Chapel with a large relic (a complete rib) at its feet. As I left the Chapel, I had the habit of praying for our missionaries, their apostolates and my own missionary vocation.

I was ordained in 1982 and immediately applied to our General House for permission to work in one of our mission areas. At the beginning of 1986, after a period of teaching Economics at St. Bede's College in Christchurch, New Zealand, I found myself in Brazil.

I have now spent 36 years in Brazil as a Marist missionary. For the first 20 years I was in Curitiba, Paraná in southern Brazil at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Paraná (PUCPR), which is administered by the Marist Brothers. Here I taught Professional Ethics in a number of courses and coordinated a Leadership Course. I have now been working for 16 years in our Marist Mission in Bahia at Palmas de Monte Alto, Bahia, an impoverished area of the Sertão of Brazil.

In all this time I have been motivated by our *Constitutions* (No. 12): "Their call is to be truly missionary: they are to go from place to place, announcing the word of God ... They attend especially to the most neglected, the poor, and those who suffer injustice." Fr. Jean-Claude Colin's, our Founder, vision of Mary at the heart of the new-born Church encouraging and supporting the Apostles but in very discreet yet powerful way (cf. *A Founder Speaks*, Doc.140, n.4) has always been very much part of how I see and live our Marist charism. However, especially since ministering here in the Sertão of Bahia, following Fr. Colin's exhortation to think, feel, judge and act like Mary, I have been drawn to contemplate the dynamics of the Visitation. Mary, full of haste, takes the Word of God to her encounter with Elizabeth, as we are all called to do in our ministry today, but so often we forget the full force of her Magnificat: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord ... He has shown the power of his arm, he has routed the proud of heart. He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich sent away empty." (Luke 1,46.51-53)



Mass in the community of Brejo Bezerra, Iuiú, Bahia, Brasil

For this reason, more than ever, our Marist vocation is critical to the Church today.



Procession on Pentecost Sunday, Palmas de Monte Alto

Why is a Marist Vocation Critical to the Church Today? - *A missionary perspective*

by Fr. Tony O'Connor, SM, Pastor, San Felipe de Jesus, Brownsville, Texas

Marists missioned to foreign communities have the same but also a somewhat different path in their Marist Vocation.

The Marist Way especially in these missionary circumstances I believe has its inspiration in Luke 2:19 and 2:51b

“Mary remembered all these things and thought deeply about them, ...” and “His Mother treasured all these things in her heart, ...”

This is the launching pad to profoundly **“Think and Judge and like Mary to feel and act in everything like her.”**

Human Nature tends to be suspicious of people of other cultures, races, countries or beliefs. The missionary humbly and attentively must tread carefully to enter into the confidence of those he comes to serve by walking with them in every moment, especially those more vulnerable moments like in time of death, sickness and family and community trauma. as well always remembering that the local community, the local church and the culture are at home and in their very own space.



Fr. Tony O'Connor, SM

The Missionary, an outsider, needs to always be aware of and accept this space with its cultural differences and religious customs. The way things are expressed and done is the prerogative of the locals. The missionary can easily get into trouble, not only with the people but with the civil and ecclesiastical authorities, especially in politically unstable places.

The “Ugly American” is a concept which aptly signifies the pitfalls a missionary from outside can fall into because he has not in context **“thought, judged, felt and acted like Mary.”** To do so requires being unassumingly **“hidden and unknown”** and definitely not showing an inkling of pride, power craziness or greed. Walking humbly with the people is Mary’s way, rather than ruling over, which is the “Petrine” way.

Added to this is the question of language. The cultural concepts of a people are embedded in the language. Someone who comes with a different mother tongue stands to get it wrong and someone from elsewhere who speaks the same lingo can even do worse. The nuances and idiosyncrasies of each local culture can be a pitfall for these people who fall into the trap of thinking they understand all.

“What a crazy thing they do here;” can often be a refrain spoken or just secretly thought. The crazy thing and the crazies who do it are there for a reason. One day you actually come to see that it was not crazy at all.

Needless to say living and working with various local and foreign missionaries in itself can be fraught with misunderstanding or missing the mark.

Words, attitudes, tone of voice, ways of reacting are all a learning curve. Are the people passive aggressive or more likely to be in your face and up front? Fifty years pass by and you are still questioning. The main thing is your empathy, doing all you can for people and then God supplies what is lacking.

This is where Mary’s remembering and treasuring in her heart comes in. Her humble tolerance and faith, not only in her God but in her people is her “Way”. Her littleness, gentle modest interior and exterior dignity take the outsider to the inside, to lead hearts, to Mary’s way and to Jesus her Son.

“As far as you are able and as far as the circumstances of the place permit, always show yourselves modest, poor, but clean in your clothes and in your exterior.”

Repeat unceasingly “omnia possum in eo qui me confortat (“I can do all things in him who comforts me”) Phil. 4. (13th October 1836. Colin’s letter to Missionaries)



Mothers and kids in Valencia, Venezuela



Praying at the Closed Border Gate, Brownsville, Texas



Migrants on the bridge, Brownsville, Texas

Why is a Marist Vocation Critical to the Church Today? - *A missionary perspective*

by Fr. John Bolduc, SM, Parochial Vicar, St. Patrick Parish, Roxbury, Massachusetts

The Curse of Self-Promotion



Fr. Bolduc with Guatemalan community at Our Lady of the Assumption, Atlanta, Georgia

I saw a cartoon in which the Constitution was corrected. “We” the people was changed to read: “Me” the people. Some cultures are “Me”; others are more “We.” The Gospel’s is not “Me.”

The vision of the Kingdom cannot come to us in a pure state, because there is no generic human being; only people formed by culture, language and the world that surrounds them.

It is most important for anyone invited into another world to know their own presuppositions, prejudices and unquestioned values. No one does this easily. In a political climate that takes books out of the hands of teachers to give them guns, it is particularly difficult to be self-critical.

What do Missionaries bring? Missionaries might be scandalized by the clothing worn in a culture with which they are unfamiliar. So, they impose a standard of modesty best suited for a frigid climate. Cultural imperialism or presumed superiority is not the Gospel. Who needs it?

We begin to appreciate Mary by understanding that “it is not about her.” A Queen!? Royalty would be her last ambition; her Son’s crown was a mockery of thorns. In the most beautiful icons, she points to her Son; it is not about her. Saint John understood: “I must decrease so He can increase.” True happiness, true peace, is not the product of self-seeking fulfillment. It is a by-product of self-forgetfulness. All great religious traditions are awakened to that irony.

In the Gospel, it is not “Me”. It is “Our” Father, not “My Father.” We get out of the way so that others, the Other, may be felt. Our right hand cannot know what our left is doing. Actually, Mary is hidden and unknown.

A woman suffers from an infection in a bidonville of Dakar. She receives a regimen of antibiotics. Her neighbor complains of the same symptoms. What does she do? She cuts her medication in half so as to share it with her neighbor. Wrong, of course! But spontaneous sharing. For the medication to work, she has to be taught to be selfish. What a gift poverty can be! It is not “Me” but “We.”

There are homeless people gathered at the intersection of Mass Avenue and Cass in Boston, Massachusetts. One fellow receives a sandwich, the last handed out. He cuts his in two to share with a hungry woman. “Father, if I am cold, someone will always give me their coat.” Poverty is a social evil and must not be romanticized, but there is charity among the poor.

A Marist missionary does not bring the Gospel, but discovers it in others, especially the poor. There is no presumption of superiority, but a humble realization of the respect that others are due.

Of course, Marists do not own that idea. It is the Gospel. While our temptation may be to self-promoter, Mary’s is to not distract from God’s work of scattering the braggarts and leaving the callous rich out in the cold. It is a different way; a good way.



Yaquona ceremony at the seminary in Suva Fiji (picture by Fr. Bolduc, SM)

Additional Vocation Reflections



In April 2022, when visiting Notre Dame Preparatory and Marist Academy in Pontiac, Michigan, in an episode of the Marist Minute Podcast, Fr. John Larsen, SM talked about his life as a Marist and lessons on how we can live out our lives as better people by following the example of Mary and bringing the Good News of Christ to those on the fringes of society. Listen to the episode [HERE](#).

Society of Mary (Marists) Vocation News



Casa Di Maria Summer Program

In Rome, Italy the university exams are now finished and summer has arrived. Last week four students renewed their vows, on June 25, 2022 the community celebrated Lector and Acolyte, and summer departures have begun.

The year 1 students, Joseph, Joël, Clovis, Godlove, Hemi and Charles, head off on their Marist Mission experience to Ranong, Lyon, Sahagún, London and Dublin. After two years in Rome Clinton heads home to Cameroon for a holiday and a short pastoral experience. Christian will be in France for the spiritual exercises of St Ignatius and visiting the Marist places. The deacons Sefo and Yves will be heading back to Fiji and Cameroon to take up their first appointments, while Jaime will be continuing his studies in Rome. The eight pre-theologians, Leonard, Lesley, Peter, Anatole, Jean-Paul, Joe, Lewis and Robert, are about to finish 3 months of Italian languages classes. They will have the opportunity to practice their new skills over the summer in Italian communities. The student priests, Long Mechavez and Thilo Saft, are shifting: Long is moving to the General House and Thilo will go to Casa di Maria for the next year.



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.

