

# Society of Mary

## Marist Vocation News

September 2022



### Introduction

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

This will be our last bulletin in honor of the yearlong Marist Society celebration of Marist Vocations. This last issue is centered on **hope** as a dimension of Marist Vocation. It is principally in hope that a young woman or man takes up their life and dedicates it to God in the vowed life. Their most evident witness of this dedication IS a lifetime vow of celibate chastity. They also take vows of poverty and obedience, of course - but they are both vows that can apply to many walks of life. Obedience to God's will, will always be front and center in a Christian life. Poverty (a life of simplicity in possessions and lifestyle) can be seen in many young people's lives today who do not enter religious life. But celibate chastity has been as of the essence of the religious life from the earliest Church. It is a "giving up" of course - of the life of married love, of a family right down to grandchildren. This is the source of questions that emerge in the middle of the night for them, a jarring awakening about "What in the world am I doing?" But it is here where Hope steps in as it has before through the step-by-step preparation for religious life. When Jesus answered these same questions He said, "Everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times more."

The experience of many religious who have vowed lifetime celibate chastity confirm this. In a mysterious way, their Hope for a life filled with love has already been rewarded a hundred-fold. But Jesus also said "but with many persecutions." That was true as well in the broad sense of that word. There were times of darkness and loneliness but this also comes to married people as well in spite of their rich married life.

Perhaps it shows how true it is that faith, hope and charity all meltaway into love in many people's lives. St. Paul says that only love will be the human virtue in the reign of God while faith and hope will have dissolved as unnecessary.

To these young religious as their commitments grow and develop from faith through hope to love, the advice of Pedro Arrupe, SJ, the former Superior of the Jesuits is a good guide:

***"Nothing is more practical than finding God, than falling in Love  
in a quite absolute, final way.***

***What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will  
affect everything.***

***It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what  
you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what  
you read, whom you know,***

***what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and  
gratitude.***

***Fall in Love, stay in love, and it will decide everything."***



Similar reflections about the vocational path of love leads to a lay vocation as well whether rooted in a vocation to marriage and children or to the single life. Paraphrasing the words of Mother Teresa: silence finds its fruition in prayer which finds its fruition in trusting faith which finds its fruition in firm hope in God's promises which finds its fruition in service.

## Why is a Sense of Hope Critical for Marist Vocations in Our World Today?

by Sr. Georgetanne M. Donovan, smsm

Before my Profession as a Marist Missionary Sister (SMSM), I was encouraged to take a motto for my life. After reflecting on the world, the Church and the seriousness of choosing to live a vowed life in a time of upheaval (after Vatican II), I created the motto *To live in hope and serve in love*. I have carried this in my heart ever since and reflect on it often, especially in times of difficulty and periods of upheaval, such as we are living today. We do not have to look too far to know that our world today is in need of hope... not *wishful thinking* – “I hope I get that job;” or “I hope we win the game;” or “I hope the pandemic ends soon” – but *Christian hope*, the theological virtue that goes hand in hand with the virtues of faith and love.

Hope is rooted in our faith in God. We hope for what we do not see, otherwise it would not be hope. Hope is trusting that the promises God has made will be fulfilled – in God’s time, not in my time. Hope is a deep passion and longing for what we know, in faith, is already ours – salvation in Christ Jesus. But its realization requires patient endurance – perseverance – as we journey through life. A disciple of Jesus must be steeped in hope, not focused on self. To live for God in Christ impels us towards *the other* – to love God with one’s whole being and to love (to serve!) our neighbor. This describes Mary, the first disciple of Jesus, and those who, by a gracious choice of Mary, are privileged to bear her name in the world.



Sr. Georgetanne M. Donovan, smsm

To be Marist is to be a disciple of Jesus in a particular way. We are called to be a little of Mary’s presence in the world: to imbibe her spirit – attitudes of mind and heart like attentive listening (obedience), humility, self-forgetfulness, generosity, joyfulness – and trust that our lives will be transformed by the Holy Spirit each and every day. This trust – *hope* – is critical to a Marist vocation.



SMSM Pastoral Ministry in Peru

Mary lived in a period of great upheaval. Yet, throughout her life, she embraced each moment of joy and sorrow with a sense of hope. She lived fully the joys of visiting Elizabeth and assisting in the birth of John the Baptist, giving birth to her Son, creating a family with Joseph and Jesus, celebrating with a newly-married couple; and she lived fully the sorrows of being a refugee in a foreign land as a new mother without the support of family and

friends, following the public ministry of her Son while holding in her heart the prophecy of Simeon, standing at the foot of the cross of Jesus – experiencing his passion as hers without wavering in faith or hope. Mary was a beacon of hope to the disciples as they waited for the outpouring of the Spirit and she was the support of *the Church in the process of being born* after Pentecost. Like her, Marists need to be beacons of hope who engage fully with our world that is in need of healing, restoration and peace. We are called to do this in *hidden and unknown* ways within our own sphere of influence. Marist Vocation: men and women of hope *walking together* with those to whom we have been sent to serve in *participation*, communion and mission.



Sr. Sonia Tulili, smsm with deaf students recycling plastic, Solomon Islands

## Why is a Sense of Hope Critical for Marist Vocations in Our World Today?

by Bev McDonald, Marist Laity New Zealand



Bev McDonald

I enjoy walking, but mild arthritis means I limp sometimes. Mary did a lot of walking: Her trip to Elizabeth and back, her journey to Bethlehem, the escape to Egypt and back to Nazareth, the family trips to Jerusalem and her walking in the footsteps of Jesus and the fledgling church, even her unrecorded daily walks to the well. I wonder what her feet looked and felt like?

Fr. Jean-Claude Colin, SM and the early Marists walked the Bugey. They were an insignificant group fired with a sense of call. The Marists who came to Oceania walked too, in difficult terrain with few provisions. Walking with a limp seems a helpful image for our Marist vocation today. Mary's first response after the Annunciation was to set out in 'haste'. Marists are called to be people on the move, walking in faith, trusting God in every situation, even when we feel we are limping along.

That idea helps me as a Marist Lay woman. I met a woman recently who walked for weeks as a teen to an overcrowded refugee camp. She picked sugarcane stalks as she walked, stressing she did not want to steal, but had to survive. She arrived half-starved then contracted cholera and almost died. She married in camp, nearly died in childbirth and finally made it to New Zealand with her husband and child years later. They had two more children and then her husband left them. Now a solo mother she supports her children through her own layers of trauma, panic attacks, isolation and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). She is just one of so many walking wounded and Covid has amplified their struggles.

So, what does our Marist vocation have to say about hope for today? Each of us needs someone to reassure us that we are not alone, pray with and for us, support us with practical help and be a source of God's compassion, mercy and hope. Are the needs of those around us less than in Colin's time? Is Mary no longer calling us to respond to the dynamic inspiration of the Holy Spirit which impelled her to sing the Magnificat and set out in haste? Where is our sense of vitality and courage to throw caution to the wind and walk freely for God alone? Mary's call and the work of the Holy Spirit inspired all our founding Marists to persevere in bringing Mary's fledgling society to birth and walking with hope into the unknown. I would rather say, "how can we not have hope?"

Mary's quietly persistent presence, attentive listening and unflinching hope in the care and mercy of God is a critical need in our time. Mary went to the faithful Elizabeth and Zechariah. She lived among refugees and raised Jesus against all odds. She reached out at Cana interceding for needs far beyond the essential. Colin spoke of the Lay Marist vocation as a means for the "perseverance of the faithful and the conversion of sinners". Archaic language, but we see people of faith struggling and in need of hope every day, and so many are outside the church, confused, with no wine, no joy or hope in life. Particularly the Lay Marist vocation can reach into every sphere of life and step over all barriers. I encourage professed Marist's, even though some of you may feel you are walking with a limp, to actively invite Lay people to respond to Mary's call. The church and the world are crying out for people to intentionally live their faith in Mary's way. If we Marists simply keep on walking in unbounded hope, with her outrageously generous courage and conviction, if we live her radical "Yes" to the Holy Spirit every day, even if we limp with calloused feet, and see little results, we are still honouring Mary and giving glory to God. That is our call. How could we do less?

*Bev McDonald is a Lay Marist, wife, mother, grandmother in New Zealand, she was the Director of Marist Laity NZ for 10 years, holds a Theology degree and works as a spiritual director.*



Village of Cerdon, France  
high in the Bugey mountains





## Why is a Sense of Hope Critical for Marist Vocations in Our World Today?

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

A visit to San Santiago parish, at Lake Atitlan in Guatemala, raised new questions for me. The parish had been established in 1547 and after 437 years had not seen one local priest ordained. These days, and since the 1980's, there is such an influx of priestly, religious and lay-ministry vocations from that one parish, and indeed from the whole diocese, that they have more than sufficient religious leaders for their own needs and they are able to contribute missionaries to other regions of Latin America and beyond. Whatever happened? Why the dramatic rise in local vocations after more than 400 years of scarcity?



John Larsen, SM

During the 1980's that region of Guatemala was the scene of terrible government persecution of the local church and the indigenous, mostly Maya, population. Thousands of priests, religious, catechists and committed lay men and women were killed, often directly on account of their faith. "The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians" ...and vocations.



Fr. Stanley Rother

The story that I heard most clearly was of one priest from Oklahoma, [Father Stanley Rother](#), who had remained with his people in the parish of San Santiago on Lake Atitlan even while he personally knew many Christians who were being killed just nearby. He knew that he himself would probably die as a martyr. He was shot in his rectory at San Santiago parish on July 28, 1981. He had remained resolutely with his people when he could easily have returned to the safety and security of his home diocese in the USA. Blessed Stan Rother is the first officially declared martyr of Guatemala and also of the United States. He is also the first priest born in the United States to be beatified. Now that region of Guatemala is full of Christian life and faith and vocations to serve the people still traumatized from those years of persecution.

When we Christians are giving our lives totally to Christ and to his Gospel – without compromise – there will always be vocations to serve the people in all our different situations and circumstances. The lesson I learned so dramatically in Guatemala from Father Stan Rother's life and death is true everywhere. Christ will always be calling people to lay down our lives, whether physically or spiritually, for our sisters and brothers. When some Christians are responding to the Gospel call with deep prayer and total dedication to serving those around them then others will be inspired to follow. The joy of the Gospel lived radically is infectious.

There are many ways of laying down our lives for our people out of our love for Christ. Self-offering begins when we are prepared to hold lightly and with open hands all our own "theories" and ambitions, and also our pains and anger – our "ego's"-weighing us down, both personally and institutionally. When we can gratefully acknowledge all of our own history and freely hand it all over to God's love and forgiveness, what is called "detachment" in the spiritual literature, then we empty ourselves and create space for God to call us to new horizons. God calls us in the quiet of the desert-silence of our hearts.

As we empty ourselves of all our inner clutter we sometimes begin to feel fearful. Inner silence can be eerie. The immediate reaction can be to search for anything at all to fill the void. However, this very emptiness is the place where the Spirit speaks and calls us to follow Christ by dying to ourselves and loving him among our sisters and brothers, especially the poorest and most abandoned.

One encouragement is that we are not on our own. We form communities with fellow disciples who are also searching for what the Lord is asking of us. We both challenge and encourage each other within our communities when we are authentically trying to live the Gospel. We may be called to live community life in a religious order or within a diocese or together with a faith-based movement. The Lord unites us and challenges us together not to settle or compromise for anything less than the real Gospel, lived radically. The religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience are one traditional, tried and true, way of abandoning ourselves to the love of God and neighbor. There are many other paths, too.



Blessed Stanley Rother from Oklahoma is a star. Yet, as I came to know his story upon visiting the parish where he was killed, I learned that he was a very simple man who struggled humanly in so many ways and he was often disappointed. His one uncompromising commitment was to the Gospel and this led him to his true vocation as a priest, a man of deep prayer, serving some of the most abandoned people in Guatemala. He was a martyr, a witness to Christ by the power of the Spirit, throughout his whole life. We are called to the same radical "martyrdom", in one form or another, of witnessing to Christ wherever we find ourselves and however the Spirit calls us to serve.

After Fr. Stan's death, and the generous sacrifice of so many other Christians in Guatemala in the 1980's and 90's, the local Church has been blessed with an abundance of vocations to follow Christ by total self-offering. The vocation to be a radical disciple of Christ is renewed in every generation and in every place where the Gospel is joyfully embraced without compromise. Our hope for vocations in the Church is the vibrant faith of the disciples who respond to the call of Jesus Christ in profound prayer and by generous service of our brothers and sisters, whatever the cost.

## Why is a Sense of Hope Critical for Marist Vocations in Our World Today?

by Mary Ghisolfo, Marist Laity member



*Mary Ghisolfo shaking hands with student*

A good example of the critical need for a sense of hope for Marist vocations in our world today is in our elementary schools. Marist schools can give students and their parents reason to have hope in challenging learning situations. As a seasoned educator, I remember the time when students with learning differences were not identified or well understood by educators as they presently are, and were frequently disparagingly considered “slow” and “not smart” by their peers.

As Catholic educators, we are called to support, guide and provide hope for students and their parents. Having a sense of hope necessarily believes in possibility. It is a positive outlook that knows more can be done even when faced with setbacks. It’s what can be done for others, situations and challenges. Hope

motivates, activates and moves us forward. Hope is a verb. Hope asks questions and sees possibilities.

As stated in the Mayet Memoirs (September 1845) and reflected in A Certain Way, Jean Claude Colin shares a hopeful attitude when he said, “I think more is to be gained by arousing people’s feelings of confidence than by thundering and frightening people. There are souls perhaps who respond to a fright, but there are far more, I think, who respond to kindness, gentleness and trust.”

While working as a teacher and as an administrator at Notre Dame des Victoires, a Marist school in San Francisco, a Student Success Team (SST) process was instituted to provide students who struggle academically and/or behaviorally with a support system to assist them in a positive and effective way. An SST is comprised of a student’s teachers, counselor, vice principal, principal and parents. The vice principal served as the facilitator and notetaker. The purpose of the SST is to support a student’s academic, spiritual, social and emotional well-being. Having a student’s teachers and his/her parent(s) present provides a more complete picture of the student.



When a parent or teacher felt a student would benefit from an SST meeting, a Student Referral Form is initiated by the student’s teacher to begin the process. The form indicates areas of strength, areas of concern and interventions which have been used with the student. The parents also complete a Parent Preparation Form indicating the student’s strengths, the parents’ concerns, what motivates the student and the parents’ goals and expectations for the student.

At the SST meeting, an Action Plan is developed to help the student become more successful in school. The Action Plan might include interventions such as, working with teachers after school, working with a tutor, monitoring of the student’s planner and if appropriate, a request for a psychoeducational assessment to see how the student learns.

The vice principal summarizes the SST meeting articulating the agreed upon interventions intended to assist the child in becoming a successful learner and also monitors student progress. Each participant receives a written copy of the Action Plan. Follow up meetings are held as needed.

The Student Success Team process is incredibly helpful, provides guidance and support and assists with building confidence and hope in our students. Through this effective process, students learn how they learn, what support they need to achieve success, and how to advocate for themselves as learners.



## *A Note to Readers . . .*



**Brother Seán D. Sammon, FMS**

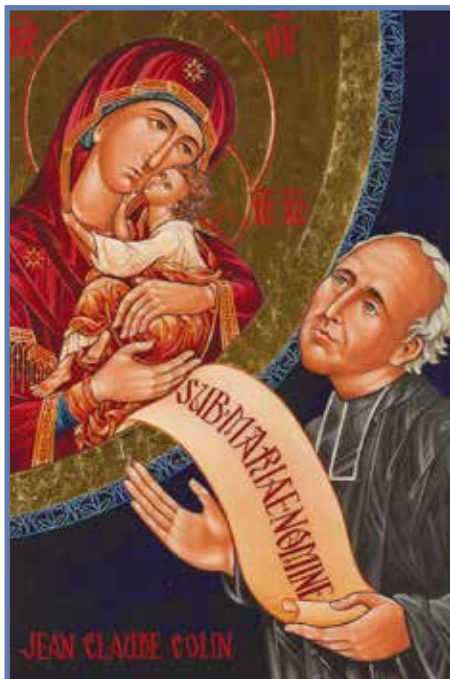
We had invited Brother Seán D. Sammon, FMS to write a reflection for this final issue of the Vocation Newsletter which he graciously accepted. However, sadly he passed away on September 9, 2022.

Bro. Seán professed his first vows in 1967 and served as Provincial of the Marist Brothers' Poughkeepsie Province, President of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, Vicar General and Superior General of the Institute of the Marist Brothers of the Schools. He was a licensed psychologist and was appointed Novice Director in 2017. At the time of his death, he was a Scholar in Residence at Marist College in Poughkeepsie, NY.

In 2013 Bro. Seán was instrumental in assisting the members of the Assembly and Chapter of the Marist Fathers and Brothers (Marists) in the U.S. in the process of developing the current Marist Statement of Identity in ways that help make it measurably real in our ministries, communities, and personal lives. Bro. Seán led a retreat for the Marists (U.S. Province) in June 2015. The retreat presentations dealt with the spirituality of transition and change and was designed to engage Marists in the Statement of Identity. The Marists will forever be grateful for Bro. Seán's contributions.

In closing we share a quote Bro. Seán made when receiving the National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC) Outstanding Recognition Award in 2020:

*In looking back on my life, I could not imagine living another life. I'm one of those souls who's optimistic and enthusiastic about the future of religious life. This current period has given us an opportunity to reimagine our way of life. Each of us is the best advertisement for our way of life.*



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 Marists  
Assembly and Chapter of June 2013



## Vocation Resources



### Let's nurture vocation culture throughout the church

by Craig Gould

Craig Gould is a husband and father and director of family, youth, and young adult ministry for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Maryland. He has also ministered in parishes, apostolic ministries, and graduate schools.



### Can We Let Candidates Bring their Whole Selves?

by HORIZON interviews Father Joseph Brown, S.J.

Father Joseph Brown, S.J. joined the Jesuits in 1962. He is a poet, speaker, and presenter with expertise in Black Catholic history, culture, and spirituality. He has served since 1997 as a professor in the Department of Africana Studies at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.



### Feed Your Spirit: Hope is not dependent

by Father Henri Nouwen

## Society of Mary (Marists) Vocation News



The Superior General has extended Fr. Tony Kennedy's, SM term as the superior of the International Theologate in Rome, until the end of the first academic semester in February 2025. His term of office had been due to finish in October 2023. Tony has been the Superior of the Theologate since 2017.



Students and staff at Casa di Maria celebrate the September birthdays of Fr. John Larsen, SM and Fr. Larry Duffy, SM

Marist Deacon, Jaime Perez Martinez, has published his first book: [Nuestro Padre es un Jardinero](#) (Our Father is a Gardener). Jaime writes: "We all need to live with our personal garden; our body becomes the land that longs to be fertile, tamed from the Easter experience of Christian life, in a process consisting in gracious moments leading to family and community coexistence."





## 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.

