

Special: Jeff's Advent Letter 2013



It has been a year since the inauguration of the new Province! A new chapter in the Marist story began in Australia. As I said on that day it was

also the birthday of the Australian Marist Community. So Happy Birthday to you all.

As we begin Advent, we are more conscious of our call to imitate Mary in her faith response to God and share her work of bringing Christ-life to birth and nurturing its growth in young people. Br Emili gave us a statue of Mary "Pregnant with Hope" that communicates this call well.

In this letter I would like to report on developments in the Province since last December. Much has taken place in terms of "Growing Committed Marists".

1. Ministries

Even a brief visit to any Marist ministry would allow you to be impressed by

the sense of mission and vocational commitment of the Marists working there. People relate strongly to the charism and their enthusiastic dedication touches hearts.

The **Mission Council** of Brothers and Lay now provides leadership for all matters that concern Marist ministries and for the life and mission of the Australian Marist Community. It provides guidance to the Provincial, the Executive Director of Marist Ministries and the Director of Lay Marists.

Our schools are indeed privileged places of evangelisation of young people. Great things are happening in both religious education and faith formation. The **Biennial Marist Schools Conference** in Cairns brought together 180 of our school leaders and future leaders, and the Superior General. Enrolments are increasing everywhere.

Formation remains a top priority. In the last meeting of the Leadership Team of Marist Schools Australia there was mention that over 3,500 people

had participated in Marist formation programs this year: induction programs, Footsteps, Hermitage Pilgrimage (this year starting in the Holy Land), succession seminars, conferences, symposia, colloquia, retreats, school-based "I Believe" programs – next year "Serve One Another".

Marist Solidarity has been launched in all the major centres. The new Board of Australian Marist Solidarity has started to focus more on public fund-raising. We support some 90 projects in Asia, the Pacific and Africa. School-sponsored overseas immersions continue to improve on their formative aspect. Over 20 volunteers of all ages and backgrounds have been placed with Marist communities in Asia and South America.

An **Advocacy Advisory Committee** has been set up. Its purpose is to advocate for change for children and young people in Australia who are disadvantaged. In dialogue with the Mission Council the committee seeks to promote and engage



pregnant
with
hope

in a culture of solidarity; engage the members of the Australian Marist community in order to assist them to be advocates for children and young people in Australia who are disadvantaged; engage in public advocacy. Their chosen focus is indigenous education.

Marist Youth Ministry has grown in 2013. REMAR has expanded into schools in NSW and Queensland. A delegation of Young Marists attended the international Marist gathering and World Youth Day in Rio. The focus of regular gatherings in the capital cities has sharpened to include faith formation and outreach. A national festival is being planned for January 2015.

The Mission Assembly asked us to explore “diverse and creative models of community for brothers and lay”. We are looking to begin ‘**intentional**’ communities in Alice Springs and Santa Teresa in 2014. Some Young Marists will be engaged in the ministries there and live close enough to the Brothers to allow for them to share life in ways that they determine.

2. Marist Association

What is being envisaged here is the most daring change for Marists in Australia since the Brothers arrived in 1872. We are planning an Association to be the face of Marists to the Church and civilly. It will be the home for Marists to acknowledge and deepen the vocational and community dimension of their lives.

This year we appointed a National Director of Lay Marists, Joe McCarthy, and a Pastoral Team to work with him in visiting Marists in their workplaces and gatherings to meet individuals and groups who identify themselves as Marist.

There was a Forum in August to test ideas and prepare local animators for groups of Marists. We should be in a position to invite people to join the Association in 2014 while continuing to work on its canonical and civil recognition.



*the most daring change for
Marists in Australia since
the Brothers arrived in 1872*

3. Brothers' new steps

Vocations

God surprised us in Australia. We have two postulants, Jack and James! For the sake of companionship in formation and in the spirit of internationality of the last General Chapter, we arranged for them to go to the United States for postulancy and novitiate after a period of aspirancy here.

We are in the process of setting up of a House of Discernment. This is not a formation centre as such. Young men who want to explore their life options with others and be accompanied can opt to spend an extended time in a setting designed for them. We have chosen to initiate this in 2014 at Eastwood under the direction of Br Greg McDonald. The house has been renamed as Healy House after Br Stanislaus Healy, one of the first Australian Brothers who made a major contribution to the early development of the Province.



Little Brothers of Mary Project

We are looking at founding a new community with possibly some Brothers from other countries included to start a new presence of Marist Brothers in Australia. They would have a special brief of re-imagining Marist religious life here. There was the germ of such an idea at the Brothers' Provincial Chapter last year and this has developed after the recent General Conference.

At the General Conference in September, Br Emili spoke of "A new beginning". He deliberately used the physical reconstructions at the Hermitage and especially La Valla as symbolic of such "new beginnings".

When Marcellin gathered his young followers at La Valla he called them "Little Brothers of Mary". Our 'new' community would reclaim this name and the spirituality that characterized this first community.

This is an exciting project for us Brothers, an important one too as we find our place in the 21st century within the wider Australian Marist Community and the proposed canonical and civil Association of Brothers and other Marists.

East Timor

The Marist presence in East Timor (or Timor Leste as they name themselves) has seen significant developments this year. Recently we accepted three young men to begin their novitiate in 2014. This will be in Sri Lanka, starting in June with novices from East Timor, Vietnam and Pakistan. Great news. There are other resident aspirants ready to become postulants in 2014 and more aspirants ready to start. To accommodate this new family we have purchased a piece of land near Bacau and will build a formation house on it.

To strengthen our capacity to support this new growth in a country where people are more familiar with Portuguese than

English, we have forged a link with Marists in Brazil. Already we have an assistant formator from there. We are also working with the Brazilian Provincials to plan a Marist school in the coming years.

Start of the new District of the Pacific, new relations in Oceania

December 15 is the "Genesis Day" of the new District of the Pacific which comprises the Brothers and ministries of what has been the Province of New Zealand. That is, it takes in the countries of New Zealand, Fiji, Samoa and Kiribati.

At the Concurrent Chapters at the end of 2010, a decision was taken to reconfigure the administrative units in the region of Oceania into a Province (Australia) and two Districts (Melanesia and the Pacific). Each unit has its own major superior and the relationship is characterised by interdependence rather than dependence. That is, the Provincial of Australia does not have direct responsibilities in either District.

4. Royal Commission and court cases

In December and late January the Commission will focus on the way the Catholic Church has responded to victims through the Towards Healing process. We are involved in two of the four case studies. Brothers Alexis Turton and Michael Hill and probably myself have been summoned to appear.

In addition to the Commissioners, we can expect scrutiny from one or other groups representing victims. Sadly, some Brothers are already facing court action in the coming months.

In addition to the shock of such revelations, the potential for discouragement and disillusion is very real. Procedures in our ministries are greatly changed from twenty years ago. There has been considerable cultural change as well. Marist ministries have been learning and adjusting. The Brothers want to apologise not only to the victims and their families but also to our fellow Marists for the shame that these revelations will cause.

As an institution, the Marist Brothers before the 1990s failed in its duty in a number of cases and through inadequate action when such abuse came to light. No wonder these former students and their families are full of rage. As an institution dedicated to the well-being of children and young people, the Marist Brothers are committed to continue making the changes needed to address grave errors of the past and to ensure that they are not repeated.

A statement by Mr Francis Sullivan of the Truth, Justice and Healing Council of the Catholic Church can be found on <http://www.tjhcouncil.org.au/media/video-gallery.aspx>

I wrote a letter last year on this topic to all our lay colleagues in ministry. I concluded that letter saying, "Our faith teaches us that God is present to all of us at this time, especially the innocent victims. We can all pray whole-heartedly for their healing. We can all pray for the gift of hope."

5. Thanks

A special word of thanks to all of you in schools, youth welfare, solidarity and youth ministry for your dedication and vitality. Our thanks to the leaders in a special way. On your behalf I also want to thank all in the Province Administration Centres and the various ministry teams for their excellent service and good will this year, a year that had its special challenges in going national.

Best wishes for a Happy Christmas.

Jeff

An Advent Prayer:

*Intimate God,
we yearn for the light of your coming
and the warmth of your embrace;
focus our hearts on the truly important
and keep us centered on that still point, Jesus our Emmanuel,
who is alive with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God now and forever. Amen.*

