

7th October 2014
Feast of the Holy Rosary



Dear Marist friends

It was with a deep sense of privilege that we seven Australian Marists participated in the second Marist International Mission Assembly last month. Two of us (Sarah and Michael) were representing the Province, two the Region (Jeff and Jack) respectively as Leader and as a young Marist, two were there from the General Administration (Tony and Chris), and Frank was a member of the Organising Committee. To complement the communiqué and other official documents that will come from the Assembly in due course, we thought it important to share with you some of our specific experience as Australians among the one hundred and twenty other Marists who gathered in Nairobi from all parts of the world.

First, our thanks for all the time and reflection that Marist groups from around Australia invested in the preparatory phase of the Assembly. Before we left we spent some time with the summary statements, the videos, the artwork and the music that had been contributed from various meetings and staff days. They spoke strongly of our shared identity as Marists, our commitment to our distinctively Marist approach of making Jesus known and loved through the education, care, and evangelisation of young people, and our wish to enhance and to grow Marist life and ministry in this country. We took all this with us, and had opportunity to share it. There was considerable interest in what we presented, particularly in the new Marist Association of St Marcellin Champagnat.

It was hugely significant for the Marists of Africa that we came to their continent for this Assembly. They made us very welcome. In turn, it was uplifting for us to be among Marists who had such vitality and sense of future – especially the eighty student Brothers of the Marist International University College who helped to lead our liturgies and our social gatherings with their music, their rhythm, and their spontaneity.

As with any international and intercultural gathering, there was enormous richness in the encounter itself – to meet and to get to know fellow Marists who live and minister in contexts quite different from our own. They were women and men, younger and older, professed and lay, with a wide variety of roles in Marist ministries: Province-level animators and administrators, teachers, youth ministers, principals, programme directors, community workers, advocates for children's rights, Provincials, and Councillors General. In many ways, it was the Marist world, indeed the Church, in microcosm.

Not surprisingly, this variety of perspectives and experiences prompted a range of opinion concerning the most urgent calls of the present time for us as Marists. Our Australian contribution to these debates centred principally on, first, the need for a new model for how all Marists can be associated and share responsibility with one another – as we hope our new Association will do – and, second, the enduring relevance of our schools and our youth ministry programmes to be effective places of evangelisation, engagement and empowerment of young people.

The various presentations and processes of the Assembly led the delegates to identify three broad priorities that all considered to be most important for us as Marists on the threshold of our third century in the service of God's mission in the Church. First, we Marists need to be **mystics** – people who in the groundedness of our daily lives are centred in Christ, who are prayerful and serious about developing our interior lives, and who want to personify the Marian face of the Church. Second, we need to be **prophets** – people who will take up Pope Francis's invitation to go out from our encounter with the living God, like Mary of the Magnificat, bringing joy, hope and justice to those most in need of it, those on the peripheries – the Montagnes of our day. Third, we need to do this in and through a spirit of **communion** as a Marist spiritual family, and so we need to develop structures and strategies for being inclusive of the various ways in which Marists live out their Christian discipleship. In this we are called to what the Africans call a sense of *ubuntu*: I am because we are. These three topics will provide the basis for our reflection in Australia over the next twelve months, leading to our own Australian Mission Assembly in August next year.

In the middle of the Assembly, we went to the Marist International University College for Mass, followed by a ceremony of tree-planting in the Brother Charles Howard Memorial Garden on the campus. Various groupings of delegates were given trees to plant. For us as Australians this was especially poignant, as we brought to mind the outstanding Australian Marist after whom the garden is named and who, indeed, was the one principally responsible for commencing this African centre of formation that is flourishing today.



Brother Charles was someone of vision and purpose, some with the profound sense of the prophets and mystics that today's Marists are called to be, and who was a pioneer in advocating for a more inclusive and co-responsible model for how all Marists could live and work in communion. We take up his legacy to be the "new Marists in mission".

Over the months ahead, we look forward to discussing all of this in more detail with you.

Yours in Jesus, Mary and Marcellin

Brother Jeff Crowe
Sarah Nowlan
Frank Malloy
Brother Michael Green
Jack Stammers
Brother Tony Leon
Brother Chris Wills

