

## CHAPTER MESSAGE - Dreaming Together for a New Beginning

We, the Marist Brothers of the Province of South Asia, gathered at the Good Shepherd Serene Pastures Spirituality Centre, Negombo, Sri Lanka, from the 26<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> of August 2016, for our 4<sup>th</sup> Province Chapter, with Br. Joe McKee, Vicar General, and Br. Philip Pinto CFC as our facilitator.

Our coming together was characterised by deep fraternal joy and began with a ceremony installing our new Provincial, Br. Mervyn Perera, anointing him with fire and water.

Lay Marists, including Marist Youth, gathered with us on the morning of the second day, and our hearts were inspired by their presence.

We “dreamed together” at this Chapter in anticipation of our Bicentenary in 2017. Embarking on a “new beginning” for our Institute, we heard some pearls of wisdom from the Chapter floor:

- In our prayer life we are called to feel the power of God
- I’m committed to build a vibrant and joyful community
- Our Province is on a journey and I feel that there’s a strong need to bond our Laity, Brothers, and Marist Youth
- Our sharing as Brothers and Lay brings an engagement with life and wholeness that we would not experience otherwise.

And these are some of the questions we grappled with:

- What form of Community life will excite and enliven us?
- What form of prayer will bring joy to our spirits?
- How would living as Lay and Brother together bring life to us and our mission?

After listening to the various messages and reports our deliberations led us to the following topics and questions for all of us to grapple with, as priorities for the next three years.

### **The Province is on a Journey** “Dreaming anew as pilgrims of hope”

Every Chapter is another step in the love relationship between the Congregation and God. We are invited yet again to dare to risk. We face the reality that some Brothers find it difficult to move, but are encouraged that many are energetic and vibrant, wanting to take risks to continue the journey. We have already taken up this journey with God but when we are faced with challenges, we can begin to doubt in God’s providence, we complain and mistrust our leaders, and look for our familiar comfort zones like the Israelites in the wilderness. Isaiah calls us to: *“Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. (Isaiah 43:18-19)* Every year we make community life plans and very often find it difficult to live these. We believe that our Communities can only be renewed if we have new skins while searching for new wine. Our dream is to trust in God, *live our Marist life with consistency, let go of our familiar comfort zones, and be courageous in taking up our responsibilities, so that we can be a Province which is open to the promptings of the Creative Spirit and ready to follow the invitation of the Lord in new apostolates, co-labouring with Marist Lay and Youth.* Therefore we commit to reflecting on and putting into practice the following areas:

### **Brothers and Laity** “Inspired to plan and dream together”

The spark the Marist Laity generated amongst us encouraged us to go further in developing ways to promote our Marist life and ministries together.

Practical Recommendation:

- We strongly recommend our starting a new “joint community” of Brothers and Lay Marists, in a new situation.
- In making this dream a reality we Brothers and Lay must investigate, right away, possible areas of ministry, a means to invite members who are ready and willing, and a “joint formation program” for their preparation.

Let us ask:

- What are the underlying values and emerging needs for such a venture?
- What possible blocks might encounter in achieving this?

### **Community Life** “Sharing our search for the mystery we call God”

Marist Community life is to create an atmosphere of trust, openness and a sense of belonging in order to build a vibrant, joyful and prayerful community. This is our first mission.

Let us ponder:

- If a young man asked to join us, what would he expect from community life? Would we be able to offer it to him?

### **Prayer** “Searching for God as mystics and prophets”

The contemplative attitude of Mary inspires us in our search for God and his will. Our call is to make God visible.

Practical recommendations:

- We invite all Communities to set aside quality time, agreed upon in the community structure, for personal prayer in common. This will help the Brothers in their listening to God together, leading to a transformation in the personal and communal life we desire.
- The Province will create a contemplative community with at least three Brothers that is a mixed community, Brothers and Lay. This community would be opened to the Institute to invite future members from around the Marist world.

Let us ask:

- What signs do you see in yourself that you are awake to the thirst for God?

### **Vocation** “Imagining our life with fire and joy”

We are called to be disciples of Jesus in Mary’s and Marcellin’s way, but we know that there can be various obstacles to our living this joyfully and wholeheartedly, as the Pope reminds us. Our lives and invitations are the best advertisements for those attracted to our way of life. We are all involved.

Let us ask:

- What inspires and fuels the fire within me in the life and ministries of Lay Marists and Youth?
- New Brothers will come from our present and future Lay Marists and Youth. What structures could we put in place to open our communities to welcome these?

Brothers, in our days together we heard a powerful and exciting invitation from the Spirit for a new beginning, and we invite the whole Province to be part of this journey we set before you. Let’s dream together so that, with Mary and Marcellin, we may make this dream a reality over these next three years for the sake of the young people that we, Brothers and Lay Marists, are called to serve.