

MARIST BROTHERS PROVINCE OF WEST-CENTRAL EUROPE

Nijmegen, 6th May 2014

Dear Brothers and Marist friends,

May is the month that is traditionally devoted to Mary. In the past processions, Marial devotions, hymns and other special prayers marked the month of May. Some Brothers will remember May as the month when they prepared children for their First Communion. Many of these things belong to our memory of a time when Catholics lived in a culture that was bounded by religious events and activities. The liturgical calendar was part of the way that we viewed and experienced the world. Our world has become more secular, and many of these reference points have gone.

The loss of such aspects in our culture does not mean that the month of May should be any less special. I am writing this letter at the beginning of May, when the days are longer and brighter, but there is still a cold chill in the air. By the end of the month we will be on the threshold of June, when we can expect to enjoy warm days and gardens full of colourful flowers. Brother Emili invites us to meditate on “Mary, mother of a new dawn.” We can look upon the month of May like a bridge between the cold of late spring and the warmth of high summer. May then becomes a space of transition, with the uncertainty and ambiguity that we experience in times of change where we yearn to hope but can also experience disappointment.

In recent years I have found myself reflecting on “Mary, Mother of Transition.” During her lifetime she experienced the transition from being a daughter of Sion to being the mother of the Church, from being mother of Jesus to first disciple, from Jewish girl to Christian woman, and from concerned relative to believer. We all experience transitions in our own lives and the Institute of the Marist Brothers is also going through its own transition, from an Institute of individual Provinces, often with people who spoke one language and sharing a similar culture, to an international community with Provinces comprising people who speak different languages and who experience different histories and cultures. During this month of May perhaps we could reflect on Mary as model of transition and invite her to be with us as we navigate these transitions in our lives, communities, Province and Institute.

THOSE WHO HAVE DIED

Brother Declan Duffy died in Dublin on 22nd April. Brother Declan was an outstanding leader, educational thinker and innovator. The presence of many key people from the worlds of education, religious life and the Church at his funeral bore testimony to his leadership and influence from the 1960s to the 1990s. He suffered decline in his cognitive abilities in the last ten years of his life and lived in a nursing home from February 6th until his death.

Mr Josef Herrmann died on 26th February, six weeks before his 80th birthday. He was an affiliated member of the Institute. He worked in the brewery in Furth, and latterly took over responsibility for the distillery. The work of the distillery expanded during the time that he was the manager. He was a good worker and manager and deeply a Marist.

THOSE WHO ARE ILL

Brother Antoon Delva (Kessel-Lo) was taken to the Sacred Heart clinic in Leuven as a result of problems with his heart. He was kept in intensive care for two weeks and then spent time in a normal ward. He returned to the hospital in Kortenberg, but was readmitted to the Sacred Heart hospital on 4th May due to further complications in his health. Brother John Phillips has made significant progress and will return to Marist House, Glasgow, on the 8th of May. In Furth Brothers Luitpold Ramsauer and Aloys Kessler have left hospital and returned to the community. Brother Franz Eberle moved to a nursing home on the 7th of May, and Brother Gerhard Mensch will move to the same home in a few weeks' time. Their new address is:



**Spitalstiftung Pattendorf
Alten- und Pflegeheim
Ritter-Hans-Ebron-Str. 15
84056 ROTTENBURG
Germany
Telephone: +49 (0)8781-94260**

Please remember all of these Brothers in your prayers.

THE VISITATION

As you are aware, the General Council visitation began on March 5th and ended on April 16th. Brothers Antonio Ramalho and Ernesto Sanchez visited every community in the Province, all of the former Marist schools in Germany, L'Institut Sainte Marie in Arlon, and the three Marist schools in Ireland. Brother Antonio Ramalho also visited the fraternities in Belgium. There were meetings with lay people in all of the countries. In Scotland they met Brother Douglas Welsh and two lay people who work with him to support the Mangamanuthu project in India. They also met Mr Gerry Devlin and Ms Angela Ferrier who provide a range of management and support services for the Brothers in Scotland. In the Netherlands the Brothers visited the Moria project, and met young adults involved in the Stiltehuis and Inner Journey projects. It was a very comprehensive visit, and they were able to have individual interviews with most of the Brothers in the Province.



The Provincial Council met with Brothers Antonio and Ernesto in Furth on 1st – 2nd May. The Brothers shared their report, which will be translated and distributed as soon as possible. The report is positive and encouraging and focuses on the three General Chapter calls:

- 👁️ A new consecrated life that promotes a new way of being Brother;
- 👁️ Communion with Brothers and lay people;
- 👁️ Mission: a highly significant presence among poor young people.

They also shared reflections on Provincial leadership.

The Provincial Council thanked the visitors for the fraternal nature of their visit. I think I can say with confidence that we found their visit a source of encouragement. It also enabled me to make contact with the Brothers and groups of lay people in the Province. Brothers Antonio and Ernesto said that they feel very encouraged by the visit, particularly the witness of so many men who continue to live faithfully in a time of significant loss and change. They specifically mentioned the development of a new relationship with lay people, commitment to new projects and ways of being present as Brothers, the brotherly atmosphere in our communities, the achievement of a sense of being part of a new Province, and the positive spirit that exists in the Province.

ASSEMBLY IN BELGIUM

The Third Assembly of Belgian Brothers Habay-la-Vieille March. The focus was on the mission in Belgium. The presentations were from communities and the future of mission will be a combination of the four “pillars” of Genval (Œuvres and Maison Marie-Médiatrice), Kessel-Lo, and Linthout. The assembly process has led to important reflections, discussions and conversations which will help the Provincial Council in their decisions. The commitment of the Belgian Brothers to the assembly process encourages the Council to continue with this style of consultation and participation for the Brothers in Belgium.



The assembly of Belgian Brothers took place in Habay-la-Vieille on Saturday 22nd of March. The focus of this assembly was on the mission in Belgium. Before the assembly, there were presentations from communities and individuals. The future of mission in Belgium will be a combination of support for the four “pillars” of Genval (Œuvres and Missionnaires and Maison Marie-Médiatrice), Kessel-Lo, and Linthout.

LAY MEETING IN ROME

Brother P.J. McGowan participated in a meeting in Rome on lay association and belonging. This meeting was based on an initiative of the Province of Australia, and had two objectives:

- A: To share information about the different possibilities of lay Marist association and belonging;
- B: To begin a process of discernment about the structures of association and belonging most suitable for our Institute.

Brother P.J. has written a report on the meeting for the web site, so I will not repeat everything here. This meeting was an important beginning of a process that could lead to significant changes in the Institute. It may lead to the creation of new structures for the future of Marist institutions which are currently owned and managed by the Brothers.



DAY OF RECOLLECTION IN IRELAND

The Provincial Council is keen for the Brothers to meet together, and to create opportunities for retreats and days of recollection. A day of recollection was organised for the Brothers in Ireland on Palm Sunday, 13th April, and was led by Fr. Brendan Comerford S.J. The Brothers appreciated his presentations. Hopefully we can continue to hold days of recollection during the seasons of Lent and Advent.

THE "HOUSE TO BE" PROJECT

For a number of years the Brothers in the Netherlands have been exploring the possibility in Nijmegen of establishing a project for adolescent boys at risk. The Dominican Sisters of Neerbosch (a congregation in Nijmegen) have joined the Brothers for this project. Its goal is to provide preventative shelter and accompaniment for boys aged 12 – 17. The house will be run by “care parents” who will live and stay in the house with the

young people. As a result of several meetings with the City of Nijmegen, the City considers the house as a pilot project with a preventative mission. The City has agreed to provide significant financial support.



HOUSE TO BE

On 15th April 2014, the 14th anniversary of the foundation of our Province, the Brothers and Dominican Sisters were given the keys to the house which will be

used for the project. It is an ideal property with space for the young people, an apartment for the house parents, a garden and a garage which can be used for recreation. The "House To Be" is a necessary and exciting new project, which is consistent with the desire of the General Chapter for a significant presence among poor and vulnerable children. I would like to offer my congratulations to the Brothers in the Netherlands for their initiative in undertaking this project and for achieving the support of the City and other partner organisations.

Cmi GERMANY

The *Cmi* office in Germany has received applications from 12 young people who want to work as volunteers in the Marist world next year. It is encouraging to see the level of interest and development in this new initiative.

IRELAND: HERMITAGE VISITS

A group of Irish teachers made a pilgrimage to the Hermitage from 13th – 16th March. The pilgrimages have been very effective in creating a group of lay Marists who are interested in promoting Marist characteristic spirit in our schools. Brother P.J. McGowan returned the following week with Ms Rowena Lacey, a member of staff at Moyle Park College. They led a group of transition year students (15 years of age) in a pilgrimage to the Marist places. The visit made a deep impression on the students, some of whom want to return as guides for younger students in future years.



SCOTLAND: BROTHER EMILI TURÚ

Brother Emili Turú, S.G., made a short visit to Scotland at the beginning of April. During his visit he was able to spend time with the Brothers. He also made a pilgrimage to Iona, an important site in the history of Scottish and European monasticism, with Brothers Ernesto Sanchez and Antonio Ramalho. Brother Emili also visited Dundee where he met Brother Douglas Welsh and Brother Adrian Walker. We then had breakfast with Bishop Stephen Robson, the newly installed bishop of Dunkeld. While we were there we visited Dunkeld Cathedral. The Brothers started to teach in the rooms underneath the cathedral when they arrived in Dundee in 1860.



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COUNCIL NEWS

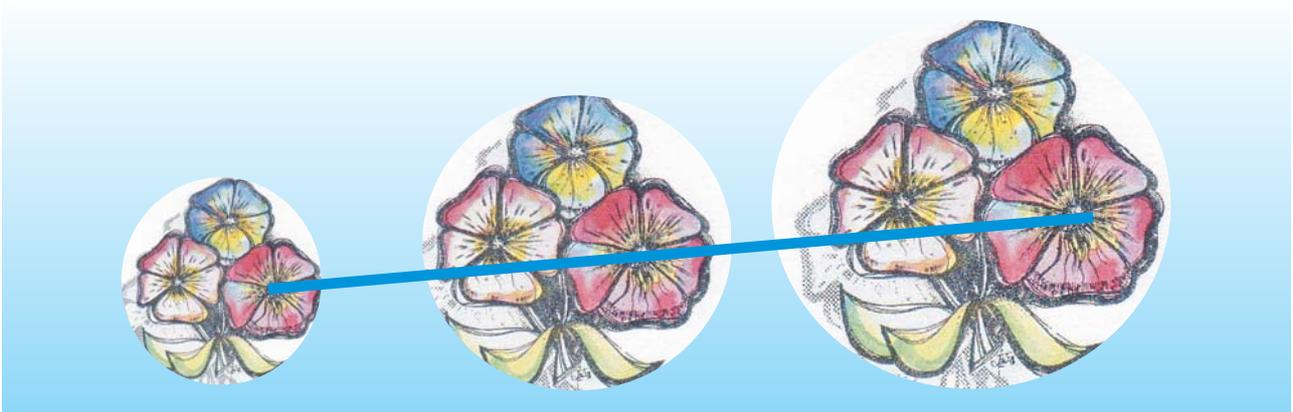
The Provincial Council met in Furth from Thursday 1st May until Saturday, 3rd May. As well as the usual business of the Provincial Council we listened to a presentation from Brother Gerhard Ippisch about possible future use of the buildings in Furth. A number of people have shown interest in the future use of the buildings, which are now bigger than we need for the community and the care of the elder and infirm German Brothers. Brother Brendan will discuss the situation with the Brothers in Furth as part of a future visit.

We also reviewed the plans for the celebrations of the centenary of the foundation of the German Province. The following two events will be held in Furth:

- September 13th: Assembly of German Brothers
- October 11th: Centenary event

A number of official representatives, as well as German Brothers living abroad, and representatives of Provinces that have a strong connection with the German Province, will be invited to this event.

The Council was informed of the start of renovations in the community in Marian College, Dublin.



PROVINCE MEETINGS

Fr. Gero McLoughlin S.J. will lead the Community Animators meeting that will be held in Habay-la-Vieille from 20 – 22nd June. Fr. Gero will give input to help to deepen our spiritual lives. Please ensure that all information about participants and travel is sent to Brother Maurice Taildeman by 12th June.

The Provincial Council also made plans for future Province meetings and workshops.

MARIST EUROPEAN CONFERENCE (CEM)

The 16th Marist European Conference took place in Edinburgh from 7 – 10th April. A separate letter will be sent out regarding this event. I am grateful to Brother Ronnie McEwan who led the workshop on leadership, and to Ms Angela Ferrier who took care of many of the practicalities of the meeting.

RETREATS IN AND OUTSIDE THE PROVINCE

Brothers European Retreat

There will be a European Marist Retreat in Valladolid from 28th July to 2nd August. The theme of the retreat is: "Mary, dawn of a new time." The retreat is for Brothers between 45 – 65 years of age. There will be seven participants from each Province. Brother Maurice Taildeman is a member of the organising team. The following Brothers will participate from our Province: Roberto Di Troia, Ewald Frank, Maurice Godenir, John Hyland, Vincent Keaveny, René Paulus, and Stephen Smyth.

Furth

There will be a retreat in German in Furth from 24 – 28th June. If you wish to participate please contact Brother Winfried Schreieck: winfried.schreieck@maristen.org

Habay

There will be a weekend of "Marist renewal" for lay people and Brothers in Habay-la-Vieille from 18 – 20th July. Brother Teófilo Minga, a Portuguese Brother who has worked in many countries and who has given retreats all over the Marist world, will lead this weekend. This spiritual weekend will be presented in French. More details will be sent out later.

Kessel-Lo

There will be a retreat in Dutch in Kessel-Lo from 21 – 24th July. The theme will be, "St Paul and Pope Francis." It will be led by Fr. Paul Delrue, a Scheutist Father. I would like to thank Brother Edouard Blondeel for organising this retreat and the Brothers in Kessel-Lo for their hospitality.

JUBILEES

Germany

The following German Brothers will celebrate their 60th anniversary of profession this year:

Brother Reinhard Keller
Brother Romanus Nothof
Brother Heinrich Schamberger
Brother Hans Seubert
Brother Ehrenbert Steinkirchner

The jubilees of German Brothers will be celebrated in Furth on Sunday, 14th September, the day after the Assembly of German Brothers.

Belgium

The following Brothers in Belgium celebrate their jubilees this year:

75th Anniversary: Brother Gérard Bernaert
70th Anniversary: Brother René Pique
50th Anniversary: Brother Marino Primiceri

The jubilees in Belgium will be celebrated in the communities of the jubilarians.

The Netherlands

The following Brothers in the Netherlands celebrate their jubilees this year:

70th Anniversary: Brother Victor Vermeersch
60th Anniversary: Brother Herman Terra
50th Anniversary: Brother Jacques Scholte
Brother Gerard de Haan

We have still to make arrangements for the celebration of jubilees in the Netherlands. I wish to send my congratulations to all of these brothers for their fidelity and witness to their vocation.

GUARDAMAR EDUCATION CONFERENCE

The Conference will open on Friday, 6th June, Champagnat day, and will finish on Monday, 9th June. There will be over 70 participants from all the countries of our Province with presenters from the United States, Australia, and the Netherlands. Brother Ernesto Sanchez and Brother João Carlos Do Prado will also lead workshop presentations.

The participants have been asked to send their registration information. Ms Petrina Shortt, a member of the organising committee, has designed a web site to provide information to participants and to create a forum for communication and exchange.

CONCLUSION

The month of May comes to an end with the feast of the Visitation, which, as we know, became a key text and image at the last General Chapter. The Magnificat, which we recite each evening, was first uttered during this encounter. Elizabeth Johnson, an American theologian, writes about the Magnificat as follows:

What does it mean to rejoice in God your Saviour? This is not a superficial joy, but is written against the whole canvas of the world's pain . . . In the midst of suffering and turmoil, the sense of divine presence in compassionate care offers strength, leading one to be glad that God is great. (*Mary, our sister*, p. 265).

We do not need to look too far to become aware of the suffering in our world. We need only think of Syria, the Ukraine, Central Africa, the ferry disaster in South Korea or the situations in Afghanistan and Pakistan. At a local level we often hear stories of illness, tragic events, accidents or situations of interpersonal hurt, which remind us of the pain and suffering in the world.

The Magnificat which brings the month of May to an end in a hymn of praise and radical commitment to the poor, reminds us that we stand with those who are poor and in situations of vulnerability. In some ways our Marial journey as a religious Institute has, in the time since the Vatican Council, brought us from devotion to solidarity, as we take our stance with the powerless and those who suffer.

I pray that Mary, Mother of Transition, will be with us as we continue our own journey of renewal as a Province and religious Institute, and that Marcellin Champagnat will bless our efforts to keep our eyes focused on mission as we manage the demands of ageing and diminishment.

Sincerely,

Brother Brendan Geary

DATES FROM MY DIARY

May

10	Accompaniment: L'Hermitage community
13 – 24	Visit to Brothers in Kenya and Tanzania
29	Travel to Glasgow
30 – 31	Provincial Council meeting

June

6 – 10	Guardamar: Education Conference
13	Habay-la-Vieille: Champagnat Celebration
14 – 20	Belgium
21 – 22	Habay-la-Vieille: Community Animators' meeting
23	Habay-la-Vieille: Provincial Council meeting
24	Nijmegen: C.F.M.N. meeting

**The House of Silence
Nijmegen**

