

Reflection from the Superior General

“Community for mission” seems to be encoded in our Marist-DNA. From our very earliest days – we celebrate St. Marcellin this Monday, June 6 – Marists have evangelized from within Christian communities, with Mary at our heart. “We have no other model than the early church” Father Jean-Claude says. This Pentecost on Sunday, June 5, challenges us to be faithful to this vision of Mary at the heart of the community, sent out to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ. There are always some Marists who live on their own for very good reasons. However, our Founder always encouraged us to live in communities for mission, as he himself had done in Cerdon and in the mountains of the Bugey.

Father Jean-Claude finds the model for our communities in the Book of Acts. The group of believers is “faithful to the breaking of the bread and the fellowship”, “one in mind and heart” and “without a needy person among them”. I have been delighted over recent years to visit many communities that embody these traditions of the “early church” in various Marist ways. Recently in England I met confreres who obviously rejoice to be together as brothers and seem never to retire from preaching the Good News.

Notre Dame de France, the French church in London, is a good example of Marist community-based mission. The community is indeed vulnerable. No number of well-tended pot plants on the roof-top garden alleviate the stress of high-density living in the noisy, congested centre of the metropolis. There are also serious human issues around ageing and health. Yet, at least for now, the mission is going well.

One evening, along with Fr. Juan Carlos, our General Councilor for Europe, I met with a group of young, professional French-speaking Catholics in London. Most of their responses seemed to focus on some aspect of community life.

They spoke of how they were sometimes lonely, living and working long hours in high-pressure jobs as young Francophones in London. They heard of this NDF community by word of mouth or by searching the internet. They appreciate both their time together as young professional people and also their experience of our Marist community where the priests, the Marist missionary sisters and the committed lay Marists, along with the pastoral team, all make them so welcome.

They also spoke of how this community nourishes their faith-life. The liturgies encourage them and they value the regular, quiet time in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Speakers from around London and Paris are regularly invited to help these young people reflect more deeply on some of their many faith issues. One man said: “I had never acknowledged God in my life. Now I have been a committed Christian for the last year, introduced to Christ by this group”. Others commented that it is so unusual in London for a young professional person to claim, however tentatively, to be an enthusiastic Catholic that some of their co-workers seem genuinely intrigued and interested.

Many also appreciate the opportunity to participate in the ministry of Notre Dame de France among the youth and the poorest people in London. Some of them dedicate Saturdays to preparing sandwiches which they then help to distribute among people who live in the streets. Others give a few hours each week to work with the Marist refugee centre, adopting and assisting particular refugees to navigate the frightening bureaucracy in Britain. Others volunteered their time to go to French-speaking schools nearby to teach catechism to the young people gathered in out-of-school hours.

There are some perennial elements in communities-for-mission. They are communities where everyone is valued for who they are, a rich and shared faith-life rooted in the Word and the Eucharist, and practical, creative ways of sharing the life of Christ among the young, the migrants and the poor.

John Larsen s.m.



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