

Reflection from the Superior General

On visitation recently I asked one confrere what was the one thing necessary to renew our Society of Mary today. He looked at me quite intently, saying: "put out into the deep". The context was a conversation during which he had expressed dismay that some of our confreres felt like they were being moved about in an unsustainable effort to meet pastoral commitments from a past era. These confreres felt, he said, like pieces on a chessboard. I came away wondering what "putting out into the deep" might look like in our present reality in the Society of Mary.

Surely, it would most fundamentally involve deepening our appreciation of the mysteries of our faith through more intense prayer, study, with a prophetic imagination and a healthy asceticism. This Easter season we recall how the early disciples, Mary among them, had to renew radically their understanding of how God accompanies and saves his people in the light of the events of Easter Sunday morning and their encounters with the Risen Lord. We, too, are called to an on-going, inner conversion towards living the Gospel more radically. This is a particular, but far from exclusive, call to our more senior confreres.



We are also called to deepen our passion, commitment and creativity for the Work of Mary, our Marist mission. Rather than asking ourselves the question "how can we find Marists to maintain this mission for as long as possible?" we could start by asking what are the greatest challenges of our age, the "signs of the times". Then we would discern: "setting out again into the deep as the Society of Mary today, enriched by the wisdom of our history and charism, and with a realistic assessment of our present and future resources, including labouring alongside lay women and men, how are we Marists called to respond to the most challenging situations in

today's world? What would we need to do to be equipped to respond authentically to such a contemporary call?" Where would that discernment lead us? These are particular, but far from exclusive, challenges for our younger and middle-aged confreres, and those in leadership.

This journey of setting out into the deep is more than a pious "going with the flow". It calls for a deep *human commitment*. We are never mere pieces on a chessboard, moved around like robots. Technology can easily dominate our waking hours and lull us into passivity. The growing power of Artificial Intelligence (AI) can frighten us, and for good reason. Some powerful political forces reduce some people, especially migrants and refugees and those marginalized by society, to being pawns and easily able to be sacrificed. For us as Marists the model human being, after Jesus Christ himself, is his mother. Mary shows us what it is to be human by her faith, "let it be done to me according to your Word", her missionary zeal, going out "into the hill-country of Judea", and her contemplation "pondering all these things in her heart". Mary at the foot of the cross reminds us of our redemption from the de-humanizing evil and sin that disfigures the human being as created in the image and likeness of God.

Setting out into the deep is a full-time, life-long commitment to the journey. Our Marist commitment is never simply a seasonal undertaking, sometimes hot and often cool. Each one of us has particular talents and individual stories, our strengths and our weaknesses. By our Marist way of life, we contribute everything towards undertaking our mission, in communion with others. In discernment with our community and our leadership we try to develop our talents, and encourage others to develop their talents, for the sake of our mission which we embrace wholeheartedly. Is the way I am living my Marist life worth living and dying for? Is it a robust expression of our deepest faith in the Risen Lord? If it is not, or not yet, then it is time to "put out into the deep".

This month we celebrate Pentecost. Father Jean-Claude, in 1846, challenged us: "The Society must begin a new Church over again".

Mary, Queen of the Apostles ... Pray for us, missionaries.

John Larsen s.m.