

4
2015

MARIST BROTHERS

WEST-CENTRAL EUROPE



BULLETIN

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EDITORIAL

Here is our 4th Bulletin of 2015. In this editorial, we look again at the effect of “communion”. This time it is inspired by the time of the year. Winter is here, soon there will be the longest night of the year and the liturgical calendar is the season of Advent and Christmas.

A STRENGTH THAT BINDS US TOGETHER

These events make up the rhythm of life, which we rely on more than we realise. The rhythm is universal. It is given to us and even if the real life experience of these repeated events is different for each individual, for groups, and for believers or non-believers, each person will recognise the feelings and thoughts which winter, the longest night, Advent and Christmas bring. As a society we need this cycle of events. It creates a bond in our life. We allow ourselves to be guided by the seasons, the changes in weather, the celebrations and commemorations. Life is to be lived and celebrated to the full. It is obvious to us that we should ask ourselves, as believers, what “communion” effect comes from Advent and Christmas. Here are some thoughts.

Advent and Christmas make us think of “God made man”. We tend to see this as part of the annual commemoration of a historical event which took place two thousand years ago. This commemoration has an intrinsic value that is not insignificant. People throughout the world feel moved by the Christmas atmosphere. People look for and wish for peace.

Another dimension of Advent and Christmas is less thought of. Seeing the birth as a permanent revelation of God. There is a strong, well-known statement of Meister Eckhart which says: “The Father fathers his Son unceasingly, and even more: He fathers me as his Son – the same son.” You have to admit that this sentence is not logical. Apparently we are invited to read this text in another way. Our eyes and our intelligence are not sufficient to grab the meaning of this phrase. The heart is needed to see, to understand, to know the real meaning. If we look deeper into Eckhart’s statement, we learn that to father, to incarnate, to reveal are continuous events that are fulfilled in us continuously.

The language of the heart

Our heart tells us that Eckhart wants to express a communion between the Father, the Son and man. When we abandon all logic and let ourselves be touched by “the Word made flesh”, we can detect and taste the active and continuous presence in our life. Just as darkness precedes the light, and the longest night gives way to the dawn, so God continues to father and reveal himself in men. Whoever is open to this divine action will experience the continuous communion between God, himself and mankind. It is inescapable!

If we introduce Christmas into our life, into our daily life, then God is living in our midst. A believer accepts and is open to the divine action in each person. This creates a communion among us. Those who live this communion make up a community based on justice and real love for all mankind. They radiate a living strength, a strength that binds us together.

In this way, we live out Christmas each and every day.

Brother Jacques Scholte

Dear Brothers and Marist Friends,

In this letter I want to write about the 50th Anniversary of the arrival of the Marist Brothers in Cameroon. The main celebrations took place in Bafut, Cameroon from 17th – 18th October, which I attended along with Brothers Edgard Iserentant and Julian Harrison from our Province, and Brother Emili Turú S.G., and Brother Antonio Giménez, Provincial of Mediterránea Province. The Cameroonian Brothers have built a Boarding College in Bafut, which lies just outside the town of Bamenda, with assistance from the Province of Mediterránea and Spanish NGOs.

Brothers from Great Britain arrived September of that year, four French-fled Congo-Brazzaville as a result of nist government in that country, two colleges in the Archdiocese of cations in the French-speaking side, years. The Canadian Brothers were tions but no one was able to attend. I Iserentant, who spent nine years as in the 1980s, was able to be present



in Cameroon on May 30th, 1965. In speaking Canadian Brothers who had the policies of the new Marxist-Leni- were asked to transfer their efforts to Yaoundé. There were numerous vo- but most of the Brothers left over the invited to the anniversary celebra- am delighted that Brother Edgard a teacher at the Collège Bullier at Sa'a for the 50th celebrations.



Many Brothers in our Province worked in English-speaking Cameroon over the years, including Brother Chris Mannion, who was killed in Rwanda in 1994, Brother John Phillips, who died in 2014, and Brother Joe McKee, former Provincial and Vicar General. The following Brothers also worked in Cameroon at some point over the past 50 years: Norbert Simms, Julian Harrison, Joe Lavelle, Alan Hargan, Bonaventure Frain and myself.

I was looking forward to the return trip, particularly in the company of Brothers Julian and Edgard, as well as Brother Emili Turú, Brother Antonio Giménez, and Brother Aureliano García, a member of the

Provincial Council in Méditerranée Province, who had also worked in Ghana for nine years. We landed in Douala at 16.35 on Thursday, 15th October. The airport is more modern, and entry procedures are easier than I remember from 22 years ago. The road to Bamenda, however, is not in as good condition as it was when I lived in Cameroon, and there is far more traffic in Douala and Bamenda. Brother Francis Lukong, the District Superior, told me that the population of the country has doubled since I left. There are also problems in the Northern part of the country as a result of the presence and activities of Boko Haram.

The main celebrations took place on Saturday, 17th October at St. Albert's College in Bafut. Brother Emili informed the students the following morning that with 1,066 students, boys and girls, that it is the largest boarding college in the Marist world. The liturgy lasted for a mere five and a half hours! Two bishops were present along with numerous priests and religious. Six young Cameroonian Brothers made their final profession that day, which added to the celebrations. The Africans have a wonderful way of celebrating liturgy. The singing was enthusiastic and inspiring, the children wore their colourful uniforms, family members either had special clothes made from the same cloth (with a range of styles) or turned up in eye-catching dresses and suits. I met many people whom I had known when I lived in Cameroon, along with a number of former Brothers who came to be part of the celebration. I was moved, almost to tears at times, with the singing and dancing, the warmth of the welcome, and the enthusiasm and generosity of spirit that I encountered that day.

What impressed me most however, was the youth and energy of the Cameroonian Brothers. The average age of the 33 Cameroonian Brothers must be around 34 years of age. There is a group of about five "Senior" Brothers, who are in their mid-forties to mid-fifties, who have carried responsibilities over the years. There is a middle group of five men whom I knew when I was Director of Postulants, who have also shown a capacity for leadership in schools, formation houses and communities. There is also a large group of younger men who are beginning to grow in their Marist experience and who are capable, and who have energy, determination and creativity. It would be delusional to think that there are no problems. I suspect that community life is still challenging, and that trying to work as one District with Brothers from five countries who speak three different European languages is challenging. What struck me, though, was the happiness this group of men showed in being together. I also detected a deep sense of being African, Marists and Brothers.

When I spoke to Brother Francis Lukong about the two schools that the Brothers have established in the past 25 years, he spoke about academic successes and growth in numbers of students, but he also emphasised what the Brothers had done to promote Marist identity and to stamp out bullying in the schools. This determination is reflected in the architecture of the school in Bafut where the senior students cannot go to the younger students' dormitories to impose on them to do their work for them (girls) or physically beat them (boys). This is no small matter in a culture that is tolerant of bullying and physical punishment. It was wonderful to see the Brothers bring their Marist values to their schools in this way.

The Brothers have now opened a new community in Douala, where they teach in a Diocesan school. They have also bought a property just north of Douala in the French-speaking part of the country. Once they have built a wall around the compound, they can begin to put together the finance necessary to construct classrooms and other buildings.

I was asked to say a few words during one of the formal gatherings. As well as referring to the foundation of the mission in Cameroon, I said that their achievements gave the Brothers who had worked in Cameroon a justified sense of pride in what they had achieved. The Cameroonian Brothers thanked the Missionaries for their work, but I also informed them that their sense of commitment, passion for the education of young people, and determination to lead schools and other educational institutions in a way that reflected our Marist values, was a gift they had given in return.

It was a short, but very worthwhile visit. The achievements of the Cameroonian Brothers are a source of honour and pride for the many Brothers who have dedicated their lives, or part of their lives, to supporting Marist work in other countries.

Sincerely,

**Brother Brendan Geary,
Provincial**

WATER FOR ALEPPO

The flow of migrants from Syria gets bigger all the time. The accommodation and care of these refugees from a country torn apart by a gruesome civil war is one of the greatest problems facing the European governments and their citizens. When we talk about genuine refugees we are referring to those specific people from Syria who have undergone such shocking experiences. The journalist, Rupert Neudeck avers, "The Syrians are currently the most abandoned and most mercilessly attacked nation." (Augsburger Zeitung, 17.08.2015)

The suffering of the refugees is only one side; many do not even have the option of flight. In the worst scenarios as is the case in certain war zones in the middle of the city of Aleppo, they seek to survive in spite of the constant threat of death. The brutality of the methods adopted by the Islamist controlled opponents of the regime are beyond compare. One of these is the blocking of water supplies. This demands the most valiant response. The "Blue Marists", a group of Marist Brothers and their companions offer generous and effective help. As this problem has become more acute the following abstract, originally from a news report of the Spanish press, is about the situation in the city of Aleppo.

The Blue Marists do their bit

One of the greatest problems, as reported locally, with which the people of Aleppo are confronted alongside the constant threat of snipers and bombs, is the cutting off of the water supply, a deliberate and conscious battle action by the militia. So it was that the inhabitants right in the middle of July and into the month of August were totally without water, a time when the temperature reached 40 Centigrade. In these conditions



the initial effort to seek help came from the faithful of Holy Trinity Parish where Armenian and Catholic Christians live together. Among these are the Blue Marists. The help for the provision of life-saving action originates in an Italian NGO which calls itself *Aiutiamo la Siria!* (*Help to Syria*) and operates under the battle cry, "Water for Aleppo" in the battle it has undertaken against the life threatening lack of water, particularly amongst the poor. They have put two container vehicles at the disposal of the helpers which supports the Blue Marists in their local distribution of water. They go from house to house delivering water containers of variable sizes according to need. You can find further information about this NGO on the homepage of their website: www.aiulas.org and for the work of the Blue Marists www.facebook.com/MaristesAlep.

A short history of the Marist Brothers in Syria

There have been Marist Brothers in Syria for over a century. Most of these were French, but there have been a few German Brothers, eight over the years, who have worked there. The foundation was in Aleppo in 1904 when the Brothers took over the running of the school for Armenian Christians. This was in a country in which 92% of the people were Muslim and at that time was part of the great Turkish Empire. A second foundation followed in Damascus. Both of these establishments were closed down in 1914 since all the French Brothers, who comprised the vast majority, had to leave the country. Both schools were re-opened in 1919. Once again there



was another closure caused by the Second World War from 1939 to 1949. The school in Damascus always had a high number of Muslim pupils, so much so that the President of the young Syrian Republic, His Excellency Mohamed Aly bey El Abed was present in 1932 at a major celebration in the school. In 1967 when the Syrian government took control of all the private schools the two Marist schools were closed. However, the Brothers remained in Aleppo where today, in the midst of the civil war, they organise wonderful social and humanitarian activities. Unfortunately there are only three Syrian Brothers; yet their impact is all the greater since their house has become the centre of an exemplary Marist activity undertaken mostly by young lay people.

It is to be hoped that we don't fall into the trap of considering the frightening happenings in Syria as sim-

ply a matter of fate and lose sight of it as it is relegated more and more to a peripheral issue in the media. It is an obligation on us Marists to ensure that this does not happen. Through our own international social aid organisations the Brothers in Aleppo are generously supported, and the courageous and determined action of the Italian NGO is worth imitating. Even with modest means much can be done for the citizens of Aleppo. Donations for the Blue Marists can be transferred to the following bank account of SED, a Spanish NGO.

IBAN: ES29 0075 3029 4506 0175 1608

Account holder: SED

Indicate: Support for Blue Marists

Brother Augustin Hendlmeier

SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR TRAINING

In spring 2013, the Brothers from Westerhelling in Nijmegen invited me to follow the Spiritual Director Training Course at the Titus Brandsma Institute* (TBI). To begin with I was not at all enthusiastic: "Me, a spiritual director? I don't think I am capable of doing that." I did not see myself as a "people person", which I thought was essential to carry out this task. A friend who had done the training two years earlier put my opinion into perspective. He pointed out the fact that a good spiritual director has himself already followed a spiritual pathway, and that the training would help enormously. This convinced me, because if something was motivating me, it was more the training at a spiritual level. This seemed important for me and for my work in the House of Stillness (a project run by the Brothers in Nijmegen).

Now, more than two years later, I have finished all the lessons and the practical activities. First of all, I have observed a profound difference from other courses that I have completed. Beforehand, it was a scientific based training. Through this, I learned to think critically before reaching the correct conclusion. At TBI, it was not a question of learning to judge, but to consider. Learn to listen. What is alive in this person? And in me? Can I see how God is at work?

Learning to consider things does not only involve asking the question: "What do I see when I consider things?" Equally important is the question, "From what perspective do I consider things?" Do I look at someone from the viewpoint of my wishes and desires? Do I start from my own judgment about that person or that situation, or can I look beyond that?

Learning to "see" is done from the Christian tradition

of Spirituality and Mysticism. I was very keen to look closely into this. When I was very young, I saw the Christian faith as a collection of reflections about the state of the world. A kind of religion that teaches people what they must believe. That did not (and does not) interest me. On the contrary, should religion not give some keys so that we learn how to look at things? To develop a sensitivity for the Secret of Life? The training at TBI is precisely based on that, and I can say that it has "revealed" to me the Christian tradition.

To this day, the training has in effect progressed my spiritual journey. I notice that I have acquired a sensitivity, and am less inclined to judge. But also that it is happening progressively and that I am only at the start of a long journey. I can accept that, and I am happy to be able to continue along that path. And I also see that I still need a lot more practice in "directing" people. Alongside the experience acquired in the House of Stillness, I hope that the work placement which is part of the training (which I have yet to start) will help me. This will show, step by step, if there is a spiritual director in me, and what form this will take.

** The Titus Brandsma Institute was founded in 1968 as a kind of collaboration between the "Radboud" Catholic University of Nijmegen and the Dutch Carmelite Province, in memory of Professor Titus Brandsma (1881-1942), a Carmelite and former Rector of the University. It is an Institute for scientific research which combines applied scientific research with a form of spirituality.*



Thomas Volman

In view of the commemoration in 2016 of the consecrations of the first Marists in the church in Fourvière, the editorial staff asked Father Jan Snijders s.m. to write an article on this event. In the Bulletin of September, 2015 we published the first instalment of his work. You will find the second and last instalment below.

TWO HUNDRED YEARS LATER

In the autumn of 1993, Sister Marie-Chanel, Superior General of the Marist Sisters, visited Father Jean Coste. The Sisters were preparing for their 1994 General Chapter. Jean was very ill, suffering from an incurable disease, his condition visibly worsening. Sister Marie-Chanel asked if he could give a presentation to the Chapter. On what subject, he asked. Sister wanted a simple subject and said: "What would our Founders do today?" "No", said Jean, "Put like that, I cannot. It is impossible to know." "How would you put it then?" "Well", he answered, "you could ask yourselves if a real, living and continuous line traverses two centuries, joining the time of our Founders to our present situation."

Jean Coste thought about the Order of the Knights of Malta, founded in the 12th century to reconquer Jerusalem from the Saracens. The Order still exists today, but no line is imaginable between that time and the present. They do very good things, but with new objectives. Things are different with the Franciscans. Founded by Francis as a Gospel inspired reaction to the prosperous Italian cities where wealth was the supreme goal. We also live in a prosperous times, and must rediscover the poverty of the Gospel. There is a real line of continuity, a same calling and a same mission. Referring to our Founders, he then said:

"We all know how much our world has changed since the start of the 19th century: new ideas, new theological views, new forms of piety and apostolate. The list is long. Each person knows it, there is no need for proof. Nothing remains the same. However there is a remarkable continuity between the times of our Founders and the present day. It would not have been so if they had lived a century earlier, in the 18th century, before the Revolution, but they were confronted by the religion crisis of our modern world, that is a world that for the first time in history wants to see itself and build a future without referring to God. Those who began this process have now achieved their goal. We call it secularisation. Officially, the State and most people were still Christian, but the dominant middle class were already proud of the autonomy of secular values and no longer wished the Church to comment on matters that were not strictly religious. The question is, then as now, how do we talk about God without putting ourselves on the side lines?"

The society that then began to move away from its traditional Christian faith became the focal point for the mission that our Founders had before their eyes. "The conversion of sinners", as they said, for that was the specific sign for those accustomed to consider as sinful the non-practice of the faith. This specific mission was given to them by Mary and they wanted to dedicate themselves to it in her name. Mary was also the model on how to approach the modern world. And with diverse apostolates, education for Marcellin, parish missions for Déclas and Colin.

They were unanimous in saying that their Society should not be a clerical group like the Jesuits, a congregation exclusively of priests. Men and women, lay people and religious, all were welcome. The future would prove that this could be done. The two centuries since the Fourvière promise have brought it about.

Twenty years later Colin was in Rome and someone said to him that we should stop founding new religious orders.

"Excuse me, sir" he answered, "but I disagree. Each century sees the birth of new orders. God calls them to meet the needs of the times. Each order has its own calling, its own mission, its own time... In the true meaning of the term, only one congregation must always remain: the Church with Jesus Christ as its Head. The other congregations which recognise men as Founders must not be eternal and they disappear when the needs for which God created them are met."

Two hundred years after Fourvière, this is perhaps a question for us!

Father Jan Snijders s.m.

The previous edition of the Bulletin contained the text of the promise at Fourvière. From what I remember, that fact hardly caught the attention of the Marist Brothers. It was picked up in passing occasionally. It's all the more remarkable that the consecration to the Virgin of Fourvière by the group of young men in 1816 now catches the attention of the large Marist Community. A beautiful gift from history.

OURSELVES AND ALL THAT WE HAVE

A careful examination of the text gives us a feeling of what these young seminarians and priests experienced, lived and brought to fruition. This poses the questions "What prompted them? What was their motivation? What process of discernment and decision making did they go through? Did this text influence the foundation of the Marist movement, or was the Fourvière *event* more important than that?"

Here we stop briefly to consider several passages that can inspire. A text dating from 200 years ago can also nourish our activities.

Know what you want

The group expressed their wish three times – twice at the beginning, and a third time towards the middle of the text. It states: "To work for the greatest and unique glory of God and for the honour of Mary, the Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ". We can also add two other statements: "We can achieve all that through the one who gives us strength, Our Lord Jesus Christ", and "because we are true servants of Jesus Christ".

It is noticeable that the group speak in similar terms to God, to Mary and through Mary to Jesus. Here, Mary occupies second place. The words show the deep motivation that animated these young adults and inspired what they wrote. Words such as *the greatest glory, in honour of, unique glory, to be true servants* can only be said and written honestly if one is really driven from within to say that God, Mary and Jesus are the centre and the foundation of one's life. Expressions such as *good intention, strong desire, as soon as possible and without reservation* truly confirm that these twelve young priests and seminarians were fired up by their ideal and that it was their sole goal. They are young adults with high ideals who express themselves strongly, and whose lives are imbued in them. For twenty year old adults, this conviction is understandable. And,... from the text, they were in a hurry! Now is the time! It is now that the Spirit works in them.

How motivated we can be if we imagine the inner strength that the group experienced. Not that we must do what they did. But what they did can encourage us, can ask the question, and set us on our way.



Follow a spiritual path

By signing up to what they had written in the text, they stated, as a justification and defence of their action, that they had, as a group, followed a spiritual path. The text points out first of all that their decisions and path would **NOT** be taken

- lightly,
- as children,
- for human reasons,
- for temporary personal reasons.

These “nots” appear first. They played a part in the discernment process undertaken by the group. We can feel the struggle that took place as ideas emerged: We are not superficial, we are no longer children, we do not do it for human reasons or for our own interests!

The spiritual journey undertaken as a group is also surprising, fascinating and suitable for creating a Marist movement. This journey as a group is characteristic of the development of the Marist community. Think of the different Marist groups which have emerged and are currently being developed in all forms among lay people in many countries.

Then the experience of the process is described;

- Serious
- Deeply thought out
- Advice taken
- Everything considered before God

This passage ends by recalling the goal for a third time. It is a confirmation of their choice.

Go out

No matter how resolute your choice may be, when you go out with your ideas to put them “into action”, the reactions of others can be harsh. They will say “Look at these children.” “Obviously they have not thought it through.” “They must have their own reasons.” These reactions weaken our resolve. It is perhaps the reason for the ending of this part of the text: “for the unique glory of God”.

The group describe in a long paragraph that they are aware of what the vow means individually, even when they use “We”.

Three verbs surprise us: offer, swear faithfulness, and unite. These words find meaning in the text:

- Offer up the pain, the work, the suffering, and the worries. Adding; if necessary! It is humanly soothing.
- Swear fidelity to the bosom of the Church. In the historical context these words have a particular significance. We know that the group also wanted to be a reaction to what was happening at the time.
- Unite all actions with authority. This passage also has a significant context. The second last sentence of the text says: “everything subject to the judgement of the Superiors”. The accent is put on “wishing to be true servants of Jesus Christ, nourished by the words of faith and of the true doctrine received through His grace”.

The Marists of today do not use this language. However the strength of these words can be seen in present day Marists. The Marists are ready to put in the effort. They do not feel the need to place themselves outside the community or oppose the hierarchy. To work for the Kingdom here and now, among and with men, comes from a caring presence that comes from within, reflected on, consulted on, thought about, and discerned before God.

May this attitude be our wish for the 200th anniversary of Fourvière.

Brother Jacques Scholte

1816 - FOURVIERE - 2016

VISIT OF BROTHER JOE MCKEE TO BELGIUM AND THE NETHERLANDS

18th-21st September 2015

Brother Joe McKee, Vicar General and former Provincial, arrived in Belgium on Friday, 18th September. He spent his first day in Genval, where he had time to meet Brothers. He also made a presentation to them to inform them about various developments that are taking place in the Institute.

Gathering of Belgian Brothers

On Saturday, 19th September, Brother Joe met with around 20 Belgian Brothers at the Focolare Centre in Rotselaar. Making use of an attractive Power Point presentation he shared information about recent developments in the Institute. He began with the General Conference that was held in the Hermitage in September 2013, which led to the initiative to establish international communities in each region of the Institute as part of our new beginning for the Marist Institute. He also discussed the process that has been underway for two years to find new models of animation, governance and management for the Institute. Brother Joe explained the increased involvement of lay people in positions of leadership and management in the Institute in recent years, as well as the significant reduction in the number of Brothers which has led to discussion on how to provide leadership and management across the Institute in the years ahead. He also mentioned the process for revision of the Constitutions. We are currently in the first stage of consultation. Brother Joe said that it has been surprising and encouraging to see the level of engagement of the Brothers as we reflect on how to write Constitutions that will form a basis for our life as we begin the third century of Marist life and mission.

Biographies of Belgian Brothers and Chronology of the Province of Belgium

After lunch the Brothers who participated in the gathering in Rotselaar travelled the short distance to Kessel-Lo for the launching of the two volumes of biographies of Belgian Brothers and the Chronology of the Province of Belgium that were prepared by Brother Joseph De Meyer. Brother Edouard Blondeel and the community and staff in Kessel-Lo had pre-



pared the chapel for this event. Brother Brendan Geary, Provincial, opened the event by thanking Brother Joseph De Meyer for these three outstanding volumes. In his opening words, Brother Brendan quoted Saint John of Salisbury, a 12th century theologian who wrote that, "We are like dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants." Brother Brendan continued, saying, "As we read these accounts of the men who went before us, it is clear that some of them were certainly giants in our Marist world. Many were ordinary men, but as a group they built the foundations that enabled us to do great things, and for that reason I am glad we can read about their lives and honour their memory."

Brother Joseph De Meyer explained how he had gone about this task and also thanked those who had collaborated with him on these two significant productions. Brother Edouard Blondeel then offered a reflection on behalf of the Belgian Brothers, thanking Brother Joseph for undertaking this work, which will be valued and appreciated by the Brothers in Belgium and the Netherlands. Brother Maurice Taildeman then asked Brother Joe to distribute the volumes to the Directors of communities and to those who had collaborated in writing the lives of the Brothers, finding photographs or editing the first draft of the volumes.

Opening of Marist Study House

The day ended with the official opening of the Marist Study House in Kessel-Lo. Mr Sepp Mondelaers, manager, spoke to the Brothers and lay people in the chapel before the group moved to the hall of the Study House. Brother Robert Thunus led us in a liturgy of blessing which included placing a statue of Our Lady in the Study House that had been brought from Couvin, where the community house has recently been closed. This symbolic gesture represented the continuity of Marist work in Belgium. The group then celebrated with refreshments and snacks.

The Netherlands

Brother Joe travelled to the Netherlands after the meetings in Belgium. On Sunday, 20th September he joined Brother Carlos Lacante for mass in the Catharinahof, where he now lives. Brothers Brendan and Joe then joined Brother Carlos for a coffee in his apartment. That evening the Brothers from the Netherlands gathered in Nijmegen for a meal with Brother Joe. In this informal setting, the Brothers were able to spend time with each other and to hear news from Brother Joe about his work as Vicar General.

On Monday, 21st September, Brother Joe met with the staff who work at the Westerhelling, the Provincial House, in Nijmegen. During the morning coffee people involved in the Moria project, the Stiltehuis (House of Stillness), and the new spirituality projects shared about developments in the Netherlands. He said that



he appreciated having an opportunity to hear about what was happening in the Netherlands and said that he often shares information about the projects in the Netherlands with Brothers in other countries. He also shared about similar initiatives in other parts of the Marist world. After this meeting Brother Joe returned to Rome.

Brother Brendan Geary

PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY: "BEING SPIRITUAL BEING HUMAN"

From 2-4 October 49 Brothers and lay people from the five countries of our Province attended the Province Workshop which was held at the Marienland formation centre at Vallendar, Germany. The following account comes from Mr Josef Maier from Cham.

Father Dennis Tindall from the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle in England opened the workshop with a talk on how aware we are of how God works within us. He pointed out in his impressive delivery that God became our Brother and that it is through people, and therefore through us, that God works in the world. Nevertheless, we must keep in mind that God himself is endlessly greater than anything he can achieve through us. The message of God for us includes above all the important task to allow the poor to experience the love of God. To substantiate this Father Tindall gave the participants a handout with a list of quotes. I would like to highlight one which particularly struck me and which encapsulates our everyday apostolate, ...*the future of humanity lies in the hands of those who are strong enough to provide coming generations with reasons for living and hoping.* (Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 31)

On the Saturday Father Tindall went into the question of why Jesus specifically chose fishermen when seeking out his disciples. These people knew that there was something lurking beneath the surface. He explained how Jesus associated with the deaf, lepers, outsiders and doubters, giving them his full attention and with it a certain dignity when he talked to them. He was very sensitive, unequivocal but always personal when speaking to outsiders. Their response was equally unequivocal, "You are the Son of God." Likewise, our spirituality must keep in mind how Jesus has spoken; to show people in all their vulnerability that God loves them. To suffer death and Resurrection is the burden which the Son of God undertook. Part of the mystery of the Incarnation is the consciousness of our own vulnerability. The Incarnation must be the basis of our social interaction. We see in the *Option for the Poor* that God wishes to share his life with us; he draws us into his own life. It is particularly the poor and the needy who challenge us. In small groups the following questions were discussed. In which people have you met Jesus? What did Jesus say to you? With the possibilities shrinking how have you arrived at decisions on what to do? In the ensuing full group discussion the seeming helplessness in such situations was expressed. Engage-



ment with the needy is one of the challenges of the following of Jesus. Simply to honour Jesus is much simpler. Furthermore, to meet God in nature is so much easier than meeting God in the neighbour. Incarnation means that we are always being challenged by people in need. Looking to Pope Francis, Father Tindall reminded us that the true followers of Jesus are the meek and gentle. The Church today must take great care to concern herself that she heals the wounded. In the Gospel of John Jesus constantly speaks of his Father; what he learns from the Father is love, and we also must let the word of God flow into our hearts.

In the afternoon of the second day Father Tindall concerned himself with the question of how near to the word of God humanity is when it comes to supporting people in need. When Jesus was healing people he was expressing his humanity. The Gospel teaches us that we are the "stories" which God tells. In reflecting on Scripture we become aware of how God works through us. Being human is the method of communication God uses to hand on his message. For us as religiously convinced people, to accept our fellow human beings as they are no further demands are required to be made of them. In this way God approaches us; he is knocking constantly at our door. God is concerned about us the whole time, so we for our part must make it possible for this to be done. For this we need patience for we are always seeing difficulties and hindrances. For me personally, this message lifts an enormous burden from us in our demanding task as educators and formators in our Marist schools.

Again and again Father Tindall spoke to us about Pope Francis who is so unlike earlier Popes and who is constantly encouraging us to follow his example. We have a Pope with the courage and the energy to demit his office to allow new things to happen.

Prayer together, meditation and a solemn liturgy added greatly to the spiritual character of our formation and hardly less so the companionship of the international gathering. This impressive and successful assembly was closed with a comprehensive gathering of ideas on how to carry on the Guardamar process, *Awakening a New Dawn*.

Josef Maier
Marist School, Cham,
a school of the Diocese
of Regensburg



FIRST WORLD WAR BROTHERS AT THE FRONT

Many German Brothers were conscripted and soon found themselves at the front where 45 fell in battle. They were young and most of them had just recently left the Novitiate and Scholasticate in Arlon. What a brutal intrusion into their lives! They were steeped in their Marist Vocation and the ideals of Religious Life and imbued with a deep piety. Now they found themselves confronted with the gruesome reality of war. Their faith and their vocation were sorely tested. How could they survive this and how, under such extraordinary circumstances, could they remain true to their vocation? Indeed, how in this milieu could they offer a sign of their trust in God and particularly as Marists, their trust in Mary and so be for the other soldiers a source of help in making sense in this mindless world of brutal fighting and death? Letters, which at the time were published in our periodical *Marist Voices*, give us an insight into their experiences and their response as Marists, namely their trust in Mary in the middle of this war situation. These letters offer splendid authentic witnesses of Marist life in the war. A few, for the most part, short examples will bear this out and also how soldiers practiced their faith in war.

yards further on, 'Hail Mary full of grace... thy womb Jesus, who was crucified for us.' The muddy beads glided through our fingers. There immediately in front of us a shell landed, exploded and threw to the ground knocking us out. I came to my senses again. I was filled with horror as I caught sight of my next encounter: several comrades lay blown to pieces on the ground. The angel of death had passed very close to me. A heartfelt prayer to our heavenly mother came from my quavering breast. I was bleeding from a number of wounds: it was clear that in this moment of the greatest danger Mary had stretched out her protecting hand over me and engaged me for further new and thankful service. Four men dragged me through gruesome darkness, sodden mud, sludge and cold from one pothole to another caused by falling shells, till finally after four hours we arrived at the medical station. Escape from disaster. Hail Mary!"

Brother A.R. writes in 1916:

"Shortly before Christmas we received the order to proceed to the front line. We had hardly moved when we were surprised by a fire as if from hell. We had to wait a short time in our communications trench. The frightening thunder of cannons was all around us and the sky was a flaming red. The concern was if rescue were possible. The correct response followed immediately, 'Hail Mary, full of grace... thy womb Jesus, who for us carried the heavy cross.' It was a response of faith and hope. As the danger rose so also did the trust in Mary. Suddenly, a deafening bang, a jolt – 'Mary help us!' – and we were covered in rubble. We feverishly worked our way out, helped by people rushing by. A short time dragged by and all five of us were safe together. In unison we all cried out, 'Thanks be to God' and 25

Brother Joseph Ludwig writes from France in October 1916:

"Once again it is October, the month of the rosary. And those of us at the front have not forgotten the rosary. Certainly our brave Bavarian reserve forces don't let the opportunity slip by to take part in the Rosary when their service duties allow it. In G there was rosary every evening, and although this was prayed in French our 'Greys' (German soldiers who wore grey uniforms) appeared each night in large numbers and prayed the rosary for themselves. When the devotions were over and the locals had long gone home, they remained kneeling in front of the picture of Our Lady and prayed in peaceful piety. A few days earlier I came to the village of R which was only a few hundred

yards from the front. Most of the inhabitants had fled. The war had not left the small church untouched since there is a gaping hole on the side wall. But inside were a number of 'greys' quietly praying the rosary. Not far off was the thunder of war and French shells swished loudly through the air. But the pious petitioners did not allow themselves to be disturbed. 'Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen' continued slowly with deep devotion. It was a touching sight. Those who when outside fight like lions, pray here like little children."

since we were wedged between two machine guns. As we were trying to scramble back into the trenches there was a salvo of about ten shots near me. A bullet struck through my canteen utensils but I was fully protected. From our group of eight, five were killed and two were wounded. I alone remained – thanks to the protection of Mary. Daily, even hourly I had further evidence of the particular protection of our Good Mother... What I have most to be thankful for is that I am now fully removed from the battle zone since I have been for some time now in the foreign language department."

Brother Anton Michael writes in 1915:

"How many experiences could I recount in which Mary clearly protected me! In every assault I prayed to her for protection. Hundreds of shots were fired towards me but she always spread her protecting mantle over me. Evidence of this I have from 19th February. For the first time I was charging with others. A comrade fell to the ground silently but screaming. We had to go back

Brother Augustin Hendlmeier



IN MEMORIAM



Emile Pècheur
12th February 1921
3rd October 2015
Marist Affiliate since 6th July 1982

On 3rd October 2015 Emile Pècheur passed away in Saint-Hubert, Belgium, at the age of 94. A teacher and an affiliate of the Congregation of the Marist Brothers, Emile has written the last chapter of his life story.

"Sir!" An expression full of respect and affection repeated thousands of times in the Primary 1 class of St Joseph's School in Saint-Hubert where Emile taught the fundamentals of education: numeracy and literacy.

Having gained his Diploma with distinction at the Institut Sainte-Marie d'Arlon in 1940, Emile then completed his teaching qualification in his native town. In his Primary 1 class, anyone whose shyness would make them terrified of making a mistake in front of their classmates, or whose difficulty in understanding upset them, could always count on the support of Mr Pècheur.

A teacher through and through, whose model lessons enlivened the teaching day, Emile was entrusted by the Brothers with the headship of their Primary School.

One of his greatest virtues was his sense of family. He spoke of his parents with veneration, since both of them had imbued him with non-worldly values: Honour, Honesty, Work Ethic, Piety and Patriotism.

In his home, in pride of place alongside his family photos, was the Certificate of Affiliation to the Marist Brothers, awarded by the Congregation, since Emile had lived as a brother among the Brothers living out their Christian ideal: "All to Jesus through Mary, all to Mary for Jesus".

A pillar of community life in Saint-Hubert, his native town, he was also a talented writer in the local dialect. The esteem of the whole town and of the generations of pupils "formed" by this exceptional teacher was expressed in the Basilica of Saint-Hubert under the gaze of the Virgin and Child, a statue by the artist R. Panhay – a beautiful reminder of Emile's devotion to Mary.

We say a profound thank you to one whom Saint Marcellin has given a brotherly welcome, as he has followed the teacher's dogma: "To be a good teacher, one must first love the children and encourage each child to develop his given talents."

Albert Fraipont
Free Secondary School of Saint-Hubert
Teacher from 1967 to 1979
Head Teacher from 1979 to 2003

IN MEMORIAM



Brother Benedict McGranaghan
10th October 1931
25th September 2015

Brother Benedict was born on the tenth of October 1931 in the small town of Raphoe, County Donegal. One of a family of four (three boys and a girl) he was christened Gerald. He attended the Parish Primary School until the age of fourteen when he entered the Juniorate at Our Lady's Hermitage in Athlone and started his Secondary Education in Marist College.

He was accepted into the Novitiate (also in Our Lady's Hermitage) in 1948 and made First Profession in 1950. He made his Final Profession in 1955 in Dumfries, Scotland. He graduated from De La Salle Teacher Training College in Waterford in 1955 and he commenced his teaching career in St. John's School in Sligo where he remained until 1959. He was then assigned to Castlereagh where he spent ten years and after that he went to Strokestown for five years. When the Marist Brothers withdrew from Strokestown he was appointed to teach in Marist Primary School in Athlone where he also acted as Bursar for Our Lady's Hermitage.

In 1977 he was appointed Director and Bursar of the Community in Ballina and teacher in the Primary School. He was again Director of the Community in 1992 and taught in the Primary School until he retired from teaching in 1996. He completed another term as Director in 2006. He continued as Bursar until the time of his death.

He was a lifelong keen gardener where his extensive knowledge of plants and flowers made him a much sought after advisor to neighbours and friends. In his tiny greenhouse he produced an annual crop of both red and white grapes as well as a crop of large red tomatoes.

As a teacher he was kind, considerate and conscientious. For many years he took responsibility for either a Confirmation or First Communion Class. His ability to nurture the faith of his young pupils was impressive and he was often visited by some of these same former pupils during his retirement. Whether in the classroom or the sports field he was sure to be found giving a boost to the less academic or less sporty ones, always in an unobtrusive way. He had a gift for spotting the "underdog" and quietly smoothing the path for them.

He also had a gift of being "available" to those in need. An occasional visit to a lonely old person, a lift to the local hospital for a parent with a sick child and little money, a box of "goodies" to a house with children where there would not otherwise be any such luxury – all this completed without fanfare or fuss.

Despite his busy schedule he was awarded a Diploma in Social Science from Galway University in 1975 and a Diploma in Religious Studies from Maynooth University in 1989.

He was diagnosed with cancer at Easter 2015. He died peacefully in the care of the South Westmeath Hospice in Athlone. His Funeral Mass was celebrated in Ballina, where he spent almost forty years of his Religious Life. He was buried in the Marist Brothers' plot in Cornamagh Cemetery in Athlone.

*When orchids brighten the earth,
Darkest winter has turned to spring,
May this dark grief flower with hope
In every heart that loves you.
(John O'Donoghue. Benedictus)*

Brother Sebastian Davis