



Dear Confreres,

This Sunday's Feast of Corpus Christi has almost crept up on us this year and caught us by surprise! We are struggling to know how to celebrate the Eucharist with our people in these days of Coronavirus. As this newsletter makes clear, the situations are very different throughout our Marist world.

One dimension of the Feast, though, remains constant. The Eucharist nourishes and cares for the People of God by Word and Sacrament. These days challenge us as how best to give expression to this care and nourishment of the Sacrament when the doors of the churches are, at best, only partially open. As Marists – with our lives centered on the Eucharist - we are called to be creative in our ways of nourishing and caring for our people.

This Covid-19 Marist Newsletter gives us four stories of how Marists are responding to the call to nourish and care for our sisters and brothers who are going through such a strange and difficult time. We hear from Marists in the North of Italy, one of the early epicentres of the virus; from Thailand, as confreres and their team together care for families facing a dark and uncertain future; from Rome, as some of our young Marists prepare for ministry by adapting to these times educationally, and from New Zealand, where a Marist Bishop reflects on his experience of nourishing and caring for people in his diocese while he himself is locked-down at home.

Thanks to all who have contributed, and if you feel inspired to add your own stories for future editions, please send them to Pat Devlin or Sophie Janssens, who have been preparing these newsletters.

How to celebrate Corpus Christi this year? Let's focus on nourishing and caring for our people, giving corporal expression to the truth that the Eucharist nourishes the People of God. This is a challenge for all of us individually and as communities. We all have our own stories to tell.

Wherever or however you celebrate the Feast of Corpus Christi this 2020, may it be rich in blessings for each of you and your communities as, by God's grace, we all search for creative ways to nourish and care for our people whom we are called to serve, especially the poorest.

*John Larsen s.m.*

# Brescia (Italy) from Faustino Ferrari

Brescia and its surroundings – located in the North of Italy, not so far from Milano – has been severely hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. 10% of all the deceased in Italy were from here. Along with Bergamo it is the most affected city of Italy. During the lockdown a profound silence had fallen on the city and the only noise one could hear came from the sirens of the ambulances, and from the bells of the churches ringing when somebody died.

One young man said to me “I thought that these things were only happening in science fiction movies. I could never have thought to find myself living such an experience”. This experience has been a strong and sad experience. One had not only to bear a life in a lockdown which was imposed in an extremely severe way, but one was also consciousness of the continuous danger. The worst thing was that we had to see neighbours, friends and their families getting ill and dying. Many families have been marked by a loss, and many others by a long, tiring and painful illness. We have been told that most probably the final and real number of deceased is at least one third higher than what was officially reported so far.



*The bishop of Brescia blessing 300 urns*

Since the beginning of the pandemic our Marist community, which is made up of elderly and sick confreres, has decided to maintain a certain isolation. I was in contact with persons at risk, but I remained confined in the building of our social center “Carmen Street” along with the young men hosted there. During that time Fr Giuseppe died after a long time of ailing, and I was not even able to celebrate his funeral.

The education ministry with children and young people of the “Carmen Street” center had been suspended since the end of February, and even now we still don’t know when we will be able to resume activities. Our educators have continued to accompany the youngsters from home, through the internet. We have also had to interrupt other activities such as the ministry with migrants, mostly women. Only the distribution of food to families in difficulty continued through the lockdown, even if it was in a reduced way.

Now there is a new phase, and it is lived with extreme cautiousness. The storm has not completely gone yet. Rightly, there is a lot of fear that the spread of the virus will return. Now is the time to reflect on how to cherish certain aspects of this lockdown especially from a spiritual viewpoint. There are tears, mourning, difficulties from an economical, social, relational, psychological and religious viewpoints. We have to start again.

In the eye of the hurricane there is a stillness. The forced isolation has given us the possibility of having time. However we had many things to do, we had also time for ourselves: time to pray and to meditate, to read and to write but also to listen to music or to watch movies. It was a precious time, where there was not much space to be interrupted. Fr Colin wanted that the Marists would alternate moments of work and ministry with moments dedicated to the care of ourselves, especially on the spiritual level. The pandemic has been an unexpected opportunity to live this, as we had time for it. In a certain sense, it has also been a time of grace.



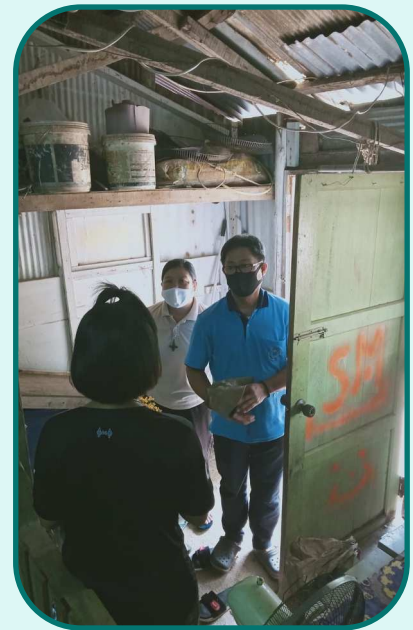
*The desert square in front of the duomo of Brescia*



Br Faustino Ferrari has collected several reflections he matured during the quarantine in an *instant ebook*: *Vivere e sperare in tempi difficili* (in Italian). It can be downloaded here: <http://www.youcanprint.it/religione-spiritualit/vivere-e-sperare-in-tempi-difficili-9788831676731.html>

The Marist Community in Ranong continues to accompany the Myanmar migrant community in the South of Thailand, on the Thai Burma border. Covid-19 restrictions began almost at the same time as the Summer holiday in the middle of March. Even though temperatures can get to 40 degrees, we have been thanking God for the wonderful new Marist community house and chapel that was finished at the end of 2019. The lockdown has certainly been more bearable.

In Thailand and Myanmar, extensive lockdown measures included travel restrictions between provinces and quarantine procedures. This effectively stopped all travel. While there are no reported positive Covid-19 cases in Ranong and Kawthaung, this may be because there are no testing resources available. The work closures and travel restrictions saw many migrants urgently fleeing from the big cities of Phuket and Bangkok only to arrive at closed borders. Families became separated. No fishing means no jobs. Many Burmese migrants now feel more vulnerable with their migrant documentation status without a job making them 'illegal'. It has certainly been eye-opening to see first hand how migrants quickly fall through the cracks of health services and social security as 'daily wage earners'. Why have we allowed a system that creates this 'underclass' is a frequently pondered question here.



In the Marist Community, the 'Summer holiday at home' or 'Covid retreat' as we have sometimes called it, has seen us slow down, but still continue to support our health and education programmes. Our health team has slowly been able to resume visits into the community, especially ensuring the most vulnerable HIV patients have food and support. In the last few weeks our education programme has been busy making paper-based workbooks for our 120 Burmese secondary

students. We visit every student home every Monday for a chat with them and their parents to help them continue learning. We are waiting for July 1 to be able to open again and also welcome another 50 new students to school.

# Ranong (2)



We've been busy building a large water tank, painting and preparing some new classrooms. We are still sad that the other 9 Burmese Migrant Learning Centres are termed 'illegal'. While we are the only learning centre allowed to continue in Ranong, it still leaves over 2,500 migrant children walking around without a school. We face a lot of pressure from the community with parents and teachers

bringing students to the Marist centre pleading for them to be allowed into our school. Many students have been 10 months without a school to go to. Without an education these children face a dark and uncertain future.

While most of our migrant students cannot access learning 'online', we have been blessed with Fr Kevin Redmond SM from Australia being with us. Travel restrictions have meant he cannot go anywhere, so he has been the 'online tutor' for our Australian Catholic University Diploma Programme. We have been learning how to use 'Zoom' and 'Google Meet' and 'Edmodo' while our university students work from their homes with a laptop. We think the classroom is certainly a better education solution.



We are thankful to those who have shared greetings, remembered us in prayer, and have shared donations to help. It is a great comfort and a feeling of solidarity in the mission fields knowing love and support is behind us and helping us with the tools and resources to cut the pathway ahead. If you are interested in stories and photos you can catch a glimpse of the Marist Mission Ranong on facebook <https://www.facebook.com/maristasiafoundation/>.

# Student Priests

from David Sánchez



Here at Villa Santa María, we are five confreres who are in the process of studying: Kevin Medilo (Philippines- Interreligious Dialogue), Kosema Masei (Walis-Missiology), Lutoviko 'Ollie (Tonga-Moral Theology), Xavier Sariman (Papua New Guinea- Fundamental Theology), and David Sánchez (México-Formation); in addition to Juan Carlos Piña of the GA, who studies Canon Law. It has been a complex period for all of us. On March 8th, quarantine time began, and overnight we

changed from going to school almost every day to being in front of the screen to meet the requirements of the courses ... Not an easy task! Normally we use the university facilities, such as the library or the rooms for group work, and now our work must be carried out almost individually, without the possibility of sharing experiences with our classmates or the socializing during the coffee break at university. Perhaps in reality that is what we missed the most: the fraternity with those whom we share the classroom with, with those whom we create a bond of friendship and fellowship.

However, that is only one side of the coin. Community life has been reinforced in different ways. As the members of the General Administration are all at home, and we don't go out as we usually did, all confreres of our community are always present. It has been a blessing to have the opportunity to share in fraternal talks about our personal, school and pastoral concerns, as well as about the joys that arise day by day (like the final delivery of the thesis for those of us who are finishing our studies!). All of this has helped to strengthen ties of brotherhood. It is very interesting that, despite spending so much time together, with all the differences we have, we have been able to move forward without great friction, which is God's grace!

Our community and personal prayer has grown in creativity, always looking for new ways to make all of us have a more active role in it. We all participate by sharing the gifts and talents we have, some are singing... others, like myself, trying to reach the correct tone of the song, but all wanting to follow the same voice of God.

In the end, it seems to me that this has been a unique time for everyone. Reflecting, praying, doing sports, but above all sharing and building community have been great pillars for who we are and for our future missions. I am convinced that we are here for more than just studies (although school is perhaps the first activity): our first mission is the community, to build the work of Mary from the community to witness to all the love of God. This time has allowed it in a special way in all areas. And it has helped us to get the best out of ourselves, I hope, with the grace of God, finding God in all things and all things in God.

# Christchurch Diocese from Paul Martin



The time of lockdown happened very quickly in New Zealand and we went to full lockdown on March 26th. In the 'bubble' as we call them in NZ there were seven of us – myself, the Administrator of the Cathedral, two assistant priests, a deacon, a seminarian and a pre-seminarian. Of this group four are Vietnamese, one Indian and two New Zealanders so we were somewhat multicultural!

One of the main focuses of the time was the on-line Mass for the people of the diocese. This took place each morning at 9am and so managing the technical challenges of this and getting thing right was always a relief each day. From a work point of view much of the life of a bishop involves meeting with people and going to events, so in that sense the two months of lockdown cleared the calendar somewhat, which was great!

In the diocese we have been preparing for some major restructuring of our parishes in Christchurch, the main city of the diocese, so that work continued through lockdown and we celebrated the establishment of the new parishes on Pentecost Sunday. This was also the first day we were able to have Masses again in public with up to 100 people. This has involved people booking into Mass and in the Pro-Cathedral having 11 Masses over the weekend, so that kept us busy.



Obviously the financial ramifications for people over this time is a concern and the pastoral care of people has had to change to meet the restrictions. However there has been a great uptake in the daily Masses and the online material, as well as parishes and groups checking in on each other, more than would have been normally. I do believe that there are many graces received and more to come from this time.

Personally this time represented another change from what I ever expected to happen in life, but I do trust that God has a plan and that all of this forms part of it. It is strange to think that so much of the world is going through the same thing. I do hope that this time will bring people to reflect more on what is truly important in life. I know it has given me that opportunity and I am very grateful.