

Society of Mary – Rome – 26 June 2020

No. 6

Dear Confreres,

Fr John Larsen is not able to front the newsletter this week because he is in La Neylière visiting those who are finishing the *Colinian Renewal Program*. In a few days those ten confreres will be returning to their home and ministry. It will be a new beginning for them. This is also a time of new beginnings of some confreres in Rome. Four of our young student priests have this week graduated in their STL and will be assigned to new places and ministries. Our seven transitional deacons have just finished their studies and will be starting their ministry.

All these confreres have difficult and challenging journeys ahead of them as they try to negotiate the present complexities of international travel. They may remember that Jean Claude Colin and Peter Chanel had a similar experience in 1833 trying to get transport from Marseilles and being threatened with quarantine in Italy before entering Rome because of the cholera epidemic.

In this newsletter we hear from two of our Latin American confreres about how Marists are coping with the current situations in Mexico and Peru. They also have embarked on a new journey of ministry and life in response to the challenges of Covid-19.

We all begin the second half of this dramatic year with challenging situations in every part of the globe. This “new normal” also offers us new opportunities. We might be inspired by Mary who generously responded to the new situation of her cousin and embarked on what probably was not an easy journey. And John would become the prophet telling of the tender mercy of God which is like the rising sun for those living in the shadow of death. May we be courageous instruments of that mercy .

Pat Devlin s.m.

Peru from Miguel Angel Contreras

After 100 days of quarantine, the situation in the country is still serious because the virus has affected us in all areas of life.

At the religious level, parishes are still closed as the protocol sent by the Bishops Conference to the government has not been approved. From the beginning of the quarantine we have been celebrating Mass and transmitting it digitally every day. The solemnities of Pentecost, including the vigil, and Corpus Christi were transmitted on the Meet platform and the Facebook to many parishioners.

We have worked closely with the Marist Missionary Sisters (SMSM) and with the Marist Youth of the parish.

We have been visiting the sick in their houses and there is also virtual and telephone care for the faithful who contact us. Through the parish Caritas and with the support of the diocesan Caritas and others, we have been distributing food, medicine and clothing to people need who are mostly Venezuelans.

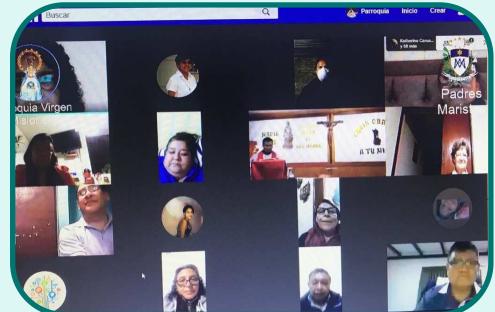
Economically, Peru's normal business has fallen by 40% in these months and 2.3 million people have lost their jobs in Lima alone. This number includes only the official companies, who

represent only 30% of the real activity. Even if the lockdown is not officially ended yet, there are many people on the street. There is a lot of hunger and people are risking travel to bring food to their families. Many of them say, "We would rather die of Covid-19 than starve".

On the educational field, the classes are virtual and this will probably be extended until the end of the year. There is a delay in the payment of the school fees, as many families lost their jobs and have had to spend their resources for medicines because they were infected with Covid 19. At Colegio san José where we minister, we continue connecting virtually to accompany teachers, parents and students.

The health care is under great pressure. Hospitals and clinics are overcrowded and have exceeded their maximum capacity. They lack the main resource, oxygen. The government has had to import oxygen, but there is not enough and it is very expensive. According to the official Health Report, so far there are 257,447 infected persons and 8,223 have died. It is likely that these numbers will increase further.

As a community we are well. We have more time together and fortunately we live in good conditions. We are encouraging one another along with the parish community and the educational community.



Toluca (Mexico) from Fernando David Torres

Three months ago, the activities of our university parish which is located in the archdiocese of Toluca were cancelled just before the start of Holy Week. This news was received with sadness by the young people, since in Holy Week they usually go on mission to some villages near the city of

Toluca, and they had been preparing for this for months. However, their response was admirable, as they decided to undertake a virtual Holy Week mission.



Together we have carried out several tasks. We had catechesis for the children, the rosary and a "missionary awakening" in which a Catholic blogger was invited every day to share online his experience of faith and mission. In the evenings a "Missionary Cafe" was held as a space to

share the study on the encyclical Faith and Reason of St. John Paul II and finally, to conclude the work of each day, we celebrated the Eucharist via Face Book.

Many young people were encouraged by this, and the response through the social networks exceeded many of our expectations. It was a good experience to stay united virtually.

Because the young people are adept with social media, it has been easy to keep alive our usual life of prayer, community and intellectual formation. Currently each apostolate of the university parish continues to have its meetings of formation and community prayer. We have training on Saturdays with the theme of "Theology for University", in which young people belonging to different groups and also people from outside the parish participate.



On the other hand, one of the situations that has touched me during this crisis is that we have had some students or their relatives who have been sick with COVID and others with the symptoms. We have organized prayers to ask for the healing of all. We had a young woman hospitalized, and her mother would join us every day to ask for her daughter's healing. Thank God the girl left the hospital and her mother was very grateful to have participated with us the prayer sessions.

The young people of the university parish continue to work in evangelization. We offer the possibility to participate via zoom in the Eucharist with songs and we ask the participants to do the readings. Some of them, even in the midst of the crisis, have even attracted new young people to their groups. In the midst of these difficult times these young people have always continued to bear witness of the experience of God they have had in their lives and have been able to share this with others.