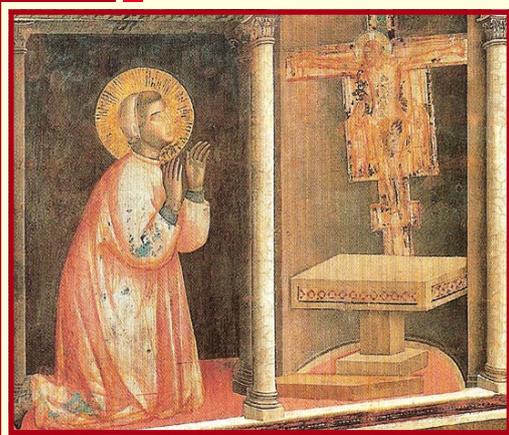


# Reflection from the Superior General

The spotlight has been on Rome this last week as the presidents of the Bishops' Conferences from around the world have been responding to Pope Francis' invitation to gather as pastors to consider a more just and honest ecclesial response to the scandalous tragedy of sexual abuse. Our own Bishop Paul Donoghue S.M., President of the Pacific Bishops' Conference, (CEPAC), has been staying with us here in Villa Santa Maria, Monteverde, while attending the gathering.

As Lent begins next week it is an opportune time for all of us as Marists to examine our own lives searching out any form of abuse, however subtle. We pray and discern with great honesty, confronting our own sinfulness, always aware of God's grace. Our penance can be designed – either individually or as a community - as a way of repentance and conversion towards the true light of the Gospel and against the darkness of any abusive attitudes. May Easter 2019 truly herald New Life.



The child abuse crisis is an abuse of power. Our Marist charism clearly opposes all over-reaching forms of power, challenging us to humble service of the poor. Sometimes our structures keep us far away from the dreary, grinding, anxious lives of the very poor. This Lent we could make a conscious effort to undertake some activity which brings us personally to an encounter in friendship with some of the poorest people around us and to share with them what they understand as "Good News". Our penance may also involve employing our talents to confront unjust structures which oppress and abuse those who are powerless.

The Gospel and the charism of Marist Religious Life - especially the vow of poverty - demand a simple life-style where everything is shared in common and in a transparent way. For Marists, there is no such thing as "my" money or car, "my" time or bank-balance. We live very simply and share openly our lives and our possessions with each other and with the poor. We can consider a Lenten penance that leads us towards repentance and conversion to a more simple, transparent and generous life-style, sharing all things in common. (cf. Const. 106 – 113)

By our way of life we can easily abuse the created world around us. As Pope Francis writes: "*What is needed is an "ecological conversion" whereby the effects of our encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in our relationship with the world around us. Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to the life of virtue*" (*Laudato Si'*, n. 217). The Marist Chapter of 2017 echoes this: "*An ecologically sustainable style of living is an intrinsic part of living the Gospel today*" (2017 GC, 44). In Fiji Marists are developing an Ecological Centre while in New Zealand some Marists are calling for greater accountability for our harmful carbon footprint.<sup>1</sup> With these initiatives the work of the new Marist Ecological Commission is gaining momentum. A Lenten penance might involve for all of us some work of protection and healing of a particularly abused corner of the world where we live.

The terrible story of abuse and cover-up in the Church and elsewhere cries out for repentance and a profound conversion of heart and life-style. This Lent, 2019, may each of us individually and all of us in our communities, undertake focused penances that effect a Gospel conversion from any form of abuse towards more just and compassionate communities, ministries and environments.

The 2017 General Chapter gave us a direction for deciding upon an appropriate penance this year: *From our communities, where we care for our brothers as we care for all those who are struggling to be faithful disciples, Mary, the mother of the New Creation, calls us to nurture life in all its forms, especially among our most vulnerable brothers and sisters and in our damaged planet.* (Declaration on Mission, 5).

*John Larsen s.m.*

<sup>1</sup> <http://jpicblog.maristism.org>. This is a new Marist justice and peace blog, well worth following!