

# Reflection from the Superior General

*"Our presence, especially in the Middle East, does not depend on our number, our strength, our greatness, and our ability, but rather on the effective work of the Holy Spirit in our lives".* This is what the Melkite Patriarch said recently about the presence of Christians in the Middle East. He could have been speaking to Marists!

As I review our new 2020 Marist Index, I see our number of Professed Marists has fallen below seven hundred. There is a prophetic truth in the very opening words of Fr. Colin's Constitutions of 1872: "This least of Congregations..." (*"Haec minima Congregatio..."*).

As the Melkite Patriarch taught, the effectiveness of our lives does not depend on our numbers, and even less on the size of our institutions, nor even on our robust physical health but only on the Holy Spirit. Our lives are about "letting go" and surrendering totally to God, co-operating fully with his grace. So often it is our elderly, frail or suffering confreres, who are graciously entrusting their lives to God – with loving detachment - who speak the most eloquently of Mary's gracious choice and God's mercy.



This diminishment can actually be a grace for all of us, calling us to focus more on the very essentials of Marist Religious life. What might the future look like? Small, deeply prayerful, communities living simply and sharing everything in common and bringing Good News to the poor. Increasingly we will be living with confreres from diverse cultures. Marists will live in communities, centered on the Word and the Eucharist, as ordinary and unobtrusive as Nazareth, where everyone - especially the poor, the migrants and the young people – is welcome. In our communities Mary is gathering her people and bringing them to her Son now and until the end of time.

We rejoice that five novices pronounced their first vows a few weeks ago at Cerdon Novitiate in Davao. We will support them and all those in formation by our own joyful enthusiasm for our Marist contemplative and missionary vocation.

We will need to keep searching courageously for radical new structures for leadership and communion among ourselves – what is called "re-configuration" - especially as each unit approaches its Chapter in the next year or so. New styles of leadership and structures of governance may involve challenging decisions. Hopefully they will free us to be more available for "the Work of Mary".

Smaller numbers mean we need to re-consider how we make best use of our resources. This month there is a meeting here in Rome for Marists involved in our financial management. This gathering will be an opportunity for our administrators "to discuss financial issues and to broaden the understanding of the Society and its needs". (2017 General Chapter, 107). As we become smaller there is a danger we keep grasping onto our old ways and material resources out of fear for an uncertain future. We trust in God alone, while working towards an ever more responsible stewardship of our patrimony.

February opens with the beautiful Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, often called "Candlemas". It is the special celebration of Religious Life. Mary and Joseph, migrant and vulnerable parents, offer all they have to the Lord. Their Son is "the light of the nations". We Religious, vulnerable as we may be, offer all that we have so that we too may be, by God's grace, a light to the nations.

Pope Francis was preaching a similar message in Morocco last year: *"Our mission as baptized persons, priests and consecrated men and women, is not really determined by the number or size of spaces that we occupy, but rather by our capacity to generate change and to awaken wonder and compassion. We do this by the way we live as disciples of Jesus"*.

*John Larsen s.m.*