

Reflection from the Superior General

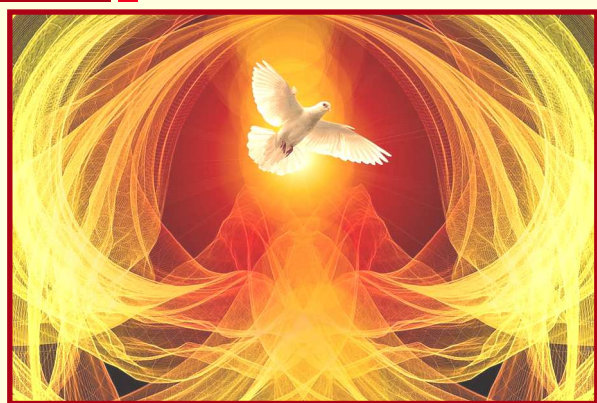
"The status quo is not working!". So, where do we go from here?

"The status quo is not working!" These were among the parting words of our former Superior General, John Hannan, at the 2017 Chapter, as he reflected on Marist and Religious Life.

His words are now proving prophetically true, universally. The virus, the fear and the anger, the economic and social devastation are all evidence that these are times of crisis.

"Crisis" is also a word for opportunity. We can easily miss the graced opportunities of these times of crisis. We can be paralysed by fear or denial or lethargy. We can easily become self-absorbed as we try to survive.

Alternatively, we can seek new directions with a boldness born of faith. This will call for personal and community discernment leading to practical actions. This can be a time of grace and renewal.



Where do we go from here? The prayer of discernment provides a compass for new directions. Communal and personal prayer bear fruit when we discern God's Will together and act upon it. It has been good to read in our Covid-19 Marist Newsletters of so many Marists taking the initiative to respond to the needs of people who are suffering in these times. We need to keep discerning for ways to respond to "the signs of the times".

Our foundations for this discernment are the Word of God, the genuine Tradition of the Church, our Constitutions and the real-life situation of the world all around us, especially our sisters and

brothers who are suffering the most. Everything else is dispensable. We are called to respond to our times with the creativity of the Spirit, as Mary and the early disciples before us. Each Marist community needs to discern the best way forward. There is no "one size fits all".

Pope Francis was addressing missionaries recently and he advised us all to: "Look outside. Do not look at yourselves in the mirror. Break every mirror in the house!"

We need to look beyond our own petty concerns, especially for comfort and security. This month we celebrate the Feasts of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. A spiritual sword pierced the heart of Mary and a physical sword pierced the heart of her Son. From their wounds flowed life-giving waters. We all share in this contemplative prayer of discernment but it is the special vocation of our sick and more senior confreres.

We also need to look beyond our own walls to see the plight of our neighbours who are suffering. On June 6 we celebrate the Feast of our confrere Saint Marcellin Champagnat. When he saw the suffering of the young people around him he discerned a courageous way forward, together with his companions committed to the Work of Mary. We all share in this discernment-leading-to-action but it is the special vocation of our more active confreres.

Our last Chapter offers us a life-giving direction: "Search for creative ways to grow constantly in lives of contemplation and lead others along the path of discipleship and mission rooted in deep prayer. Focus on the poor, migrants and youth, and the spirituality that underpins these directions". (GC 2017, n.9).

Let's pray that each Marist and each community can discern courageously what is asked of us in these critical times and respond with the same enthusiasm and commitment as Mary and Marcellin and so many others before us. "The status quo is not working!". Coraggio!

John Larsen s.m.

(1) <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-05/full-text-pope-francis-message-pontifical-mission-societies.html>