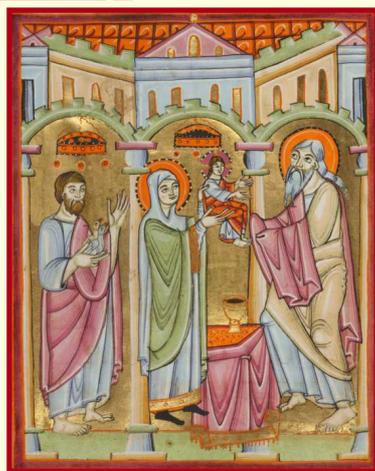


Reflection from the Superior General

Most Districts and Provinces are having to delay their Chapters. Australia, after several frustrating delays, hopes to gather this month. We are united fraternally with you. Other units are still waiting.

We may be able to delay the event of the Chapter, for good reasons, but the underlying issues remain. The situation varies from place to place, but one perennial issue is the on-going need to re-shape our structures, "re-configure", for the sake of our Marist mission.

Even more important than the administrative work of a Chapter is our on-going interior conversion for mission in our own hearts and communities. Chapter decisions alone, without a concomitant profound on-going conversion of heart for our common mission, can lead to frustration and even anger.



The month of February opens with the beautiful Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. Traditionally this Feast celebrates Religious Life. The story of the Presentation can show us a Gospel-path towards re-shaping our hearts and attitudes, personally and communally, for greater flexibility for mission.

Sometimes we may hear ourselves, or others, declaring: "I'll leave all this talk of re-configuration to others. I am tired of it. The Society, as I have known it, will see me out!". This can sound like a form of "acedia", spiritual weariness, as old as the Desert Fathers and Mothers. The wonderful characters, Anna and Simeon, will not hear any mention of "acedia". Simeon was "looking forward to the consolation of Israel". Anna "never left the temple, worshipping... day and night" and never tired of "speaking about the child". Our more senior Marists, like Simeon and Anna, have so much to contribute by remaining engaged in the life of prayer,

encouragement and service. It is beautiful to see so many who are happy to direct whatever energy they may have towards keeping a kindly interest and concern for everyone.

Others may proclaim: "We need to be protective of our ministries and of our human and financial resources that we have built up over so many generations. Circle the wagons!" The story of the Feast of the Presentation is about offering our "first fruits" to God. Joseph and Mary offer their very own son "in accordance with the Law". As we Marists become more fragile and vulnerable the temptation may be to cling desperately onto whatever we have, although there are many contemporary examples of quite remarkable Marist generosity. Joseph and Mary challenge us to develop an inner freedom to offer everything – the "first fruits"- in great faith to the Lord. Sharing of our resources, which benefits both the donor and the recipient, starting with my own life and community, is essential for the Work of Mary.

Another theme may be: "We would like to be open to working with others in new and creative ways, but, unfortunately, we have such different cultures that we really could never work together". The reason that the Feast of the Presentation is often called the Feast of Lights is that Simeon recognized the universal call of the "the light of the Nations". Simeon prophetically proclaimed salvation, reaching way beyond the home-boundaries of Israel. Our call to be "the light of the nations" is heard most clearly when we include those who are different from us and extend a special welcome for the stranger who may speak a foreign language, look a different colour and respond in unexpected ways. It is never easy, but it is Mary's Work of uniting everyone, with one mind and one heart, now and "at the end of time".

February marks the beginning of Lent, a time of Gospel-conversion. Chapters consider possible new reconfigurations to facilitate our Marist mission. Lent can help us in the work of personal and communal conversion for mission which provides the soil for the work of our Chapters to bear abundant fruit.

John Larsen s.m.