

# Reflection from the Superior General

We will be asking ourselves how best to celebrate the Feast of the Holy Name of Mary this year. How could September 12 this 2022 bring a fresh vibrancy and commitment to our Marist life and mission?

During August I visited Norway, in Scandinavia. For nearly one hundred years a small number of confreres have been serving in Norway. With changing circumstances over time our confreres have needed to be flexible and creative in bearing Mary's Name.

From 1932 until 1964 our own confrere, Jacob Mangers s.m., was the bishop of Oslo, the capital city of Norway. He encouraged other Marists to come to Norway to give the local Catholic Church a voice in an almost entirely Lutheran Protestant milieu. Our Marist bishop asked our confreres to be discreet, for ecumenical reasons, when talking about Mary, even discouraging the formation of Marist Lay groups for

fear that the small Catholic population would become even further divided since they were scattered in remote settlements throughout the vast land. Respecting Lutheran ecumenical sensitivities and the bishop's advice, Marists "spoke" of the holy name of Mary more by their way of life than by their words.

However, in more recent times the face of the Catholic Church in Norway has changed with the arrival of so many migrants. Now new Catholic communities are flourishing. Tamils, Poles, Filipinos, Vietnamese and Burmese Catholics all have their own particular and strong devotion to Mary and often their own priests and religious to accompany their communities. I attended a very international parish Mass on the Feast of the Assumption. The liturgy included offering candles and roses to Mary, hymns and a litany to Mary, as well as a procession around the church to pray at her statue. That could never have happened just a few years ago before the migrants arrived.



St. Olaf, Patron Saint of Norway

Our few Marist confreres in Norway are adapting to the new circumstances. One of our confreres is the national youth director. While confreres still assist in some parochial ministry, including working with the migrants, they are focusing increasingly on spiritual accompaniment with retreats and recollection days. As one religious Sister explained to me: "In Norway the vast areas of silence and the dramatic natural terrain easily lead people to ask ultimate questions and to undertake the inner journey". In Oslo our confreres provide a hermitage, or "poustinia", accompanying those who seek an opportunity for a silent retreat. I benefitted from that "poustinia" myself for one week. Another confrere is a chaplain to Sisters involved in formation and retreat work. Bearing Mary's Holy Name has called for flexibility in Norway as it does for all of us in our different circumstances.

I met with the current bishop of Oslo, himself a religious, while I was there. He had one request: "Please send more Marists! The Marists have always been most appreciated here." I pointed out that, while we have received a few young men from Norway in recent years to test their Marist vocation, no-one has persevered. He replied: "Years ago we were approaching a vocations' crisis here in Norway. Then I began requesting every community in the diocese to offer one Mass every Thursday, the day of the Blessed Sacrament, for an increase of vocations and preferably to have some time of Adoration as well. Since then we have been blessed for priestly and religious vocations from Norway". The bishop of Oslo speaks from his experience.

One excellent way to celebrate the Holy Name of Mary this year would be to commit ourselves every Saturday, Mary's day, to celebrate the Eucharist with the prayer intention for an increase of Marist vocations and preferably to have time in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament for this intention as well.

Let us be praying for young people to be committing themselves to bear Mary's Name into the future!

*John Larsen s.m.*