

Reflection from the Superior General

Those who attended the Council of the Society here in Rome during October were greatly encouraged by the prayerfulness, fraternity and rich discussions during our time together.

As always in our history, we can see plenty of great challenges facing our Society. However, enriched by our deep faith in our Marist call to mission, and by God's grace, as well as a profound sense that Mary always accompanies us, we enjoy good reason for a lively hope for the future.

One challenge is to give our younger confreres their own "space" to develop a renewed sense of mission and Marist life, sometimes different from that of their predecessors, yet always faithful to our Marist heritage and charism. International formation and various on-going formation programmes for the younger confreres help them to form bonds among themselves, while cherishing the wisdom of their mentors. A new sense of internationality is refreshing our Marist life, mission and governance.

Some of our confreres, as they grow older, can sometimes feel discouraged because their ministry is no longer demanded as it was in previous years or because they no longer enjoy their former robust strength and good health. One senior confrere was reported as commenting: "you can talk all you like about "future mission priorities"; my first daily priority is trying to pull on my socks!". Yet the challenges of senior confreres can also inspire a season of grace for all of us. So many senior confreres retain a lively and supportive interest in all that is happening and a desire to keep learning more. So many are profoundly prayerful, wise, and cheerfully available for whatever they may be asked to contribute, at least on their good days. So many such confreres are signs of hope for the present and the future.

With about just 600 professed Marists presently in our Society we are less numerous than we once were. Yet in the Council there was a sense of encouragement and renewed commitment for Marist mission, both realistic and courageous. There is a healthy tension between committing ourselves to particular present Marist ministries while being open to new international missionary communities.



I would recommend an encouraging video that we watched, produced by our vocations' team: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NNpwhwFRtCU>. We are grateful to our European confreres, especially those in Italy, who are making it possible to welcome an increasing number of Marist theologians here in Rome, most of whom come from the global south. The future will certainly be different, but it is full of hope.

One of the dark clouds over some discussions was the reality of the sin and the crime of all forms of abuse and of its cover-up in our world. Father Sione Hamala from Oceania gave an enlightening presentation which addressed many of the real challenges we are facing but also highlighted the call for the radical gospel conversion towards prioritizing the weak, the vulnerable and the excluded in all our attitudes and ministries.

As we prepare together for the Chapter of 2025, and beyond, we all still have a lot of work ahead of us, especially in the areas of developing more focused leadership and governance patterns in the interests of greater vitality for Marist life and mission. Thank you for all your responses to the questions you addressed in preparation for the Council which helped us then and will continue to guide all of us in our synodal preparation together for the Chapter.

We Marists still face plenty of challenges, some of which we attempted to address at the recent Council. Our shared sense of vocation and mission, our daily yearning for real holiness, our prayerfulness and fraternity, all give rise to a joyful hope for a different but lively future for the Work of Mary.

This November we pray in a special way for all our deceased confreres and we especially remember our saintly Founder's death anniversary on the 15th.

John Larsen s.m.