

Reflection from the Superior General

Many Marists have generously dedicated years of their lives to the mission of education among the youth in schools. Father Jean-Claude is reported to have enthused in 1838: "Nothing is more meritorious, nothing greater, than the great work of education. I considered whether we would take a special vow in the Society, to devote ourselves to education. It is the greatest work". (F.S. 13,10). More recently, some confreres grieve the diminishment of the presence as Marist Religious in "our schools".

All of us, wherever we find ourselves in our Marist world, can be encouraged by the fruits of the recent "Forum on Marist Education" held in Toulon, in the south of France. There were nearly one hundred men and women participants there, all committed, professional and enthusiastic, and all dedicated to Marist education. The Forum was another step in a journey that has been making progress for decades.

Marist educators today are mostly Lay People, many of whom are profoundly inspired by the Marist charism and tradition in education. At the same time, there was encouragement for Priests and Brothers of the Society of Mary to be as involved as possible in the schools, and discussion on how our schools could be more pro-active in encouraging Marist Religious vocations.



The first Marist School at La Seyne-sur-Mer, 1849

The Forum was based on the strong belief that our profound Marist charism can find wonderful expression in the mission of education. The Marist charism, given by the Spirit of God to build up the Church, flourishes in a much wider ambience than simply within the Society of Mary.

All Catholic schools are called to be centres of evangelization among young people and their families, whatever their faith or social background. However, the Marist school has a particular contribution to make to this work of evangelization based on the faithful discipleship of Mary in the Gospel and our own traditions of respectful welcome, kindness and mercy. It is a family spirit.

A leading educationalist from Scotland was the key-note speaker basing his comments around Mary's presence in Luke's Gospel as a model for the attitude of Marist educators. (See the attached key-note address and other documents.)

Father Colin's approach to education continues to inspire many people. His first principle of education is that we form our students in the way of Christian discipleship. His next two principles are to form our students as upright citizens and then as people of learning. (Father Colin's Instructions to the staff in Belley in 1829, no. 2.)

The work at the Forum in Toulon mainly involved discerning the future for Marist education by considering several possible "scenarios for the future". The Forum included a call to consider establishing new schools in the Marist tradition in places of special need. Our world has changed dramatically since Father Jean-Claude was directing a school in Belley, but the Marist ministry of education retains its relevance and dynamism in all parts of the world. We need local adaption appropriate for our situation.

There was a special poignancy in holding this Forum in Toulon in France. We visited the very first school that we Marists owned, at *La Seyne-sur-Mer*. This school was started by Marist missionaries waiting in Toulon for a ship to bring them to the Pacific. While waiting, these French missionaries gathered some youth around them into a simple school which developed into one of the three Marist colleges presently flourishing in Toulon.

In many parts of our Christian world the schools are flourishing where other Church institutions may seem to be struggling. We can all ask ourselves, especially as we approach so many Unit Chapters, how we can respond ever more creatively to the call our Constitutions: "Marists devote themselves to all forms of education, especially among the young". (#13)

Mary, Queen of Apostles – Pray for us.

John Larsen s.m.