

## COURSE ON THE MARIST CHARISM AND EDUCATIONAL PRINCIPLE

Thirty students progress towards the end of the program

The course for specialists in the Marist charism and principles of education has crossed the equator of its programming to enter the final lap. The program, consisting of eight disciplines, covers a total of 420 hours over two academic years. The first group to graduate from the course began its studies in February 2014. At this time, it has completed four of the eight disciplines, having studied the contributions of Brothers André Lanfrey, Juan Moral, Michael Green and Professor Ricardo Tescarolo.

The desertion rate has been very low. Of the 31 students who enrolled and commenced their studies, only two have had to abandon the course because they could not harmonise its requirements with their work timetable. This high rate of fidelity is a good augury for the graduation of specialists in the Marist charism and educational principles at the end of the year 2015, who will help with the reflection for celebrating the second centenary of the foundation of the Institute. On 24 February 2014, we gave detailed notes about the participants and the provinces they belong to. This information can be consulted on: <http://www.champagnat.org/400.php?a=6&n=3146>



### GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

Br Giovanni Bigotto, who died in Carmagnola, Italy, on the 12th, has been buried in the pantheon of the Brothers in Rome. Before the burial, a Mass was celebrated in the main chapel of the General House, where Br Giovanni lived in the General Administration community for 10 years, 2001 to 2011, as Postulator General.

From 13 to 18 October, Brothers of the General Council Emili Turu, Joe Mc Kee, Michael De Waas and Victor Preciado are meeting in the General House with 9 new provincial and district superiors.

On Tuesday 14, the Marist European Conference (CEM) held a meeting in the General House, with the participation of the 5 Provincials and one delegate per province. General Councillors Antonio Ramalho and Ernesto Sanchez accompanied the meeting.

On the 15th, and also in the General House, began the meeting of the European councils to study the question of the new models of animation, administration and government. The General Council is represented by Brs Antonio Ramalho, Ernesto Sanchez, and Victor Preciado, and the General Administration by Brs Joao Carlos do Prado and Miguel Angel Espinosa of the Secretariat of Mission. The 50 participants include members of the provincial councils and other representatives of the 5 European provinces.

After overcoming some initial difficulties in mastering the Eureka system with which the students work extramurally with PUCPR, which is running the course, and making some adjustments of methodology to accommodate the work to the study rhythms of the participants, they entered on a process of study and work which has been maintained up to the present time. The testimonies of the students manifest great satisfaction for the subject matter encountered and for the richness of the discussion it has aroused.

This course was created as a contribution offered to the Institute on the part of the Marist Universities Network. The first students to enter came from among the personnel of the Marist province and were invited by the provincials. In

November 2015, the VI Assembly of the Network of Marist Universities will be held in Koronadal, in the Philippines. This will be an opportunity for promoting and disseminating the course also in the Marist university sphere.

The interest this course has aroused in various areas of the Institute has encouraged us to open enrollment for a new group of students to begin classes on 9 February 2015. Those who wish further information can access the following pages:

- <http://carisma.pucpr.br>
- <http://www.lami.pucpr.br/carisma/>



# A YEAR TO REMEMBER IN CAMBODIA

## Reflections from a Marist volunteer...

Tony McDonnell has had a long connection with the Marist Brothers as a teacher at Marist College North Shore, Australia, since graduating from university in 1985. In June of last year Tony packed his bags to spend twelve months volunteering in Cambodia at LaValla School for children with disabilities. On his return Tony reflected with Marist Solidarity of Australia (MSol) on his experience. Here's an excerpt from his reflections.

### How did your involvement with the Marists start?

It wasn't from a desire to teach in a Marist school – I needed a job when I graduated and, as a Catholic, teaching in a Catholic school was my priority. I was educated by the Christian Brothers and my only interaction with "Marist" was on the sporting field whilst at school. So when a job was advertised at Marist College North Shore I applied because it was firstly a job and secondly it was in a Catholic school. The Marist title didn't mean as much to me as the school being Catholic.

### How long have you been a teacher at Marist College North Shore?

Since that very time mentioned above. I have taught (in a variety of capacities) at Marist North

Shore since 1985.

### What has your experience been as a teacher at Marist College North Shore?

An overwhelmingly positive one! Obviously you have a range of experiences, but teaching here for many years indicates that something gelled with me very quickly. I think it is that the things

valued by the school are things that I value in my life. There are a range of ways this manifests itself. The school is in a very privileged socio-economic setting – the lower North Shore of Sydney – this means, to me, that we need to constantly ensure we are faithful to Champagnat's charism. The same socio-economic profile means that many of the concepts we present to the boys on a daily basis are also counter cultural. The value of "other-centredness" is probably the best example I see. The presence of very active Solidarity program and the growth of our immersion program have shaped many of our daily experiences – our emphasis on "the other". In this school Solidarity is not something we add on – it is at the heart of our identity. It is one way that I see us as being authentically Marist. There are many other ways I feel that my



personal values align with Marist values.

### **What has been your involvement with Cambodia prior to volunteering at LaValla?**

I have been very fortunate to have been involved in our immersion program since its inception in 2004. Prior to my 12 months in Cambodia I had travelled with 10 immersion groups to Cambodia. I had also spent 3 months living in the LaValla community in 2012, whilst on long service leave. The 3 months left me wanting to be involved further with the organisation and reinforced the place LaValla and Marist Solidarity Cambodia had become in my life.

### **What made you want to leave everything behind to return for one year?**

Since my very first visit to Cambodia I have had a great desire to spend a longer period than two weeks with the LaValla community. I do not really know where that desire came from. The 12 months stay just seemed "meant to be". A whole range of circumstances gave me the ability to take leave from school and move to Cambodia for the year. Every time I thought something may prevent me from going, a path through seemed to present itself. In the time after my 3 month stay I was encouraged to take time to explore what the experience had really meant for me. This discernment led me to feel that I had not really experienced the totality of life in Cambodia and what it had to offer me. It had ended just as I was starting to understand what life meant for a disabled Khmer person.

### **What was an average day at LaValla School?**

I don't know if would call any day in Cambodia average! There certainly was a routine – one of the great joys was the rhythm of life. It was incred-



ibly busy, but busy with "important" things – not bureaucratic things that seem to distract us so much in Australian education circles at the moment.

Most days started at 6.30am with our community prayer (with Br Terry, Br Tony and any other visitors to the community) followed by breakfast with everyone who lives on site. Some mornings I would join/lead the students 7.30 exercise class.

My teaching day commenced at 8.00am. Marist Solidarity Cambodia is bigger than just LaValla. I lived at LaValla and did most of my work there, but I also worked daily at Villa Maria – post-LaValla residential program for disabled high school students. Because of the lack of teachers and educational facilities, the school day is divided in two – in Takhmao this meant that Grade 9, 11 and 12 go to school in the morning and Grade 7, 8 and 10 attend in the afternoon. Each morning I taught English to the Grade 7, 8 and 10 students.

At midday the whole LaValla school have lunch together. After lunch my day usually involved either teaching English/Music at LaValla or working on one of the many smaller projects happening at the time. When the school day finished at 4.00pm it was time for music practice. After dinner the students have a one hour supervised homework time and the day would finish at 8pm with many "good nights" as the children headed off to bed.

### **What motivated you whilst at La-**

### **Valla School?**

Days were very busy, but your energy always seemed to be focussed on significant areas of need. The enthusiasm and eagerness of the students certainly made the task at hand both easy and rewarding. Look at the kids... How could you say "I'm too tired to teach you the drums" when a boy with one prosthetic arm is asking the question with drum sticks in hand. The kids at the school are very special and they certainly provided the motivation.

### **In terms of Marist life, what similarities and differences are there between Marist College North Shore and LaValla School?**

I have always believed Marist North Shore has a great Marist spirit. I know it does (the overwhelming welcome back to school reminded me of that) but there is something even more authentic and real about the Marist spirit at LaValla. At both places the importance of relationship is paramount. Maybe because of the Khmer culture or maybe because all the teaching staff at LaValla are disabled but the relationship the teachers have with the students at LaValla is wonderful. They have a very personal knowledge of each student in their care and seem to be so accessible and available to their students. They know the importance of their role in the life of a disabled person in Cambodia and embrace it.

### **What were the biggest challenges you faced?**

I think most of the challenges were related to living in a developing country and "cultural" issues rather than any specifically related to Marist Solidarity Cambodia. Across my 12 months in Cambodia there were significant political pressures and events that I struggled to understand – particularly that human life often seems to have so little value. I think once you realise you can't change the institutions of state you can then concentrate your

energy on the people you work with. It didn't stop a sense of sadness and frustration with the "bigger picture" events.

The other challenge for me was the language – I'm not a linguistic person. Whilst my Khmer improved over the 12 months, it was frustrating to think that my limited Khmer would prevent me knowing more about the people of LaValla.

**What would you say to teachers**

**who are considering volunteering abroad for a term?**

I would encourage anyone who thinks that volunteering sounds like them to find a way to explore that call. I'm more convinced than ever that volunteering isn't for everyone. I met a couple of people volunteering in Cambodia who were letting the frustrations of working in a developing country undermine their experience. But, if there is a nagging thought that volunteering sounds like you – don't

ignore it. I also think that perhaps the term "volunteering" doesn't really capture the experience I had – I prefer to speak of my time in Cambodia as a personal immersion. Why? Well, I think rather than just going to do good things (which is important in itself), the personal immersion is a journey where you take the time to stop, think, reflect and listen – something that seemed so much easier in Cambodia than in the "clutter" of daily life in Sydney.



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# UPDATE FROM LIBERIA

## Ebola has now killed more than 2,600 people across West Africa

**E**bola has now killed more than 2,600 people across West Africa, and approximately half the deaths have occurred in Liberia. Hospitals are overwhelmed, and the lack of treatment centers in the country is contributing to the unchecked spread of the virus. According to the World Health Organization, Liberia faces an "exponential" increase in Ebola cases in the coming months.

The current state of affairs regarding the Ebola situation in Liberia since four months has shown no improvement. International Community continues to provide medical personnel and other health facilities to help fight the deadly disease. Many Ebola centers have been established in Monrovia and gradually MSF will move out in the rural areas to establish more centers for Ebola patients. The disease continues to spread throughout the entire country and Ebola death cases remain on a high level.

As we continue to battle with the disease, the Ministry of Youth and Sports has recently called on all youth groups to begin taking responsibility in the fight of the Ebola virus. Many of the Youth Groups have given themselves series of name. E.g. Concerned Youth for Development, Liberian Youth for Voluntarism, Environmental Youth for Ebola Battle, Christian Youth for Charity, Self-Help Organization for Youth Development, etc



Barnersville Community, where the Marist Community is located, has its own Youth Group who called themselves "Concerned Youth for Development". These are the young people we are working with to KICK OUT the disease in Liberia.

Br. Anthony Doe Siryeh  
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