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# MARIST NEWS

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## GENERAL HOUSE

# MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF FMSI ON THE COVID-19

“The impact of the COVID – 19 Virus has been felt throughout the world. This pandemic crisis is a shock to our system and can have lasting effects on societies’ values. Much of what we read in the media concentrates on the ravages of the disease in Europe and the USA, and it is true the virus has had and will continue to have a devastating impact in these places.

However, this is a global pandemic. It is in those countries with less resources that the impact will be on the poorest and most marginalised people. The measures to slow the spread of the virus are difficult for all of us and are even more difficult for those who live in overcrowded settlements, refugee camps or on the streets. Social distancing and hand washing are not real options for those on the margins.

People living in or near poverty often lack disposable resources and cannot easily stockpile food or other basic necessities which compound vulnerability to the virus and contribute to a vicious cycle of disease, destitution and death. Poverty can fuel contagion, but contagion can also create or deepen impoverishment.



In many instances, those agencies which work to support the most marginalised have also had to curtail their efforts. Despite all the current difficulties, FMSI will continue to support education and community development projects for marginalised children in a number of poorer countries. True to our mission statement, FMSI strives to make the world a better place for children and young people, a place free from fear and want. In looking back after the pandemic has passed -and it will pass- history will remember when we as a people fought for the weak and protected the most vulnerable. As we look to the future, our hope lies in our common humanity which binds us together as a global family”.

Br. Ken McDonald – President of FMSI | Councilor General



**Greeting from Brother Superior General to the Institute in Times of Crisis by COVID-19**

[click here to read the message](#)

BANGLADESH

# TESTIMONY OF BR. CÉSAR BARBA GÓMEZ, MISSIONARY IN THE MARIST DISTRICT OF ASIA

**Listening to your voice again**

**Following in the footsteps of the Spirit**

I arrived in Bangladesh on exactly 19 November 2019, on a flight from Thailand, with the airline THAI. On that memorable day, I was welcomed by Brothers Eugene and Alexander at the International Airport of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, thus ending a long journey that by plane alone, with its three transfers, lasted about 26 hours. Many experiences have taken place since then and I want to share them from a human and spiritual point of view. Breaking the silence is not easy for me, much less writing, but I recognize that if I am here today it is because of a loving design of God's presence in my life.

I was called by God to the consecrated life when I was very young and I decided to enter it, when I had just finished my secondary school and a few days before turning 16. I entered the Institute of the Marist Brothers in Mexico City, Mexico, on August 6, 1977. I made my first vows when I consecrated myself to the Lord on 11 July 1981 with 19 other fellow novices in Morelia, Michoacán, Mexico. From then until last year I had dedicated my life and my apostolate to the education of children and young people in several of our Marist works in my country, including a public high school or a mission among the indigenous people. I am convinced that each of the apostolates and services entrusted by my superiors, each and every one of them has contributed to preparing me to live this

new ministry in Bangladesh, a place of mission of the Institute for 13 years, where Christianity is a minority and the marginalized need us.

It is well known to many today that the Institute of the Marist Brothers is urgently called to create international communities of lay people and brothers where it is possible to share life, spirituality and apostolate in community, involved in places where God's call to serve cannot wait. I heard this call again very strongly: "If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). So, aware of my own human limitations, of the trials of staying in my vocation, I received the invitation to become a member of the Marist District of Asia (MDA) in December 2015, during the annual retreat of my province of Central Mexico, this invitation was reconfirmed in February 2017 and finally the call became clearer in April 2018.

Sometime later, a letter came from Brother Ernesto Sánchez Barba, Superior General, asking me, before making any decision, to first participate in the Lavalla200> Programme, from the beginning of August to the end of September 2019, by living a process of personal and group discernment between laypeople and brothers, forming two small communities to live, share and understand more clearly what an intercultural community is, for a multicultural world. The constant commu-



nication with the Brothers in charge of the programme, Jeff and Angel, as well as with the General Council, was decisive in confirming the call and during our retreat at l'Hermitage in France, which took place during a Eucharistic celebration in the General Chapel, where the seven members, who form the 4 LaValla200> group, received our destiny from the hands of the Superior General, symbolised by a simple cross.

**As a partners of the spirit**

During four months of immersion in the culture and language of Bangladesh, the first thing I experienced with all its rigour, was to realise that to enter a culture totally unknown to me, I had to start from scratch, and so it was, to put into practice patience and open myself to the action of the Spirit, starting by hardly recognising the sounds that people use in their language, to all this, add the range of sounds and signs in their writing; the customs, traditions and ancestral relationships; the ethnic groups; their past and present marked by profound political, social, cultural and religious changes; their diet which basically consists of rice, dal (a greatly appreciated delicacy), vegetables, various flat vegetables, fruits, fish, chicken and chilli. The food is very spicy, but they also use desserts that are generally made with rice and are very sweet. I really enjoy the food which is very healthy for me so far.

The brothers run a school and two hostels, with the help of two Marist Missionary Sisters and two lay people, and they also have several teachers who speak the language of the region well. With the support of the Brothers in Bangladesh and after consultation with them, I decided to study the language. I have been living in Dhaka for a month and a half with the Jesuits who give me what I need to live.

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and a half in the house of the Jesuits, who give me what I need to live. Nearby is the place where I am going to receive classes. The plan is to continue studying for at least six months.

There are many other details to be mentioned, but I think that the most important thing at the moment is to be able to feel the action of the Holy Spirit in confirming that the Marist Brothers and the Marist Sisters have learned the language, their commitment to the Bengali children and youth in the education and formation of their persons and their dignity. May Jesus and Mary continue to show their protection and help through our presence and witness.

Br. César Barba Gómez, Bangladesh, 20 March 2020



## EXTRAORDINARY MOMENT OF PRAYER PRESIDED OVER BY POPE FRANCIS

# MEDITATION OF THE HOLY FATHER

Sagrato of St Peter's Basilica, Friday, 27 March 2020

“When evening had come” (Mk 4:35). The Gospel passage we have just heard begins like this. For weeks now it has been evening. Thick darkness has gathered over our squares, our streets and our cities; it has taken over our lives, filling everything with a deafening silence and a distressing void, that stops everything as it passes by; we feel it in the air, we notice in people's gestures, their glances give them away. We find ourselves afraid and lost. Like the disciples in the Gospel we were caught off guard by an unexpected, turbulent storm. We have realized that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other. On this boat... are all of us. Just like those disciples, who spoke anxiously with one voice, saying “We are perishing” (v. 38), so we too have realized that we cannot go on thinking of ourselves, but only together can we do this.

It is easy to recognize ourselves in this story. What is harder to understand is Jesus' attitude. While his disciples are quite naturally alarmed and desperate, he stands in the stern, in the part of the boat that sinks first. And what does he do? In spite of the tempest, he sleeps soundly, trusting in the Father; this is the only time in the Gospels we see Jesus sleeping. When he wakes up, after calming the wind and the waters, he turns to the disciples in a reproaching voice: “Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?” (v. 40).

Let us try to understand. In what does the lack of the disciples' faith consist, as contrasted with Jesus' trust? They had not stopped believing in him; in fact, they called on him. But we see how they call on him: “Teacher, do you not care if we perish?” (v. 38). Do you not care: they think that Jesus is not interested in them, does not care about them. One of the things that hurts us

and our families most when we hear it said is: “Do you not care about me?” It is a phrase that wounds and unleashes storms in our hearts. It would have shaken Jesus too. Because he, more than anyone, cares about us. Indeed, once they have called on him, he saves his disciples from their discouragement.

The storm exposes our vulnerability and uncovers those false and superfluous certainties around which we have constructed our daily schedules, our projects, our habits and priorities. It shows us how we have allowed to become dull and feeble the very things that nourish, sustain and strengthen our lives and our communities. The tempest lays bare all our prepackaged ideas and forgetfulness of what nourishes our people's souls; all those attempts that anesthetize us with ways of thinking and acting that supposedly “save” us, but instead prove incapable of putting us in touch with our roots and keeping alive the memory of those who have gone before us. We deprive ourselves of the antibodies we need to confront adversity.

In this storm, the façade of those stereotypes with which we camouflaged our egos, always worrying about our image, has fallen away, uncovering once more that (blessed) common belonging, of which we cannot be deprived: our belonging as brothers and sisters.

“Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?” Lord, your word this evening strikes us and regards us, all of us. In this world, that you love more than we do, we have gone ahead at breakneck speed, feeling powerful and able to do anything. Greedy for profit, we let ourselves get caught up in things, and lured away by haste. We did not stop at your reproach to us, we were not shaken awake by wars or injustice across the world, nor did we listen to the cry of the poor or of our ailing planet. We carried on regardless, thinking we would stay healthy in a world that was sick. Now that we are in a stormy sea, we implore you: “Wake up, Lord!”



“Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?” Lord, you are calling to us, calling us to faith. Which is not so much believing that you exist, but coming to you and trusting in you. This Lent your call reverberates urgently: “Be converted!”, “Return to me with all your heart” (Joel 2:12). You are calling on us to seize this time of trial as a time of choosing. It is not the time of your judgement, but of our judgement: a time to choose what matters and what passes away, a time to separate what is necessary from what is not. It is a time to get our lives back on track with regard to you, Lord, and to others. We can look to so many exemplary companions for the jour-



ney, who, even though fearful, have reacted by giving their lives. This is the force of the Spirit poured out and fashioned in courageous and generous self-denial. It is the life in the Spirit that can redeem, value and demonstrate how our lives are woven together and sustained by ordinary people – often forgotten people – who do not appear in newspaper and magazine headlines nor on the grand catwalks of the latest show, but who without any doubt are in these very days writing the decisive events of our time: doctors, nurses, supermarket employees, cleaners, caregivers, providers of transport, law and order forces, volunteers, priests, religious men and women and so very many others who have understood that no one reaches salvation by themselves. In the face of so much suffering, where the authentic development of our peoples is assessed, we experience the priestly prayer of Jesus: “That they may all be one” (Jn 17:21). How many people every day are exercising patience and offering hope, taking care to sow not panic but a shared responsibility. How many fathers, mothers, grandparents and teachers are showing our children, in small everyday gestures, how to face up to and navigate a crisis by adjusting their routines, lifting their gaze and fostering prayer. How many are praying, offering and interceding for the good of all. Prayer and quiet service: these are our victorious weapons. “Why are you afraid? Have you no faith”? Faith begins when we realise we are in need of salvation. We are not self-sufficient; by ourselves we founder: we need the Lord, like ancient navigators needed the stars. Let us invite Jesus into the boats of our lives. Let us hand over our fears to him so that he can conquer them. Like the disciples, we will experience that with him on board there will be no shipwreck. Because this is God’s strength: turning to the good everything that happens to us, even the bad things. He brings serenity into our storms, because with God life never dies.

The Lord asks us and, in the midst of our tempest, invites us to reawaken and put into practice that solidarity and hope capable of giving strength, support and meaning to these hours when everything seems to be floundering. The Lord awakens so as

to reawaken and revive our Easter faith. We have an anchor: by his cross we have been saved. We have a rudder: by his cross we have been redeemed. We have a hope: by his cross we have been healed and embraced so that nothing and no one can separate us from his redeeming love. In the midst of isolation when we are suffering from a lack of tenderness and chances to meet up, and we experience the loss of so many things, let us once again listen to the proclamation that saves us: he is risen and is living by our side. The Lord asks us from his cross to rediscover the life that awaits us, to look towards those who look to us, to strengthen, recognize and foster the grace that lives within us. Let us not quench the wavering flame (cf. Is 42:3) that never falters, and let us allow hope to be rekindled.

Embracing his cross means finding the courage to embrace all the hardships of the present time, abandoning for a moment our eagerness for power and possessions in order to make room for the creativity that only the Spirit is capable of inspiring. It means finding the courage to create spaces where everyone can recognize that they are called, and to allow new forms of hospitality, fraternity and solidarity. By his cross we have been saved in order to embrace hope and let it strengthen and sustain all measures and all possible avenues for helping us protect ourselves and others. Embracing the Lord in order to embrace hope: that is the strength of faith, which frees us from fear and gives us hope.

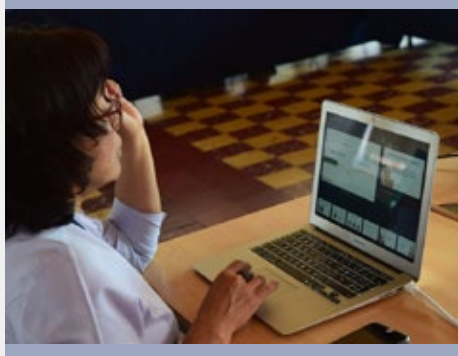
“Why are you afraid? Have you no faith”? Dear brothers and sisters, from this place that tells of Peter’s rock-solid faith, I would like this evening to entrust all of you to the Lord, through the intercession of Mary, Health of the People and Star of the stormy Sea. From this colonnade that embraces Rome and the whole world, may God’s blessing come down upon you as a consoling embrace. Lord, may you bless the world, give health to our bodies and comfort our hearts. You ask us not to be afraid. Yet our faith is weak and we are fearful. But you, Lord, will not leave us at the mercy of the storm. Tell us again: “Do not be afraid” (Mt 28:5). And we, together with Peter, “cast all our anxieties onto you, for you care about us” (cf. 1 Pet 5:7).

marist world

CUBA: LAVALLA200>HOLGUIN

MEXICO: MARISTA DE QUERÉTARO UNIVERSITY – DISTANCE TRAINING

URUGUAY: SAN LUIS SCHOOL MARIST BROTHER, CANELONES



AUSTRALIA: LAVALLA200> MOUNT DRUITT

CAMBODIA: MARIST SOLIDARITY CAMBODIA

PHILIPPINES: MAPAC BROTHERS

NIGERIA

BROTHERS GATHERED TO DISCOVER THE IMPORTANCE OF RELAXATION

The Spirituality Commission of the Marist Province of Nigeria organized workshops in all the three zones of the Province on 14th March, 2020. The three zones were: Uturu zone, Enugu zone and Abuja zone. The theme of the workshop was: The Importance of Relaxation. The members of the Spirituality Commission spread themselves in all the three zones to facilitate the workshop. During the workshop, Brothers were organized in groups to discuss the theme and give answers to the questions given to them by the Commission. The Brothers participated actively in their various groups during the group discussions. At the end of the group discussions, the secretaries of the various groups presented their reports to the larger assembly. There were reactions and further contributions to the various presentations.

The workshop was so enriching and successful. It was an opportunity for Brothers to gather together and share their experiences and at the same time relax. Over the years, it has been alleged that the Brothers of the



Nigerian Province work and hardly create time for relaxation and rest. At the end of the workshop, it was realized that it is possible to work and at the same time relax.

FRANCE

Brother Étienne PITIOT, was a missionary in New Caledonia for many years. He died in St Genis-Laval, France, a victim of the coronavirus. His death occurred on March 26, 2020, at the age of 76.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Brother Patrick McNamara, Provincial, invited the Marists to make a novena together to Our Good Mother and to use the Memorare prayer. Each day, for 9 days in a row, from April 1st to 9th, recite the prayer: Memorare (Remember) <https://maristyouth.com/memorare>

ECUADOR

The Marist community of Catacocha granted permission for the use of the facilities of the “Quinta Fatima” to house medical personnel, nurses and workers of the Guido Alfonso Díaz Basico Hospital of Catacocha, during the crisis caused by the coronavirus.

CAMBODIA

On March 16, Lavalla School held a dance to celebrate the end of the first semester. And now, as in many places in the world, all the children and young people from the Lavalla School and Lavalla Village centres are at home with their families.

BRAZIL

During this Easter time, the Province of Brasil Centro-Sul, the Marist Group and the PUC of Paraná are promoting an activity on behalf of the inhabitants of Vila Torres, a community living in Curitiba, in the region of the Campus of the PUCPR.

CHILE

ASSEMBLY OF THE CHAMPAGNAT MOVEMENT IN SANTIAGO



The Champagnat Movement of the Marist family in Chile, Province of Santa María de los Andes, held an assembly on March 14th at the Marist Spirituality Centre in Santiago. During the meeting, the project and the planning prepared by the Animation Team, which will be in office from this year until 2025, were presented.

It was a fraternal meeting where the fraternities felt revitalized and recognized as a family. They also had the opportunity to dialogue, reflect and observe the strengths and weaknesses they have in achieving their objectives as a Movement that practices the Marist charism with audacity, creativity and efficiency, in communion with

other manifestations of the Movement at provincial and regional levels and in harmony with the Church.

The Lay Marists of the Champagnat Movement practise the Christian values by making Jesus Christ known and

loved in the lay communities of the different works of the Sector, especially among the families, parents and guardians of the students. And

they try to be attentive to the needs of the community (family) and its challenges in these new times.

In Chile, there are six fraternities of the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family, where nearly 60 people take part.



SPAIN

# EL ESCORIAL ACCOMMODATES THE HEALTH STAFF OF THE HOSPITALS FOR PATIENTS WITH COVID-19

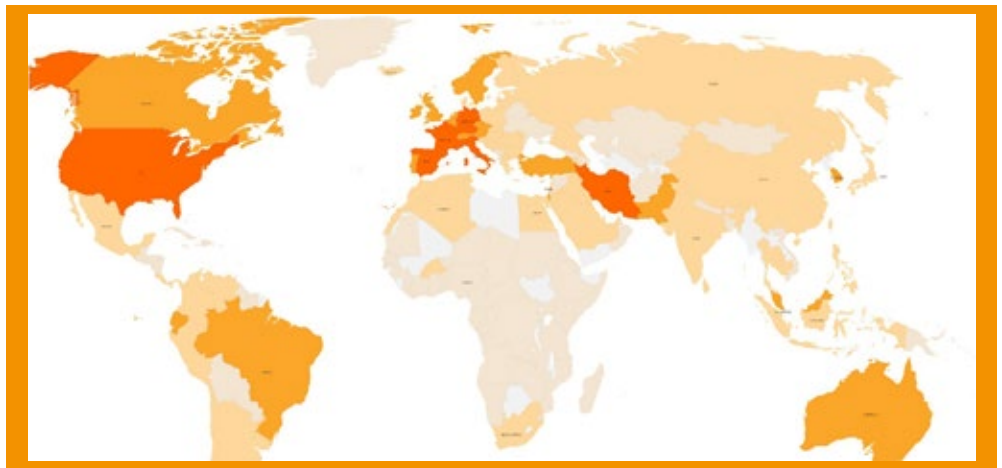
The Marist Province of Ibérica will provide accommodation in the house of Fuentenuueva at San Lorenzo de El Escorial for the medical personnel of the hospitals of La Fuenfría El Escorial, Guadarrama and the field hospital set up at Eurofórum Infantes (San Lorenzo). This will allow the professionals of the hospital centres to remain in San Lorenzo de El Escorial.

The house is located 57 km from Madrid. It is a formation centre for the Iberian Province and has also welcomed many groups from all over the Institute. The Marist centre is one of the eight hostels established by the Health Council of the Community of Madrid which seeks to provide accommodation for health workers who are currently working for the care of patients affected by Covid-19.



## CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19) PANDEMIC

The Marist Administrative Units and educational centres are taking several initiatives. Some examples are gathered in our site, in that link: <https://champagnat.org/en/maristas-covid19/>. If you wish to share what you are doing as an Administrative Unit or Marist Centre, you can send your proposal to [comunica@fms.it](mailto:comunica@fms.it)



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