

Reflection on the Marist Community of Welcome (Austin, Texas)

Original Vision and Proposal: Marist Community of Welcome

Approved by the: Provincial Council & Bishop Joe Vasquez

With the consent of Bishop Joe Vasquez* the Marist Brothers of the Province of the United States of America will establish a Community of Welcome near the University of Texas (Austin) in the summer of 2019. This community will consist of 2-3 Brothers who will commit to a prayerful, simple and intentional Marist life together in service to young people. A primary commitment of the community will be a ministry of encounter with young adults by inviting and welcoming them to share in prayer, community and service with the Brothers. The Brothers will be open to young adults joining them to live a shared Marist-Christian community life.

*As per Canon 609.1 Bishop Joe Vasquez consented to this proposal on November 5, 2018

Mission Statement created by Community, January 2020

We are a community of young adults and Marist Brothers
united in faith by the love of Christ and guided by the Marist Spirit.

Our brotherhood is fostered by our commitment to: hospitality, group prayer,
shared meals and a genuine concern for each person.

House & Property

The Marist Community of Welcome is presently located in two houses on an acre of land in the Hancock section of Austin. It is approximately one-mile north of the University of Texas and is easily accessible by three bus routes. The houses include: 5 bedrooms (sleeping for 7) 2 living rooms, a chapel, kitchen and dining area. The yard is large and tree-filled, our back boundary is Waller Creek.

Community Members

The first 22 months of the community has been blessed with two brothers and over the years a total of 9 young adults. While the two brothers offered a sense of “stability” to the community and initiative, the young adult’s commitment varied depending upon the realities of their lives (e.g. graduation, finding a job). It is important to note that the proposal for the Community of Welcome was to establish a community of 2-3 brothers who would be open to welcoming young adults to live with them. Though we began with that reality, with Peter leaving there is one brother living with 3-4 young adults.

Another reality is that there might not be a “full-house” all the time. One recent development is having young adults living with us for 1, 2 or 3 months. Again, that is determined by work, school and other commitments. Regardless if any young adults are living in the community, young adults would be welcome to join the brother(s) in prayer, meals and other activities.

Finances

Our major expense is housing, \$5000.00 per month. This would be typical for a house and property of our size in Austin. Utilities are an additional \$600.00 a month. Food costs depends

upon the number of community members. The Province has agreed to pay our monthly rent, while the other expenses are paid by the room and board from the young adults (each pays \$900 a month) and the salary/stipend of the Brothers. Though not expected, in our first full year we were able to give back to the Province \$60,000.00 in surplus funds.

Community Life

The form our community life has taken reflects both a desire to have regular times to connect and to give room for the spirit/personal needs. A typical week: we have Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer and meals together Monday-Thursday. Monday is a community day, “Marist Monday,” where we have a special meal, prayers prepared by the Brothers on a Marist theme, a community conversation and sometimes an activity. Friday-Sunday the community decided to let the spirit move us, and so prayer and meals are determined by who is around.

Each community member is responsible for cleaning some part of the house.

In addition to our ministry-of-welcome we spoke about finding some form of service we could offer outside of initiative. We had planned to join a program to feed our neighbors who are homeless, but that opportunity was cancelled because of the Covid-19 virus.

“Welcome”

In calling this initiative the “Marist Community of Welcome” we want to emphasize that it is the members of the community who welcome guests (rather than a “house”). Over the first 22 months we have welcomed all sorts of guests: Marist Brothers (Pat, Dan, Al, Brian, Mike Williams), family members, friends of community members, other young adults and student groups and the staff of the University Catholic Center. The guests have been here for prayer, meals, and general socializing. We have also offered the opportunity for some grads to spend a night or weekend while they return to Austin.

In our reflection as a community we wanted to find ways of enlarging the circle of those we “welcomed” to share community. Just before the pandemic we had decided to begin “Welcome Wednesdays” – where we planned to invite specific people/groups to join us for prayer, dinner and conversation. The initial two invitations had to be cancelled as the requirements for the pandemic precluded any gatherings at our home.

Challenges and Graces

The unfolding of our charism in a new way has been a blessing for all those involved. The fact that this Province initiative was a response to a request from young adults illustrates the gift we have and can offer young people. The graces have been manifold and the many ways we have been able to share our community with others has been very positive.

The major challenge has been “welcoming” in an era where social distancing has become the norm. For almost a year we have only had limited opportunities to welcome people into our community. Our community has also been impacted the number of young adults who are in Austin (79% of classes @ UT were on-line), and who could become potential community members. The

loss of Brother Peter Guadalupe, has lessened the presence of Brothers in the community, and support for Rob.

It was at our last Provincial Chapter where the suggestion that a Community of Welcome be established in Austin, Texas. I extend my deep thanks for your confidence and trust in me as I joined with Peter and 9 young adults in forming this new expression of our Marist Charism.

Presented to the Provincial Chapter by Rob Clark— April 2021