



17 August 2021

Dear Members of the Oceania Council,

Greetings from Brother Ernesto and the members of the General Council! We hope that you and your loved ones are well during these difficult days of the pandemic. Know that you and all the Marists of Champagnat are remembered in our prayers.

We speak with you today to mark a milestone---the last meeting of the Oceania Council. Milestones can be helpful because they encourage us to reflect on the past and look toward the future. During these months of the pandemic, as the rate of infections and deaths subside in some parts of the globe and rise in others and we continue to count the human, emotional, social, and economic cost of COVID-19, we cannot help but think about how “leadership” matters. It always matters. Leadership in dynamic times always requires different skills than required in the past. If there is one thing the pandemic has taught us it is that leadership must foster cooperation and collaboration.

In our earliest years as a congregation, Marcellin worked to build up collaboration and cooperation among the brothers and among the larger Marist family. He welcomed collaboration in his quest for novel solutions to the challenging situations facing war-torn France to ensure that the poor, rural youth knew and loved Jesus and received a solid Christian education. Like Marcellin, the past and present leaders within the region of Oceania welcomed collaboration and cooperation.

Even before the creation of Oceania Council, there had been a great deal of cooperation between the Provinces of Melbourne, Sydney, New Zealand, and the District of Melanesia, particularly in formation and Marist laity. The aim of these efforts of collaboration was quite simple: to seek input from multiple perspectives and to value diverse points of views. Over time, the leaders considered perspectives other than their own and created processes to synthesize these perspectives to create more robust and inclusive solutions.

As time went on, lay men and women joined the AU leadership to form the Oceania Council. Its task was to build on different viewpoints and to create an environment that promoted trust and reciprocity so that Marist life and mission could be enhanced. All involved felt heard and respected, even when their approach was not the ultimate choice. This experience-sharing-- provided by the regular meetings of the Council and the work of various commissions--improved everyone's awareness of issues and broadened potential solutions. This in turn demanded creativity and new approaches to the complex issues facing the region. Structures and commissions were established to pull people together from across each sector of the AUs, and in doing so created a culture of “doing what is right” for the larger Marist community. The Oceania Council understood, that in times of change, input from multiple voices with diverse points of view is required and welcomed.



So now we come to the final meeting of this Council. It has done well in laying the foundation for the future...a future full of hope and anticipation as a new province—the Star of the Sea—is being born. When you read the history of the Marist Brothers, in Oceania or other parts of the world, Marists can appreciate that administrative arrangements have been in a state of continual change. In Oceania, Provinces have come and gone, adapting to changing circumstances. The most recent changes date back to 2010 when the concurrent Chapters of the Melbourne, New Zealand and Sydney Provinces and the District of Melanesia were held. This resulted in a reconfiguration that was once again adapted with the amalgamation of the District of Melanesia into the Province of Australia in 2020. Each configuration was always seen as a transitory arrangement, with further alterations and accommodations being required.

Despite nationality, language, or ethnic background, we are all Marists, we are all “Little Brothers and Sisters of Mary”. We have much more in common than those things that distinguish and separate us. As this Council concludes, it is time for each of us to recommit ourselves to continue the work of building God’s kingdom for the benefit of those we serve. This ending really is a new beginning of another Marist journey. As we move forward, let us ask Jesus, Mary, and Marcellin to bless our work and accompany us into the future. Adelante!

Be assured of the gratitude, support and prayers of Brother Ernesto and the other members of the General Council. We remain,

Fraternally,

Brother Ben Consigli
General Councilor

Brother Josep Maria Soteras
General Councilor