

# **EDUCATING FOR PEACE: A NEED AND AN INVALUABLE OPTION**

**IN MEMORY OF ALL THE VICTIMS OF  
VIOLENT CONFLICTS RECOGNIZED OR IGNORED**

**MESSAGE FROM THE MARIST  
INTERNATIONAL MISSION COMMISSION**



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In a world that is constantly changing, peace is highly dependent on the individuals having unwavering faith in harmonious co-existence and having tranquility of minds and hearts - educated and formed to live peacefully. Throughout human history and in the contemporary world, conceivably, the fundamental reason for the absence of peace has been either refusal to co-exist or a lack of peaceful minds and hearts. In spite of exhaustion of all the possible options for building peace – forces of religion, advanced weaponry, socio-economic reforms and political system or military dictatorship, democracy, based on the rule of law – humanity still has the most powerful option to build lasting peace in the world – the education for peace.

In a troubled, wounded and uncertain world, education for peace remains our only hope as well as option to cultivate minds and hearts of children and youth to live in peace, love and joy. For us, the Marists, Marist education finds its origin and roots in the experience of God’s love for humanity and consequential and deliberate attempt by each Marist to *‘make God in Jesus loved and known’* through formal and informal education in all the dioceses of the world.

## **1. WHAT WE HAVE BEEN REALLY DOING WELL TO EDUCATE FOR PEACE?**

### **A. Integration, not segregation**

As Marists, throughout our history, we have been spreading the Good News through the integration of human and gospel values in Marist educational culture. A fundamental and significant aspect of Marist education has been an intentional emphasis on justice and peace in the religious education curriculum. Values of Jesus Christ are modelled through the policies, procedures, structures and the daily routines in Marist schooling. Paying heed to Pope Francis’ words, “Integral education is the horizon of peace”. Marist institutes of education strive to educate in an integral way: mind, hands and heart in order to form good Christians and citizens. More importantly, our educational style continues to exhibit its capacity to form leaders who integrate into the fabric of social life in order to transform it. In the different areas of Marist mission, we offer values that help integration and inclusion, respecting social and cultural diversity, socio-economic and political differences.



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## B. A culture of encounter

A culture of encounter is a significant and integral aspect of Marist education across the globe. We open our apostolic activities to all without making distinction in nationality, education or status. This aspect of inclusiveness and encounter enables our missions to develop a common goal and home by working more on what unites us than what divides. Our institutions, on one hand, provide spaces of protection and security to all who serve and are being served, and, on the other hand, promotes critical thinking in order to be less influenced and consumed by pop culture. Thus, a safe and healthy atmosphere in our centres seeks as well as generates spaces for peaceful encounters.

In our schools, and in other Marist centres, our social works and our attention to groups, displaced due to conflicts and violence, provide opportunities of mean-



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ingful and supportive encounters with least favoured. Similar way, FMSI and other Marist NGO's continue to facilitate and assist Marist missions through solidarity initiatives and projects that focus on human rights, inclusive education and peaceful societies.

### **C. A sense of hope for coexistence**

Amid harsh realities of senseless violence against humanity and nature, Marists offer an educational system that awakens hope for peace and co-existence. We prepare our students with critical democratic education to contribute to build peaceful families and societies. To the children at margins of society, our response is creating safe spaces and addressing various matters that threaten the religious harmony and peaceful co-existence in the society. Our education continually and constantly provides coordination in different groups, makes agreements with other stakeholders for the implementation of co-existence, and forms social-community teams (SCTs) in the Marist institutions.

### **D. Human rights advocacy**

Advocacy for human rights is a crucial aspect of Marist education. This includes issues of inclusion (races, religions, gender orientation, people with disabilities, etc.), discrimination (among others) and bullying. We prepare our students with a critical and democratic conscience so that they can contribute to their societies as advocates and ambassadors of human rights. This strong commitment to defend human rights and especially the right to peace is evident at local, provincial and institutional levels – for example, the Marist presence at United Nations in Geneva.

### **E. Safe and peaceful spaces for youth**

Marist apostolates are places of social promotion, good treatment and joy, and all this emerges from the deep connection with Gospel values and love for God and humans. Our ministries provide information, knowledge and insights on catholic social teaching. As a result, it lays the groundwork for respect, dignity of the person, tolerance, acceptance and solidarity. On the other hand, practical measures such as anti-bullying campaigns led by the students, support groups for children facing difficulties and prayer services and special liturgies help students to live in peace. Specific spaces for reflection and action, in number of Marist missions and ministries, provide the youth with opportunities to be the agents of a peaceful and tranquil environment. In many of our school



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ministries, there are guidance programs offering young people spaces to share challenges they are facing.

## **F. Leadership for peace and celebration**

Marist apostolates in general and educating for peace in particular have been highly focused on a concrete level through various initiatives, projects and campaigns. Our local leaders are empowered to act as promoters of peace and human rights in their communities. Marist leadership involved in education, social works, human rights campaigns, conservation groups and solidarity projects are convinced to join hands with other groups sharing the same cause for peace and harmony.

The element of celebration is a key to develop peace-oriented communities and nations. That's why the achievements of peacekeepers are celebrated in various Marist regions at the community and apostolate level, for example, the lives of Nelson Mandela, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and our Marist martyrs of peace (could name those in Africa). In the USA, the national holiday in remembrance of Martin Luther King Jr. and the discussion on non-violent resistance, the impact of racism and poverty etc., provides opportunities to form future leaders of peace.



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## 2. WHAT CAN WE DO AND DREAM TO CONTRIBUTE TO BUILDING A PEACEFUL WORLD THROUGH EDUCATION?

### A. Fostering the culture of encounter and peace

As Marists, we hope and dream to develop a culture of encounter and peace in our mission spaces, especially in the educational and formational institutions. This involves creating educational and evangelistic programs that entail reception, inclusion, integration of children and youth in order to form them as the active agents for peace. Further, it includes growing and intensifying our presence with the most vulnerable and excluded in society focussing on stimulating dialogue and concrete actions for building peace between diverse societies, countries and nations at large.

We want to promote reflection and a culture of peace (as cross-cutting themes in the curriculum) in which a solidarity economy is highlighted, the senselessness of weapons is made clear, the advantages of cooperativeness between nations are shown and the advantages of strengthening international institutions such as the UN, FAO, WHO, UN-SCEO etc. are pointed out. We also aspire to promote clubs that condone political reflection and leader-



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ship with a human rights perspective, integration of people, and culture of peace. For example, parliamentarianism clubs, United Nations clubs, etc.

## **B. Integrating global citizenship into our educational and training plans**

We are called to be *'a global charismatic family, a beacon of hope in this turbulent world'* (22<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter). As we envision our future, we identify the concept of global citizenship as a key factor in the education for peace. The concept of global citizenship, therefore, needs to be expanded and included in the social debates and study programs throughout the Marist world. It is time to review the curricula of social sciences and socio-political ethics for the formation of 'good citizens' – an active precursor of social peace. Undoubtedly, another equally important and required initiative is the increased mobility and collaboration of people (brothers and lay) within the Marist world and with other institutions. A strengthened Marist concept of global citizenship is hoped to pave the way for peace in the world. On the other hand, if we fail to accomplish the goal of global citizenship, our dream for a peaceful future through Marist education will also remain a pie in the sky.

## **C. To deepen a value-based and formation-oriented education**

Although, Marist education has been value-based, gospel, human, ethical and formation-oriented, throughout history yet we dream to revitalise and expand it to limits in future in order to make the dream of peaceful future for all a reality. For this, we need to support initiatives that align with Marist values and are focussed on the holistic formation of students and all the other stakeholders. In other words, every program and initiative in education for peace in Marist centres must support the formation of children and young people. It is highly imperative that required skills and commitment for social transformation are in-built in the future Marist education for peace because the current social, cultural, political and economic crises call for it.

Equally important is to strengthen spiritual and ethical aspect of Marist education because peace is not just the absence of conflicts and wars but a sense of interconnectedness with the self, divine, humans and the environment with a highly interiorised sense of balance and service. We dream *to cultivate a spirituality of the heart, that fills us with joy and makes us inclusive- being face and hands of God's tender mercy* (22<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter), and educate children and





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young people to build a rights-respecting and peace-building society. This entails being coherent in proclaiming Marist and evangelical values, taking stand with the poorest, and courageously defending children's right to live and learn in peaceful and safe surroundings.

### **D. Focusing on marginalised**

Poor, under-privileged and marginalised were the focal point in Jesus' ministry. As Marist educators, we are challenged to side explicitly with those on the peripheries of the modern society. Similarly, 22<sup>nd</sup> General chapter has made an explicit invitation *'to journey with children and young people living on the margins of life'*. Focussing on marginalised may involve creation of spaces, in our ministries and institutions for young people and to guide and support them to face and discuss situations and realities such as the LGBTIQ, racism, discrimination, intolerance, unemployment, abortion, early pregnancies, suicide, IDPs and wounded environment. Yet, more importantly, we are called to pitch our Marist tent deep where the marginalised youth live and moves around. Further, it requires to work with adults to jointly establish problems and paths for the creation of peaceful communities.

### **E. Participatory education for peace**

In the contemporary digitalized and highly evolved age of communication, participatory mindset is a prerequisite to education for peace. Promotion of peace culture through education requires maximum participation of students, parents, teachers and all the other stakeholders at school, district and national levels. It is hoped that participation, based on mutual respect and dignified treatment, will act as a catalyst to transform our students, teachers and parents as agents of social transformation, and thus paving the path for a peaceful future for all. Our schools, social works and Universities need to bear witness to a different kind of society – a society based on the principal of common good and a profound respect for the dignity and rights of humans and the environment, as we see in experiences such as Fratelli or the provincial or institute communities that seek to be signs of light.

Moreover, participatory aspect of Marist education for peace demands a deeper, effective and decisive association with Church, other congregations, civil society and groups of people from other faith backgrounds to develop initiatives for the promotion of a culture of peace. For example, we need to strengthen the link with civil society institutions, to continue implementing actions in the





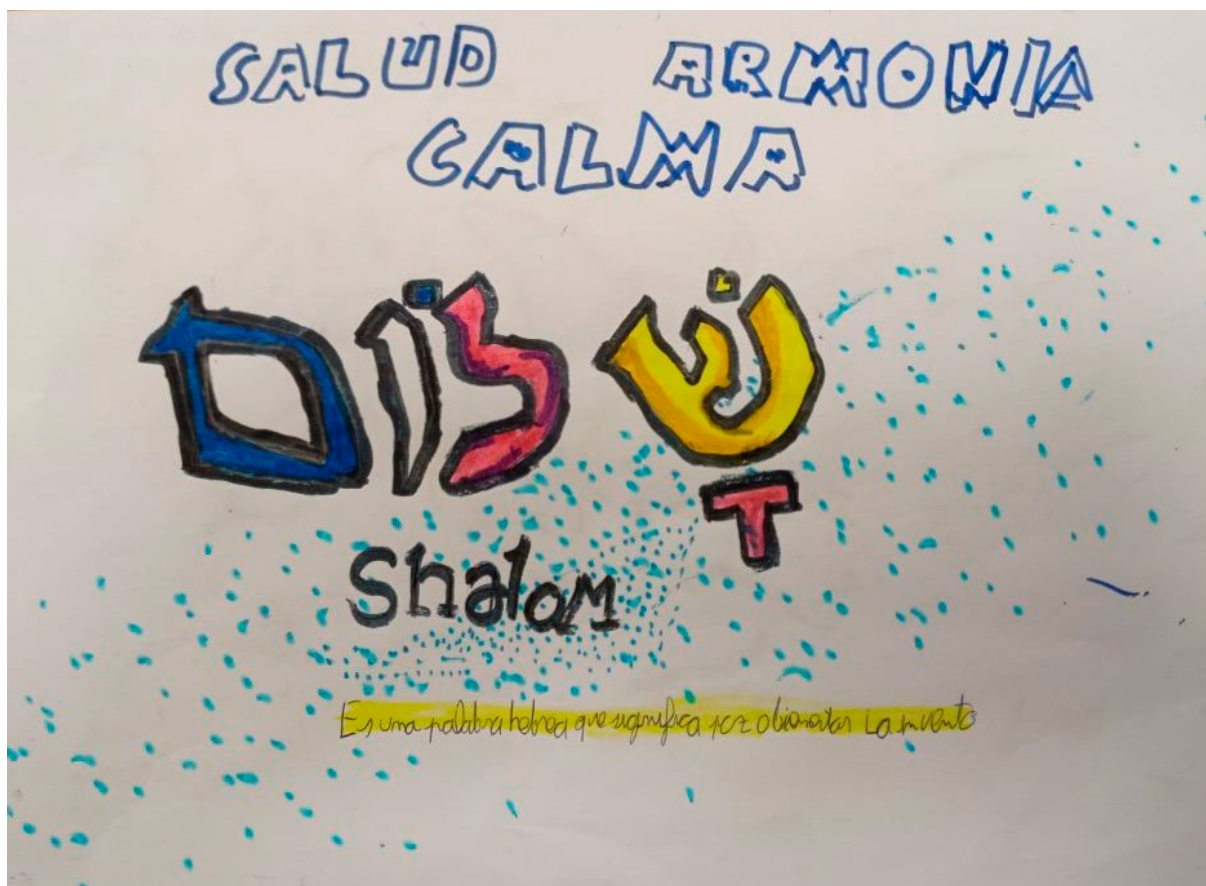
favour of children. A strong participatory aspect in Marist education will enable Marist youth to reach every nook and corner of society to leave imprints of peaceful and harmonious co-existence experienced in Marist schools and centres (e.g., through the project “Stand up, Speak Up and Act”).

### **3. WHAT PATHS CAN WE FOLLOW TO PROMOTE EDUCATION FOR PEACE (ACTIONS OR STRATEGIES)?**

As we look forward to a peaceful future through education for peace, we need to be focused on the following areas, action and strategies:

#### **A. Awareness**

- Promote signs, symbols and the stories of peace champions.
- Conduct gestures for peace, vigils and reflection as well as prayer initiatives.
- In formation plans of Marist works, develop initiatives to raise awareness about peace and the consequences of war.
- Engage with external partners, working groups, solidarity networks, congregations and groups of influence in civil society to promote peace awareness.



## **B. Allocation of resources**

- Allocate and provide adequate funds, with a special focus on the marginalized and disadvantaged groups.
- Implement already developed proposals and incorporate those into the organisational structure of the missions and ministries at community, sectorial, provincial and congregational levels.
- Strengthen the teams of mentors, psychologists and socio-emotional and human development companions in schools and social centres.
- Develop skills for dialogue, active listening, collective decision-making and recognition as well as appreciation of diversity.

## **C. Curriculum**

- Design and conduct regular audit of peace processes in Marist educational institute encapsulating both the curriculum and overall operations.
- Develop education curriculum that is comprehensive and holistic, addressing gender equality, conflict resolution, religious education, non-violen-



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ce communication, children rights, care for the environment and international understanding.

- Communication being the key to conflict resolution, our curriculum needs to build better communication skills among teachers and learners.
- The concept of ‘peace chair’ is required to be transversal in the curriculum.

### **D. Develop initiatives**

- Produce a set of guidelines for peace education – practical ways of engaging in peace.
- Develop encounters of different cultures, different religions and creeds, as well as different social groups.
- Implement methodologies that incorporate corporeality and meditation in collective meeting spaces.
- Create spaces to provide support and guidance to young people to face contemporary issues such as LGBTQ, racism, discrimination, intolerance, unemployment, abortion, early pregnancies, suicide and the destruction of the environment.

### **E. Participation of youth**

- Train and encourage participation of student leaders in the promotion and defence of human rights.
- Ensure students’ participation in various forums involving parents, teachers and larger community to express their experiences on the subject of peace.
- Strengthen the role of ‘youth councils’ in school decision-making across the activities with a specific focus on the theme of peace.
- Plan and conduct workshops for parents, teachers and students related to the theme of peace and harmonious co-existence.
- F. Joining in some way to the global campaign for peace education
- Begin a Marist campaign for peace education at the provincial, regional and congregation level and link it with the global campaign for peace education.
- Organise debate and discussion with experts on peace at schools and universities.

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- Create a Marist Centre of Excellence for peace education.
  - Participate in Church and civil society networks in support of a culture of peace.
  - Engage with key stakeholders such as NGOs and community organizations, to work with IDPs and refugees.

## CONCLUSION

The task of education for peace is important as well as urgent, and it can be achieved only if *we journey together as a global Marist family*. Br. Ernesto Sanchez Barba, superior general, has put it beautifully, “*As men and women of action, we would like to find effective solutions and act fast.*” A polarised world, wounded by the violence, demands for urgent action and solution through education for peace so that families, communities, societies and countries may become ‘*homes of light while caring for life and generating new life*’ (*Home of Light, 2020*).

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