

Star MESSENGER

Dear Brothers

The second half of our visit to Fiji was as enjoyable and beneficial as the first half. We concluded our 3-day Council meeting on Saturday evening and then returned to Suva on Sunday. There, we attended the February meeting of the *Marist Brothers Fijian Trust Board*. In a similar way to the Samoan and New Zealand Trust Boards, it is the legal corporate entity of the Brothers in Fiji through which we can own property and carry out business. It is the Trust Board that owns the schools for the Marist Brothers. In these early days, Council is still learning about our new province. Being part of the Trust Board's discussion was helpful and gave us an insight into our mission in Fiji. That evening we attended a gathering at the newly re-established community at Carew Street, adjoining the High School. Once again, there was a special Fijian farewell ceremony and feast.

We are very grateful to the Brothers of the three communities that hosted us: **Vatuwaqa**, **Carew Street** and **Lomeri**, and to the **Champagnat Marists** who made us most welcome.

The agenda of our Council meeting kept us busy for our days in Lomeri. Some of the key items were:

- We spent much of our first day on matters relating to Formation. Early in my years on Council, we spent very little time on this issue, but that's not the case now. We received Minutes and Reports from the **Initial Formation Commission** and its **Core group**. We also took considerable time to consider applications for renewal of vows from 15 temporary professed Brothers. An issue Council has asked the Commission to explore is time limited commitment as a Brother, or, for want of a better phrase, 'temporary vocation'. A task force is being established for this purpose.
- **Chris Poppelwell** joined the Council to present a report on the Lomeri Project. He and the

community have worked assiduously to re-establish the Marist presence there and to offer hospitality to a variety of groups: schools, Parish, local and Diocesan. Slowly, it is establishing its identity as the *Marist Champagnat Centre for Spirituality and Ecology*. It's hoped that a reference group will be established to offer guidance on how it can further promote sustainability, ecological awareness and eco-spirituality. Obviously, it's important that the facility is sustainable, and so one of the imminent projects is the development of greater solar power. Council is happy to facilitate this. We are grateful to **Chris, Damien, Ani** and now, **Cyril**, for their work and commitment.

- Professional Standards and Safeguarding remain significant issues that require great attention and resourcing. Each month we receive reports from **Jonathan Sankey**, who manages New Zealand Safeguarding, and **Domenic Pagano**, who looks after Professional Standards' claims and matters in Australia. The New Zealand Royal Commission is drawing to a close with a report due in May. Of particular importance will be its recommendations regarding the establishment of a redress scheme. Claims and cases continue at a pace.
- Council reviewed and discussed Reports from the **Champagnat Family Commission**, the **Spiritual Formation Task Force** and the **Mission Commission**. As a result, the conceptual framework of the Province developed by the Mission group will be further refined, the Champagnat Family group will develop a staged plan for engagement with our broader Marist family across different countries, and **Br Jeff Crowe** has agreed to lead an investigation into how best to provide equitable formation

opportunities and resources across our diverse Province. Thanks Jeff. He will build on the work already completed by the Task Force, which has now ended its mandate. Thanks to **John Finneran**, Chair of that group.

- Province Bursar, **Paul Burges**, joined the meeting via Zoom to discuss financial reports and property matters. One of these is the major renovation to Laumanasa House at Tenaru. This work should be completed by May. Paul also updated us on the itinerary of the Econome General, Br Jorge Gaio, who is visiting the Province in April. Financial markets are volatile so prudent management is essential. We are fortunate we have such oversight through our structures.

Brothers, I could write much more, but these are among the major issues. I'm most appreciative of the support of **Kevin Wanden**, Province Secretary, **John Hazelman**, Delegate for Pasifika, **Kees van der Weert**, Fiji Country Coordinator, for organising our visit and programme.

Community at Onslow Avenue, Epsom

You were notified last year that the community at Manly would close and the Brothers in residence move to other communities. Soon after, **Dunstan Henry** moved to Onehunga and **Graeme Clisby** went to Epsom. **Colin Divane** and **Barry Burns** have remained at Manly until now. During March, they will also relocate to Epsom, where **Colin** has agreed to be the **Community Leader**. Onslow Avenue has a tradition of being a community of welcome and this will continue to be a core part of its mission. Many thanks to the Brothers there for extending hospitality to our Champagnat Marists and others.

Lent from the Guardian

I don't normally quote from the secular press, but a recent article in *The Guardian* took me by surprise. I'm not used to reading positive articles about religious topics in this publication, or any other for that matter. I include it in today's Star Messenger for your interest and reflection.

Br Rodney Pauru

Rodney has requested and been granted Leave of Absence to engage in a process of vocational discernment. He will continue his work at Divine Word University, where he has a significant position, until the end of the First Semester. He will then have a period of time for reflection. I know we all wish him every blessing for this time away from the Brothers.

First Vows

Please continue to remember **Edgar, Dedimo, Manecas** and **Simon** in your prayers. Their first profession will be at Tudella on 16 March.

Br Tony Shears

Tony is in his fifth week in St Vincent's Hospital Sydney. While critical indicators have returned to normal and his infections have subsided, he is still in a serious state. Since his exit from ICU, the major issue has been his fluctuating level of consciousness, though there have been some recent positive signs. All going well, sometime in the next month he may move from the Hospital to a rehabilitation facility. His brother, Bill, is still staying at Randwick and visiting daily. Please continue to keep Tony in your prayers.

Acting Provincial

This year's meeting of the Provincials with the Superior General, Vicar, Council and General Administration, will be held at L'Hermitage in Lyon in honour of the bicentenary of its construction. The meeting starts this Sunday. While I am away from the Province, **Br Darren Burge will be Acting Provincial**.



Br Peter Carroll
Provincial



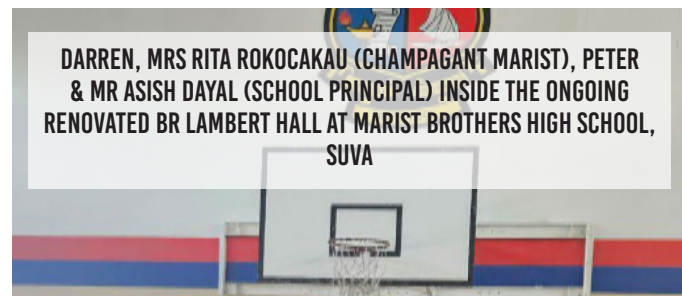
PROVINCIAL COUNCIL WITH MEMBERS OF THE FIJI MARIST BROTHERS TRUST BOARD



THE PROVINCIAL COUNCIL WITH THE FIJI MARIST EDUCATION BOARD MEMBERS



FR STEVE FILIPO (NEW PRINCIPAL OF CORPUS CHRISTI) WITH SEFO AND GREG



DARREN, MRS RITA ROKOCAKAU (CHAMPAGANT MARIST), PETER & MR ASISH DAYAL (SCHOOL PRINCIPAL) INSIDE THE ONGOING RENOVATED BR LAMBERT HALL AT MARIST BROTHERS HIGH SCHOOL, SUVA



PROVINCIAL COUNCIL WITH MEMBERS OF THE FIJI CHAMPAGNAT MARISTS



BR CLAUDIUS MASON'S "24TH" BIRTHDAY

29 February 2024

At 96 years of age, our brother, Claude, today celebrated his "24th" birthday. Wanting no fuss, it was only the Campbelltown community and the nurses and carers who gathered in the community room for a cuppa and cheesecake.

Claude is well cared for at Molloy House; he absolutely enjoys the view; welcomes many visitors for a chat and looks forward to regular phone calls from his sister, Ron Perry and Michael Curnow.

We wish our brother, Claude a very happy 24th birthday.

The Campbelltown Community



Scripture Reading: Matt 21:33-43, 45-46

³³ “Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. ³⁴ When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. ³⁵ But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶ Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. ³⁷ Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ ³⁸ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.’ ³⁹ So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. ⁴⁰ Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” ⁴¹ They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.” ⁴² Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the scriptures: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is amazing in our eyes’? ⁴³ Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. ⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. ⁴⁶ They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

Reflection:

Our confusion about how to read this parable is built into its role and place in Matthew’s Gospel. This exchange between Jesus and the chief priests and elders is set in Jerusalem near the end of Jesus’ ministry. This final section of the Gospel before the passion narrative gazes stereo-optically at Jesus’ own life and ministry and at the church that will carry on his witness to God’s reign after Jesus’ approaching passion, death, and resurrection.

Jesus’ collision with the Jerusalem leadership is a thread running through the whole Gospel, just as the Church would later be in conflict with the synagogue as both communities attempted to deal with the consequences of the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple. The arguments between them were most often not about religious practices, but about the temple leaders’ collusion with exploitative economic and social policies of the Roman Empire, and later over different ways of negotiating life under that Empire in the church and the synagogue from which it was “called out” (ekklesia).

Jesus’ citation of Psalm 118:22-23 (verse 42) does not rebut the verdict the leaders have pronounced on the tenants, but rather it refocuses the discussion. The issue is no longer the old “vineyard,” but rather a totally new structure of which Jesus himself is the “cornerstone.” That structure is God’s reign or empire, which Jesus has been proclaiming from the

beginning of his ministry and which the church will continue to proclaim in Jesus’ name.

This parable does not use the story to set forth the surprising nature and qualities of God’s reign, as do so many others in the Gospels. Its focus is rather on the futility of debates about, and maintenance programs for, the institutions of this age. Even the terms of God’s relationship to God’s own people are new. This puzzling parable pulls us forward toward that unknown future in which we will be both blessed and judged, and about which we know only that it is anchored in Jesus Christ.

In Jesus’ teaching, there was a fundamental reminder that only the Creator owns everything and we are simply tenants leasing out the talents God has granted to be used for the greater good in the kingdom. We are reminded that our world does not readily accept prophets who herald the truth about structural injustice. Time and time again in our history prophets for truth and justice had been rejected, jailed, tortured, and often killed. They have become role models for their people on how to confront the powerful. We are reminded of Romero in El Salvador, Mandela in South Africa, Martin Luther King in the USA and Gandhi in India. Let us pray that we listen to the right people who have the message of truth, love, compassion, and justice that are in harmony with the Gospel message.

3rd Sunday of Lent | 3 March 2024

Scripture passage: B John 2:13-25

In this season of Lent we are preparing for the celebration of Easter, in which we will renew the promises of our baptism. Let us walk in the world like Jesus and make our entire existence a sign of his love for our brothers, especially for the weakest and poorest, let us build a temple for God in our lives. And so we make it “findable” for many people we meet along our path.

May the most holy Mary, privileged dwelling place of the Son of God, accompany us and sustain us on the Lenten itinerary, so that we may rediscover the beauty of the encounter with Christ, who liberates and saves us. Pope Francis

WHAT RELIGION IS OURS?

All the Gospels echo a bold and provocative gesture on Jesus' part within the court of the Jerusalem Temple. It probably wasn't all that spectacular. He jostled a group of sellers of pigeons, overturned the tables of some money-changers, and tried to interrupt activity for a few moments. He couldn't do much more.

However, that gesture full of prophetic power was what led to his detention and rapid execution. To attack the Temple was to attack the heart of the Jewish people: the centre of their religious, social, and political life. The Temple was untouchable. There dwelt the God of Israel. What would become of the people without God's presence among them? How could they survive without the Temple?

For Jesus, however, it was the great obstacle to welcoming God's reign as he understood and proclaimed it. His gesture put into question the economic, political, and religious system that is maintained from that holy place. What was that Temple? Sign of God's reign and God's justice, or symbol of collaboration with Rome? House of prayer, or storehouse for tithes and first fruits of the peasants? Sanctuary of God's forgiveness, or justification for every class of injustice?

That one was a marketplace. While around God's house was accumulating wealth, in the villages was growing the suffering of God's children. No. God would never legitimise a religion like that. The God of the poor wouldn't be able to reign from such a Temple. With the coming of God's reign it was losing its reason to be.

Jesus' activity puts all of us, his followers, on guard and obliges us to ask ourselves what religion we are cultivating in our temples. If it is not inspired by Jesus, it can become a holy way of shutting ourselves off from God's project that Jesus wants to promote in the world. What's first isn't religion, but God's reign.

What religion is ours? To let grow our compassion for those who suffer, or to allow ourselves to live tranquil in our own wellbeing? Nourish our own interests, or put ourselves to work for a more human world? If it looks like the religion of the Jewish Temple, Jesus won't bless us.

LEANING INTO LENT: WHETHER BELIEVER OR AGNOSTIC, THERE ARE LESSONS FOR US ALL

Justine Toh – The Guardian, 26 February 2024

I've been a Christian for 20 years but have only just discovered the church season of Lent, the six weeks or so in the lead-up to Good Friday, Easter Saturday and Easter Sunday. Now, with the annoying zeal of a new convert, I'm convinced whether believer or agnostic, we'd all be better off leaning into the season.

As a society, we are already halfway converted. Familiar events in the annual calendar, like Movember, are Lent-like in their emphasis on giving up something, or focusing our collective efforts, in pursuit of a greater good. Feb Fast is a prompt to reset after the excess of Christmas, Dry July a mid-year pause to abstain from alcohol. Each event is time-bound and concentrated on a positive goal. When deployed like this, the argument goes, peer pressure is actually very good.

Then there are other Lenten adaptations that ditch the communal aspect, treating it more like a competitive sport. Think the biohackers and self-optimisers of Silicon Valley, who turn to self-deprivation for productivity hacks. Fasting is good for clear thinking, apparently. Sometimes this kind of thing produces a public good.

The Lenten logic behind all of these is that discipline matters – and there are benefits of adopting a regime or schedule you wouldn't necessarily choose for yourself. We creatures of comfort and convenience don't willingly submit to hardship. We all need a nudge because "you do you" is fine until it gets hijacked by an all-too-human trait: we don't reliably choose what's good – for ourselves or each other.

When believers observe Lent, what they add on top of the discipline is discipleship, the commitment to bring their everyday life in line with their convictions. It's hard. According to Jesus, the greatest commandment, or what helps life go best, is loving God and loving your neighbour as yourself.

Sceptics may doubt the existence of God, but plenty will understand the difficulty of loving their neighbours... Which isn't to put the onus on loving others just on those who are struggling. Neighbourly love, for the negatively geared, might look like forgoing the tax break so others can break into the market. Taking a hit for someone else's good may seem preposterous, but this is what Jesus was on about: stretching our loves beyond our own interests.

This is what Lent is: a chance to willingly embrace discomfort for a greater outcome. And it's not as though Jesus asks something of his followers that he doesn't do himself. The season takes its cues from the 40 days Jesus spent fasting in the wilderness while the devil dangled earthly power and riches before him. But Jesus resists temptation – not because of how hardcore he was, but because he relied on God through prayer.

The idea is that believers do the same during Lent. In the weeks preceding Easter, believers give up something as a small reflection of Jesus' sacrifice of himself for the world. He gave up his life on Good Friday; I'm giving up sugar. Piddly in comparison but resisting my nightly beeline for the pantry is a tiny attempt to not put myself first – but to willingly enter a kind of desert.

The experience helps me face myself: someone who'd prefer to eat feelings rather than feel them, whose interests are curved in on themselves rather than oriented around other people. Without distraction from a sugar rush, I try to seek comfort in prayer and show up for others. It's not going brilliantly, but there's more time to keep trying.

The aim isn't to give up the sweet stuff forever: Sundays throughout Lent are feast days when the fasting is broken... Six days of fasting, followed by one of feasting, inducts me into the rhythms of the Christian story. Becoming a Christian is only the first conversion, it turns out. The second involves being habituated into a different order of time.

The mini-desert of Lent is a way into that. But the wisdom Lent has for all of us is the surprising potential for growth to be found in apparently barren places. It's why the desert mystic Carlo Carretto insists: "If you cannot go into the desert, you must nonetheless 'make some desert' in your life."

(Justine Toh is a senior research fellow at the Centre for Public Christianity)