

Star MESSENGER

Dear Brothers

I'm sure you agree that we shouldn't take our health for granted. From our experiences of disease and illness, we realise how much we depend on being fit and well. As a result, most of us are very conscious of our health – we follow medication regimes, exercise (at least a little), heed medical advice, have vaccinations when required and even take vitamins and supplements.

Similarly, I trust you agree we shouldn't take our mental health for granted. It can be as vulnerable as our general health and as fragile as a bone in our body. Such ill-health can be as debilitating as any physical ailment; and, as we know from sad experience, can lead to a terminal condition. Suicide touches far too many lives in our world, including record numbers of young people.

Mental illness covers a broad spectrum. It's commonly accepted that there are five categories:

- **Anxiety** – panic attacks, post-traumatic stress, obsessive thoughts and fears.
- **Mood disorders** – depression and bipolar.
- **Psychotic disorders** such as schizophrenia.
- **Dementia**, including brain injury and Alzheimer's Disease.
- **Eating disorders** – anorexia, bulimia and the like.

We mightn't have been touched personally by any of these, but I suspect most of us have. I'm sure we have family, friends or colleagues who have been. From my years of leadership, I know Brothers who have been affected by all of them – exception the last category: sadly, it seems to disproportionately affect adolescents and young adults.

You might recall that Br David Leary OFM spoke with us at our recent Province Forum about trauma. He explained very clearly that trauma occurs when we experience stressful, distressing or frightening events over which we have little control and with

which we find it difficult to cope. Traumatic events can be single, multiple or recurrent occurrences or even long-term conditions and debilitating environments. Natural disasters, acts of violence, accidents, illness, death are all examples.

Trauma affects everyone differently. Some individuals may clearly develop symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), especially those who confront stressful situations frequently, such as police officers, emergency services staff, combat soldiers. Many more people will show resilient responses or brief traumatic responses that don't result in a continuing psychological condition. We are advised that the impact of trauma can be subtle, insidious, or outright destructive. Untreated PTSD can result in suicide. How an event affects an individual depends on many factors, including characteristics of the individual, the type and characteristics of the events, developmental processes, the personal meaning of the trauma, and other factors.

In our own situation as Brothers, there are a number of events that could be traumatic – not for all of us, but for some at least. For example, the sense of diminishment that accompanies loss of vocations, ageing membership, the closure of well-established communities and the deaths of good friends; personal ageing with its accompanying health challenges, reduced vitality, retirement from active ministry; the sexual abuse crisis and commissions of inquiry that have scrutinised and criticised us and shown our deficiencies; the accompanying loss of esteem and respect. For younger men, there are questions about the future of their chosen way of life, which will continue to change. We experience all of these, and they all affect us in one way or another.

I've heard that two of the most stressful events in ordinary



contemporary life are change of jobs and change of residences. Most of us have experienced those multiple times, and so the more persistent conditions outlined above are likely to have a more profound impact on us.

Loss, grief, sadness, maybe even anger, are common responses to such situations. You might remember Elizabeth Kubler Ross' stages of dying - *denial, anger, bargaining, depression* and finally *acceptance*. All of the experiences outlined are like 'small deaths' and it's therefore natural to have some of the same emotional reactions. Reaching the final stage isn't guaranteed, and it often takes close family, friends and professionals (health, psychological, spiritual ones) to assist the person reach acceptance.

Br David's simple advice to us about trauma was to **recognise it and deal with it**; lest it worsen and affect our lives and the lives of each other. As men, many of us haven't been comfortable or practiced at reaching out when we need help. Our situation is changing and Brothers who have spoken to trusted friends or sought professional support have benefitted. I can attest to that personally. Please ask yourselves some simple questions: "Am I ok?", "What is weighing heavily on me?", "Can I feel better than I do?". If your answers are "not really", "many things", "yes, I hope so", then seek some help. Our health care professionals, nurses, general practitioners can offer some advice. We will assist, we want to assist.

Br Paul Bhatti

Paul is a Pakistani Brother from the Province of South Asia. In recent years he has been a member of the Lavalla200> programme in both Tabatinga, Brazil and then later at Atlantis, South Africa where he lived with Br Tony Clark. Paul arrived in Sydney on Monday night. In a fortnight's time, he will commence studies at Notre Dame University for a *Masters of Counselling* degree. He is now a member of the North Sydney community where he has already been warmly welcomed. I'm very grateful to Paul Kane and Jeff Crowe who have supported the visa process over nearly two years! It's taken that long for Paul to surmount

the bureaucratic obstacles. So welcome to Paul. We offer you our support and encouragement as you settle into a new environment as a full-time student.



News from the Institute

The headline from today's Marist News was that the three Spanish based Provinces will restructure in four years' time:

"In 2028, the Provinces of Compostela, Ibérica, and Mediterránea will unite to form a single Province. This decision was authorised by the General Council on 19 June 2024, initiating a process that will lead to this canonical reconfiguration. The request was made by the Councils of the three Provinces in a letter dated 15 May 2024. Brother Ernesto Sánchez, in his letter informing the Provincials of the approval, wrote: "The General Council and I support and approve your proposal to initiate, starting this year, a process of convergence between the Provinces of Compostela, Ibérica, and Mediterránea with the aim of a canonical

reconfiguration to form a Province from 2028.” He praised their “efforts to go beyond borders and build a more open, wider and pluralistic Marist entity in Europe”, reflecting the founding spirit of St Marcellin Champagnat. On 25 June 2024, the three Brother Provincials—Br Máximo Blanco Morán (Compostela), Br Abel Muñoz Gutiérrez (Ibérica), and Br Aureliano García Manzanal (Mediterránea)—informed the Brothers and Laypeople of this historic decision. Their letter acknowledged the challenges and questions this reconfiguration might bring but also highlighted the opportunities and the shared hope and confidence in the future”.

Reconfiguration has been a priority of successive General Administrations since the 1990’s. This is the latest development, however, won’t be the last. Other regions are also considering their administrative and leadership arrangements for the future.

Prayers Please

- **Br Donald Teixeira** who is still hospitalised in Auckland for treatment.
- **Mrs Alison Murphy**, Br Donald’s 80-year-old sister, who died last weekend. Please keep her, her family and Br Donald, who is unable to attend his sister’s funeral, in your prayers.



Br Peter Carroll
Provincial



LATEST NEWS www.mariststar.org

Click on the image below to read this week’s Star Post which features a small group of Australian educators who are spearheading an English teaching initiative in Timor-Leste. This collaborative project between Marist Schools Australia (MSA) and the Instituto Católico para Formação de Professores (ICFP) in Baucau, Timor-Leste, aims to enhance the English language skills of the ICFP staff. Launched last year, the initiative has developed into a remarkable success story. The Star Post caught up with Sydney’s Paul Brooks, who spoke about the impact the project and the team are having.



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1 day ago · 4 min



The Star Post

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39 views



Scripture Reading: Matt 9: 9-13

⁹As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. ¹⁰And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. ¹¹When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹²But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

Reflection

Immediately, prior to this story, Jesus had returned to his own town, showing his authority has come from God with the healing of a paralytic, and asking of the religious authorities which is easier: "your sins are forgiven" or "stand up and walk" (Mt 9:1-8). The issue we encounter in this passage is again about the nature of sin and the power to forgive, which was seen in first-century Palestine as one of the powers reserved to God. We need to remember that Matthew's Gospel has a central motif or Jesus being shown as the New Moses: as someone who had, like, Moses, been called by God, to deliver an understanding of how God's hopes and desires for humanity are to be lived. Jesus, in Matthew, reinterprets the Mosaic law to show that it is the intent behind one's actions, besides the action, that is God's primary concern. Here, in eating with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus is calling people to recognise the gratuitous love of God.

We need to be aware that in Jesus' time tax collectors were despised for two primary reasons. First, they were seen as collaborators with the occupiers, the Roman authorities, as they worked with Rome and its social and cultural aims rather than with their own 'kind'. Second, tax collectors, were

like a tax franchise. They paid the expected tax to Rome from a given clientele or area – it saved Rome from doing the 'dirty work' – and were then allowed to collect that tax however they saw fit. If they made a profit that was not Rome's concern. Hence, these tax collectors often used extortion or other means to ensure that people paid what was due.

As such, Jesus calling a tax collector and then sharing a meal with a group of tax collectors and other 'sinners', along with his disciples, was seen as supporting their disloyalty to Judaism as well as appearing to tacitly approve of their methods of collecting their tax. No wonder there was a reaction from the local religious authorities! We might see this same scenario play out in our own world when 'reputable Christians' pre-judge 'sinners' – the homeless, the marginalised, people who belong to LGBTQ groups, drug addicts and dealers, those who no longer practice their faith – declaring them to be 'outsiders' to living out an authentic faith. They see their own adherence to the expected behaviours and beliefs as Christians as marking them as 'insiders'. With this attitude they are acting like Jesus' detractors as if they can decide who are the 'insiders' and who should be 'outsiders'. We

FRIDAY GOSPEL REFLECTION FOR COMMUNITY PRAYER

need to remember that we do not decide who should belong to God. God's capacity to love and to bring into God's community is a decision for God. God invites: "*Follow me. Come and see*", and it is up to the individuals to respond to that call.

It is a reminder that God looks beyond human stereotyping and challenges us to remember that all persons are made "*in the image and likeness of God*" (Gen 1:27). The issue in this story is not Jesus becoming 'unclean' by association but about those who struggle or have lost God in their life now being offered the opportunity to see things from a new perspective. The critical action being that to bring the message of God's love then one must meet people in the messiness of their lives. By remaining apart, God continues and will remain the property of an exclusive group. By breaking down the barriers of stereotyping and not prejudging others' life circumstances, it might be in this situation that the power of God's love to transform the lives of others becomes a living reality.

The question is one of trust. I can remember working with homeless people and was told on my first day that how you react to these people is critical. One of the first things they will do is to move into your personal space to see how you react. If you step back, then you will be judged as being a good person but not someone who truly accepts the group or individual for who they are. It was great advice as on my very first encounter a representative of a group of young homeless approached me into my space. I did not move back and from that point on I was able to talk and to be present to that group: "*what I require is mercy, not preaching*".

Finally, those who are acting out of God's love think primarily of the needs of their brothers and sisters, not their own social standing. God's love is not the possession of the virtuous, it is a gift freely given, and freely refused, by human beings who have come to find themselves in all levels of society. Those who are virtuous will continue to be witnesses to the power of God's love to transform through their actions; it is those who struggle with God that need to be shown how much they are loved by God. The challenge to us from this passage is to ask ourselves how open are we to others who are different from ourselves? How quickly do we judge people on appearances or on their actions? Where do we look to truly find the presence of God's love actively working to transform society? We are reminded that those who are well do not need a physician: but should be open to being the physician to those who are most in need of God's healing touch.

12th Sunday of Ordinary Time: 7 July 2024

LEARN TO LIVE FROM JESUS

The life of a Christian starts to change the day he discovers that Jesus is someone who can teach him to live. The Gospel accounts don't tire of presenting Jesus as Teacher. Someone who can teach a 'unique wisdom'. A wisdom that was so surprising to his neighbors in Nazareth.

Indeed, the first ones who met up with him were called 'disciples', students, that is, men and women ready to learn from their Teacher Jesus.

Christians today must ask ourselves if we haven't forgotten that, to be Christian, is simply 'to go about learning' from Jesus. To go about discovering from him what is the most human, authentic, and joyful way of confronting life.

How many efforts are being done today to learn to triumph in life: methods to obtain success in professional work, techniques to win friends, arts to turn out triumphant in social relationships. But where to learn to simply be human?

There are all too many Christians for whom Jesus is in no way the inspirator of their life. They don't find how to see that a relationship exists between Jesus and what they live each day. Jesus has been converted into a personality whom they believe they know from childhood, when in reality he continues being for many the 'great unknown'. A Jesus without real consistency, incapable of animating their daily existence.

And yet that Jesus better known and more faithfully followed could transform their life. Not as the far away teacher who has left a legacy of admirable knowledge to humanity, but as someone alive who from the very depth of our being accompanies us with patience, understanding and kindness.

He can be our teacher of life. He can teach us to live, not to manipulate others, but to serve. He can help us discover that it is best to go about giving rather than grabbing. Listening to his message and following his steps, we can learn to live with more solidarity and less selfishness, to risk ourselves more for all that is good and just, to love people as he loved them, to trust in the Father as he trusted in the Father.