

Marist Laity Australia



Cathy's Report Greetings!

Plans for 2025

Having organised a stimulating reflection day in May, planned the Marist Family Fourviere celebration, experienced a prayerful weekend retreat in November, and continued posting regularly on our website, Marist Laity Australia is very excited to continue our engagement with you and others in the future.



An extremely significant event this year was a conversation conducted in September with representatives present from each branch of the Marist Family. We reflected on and discussed the following questions:

- Where are we now?**
- What are our hopes and dreams for the future?**
- How can we work more together?**

Our conversation proved very rich and fruitful, giving us hope, direction and a sense of purpose. Inspired by our principles of simplicity, inclusiveness and flexibility, Marist Laity Australia is very enthusiastic about how the outcomes of this gathering might be given expression next year and beyond. Of special significance, we will be deeply engaging with the St Patrick's Church Hill community, especially given the Marist Fathers are withdrawing from the administration of the parish at the end of

2026. It's time for us to step up! Stay tuned for further information!

Christmas reflections

Every year around this time, like many people, I get together with friends to celebrate Christmas and the end of the year. One of these gatherings has a distinctly Marist flavour. This involves a group of about a dozen women, all former students of Cerdon College Merrylands. Indeed, some of us met up in Kindergarten at St Margaret Marys, taught by Sr Clare Francis SM! There are many Marist Sisters who taught us who we remember with great affection and appreciation.

A little tradition that has grown between us is to reflect and pray as part of our gathering. This might look strange to others around us at the venue we've selected, but I hope it gives them pause to think!



We begin by reflecting on our time together and what it is that unites us, our Marist identity and connection. This is OUR collective story.

Our prayer this time was entitled, Prayer of Christmas Past, Present and Future, and I've included it below.

*Gracious God,
We turn to you in wonder and praise as
we celebrate Christmas*

*Remind us during this sacred season of our
collective story. May our roots extend deep
into the soil of faith and spread outwards to
share the Good News of Christ's coming.*

*Focus our attention so that we may remain
attuned to the sight, sounds and sensations
of the season. May the presence of Christ be
at the forefront of our thoughts and actions
as we enact each holiday ritual.*

*Fill us with hope in the continuous birthing of
Christ in our world. May we never lose sight
of the promise of the Kingdom of peace and
compassion that is both present and yet to
be.*

With gratitude in our hearts, we pray.

Amen

I gave a copy of this prayer to each of my friends. I hope they use it again; I hope you can use it too, especially when your family or community celebrates at this time.



You are able to download this prayer from:

<https://www.sadlier.com/religion/blog/bid/89825/christmas-past-present-and-future>

Wishing you hope, blessing and peace,
Cathy Larkin
Co-Convenor
Marist Laity Australia

He must be born in our hearts...

By Maria Baden



From my observation of children today, the meaning of Christmas is largely wrapped up in Santa Claus, decorations, trees lit with lights and baubles and lots of presents. When I suggested to my grandkids that they write Christmas cards to people who were poor, lonely, disabled, I wasn't sure what their reactions would be.

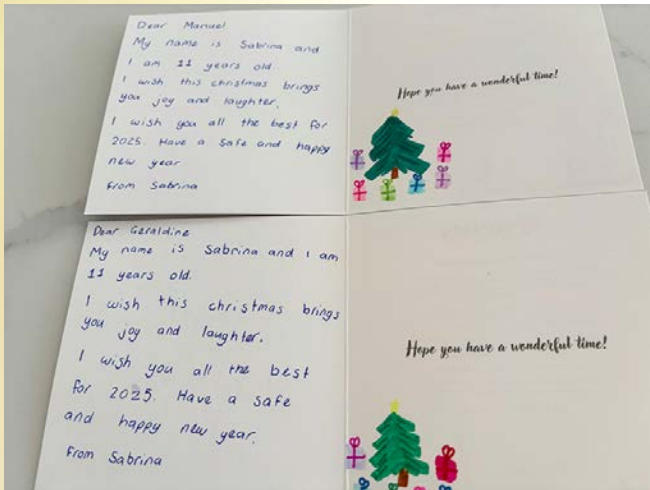
The Gesthsemene Community Inc. runs a Christmas project to help alleviate loneliness and poverty. In the community they minister to are some 822 men and women with disabilities. Some suffer from mental health and drug addiction. Some are refugees or asylum seekers. Part of this project is sending a personalised Christmas card. None have family or friends and they all live alone.

These will be the only cards they receive for Christmas.

After buying our cards and stamps, we set about our task. Each child picked three names from the batch I'd been given.

"Who are these people?"
"Why are we writing to them?"
"What will I write?"

We had a really good conversation and then, it was as though the real spirit of Christmas emerged from these youngsters.



Many thanks to Cathy Bertulfo, member on our Marist Laity Committee, who gave me the information to go ahead with this project of love.

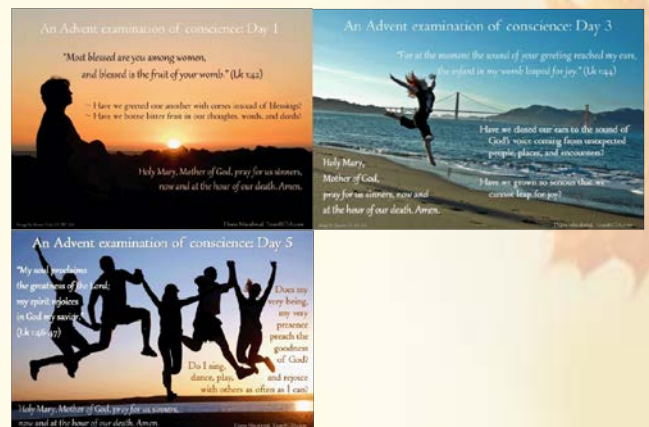
"Christ was born at Bethlehem and that is a marvellous, historical fact. But it is a fact that is completed. (Now) He must be born in our hearts. Our hearts must be made ready for Him. There must be room for Him in the inn of our heart." (John Main OSB "The Heart of Creation")

A silence descended, a silence of deep thought, focus, empathy. Give a child a meaningful task and they will shine! With their words finally written, out came the coloured pencils and the cards were duly decorated.

I watched in wonder and joy. It was truly a Christmas moment where room was found "in the inn of our hearts."

An Advent Examination of Conscience

Download this 2024 Advent Calendar in preparation for the coming of Christ at Christmas.



There are 12 prayer cards for the 12 days leading up to Christmas.

[Click here](#) to **download** and **PRINT** each PDF

<https://www.maristlaityaustralia.com/2030/Events/advent2024>

Marist Laity Australia Hosts Gathering of Marist Leaders

In late September, Marist Laity Australia hosted a significant gathering at Hunters Hill, bringing together leaders from the five branches of the Marist family in Australia: the

I was rather surprised to be asked: "Oma, where do we put the stamp?"

Marist Brothers, Marist Association, Marist Sisters, Marist Missionary Sisters, and Marist Fathers. The meeting followed the Synodal process of dialogue and listening, a method that encouraged honest reflection and collective discernment on where the Marist family stands today, the future of its mission, and how the branches can better support one another.

The gathering began with a structured spiritual conversation, where participants reflected on the current state of their communities. A recurring theme was the importance of formation as a foundation for sustaining the Marist spirit. One participant noted, *"Formation is critical; it allows us to go deeper into the Marist values of simplicity, inclusivity, and flexibility."* Another emphasized, *"Retreats, pilgrimages, and collaborative formation programs can rejuvenate our mission."* There was a shared sense that innovative approaches to formation are needed to meet the challenges of a new era.



A major topic of discussion was the shift toward lay leadership within the Marist family. With the average age of many religious members in their 70s and 80s, participants acknowledged the need to engage younger generations and empower lay members to take on leadership roles. *"The laity is central to the future of the Marist movement,"* one participant reflected. Another added, *"We need to build the confidence of lay leaders and provide them*

with formation opportunities that are inclusive and accessible." This transition is seen not as a diminishment of the role of religious members but as an evolution of the Marist mission in today's world.

Participants also addressed the need for collaboration and communication across branches, both nationally and internationally. The gathering emphasized breaking down silos and leveraging the collective strengths of the Marist family. One attendee remarked, *"We cannot be individual silos; we need to integrate and collaborate to truly embody the Marist spirit."* Another shared, *"There is so much depth within each branch, and working together can create a unified Marist identity."*

Despite challenges such as recruitment and aging membership, hope remained a strong theme throughout the meeting. Participants expressed trust in God's ongoing mission and saw opportunities to adapt in meaningful ways. *"This is not just an era of change; it is a change of era, as Pope Francis reminds us,"* one participant noted. Another highlighted, *"Our hope lies in being open to the Holy Spirit and embracing new ways to live out the Marist mission."*

The gathering concluded with a focus on next steps, including reviewing the guidelines for Marist Laity Australia and considering rebranding to a more accessible identity, such as "We Marists." Practical action areas included prioritizing formation programs, fostering collaboration, and engaging young people in the mission. This gathering served as a powerful reminder of the shared values that unite the Marist family and the possibilities for renewal through collaboration, simplicity, and faith.

Marist Laity Retreat: Streams of Living Water

In November, Marist Laity Australia gathered at the Marist Hermitage in Mittagong for a retreat led by Marist Father Ray Chapman. Centered on the theme from John's Gospel,

"The woman at the well" and *"seeing Jesus as streams of Living Water,"* the retreat offered participants a profound opportunity to step away from the busyness of life and reconnect with their spirituality.



The retreat process, guided by Father Ray, blended silent reflection with shared discussions. Through moments of quiet pondering, participants were invited to delve deeply into the themes of the Gospel, finding new ways to encounter Jesus as the source of renewal and life. These personal reflections were enriched by group sharing, where deep insights emerged from the collective experience. One attendee shared, *"It was refreshing to pause and listen—not only to God but to each other's perspectives on faith."*



Set in the serene surroundings of the Marist Hermitage, the retreat provided a perfect environment for spiritual rejuvenation. With its rich Marist history and tranquil gardens, the Hermitage served as a reminder of the

enduring legacy of Marist spirituality. The outstanding hospitality added to the sense of community and care, making the experience even more special.

A heartfelt thank you goes to Father Ray Chapman, who travelled from Brisbane to lead this retreat. His thoughtful guidance and ability to bring the Gospel themes to life left a lasting impression on all who attended. As one participant reflected, *"Father Ray's reflections on 'Living Water' have given me a renewed sense of God's presence in my daily life."*

The retreat concluded with a collective sense of gratitude and a deeper awareness of the need for ongoing spiritual renewal. This time together reminded us of the importance of carving out moments to reconnect with God, with each other, and with the rich Marist tradition. It was a time of renewal that will undoubtedly inspire and sustain the Marist Laity community as they move forward in their mission.



Marist Laity Australia Immersion to Davao: Guided by the Marist Sisters

Nine participants led by Marist Laity Australia recently travelled to Davao in the Philippines for an immersion experience designed to foster an understanding of Filipino culture and Marist ministry. The journey began with visits to Marist communities of the Brothers, Fathers, and Sisters, where the group experienced heartfelt hospitality. One

participant reflected, *"It was humbling to see how generously they opened their homes to us."* Another added, *"Their warmth and hospitality set the tone for the whole immersion."* These encounters created a foundation for the group to connect deeply with the Marist mission and values.

The group spent three days at the **Pope Francis Centre for Mercy**, a diocesan feeding program that serves some of the poorest communities in Davao. Participants assisted with food preparation and activities for the children, many from the Bajao community. While engaging, it was also emotionally challenging. One participant shared, *"We were very involved in the food preparation and in activities with the children, but it was difficult to come to terms with the different treatment of the groups."* Another remarked, *"It was engaging to chat with the older children, but we also had to navigate some challenging behavior from the Bajao children, which is understandable given their background."*



The next two days were spent at **Balay Banaag**, a girls' orphanage, where participants developed strong connections through activities and drama games. The girls' openness and kindness were deeply moving. One participant reflected, *"It was wonderful to see their response to us; their little notes and tokens of friendship were so touching."* Another noted, *"The hardest part was hearing their stories and understanding the circumstances they came from, but their*

resilience and joy were truly inspiring." Despite the challenges, the group felt that their presence made a meaningful impact and suggested extending the time spent at the orphanage in future immersions.



The group also visited **Balay Pasilungan**, a boys' shelter, for two days. While participants found meaningful moments, such as cooking alongside the boys and engaging in social work discussions, some felt a lesser emotional connection than at the girls' orphanage. One participant noted *"The boys did seem to appreciate our presence"*. Another added, *"Although the activities weren't always structured, the boys' gratitude and kindness left a lasting impression."*



A highlight of the immersion was meeting the **Aгдаo Marist Mothers**, a resilient group of women rebuilding their lives after a devastating fire. Their hospitality and strength left a moving impact on the participants. *"It was incredible to see these*

women happily sharing their stories and welcoming us into their homes," a participant shared. Another reflected, "Their sense of community and joy in the face of such adversity was humbling and inspiring." The group suggested that future immersions include an additional visit to further build connections with this remarkable community.



The immersion concluded with a debriefing session and a Eucharistic celebration led by Marist Father Chris, allowing participants to reflect on their transformative experiences. Many described the immersion as life-changing. "This has been the most profound experience of my life. It has changed me, and I hope I can use what I've learned to become a better person," one participant stated. Another reflected, "I've come to appreciate all that I have and learned that, with God's help, I can make a difference, no matter how small." As the group returns to Australia, they remain inspired to live out the Marist mission and continue supporting the communities they encountered, embodying the values of simplicity, presence, and service. Two of the participants have made formal enquiries to travel to Davao soon and volunteer for a month as a Lay person with the Marists and Marist communities. **A Massive thank you** to Marist Sister Sheila Manulo and the Marist Sisters who guided the group in every direction, leading many sharing, debriefing and prayer sessions with their loving presence.

Please contact Marist Laity Australia about how your, community, or school is interested in a future immersion to Davao can go about doing this to....

