

Reflection from the Superior General

From his vast perspective after his eight years in leadership Pope Francis highlights "synodality" as the future direction for the Church. "It is precisely this theme of synodality which God expects of the Church in the third millennium", he says. We are all urged to participate as best we can in this synodal journey towards and beyond the "Synod on Synodality" in Rome, in October, 2023.

Synodality means "travelling together". Jesus, journeying with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, offers a helpful example. It is a Spirit-led process involving "*communion, participation and mission*", the stated objectives of the synodal process.

Religious Life with its various structures - community life, chapters and revolving terms of service as leaders, for example - has a long tradition of synodality, even if we may not have used the word. Our Marist charism fits naturally with the style of synodality. The Venerable Jean-Claude proposed: "the Society of Mary must begin the Church over again ... we too must gather everyone". (F.S. 120, 1)



Synodality involves "*communion*", companionship and accompaniment. It is a spirituality, a way of life and a style of mission, all at the same time. Together we discern the promptings of the Spirit so we can follow the Lord more faithfully, especially attentive to the voices of those we usually do not want to hear.

We Marists find our "model in Mary the woman of faith. Our spirituality is simple and modest, close to the lives of ordinary people..." (Const. 117). We can imagine Mary and Joseph, Elizabeth and Zachariah, discerning together how they were to respond to the call of the Spirit in their families. In a synodal style of prayer we discern together with the ordinary and humble people we meet along the way.

Our Marist life is characterized by our "*participation*" in the day-to-day life in our communities, formed for mission, the Work of Mary. Mary at Pentecost was the woman who prayed with the disciples, men and women. They were emboldened to be open to the Spirit and go out to preach to all peoples and languages even to the ends of the earth. We Marists are called to true companionship – sharing our lives and our faith at a truly profound level – when, with Mary, we try to listen together to the Spirit who leads us out courageously to the peripheries of our world, however confined or afraid we may feel.

Synodality becomes especially challenging when we decide to open our lives to "*mission*" among people who are very different from us. Mary herself was one of the "anawim", the forgotten people on the peripheries of society, and so she was able to proclaim that "the Lord has raised up the lowly". The enslaved, foreign, migrant-worker, Daniel was able to interpret the dreams of the king. Pope Francis challenges us to listen to the Spirit of God especially in "the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth".

Hopefully we will all be participating in the synodal process in our own local church communities but we can also be contributing on a Congregational level in Rome. If you would like to participate in the questions that are being posed by those preparing the 2023 Synod in Rome – either individually or as a community – please write to us, (admingen@maristsm.org), and we will send you the material.

What Pope Francis proposes about synodality as the necessary direction for the Church is in profound harmony with our own Marist charism. By embracing Pope Francis' vision we also renew our own Marist life and mission.

In the spirit of synodality ... your brother and travelling-companion along the way,

John Larsen s.m.