

Reflection from the Superior General

I am writing this Reflection while visiting the Angelicum University here in Rome, a school in the fine Dominican tradition that has educated thousands of students over many generations, including some of us Marists. This visit prompts me to reflect on our own fine Marist tradition of education.

In the chapel here at the Angelicum, as in churches everywhere, people are preparing the Christmas crib. Mary prepares and forms the Word of God within a world that is empty without the Light of Christ. The empty crib offers a beautiful symbol for Christian education, as people await the enlightenment of the Truth, who is Christ. For Marist education, Mary always accompanies us and gives us life.

Venerable Father Jean-Claude shaped our own tradition in his "Article on Education": The Marist educator is called "first and foremost, to form the students into strong and faithful disciples of Christ", he wrote,

and then to form them into "upright citizens" and finally to "to teach them letters and the various sciences". (Constitutions of 1872, 453). Forming disciples of Christ is the heart of the ministry of education. He wondered aloud in 1838: "I considered whether we would take a special vow in the Society to devote ourselves to education. It is the greatest work". (F.S. 13, 10)



All of us, whatever our age or wherever we live, commit ourselves to our own on-going education and to be eager to continue to grow in knowledge, experience and wisdom. We need to keep reading and investigating our faith seriously, avoiding superficial, tired and sometimes media-driven answers to the profound questions of our age. By "pondering the Word in our hearts", by our patient commitment to serious study, both theological and secular, by our constant spiritual reading – and a prayer life rooted in the Liturgy and the Sacraments, especially the Sacrament of Reconciliation this Advent – we allow the Spirit of God to form and shape us, year by passing year.

Our Marist schools are in a state of transition within our Society. Some units have made the decision to let go of the responsibility for "our" schools. Some units continue to support them wholeheartedly, especially by the formation of lay partners in mission. Some units are preparing to establish new schools. The effectiveness of our schools stands or falls by the criterion of how they are forming disciples of Christ – as Mary formed her Son – as the beating heart of the overall busy-ness of the many everyday demands of school life. Of course, what "forming Christian disciples" might mean in practice needs to be carefully discerned in the context of our dialogue with our various cultures and religions.

Marist education, which is at the heart of our charism, has always assumed many forms. One confrere was lamenting to me recently that he is struggling with his ministry among migrants because these migrants are often afraid to speak aloud in their host country, even within the synodal Church. Our confrere's response was "formation, formation, formation!". It is not enough simply to "administer the Sacraments", he commented, without accompanying the people with human and spiritual formation.

Another aspect of our personal on-going formation demands our own regular meeting with our spiritual director and, when requested, making ourselves available to accompany others spiritually.

Today, the formation of our young confreres in houses of formation is an especially critical ministry. Our formators today need the wisdom of Solomon to exercise their ministry fruitfully in the modern world so different from when we were formed. These confreres need our interest, prayer and support. Fr. Jean-Claude commented: "training priests is the most useful of works – it is directly to imitate Jesus Christ".

A blessed and happy Advent and Christmas to Marists everywhere.

Fraternally, in Mary's Name .

John Larsen s.m.