

## ITALY: A VISITATION AND AN ASSEMBLY

With its five communities, *Italy represents the largest unit in the European province.* Consequently, the provincial visitation where the provincial speaks with each of the individual confreres followed by brief community meetings, takes significantly longer than in the other countries. Throughout most of the month of February, I experienced great hospitality in each of the communities. Despite my very limited Italian, I was able to converse easily with the confreres with a little technological magic and the skilled help of Carla Bertana who accompanied me throughout as interpreter.

The month culminated in a well-attended Assembly of the Italian unit. This was held in the Villa Lascaris in the town of Pienesza, outside Turin. The five local superiors had led the communities in a variety of sessions preparing for this meeting and this work bore fruit. The Italian Marists had not met together for some years, with covid constituting a major interruption. Confreres were very happy to meet up once again.

I wasn't alone in being surprised at the depth of the sharing between the confreres and I think what you could call the spiritual energy. They addressed some difficult issues in community life and in the life of the unit. With the help of Silvia Gollini who facilitated the sessions, *a renewed hope for the future emerged.*

We are all aware that we find ourselves in a Jubilee Year. In Italy, I think it looms larger than elsewhere. *Confreres in Turin for example were quick to point out that the Marist Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes is one of the six Jubilee churches in the city of Turin.* The Jubilee year with its theme of hope and daily bulletins on the health of the Pope, who has recently published autobiography has the same theme, were a fitting background to the Assembly discussions.

*Kevin Duffy, sm*



## DEAR MARIST FRIENDS

I write these words in Rome at the end of a month in Italy. I say a few words about this time in the third of the pieces in this month's EuroInfo. The other two pieces, one from London and one from Paris, I have a very different character – Christina Ball's description of her experience at the NDRC in London working with migrants, and Olivier Laurent's presentation of what are the fruits of a long period of reflection on the future of religious life. Variety, they say, is the spice of life...

*Kevin Duffy, sm*

## PRAYER INTENTION:

the work of the Notre Dame Refugee Centre in London

## WORKING ALONGSIDE THE MARISTS



I've been the *Director at Notre Dame Refugee Centre (NDRC) for about 18 months and find my job incredibly rewarding.* As I work within a small team it is easy to see first-hand how our work makes a real difference to the lives of the most vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers. The Refugee Centre was originally established 28 years ago by the Marists at Notre Dame de France, as a response to the political crisis then in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Many French-speaking Africans fleeing the upheaval in their country joined the church congregation, which led to the priests and parishioners wanting to do more to help those who were seeking to make the UK their home.

Since then, the centre has grown although it is still a small charity with its own charitable status, where we offer expert immigration advice along with a range of support services, and above all a warm welcome. Having a staff of just seven, mainly part time, we rely on the support of more than 30 volunteers from all walks of life – including some of the priests and parishioners. The Refugee Centre remains a vital part of the mission of the Society of Mary, and we enjoy a strong working relationship with the Marist community – participating in different activities throughout the year. On a day-to-day basis we regularly see Fr. Pascal and Fr. Martin, even if it's just for a brief chat or we meet more formally at trustee meetings. Only this week we had a joint staff outing, with the Centre and the Church teams enjoying a rather competitive game of pétanque by the Thames.

In 2024, I was privileged to be invited to visit La Neylière where I learned so much more about the Marist history and mission, which *I found hugely inspirational and brought a valuable new insight into the work that I do every day* – and an understanding that the reason the charity was established so many years ago is as important today as it was then.

*Christina Ball, Director* [www.notredamerc.org.uk](http://www.notredamerc.org.uk)

## RELIGIOUS LIFE AND THE CHALLENGE OF THE FUTURE: BETWEEN EXTINCTION AND RENEWAL

The Society of Mary is entering the year of the 150th anniversary of the death of JC Colin and of its next General Chapter. Like many religious congregations, it is at a turning point in its history and is called upon to remember its past and revisit its sources to invent its future. We are at a pivotal moment in human history. One world is collapsing and another is being born. This is not without its share of upheavals, shaking the very foundations of what has sustained us and calling into question the heritage of our great religious traditions.

After a life largely devoted to welcoming and training the first Marist priests from Africa, then to creating and running a cultural and spiritual centre in the heart of Toulon, the time came for me to review and reflect on the issues and challenges facing religious life. For the past two years, I've been writing a book entitled '*La vie religieuse au défi de l'avenir: entre extinction et renouveau*' (*Religious life and the challenge of the future: between extinction and renewal*), looking for a publisher, and then an article summarising the main points of the book. It is this article that I am passing on to you. While inviting you to a fraternal dialogue.

There is no formula that, properly applied, will ensure the future, but there is *an invitation to become pilgrims again and to let ourselves be led by the Spirit.* By giving the young people who join us a taste for the future and the desire to embark on an adventure, while drawing inspiration from the daring and faith of our first missionaries who went to the furthest reaches of the earth.

[\(attached summary in English and French\)](#)

*Olivier Laurent, sm*

