

MISIONEROS MARISTAS
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Dear Friends of the Misioneros Maristas,

This day is a very special one for me personally and I wish to share these lines with you who are my very dear friends and have journeyed with me in faith over the years and been in solidarity with us in our missionary project. Firstly it is the 41st anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood, secondly here in Bolivia it is Mother's Day and thirdly this year it is Pentecost (our birthday as Church-Community of Jesus). Last year on this day I had the joy of celebrating my 40th anniversary there among my dear friends in my native Australia. It is hard to believe that is was just a year ago. Around this time last year I was caught up with a multitude of activities and really did not have the space and time to share with all our friends what I had hoped to as regards to this moment in my life and Marist vocation. Although at present we Misioneros Maristas are fairly occupied with two important upcoming celebrations, it is fitting that I do not let this occasion past without having this brief sharing with you.

When our very dear Grafton-Yamba friends organized my 40th celebration last year, we as a Marist Community realized just how blest we are and that we are continually accompanied in our missionary journey and that my priesthood and our mission is also that of all of you to whom I address these lines. This month in my daily period of silent prayer I refer to the work of a French laywoman entitled "*Sacerdote -Por Amor de Jesús y del Evangelio*" ["*Priest -For Love of Jesus and the Gospel*"]. Among the many counsels Georgette offers us as priests is that of living the grand tradition of "*contemplate trader*" -"*transmit what one has contemplated*". And to do this one has to have courage; what she calls the "*joyful audacity of the Holy Spirit*". In this context you will recall what I referred to in my previous letter as regards to the first Marists; they have been referred to as "*Men of Fire*". As we celebrate today the Solemnity of Pentecost we meditate on that reading from Acts that describes how the disciples went forth with that fire of the Holy Spirit that had descended upon them in the form of tongues of fire. In addition to that blessing of your friendship, what has sustained one in these years in the living out of one's vocation and mission is community life. Community gives the confirmation we need to go forward. It has been an experience of belonging and of solidarity. The sense of belonging takes time to be born. We have to go through passages that are more or less painful before it comes to birth or reaches maturity. To belong means also to die to some aspects of our being: to our independence, to our freedom to do things. In each of us we know there is a struggle against belonging. We fear the call to claim and develop our gifts to become responsible for others. We fear also the call to submit to the gifts of others. In each of us we find there a pride that prevents us from believing in the call and the promise of Jesus, and from giving ourselves in a love and humility that would enable us to receive from others. This sense of belonging flows from trust: trust is the gradual acceptance of others as they are with their gifts and limits, each one with the call of Jesus. And this leads to the realization that the body of community is not perfectly whole and cannot be; that this is our human condition. And it is all right for us to be less than perfect. Our God knows in so many ways we are lame and half-blind. Graciously accepting this human condition, we can walk together in hope, celebrating that we are loved in our brokenness, helping each other, growing in trust, living in thanksgiving, learning to forgive, opening up to others, welcoming them, and striving to bring peace, justice and hope to our world. So it is that we have come to put down roots in our little mixed Marist community here in Bolivia. We believe that Jesus has called us together. It is where we belong and are called together to grow and to serve, bonded together in a covenant given my Jesus and lived out in the spirit of his mother, Mary of Nazareth. This is the cause of our joy at this time as we celebrate another year

of priesthood, remember in a very special way our earthly and heavenly mothers this Mother's Day and celebrate our birthday as Church which is community on this Day of Pentecost 2012.

To commemorate this grace-filled day we are attaching to these lines two photos that we have just taken for the occasion. The first is a photo of our Marist community gathered around our new Ford Ranger Pick-Up thanks to the generosity of a number of our Australian friends. As previously mentioned, it is accordingly christened "*Cangurito*" [*Little Kangaroo*] and its banner done out in the Australian colours of green and gold!! The second photo is that of our newly formed Marist Soccer Team (composed of the original and the newer generation of Marists). On the initiative of the youth of our urban CEBs, a soccer tournament got underway this month. Each of the CEBs of different barrios (sectors) of Tarija City have fielded a men's and woman's team – (young and old alike...all very friendly and in good spirit). On the opening Sunday evening all present insisted that the Marists too field a team, and so Gilberto, Javier and myself had to come out of retirement and front on! It is proving to be a very good way for all the CEBs with the families to get together and have a very enjoyable Sunday evening and thus strengthen our bonds of friendship and solidarity, and thereby bring about greater commitment to this model of Church as community.

As mentioned above, we have two important upcoming happenings that involve preparation on our part in these days. On the weekend of June 2-3 here in Tarija we will celebrate the 5th Diocesan CEBs Encounter where we hope to have the presence of all the members of the various CEBs of the diocese. In which case, the organizing commissions have to see to the feeding and lodging of the expected multitude as well as to the preparation of the facilities and different activities that have been programmed. The theme of the Encounter is "*The Base Church Communities with Jesus: an Alternative in History*". Then at 3 a.m. on Monday 11th Gilberto, Javier and myself take the flight out of La Paz on route to Honduras in Central America where we as a Marist Team will participate in the IX Latin American-Caribbean CEBs Encounter and the annual meeting of the CEBs Assessors of each country with the Continental Articulation Team of which I am one of the members. Before our flight out of La Paz we will have spent the weekend in the giving of a workshop to the CEBs of the Oruro Diocese (some 800 kms from Tarija). Later on in August we will be off to Peru to give in 5 dioceses a follow-up CEBs Workshop.

The Director of the Jesuit Radio National Network (ACLO) has advised us that our weekly 30-minute radio programme now, apart from the local Tarija station, is aired from satellite to all the independent stations in Bolivia and throughout all of Latin America on the ALER Network. In recent weeks Bolivia has been in violent turmoil with strikes, marches, manifestations and blockages of the roads and highways by different sectors of society, each making their demands and, in the majority of cases manipulated by the fascist rightist opposition that although now a minority use their financial strength and control of the media to bring down our popular government. Hence we have dedicated the last two programmes to the current situation, trying to put it into context and to offer a response in light of the Gospel.

Winter is starting to make its presence here in Tarija. In July, after our return from Honduras and before our workshops in Peru, we have planned our visit to our former Palma Flor Mission in the Amazon Region of Bolivia. It is school vacation time and the generally dry season. So the nine of us will set off from Tarija in the Ford Ranger and literally go from the far south to the far north of Bolivia –some 2000kms. We are looking forward to the visit and time away together with the wives and the children. As you may recall, Arminda and Nair are from there and Juan Jose, Gilbertito and Lupito were born there, and it has been some years now since we have visited our people there. So we are looking forward to this opportunity.

In anticipation that we will be united in mind, heart and spirit on the 27th I sign off.

With all our love and in grateful thanks for your trusted friendship,

Juan Hopkinson, S.M. (Juanito)