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***MISIONEROS MARISTAS, BOLIVIA***

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Christmas 2022

Dear Friends,

And for us as in our little Marist Community there will be joy in Christmas, as we have the chance to reminisce, and see anew the wonder of this most holy of seasons through the eyes of our beautiful community, of which we were delighted to welcome two more this year –Chiqui’s wife, Paula and their first born named John. We will be together to celebrate here at our Marist residence. As mentioned in our June letter, John was born to Chiqui and Paula on April 28th that happens to be the feast day of our first canonized Marist saint –St. Peter Chanel. The following day his birth certificate was issued showing his name to be “John”. “John” in English –and not the Spanish equivalent that is “Juan”. While Gilberto and Arminda became grandparents for the first time, our Juan was deeply moved in knowing that his first “great grandchild” had been named after him.

Juan turned 77 in June and we celebrated the occasion in accord with its biblical significance and with the expectation that Juan would now enter into a process of retirement as approved by his Marist superiors. Here in Tarija in recent weeks we concluded our end-of-the year Marist Community Retreat with John’s “official” retirement from full pastoral ministry and responsibilities. Subsequently his letter of resignation was presented to the bishop. As Juan enters what one can call his “Golden Years as a Marist”, we welcome the entrance of Paula and little John as new members of our community.

During the latter part of the current year, we entered into a period of discernment and prayer as to our future direction in terms of our continuing presence and ministerial service to the people and to the Church. We termed this process “*Hacia un Nuevo Rumbo –Towards a New Direction*”. The past weeks during our annual sessions of evaluation and planning, we have finally defined what is the new direction we will take and what we will commit ourselves to for the next three years. We wish to be faithful to our Marist Spirit and Charism of “Ignoti et Quasi Oculti –Hidden and as if Unknown” and thereby be in our world of today a presence – a presence that welcomes, listens and accompanies. A presence there where others do not go or enter –in the peripheries, among those who feel abandoned or unaccepted by the institutional church or society. Now it is for us to embark with audacity upon this “*Nuevo Rumbo”* in 2023 guided by the Spirit and with the knowledge that our good friends of many years are there in solidarity with us. Here we share with you textually the introduction to the corresponding document that we have composed: Our New Marist Orientation [Period 2023-2025] –Introduction: “*After having passed the different stages in our journey, we consider this new stage a hopeful opportunity to leave behind the previous schemes and practices, to break routines and, moved by the Spirit that guides us, to launch together with full confidence, to row the same boat and thereby start and carry out this new course”.*

*“We assume this challenge with joy and enthusiasm, aware of our energies, capacities, experiences and demands, giving ourselves in total commitment to be “Good News” today in the midst of the People”.*

Our new direction does not imply any rupture or abandoning on our part with the many Base Church Communities [CEBs] that we have promoted, formed and accompanied over the past 32 years. We will continue to be there, accompanying and being a **presence** among them, but in a new manner –companions on the journey, animating them along the way and celebrating with them life in the Kingdom here on earth. In addition, we intend to make our weekly radio programmes with Radio ACLO [Jesuit Network in Bolivia] and Radio Pachamama [Local Popular Radio Station] more agile and to have a more direct contact with the social organizations and popular movements throughout Bolivia, offering our services in the formation of leaders imbued with the Gospel values. *[As ATTACHMENTS to this Christmas Letter, we share with you 2 provocative recent reflections that challenge those of us who love the Church and live in the hope of realizing the vision of Pope Francis for the Church in our day.]*

We hope you enjoy our Christmas Card designed by Gilberto. With it, goes all our love and appreciation of your friendship and solidarity.

***Gilberto/Arminda/Juan José/Chiqui-Paula & John/Marian –Javier/Nair/Lupo/Paco - Juan***