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***“MISIONEROS MARISTAS, BOLIVIA”***

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**Christmas-Navidad 2019**

**Dear Friends,**

**It is difficult for us this Christmas to share with you in the same spirit as we have done in previous years. No doubt you are somewhat aware by means of the different social medias that in recent months here in Bolivia we have been in turmoil and a political crisis that has torn us apart and affected relationships on the level of families, friends, associates, religious groups and communities and political affiliations. We have seen the power of the minority fascist right of politics, supported by outside interests, to bring about this chaos, resulting in so much destruction, suffering, extreme violence, deaths, injuries, detentions, abuses of human rights, persecutions, massive censorship, control of the media, distortion and manipulation of the truth, hatred, racism and loss of confidence in whom one can trust and confide. As in biblical times, here too today there are the false prophets and traitors of the cause, calling for pacification, dialogue and unity. Independent international social and political analysts without equivocation have named what has transpired as a *“Golpe del Estado –an Overthrow of the State”*, while the true perpetrators emphatically deny such, claiming such to be a return to *“democracy”* and end of a *“dictatorship”.* Unfortunately, in all of this, the institutional Church has been seen by the poor (who have voted for and supported the *“Process of Change”* instigated some 14 years ago with the coming to power for the first time of a popular government in Bolivia) as lacking what should be its prophetic voice and being seen to be supporting those in whose hands the transitional *de facto* government have taken control. As some of our humiliated poor farm workers [campesiños] and indigenous brothers and sisters have expressed: *“This Church does not speak for us”.* We as a Marist Community and Team find ourselves at this time in mourning for our beloved people and trying best to assimilate all that has transpired and thereby respond in consolation, healing and reconciliation that no doubt will take years. In one sense as pastoral agents inserted among our people, we feel alone in the midst of those who exercise ministry in the Bolivian Church. However, we have enjoyed in these days the solidarity and encouragement of so many of our friends and fellow travellers of the Base Church Communities [CEBs] throughout the whole of Latin America.**

***[Gilberto now takes up his pen to share with you something of our Marist community life since our last Circular Letter of September 12th.]***

**Life in community is a very beautiful adventure, but at the same time one finds shadows since we are each different in age and culture.**

**In this last part of the year in the community in one form or other Gilberto, Arminda, Marian, Javier, Nair and Paco were treated for health problems. Thankfully all have responded well. As we walk together as a community in our day- to- day life, we continue to grow together and accept our differences and weaknesses. Imagine almost 30 years of being together! We cannot say that we have arrived, no. What keeps us strong and well is our full confidence in the God of Life and Mary of Nazareth whose name we bear. They are the ones who summoned us back in 1990 and accompany us, guide us, unite us and challenge us today. And of course. to respond to that love, we continue in prayer every morning in our little chapel and we continue to celebrate life with weekly meetings, spiritual retreats every 4 months and we also have one day each month dedicated to being alone with God (our desert day).**

**As shared in previous letters, our children are 5 in the community; 3 studying at the university, 1 will start university next year and our 5-year-old girl who is in 1st Grade.**

***[Javier now takes up his pen to share with you something of our Marist pastoral mission since our last Circular Letter of September 12th.]***

**Our specific charism consists in the incarnation of the experience of God through the following of Jesus, lived in fraternal communion inserted in the midst of the poor and marginalized, whom we wish to accompany and with whom we wish to be in solidarity, as a prophetic sign of the Reign of God - a future promised by God and incarnated in the world.**

**- This charism is lived out in the spirit of Mary, who was open to the Word and carried it in the depth of her heart – who tenderly accompanied her Son from conception to glorification. *(Project of Misioneros Maristas, Bolivia)***

**The latest events in our Bolivia, to which Juan has referred above, have divided our country into two opposite fronts. On the one hand, the group financed and organized by economic sectors - very powerful politicians, who have imposed their power on the basis of violence, fear and death towards the humble and simple people. And there are those of the humble and simple class, the peasant class and the geographical and human peripheries, who faced this offensive and had to thereby defend what had cost them so much. I have asked myself, where should we be? With whom should we be identified? What options do our mission demand from us at this current juncture?**

**There was a march organized by the peasants of the different provinces, in support of the process of change led by the ousted President Evo Morales. Many participants of that march were adults, both men and women and many young people from communities we accompany and with whom we maintain a deep bond of friendship. This march was one in protest to the events that were taking place. We saw in the faces, tanned by the sun, of those our brothers and sisters, a deep conviction of what they went out to defend.**

**Upon hearing about this event, we went out to the main avenue to greet them and make them feel that we are with them. Seeing so many simple people, tired for the long walk, exhausted by fatigue, we shed tears of emotion because these brothers and sisters are the obvious sign of the struggle for life. That is where we have decided to be. These are our people. This is our family. They give us a lot of strength and hope in these days of deep crisis and pain in our country.**

**On Saturday November 30th of this year we were invited by the Pérez-Guerrero family of the community of Rio Negro [located about 75 km from the city of Tarija] to accompany them in a family celebration. The seven children [Nicanor, Yola, Johnny, Norah, Bertha, Eloy and Fatima], each with their husbands and wives organized a party to commemorate the birthdays of their parents [Elígio -70 & Saturnina -59]. It was an event typical of the simple village. Almost all the guests were the families we know from the community and neighboring communities. It was a time to live with our people, who appreciate us and consider us their friends. This is the church that celebrates life.**

**The contribution we make for our service is small and apparently insignificant. At this current juncture, we feel like the *Anawin*, that small rest of Israel, who remained faithful to the promises. We know that this means for us to walk against the tide. We are aware of what this reality means to us. In union with the different Base Church Communities [CEBs] in our Diocese and in harmony with the CEBs throughout Latin America, we strive to present an alternative model of Church to an increasingly *indifferent society* – (using the language of Pope Francis).**

**As a Marist Community and Team, we know that the seed we have sown will grow slowly and the fruits we may not see for ourselves, but we know that what we have sown is not in vain.**

**As family or as community, we celebrate anew the coming of Son of God and the Son of Man to our world. As in His time so too as in our day, the world was in conflict. May we take to heart this Christmas His message of love and peace and sing together “*Joy to the World”* as we search for His presence amongst us.**

**We hope you like our Christmas Card and 30th Anniversary Calendar!**

***GILBERTO/ARMINDA/JUAN JOSÉ/CHIQUI/MARIAN-JAVIER/NAIR/LUPO/PACO-JUAN***