

Wednesday 29 August 2018

New Developments in Marist Youth Ministry

Dear Brothers,

I write to inform you about emerging developments in Youth Ministry in our Marist Schools, with some background as to the present situation.

Youth Ministry – a Priority for the Signs of our Time

The call of the Church in recent times to the ‘new evangelisation’ has seen consistent promptings from Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis to provide creative pathways and programs of evangelisation for young people. During WYD08, Pope Benedict XVI reminded the Church of our role in kindling the flame of the Gospel among your people by taking on the grace-filled role in evangelisation:

“I assure you that the Spirit of Jesus today is inviting you young people to be bearers of the good news of Jesus to your contemporaries.”

(XXIII WYD, Sydney 2008)

In addressing Catholic youth ministers working throughout Europe, Pope Francis said,

“You, who work in the field of youth ministry, do a valuable work for the Church. You people are in need of this service: of adults and mature contemporaries in the faith, who accompany them on their path, helping them to find the way that leads to Christ. Much more than the promotion of a series of activities for young people, this ministry consists of working with them, accompanying them personally in the complex and at difficult contexts in which they are immersed.”

(Pope Francis’ Message to the 4th European Congress on Youth Ministry, 2014)

Youth Ministry in Australia

The past ten years in Australia have seen the Catholic Bishops make increasing efforts to focus diocese, parishes, religious institutes, schools and ecclesial movements on the question of “Why?” we engage in ministry with young people



more than the “How?” This question is the foundation of the document *Anointed and Sent*, which is a vision for Youth Ministry in the Catholic Church in Australia. *Anointed and Sent*,

“Calls the entire Church to accompany young people as maturing disciples through their school and post-school years into young adulthood, and to help them find their place in the Church and the world. It calls on young people, to be more involved in their faith community and to grow in understanding and expressing who they are as the Church of today and tomorrow.”

(Anointed and Sent, 2014)

Marist Evangelisation and the REMAR Movement

Across our Marist Institute, significant efforts have been made in the past forty years to create vital programs of evangelisation; the most notable being the REMAR Movement, which was established in Colombia in 1975 and introduced into Marist Schools in Australia in 1991.

For the past twenty-seven years, this program has been the primary means through which the Gospel and youth ministry have been promoted to young people in Years 10-12 in a significant number of our schools. Introduced and piloted by the Brothers and taken up enthusiastically by Marist educators, REMAR has enabled thousands of students to be formed in their Catholic and Marist identity and to come to a deeper awareness and appreciation of what it means to be a disciple in the way of Jesus, Mary and St Marcellin Champagnat.

REMAR meetings, retreats, camps and solidarity activities have offered young people a pathway beyond the experiences of a traditional Religious Education program and to grow visibly in their Christian faith and leadership, adopting an active and practical Christ-centred service approach in the wider community. Significantly, the program has also been an extraordinary source of vitality in complementing and growing Marist young adult ministry and engaging young people in a range of faith and service opportunities.

Review and Renewal in Youth Ministry

As with REMAR, the past two decades have witnessed continued efforts to adapt and modify expressions of Marist Youth Ministry to ensure it is achieving its fundamental purpose of making Jesus Christ known and loved. The Marist Mission



Assembly in Mendes in 2007 affirmed, “Evangelisation is the central priority of our apostolic activities, proclaiming Jesus Christ and his message.”

The publication of *Evangelisers in the Midst of Youth* by the Marist International Commission for Youth in 2011, provided a helpful reference point for those working with youth and young adults, together with a series of underlying pedagogical principles for effective youth ministry in the Marist way.

In 2014, an extensive review of REMAR was conducted by Br Michael Callinan at the request of Marist Schools Australia. The review affirmed the positive profile which the program has in schools in which it operates. Particularly noted was the deeper sense of encounter with Christ which the program offers, through dedicated staff and the Remar Ministry Team, and the formation and growth in Christian faith and leadership among the Rowers. The review also affirmed the growth in faith amongst participating staff members who acted as Helms and Co-ordinators.

At the same time the review highlighted a growing need to find more creative ways of adapting REMAR in schools, of providing more flexible youth ministry options for students and staff, and a deeper faith-based approach in light of new developments in youth ministry with the new evangelisation.

In 2015, a writing party was set up to investigate new possibilities in the provision of school-based youth ministry. The recommendation of the writing party affirmed the need to establish a flexible MYM option as an alternative to REMAR, a review of the current REMAR program, resources and retreats, and consideration given to broader operating costs, and the re-writing of curriculum resources.

The REMAR Ministry Team has continued to provide excellent retreats and formation experiences for students and staff in many schools. We have been able to draw upon graduates of the program who have generously undertaken a year of mission as volunteers on the national team. REMAR has been ably led by a succession of faith-filled and passionate coordinators who have given further shape and expertise to the program.

2019 - A New Approach to Marist Youth Ministry

During the first half of 2018, Marist Youth Ministry has engaged in discussion with principals and leaders in faith and mission across the Marist Schools Australia network, in seeking to consider how best to create a comprehensive school-based framework for youth ministry into the future. This undertaking has been fully



supported and endorsed by the National Director and Regional Directors of Marist Schools Australia.

The review of REMAR and our existing programs, together with the acute realisation that the current financial methods of operating youth ministry are unsustainable into the future, have enabled us to realise that the time to adapt and reshape MYM into something new is now.

The 'new' is a 3-year project that will see Marist Youth Ministry become an 'engine room' in the facilitation and provision of excellent youth ministry programs and resources, available to all Marist schools, by 2021.

Our initial goal for 2019 is the creation of a comprehensive and flexible Catholic youth ministry program for students in Years 7-12, with consideration also given to primary schools in Grades 5 and 6.

The core vision of the Marist Youth Ministry program remains the same: *to make Jesus Christ known and loved*, through the formation of the young person in their Catholic/Marist identity. The program aims to complement what is being taught in the Religious Education Curriculum, with greater emphasis on providing an authentic encounter with Jesus Christ, through formation in:

- Christian leadership
- Marist spirituality and charism
- Community and identity
- Prayer and worship
- Justice and solidarity
- Connection to diocesan and local parish
- Advocacy

The Marist Youth Ministry program will:

- have two distinctive movements, spanning Years 7-9 and Years 10-12, with the latter movement retaining a formal 3-year phase optional program, similar to that of the current REMAR program;
- embed the key principles of *Anointed and Sent*: the Australian Catholic Bishops Document on Youth Ministry and its respective goals and focus areas;
- draw on key contemporary Catholic and Marist youth ministry documents and pedagogy;
- have a suite of flexible options for schools to link into, rather than a 'one size fits all' approach.



We anticipate rolling the program out over a three-year period:

- 2019 – Years 7 and 10
- 2020 – Years 8 and 11
- 2021 – Years 9 and 12

In 2019 several schools will pilot the new MYM program in Years 7 and 10 with other schools invited to come on board in 2020, and so on.

The REMAR program will continue to operate into the foreseeable future with retreats and solidarity camps being offered. Individual schools will have the choice to continue with the existing program, however, time and resources will gradually be given to supporting the emerging Marist youth ministry program and the schools who are coming on board.

Having been involved directly in youth ministry for twenty years now, I appreciate the significance of what this change means, especially for those Brothers who have sown, grown and nurtured youth ministry in Australia, especially through the REMAR movement. I want to assure those of you who have given extraordinary time and energy to REMAR, that while change is happening, the new Year 10-12 program – whatever name or look it has down the track, will retain the fundamental elements of REMAR including regular meetings, themes, retreats, solidarity camps and a national youth festival.

It is essential that we revitalise youth ministry in all our Marist schools and ensure that we become experts in Catholic youth ministry in Australia. There is much work to be done in enabling this to happen. With the enthusiastic support of Frank Malloy, the National Director for Marist Schools Australia and the Regional MSA Directors, our keen MYM Regional Coordinators and current REMAR staff, I am confident that our school-based Marist Youth Ministry program will be as significant into the future as it has been in our recent history.

Brothers, please feel free to contact me or if there are any thoughts or reflections you would like to offer which I am happy to pass onto our MYM Leadership Team. Thanks for your prayers and support as we continue to form young people as disciples in the way of Jesus, Mary and Champagnat.

Greg McDonald
MYM National Coordinator