"Behold, I Am Making All Things New."

Revelation 21:5

The Society of Mary and the Marist School Board of Trustees recently hired a new president, James D. Childs, to succeed Father William Rowland, S.M., as the first lay president in the school's 122-year history. Originally from South Bend, Indiana, and a graduate of the University of Notre Dame, he comes to Marist after serving as principal and president at Bishop O'Dowd High School in Oakland, California.

Fr. Rowland, S.M. commented, "I look forward to J.D. Child's becoming the next president of Marist School and to what he will bring to the position in terms of his experience as a teacher, principal, president, author, his commitment to Catholic education, and his compatibility with the Marist mission and charism."

The Marists also announced that Fr. Rowland, S.M. has been appointed to a new position of rector. His primary role will be to serve as the liaison between Marist School and the Society of Mary, ensuring and protecting the school's Catholic and Marist identity. The new president and his leadership team, along with the Board of Trustees, will be the ones responsible for doing the actual work of articulating and implementing the day-to-day Marist educational experience of our students in ways that are fresh and inspiring as well as faithful to both our Catholic tradition and the Marist mission in education.

Fr. Colin envisioned the Marist laity, because of its sheer numbers, would play a key role in creating a Church with a Marian face. The Marist Fathers and Brothers were to serve the Marist laity by providing for their formation in the mission and spirituality of the Society of Mary. The Marists were to take a back seat (hidden and unknown) and encourage, support, guide, and promote the work of Mary, which the laity would lead imbued with her spirit that Fr. Colin described as "a spirit of humility, self-denial, intimate union with God, and the most ardent love of neighbor…"

It is appropriate to acknowledge that the mission of Marist School, to form the whole person in the image of Christ through instruction grounded in religious values, the teachings of the Catholic Church, and the spirit of the Society of Mary, has been for decades a lay ministry and one that is done in partnership with the Marists of the U.S. Province. While retaining ownership of the school, their influence will now be felt through the dedication and commitment of the laity who have been called by a gracious choice to make their own the work of Mary of educating young people her way, the Marist Way.

This relationship between the laity and the Marist religious is more in keeping with what the Church herself should look like. Marist School is an expression of the mission of the Church where the role of the Marist religious blends in with, recedes into, and works alongside the laity whose numbers vastly outnumber that of the Marist religious. In this way, the Marists resemble the early community at Pentecost, where Mary is named but at the end and as a member of the larger community. She had receded into the Church and supported and encouraged the early believers from there while being content to take the back seat, as if hidden and unknown in the world. That is not to be interpreted as being dead and buried but as a strategy by which Mary can influence the Church and its struggles to be born again in an increasingly secular milieu as she did the Church at Pentecost that was struggling to be born.

The Marist Way of being with and for the Church embraces the role of the priest to sanctify the laity through the celebration of Word and Sacrament. That needs to be nuanced. Most laity see parish priests almost always in that role, along with the attention they receive because of it. Consequently, it is tempting to identify the Church with those who have been ordained. First, there is the hierarchy, and then everyone else. That was the popular perception of the Church before the Second Vatican Council.

The Council wanted to correct that misunderstanding by situating the role of the ordained within the community of believers (people of God). Their role is to serve the laity by sanctifying them through Word and Sacrament so that they, in turn, may sanctify the world. To sanctify the world and make it holy is to advance God's Reign (Kingdom) so that God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven. Aware that shift in consciousness had yet to be fully realized, the late Fr. Tom Ellerman, S.M. '58 said, tongue in cheek, that the newly ordained should receive a mop and a bucket to make it clear from the beginning that they are to serve and not be served.

In the context of Marist School, the diminishment in the number of vowed religious engaged in the education ministry is augmented by a keener sense and appreciation of the role that the laity has and will continue to play in carrying out its mission. That includes educating and forming Marist students to embrace their role as laity in the Church and the mission the Church entrusts to them. The lay faculty, staff, administrators, parents, and Board of Trustees are called to model to the Marist students how a Catholic or Christian layperson is to witness their faith in the spirit of Mary in an increasingly secular world. With the diminishment due to the lack of vocations, Marist religious recedes into the community of believers, called the "Marist Fam," and pledges to be for them what Mary was for the early Church. Reduced visibility suits them fine.

One might be tempted to lament that things have reached this stage and long for "the good old days" if such a thing ever existed. It would be better to remind ourselves that the Risen Christ is the Lord of history rather than looking to an idealized picture of the past and copying it onto this present age. This truth was brought home to Cardinal Timothy Dolan when Pope Francis had become Pope and was giving his blessing to the crowd below. The Cardinal was caught looking in the direction of where Caesar had once resided and ruled a vast empire. He said he was struck by how many empires have come and gone, but the Church has stood the test of time. So often in history, it appeared as though the Church was coming to an end, only to see her rise again and again. Each apparent ending signaled a new beginning. Such is the case here, where the diminished presence of Marist religious signals that something new is afoot.

Together with the people of God and with all people of goodwill in this little corner of the universe called Marist School, we take our cue to interpret this moment in the school's history from the Risen Christ. He is "the one seated on the throne who said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.'" (Rev. 21:5)

Our response is to say Amen or, if you are a fan of Star Trek, make it so!