

Space for a community to come together

A new year begins and with it new blank pages on which more stories of this small pilgrimage in this corner of our beloved Amazon will be penned.

I want to begin this sharing with a quote from Paul's letter to the Romans: "*Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves*" (Rm 12, 10) This month has been a time for making this passage come alive, not only for the precious time shared with my family and friends during the short visit to my country, but also because I really feel the love of God in everything that happens to me. At the end of the month of December after the Christmas missions I got the unpleasant surprising news that the cottage in Leticia where I lived alone had been burgled. I was deeply taken aback as I had not experienced such an event before. I am aware that this can happen anywhere in the world, it is one of the painful setbacks to which we are all exposed to and it is probably easier to live through them in a border area.

As it is often said: "*there is no evil that some good does not come from it*". This is thanks to that infinite love of God that he shows us in every way that he knows us more than we can know ourselves. It is the God who is always greater than us and understands our limits and how far we can reach. The God who is Father and Mother and who uses everything as pointers of his love. That God of Jesus who is Good and only knows how to love. To that God, today I want to give thanks for what happened, because although unpleasant in itself, it was an opportunity for Him to extend his generous hand through the Marist Community located in Tabatinga across the border in Brazil.



When I returned from Ecuador, they welcomed me with open arms while looking for a new home, perhaps a little more secure. It happened in the first week and unfortunately it is not easy to find something suitable here. It was one night after dinner that Vero and Peggy, lay Marist missionaries, asked me a question. Vero is from Argentina and with her [special Argentinian] accent said: *Do you want to live alone or would you like to live in community?* I answered: *"I feel that my time living alone in this mission was very rich, with its ups and downs, but now I would love to live in community."* On hearing my answer and almost with a single voice, they said: *"the doors of our community are open to you to live with us, we have discussed this hypothetically with the two Marist Brothers who are also part of this community, Iñigo and Justin who are now outside Tabatinga, and together we believe that for the short time you will be here of less than 6 months, and since it is not easy to find a safe home knowing that it is not easy to live alone in a country that is not yours, you can stay here with us. We shall enrich each other with our spiritualities and our mission"*.

When I heard these words, my heart was filled with joy and gratitude for their suggestion. It is more than what I had hoped for, it would not only be a safe place, but I would also could meet and live with other people who share the same vocation of service in this area where

Space for a community to come together

three borders meet. They also asked me if the distance was not a difficulty for me. Just to give you an idea, walking from the Marista Educational Centre in Tabatinga to the PAMSJ Project office takes 35 minutes. Here everything is close, there is even a motorcycle service that in 5 minutes takes you to the border.

Of course, I accepted on the one condition that I paid my share of expenses through a monthly rent. This for two reasons: the first is that the contribution I receive from CLC is intended for that cost, and the second, and more importantly, is that my parents have always taught me to show appreciation of the welcome of people. I would not feel the same freedom to help myself to food or use the services if I did not contribute financially to the expenses of the house and of course with the activities of daily life. At first, they did not want to accept, they said that about that we would talk later, but in the end with the



reasons as I explained them, they accepted and as of January 15 I am now living with the Marist community.

That's why I started this letter with Paul's passage: although it has been only a few weeks, I can say that I'm discovering the richness of living in community. A community that is built in the day to day, with the sharing of prayer, the activities of the house, life and mission. I am

discovering a new spirituality, the Marist spirituality of brothers from service and fraternity, a spirituality that seeks to be simple and to be immersed in the other in everyday life and thus putting into practice one of the desires of its founder Marcellino Champagnat: "*See how they love one another*". This is how myself I look at the differences not only of cultures, but of persons, with tolerance, respect for the other, in a word with that desire to find Jesus in the other by accepting the others and loving them as they are. A simplicity of life and an open heart make us concern ourselves with each other, in the way Jesus did with his apostles. Now I am experiencing that every spirituality has a lot to offer and that it is a real privilege for our Church to have a variety of spiritualities because each one, from its own charism, builds the body of Jesus.

Thanks also to this experience, I understand the importance of our community dimension in CLC. In this time where individualism and competitiveness drag us down, the role of the community plays a very important role, this being the place where we truly create the spaces of encounter and sharing that make us live that "being friends in the Lord." To live in community, it is important for community members to be open-minded, to be discerning, to know when to speak and when to be silent, to gradually discover what their role in the community is, what their contribution is and from that to achieve the building of the whole body. Thanks to this inner work, the community, with the contribution of all, will be the

Space for a community to come together

place where truth, creativity, joy, forgiveness and reconciliation help us to discover the will of God in this mission that we are sharing.

Otherwise, this month is still the holiday season so normal activity in Leticia does not start. As for the mission this month has involved giving support to my colleagues Pablo SJ and Robby in specific tasks of the Mapeo de Fe y Alegría, as they are in the final stretch of the project: tabulating surveys, transcribing interviews, and thanks to that work I have been able to get to know the real life of the indigenous communities of Peru and Venezuela. It has really been a well-worked and well thought-out endeavor that will certainly bear many fruits for Fe y Alegría who work in the Amazon.

Lastly, I have drawn up a plan for these 5 months of pastoral work in the riverside communities of the Amazon on the Colombian side. From February, we will begin our pastoral work with the local pastoral team and undertake visits to the indigenous communities.

I accompanied Vero and Peggy to the novena of Saint Sebastián in the borough of La Comara, living at the same time the richness of popular spirituality and their devotion to the saint. I have also had the opportunity to meet Brenda a young volunteer who works at the Pontifical Catholic University of the Marists in Porto Alegre, it was a gift to share with her a couple of weeks. Of course, the community was also a beneficial source of conversations we had an opportunity to meet and talk with Brother Nilvo, a Marist who for a long time was part of the Itinerant Team: how much wisdom, how much God's experience in living with indigenous communities! It is easy to find God in people who have immersed themselves in their work. This community is open, very welcoming to those who need a place to rest and a plate of food. May God continue to bless so much generosity and mission in this corner of 'Our Common Home'. We went to a mass in the Tikuna community of Umariáçu and later we were invited to a rite called Mosa Nova, which is like the 15th birthday party for girls in our countries. Another time I will share what this ritual is about, because I do not want to lengthen this letter.

So, these 5 months I will be "Jesuit" in Leticia and "Marist" in Tabatinga. What a privilege to be able to live two Amazonian perspectives of this area where three borders meet, to obtain a vision of life in Colombia and Brazil. In a word, to realize the desire of the REPAM, the Church Network for the Whole of the Amazon: to embrace each other in our work for this our Amazon with the feeling of one single body.

I begin the year on this mission in the right direction and with a great desire to give my best I can in the missionary work. As always, I commend myself to your prayers. A great hug for the new year full of dreams and blessings for everyone.

Lore Pérez E.

Volunteer, CLC