

## Collaboration & Volunteering | Br Chris Wills

# Bridge Builders

### Supporting Marist Collaboration and Volunteering



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**T**he Bridge Builders program explores the possibilities for Collaboration and Volunteering nationally and internationally. It is a service to the four key Marist Ministries, MSA, MYM, AMS and Marist180, and, through the Association of St Marcellin Champagnat, to all Marists in Australia.

Australian Marists have a strong representation in international collaboration. Presently there are over twenty international Australians located in eleven countries. It is a matter of history that many of these positions are filled by brothers but, on the forward side of history, there is a growing group of lay Marists who are taking the opportunity to become a member of a Marist community for a time. Often this is done as a part of wider travel plans. In addition, whatever we have been able to do internationally, can be done within our borders as well.

Possibilities are wide ranging and are often generated by the preferences of the volunteer. In the recent past we have had Australian lay and brother Marists invited to communities in the six Marist Regions of America Sur (Latin America), Arco Norte (North America), Europa, Africa, Asia and Oceania.

### Is This for You?

So if you are young or more mature, retired, or a teacher or other professional on sabbatical leave, and identify and feel at home as Marist, you may have the opportunity, or harbour a latent wish (I always wanted to do that!) to be involved as a Marist volunteer for a short or longer time. You are welcome to join in the work of a Marist community. See the contact details below.

### Opportunities:

**1. The first option** for volunteering is not classically needs based, but many Marist international and national communities would welcome your proposal to join in with their work. The process is that you discuss your preferences here in Australia and we (Australia and Rome) will 'broker' an invitation from a suitable community.

AND: There are some current communities in need of volunteers right now:

#### a. The Fratelli Project



Photo courtesy of Fratelli Project Facebook page.

in Lebanon is a Marist collaboration with the Lasallians (lay and brother organisation) and works with Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Lebanon. They run school support programs throughout the year and a holiday program in July and August, which is open to a limited number of volunteers (there is a big list). They are interested in volunteers from countries beyond Europe so that the confronting situation of the displacement of people (most of whom are young people) can be understood. This is a work of advocacy. English is very acceptable, and you will also hear a lot of Arabic and French. There is a selection list so if you are interested your name needs to be on that list before the end of February. Beirut is sort of on the way to Europe, so it is possible to include it in your wider travel plans.

<https://www.facebook.com/FratelliProject/>



**b. Lavalla200>** is a project which establishes intercultural communities on the peripheries. The periphery is not necessarily geographical. It can often be an existential periphery such as the ministry to undocumented Latinos in East Harlem, NYC. These communities are made up of lay and brother Marists appointed by the Superior General to work with the most disadvantaged people. At present there are seven Lavalla200> communities located in Brazil, Cuba, USA, Romania, Sicily, South Africa and Australia.

The next two-month preparation program begins in Italy at the beginning of May. You will live in a small Fraternity of four or five within the larger community located

in a [hamlet](#) in a forest in Tuscany. The preparation program of two months is funded by the General Administration and travel expenses are subsidised by the Australian province. No commitments are made until towards the end of the preparation program.

<http://www.champagnat.org/400.php?a=24>

**c. New Horizons, Vietnam** is a community of the Marist District of Asia. It started in 2012 when Australian, Br Geoff Kelly, realised that living under the radar in Vietnam was not the best option, so he boldly approached various government authorities asking, "Do you want me to stay or do you want me to leave?" Their reply was that the Marists (as an NGO called FMSI-Vietnam) should stay and work in collaboration with a local partner NGO. New Horizons was established to meet the needs of young people in the rural area of [Quoc Oai](#) who were being forced off their land and away from their income by encroaching industrialisation.

The main activity is the teaching of English so that the young people have an advantage in Retail, IT, Tourism and the Civil Service. Volunteers are needed to support the teaching with conversational English. This is an ongoing and expanding need because now New Horizons has been asked to replicate the project in a more remote and poorer area in Vietnam.

<http://csds.vn/new-horizons/>

**2. Nationally**, we are developing the idea of an up-to one-year (extendable) assignment in some of our most remote communities. It is envisaged that this would appeal to any age group: either at the professional level (newly minted teacher or other professional); a person on sabbatical; a retired teacher, builder, administrator or the like.



Photo courtesy of Lavalla200> Mount Druitt.

There are many opportunities to be involved in Marist mission nationally or internationally. After recently completing seven years as the director of the secretariat Collaboration for mission, international (Cmi), I still have useful international connections. The Provincial has created a desk for me to manage this, named *Collaboration and Volunteering*.

Feel free to contact me by email:

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