

Reflections from Bro Rob Clark

on the beginnings of the Marist Community of Welcome, in Austin TX.

Last Saturday morning I joined Peter (Guadalupe) on the back patio to enjoy a cup of coffee together. I asked him, "Do you know who is sleeping on the couch in the living room?" He didn't! Later on, as I quietly crept back into the house, our guest jumped up and immediately I recognized him as the brother of one of the students I know well. We sat, and shared a little. He mentioned that the next day he and 3 of his friends were going to move in together and they wanted to be more than just housemates. He was intrigued by our community and eventually asked if he could have copies of our prayers and meetings, so that they could set-up something similar to our community.



(Community) life is certainly different here in Austin! The night before the couch story another UT grad returned to Austin from Colorado and three of us talked late into the night about God, suffering, and other questions that were on his mind. Early the next day a Senior from UT contacted us and asked if he could come pray in our chapel. This was all before we had a rib BBQ for 12 Longhorn students headed to our opening game.

We call ourselves the "Marist Community of Welcome," but we've also been called "The bro's house." "Marist." "The Fellowship House." Over the summer the 7 of us: Andres Almendarez (Coordinator of Development and Communication at a local parish), Jaret Criss (Senior @ UT), Peter Guadalupe, Luke LaRue (Senior @ UT), John Paul (JP) Nguyen (Senior @ UT), Blake Simon (Grad Student @ UT) and I (still a full-time campus minister @ UT) gradually arrived at our rented two-house home on an acre of land, bordered by Waller Creek.

Last Tuesday was actually the first day we were all together. We gathered for a conversation on three scriptural questions: "Where are you?" "What are you looking for?" "What things?" It was a wonderful sharing where each of us identified our needs, hopes, fears and expectations as we began this new incarnation of the Marist charism. That was followed by a community-prepared meal and night prayer.

We've decided to keep our commitment to each other simple in our early days together. Monday is designated as "Marist Monday." We have morning prayer @ 7:30 which is led by Peter and me on some Marist theme. We then gather later in the day for a festive meal, a conversation on the week ahead (or some other topic), and then shared prayer. This day is a firm commitment for each of us. The rest of the week we gather for morning prayer @ 7:30, and then, for those around, at 6:30 we have dinner and night prayer. Each takes part in preparing the meals and we often welcome others to our table. There are also natural times of hanging-out, playing, talking or watching a movie together.

One significant motivation for opening this community is welcoming young adults into our community for prayer, conversation, a meal, and socializing. We have welcomed almost 100 guests so far! Family members, staff from the UT Catholic Center, religious women and men, students, graduates, and friends of community members have all joined us. In the coming months we will be looking for other opportunities to welcome young adults. We're considering a Praise and Worship night (we have a number of musicians in the community) in our large backyard, a "Vino & Veritas" evening to speak about important personal/spiritual topics over a glass of wine, and also some service opportunities in the local community.

We have been truly blessed with the men in our community and each of us is grateful for the opportunity and support the Province has given us to begin this new initiative. As we join together, we know we are not a formation community and this isn't a discernment house (though both are happening informally!) so we listen to the Spirit and each other to help create our community. It's been said that in the early days of the foundation of our Institute there was a similar experience of not having a clear understanding of what God was bringing forth in that simple home in LaValla, but Marcellin and our early brothers had the trust "The Lord will build the house..." Faithful to our Marist tradition we begin and end our day with the Salve - placing our lives and our community into the heart of our Good Mother.

Thanks for those who have supported us with prayer, gifts - and soon visits! Y'all are most welcome to "Our" Community of Welcome.

Rob Clark