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Kia ora. My name is Jen Martinez, I'm 32 years old, I am a NZ born Filipino, raised in Mt Albert. My parents came to NZ after many years living in Beirut, but because of the Beirut bombings and civil war, they left and decided NZ was a safe place to call home.

My parents had high hopes to raise me as a Kiwi kid, so I never learnt how to speak Filipino and I was encouraged to participate in things like the Weetbix kids TRYathlon and school Kapa Haka groups. I have lots of fond memories growing up. As a child I would get on my bike, meet up with the local kids and we would bike around the neighbourhood for hours. We would play cricket in the backyard, have dinners at each other's houses and sell lemonade on the footpath. Sunday was my favourite day of the week, I would dress up for church and after Mass my parents and I would visit our elderly friends in rest homes. All of them we met through church and who spoiled me with big hugs, sloppy kisses and of course sugary treats.

I went to the local Catholic schools, both Marist Primary and Marist Sisters College as it was known in my day. After school I followed my passion for food and studied Culinary Arts while I worked as a chef. Some friends of mine were part of the Edmund Rice Network and I was invited to live in the young adult community house and support the Eddie Rice Camps for kids. It was during this season in my life that I met Fr Frank Bird sm who gave me the opportunity to work for Logos. For the last 12 years I have worked for The Logos Project, a Marist Youth Development organisation, based in Auckland. I started as a trainee Youth worker and slowly progressed through the years, and today I lead the organisation alongside 4.5 full time staff.

A year before my 30th birthday I began to think about myself as Marist woman. It was strange really. I've been in Marist environments for a good chunk of my life and all of sudden I was questioning my Marist Identity. Was I really Marist? What does it mean to be Marist, and not an ordained Marist? What does it mean to be Marist at my age? These were big questions and to be honest they scared me. Most people my age are thinking about travelling the world, careers, and relationships. I'm not a religious person, I am pretty ordinary in many ways and like lots of my peers I struggle to get to church most Sundays. Over time these questions became louder and louder and I began to become more afraid.

One evening I was sitting with my mentor and friend Fr Denis O'Hagan sm. Out of nowhere he told me that I needed to get ready and prepare, he didn't know what for but he said to get ready. The next day he gave me the book 15 days of prayer with Jean-Claude Colin (the founder of the Marist (Fathers). And guess what? Day 1 of the book is called "Tasting God". JC Colin is a man that speaks to my heart. The chef in me relates to this metaphor so well. Fr Colin used this expression right through his life. He used it to draw in young Marists and he would remind the older men during retreats. He even told the Marist missionaries who ventured out to Oceania to 'taste God'.

This metaphor made sense to me. Tasting God is like eating something delicious for the very first time. It's memorable, even if you don't eat it again, you'll never forget how it tasted and how it made you feel. It's an experience of the senses.

For many years I dreamed of going to Lyon and visiting the Marist places of origin. In 2015 I was told that I would have the opportunity to go to the 200 year celebrations that were happening in Lyon in July 2016. It was good news that a small group of us would represent NZ in Lyon at the

young adult gathering *Dare to Dream*. Could this all be a coincidence? Is this why I am questioning my identity as a Marist woman? Fr Colin's expression 'tasting God' had a profound impact on my spirituality and how I viewed the world. Once I accepted it, it became clear to me that I was discerning my vocation. It felt like the right time to commit myself as a Lay Marist especially as I was preparing to go to Lyon. On the 14th September 2015 at a Mass, I made my permanent commitment as a Lay Marist alongside Jan (who was the cook at the Marist Seminary for many years). The irony! I had met Jan a few times at the seminary before, and I always looked forward to her meals. I had no idea that both Jan and I were making our commitments and we shared a special moment after Mass which cannot be described. All I can say, it was special.

At the end of 2015 I was appointed to lead Logos. When I was first approached about this I took a deep breath and thought very hard about it. I thought about the time I was questioning my Marist Identity; I thought about the 15 days with JC Colin; I thought about that strange night that Fr Denis blurted out 'prepare yourself'; I thought about the moment I made my commitment as a Lay Marist and I thought about Fr Frank who gave me the opportunity to be at Logos right at the beginning. I thought maybe there was a reason I had Marist formation for most of my life. Maybe it was preparing me for this season.

When I first saw the famous 800 steps that lead to Fourvière I felt like I went back in time. As I took the first steps I imagined the early Marists who walked these steps on route to the Basilica of Notre Dame de Fourvière. It was almost as if they were there with me. It gives me chills just thinking about it. Just over a year ago I was in Lyon with 500 people from 27 countries. As I look back I feel a sense of gratitude that I was able to have this experience. I met the most extraordinary people - lay, religious, young, old and who work or volunteer in Marist ministries all over the world. And you know what? We all share something in common. We call ourselves Marist.

During our visit to La Neylière I was surprised by the Oceania Museum, walking through it felt familiar and reminded me of home. Only those from Oceania could relate to this and it was an eye opener to see how the first missionaries travelled. Before walking into the bedroom of Fr Colin we listened to the words of Fr Colin's letters and I was moved by his words that spoke of mercy, compassion and courage. At the tomb of Colin we sang *Mo Maria* and spent time in silence. There was a stillness and a reminder of the promise that was made 200 years ago. The impact of this experience has sustained me in so many ways. It has sustained me through my leadership so far, and most definitely it has affirmed my call to be Marist in the world today.

As Marists we are called to be the Marian vision of the Church. Just like the early Marists we are invited to taste God and respond to our special call.