

*Magdalena Webb*

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Kia Ora, my name is Magdalena Webb and my story as a Marist goes back long before I was born.

Let's start when the first Marist came across the Pacific and landed in the Hokianga harbour. My ancestors of the Nga Puhi Iwi would have been there greeting them - as friend or foe, I don't know – but they would have been there none-the-less. Nearly 100 years later my grandparents, Peter and Judith, were born, and later became involved with the Marist family as teachers at the Marist Brothers High school in Suva, Fiji. It was there that they raised my mother (and her siblings) in her early years of life. Later on they moved back to Aotearoa, finally residing in the Hokianga, no doubt constantly reminded of the rich Marist history. My grandfather still lives there today.

Now, my father's parents, Fred and Mary-Rose, both made commitments as Lay Marists in 2012. I feel that it is no coincidence that I find myself working at The Logos Project, a Marist Youth development organization. In fact, I feel am walking in the same footsteps as my grandparents and our tipuna.

A recent experience took that to a whole new level. Earlier this year, four of us from the Marist young adult group at Logos, set out on a Marist immersion experience that became very pivotal for us all.

On the 12th of February, Claudia, Sione, Kulu and I, somewhat nervously flew out to the U.S.A. with Father Denis O'Hagan sm. Our mission was to journey with a community of young and old in Brownsville, Texas.

We stayed three nights, en route, with the Marist Brothers in San Francisco. Then our mission took us to Brownsville on the border of Mexico.

We arrived to stifling heat and the welcoming face of Tony O'Connor sm, the Parish Priest of a beautiful church community.

Some of these people suffer the hardships of living in the U.S as people born in Mexico. We met the beautiful women who ran a food bank for the area. We helped lift box after box of tomatoes, cucumbers, oranges, beans...you name it. Enough to feed a village and

that is exactly what we did. The manaakitanga (hospitality) and whakawhanaungatanga (sense of family connection) made us feel right at home.

All my life, I have thought about how to save the world, about what I can do to make this world a better place. Going to Brownsville, gave me the reality check of a lifetime. Rather than going in circles, thinking about what I can do, I came to realise that it starts with who I can be. I'm not too sure if that's more or less daunting.

We also got to hang out with the young people of the parish. We ran a day long confirmation retreat and two activity based learning (ABL) sessions with them. They came a long way from being extremely quiet and shy to chasing each other around the room in a game and asking us 101 questions about New Zealand.

We went to the beach, watched the annual parade that starts in Brownsville and goes all the way to Mexico. We visited new found friends and attended Masses.

It was sad to leave as we had met so many amazing people and visited some beautiful places. However, everything we learnt about the life of those people will remain an inspiration to us.

As a young woman who is part of this Marist family, I believe that I am called to take up the torch that was lit two centuries ago, by a group of young people who were called to live like Mary. Knowing that we, including me, among many, are just like that group of founders, gives purpose to my passion. I am thankful for the Marist experience in Brownsville, as it has brought light to who I am and to who I can be as a Marist.