November 11, 2018 marks 100 years since the signing of the Armistice that ended WW I

What was the impact on the Marist Brothers?

France

Between 1901 and 1905, the French Parliament passed laws leading to the separation of church and state. It resulted in the closing of thousands of Catholic schools, and the secularising of other aspects of life. Many Priests, Sisters and Brothers continued their ministries while working at other occupations to support themselves.

Many Marist Brothers left France for other countries and began new ministries in schools there. When World War I broke out the French Government mobilised (conscripted) 9,281 priests and religious including 708 Marist Brothers, many of whom were already overseas and the French Government demanded their return to fight. Marist Brothers who returned to France included: Canada 20, Mexico, 58, China 32, Egypt 59, Syria 58, Brazil 18, USA 17, etc. There is no mention of those in Australia returning. Some Brothers refused to return (Refractory Brothers), but many considered the call of the homeland as a duty both civic and religious. In Australia Conscription was defeated in a referendum in 1916 and again in 1917. Prime Minister Billy Hughes strongly supported YES, but Archbishop Mannix in Melbourne strongly promoted the NO vote.

French Brother Felice's notes on his war experiences. *"My God thank you! But what am I going to do to get rid of this mud which is covering me? Blessed Virgin, I am counting on you, for I have need of your help!"* At the end of the war he writes: *"I feel, my God, that if I do not go away with a will resolved for reparation for what 5 years of war have destroyed in me, I am lost …".*

101 of the 708 conscripted French Marist Brothers who served in the army were killed in action in World War I.

Belgium

Belgium was occupied by German troops during the war, however some Marist schools continued to operate under difficult circumstances while the war continued around them. The German troops took over some other Marist schools, which were converted into barracks or military hospitals. 26 Belgian Brothers served in the Belgian army.

Germany

It is believed that 205 German Brothers served in the frontline and 45 were killed in action. Military Conscription for single men was introduced in Germany in early 1916. Military hospitals were set up in some Marist schools and Brothers who had been trained as nurses cared for the wounded German soldiers, but also wounded soldiers from France, Russia, Ireland, Belgium, Italy, Portugal, USA, and Great Britain.

From a report at the time: **"The date of the centenary of the Marist Brothers, January 2nd 1917 was a great celebration for Brothers and wounded soldiers. The farewell at the end of the war was extremely touching and will always remain in the hearts of all who were witnesses. Over 7000 wounded soldiers were cared for by the Marist Brothers nurses, 82 of them were guided to their first communion and many of the soldiers found their way back to God".**

1037 Marist Brothers from all nations at war took part as soldiers, and over 150 were killed. Some of the Brothers who returned withdrew, however most went on to live valued lives as Brothers, despite the trauma of their war experiences.

Marist Brothers martyrs for their faith over the past 200 years: 175 Spain, 9 China, 6 Ruanda, 6 Congo, 3 Australia (WW II), 1 Guatemala, 1 NZ, and 1 Algeria. The Brothers who were conscripted to fight are obviously not considered as martyrs.

French WW I Brothers with their service medals   **German Brothers nurses in their military hospital** **Br. Adolphe-Louis (French)**