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## A new year ... some new novices

"Mary — her simple 'yes' lights up our lives"

'La Valla' interprovincial novitiate, Colombia

On February 2, 2009, at the 'La Valla' interprovincial novitiate, eight young men from the provinces of Norandina and Central America took another step in their formation at a simple and family-oriented Eucharistic celebration.

Present were Br. Laurentino Albalá, Provincial, and Br. César Rojas, as well as the community of Santo Domingo, Brothers on the novitiate staff and the novices' families.

The celebration was centered on simplicity, modesty and loving one another in Christ as the fundamental underpinnings needed to set out on living religious life as a Marist. It is worth mentioning that

the new novices have chosen as their model: "Mary, the experience of a simple 'yes' that lights up our lives", desiring to show how they wish to live this new stage in their lives so as to better discern their vocation.

Following the celebration we headed, singing, to the dining room, where we partook of a delicious meal, including fine wine and a rich dessert. Later in the afternoon the Brothers and the new novices went for a stroll through downtown Medellín.

We thank our Good Mother and St. Marcellin Champagnat for the gift of our vocation and for their ongoing invitation to live this Marist life.



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# Meeting of representatives of Marist Solidarity Organisations

## Brazil

The Team of Mission for America (dependent on the General Council's Mission Commission) convoked the solidarity organisations of the continent to hold their third meeting at the end of January 2009, coinciding with the holding of the World Social Forum in Belen (Brasil), as was explained in earlier news.

Knowing this, Br. Dominick Pujia, President of the FMSI Onlus (Marist Foundation for International Solidarity), considered that it would be a good opportunity to hold a more inclusive meeting, in inviting representatives of Marist solidarity organisations from other continents. The objectives planned for this meeting were: a) to take part in the World Social Forum collectively, as Marists, interacting with others who believe that "another world is possible" and who are working towards this end; b) to meet with representatives of Marist solidarity from all over the world, together with FMSI, to become acquainted with one another

and to set up a dialogue for proposing possibilities of collaboration and coordination.

The meeting of the American representatives took place from 23 to 27 January, and starting with the last day incorporated into the group representatives of SED (Marist NGO in Spain), as well as from the provinces of Compostela, Mediterránea and the Hermitage. From 28 January to 1 February all were able to participate in the activities of the World Social Forum, except for the day of 31 January which was dedicated to the Marist meeting with the FMSI Onlus.

During this day, Br. Dominick and Sara Panciroli (Secretary general of the FMSI Onlus) facilitated the process of getting to know this new Marist Foundation at the service of the defence of the rights of children and, by means of the various activities, helped the group to become aware of the need to work together and of the challenges this

entailed. The FMSI Onlus proposed a draft of an "Accord of cooperation" between the said organisation and the Marist administrative units or NGOs, which was studied by the participants and which will become definitive in the coming months.

The day, which was evaluated in a very positive manner by all those taking part, closed with a time of prayer of thanksgiving, as well as a statement of commitment which we take on both personally and individually for the defence of the rights of children.

The FMSI Onlus wants to thank all the organisations taking part for their availability and enthusiasm. A special thanks to the organizing team of the Meeting of the Americas, which made possible the realization of this day, as well as the Province of Brasil Centro-Norte which, once again, hosted with generosity and joy an international Marist event.



## Shaping the future of Marist Mission

### From Mendes to Melbourne

The Melbourne Province continues to bring shape and form to the vision it has derived from its own Province Chapter of 2007, Province Consultations of 2007, its Province Assembly of Brothers in 2008 and the forthcoming Mission Conference. At this Marist Mission Conference participants will draw inspiration from the Marist International Assembly of Mendes held in 2007.

Marists from all ministries of the Province will reflect on their progress in the areas of co-responsibility and shared mission especially with its commitment to the marginalized youth drawing strength from the calls of Mendes to forge the Province vision!



# My vocation as a researcher

## A testimony of Brother Alexandre Balko

**T**he International Patrimony Commission, in June 2008 at Rome, resolved to attempt an « Essay on the History of work on the Patrimony of the Institute » : this is the sub-title of the article in "Marist Notebooks" No. 26, written by the co-ordinator of this commission, Brother André Lanfrey. Towards this end, Brother Alexandre Balko was asked about his participation in the work on the patrimony of the Marist Brothers, with this specification : « it is not a question here of the results of your work but of your life as a researcher in the patrimony of the Institute ». You will find here, therefore, his own testimony written 4 months before his death on 31 January 2009.



The call became concrete with a telephone call from Br Gabriel Michel, secretary general, towards the end of the summer holidays of 1971. I learned later that this project had been occupying the members of the General Council for some time. Personally, I knew nothing about it and was getting ready for the new year at our secondary school at Fribourg, in Switzerland. It came as a total surprise and, fully convinced of the impossibility of undertaking such a special work, I made no delay in meeting Br Gabriel Michel at Varennes-sur-Allier, where he was at the time. It was in vain that I raised the handicap of headaches. Rome has spoken ...

I went to Rome, then, out of pure obedience. Brother Gabriel Michel had already made contact with the late Father Jean Coste, who promised his collaboration. But, what had to be done? The General Council wanted a work in the form of a thesis. The suggestion had been made by M. Jourjon, doyen of the Faculty of Theology in Lyon, where I had already worked for a licentiate in Philosophy and done a course in Theology. So I could complete a licentiate in Theology as well and work towards a thesis on this subject. I took up Theology studies again, therefore, and preparatory courses towards a thesis ... In Autumn 1972 I was able to present a report on the sermons of Father Champagnat. At the same time, I found the field of

my later researches.

If Father Champagnat wrote practically nothing of a directly theoretical nature, he has left a not negligible number of writings which reveal, more or less directly, his convictions, his personal spirituality, his practical directions for the formation of the Brothers, etc. Together they form a considerable quantity, which provides a world to be explored and analysed : letters, sermons, drafts of rules, private notes ... It was a question of extracting « the substantial marrow » of all this indirect data, to construct a faithful and original doctrine on the charism and the person of the Founder.

My work on the sermons of Fr. Champagnat, by throwing me into a demanding bibliographical research into the sources of the texts, showed itself very useful as a consequence. At the same time, I was quickly asked to present the fruit of my studies. One can say that the Brothers were thirsty for a renewed Marist doctrine. In fact, since the publication of the life of Fr. Champagnat, in 1856, all that had been done was to repeat the contents of the « books of the Institute ». Beginning in 1956, the centenary of the first edition of the « Life », Brothers Gabriel Michel and Pierre Zind had undertaken historical research which, despite its quality, had not really affected the mentality of the Brothers.

A serious contact with the writings of Fr. Champagnat made me aware that their content suggested an image of the Founder quite different from the one presented by his first biographer. Now I think that many Brothers had that impression, without expressing it clearly. Moreover, the first results of my researches pointed in that direction.

A suggestive example. Fr. Etienne Beudoin, parish priest of La Valla, a former fellow student and friend of Fr. Champagnat, on reading his biography, very edifying, noted that Marcellin, during his first two years at the seminary, belonged to « the merry band », and that it was the death of a friend, a fellow student, which was the occasion of his conversion. (I quote from memory). I took the trouble to go to Verrières to rediscover traces of this interesting testimony. And I was able to read, in the parish registers, that Denys Duplay, originally from Jonzieux, died on the second of September 1807, at the college of Verrières. There you have all the elements of a precious testimony.

At the beginning, I was concerned with exploring the archives of the region, which might contain information about Marcellin. I was sometimes helped by Brothers native to the area, like the late Brother Marcel Soutrenon, Brother Colombat, former Provincial, and others. Obviously I explored the

departmental and diocesan archives, the archives and libraries of the Marist Fathers and other congregations, especially in Rome. Here I owe a special mention to the late Father Jean Coste, who was for me an excellent and devoted teacher.

It was in the course of my research work that I became aware of the special difficulties of the task that had been confided to me. It was a question of becoming closely acquainted with Fr. Champagnat and his writings, in order to be able to compare them with the corresponding elements of the Marist literature. This could only be done after minute examination and multiple comparisons. Given that Fr. Champagnat left practically no writing of a directly theoretical nature, it was necessary to explore all his writings in order to draw out the elements for understanding the different aspects of his person and his work. Let us spell it out clearly, one can not perform a rapid survey of our Founder.

This was why, that besides the historical research, I undertook lengthy and detailed analysis of the texts. I drew up a complete study of a hundred of the most significant letters of the Founder. I also accomplished a detailed analysis of his private notes and

resolutions. I made a systematic study of the drafts of the rules. The study of the sermons was the subject of my report for the license in Theology.

This work, which required a lot of time, was to serve for the composition of a thesis on Fr. Champagnat. Problems of health resulted in impairing the final result of all these efforts.

However, it must be emphasized that I consecrated a lot of time to conferences requested by the Brothers almost everywhere. These simple talks, which always tendered towards dialogue with their hearers, probably were of more use than the presentation of a thesis in good and due form. As a regular practice, I also distributed a reference text allowing for a deeper study of the subject. I also contributed to Marist reviews. There were, as well, collections published in Brazil and Spain. Moreover, one can affirm that the thesis did see the light of day, but achieved by Brother Manuel Mesonero of the Province of Madrid, who worked closely with me.

When I left the community in Rome, in 1983, I think, my work consisted mainly in accompanying the pilgrims and the visitors from all countries who came to N-D de l'Hermitage. Formal

conferences became more rare, but direct contacts with brothers and lay people, very motivated, for the most part, still offered me the opportunity to present Saint Marcellin Champagnat directly, especially to the lay people. This type of apostolate provided me, and perhaps also the visitors, with many happy days.

At present, I am benefitting from a studious retirement in our house at Varennes-sur-Allier. I have brought with me my books and my notes, always working, with the aim of still being able, if God permits, to continue the mission entrusted to me. There is still work to be done on Fr. Champagnat.

Subjects are not lacking. I would still like to present the letters of the Founder. There is a complete work on the intimate notes of Fr. Champagnat which could possibly be published after revision. I dream also of producing a text of more general import under the title of "The Marist vocation." I also have abundant notes reflecting on the important themes of our religious life....

But let us stop dreaming! I am 84.

Brother Alexandre Balko  
September 8, 2008



# Marist Bushfire Assistance Fund

## Australia

We have all been deeply saddened by the tragic loss of lives, as well as the loss of homes, during the recent Victorian bushfires. All our Marist Schools in Victoria have been affected. Principals and staff have been magnificent in the support they continue to give their school communities. Families have lost loved ones, properties and much more.

At the same time, we have been overwhelmed by the expressions of

support we have received. This has come from our own Marist schools and friends in Australia and internationally from places as distant as Auckland in New Zealand, Sargodha in Pakistan and New York in the United States. Marcellin Champagnat's dream of a united international Marist Community is real.

In response to many requests, we have established a 'Marist Bushfire Assistance Fund' which will gratefully receive donations from people who are able

to contribute. This money will in turn be distributed to parents, staff and associated Marist families of schools most affected. Donations can be forwarded to

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In the meantime we continue our prayers for these stricken people.

