

CONTINENTAL COMMISSIONS MEETING



In this second letter, we offer you the first set of reflection topics to prepare our meeting in the Hermitage next year. We invite you to start a process of prayer, reflection and discernment on a personal level, but also to share with some groups in your Province. The last Expanded Secretariat Meeting in October 2015 selected the topics we now offer you. We believe they reflect our experience in the Institute in recent years regarding the lay process and the new relationship between brothers and laity.

The reflection topics in this first stage are:

Topic 1: Proposal by the General Council.

Topic 2: Initial and ongoing formation processes for laity and brothers.

Topic 3: Bonding, belonging and association.

As we mentioned in the motivation letter (November 2015), we propose the following procedure to study each topic:

- **Personally reflect and discern** about the suggested topics.
- **Share your reflection** with some groups in the Province (Provincial Commission of Laity, Provincial Council, etc.).
- **Send the conclusions** to the Continental Commission (Tony Clarke in Oceania; Agnes Reyes in Asia; Mike Greeff in Africa; Teodorino Aller in Europe, and Moisés Beltrán in the Americas).
- **Synthesis** by the Continental Commission, which they

will finally send to the Secretariat (Pep Buetas, Tony Clarke and Javier Espinosa) at the beginning of May.

We believe the meeting at the Hermitage will be a great opportunity to propose new paths for the future of our charism. Both the preparation year and the meeting itself can stimulate our wakeful attention in order to listen to what the Lord has to say.

In May next year, you will receive the following letter of this preparation process inviting you to carry on with the reflection work in a similar way. With all the contributions elicited by the reflection topics, we will draft a working paper for the meeting of October 2016.

We do not intend to write a formal document but to look for concise and essential proposals for the General Chapter in order to boost the process of communion.

Our last two communications during this preparation year will include some additional documents that can help you in the reflection and discernment process we are proposing.

Secretariat of Laity
January 2016



PROPOSAL BY THE GENERAL COUNCIL

TOPIC 1



Course for lay leaders of the Secretariat of the Laity - General House, May 2015

FOCUS OF THE PROPOSAL:

The General Council wishes to present the General Chapter with a framework regarding the identity of the lay Marists who feel the call to live our charism in the midst of the world. This involves the recognition of such identity within some form of association, and must have an international character.

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS:

- Proposal by the General Council (Rome, June 2014).
- Basic Elements to Design the Global Framework of a Marist Vocational Process for the Laity (Barcelona, October 2014).

A. A FRAMEWORK ON LAY MARIST IDENTITY

The framework assumes that those who feel the call to follow Jesus in the way of Mary according to the Marist charism will undertake a process of discernment and attentive listening to God (cf. GAST 12). This framework or formation itinerary was born from life. It brings together the experience of so many Marists from different backgrounds and cultures, who share the call to live the Marist

charism through their lay vocation. The goal of this framework is to offer some route marks for those who want to take part in the same experience.

These route marks wish to address the identity of lay Marists by proposing a formation itinerary, specifying guidelines, content, experiences, and means to foster a

vocational process of charismatic bonding and, in some cases, a link to a lay association.

The framework provides common criteria aimed at allowing lay people to mirror themselves as such and share their Marist identity, as well as offering a sense of belonging at the international level, which includes the concrete expressions of provincial, regional and cultural sensitivities.

The proposal regards all the lay people who feel called by God and want to respond to this invitation. It is a faith journey underlying the process of discernment and attentive

listening to God, unconceivable without a community experience. It requires a dynamic group (community) to follow up the proposed itinerary within the Province and look after each person's process. The framework's general features call for an adaptation to the situation of each Province.

This institutional roadmap regarding lay Marist identity aims at helping us meet together the challenge of a new beginning for the Marist charism, which enables vocational complementarity, mutual enrichment, the sharing of our charism, the strength of our mission, and a future of communion.

B. DISCERNMENT INPUT

ASPECTS:

1. Do you think it is possible to speak of a lay Marist identity with common features describing the laity throughout the Institute, and to determine general guidelines for a formation process?

Would you agree to the following statement?

"The Institute avoids any generalization when assuming the identity profile that lay Marists develop and, at the same time, it tries to determine the essential features lay people identify with at the international level and the common criteria of a formation itinerary."

Justify your answers

2. How should we outline this lay identity framework in order to include all the expressions of our charism?

What do you make of the following statement?

We believe that the proposed itinerary, although it offers general guidelines, wants to become an institutional reference point for the laity who want to follow Jesus in the Marist way. This institutional reference should make room for the different expressions of our charism, besides fostering a proper adaptation to each Province or Region.

Try to explain your answer.

3. The proposed lay Marist identity itinerary implies free-

dom and gradual options. The process should explicitly include and accompany these options, besides highlighting them through a community ceremony.

Is this last statement consistent with the following paragraph?

We believe the formation path experience will require attention to personal processes, offering different ways of committing to the charism that will stem from personal discernment. The proposed lay identity itinerary could eventually imply linking with an international lay association.

Justify your answer.

4. The proposal wishes to avoid individualism, partiality, vagueness and generalization. Implementing it means introducing new experiences, carrying on our reflection, following up *the process*, and investing.

How would you put into practice this last paragraph?

What do you make of the following conclusion?

Implementing this institutional proposal of lay Marist identity involves training people to animate and accompany the different processes at the provincial and international levels.

5. What would you like to add in order to enrich the ongoing reflection regarding the global framework in view of our meeting at the Hermitage?

INITIAL AND ONGOING FORMATION PROCESSES FOR LAITY AND BROTHERS

TOPIC 2



Marist International Colloquium about Initial Formation - Hermitage, October 2015

FOCUS OF THE TOPIC:

Given that following Jesus in Mary's way unifies both the identity of laity and brothers, there could be shared formation spaces in which we could enrich and support each other's specific vocation.

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS:

- Document of the Marist International Colloquium on Initial Formation (Hermitage 2015)
- Historical process of the Institute (1985-2015)

A. STRENGTHEN OUR COMMON CHARISMATIC IDENTITY AND OUR SPECIFIC VOCATIONS THROUGH FORMATION PROCESSES

El The fact of carrying out some of our formation processes jointly indicates that we, laity and brothers, realize we need each other in order to recreate our common Marist identity

and our specific identities. *"It is a blessing and a joy for us, brothers and lay persons together, to share our common richness and to live together an exciting spiritual and apostolic*

venture" (Br. Charles Howard). The Formation Colloquium held at the Hermitage in 2015 endorsed this statement.

The Marist charism is a gift from God for brothers and lay people and becomes concrete through our specific vocations. Experience tells us that the path of communion between brothers and laity helps to better define our specific vocations, enriching and complementing them. Shared formation spaces – both during the initial and ongoing stages – enable a common process to deepen our faith and carry out a missionary project. They also teach us how to work as a team belonging to the same spiritual family, strengthening our common charismatic vocation and bringing the potential of our charism to its full expression, which transcends each of our groups.

The foundation charism – with its due reference to the Founder and his spiritual journey – is the force field within which we are weaving the new relationship between brothers and laity, and which gives meaning to our joint formation processes. The charism is our family blood, the spirit bringing life to our family and its members. It is the unifying element, the bridge allowing us to meet, the root of our mutual relations, and the link uniting and diversifying our identities. The formation process helps us to follow Jesus in the Marist style always more deeply. By sharing our specific expressions of discipleship through this process, we support and enrich each other.



Shared formation spaces – both during the initial and ongoing stages – enable a common process to deepen our faith and carry out a missionary project.

B. DISCERNMENT INPUT

ASPECTS:

1. Would you agree with this recommendation of the International Formation Colloquium held at the Hermitage in 2015 regarding a joint vocations ministry? *Why?*

Vocations promotion or animation as a priority for the Institute, which implies organizing teams of brothers and laity with the shared responsibility of promoting all vocations, especially to Marist life.

2. Our institutional reflection is inviting us to promote joint experiences (formation, community, mission, discernment, accompaniment, etc.) as part of the vocational process for both vocations (Colloquium, first recommendation regarding joint formation). If we take into account this invitation, would the following proposals make sense?

Justify your answers.

- *Ensure joint formation experiences for brothers and lay people during both the initial and ongoing stages of formation.*
- *Agree on the formation topics (discernment, accompaniment, community, spirituality, charism, mission, etc.) that brothers and lay people could share.*
- *Training lay formators to accompany the formation processes.*

BONDING - BELONGING - ASSOCIATION

TOPIC 3



Meeting on Lay Association and Belonging- March 2014

FOCUS OF THE TOPIC:

Bonding and belonging through a lay association help us feel connected to each other by joining forces, walking together, and becoming a point of reference for a global Marist project. In addition, it empowers lay identity, and offers higher possibilities of living a horizontal relationship with the brothers, allowing us to overcome dependence and grow in communion. What forms of bonding and association should be available for lay Marists?

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS:

- Recommendations of the meeting on bonding and belonging (Rome 2014)
- Anaya-Pau document (2009)

A. BELONGING TO AN ASSOCIATION STRUCTURE MEANS BEING PART OF A STABLE GROUP, WHICH LIVES OUT THE CHARISM, MAKES IT VISIBLE AND CONVEYS IT

We live the Marist charism out of the heart, and it does not necessarily imply an association structure. However, it is also true that linking and associating with others allows us to develop mission projects, have a single voice in the Church, lead process of vitality for the charism, and give continuity to Champagnat's intuitions.

Lay bonding stems from a personal process of discernment. It is a personal and free choice that has to do with the person's vocational process. Its backbone is the vocational drive, which eventually brings forth lay identity. Lay belonging brings about a sense of family and community. It expresses a charismatic and canonical commitment, and

only makes full sense within a relationship of communion with the brothers.

A lay organization structure would coordinate the laity who feel called to live the Marist charism within the Church and in the midst of the world. It would express the notion of charismatic family, according to which different

groups organize themselves around the same charism. This organization would have an international character, with a clear lay leadership in communion with the brothers. It would aim at allowing the lay Marists throughout the world to identify themselves with and feel part of the same association.

B. DISCERNMENT INPUT

ASPECTS:

1. Do you think we need to offer an association structure to the lay people who wish to live and promote the Marist charism by speaking with a single voice, leading international processes, and giving continuity to Champagnat's intuitions "in every diocese or the world"?

Whether it is yes or no, please explain the reasons for your answer.

2. If you answer to the previous question is yes, please define your choice regarding the following options and *explain why*.

Note: We suggest that you look at [LEXICUM at champagnat.org](http://LEXICUM.atchampagnat.org) to get a clear understanding of the different concepts (association, bonding, belonging, etc.).

- 2.1 Association structure only for the laity or association structure for brothers and laity.
- 2.2 Canonical structure, civil law structure or canonical and civil law structure.
- 2.3 Canonical structure: public association of the faithful or private association of the faithful
- 2.4 Another type of association structure:

3. Belonging means becoming part of an institution, and bonding, assuming obligations with the institution.

What would choosing some kind of bonding and belonging involve for the life of a lay person? How would the lay person and the institution (either autonomous or together with the brothers) commit to each other through this link?

4. What do you make of the following statement coming from one of our international meetings? Please explain your answer.

Developing a system of lay association with the charism/institution, and at the same time developing another association system to manage our works, articulating both structures so that they complement and strengthen each other without confusion