C

OMMUNION

In the Church, the term *communion* designates the filial relationship of believers with Abba God, from which a fraternal relationship is born. *Communion* translates the term *koinoia* from the Greek New Testament, which means both *communion* and *participation* or *relationship*. It therefore regards the essential core of our being Christian. As children of the same Father, as members of his same family, we “are communion” with God and with our brothers and sisters. Communion, therefore, is not uniformity. It comes from God Him/Herself and implies reciprocity, participation, responsibility and unity in diversity[[1]](#footnote-1), as in a family.

Therefore, communion is an anthropological reality. There is no doubt that each person, from the very moment of conception, is a being-in-relationship. We need each other. The other person makes me exist[[2]](#footnote-2). What our Christian experience suggests is that a person is fulfilled to the extent that he or she expresses this being-in-relation thorough fraternal communion. Based on his or her relationship with the God of Jesus, the person begins a new relationship with nature, with others, and with him or herself, that is, experiences communion, which enhances and empowers us. In this sense, closure to communion means choosing a depersonalized existence, deciding ‘not to be’.



This actually has a clear ecclesial consequence, which Vatican II called the *“Church of communion”*. In this Communion/Church the states of life – vocational paths stemming from a personal relationship with God – are not understood as isolated realities in themselves. Since the Church is a symbol of the Kingdom of God, she is fraternal communion by nature. Therefore, personal vocations only find their meaning when they are deeply interconnected: they are functions of each other. They all express the same Christian dignity, the universal call to holiness and, simultaneously, they are different and complementary modalities of this common call. Therefore, each of them has a basic and unmistakable character and, at the same time, each of them is related to the other and at its service. All the states of life together constitute the “mystery of communion” of the Church, and are dynamically coordinated among themselves in a shared mission[[3]](#footnote-3).

The documents of the Marist Institute also express this theological and ecclesial dynamism of *communion*:

* On the one hand, its theological basis: the Trinitarian Divine Communion, source of all communion[[4]](#footnote-4) and of the person’s unity with the Triune God[[5]](#footnote-5).
* And on the other, fraternal communion born from that union: communion with the Church[[6]](#footnote-6), with the Institute[[7]](#footnote-7), and among those who participate in the Marist charism through different states of life[[8]](#footnote-8).

These documents indicate that, in Marist terms, communion is expressed as family spirit. In this spirit we live the complementarity of our vocations and the common pursuit of greater vitality for the charism[[9]](#footnote-9). Living the Marist charism with others is an experience of communion. Living our family spirit today means being open, as in concentric circles, to all the people who share the Marist spirit. That is why our documents openly state that the future of the charism is a future of communion in the spirit of Champagnat[[10]](#footnote-10). Marist communion implies realizing that we all live the same basic experience: having been “caught by God” to follow Jesus in the spirit of Champagnat. It means offering together the face of a Marian Church, a family Church, the Church of the apron in the middle of the world.

New structures showing this communion in the Marist charism are currently emerging in many Provinces, mainly in different areas of mission[[11]](#footnote-11). This shared responsibility in the mission has prompted assemblies, chapters, commissions, and provincial teams, in which laity and brothers are working side by side. Structures to share the provincial management and animation are also emerging in other places[[12]](#footnote-12).

But communion goes beyond the mission itself, because it is born from spirituality and nurtured by it. That is why other activities are also being organized, such as retreat sessions for laity and brothers, and experiences of joint-formation and new charismatic vitality[[13]](#footnote-13), activities which are not only centered on mission, but on sharing the same source of communion, the living experience of God in our personal life. New and always deeper forms of relationship among us Marists will stem from this journey of family spirit and communion, demanding new structures to welcome and nurture a new vitality that is being born from the Spirit[[14]](#footnote-14).

1. Cf. Macario Díez Presa in Dizionario Teologico della vita consacrata, Ed. Ancora, Milano. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Cf. *Formation Guide*, Lexicon: human person. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. *Christifideles laici* 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “God has revealed to us that his heart is communion in plurality; he is one and three; he is love, loving and loved, a loving force always loving. As children of that God, we yearn to move out of ourselves to meet others and to live the dynamic of the same being as God” (GAST 65). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “Encounters among Brothers and Lay people are special opportunities to get to know each other better, to accept each other for what we are and to live more than ever in the communion of God who sends us, today, to manifest the charism of Marcellin in the world” (GAST 98). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Within this ecclesiastical communion, the Spirit has caused to spring among the lay people charisms that originally existed only in religious institutes. The gift of shared charism introduces *a new chapter, rich in hope,* in the progress of the Church (…). The charism of Saint Marcellin Champagnat is expressed in new forms of Marist life. One of them is that of the Marist laity” (GAST 7). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Cf. Macario Díez Presa in Dizionario Teologico della vita consacrata, Ed. Ancora, Milano. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Horizon from the XXI GC. GAST 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Cf. XXI GC. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Cf. GAST 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Cf. GAST 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Cf. GAST 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Cf. GAST 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)