

Marist ECHO

Institute of the Marist Brothers

Number 32 - Year 13 - June 2000

CHOOSE LIFE

The Preparatory Commission for our 20th General Chapter has chosen the vitality of the Institute as the Chapter's central theme, adopting the slogan, "Choose life."

The Chapter will convene in September 2001.

The Lord challenges His chosen people in Deuteronomy: "I call heaven and earth today to witness against you: I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the Lord, your God, heeding his voice, and holding fast to him. For that will mean life for you, a long life for you to live on the land which the Lord swore he would give to your fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." (Dt 30, 19-20)

Article 171 in our Constitutions is clear and to the point: "The vitality of the Institute can be measured by the quality of our response to God."

The choice is ours. As in the case of the Israelites of yesteryear, God has placed before us – brothers and lay people – life and blessings, death and ruin. As an Institute, we are posing these questions to ourselves: What does it mean to choose life here and now? Are we daring and bold enough to do it?

We look to our 20th General Chapter for a promising, hope-filled response.

Saint Marcellin Belongs to All of Us

Br. Benito Arbués, Superior General

A year has gone by since Marcellin's canonization. The light and warmth of that grace-filled event continue to bless our Marist Family. I enjoy listening to men and women who want to be "Champagnats today." That might seem like just a trendy slogan or a shooting star springing from the excitement of April 18, 1999.

To me it's something much more than that, and it continues to develop. It is showing itself in deeds rather than words. I know people who have given up promising careers to dedicate themselves to the pastoral care of souls. How can we not be amazed by the fact that Saint Marcellin is the fountain of inspiration for more and more lay people, inspiring them to take on commitments in solidarity, do volunteer work, and care for marginalized children? How can we not be overjoyed by their choice to be in education, encouraging young people in

their search for God? How can we doubt that these lay people who are choosing to live out their Baptism in Mary's way and Marcellin's footsteps are truly a treasure for our Institute? We brothers feel proud and happy to share the "gift of Marcellin" with lay people, but sometimes we just stand around wondering what we should do about this new and hope-filled reality. Maybe we need someone to come along and shake us up, make us shed fears that are holding us back, and tell us what was told to the Apostles, "Why do you stand here looking up at the skies?" (Acts 1, 11) Let us rejoice, because Saint Marcellin belongs to us all, especially the young! ♦



Brother Benito meeting teachers in Quito, Ecuador, March 2000.

O U T O F A U S T R A L I A

A special community

Kate Craig

Marist Farmhouse. Mittagong. Province of Sydney. AUSTRALIA

Living with three Brothers and three other Young Adults in a Marist Community has been an enriching experience for me over the last few years. This is a special Community which is experiencing the Superior General's call to explore some of the options that arise out of sharing in the charism of our Founder. I say our Founder because I consider myself a Marist and a sharer in Marcellin's charism.

We start our day with prayer, and work at networking with other Young Adults who wish to be associated with us as Marists. Our ministry involves offering hospitality and welcome to each other, to the Brothers, to School staff and to students from our schools. We maintain the buildings and the grounds by working together and supporting each other. All of us have our own particular gifts to offer. I earn some 'pocket money' by co-ordinating a spirituality program for staffs of Marist Ministries called "Sharing Our Call". I also work occasionally as a casual supply teacher and conduct some retreats. Other community members do other work to earn some extra money: Ben is a Pharmacist and does locum work; Joe and Madeleine sometimes work in our vineyard; the Brothers have enough to do without adding extra tasks to their day!!

We recently organised Easter celebrations at 'Farmhouse' and thirty young men and women joined us in celebrating the Easter liturgies. On Friday we walked the way of the Cross through the grounds and



Kate and some other teachers at Farmhouse, Australia.

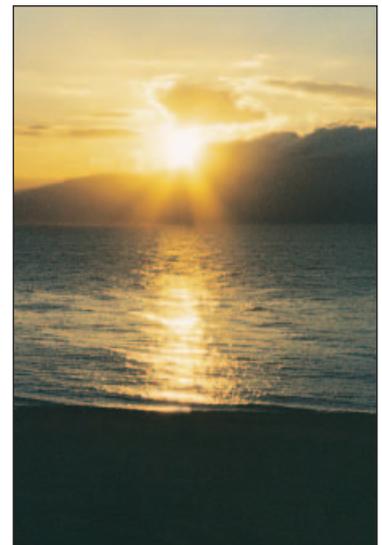
told the story of Jesus' passion and death with scripture and music. We entered our chapel and venerated the Cross in preparation for a night of recollection. The next day was spent preparing for the

Resurrection liturgy. Many of those present were gifted musicians and they practiced most of the day to prepare for our celebration of the Easter

night liturgy. We started with the Easter fire and again moved through the grounds reading the scriptures. We entered the chapel for the liturgy of the Eucharist. We sat around a long table for this ceremony.

During the year some of our highlights will be hosting five "Sharing Our Call" gatherings, conducting 'Making a Difference' (MAD) retreats for senior high school students, looking after the senior Brothers during their annual retreat and playing host to the Tunisian and Angolan handball teams just before they go into the Olympic Village for the Games.

Maybe other Young Adults from other places in the world would like to join us. I have often thought that I would like to belong to a group called 'Marist Backpackers'. We have many such visitors to Australia and we would be delighted to meet and share some time with them. Joe is going to 'World Youth Day' in Rome in August and Ben is visiting La Valla School in Cambodia in July. Perhaps you will see one of them there. ♦



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INSTITUTE OF THE MARIST BROTHERS

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Mission in Africa: the result of a flip of the coin

An interview with Br. Luis García Sobrado by Br. Lluís Serra

Br. Luis García Sobrado, Councilor General, was born in the region of Galicia, Spain. He first set foot in Africa when he was 24 years old, after his Provincial had flipped a coin to decide whether to let Luis continue his studies or go on mission. Luis worked as a formator. Today he continues to keep his hand on the pulse of Marist Africa.



WHERE DOES YOUR LOVE FOR THE MISSIONS COME FROM?

I began my education with the Marists in La Coruña. You can find elements of my love for the missions – and its culmination in my dedication to God’s call – in my belonging to apostolic movements, my love for reading and drawing on my Galician roots, and my adventure-loving nature as a youth.

HOW MANY AFRICAN COUNTRIES HAVE A MARIST PRESENCE?

Marcellin’s charism is present in 18 countries, all of them situated in the sub-Saharan region of the continent. In all there are 439 brothers there, including about one hundred from other parts of the world. By far, most of the brothers come from within Africa.



Brothers Benito, Andrew and Luis in Kumasi, Ghana.

DOUBTLESS A SIGN OF HOPE...

African brothers have assumed responsibility for our Marist mission, a sign of our maturing presence there. Today, Brothers coming from other parts of the world can concentrate on assisting with

specialized tasks such as formation work, the launching of apostolic movements, and programs promoting justice and peace, supporting whatever requests the African brothers make of them.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR MARIST LIFE IN AFRICA?

I look upon the future of our Marist mission in Africa with a lot of hope. Three elements of our charism are in great demand and very well suited to the needs of our mission there: youth, the most needy, and education. Africa has 700 million people, half of whom are less than 16 years old. There’s a great need for Marist brothers – as many as possible.

IS THERE AN OPENNESS TO EMBRACING CALLS TO THE RELIGIOUS LIFE?

The notion of vocation is deeply rooted in the hearts of the African people. God comes first. Whatever God asks, that’s it – end of discussion. Offering a son to God continues to be a sign of election and blessings. The tremendous level of affective equilibrium among the people of Africa provides them with a solid human basis for community life, consecration, and mission.

WHAT IS IT THAT AFRICANS FIND SO ATTRACTIVE ABOUT ST. MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT?

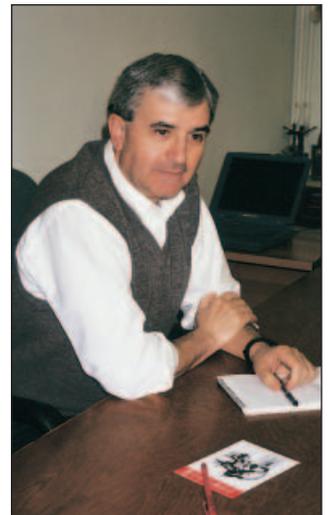
I see four outstanding characteristics that grip their imagination. First, Marcellin’s practical way of doing things. Second, his stature as an educator and formator of educators. Third, his position as an older brother, i.e., the one who takes responsibility for looking after one’s family, with great affection for younger brothers and sisters. This is what touches their hearts most deeply. Fourth and most important is the religious dimension to Marcellin’s life. An African is drawn to the religious life by spirituality, by the mystery of God.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE INSTITUTE’S OUTLOOK UPON ITS MARTYRS IN AFRICA?

I have been very close to the lives of Chris and Joseph. I would call them

“Brothers in Martyrdom,” – a British brother and a Rwandan brother who died together trying to save the lives of two other brothers and three postulants. They died out of love for their brothers and God.

Their lives have had a profound impact on our Institute. They are making us reflect deeply, but we need to look still further into the practical implications of this sign from God. ♦



● LIFE-GIVING MARIST EDUCATION

For the most part, children and young people experience Marist education in a structured setting, but this opens up their lives to wide-ranging vistas. In some countries, primary education is the chief means for combatting poverty. In others, emphasis is placed on helping marginalized and wayward youngsters. Whatever the situation, Marist education aims to provide schooling for a life based on believing and on learning how to be, to do, and to share. This is precisely what St. Marcellin had in mind.

LEARNING WHAT BELIEF IS ALL ABOUT

On finishing my degree, I took on two jobs. One involved preparing teachers to take their professional exams and the other teaching religion in a Marist junior high school to students in their final semester.

Memories of the time I was their age served me well in preparing classes. I had been fortunate to find myself in the care of people capable not only of teaching me course content, but also of giving me the witness of their lives. Their personal example had drawn me closer to a Loving Father, one who gave meaning to my life.

It wasn't easy for me to start out, for times had changed and there was more resistance to religion. Instead of considering that an obstacle, I saw it as a calling, a mission, a challenge that led me to sign up for pastoral work with the young people in the school.

I'll never know what I've been able to impart and transmit in the thirteen years I've been at the Pastoral Center, but I know I've learned some things with my students. One is that teenagers, after the rejection they sometimes show in dealing with matters of faith, are asking us adults to be credible role models. Secondly, that any old answer isn't good enough for them. This observation has led me to study theology, and to reflect continually on my own faith. And third, that the important thing is not to indoctrinate but to accompany them in their growth and give them vital spaces where they can meet and experience the God of Jesus of Nazareth.

Marián Aceves Orrantia
Province of Norte, Bilbao, SPAIN

TO BE OR NOT TO BE

"I am fat and ugly", "I'm useless", "I don't like who I am"... Those of us who are close to children and young people hear those cries everyday. They are urgent pleas for our Marist commitment to accompany these young folk, to stand along side them in solidarity. From my reflection and shared experience of such situations I have come to see the following factors as a basis for my response :

1. Within our fundamental being as male or female, sexuality is a key element in our self-understanding, and our coming to accept God's wonderful gift of our sexual body as a way for both communication and growth.

2. My affectivity and feelings, it is clear, profoundly condition who I am. They form the basis of my individuality. That is something I can easily overlook. That's why deepening this psychological element becomes a pathway for self-knowledge and self-esteem.

3. But all that is incomplete unless I enter into the very depths of my being, the place where I encounter the most basic questions and answers. There I find the best of myself : freedom, love, commitment, vocation, the encounter with God in my life.

To create and strengthen my self-esteem and self-appreciation, at the same time fostering hope and joy in opening myself to the God of love, seems to be the best way to begin to BE. This attitude is fundamentally important in the context of a culture in which persons lacking self-confidence are having dazzling personality cults constantly thrown their way.

Pablo Villarmarzo
Province of Rio de la Plata, Montevideo,
URUGUAY.

NG SCHOOL • DU CATION

“MARIST EDUCATION AIMS TO PROVIDE AN EDUCATION FOR LEARNING HOW TO DO”

I was called to the ministry of teaching and when I responded to that call, I embarked on the most incredible journey. A journey which has necessitated teaching and learning, leading and following, doing and contemplating. In the context of the Marist school I have endeavoured to find this balance between giving and receiving and impart this to my learners.

But the rapidly changing focus of education in South Africa, as well as the increasing demands placed upon the school by society, has taken its toll - even on the most resilient educator. We live in an era where instant gratification, materialism, and self-advancement dictate the pace of life. Educators are leaving the profession in droves - in search of greener, more lucrative pastures, less stressful pastures. Shepherding can be a thankless job!

1999 - The year of our founder's canonisation afforded me the opportunity to rekindle my vocation to teaching. I launched my students on an exploration of the life and charism of Marcellin, I found myself burning with enthusiasm. His love for teaching was infectious.

I think all Marist educators have stood in awe when reflecting upon the profound insights Marcellin had into the psyche of the child. Like South Africa, his country had been traumatized by political conflict, social inequality and dire poverty. His children also suffered from spiritual and emotional degradation.

The Marist school strives to keep this vision alive with our distinctive quest to educate the whole child. We aim to impart life skills that are deeply entrenched in the gospel of Jesus Christ and, above all, to model the joy of service.

May our lives resonate the words of Jesus - “I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

Evona Rebelo
Province of Southern Africa, Cape Town,
SOUTH AFRICA

FOR REFLECTION AND DIALOG

- 1. To what extent is the Marist education that we are imparting, here and now, a school for life, where one learns to believe, be, take action, and share?**
- 2. What insights of Saint Marcellin can we incorporate into our current school curricula to provide for the holistic education of those we teach?**

CLASSROOMS WITHOUT WALLS

I have had a unique perspective in this past year, serving as Director of a program for adolescent males whom the courts referred to our care instead of prison, and as Principal of a high school in a poor rural area of the United States.

I have been struck by the fact that a “Marist education” does not require a classroom setting. The young men who were given to us by the courts were very much aware of two things: they needed to change their lives and improve themselves, and they needed to help other people. Often times, these young men came from the poorest economic backgrounds. They lacked money, but they also lacked self-respect and a sense of their personal worth. Their contact with many of our brothers, those who worked with us and those who just visited from time to time, made Champagnat real for them and allowed them to become part of a “family” – the Marist family. We helped them progress in their education through our sharing of gifts together. In the school where I presently minister, many students come to us from families who are very poor. And yet, these young people learn that they have gifts to share with the elderly, the homeless and young people with special needs. Our calling as Marists is to bring Champagnat's spirit to young people in whatever setting we work with them, so that they realize their gifts and share them with those around them. In that light, the world becomes our classroom!

Br. Michael Flanigan
Province of Poughkeepsie, New York, USA

Fraternities accept the challenge

LETTER FROM BROTHER BENITO

Last Christmas Br. Benito wrote a letter to the Institute – to brothers and lay people. Several Fraternities have taken him up on his invitation to seriously reflect on its contents.

Fraternities in France have decided to share their thoughts on this letter throughout the year, and will hold a meeting of animators and moderators in October, with plans to carry out some projects.

The Le Cheylard Fraternity writes: “It’s clear that Brother Benito’s letter is inviting us to change the way we look at things vis-à-vis ‘the poor,’ and change our approach toward those whom society puts on a pedestal. Exactly who are the poor today? Our sharing makes us realize that the young are so often vitally interested in the poor... Our whole fraternity is trying to get young people involved in our work of helping the people in Central Africa... This year, we collected

medicine and money on April 15th.”

A SCHOOL AT THE SERVICE OF THE POOR

The “Champagnat” Fraternity in Irapuato, Mexico sums up its reflection on Br. Benito’s letter this way: “Saint Marcellin brings us back to Jesus, whose mission transcends all social and economic structures. His action in our hearts, like yeast, is capable of transforming any temporal reality, whenever we turn to Him and believe in the Good News. His revolution in the heart of every man and woman of good will is a silent one. Our ongoing conversion consists of learning to listen to what the poor are telling us. To experience life as Champagnat did, we need to become awash in his love for Jesus and Mary. To deepen our love for Marcellin is to delve more deeply into the heart of the Gospel. Ever since this school, ‘St. Marcellin,’ came into being, we were determined to be faithful to his desire to

make Jesus known and loved, giving preference to the children of the poor. Of our 900 students, two-thirds of them live in very poor conditions. We never turn away a handicapped

child who can do the school work. In the case of orphans, we charge them nothing.

At present the school has 50 teachers, of whom 20 belong to our fraternity, which also includes parents.

We’re very excited about redoubling our efforts and paying even closer attention to the poor, the marginalized, and our orphan children – imitating Christ in Marcellin’s way.”

NEWS BRIEFS:

Representatives from Fraternities in the Province of Norte, Spain participated in a “Spirituality Workshop” held in Lardero. They are continuing to reflect on this experience, and to absorb our Marist spirit and philosophy.

Using Brother Benito’s document “Suggestions for a New Approach to Vocation Ministry,” some members took part in “Province Days,” reflecting on the topic of “Re-founding the Institute.” Meals, friendship, and a joyful spirit were shared by all, and there was time for personal reflection and working in groups. The dreams and challenges facing the Institute, expressed in poster form, were offered to our Good Mother and Saint Marcellin during the Eucharist.

Fraternities in France have scheduled a gathering at the Hermitage to celebrate the first anniversary of Saint Marcellin’s canonization. It will be an event-filled day, with a



A Fraternity in Catacocha, Ecuador, March 2000-05-30

MY FAITHFUL FRIEND

Trust, peace, love, a role model – these are just a few of the feelings and ideas that Champagnat inspires in me. The little virtues are very important to Marcellin, since they are nurtured and developed in our everyday lives, and they do a lot to help us get along well with each other. It is essential to be patient with others and with ourselves... and to trust. I have total confidence in Marcellin – to such a degree that whenever any bodily or spiritual distress overtakes me, all I have to do is call upon this tireless traveling companion of mine and I get instant relief. On April 18th I hit the jackpot, being able to “see” the brilliant light of Saint Marcellin’s smile as he was filling me with a feeling of total joy and delight. I felt so incredibly HAPPY. Thank you for allowing me to share your charism under the tender, compassionate gaze of Mary our Good Mother!

Silvia Campana. Fraternity of Our Good Mother, Mar del Plata, Argentina.



The first Marist Fraternity in Bouaké, Ivory Coast

welcome, Eucharist, a potluck meal, a visit to Marist historical sites, testimonials, group discussions, and a musical presentation to conclude. Some representatives have been invited to participate in the Province Assembly, whose theme will be “Together in Building the World of the 21st Century.”

French Fraternities are sponsoring 40 young people from their country who want to take part in World Youth Days, to be celebrated in Rome from August 15th to the 20th. These Fraternities have also scheduled two summer activities: vacation time together from August 5th to the 13th, and a retreat experience from August 14th to the 17th. The retreat themes will be fraternal life, Marist spirituality, and the Jubilee Year.

In Couvin, Belgium, the second Fraternity in that country is coming into being.

Fraternities in Chile have celebrated their first National Conference. They reflected on their common experience of “being drawn to Champagnat’s spirituality and taking in his spirit, living and radiating it in their homes, at work, in retirement, chapels, gardens, . . . Doing good quietly for people in need.”

TWO TESTIMONIALS:

“The day someone asked us to join a Marist Fraternity and we said OK, our lives turned around completely. There was a tremendous reawakening of our family’s faith, a whole new way to live our faith in the Lord. . . I thank God for this op-

portunity He has given us, me and my whole family, letting our paths come into contact with the Marist Way. I pray daily to Saint Marcellin and our Good Mother to help us in our tasks, so that we will never turn our backs or close our doors to this amazing way of living.” (Luisma, Norte Province, Spain)

“These days I’m working at a day care center in San Francisco, an impoverished area in Bilbao. The children range in age from 5 to 8. Most are Gypsies. Kids with lots of family problems, no money, and basically, in dire need of loving care and attention. In the beginning this work is very hard, but in the end, it’s extremely gratifying. It makes you feel really good inside. It fills you up with joy and satisfaction, knowing that you’re doing what you can for your neighbor, the bottom line for Jesus and Marcellin.” (Cristina, Norte Province, Spain) ♦



Brother Juan Miguel Anaya, Secretary of the Preparatory Commission for the 20th General Chapter

BEYOND CORESPONSIBILITY

It is my great pleasure to thank the 770 lay men and women who, either individually or in groups, have made the task of our Commission so much easier in preparing for the Brothers’ 20th General Chapter.

The fact that the responses come mainly from Latin America (37 groups and 222 people) and Europe (35 groups and 505 people) is due more to the make-up of our works throughout the world and the disposition of Provincials than to any lack of desire to participate.

In a separate analysis of the responses of lay people and the brothers, we find a great similarity in the list of topics that the Chapter should take up, and the hopes for the period following the Chapter. Lay people and the brothers agreed on five of the six most often mentioned topics – Spirituality, Solidarity, Vocation Ministry, the Laity, and Community Life – although in a different order of preference. The number one topic listed by lay people was the Laity – very understandable! Lay people chose Presence in New Places, while the brothers listed Mission.

The hopes coincide completely, although the order of preference is different once again. The four hopes most often cited by lay people and the brothers are: an Increase in Sharing with the Laity, Renewal of Community Life, an Increase in Vocations, and an Increase in our Presence among the Poor.

Br. Juan Miguel Anaya

Getting to Know St. Marcellin Better

Brother Alain Delorme, The Hermitage, France

In canonizing St. Marcellin, the Church has invited people everywhere, especially those just finding out about him, to deepen their knowledge of his life and quest for holiness, the goal of all baptized Christians. (Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, N°40)

How Marcellin enjoyed meeting people and keeping in touch with them. Several witnesses mentioned this virtue during a diocesan enquiry prior to his beatification. The widows Jayet and Moulin stated, "He was very approachable, it was a joy to speak with him." Jean-François Badard, son of the sacristan at La Valla, said that "Father Champagnat was gentle and warmhearted, and always enjoyed a good conversation." Brother Marie Jubin, who spent seven years with Marcellin, affirmed, "I have always found Father Champagnat to be good-natured and kind, ever ready to help people in any way he could." Brother Aidan, who lived with the Founder for three years said, "He made you feel welcome the first time you met him. That warmth, together with his outgoing personality, made it a delight to speak with him."

All this confirms the writings of Brother Jean-Baptiste in his biography of our Founder. He describes Marcellin as being "cheerful, open and frank, strong, courageous and fervent, constant – always even-tempered." (Life, 1989 French edition, page 274) And he adds, "It was to that friendly, open-minded, easy-going, persevering and conciliatory temperament of his that he owed

a great deal of his success as a priest and the Founder of our Institute." (Id)

Marcellin's upbeat character, that magnificent gift of Providence, blossomed at the heart of his family, under the aegis of Jean-Baptiste, his father, a born teacher, who "by his prudence and conciliatory character earned the esteem of everyone in the district of Marllhes." (Life, page 2) Until he was fifteen years old, Marcellin was trained in that school of his father. We also know that he got along very well with his brother Jean-Pierre, with whom he wanted to raise and sell sheep.

In 1805, after a very difficult first year at the minor seminary in Verrières, Marcellin won the confidence of his teachers and was put in charge of a dormitory. In addition we know that he paid careful attention to the needs of those around him, as in the case of his discouraged friend, who thought of leaving the school. Marcellin realized the situation, talked things over and prayed with the young man, and persuaded him to stay. (Life, page 16) In this we see the discretion of the young seminarian. His biographer notes, "As Marcellin had a certain natural eloquence and persuasive tone, people gladly listened to him, and he won over several classmates to God." (Id.) All through his life, examples abound of his warmth and approachability – at the major seminary in Lyon (1813 to 1816), in his pastoral care as a parish priest in La Valla, and all during his labor of love in founding the Marist Brothers. ♦



"To teach is to love" a sculpture by Heber Riguetti is dedicated to St. Marcellin Champagnat, the teacher, in Montevideo, Uruguay

NEWS BRIEFS

- *The Preparatory Commission for the 20th General Chapter has set up a competition for a logo on the theme "Choose Life". Anyone can enter. The competition closes on July 15, 2000. You can look up all the information for it on our website www.fms.it*
- *The Pope honored the 12,000 martyrs of the 20th century in an ecumenical service held on May 7, 2000 at the Colosseum in Rome. Our Marist Institute numbers 204 martyrs, the great majority of whom gave their lives during the last century.*
- *The Superior General and his Council have gathered in Rome for a plenary session from May 23, until July 15.*
- *"In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat: a Vision for Marist Education Today" is a lively Marist document on education. Published in 1998 it is the combined work of both Brothers and lay people.*
- *Archbishop Henri Teissier of Algiers, has announced that he intends to open a joint process for the beatification of the 20 Algerians martyred in recent times. Among them is Henri Vergès, a Marist Brother, murdered on May 8, 1994. He gave 25 years' of his life serving Algerian youth.*
- *More than 300,000 children are fighting as guerillas or national soldiers around the world, according to the figures released by the "Coalition to prevent the use of Child soldiers", an association of international organizations.*