

Marist ECHO

Institute of the Marist Brothers

Number 46 – Year 16 – December 2003

IN MARY'S WAY

Practicing Marist spirituality as Saint Marcellin Champagnat has handed it on to us means following Christ as Mary did, in our efforts to pass on God's love to children and young people through education and teaching them about their faith. In this sense, Mary is a constant source of inspiration in our lives. The centerfold of this and future editions is being dedicated to reflecting on Mary's words in the Gospels, meditating, sharing, and praying about them. She experienced everyday challenges similar to our own, even though the times and locales were different. She heard God calling – received her vocation – and after a period of soul-searching replied with faith and trust. Her inner journey had its anxious times, when she searched for Jesus and couldn't find Him. Her spiritual life didn't blindfold her. She knew how to see things as they are and respond to the needs of those around her. She noticed the wine running out at the wedding reception. Without any fuss, she took appropriate steps whenever it was necessary to get involved. Mary of Nazareth is a spiritual, dynamic and inspiring beacon for brothers and lay Marists alike.

Request: permission to be a child. Decision: pending.

Br. Seán D. Sammon, Superior General



Br. Seán hands over his circular "A revolution of the heart" to Br. Onorino

Regardless of our age in years, the feast of Christmas can help you and me to focus on the world of children once again. Customs differ, as do nations, families, and each of us, but when our world stops to celebrate, or simply to remember the birth of Jesus, don't we sometimes find ourselves quietly appreciating a few often overlooked childhood treasures: like wonder, simplicity, and playfulness?



Now, if each Christmas day we can be grateful for these gems in the lives of some young people, what makes us deny so many others a right to them, right now? For example, UN officials tell us that the resources of Guinea are

being strained beyond capacity by thousands of refugee children fleeing wars in Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast and Liberia, often without their families. Likewise, ECPAT, an organization dedicated to preventing the exploitation of children, reports that along the border between what was once Eastern and Western Europe, bus and rest stops, and gas stations, too, have been turned into "bazaars" pairing children from Eastern and Central Europe with "sex tourists" from the West. Violence and torture are common. The children – usually from large families driven to prostitution by poverty – are paid on average between \$6 and \$30; some are only given sweets.

Christmas, a day to be stunned by God's unimaginable love for each of us. Christmas, that day when permission to be a child is granted once again. This Christmas pray and work to include so many present-day children within that sanctuary too.



Rome's General Administration community with Br. Seán

FROM CANTON ATEOS, EL SALVADOR

*I'm dreaming of a Marist school...**María Celina Ruano, School Principal, "San Antonio" Catholic School Center*

All to Jesus through Mary, all to Mary for Jesus

I'm María Celina Ruano de Moreno, I live in Cantón Ateos, El Salvador; and I'm the current and first lay principal of the "San Antonio" Catholic School Center. A school with a student population of 412 boys and girls, located in the countryside, serving families with meager resources and a high rate of illiteracy.

I've been at this school since 1989, I know and live the Marist charism, and took part in the REMAR movement before coming to the school. In 2001 I was chosen to become Principal as the result of a process the brothers used to create a new presence among the most needy, in fidelity to St. Marcellin's plan for his little brothers from the very beginning. The place selected was Talnique, a village relatively close by but with the most pressing needs.

At first, when the administration was placed in the hands of lay teachers, we were shocked. Going from night to day wasn't easy. We were used to seeing the Brothers in the classrooms and running the school full time. Our confidence was shaken – we thought the level of education and discipline would suffer once the Marist Brothers were no longer directly involved.

Right at that time I got a shot in the arm from reading the book *¿Quién se ha llevado mi queso?* – (*Who took my cheese?*), by Spencer Johnson. Brother Javier Espinosa, the

Provincial back then, had given it to me. It shows us how to deal with changes in the workplace.

Today the mission of the laity is better understood –

seen as one that calls for sharing and dedication and the assuming of responsibility for animating others in the faith. The lay principal lovingly dedicates his/her time and talents, creativity, spirituality, and education to the apostolate in order to help students become good Christians and virtuous citizens.

After three years, the teachers have forged a wonderful spirit of unity and the Marist charism continues to flourish among our students, even though the Brothers are no longer present on a permanent basis. The brothers in the Talnique community continue to help out at the School. One is the Rector of the School and works with us in the administration, and the other two work in guidance and other activities. The School continues to enjoy its good name and student applications are great.

My dream is for this school to continue to provide an education steeped in our Marist charism, of vital significance to and in solidarity with the most needy children and young people in our community. May we be Champagnat today.



María Celina with some of her students



Meeting at the school

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“ACT JUSTLY AND LOVE WHAT IS GOOD”

Brother Dominick Pujia, interviewed by Brother Lluís Serra

Br. Dominick Pujia is 52 years old and comes to us from the Province of the United States. Born in Yonkers, New York he is an advocate for youth – has spent many years in youth ministry. He is the new director of the Institute’s Bureau of International Solidarity, Rome.



BIS project in South Africa

IN THE FACE OF POVERTY IN THE WORLD, DOES BIS “GIVE A FISH OR TEACH HOW TO FISH?”

BIS uses its programs to teach people how to fish. Our advocacy for fresh-water issues before the EU, through our affiliation with the African-European Faith and Justice Network, aims to establish a world where social development can occur. Our assistance in project funding and development encourages brothers to develop creative solutions for change that go beyond acts of charity.

HOW DOES ONE GO ABOUT DISMANTLING THE STRUCTURES THAT PERPETUATE UNJUST CONDITIONS TOWARD THE POOREST?

First, develop a sense of solidarity with the poor. Know who they are, their situation. Walk with them. Then, having access to resources they do not have, using those resources to affect changes for the better.

ARE THE BROTHERS AND THE MARIST LAITY CAPABLE OF BECOMING A VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS?

I believe that if they are ministering to people as

Marists are called to do, be it in a formal classroom before students or working with homeless children on the streets, they will surely be a voice for the voiceless.

IS THERE A FORM OF SOCIAL

INTERVENTION INSPIRED BY MARCELLIN?

Our mission in education, in all its forms, is a very powerful way to intervene in society. Making “good Christians and good citizens” and making Jesus “known and loved” are a force for change in this world. Today, more than ever, educating young people, especially those most forgotten and at risk, holds the promise of empowering people to establish more just social structures.

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT FUNCTIONS OF BIS?

Our advocacy for justice, our presence before international bodies, animation of our provinces, communities and ministries, assisting in project development, awarding small

grants that encourage change, and now, our attempts to encourage networking among Marist NGOs, are all linked to our purpose.

WHAT MEANS HELP YOU MOVE YOUR WORK FORWARD?

First, the energy and expertise we have in the dedicated people who work in our office. Letizia Quintas and Stefano Oltolini are the perfect blend of the heart and mind needed for this work. Equally important: the Superior, the General Council, the rest of the General Administration, our province and district leaders, and the Marist brothers around the world. Their interest, encouragement and good will make it possible to advance.

IF SOMEBODY WANTS TO WORK WITH YOU, HOW CAN HE/SHE ASSIST?

Live the words of the prophet Micah (6,8): “Act justly, love what is good, and walk humbly with your God.” Do that where you are and that will greatly increase the effectiveness of our work.



Another BIS project, this one in Sri Lanka



Brother Dominick Pujia, Director of BIS

"MAY IT BE DONE TO ME ACCORDING TO YOUR WILL" FAITHFUL TO OUR OWN VOCA

God's dream for our lives helps us find our place in the world. He doesn't impose but points out what's best for each of us. Believing God's word shapes our lives translates into our being faithful to His call that we feel in our hearts. Welcoming His dream doesn't do away with questions and hard times; rather it fills our lives with maximum meaning, just as it did for Mary of Nazareth. As brothers and lay Marists desiring to follow Christ wholeheartedly, we have Mary to show us the way.

LIVING THE PRESENT, AS MARY DID

One of the greatest challenges in responding faithfully to God's call has been a continual process of letting go. In my life I have spent some time searching and reflecting where I believed God was leading me. Yet each time I came to realise that the direction I believed I was faithfully responding to was merely part of a longer journey leading towards another place God had in mind. With all my plans for the future, each time I found that I was being gently, or not so gently, redirected along another path. How hard it is to live, listen and respond in the present! What an incredible model Mary has been for me of living not for the future, but with two eyes attentive and focused on the present. Mary didn't know what she was getting into when Gabriel came with God's invitation. Although confused, not knowing what her choice would mean or where it might lead to, she trusted and accepted. Without any great plans or ideas of what this would mean for the future – she simply said 'yes' to today. How difficult it is to totally let go – not according to my will, but your will be done! It was this trust and letting go that led me to working with the faith formation of boys. Each day I am called to say 'yes, I trust you'. Although Mary was disturbed when she heard God's invitation, she trusted and lived the day - letting go all to God! Mary's example shows me how to respond faithfully to God each day.

Tony Clarke

Director of Faith Formation
Marist College North Shore,
Sydney Province – AUSTRALIA

MY VOCATION IS LIKE A TRAVELING BAG...

God has spoken to me of his dreams for my life several times already.

It's just that I'm inattentive (or afraid), and always left with little to say.

Sometimes I think of my life as a movie. As the story unfolds, God puts me in charge of a mission and leaves a traveling bag for me at a busy intersection.

I open the bag and find various appliances (gifts), trying to figure out what they're for and how to use them. Then I ask myself, "What am I going to do with all this? Will the fact that I have these things benefit anyone?"

What happens after that is amazing: many others come along with their traveling bags, and it just seems right for us to organize in order to accomplish more. I see us all together, astonished, looking at the vast array of instruments at our disposal.

Our vocation (the traveling bag) is a unique personal gift, and becomes even more valuable when we share it with others. Contemplating the gifts we have received from God enables us to understand God's mission and dreams.

Bringing our vocation to light, then, requires treasuring that traveling bag and believing that it's possible to do great things with it.

Now I focus on the gift of being a woman. That's where I find a call and a beautiful rallying cry that I share with my companions today – lay people, brothers, and sisters – on the Provincial animation team: never stop seeing the world through the eyes of a woman, and never stop seeing women in the world.

Today I have come across another one of your words.

Lucía Rostro

Responsible for the Area of Formation
Province of Western Mexico Animation Team
Guadalajara, MEXICO

CORDING TO YOUR WORD” TIONS, AS MARY WAS TO HERS

GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. Sharing the experience of my vocation with my group, how would I respond to the question, “What is God’s dream for my life?”
2. How does Mary of Nazareth deal with God’s call? What aspects of her personal journey can nourish our Marist spirituality?

CHALLENGE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: “HOW CAN THIS BE DONE?”

The great challenge of Christian spirituality is to be faithful to God’s love-filled call to be fully alive. Answering this call entails paying close attention to current events, important issues, and the urgent need for a good education to deal with the world of today, and then becoming involved in constructive ways.

For me two attitudes are especially challenging: careful listening to God’s will – and responding to God’s desires for me in ways that are honest and true.

In my life as a lay Marist, Mary’s example helps me immensely in developing these attitudes. Mary, who asked: “How can this be?” (Lk 1,34) – Who welcomed God’s will: “May it be done to me according to your word.” (Lk 1,38) – Who cherished what she heard in the depths of her soul: “And his mother kept all these things in her heart.” (Lk 2,51b) – Who was always ready to serve others: “Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste...” (Lk 1,39) – And especially, who introduced us to Jesus as our Lord and traveling companion: “Do whatever he tells you.” (Jn 2,5) Mary, our Good Mother, invites me to develop a more intense prayer life, act with greater resolve, and be ready to listen and help the people with whom I live and work.

This is my vocation, my challenge as a witness to Christ; this has been my ongoing quest in putting my Marist spirituality into practice.

Heloise Afonso de Almeida Sousa
Center for Marist Studies
Province of North Central Brazil
Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, BRAZIL

“LET IT BE DONE TO ME ACCORDING TO YOUR WORD.” FAITHFUL TO OUR VOCATION, LIKE MARY

God’s plan for us allows us to discover our place in the world. God does not impose on us what is best for us, but reveals this to us. To accept that the Word of God marks out our existence means that we are faithful to the call felt in our hearts. Relying on God’s plan eliminates neither the questions nor the difficulties, but gives a sense of fullness in our lives, as was the case for Mary of Nazareth. All Marists, brothers and laypeople, want to be faithful to our vocation to follow Christ as Mary did.

Our being faithful to our vocation in the same way that Mary was demands a behaviour similar to hers during her dialogue with the angel Gabriel; and then, in her relationship with God and people. For, the final words “Let it be done to me according to your word” are the result of a process of deciding with the one sent by God. The yes of Mary retains its dynamism until Pentecost and after.

As for Mary and Jesus, the will of God for us brothers and laypeople is like the compass of a pilot or a navigator, which indicates the direction to follow in our relationships and actions with the poorest around us. With this attitude, our human and vocational problems will be resolved with the help of the Holy Spirit by ongoing discernment.

Frère Valentin Djawu.
Province of East Central Africa.
Democratic Republic of the Congo.

IX National Assembly of Marist Fraternities in Mexico



A spirited time

When we travel to a place and say we feel at home, that's when we know that we are among family. That was the spirit that reigned among the 120 participants – lay Marists and several brothers – during the three-day 9th National Assembly of the Champagnat Family in San Juan de los Lagos, Mexico October 17, 18 and 19.

As happens with many movements, the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family (CMMF) in Mexico is going through tough times. Not surprising then that the Assembly concentrated on clarifying how this difficult period developed and – in the presence of God, as Mary always was – praying and reflecting on the reasons for it, closely examining and elucidating them in an attempt to overcome the crisis. Reinvigorating and deepening the spirituality that has brought new life to the group has become the concern of all involved.

The assembly provided times for intense reflection. All the topics presented were very enlightening: The Institute's thinking on the beatification of Brother Basilio Rueda; Marist mission and spirituality as a commitment to holiness for the lay Marist; Together as a family and in partnership with Mary, dedicated to proclaiming the world's salvation; and Our commitment to the poor.

The laity found plenty of opportunities to advance along the road they have chosen in coming to grips with questions such as: What is the state of your fraternity? To what can a fraternity's vigor be attributed? What weakens a fraternity? How do you coordinate the path of

each fraternity along lines that may be common to all? How do you insure the effectiveness of regulations among fraternities, without excessive bureaucracy? How are lay people assuming their leading role in a movement essentially their own? With your Marist charism, how do you live as a member of the wider local and universal Church?

Many are the challenges that fraternities are facing. One is very tied in with the current situation of the Marist brothers. As the number of brothers working in many areas decreases, they have become less available to accompany fraternities; in many places they are no longer present. Some fraternities who used to rely on their accompaniment are feeling like sheep without a shepherd. The situation has become so acute that some fraternities have gone out of existence. Others are



Coming from all over Mexico, pursuing a common goal



RECREATING THE IMAGE OF MARY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

...Our understanding and appreciation of this extraordinary woman of faith today is not much different from what was commonly held by 19th century believers.

...The mother of Jesus had been frozen in time, trapped in images created by Renaissance artists, placed on a pedestal, and elevated beyond our reach.

Here at the dawn of the 21st century, we as an Institute need a new appreciation of Mary: one in keeping with the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, and, at the same time, respectful of the varied and rich traditions that are so evident among us. It goes without saying that this woman of courage and strength who was so important to Marcellin should have a central place in our spirituality, just as she did in his.

Brother Seán Sammon, *A revolution of the heart*, page 55.



The Marist Family gathered in San Juan de los Lagos, Mexico

continuing, albeit with fewer members. The importance of having a brother accompany fraternity members is based on the fact that he brings a particular spirituality into their midst, the spirituality of Marcellin Champagnat, which lay Marists see clearly reflected in the brother. And he is able to transmit it just by being present during their meetings.

Another challenge for this group is the ongoing search for identity that any movement or fraternity has in relation to the Marist Institute. First the members must keep in mind that they are an ecclesial group, belonging to a parish, with a clear-cut mission to evangelize; then, that they share in some way in a charism and have a spirituality identified with a religious congregation that places it at their disposal.

All of us are involved in trying to find the true identity of lay Marists. Members of the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family know they must find ways to bring new life and energy to the Movement's existence with or without the presence of the brothers. They know that this is their very own movement, imbued with Champagnat's charism and the Marian spirituality characteristic of the life of the brothers. As a group proclaiming the gospel, they should clearly see the need to unite prayer and action, and have their actions demonstrate their commitment to working with the poor.

As Br. Enrique, the Provincial, said in his talk, it's a commitment that demands hard work. It could include an honest appraisal of each day. Not a routine "exercise" performed every night... but an earnest attempt to look for greater love and life. That way the fraternity will open itself up to the action of the Holy Spirit, an action we might call "the will of God," into which members pour all their activities and feelings and ask themselves if God is telling them something; where they share findings, pray and meditate on everything in Mary's company and maternal care, and in the end ask each other, "What more needs to be done?"

Every person has his or her answer. Without a doubt there's an enormous wealth wrapped up in each one of those answers. Devotion to Mary, our Good Mother, should be found in each one of them; then, like Fr. Champagnat, we will also be able to say with complete assurance: this work is her doing.

May Our Lady at the Shrine of San Juan de los Lagos, whom so many pilgrims come to visit, and in their simple, humble way to thank her for the many graces they have received, grace us also with her heavenly care.

Br. Paulo Celso Ferrarezi
Secretary of the General Council's
Laité Commission



Angelique
van Zeeland
Executive
Secretary of
AVESOL
Porto Alegre,
BRAZIL

AVESOL

The Volunteering and Solidarity Association, (AVESOL), came into existence in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2002. One of its aims is to promote volunteering for activities in solidarity, helping people and groups deal with social and economic crises. With helping hands from other partners, especially the Marist University Group (GUM) of the Catholic Pontifical University of Rio Grande do Sul (PUCRS) and Marist Schools and Social Programs, it labors to build up community involvement and better the lives of those whom society rejects.

In keeping with its vision, the Association works with others to provide community and environmental education, promotes sustained development, and encourages people's economic solidarity.

After just one year in existence, it takes pride in having strengthened the resolve of community groups, bringing smiles to the faces of children, joy to the elderly, and solidly optimistic dreams that have no tolerance for going along with the unjust realities in today's world; the Association is dedicated to encouraging alternative ways to remedy injustice.

In accomplishing its mission, AVESOL promotes an organized volunteer program geared to developing social projects that help train people committed to social justice and human dignity. It supports fund raising efforts of community organizations.

In the struggle for a better world, AVESOL reaches out to everyone working to build a freer, more just and participative society.

The spirituality of Father Champagnat

Br. André Lanfrey

Through these lines, I hope to outline one interpretation of the spirituality of Champagnat through the use of some of his sayings.

His God-centeredness is shown in the Formulary of 1816 and the Spiritual Testament: "All for the greater glory of God, and for the honour of Mary, Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ."

The nothingness of the created is made obvious by the divine glory of the Creator, as expressed by the Nisi Dominus, (*Life*, p.299), but it is a nothingness that derives energy from being dedicated to "the work of God".

"The honour of Mary" comes actually from her nothingness, because, "hidden and unknown", she bore the Word. And that is why humility must be "the cherished virtue" of Marist Brothers if we



Statue of St. Marcellin, Archbishop Molloy High School, New York NY USA

are to bring Jesus into the world.

In recognising Mary as "first superior", Father Champagnat seems to be inspired by Marie of Agréda, a Spanish mystic of the 17th Century, who established Mary as the abbess of her Carmel and whose work "The Mystical City" portrayed her as queen and inspiration of the Apostles. Some letters of Champagnat deem the Hermitage to be the mystical city of Mary.

The imitation of Mary leads onto what the masters of the French School call "the adherence" to the states of Jesus, in his mysteries of the Incarnation, of the Redemption and of the Eucharist. Father Champagnat recalls this by a colourful turn of phrase: "See, Br Louis, the first three preachers of the love of God are: the Holy Virgin (the Incarnation), the Crucifix (the Redemption) and the bell tower (the Eucharist)" (*Biographies*, p. 24)

But Champagnat is a priest and, in the sixth chapter of his *Life*, more than eight pages are given to his devotion to the Eucharist, condensed in the following expression: "We have everything in Jesus Christ, and we have nothing without Jesus Christ". (*Life*, p. 339) This allows us to understand that in his eyes the priest continued Mary's work of bearing the Word for the salvation of humanity.

This spirituality of the glory of God supposes a missionary action that is urgent and universal, expressed in the words "All the dioceses of the world enter into our plans", the brothers being missionaries invested with a "ministry" of catechetical Word and apostolic example.

Like all authentic spirituality, that of M. Champagnat is thus God-centred, Christological, Marial and Apostolic. Expressed in a personal synthesis, it makes him a spiritual master and not only a pious priest.

PUBLICATIONS

www.champagnat.org

The official Web site of the Institute of the Marist Brothers will be up and running in the middle of January 2004. Replacing the page that was dedicated to coverage of the 20th General Chapter, this newly designed site will rendezvous in cyberspace with any and all who are interested in our spirituality and mission. It's basic contents will appear in the Institute's four official languages: English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish. It will continue to provide the online Marist Bulletin, which has gone beyond the 100-issue mark and is being enthusiastically received by our growing number of subscribers. This new Web site of ours will spread news about current happenings in the Institute and provide surfers with information about the our Marist presence throughout the world.

Marist vocation year

Brother Superior General and his Council have given the green light to celebrating a Marist vocation year, to begin on September 8, 2004 and come to a close on August 15, 2005. This will be a special time for us to listen to the calls of God, the Church, and the world. Today, as in Marcellin's time, children and young people need Marist brothers, as well as lay Marists passionately living the charism of Champagnat. Reflecting, praying, and giving witness are resulting in activities fostering vocations in the Church and our Marist Congregation. Youth will now have the floor.