



## COMING CLOSER TO THE NEW RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LAITY AND THE BROTHERS

# BROTHERS AND LAY MARISTS, WE BOTH SHARE THE MARIST CHARISM, AS A GIFT OF GOD TO THE CHURCH

*Our charism expresses all its fruitfulness and fullness when it is lived exactly by the different members of the Church. It is a gift that goes beyond the life of the brothers.*

Charisms are received for the People of God and belong in first place to the entire ecclesial community, and for that reason, cannot be seen as the exclusive property of any individual or group. The Marist charism does not belong exclusively to the Institute; it is **A GIFT OF GOD TO THE CHURCH**. Moreover, we understand that our charism expresses all its fertility and fullness when it is lived exactly by the different members of the Church. It is a gift that goes beyond the life of the Brothers.

The founders are a gift for the entire Church. The founders are not the property of the religious life, even though the religious were their first children at the time. But they have to consider their lay brothers and sisters as heirs with full rights, in their lay way of life, of the charism and, consequently, as responsible for its growth and adaptation (Cf. José Cristo-Rey).

Br. Charles clearly affirmed it for us in 1993: "The charism of an Institute does not belong exclusively to that Institute. Charisms are for the Church and belong to the Church. We are the heirs of Marcellin's charism and, for this very reason, its guardians, but it is for us a joy and a responsibility that we be capable of sharing this gift. Laypersons should reveal to us new facets of that charism, to the degree that they advance in living it more fully. Sharing with them spiritually should reveal to us new depths of our vocation as Brothers. When we have arrived at the point where we see ourselves as co-responsible for the inheritance of Marcellin's charism, then we will be able to sing a jubilant Alleluia".

The fact that laypersons associate themselves with the Marist charism shows the new possibilities of this gift. It is necessary to allow the charism new expressions. When this happens, the Brothers are



opened to communion with other fundamental forms of life and they discover still more the wealth of their own charismatic gift. Lay Marists contribute a new form of understanding and living the Christian life and of living the Marist charism in a secular environment. The charism shared by Brothers and Lay Marists can bring us to "discover unexpected and fruitful implications of some aspects of the charism" (VC 126).

We do not understand our opening to lay people unilaterally. It is not a simple matter of making them participants in the gifts the brothers have

received, as one in possession of a truth that must be passed on. We want to emphasize that, from their different visions and experiences, lay people enrich and help to deepen the charism. It is, therefore, a fruitful interaction.

With some authors we are happy to say that the resurgence of the foundational charisms is not limited to the interior of the institutional Church, but goes beyond its confines and expands, not only among non-Catholic Christians, but even among believers in non-Christian religions who feel called to participate in the saving mission, at the side of Christians (religious and lay), as transmitters of the love and the mercy of God. There is nothing strange about this phenomenon from the point of view of Christian theology, as demonstrated by Vatican II's referring to the "seeds of the Word" present in all cultures; and the universal action of the Holy Spirit, who blows where it wishes and is not subject to the confines of the institutional Church.

The new relationship invites us to recognize the specific way lay people live the Marist charism. Therefore the affirmation of the 21st General Chapter: We recognize the value of the lay Marist vocation. The Lay Marist discovers God's call to live Champagnat's charism in his or her lay state, as a particular way of developing the Christian identity common to all the faithful. "It is a personal call to a specific way of being disciples of Jesus" (Cf. Gathered Around the Same Table - GAST 13). "To some of us, God has touched us and has given us a Marist heart. Certainly, more than our decision, it has been God taking the initiative. We cannot live any other way: We are Marists" (GAST 4).

We echo so many lay testimonies: We feel that God invites us to be responsible for perpetuating the charism of Champagnat in our world and among our people (the laity). We are convinced that to be Marist laypersons is a vocation and, therefore, a gift of God (Lay Marists of Venezuela, 2009). We Lay Marists are Christian men and women who have listened to the call of God in our lives to live Champagnat's charism and, in the lay state of life, we respond to it. The initiative for our vocation comes from God. He loves us and wants our fulfillment; therefore he invites each one of us to follow a unique path. It is not that we, brothers, yield something of the Marist charism to the laypeople. The lay vocation is a gift of God. Therefore we find ourselves in a relationship of equality: the vocation of a Lay Marist, the vocation of a Marist Brother (Br Emili).

We believe that the lay persons called to the Marist vocation can contribute originality in the way of understanding the Founder and of living his spirituality, besides the possibility of grasping the power of the Marist charism as a gift of the Spirit for today, here and now. They can situate the charism in the various concrete realities, translating it for each culture and favoring, thus, the inculturation of the charism. The recognition of the lay Marist vocation represents a great opportunity for all Marists: for the Brothers because it means seeing a new family, broader and, above all, with a distinct visage: a communion of hearts in a great plurality of cultures and ways of life. It is a challenge for both, because it dares us to create a new family.

**Annie and Br Diogène from  
the community of the Hermitage**



# For reflection



Gianluca and Rosa from the community of Giugliano, Italia

## Readings:

- *Chap. 5 Forms of Relationship with the Marist Charism, in Gathered Around the Same Table*

“Lay people should reveal to us new facets of the Marist charism, to the degree that they go on living it more fully.” Br Charles.

Based on your experience, what **new dimensions of the charism** do you sense are already being introduced by Lay Marists?

*What has to die in me in order for this new relationship to be born?*

It costs us to accept that for something new to be born, something has to die. We resist death. A new Brothers – Lay Marists relationship: What has to die in me so that this new relationship can be born? (Br Emili).

## Facing myself:

- I consider the Marist charism a gift I share with brothers and lay people.
- I feel co-responsible for its growth and adaptation to our time.
- I believe that lay people can reveal new facets of the charism.
- Recognizing the value of the lay Marist vocation causes me joy.
- I see the lay Marist vocation as a personal call to a specific way of being disciples of Jesus.
- Sharing the charism challenges me to create a new, broader family and with other ways of life.