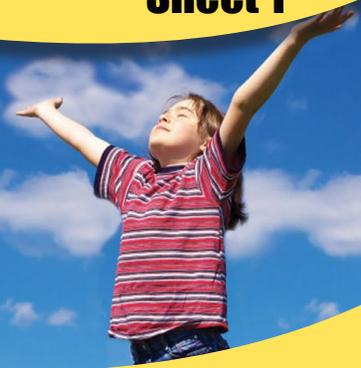


*Good news*

*for new times*



**Gathered around the same table**

The present moment in the life of the Church speaks to us of new relations between those who compose it. Relations which carry us to a much greater communion.

**The Document “*Around the same table*” is born from this life.** The strength which animates it and the initiative from which it proceeds, is the experience of numerous laypeople, men and women from throughout the entire world, who feel that God has called them to a vocation: to be lay Marists. It has been elaborated in ninety-two documents from lay people throughout the world, some of which appear in this text. Such is the foundation material from which the lay Marist vocation and the elements which comprise it have been described.

**“*Around the same table*”, although centred on the lay Marist, is addressed to everyone,** Brothers and lay-people. It doesn't matter whether they are searching, whether they have experienced them for a little time or whether they have lived it for years. What is being offered is an instrument for experimenting, questioning, for deepening what they live, to decide and continue to head forward.

The image and experience of the shared table is a great symbol suggested by Jesus to explain the Kingdom of God. The table of the Eucharist unites us around Him and has rendered him present for two thousand years. In the same way the poor table at La Valla represents for us, Marists, the beginnings of our vocation. Brothers around the same table, we share work, prayer and fraternity; as around our family tables we gather to celebrate life. There are in these pages, a desire to invite more.

## **Contents for Deepening**

Context of the document “*Around the same table.*”

Following Vatican II the Christian laity began to become aware of its dignity and its important work in evangelisation

A few lay people found in the charisms of religious institutions a source of inspiration to live their faith in life.

Gradually, it was noticed that the Spirit was asking for a new relationship between all those who comprise the Church, a relationship based more on what unites us than what separates us.

It is somewhat similar to that which we find in the evolution of the Marist charism in our family.

Since 1985, with the approval of the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family, coming from the 18th General Council right up today, the incorporation of lay people in Marist life and mission has grown increasingly: first laity at the 19th General Council; key documents addressed to Brothers and laity; the International Assembly of the Marist Mission with the participation of more than 20,000 laity and Brothers in some 2,000 reflection groups; and a large diversity of life experiences: the progress of formation shared between the brothers and the laity, communities consisting of Marists of different states of life, etc.

In order to deepen our study in this context two basic texts are offered us

- An annex which presents the ecclesial context in which “Around the same table” was born.
- The letter of presentation of the document written by Br. Sean Sammon as well as the introduction by the same author.

## The Church communion ... “Community of Communities”.



### **Annex:**

#### **The context which gave birth to the document “*Gathered around the same table.*”**

In order to speak of the vocation of the lay Marist we are going first of all to situate it in our ecclesial context. We are going to speak of the most important changes that have taken place in the Church and in the Institute of the Marist Brothers.

Vatican Council II was one of the historic events which shaped the twentieth century. It was an ecumenical council of the Catholic Church convoked by Pope John XXIII who made the proclamation in January 1959. Up till its closure in 1965 four sessions were held.

It was the council which featured the highest representation with an average attendance of some two thousand council Fathers from all parts of the world and having a great racial and linguistic diversity. There were also representatives of other Christian faiths.

This event and all the documents which emanated from it were a marvellous reflection or, could we say, a discernment ( seeking the will of God for his church) numerous aspects of which are yet to be implemented. For it was a way of thinking very much ahead of its time and above all it proposed a great change in the church 's way of seeing itself and organising itself.

## **From Church as “pyramid” to Church as “communion”**

Before Vatican II the church saw itself as a pyramid, a “perfect society ” which was hierarchical. After the council it defined itself as a “ community of communities” or “people of God” gathered around a table to which all are invited and sharing the same dignity. It was spoken of as “Church – as- communion”.

The truth, up to the present, is that even if the stance of Vatican II is “officially” recognised it is not a lived reality neither by all those making up the Church nor in every place.

The two ways of thinking co-exist and are the cause of internal conflicts of which we are aware.

However many Church movements have come to birth over recent years displaying a great diversity and dynamism and bringing together people with a variety of choices and life styles.

## **In the Marist Institute.**

Great changes have also taken place in the Marist Institute. But it should be noted that the original project which saw the birth of the Marist Brothers was in fact in accord with Vatican II.

Marcellin Champagnat and his seminary companions dreamed of forming a family bearing the name of Mary.

Just as there existed a Company of Jesus (the Jesuits) they aimed to found the Society of Mary comprising priests, religious and lay people, all as one family. But this plan proved to be too far ahead of its time and did not gain the approval of Bishop Castracane. So there were separate developments – on one side, the Marist Fathers and, on another, the Marist Brothers as well as the Marist Sisters and the secular Third Order. In the beginning relations between these branches were quite close but with the passage of time they grew apart.

After Vatican II there was the happy discovery that charisms are gifts of the Spirit for the whole Church ; all could benefit for each was bearing their own particular gift in proclaiming the gospel.

Among Marists Brothers, the canonisation of Marcellin Champagnat has helped them to understand better that the Marist charism received through the founder was a gift for the whole church.

The Marist charism, that is to say our particular qualities in living the gospel – love of Mary, simplicity, humility and modesty, love of work and family spirit – was for everybody.

That assumes a change of mentality because in former times it was thought that the charism was received solely by the Brothers who in turn passed it on to those around them.

Now the charism can be perceived as being at the core of the family which gathers together Brothers, lay people, Marist sisters....

All can receive this gift in equal measure but each incarnates the charism in the way of life to which he or she is

called: as religious, lay person, priest....

## The lay vocation

When we speak of vocation we often think it is something which concerns only religious or priests. “The laity are those who don’t have a calling.” How many times we have heard this said!

Starting from this new concept of Church-as –Communion all of us have a vocation. We are all called to holiness, namely, to become fully who we are.

## Some Church Writings

“ In recent years the fruits of the teaching of Church as communion has been the growing awareness that her members can and must unite their efforts , with a view to cooperation and exchange of gifts , in order to participate more effectively in the Church’s mission. This helps to give a clearer and more complete picture of the Church herself, while rendering more effective the response to the great challenge of our time, thanks to the combined contributions of the various gifts.

Today , often as a result of new situations, many Institutes have come to the conclusion that their charism can be shared with the laity. The laity are therefore invited to share more intensely in the spirituality and mission of these Institutes. We may say that, in the light of certain historical experiences such as those of the secular or Third Orders a new chapter, rich in hope, has begun in the history of relations between consecrated persons and the laity.” (*Vita Consecrata* 54)

“ Everyone in the Church precisely because they are members receive and thereby share in the common vocation to holiness. In the fullness of this title and on equal par with all other members of the Church, the lay faithful are called to holiness: ‘ All the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity.’

“All of Christ’s followers are invited and bound to pursue holiness and the perfect fulfilment of their own state of life.” (*Christifideles Laici* 16)

“ In Church -as – Communion the states of life by being ordered one to the other are thus bound together among themselves. They all share in a deeply basic meaning : the manner of living out the commonly shared Christian dignity and the universal call to holiness in the perfection of love. They are different yet complementary in the sense that each of them has a basic and unmistakable character which sets each apart, while at the same time each of them is seen in relation to the other and placed at each other’s service.” (*Christifideles Laici* 55)



**We are called to the fullness of life.**



# Questioning ourselves and sharing

Br. Sean expresses to us his wishes regarding the document:

***“God grant that it be for all as a call to vitality and viability of the charism given to the Church by Marcellin, and from which each us will draw our own identities as Marists Brothers and laity.”***

*What are the feelings and desires at the beginning of this journey of study regarding the document “Around the same table.”?*

In the annex relating to the ecclesial context have been introduced some paragraphs from the documents “Consecrated Life” and “Christifideles Laici”.

*What are the key ideas of these two documents which I would like to stress?*



# Towards a new Earth?

It seems evident that we have all the feelings that a new era produces, that the Spirit blows the winds of change on the Church and on the Marist world, on our fraternities....

We feel it at present clearly and strongly, with an urgency which we use to be bold and to make decisions.

One hears sentences of the type “It is the era of the Spirit”, “It is the time of the laity”, “Let us sit around the same table”. The last General Chapter condensed them into a sentence, into an image: ***With Mary, let us set out to a New World!***

This New World, will it not be different ways of being the presence of God in the world of today?

We must be very attentive to the “signs of our times”, like Marcellin in his era; seek new ways to be able to share our great treasure: a life full of the meaning of the God of Jesus.

This is why we must strive to educate children and the young in our colleges, by trying to help them to find God in their lives, to live the values of Jesus, to put people in the first place..

But very soon they are plunged into a society, into a culture which extols and practices all that is contrary to this. And where it is difficult to encounter God.

The laity, which is aware of the great variety of gifts which God gives us can cause God to be present even in the heart of society in the various professions we exercise, in the various responsibilities that we have to face up to, in the relationships in which we live.; we can share our “being Marists”. in the world.

The gift of charism shared can open the frontiers of our mission and come to us more from the reality of persons.  
**Brothers and laity together, we are able to do more!**

*(Prayer of the European Meeting of the Fraternities of MCHFM)*

***Help us, Father, to discover that which you want from us now, to read the signs to discover what new lands await us.***

***Give us, Father, the courage and creativity to learn to see in our social and ecclesial Marist environment... to know how to be prophetic***

