

From communion

to community

Gathered around the same table

John-Paul II stated that we are finding ourselves in « a new era of association for the lay faithful ». Lay Christians no longer come to religious looking for some crumbs of the spirituality of their Institutes, but to « participate, with responsibility, in the mission of the Church to bring to all the Gospel of Christ as a source of hope for man and of renewal for society. »

The new type of relationship between laity and religious leads to a new genre of groupings, different from the ones of the previous epoque. The new ecclesial ecosystem is characterised by the assembly of evangelical or charismatic families, that is to say, bodies formed by institutions and groups of believers united by a single founding charism or a single « charismatic root », but with different states of life and with diverse accentuations of the same charism.

In the measure that the founding charism takes body as the central reference point for relations between religious and laity within the charismatic family, the religious-lay division, based on the different states of Christian life, diminishes and, at the same time, the communion of communities for the common mission gains ground. These communities have the same charism but with different life and vocation projects.

The spirituality of communion is the capacity to see above all what is positive in the other, so as to accept and appreciate it as a gift of God. ... Finally, the spirituality of communion is to know how to « make space » for brothers and sisters, in mutually bearing the burden of others.

(Charismatic families , of Antonio Botana, fec.)



Matter for study

1. Reading of chapter 3 of the document « *Gathered around the same table* ».
2. Extracts from the circular of Brother Charles Howard « *The Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family. A grace for us all* » (Rome, 15 October 1991).
 - « *So, Brothers, you are invited to help in the developing and nuturing of these lay groups, to the sharing of our charism, this gift destined for the good of the Church. As someone has expressed so beautifully: “Lay people are ready to write a page of history with us.” To provide a needed clarity of identity, we have chosen to call this new chapter in our history “The Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family”.* (p.377)
 - « *At the heart of the Champagnat Movement is the union of the Brothers and the lay members, our communion in Christ, living “a real bond of union and love”: “may they be one, Father, as we are one, so that the world may believe that you sent me” (John 17. 21). We are not simply good friends and pleasant company for one another - it is much deeper than that, for we are Christians together, sharing life in the Spirit, and sharing too a particular gift of the Spirit – the charism of Saint Marcellin.* » (p.393)
 - « *We are at the beginnings of a special moment of history with the prospect that the rediscovery of the full role of lay people in the Church will not only strengthen the Church in its efforts for “the new evangelization” but will gradually help to bring about a simpler, more evangelical Church. So we will be better able to work to build a new human society, a society built on what Pope John Paul calls the new Christian virtue of solidarity, thus developing a “civilization of love”. And for that we need generous, open hearts like Champagnat, men and women of apostolic joy, on fire for the kingdom.* » (p.395)



Questioning ourselves and sharing

The communion between laity and brothers completes and enriches our specific vocations and our different states of life. Not only is there place for both around the table, but we have a mutual need for one another.

- *What experience do you have of this reality of communion of Marist vocations in your life?*
- *What advances do you think we may make in this communion between brothers and laity?*
- *What difficulties do you see, actual or possible, in this communion between brothers and laity?*

In the Marist world there exist diverse forms of expression of this life in common: the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family, the communities of life of brothers and laity, and other Marist groups.

- *What feelings does this reality of communion and community arouse in you?*
- *What types of Marist community life do you think possible from what you are living today?*
- *How would you describe a possible life of communion between brothers and laity starting from your personal situation?*





The table at La Valla unites us with the whole world

*In my experience of community life with Brothers and lay people I am discovering the Brother as an equal, not as a stranger or someone superior. I appreciate his choices and his gifts and I understand his limits and shortcomings. I have experienced times both of solidarity and confusion. I feel energised and encouraged to share our lives because I am learning. The Brothers open their doors to me making me feel appreciated and included. All of this is lived in relationships which are simple and fraternal and characterised in fine detail which speak a lot for it. If I had to choose two words to describe this relationship they would be fraternity and communion .
(Testimony of a lay person)*

“ The table of La Valla is enlarged and it welcomes everyone around us. We want to be a source of peace in our profession , in our daily life , in our own heart. The efforts of daily life can distance us at times from and confront us with other people; but, in God, we wish to experience these difficulties in peace and serenity, seeking to unite and not divide”. (Gathered around the same table, 81)

- We act in such a way that the table where we gather may be like the table of La Valla; we want to enlarge it in order to welcome those around us as we listen to their hopes and needs.
- We share this experience and seize the opportunity to present to the Lord, through Mary, the lives of people seated at this large and welcoming table.
- We conclude by praying together the prayer which Jesus taught us, the prayer of table fellowship: the Our Father.