

Opening letter

Rekindling the fire!

Marist Vocation Year



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6 June 2004

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Marist Vocation Year - Opening Letter
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Children of a New Season

Remove your shoes, unwind
those layers of cloth
that hide the working of bones,
the velvet tones of skin,
the fine, essential you.
Pressed down, summoned by love,
you will burst into flames,
become the fiery bush
from which, in guise of angel,
ripe reality will leap.

We have come a long way,
a long waterway of motion,
prayer, thought,
a long river way of pain.
Shall we not see
the great golden shaft,
the arm of light reaching down,
slicing the water,
touching our nakedness
with new, tender joy?

Catherine de Vinck (1967)



*The vitality of our Institute
manifests itself in
our personal fidelity,
our apostolic fruitfulness,
in the awakening
of vocations.*

(C11, Art. 163)

6 June 2004

Dear Brothers and all who cherish the charism of Marcellin Champagnat,

It is early morning here in Rome. The last guests from Saturday evening's vigil celebration of the founder's feast have departed, the house is quiet, and the first hours of a new day are just beginning to unfold. What better time than the dawn of Saint Marcellin's day to begin a letter to you about the awakening of vocations to his Little Brothers of Mary.

On September 8th, 2004, we will begin an intensive year long and worldwide effort to do just that: promote vocations. Please

join me in initiating this time of grace. Like so many of you, I believe that God continues to move the hearts of young people and call them to a variety of vocations within our Church. So let's pledge to do all that we can to foster their generous response, while concentrating our efforts on those called to our way of life and mission as Little Brothers of Mary (C 192). After all, our Marist *Constitutions and Statutes* reminds us that to do so is one sign of our vitality as an Institute (C 163).

AWAKENING VOCATIONS

Well designed publications, attractive posters, lively and thoughtful presentations that deal with our life and ministry are all well tested means used to cultivate vocations. Each in its own way helps young people, their parents, and our Church at large to have a better sense of who we are and what we do,

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and most especially to learn something about what we cherish and hold dear.

When all is said and done, however, isn't it actually the lives of thousands of individual brothers over the almost two-hundred-year history of our Institute that make up the most

From time to time, it does no harm to ask ourselves what it was that first brought us to the life of a Little Brother of Mary, and what it is that keeps us here.

profound and effective means that we have on hand to awaken vocations?

And so your vocational tale and mine is a good place to start if we want to understand more fully just what the upcoming

year is to be all about. From time to time, it does no harm to ask ourselves what it was that first brought us to the life of a Little Brother of Mary, and what it is that keeps us here.

My own story began when I met the small group of brothers who staffed and administered the high school that I attended in the heart of New York City. Even with the distance of years, I can still remember what it was about those men that first captured my imagination and my heart. They were obviously religious people, and appeared happy in their work together and committed to it. There was also an evident spirit of sacrifice among them that somehow appealed to my adolescent soul.

And, finally, there was the question of passion. We cannot overlook this important element for it rests at the heart of any vocation worth its salt. Though I might not have recognized it at the time, I realize now that there were some very passionate men among the members of that



small group of brothers. In retrospect, I can see that in their love for Jesus Christ and his *Good News* and for those of us who were their students, they shared with us all some of the very same qualities that the founder first cultivated in a group of young men whom today we know as François, Laurent, Jean-Baptiste, Dominique, Louis-Marie.

Even now, I find myself surprised at how subtly God was at work in my life, though I surely would never have thought to use that language when I was fourteen.

So, I would have to say that I was blessed early on in life to meet a group of men who took delight in helping a rather uncivilized crowd of young men to grow up and grow closer to God. It was that simple. These men, many young themselves, were willing to waste time on us. *Time*, it was their only currency and they shared it with us freely and generously.

Perhaps in imitation or due to the mystery of grace, during

the years since, some of my happiest moments have been with young people, sharing their world, their hopes and dreams, fears and concerns, their questions of faith.

And so now, before we go any further, let me invite you to take some time to reflect on the story of your own vocation. Also after reflecting for a while, why not share your thoughts with someone else. I cannot think of a better way for any of us to begin our year set aside to awaken vocations.

VOCATIONS FOR MISSION AND NOT SURVIVAL

Vocation promotion should never be undertaken solely for the sake of survival. So also, it cannot be reduced simply to a question of numbers. Size of membership is not necessarily a sign of viability, nor is age always the best measure of vitality.

Our zeal for mission, then,

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rather than a desire to survive “come what may” must be our reason for awakening vocations. This tradition goes back to the days of Father Champagnat. The ever-unfolding tale of our Institute records that it was Marcellin’s visit to the bedside of Jean-Baptiste Montagne that convinced him of the need to found a community of brothers with this aim in mind: the

Our zeal for mission, rather than a desire to survive “come what may,” must be our reason for awakening vocations.

proclamation of God’s *Good News* to poor children and young people.

We know the story well. Called to tend to a dying teenager by the name of Jean-Baptiste, the founder discov-

ered that the lad knew nothing about his faith. Marcellin instructed him and administered what were then known as “the last sacraments.” On returning to the boy’s house a short while later, the priest discovered that he had died.

I have often wondered about the thoughts and feelings of the founder as he hurried home to the parish in Lavalla that evening. We can imagine his pace quickening over the course of the journey on foot.

We do know that on his return he met almost immediately with Jean-Marie Granjon, who had been a Grenadier in Napoleon’s army. Picture their conversation taking place on the bridge near what today is the Hermitage.

For Marcellin, the mission was clear, the reasons for founding a community of brothers evident. So clear and so evident were both that during the course of their conversation on that bridge, the founder’s passion captured the former soldier’s heart and convinced him



to join Marcellin in an adventure that would shortly become known as the Little Brothers of Mary.

The founder loved the children and young people of his day. More than once he said, “I

Do you believe as I do that the mission of our Institute is as vital and urgent today as it was during Marcellin’s time in history?

cannot see children without wanting to tell them how much Jesus Christ loves them, and how much I love them.” In our world today so many of these very same children and young people are exploited: the victims of war, human trafficking, and the streets. Denied an education and other basic human

rights, they are in desperate need of hearing God’s *Good News*.

And, so, I ask you: do you believe as I do that the mission of our Institute is as vital and urgent today as it was during Marcellin’s time in history, and that it will remain so for the foreseeable future? If you do, then let us agree that the awakening of new vocations can no longer be a sideline attraction for you or for me. Instead, we need to develop a plan of action that will help us promote vocations and then take the steps necessary to put that plan into action.

A FIRST SET OF CHALLENGES

A few challenges before we go on. First a challenge to my brothers in the Institute. If you and I want to make vocation promotion a top priority during the year ahead, the majority, if

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not all of us, will need to rearrange our other commitments so as to free up 20 percent of our best time to devote directly to that work. Why 20 percent? Because there is a lot to learn and a great deal of work to be done.

We can all beg off citing some very good reasons not to get involved. Lack of time, the

demands of ministry, age; who among us has not heard that litany before? However, if you and I want a future for the mission and life of our Institute, we need to avoid making excuses and instead enthusiastically commit ourselves to the work of this year set aside for the promotion of vocations.

And now a word to my lay

Reflection questions

Take a few moments of quiet time to collect your thoughts. Now, turn your attention to the questions below. You might want to jot down a few notes in response to each question. They will come in handy should you choose to share your reflections with others as time goes by.

1. What was it that first attracted you to our Marist life and mission and what keeps you here? Please explain.
2. Do you believe that our Marist mission is as needed today as it was in Marcellin's time? If so, just why; if not, why not?
3. What is your reaction to the idea of putting aside 20 percent of your best time this coming year and using it to awaken vocations to our Marist life and ministry?



partners. I ask you to join us during this important twelve-month period as we work to educate parents, the young people entrusted to your care and ours, and the Church at large about who we are as brothers as well as the nature of our life and ministry here at the dawn of the 21st century.

You know us and know what we cherish and hold dear. Help us to find the means to let others come to know us in the same way. And, help us, too, by inviting young people who have the qualities needed to consider making our way of life their own.

I have no hesitation, therefore, in asking that the work of inviting new members to join us be given top priority. All who share the founder's charism should be eager to promote vocations to the brotherhood he established. God's *Good News* remains to be proclaimed to more children and young people than we might imagine.

And what happens if all of us—brothers and lay partners

alike—take a decision not to make vocation promotion a major concern or to provide sufficient time to work in this important ministry? What are the consequences? Some would say that at the very least a failure to act and act decisively would probably diminish the possibility of a vital and vibrant future for our way of life and ministry.

Others would be harsher in their judgment: if we fail to act, they would tell us, perhaps we don't really deserve a future after all.

THE WORLD OF THE YOUNG

In an Institute the size of ours, is it possible to say anything helpful about "the world of the young?" After all, we have a presence at the moment in 77 countries. Some of them are rich and others poor; more than a few are Christian but others are religiously diversified; many different political systems are represented. For us, then, the

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“world of the young” wears many different faces.

So also, in some parts of our world, young people come to our way of life after considerable contact with our brothers. In others, however, they enter our programs of formation with little knowledge of the founder or understanding about a brother’s life. In still other parts

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of the world, they come in the main from cultures that are largely non-Christian, or where local traditions and customs call into question some of the centuries old practices of religious life.

In light of these differences, we need to exercise caution when speaking about an emerging generation. Rather than try to create a composite picture, therefore, I will instead tell some stories about young people in various parts of our world.

As you read through the next few pages, then, imagine yourself thumbing through a picture album, looking at snapshots that capture some of the many faces of our Institute worldwide.

a. Talk to us about sacrifice

A few years back, I visited one of our schools in South Australia. While there, I asked the headmaster if I could meet with some upper division students. A session was arranged with about thirty young men and women in their final year.

Early on in our discussion I made the following comment, followed by a question, “There



are not many young people coming to religious life in my own country, and also not many choosing religious life here in Australia. Can you help me understand just why this is happening?”

A young man by the name of George was the first to respond. “Seán,” he said, “part of the problem lies in the fact that your generation no longer speaks to our generation about the subject of sacrifice.” His answer surprised me.

George continued, “Your life is a life of sacrifice, everyone can see that. But the brothers keep telling me that it is like everyone else’s life. If it’s like everyone else’s life, why would I give the gift of my life to it?”

The point of this illustration? Let’s not assume to know what young people are thinking, especially when it comes to religious life. Sad to say, we often do. Or, worse yet, we accept media reports about their attitudes and points of view. Try talking with young men and women directly. Often enough

you’ll get a very different picture indeed.

b. Community and prayer as the backbone of mission

Talk with more than a few young men and women and you will also learn about some generational differences that exist today in our Church and in religious life. Mission, community, and prayer, for example, are often mentioned as forming the backbone of religious life. While an older generation of brothers has not ignored the last two, it has favored the first.

As a consequence, the questions that many young people in parts of our world have about spirituality, Jesus, prayer and faith have at times worried a generation of middle age brothers committed to certain ministries. And what is the source of their uneasiness? They fear that the focus of these young people could move away from mission and quickly degenerate into a spirituality best characterized

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by the phrase “There’s just God and me.”

Perhaps, though, the questions that these young men and women pose about prayer and faith can lead to a very different outcome and help point us toward a spirituality that speaks to the minds and hearts of people today. Yes, perhaps the outcome of their unrest with the *status quo* will be the discovery of new ways of praising God.

c. Some more “orthodox”

In more than a few countries that make up the so-called “developed world,” sisters, priests, and brothers will tell you that a number of young people applying to enter religious life today appear more orthodox than many of the members of the congregations to which they seek admission. For sure some of our brothers have pointed to this phenomenon from time to time.

Many reasons have been put forward to explain this situa-

tion. One that makes sense to me is the following: young Catholics in a number of countries lack knowledge of their faith because the religious instruction they have received in school was light on knowledge of some of our long standing traditions. This lack of knowledge about matters of faith has made them hungry for clear and solid answers.

In some countries also the emerging generation is one that has witnessed shocking change. They are now in the market for a share of stability.

d. Who are we, what do we hold dear?

When inviting a young man to make our way of life his own, we should be able to tell him what we stand for and what makes us different from other groups in our Church. Put simply, our identity must be clear and our mission defined. But to arrive at that point, we will have to make choices about our way



of life and the mission of our Institute.

Many young people today long to give themselves to something that demands passion and commitment. Those with an interest in religious life are no different. They want to be part

When inviting a young man to make our way of life his own, we should be able to tell him what we stand for and what makes us different from other groups in our Church.

of something larger than themselves and to live their lives in a way that makes a difference. And that means serving God in a radical way, a way that can only happen together with others.

They agree, for example, that community can be lived out in a variety of ways. At the same time, they also want to share a life together, in more than a casual way, with others who have the same vision and values; they desire to be part of a community where mutual concern and support, and a life of prayer are the foundation of its ministry.

More so, these young people want to talk about Jesus, and about prayer, faith, and what it means to have a relationship with God that demands sacrifice. They are confused when they find some of us strangely silent on these topics. Most especially, they want a religious life that demands something of them.

e. Happiness

With that said, many young people today also believe that God wants them to live an authentic life and to be happy. Let us not be hasty and judge

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this search for happiness as being little more than self-centeredness. After all, the opposite of happiness is not sadness but rather deadness.

The lives of saints do not teach us that suffering makes us happy. Rather they help us to understand that by taking the

path to holiness we also make our own an experience of happiness for which suffering is not necessarily an obstacle.

If you or I find that young people with these ideals are not looking at religious life in our part of the world, we need to ask ourselves just why.

Reflection questions

Spend some time thinking about young people that you know. They might be members of your family, the children of friends, students, those with whom you work in ministry, young people in the parish, or elsewhere. Once you have spent some time thinking about the young people in your life, please turn your attention to the questions below.

1. What is it that you most admire about the emerging generation? Take a moment to explain your answer more fully.
2. What is it about the young people you know that most baffles you? Once again, please take a moment to explain.
3. What qualities do you look for in a young man today when considering candidates for our Marist brotherhood?



Religious life is best suited to those who seek a challenge and life of sacrifice and service. A young person with little interest in these elements is best advised to look elsewhere when choosing a life commitment. Contemporary religious life should never become a haven for those looking for a comfortable home.

Make sure to include within your plan all others who share the charism of Marcellin and want to be involved in the work of this upcoming year of vocation promotion.

Finally, there are two additional areas that bear mention because of the confusion they can cause for young people who may have an interest in our way

of life. The first is the topic of permanent commitments and the second is celibate chastity and sexuality. Let's look briefly at each in turn.

f. Permanent commitments

In some cultures where the Institute finds itself today, the work of awakening vocations requires us to challenge current conventional wisdom about permanent commitments. In parts of Europe, North America, and the Pacific, for example, we are told that more than a few young people are reluctant to put down roots. Their hesitancy is due, in part, to what they have observed during their growing up years: the disintegration of family life and the collapse of some revered institutions. Many also believe that they will be freer if they "keep their options open." This notion is mistaken.

We need to reassure these young people that permanent commitments are quite compat-

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ible with freedom. Real freedom, after all, means to be self-determining. What better way to achieve that end than to put down roots!

g. Frank talk about celibate chastity

Celibate chastity is another area where education is needed. In the past, a person asking a brother why he chose to live a

In making any plan, we must also make sure that it is adapted to the culture in which we live.

life of celibate chastity might receive the following answer: “For the sake of the Kingdom; to love everyone and not just one person; to be more available.” More often than not, the

discussion stopped there.

My how times have changed. If no one asked any more questions in the past, they will today. And the standard answers of yesterday, valid though they are, will hardly satisfy many contemporary young people.

Adding to our difficulties are recent reports of child abuse and other sexual scandals involving some priests and brothers. They have left a number of people questioning whether a life of celibate chastity is a healthy way for people to live out their sexuality.

Two points. One, most people who ask questions about celibate chastity do so out of curiosity. After all, only a small percentage of the world’s population chooses to live out its sexuality in this way.

Two, in responding to questions about this aspect of our life, remember that we are not asexual; celibate chastity is one way to be a sexual person. Also, the spiritual life must be at heart of our life of celibate chastity. And finally, discipline,



asceticism, solitude, and a sense of humor are needed to live a life of celibate chastity fully. But aren't those the very same qualities needed to live any life well?

In the final analysis, however, when people express curiosity about our life of celibate chastity, more often than not they wonder about the place of intimacy in our life. Their question, "Is genuine intimacy possible in religious life?" The best response to that question is the presence within our Institute of well-balanced people with dear friends and an ability to relate easily with others.

A PASTORAL PLAN FOR AWAKENING VOCATIONS

In 1822, Marcellin Champagnat faced a vocation crisis, the first in the history of our Institute. And how did he respond? By taking action, beginning with his pilgrimage to the chapel of Our Lady of Pity. We do well today to follow his example.

CULTURE OF VOCATIONS

Today, more than a few people use the term *vocation culture* to describe an environment in which a call or vocation can take root and flourish. You and I can

Visibility! That should be the yardstick with which we measure any efforts taken on behalf of vocations in the institutions in which so many of us serve.

foster such a culture throughout the Institute this upcoming year by believing that vocations to Marcellin's Little Brothers of Mary exist today and that with God's grace and our human efforts we can find and cultivate them.

A Pastoral Plan to awaken vocations is another important tool that can help us organize

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the work that must be done to awaken vocations to our way of life and ministry. A number of provinces and districts already have a well-designed plan in place. For them, the year ahead provides an opportunity to revisit it and evaluate its ongoing effectiveness.

What about those Provinces and Districts that lack such a plan? The next twelve months gives them ample time to develop one.

A few points. First of all, any plan must be comprehensive and include in its details the Province or District and all who make up its membership, as well as each community and ministry. Make sure to include within your plan all others who share the charism of Marcellin and want to be involved in the work of this upcoming year of vocation promotion.

Second, in drawing up any plan, you and I are better off concentrating on what can be done rather than spending our time lamenting things we cannot change. For example, in

some parts of our world today families are smaller than in the past, young people have far more options in life from which to choose, and many make their life commitments at a later age. Neither you nor I

A personal invitation on the part of a brother is the single most often mentioned factor that has caused a young person to take a serious look at our life and ministry.

can do much to alter any of these realities.

We can, though, invite young men to our way of life and ministry once again; and we can open our homes and hearts to them. We can also help these young people, their parents and



families, as well as the Church at large to understand all that has happened in religious life and in our Institute during the almost 40 years that have passed since the close of Vatican Council II. Yes, there is a great deal that we can do to promote vocations, so let us put our energies there and stop wringing our hands about what we cannot change.

In making any plan, we must also make sure that it is adapted to the culture in which we live. The idea of having a universal Pastoral Plan in the area of vocations for the entire Institute is unrealistic. Differences exist between one region and another, customs vary. What is quite acceptable in one part of our world is looked upon with suspicion in another.

As a consequence, what appears below and in the pages to follow are but a few ideas to get your thinking started. Be as creative as you can as you plan for this year set aside to awaken vocations, and make sure to plan on the level of the Province or District, the community and

ministry. And don't forget to include in the plan exactly what *you* plan to do personally over the next twelve months to promote vocations to our Marist brotherhood.

a. Province or District

If our year of vocation promotion is to accomplish its end, each Province and District will need to have in place a comprehensive plan of action and a means for evaluating its effectiveness as well as adherence to it on the part of all involved.

Some suggestions. First of all, every administrative unit should have at least one full-time vocation promoter whose only job is the promotion of vocations.

Second, help everyone to understand that vocation promotion is not the responsibility solely of the appointed vocation promoter. Rather, his job is to help others do what they need to do to make this year all that it can be.

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Third, give some thought to designing an educational program about contemporary religious life aimed at lay men and women. For what reason? Some of our brothers will tell you that they feel a bit shell-shocked due to the extraordinary changes that have occurred in our way of life during the last three to four decades. If that is the case, just imagine the reactions of the average Catholic.

In recent years, a number have felt betrayed and fail to understand, for example, why in some countries we no longer staff the local school, or live in the brothers' house next to the Church. Developing an educational program like the one suggested a moment ago, would go a long way toward helping to explain the changes that have taken place in our way of life, and in our Institute in particular, during the last four decades.

Such a program, however, is urgent for quite another reason: everyone in the Church community has a responsibility

for recruiting new members for religious congregations, and that includes bishops, priests, and laity, as well as men and women religious themselves. In recent years, some among these groups appear reluctant to do so. I cannot help but believe that part of their reluctance may stem from a lack of understanding about our life today and the journey that we have taken since the close of Vatican Council II.

Catholic parents deserve special attention. At one time, they were one of our greatest allies in

*Fire has always
attracted the young to
religious life.*

the work of awakening vocations. In contrast, today many parents are confused about religious life, its nature and purpose, and the way in which it is



Reflection questions

Spend some time thinking about what you might do individually to awaken vocations during this year ahead. What skills can you bring to the task, what will be helpful to young people, particularly those with an interest in our Institute, how can you best convey the many dimensions of our life rather than one or another? Yes, take some time to pray, seek to understand what God is asking of you this year in terms of awakening vocations, and then turn your attention to the questions below.

1. As you look ahead to this year set aside to promote vocations to our Marist life, what steps will you take personally to do just that: awaken vocations?
2. What will you do the first month, during the first three months, during the first half of the year?
3. Is there a way you can combine your efforts with others to have even greater influence awakening vocations during this time of grace? Please explain.

being lived out. Where their trust has been eroded, we must make an effort to restore it and enlist their aid once again.

How might we use any educational program that we design? The Province adminis-

tration can encourage brothers to offer it as an adult education course in their local parish, or to use sections of it at school as an in-service with faculties or other groups at work, as part of a parent-teacher conference, or an

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Advent or Lenten series offered by a local Church group.

Many other means of education exist. A person with a talent for writing could write an article about our way of life for his or her parish bulletin or diocesan newspaper. Others might also give some thought to saying a few words during or at the end of Mass one Sunday. The means are not quite as important as the message: our life and mission as brothers is alive and well and ready to receive new members.

Armed eventually with a more accurate understanding about our life and mission, lay people will be willing to help with efforts to invite new members for our way of life.

The work described above could be coordinated by the full-time Province vocation promoter. He should not, however, take on these tasks for a local community simply because its members do not want to. His time is better spent working to convince them that the tasks mentioned are rightly theirs and

that they have more than the resources to accomplish them.

Finally, the media and the internet, where available, are powerful tools that have a potential to aid us in awakening vocations. Where a Province web page exists, the vocation promoter should make sure that the topic of vocations appears on it, and is effectively presented.

b. Local communities

Local communities have many opportunities to promote vocations. First of all, though, they need to sit down as a group prior to the onset of our Year of Vocation Promotion and agree to a common plan that ensures that work will not be duplicated, and that whatever the group decides upon will be effective. Prayer must be part of any community's overall plan for vocations, but there must also be other concrete actions on the part of the group.

For example, three to four times a year, a community might



agree to invite in different groups of young people who have some interest in religious life. They can be drawn from the school(s) or other places where the members of the community minister, or the local parish. A visit to one of our communities, particularly if it is well planned, can often help a person understand our way of life and our mission far better than a series of lectures about the subject.

Another community might invite in a group of parishioners of all ages for a time of prayer, followed by refreshments and a time to talk. During those conversations raise the topic of vocation promotion. Many people are more than willing to participate and help. They will not do so, however, unless asked.

The local parish is another good place to become involved, especially if it has an active youth ministry program. Many young people would benefit from having a more informed understanding about our life

and mission. One of the best ways they can acquire this information is through contact with a brother or other religious or a lay person who knows what we are all about.

A community might also arrange to print a pamphlet describing our life and mission and place it in the vestibule of the local parish Church, or in other places where similar materials appear. In countries where the local newspaper or television station does human interest pieces, one or two members of the community could commit themselves to write an article or participate in an interview about our life and ministry.

c. The works

Visibility! That should be the yardstick with which we measure any efforts taken on behalf of vocations in the institutions in which so many of us serve. Posters, pamphlets, days set aside to present the history, life and mission of the Little

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Brothers of Mary—all these should be regular fare in any school that we administer, social service project in which we are involved, project that we co-sponsor. By year's end our colleagues as well as those whom we serve should know clearly just what it means to be one of Marcellin's brothers.

While looking beyond the school, parish, or agency to all whose lives are touched by that institution, we also need to be sure that we do not overlook those with whom we share ministry. For example, there are often enough members of a school faculty who have given thought to religious life and our life in particular but just don't know how to bring up the subject. During the upcoming year we need to insure that opportunities exist to discuss the matter, and that they exist in abundance.

d. Each brother and lay partner

If you asked me to suggest one thing that you as an individ-

ual could do during the year ahead to promote vocations, I would answer immediately: invite young men that you know to think about making our life their own. A personal invitation on the part of a brother is the single most often mentioned factor that has caused a young person, as well as those further along in years, to take a serious look at our life and ministry.

So, to my brothers I say awaken vocations this coming year so as to find a replacement for yourself. And to my lay partners: awaken vocations so as to insure a vibrant partnership between brothers and yourselves. Without a sufficient number of brothers partnership with you is not possible.

To all I offer this reminder: personal prayer is most important. So, pray for those who have religious life on their minds. Pray for them daily. Pray for them by name.

If writing is your gift put it to good use during this year ahead by writing about our life and mission. And if music, or art, or



media is your passion, use it in the service of awakening vocations during the months ahead. Teach about our life if teaching is your talent; encourage vocations if your gift is to motivate people.

Above all, be creative in planning for this year set aside to awaken vocations. Time and again, ask yourself this question: how can I use some of my God given skills to help promote vocations? Give 20 percent of your best time to the effort, and don't forget to invite.

CONCLUSION

As I close this letter, a word of thanks to Brothers Théoneste Kalisa and Ernesto Sánchez. They have spent several months planning the many events that will make up the vocation year about to unfold. Their enthusiasm for this project and hard work are evident and they are grateful, as I am, to all of you who have contributed ideas,

suggestions, and plain good will to their efforts.

During his lifetime, Marcellin Champagnat had little in terms of material goods. At the time he set up his Institute of the Little Brothers of Mary, his wealth consisted of but two raw recruits and a house bought with borrowed money and urgently "in need of repair."

But Marcellin Champagnat had a dream. And it so consumed him that he could hardly restrain himself from telling all whom he met just how much Jesus Christ loved them.

Today the fire of that dream must burn as brightly in you and in me as it did in him. For the very same fire touched the hearts of two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and transformed in a flash the frightened fishermen of Israel whom Jesus called his friends and disciples.

Fire has always attracted the young to religious life. As we set out on this year dedicated especially to awakening vocations, let us not forget that when fire is

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evident at the heart of our way of life and ministry, it will likewise attract generous young men. Young men who will carry forward the traditions of François, Laurent, and Jean-Baptiste in our new century. Of that fact I have no doubt.

May God continue to bless and keep you and to make you his own. And may Mary and

Marcellin be our constant companions during these months ahead.

Blessings and affection,



Brother Seán Sammon, FMS
Superior General





Personal notes

Rekindling the fire!

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