

Letter of Pope Francis



To Brother Emili Turú Rofes,

Superior General of the Marist Brothers

Dear Brother,

It is a pleasure for me to greet you and, through you, the entire Marist family on the occasion of the Bicentenary of the foundation of your Congregation during which you will celebrate your 22nd General Chapter in Colombia. You are keenly preparing for this event with the motto "A New Beginning". This sums up a whole programme of renewal and implies a look at the past with gratitude, a discernment of the present, and an openness to the future with hope.

Gratitude is the primary emotion flowing from the heart. This attitude of thanksgiving is necessary in order to appreciate the great things that God has done through you. At the same time, giving thanks does us good; it helps us see ourselves as little ones in the eyes of the Lord and as indebted to a tradition freely given to us. You belong to a large family rich in witnesses who knew how to give their lives out of love for God and neighbour with that spirit of fraternity so characteristic of the Congregation which sees in the other "a dear brother, especially dear to me" (Philemon 16). These two centuries of existence have been transformed in their turn into a great story of devotedness to the children and young people you have welcomed from over the five continents and have formed into good citizens and, in particular, into good Christians. These works of charity are expressions of the goodness and mercy of God, who, in spite of our limitations and blunders, never forgets his children.

However, it is not enough simply to reflect on the past; it is also necessary to discern the present. It is right for you to examine yourselves and it is good to do this in the light of the Spirit. Discernment is objectively and charitably acknowledging your present state and facing up to it in the spirit of your founding. For his time, Saint Marcellin Champagnat was an innovator in the fields of education and formation. He experienced for himself the need for love to highlight the potential that each child has hidden within. Your holy Founder used to say, "Education is for the child what cultivation is for the field. However fertile the field may be, if it is not worked, it will produce only brambles and weeds". An educator's work is one of constant devotedness demanding sacrifice; but, education is a work of the heart and that is what makes it both different and sublime. Being called to cultivate demands, before all else, self-cultivation. The Religious-educator must take care of his own interior field, his human and spiritual reserves, in order to be

able to go out to sow and cultivate the ground entrusted to him. You need to be aware that the ground you are working and shaping is "holy", seeing on it the love and footprint of God. By your devotedness and effort, faithful to the mission you received, you will contribute to the work of God, who is calling you to be simple instruments in his hands.

Finally, I encourage you to be open to the future with hope, journeying with a renewed spirit. This is not a different road you are taking, but one brought alive in the Spirit. Society today needs people who are solid in their convictions, who can give witness to what they believe in, and, in this way, build a better world for all. On this journey, you will be guided by the motto of your Religious Institute, "All to Jesus through Mary; all to Mary for Jesus". Have confidence in Mary and allow yourselves to be guided by her in her humility and service, her readiness and silent commitment. These are the attitudes that a good Religious and educator must transmit through his example.

The young people will recognise something extraordinary in your way of being and acting and they will understand that it is worthwhile, not only to learn these values, but more importantly to make them their own. Mary will accompany them in this project and, at her side, they will be confirmed in their vocation, contributing to the creation of a constantly evolving humanity, in which the weak and the marginalised are valued and loved. This future that they desire so much and dream of, is not an illusion: it is being built today, saying "yes" to the will of God, with the certainty that, as a good Father, he will not deceive our hope.

I thank the Lord and Mary, our Good Mother, as Saint Marcellin liked to call her, for the presence in the Church of your vocation and service, and I ask for you the gift of the Holy Spirit so that, led by God's Spirit, you will bring to children and young people, as well as to all those in need, the nearness and tenderness of God.

Vatican City, 10th April 2017

Francisco



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