



# **AN APPROACH TO THE IDENTITY OF THE LAY MARIST**

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*Secretariat of Laity*



## Why these lines

Even if the document *Around the same table* presents and explains the *Vocation of Champagnat's Marist Laity*, it is not infrequent in some of the meetings to hear the same questions: who are the lay Marists? Who recognizes them as such? What does it mean to be a lay Marist?

The aim of these pages is to try and provide an answer to these questions.



## Different ways in which the laity approach the charism

The lay world interconnects with the Marist world through a variety of expressions. Many people come into contact, in various ways, with the life and mission of the brothers. Students, educators, catechists, administrative and service staff, former students, parents and friends know the brothers and have heard about the Marist charism. From this relationship with the brothers, with the Marist mission, with the spirituality, with the educations ministries, with the Institute... stem different levels of closeness and participation in the charism. As expressed in GAST, 9-11:



- Some live identities distinct from the Marists: some, because they have made vital choices different from Christians; others, because they have already found their own place in the Church.
- Other lay people have felt attracted by the witness of the Brothers. They admire their life and wish to be joined in some way with their spirituality or in mission, without this signifying consciousness of a shared vocation.



- **A third group of persons exist who, after a personal journey of discernment, have decided to live their Christian spirituality and mission in the manner of Mary, following the insight of Marcellin Champagnat. These are we, the Lay Marists.**

The Lay Marists are aware that being Marist is part of their Christian vocation. They freely and voluntarily opted for it

## Personal and group expressions by lay Marists

Lay men and women bear witness of their vocation in the Marist world with their lives:

- ✓ I can clearly hear this call in my life, as if that vocation had been designed especially for me. I speak of *a call that steeps my life*, a vocation that helps me be a more complete, happier person. It is a vocation that constantly challenges me and which every time I say 'Yes', turns me into a better person, in the various situations that my lay condition invites me to live. (Brazil)
- ✓ The first thing that struck me of the charism was its educational purpose, feeling that 'Marist' is *a way of being Christian in the world and for the world*, a situation that is not common in religious movements. But what led me to choose to be Marist, was seeing me confirmed in my womanhood, in me being an educator, in me being a member of the Church, in a community where there is an air of

family. And this is seen in the depth and simplicity of relationships, in the accompaniment, in the constant and liberating presence, in times of difficulties and disagreements, just like in any family.  
(Uruguay)

- ✓ Many times I doubted that my vocation was really aiming at the Marist spirituality. But God is still writing his story, even on contrary ways. It took me a long time to understand how simple and yet challenging the *Marist vocation* is. Little by little I began to feel that call in my life, as if that vocation had been designed especially for me.  
(Brazil)
- ✓ We are called to be followers of Christ in the manner of Champagnat. Saint Marcellin is our inspiration. He leads us to Jesus through Mary, our Good Mother and Ordinary Resource. With the Church, we believe that is God's gift to the world, which drives us to prolong its charism in history.

*The Marist charism steeps our existence.* We do not know how to be any other way. Our life multiplies and is strengthened in the mission; it is nurtured by the spirituality and becomes rich in the shared Marist life. Mission, spirituality and shared life are the three colours that, together in one single harmony, characterize us and make us admit: We are Marists!

(EMM Open letter)

- ✓ These are people (teachers, fathers and mothers, young, former students, co-workers) who after a personal journey of discernment decide to live the Christian spirituality and mission, in the style of Mary, following the intuition of Marcellin Champagnat. They are Christians who *have heard God's call to live the charism of Champagnat* and from their lay state, respond to it.

(Santa Maria de los Andes)



- ✓ We assume our identity as lay Marists, a particular and rich vocation for the Church and for the Marist Family. We are aware of our participation in the charism left to us by Champagnat and the responsibility to make it reborn with a renewed face. The example of Mary going quickly to meet and attend her cousin Elizabeth and the example of the first Brothers sharing life around the table in La Valla, urge us to reaffirm our vocation and be faithful to it.



Children of Marcellin Champagnat, committed to following Jesus as Mary did, we are called by God to build a better world, a society governed by the values of the Gospel, *we believe that being Lay Marists is a vocation and, therefore, a gift from God.*  
(Lay of Venezuela)



- ✓ The “Yes” of Mary touches our hearts and gives us the strength we need to say “Yes” in our turn, when we feel we have also been chosen by the Father to be tools in His hands. We know that the initiative is His. We have received it and celebrate it. Looking back to the story of our vocation, we become aware of the constant presence of God's hand. *The Marist charism has captivated us.* We received Champagnat's heritage and while sharing it with other brothers and sisters we have felt part of his history, his dream and his family. Being part of all that made us feel happy.

(Regional Meetings 2011)



## The lay Marist vocation in EMM.

Our EMM document synthesises the lay vocation in a simple way:

### ⇒ *Lay Marists: a Christian vocation.*

We Lay Marists are Christian men and women, who in the course of our life have listened to the call of God to live the charism of Champagnat, and, from our lay state, we respond to it. *The initiative for our vocation comes from God.* He loves us and wants our fulfilment, which is why he invites each one to follow a unique path. In this way, the lay Marist vocation does not originate as a necessity in moments of vocational crisis for the Brothers, or as a form of expressing friendship towards them. It is a personal call to a specific way of being disciples of Jesus.

### ⇒ *Stages of the journey*

Just like the religious, lay men and women, aware of their specific vocation, shall live their own vocational processes: attraction, formation, discernment, commitment and connections. Little by little these vocational processes should be more conscious, systematic and accompanied.

#### ✓ **We Discover the Call of God**

It is necessary to invite lay people to set out on a vocational road open to the different charisms and ministries of the Church. For this, it is necessary to create gospel spaces that help them to grow in personal relationship with God.

#### ✓ **We Discern the Marist Life Option**

Like all vocations, the Marist life emerges from a process of discovery: we have been enchanted by Marcellin's Christian journey and that of the community of those who live his charism, and we understand that God sends us to be part of this family. In this process it is necessary to contrast our life with our companions on the road. Therefore, we live and offer personal accompaniment, helping others to make their own decisions, based on faith.

#### ✓ **We live together in constant growth**

These processes are integral, embracing the different dimensions, human Christian and Marist, and they are also integrative, helping to unify our life in Christ.

The lay Marist life generates its own wisdom. Sharing the faith in community and to reflect on it, strengthens our Christian and Marist vocation. In this sense, lay communities should become formative communities.

The formation processes should be lived in community. Other help us grow. Without their shared wealth and their fraternal correction we are locked in ourselves and our vocation weakens.

#### ✓ **Sense of belonging. Recognition of the Vocation**

All Christian vocation is born in and for the Church, and it is at the service of the world. For that reason, our vocation of Lay Marists, like that of the lay men and lay women who are attracted by other foundational charisms, tend to be recognized by the ecclesiastical community.



## The primary recipients of the chapter contents

The Marist vocation embraces the identity of the lay and the brother. Both the brother and the lay who have heard the Lord's call to live the Marist charism are the primary recipients of the chapter contents.

Starting from the acknowledgment by the XXI General Chapter to the **Lay Marist's vocation**,

- We Lay Marists and Brothers are all moved by God to go to a new land, which favours the birth of a new era for the Marist charism.
- We lay Marists and Brothers, from a new relationship based on communion, together seek a greater vitality of the charism in today's world.
- We lay Marists and Brothers contemplate our Marist future as a communion of persons in the charism of Champagnat, where our specific vocations will be mutually enriched.
- We lay Marists and Brothers foster the development of local communities of lay people and brothers, to share Marist life, spirituality and mission.
- We lay Marists and Brothers help each other explore a new consecrated life, firmly rooted in the Gospel, which promotes a new way of being brother.
- We lay Marists and Brothers promote a highly significant presence among poor children and young people.



- We lay Marists and Brothers try to revitalize the vocational pastoral ministry together through a joint work.
- We lay Marists and Brothers affirm that evangelization is the focus and priority of our ministries, proclaiming Jesus Christ and his message.



- We lay Marists and Brothers who live in today's globalized world are called to have an international horizon in our minds and hearts.
- We lay Marists and Brothers promote international and interprovincial communities open to brothers and lay Marists, to serve in new border missions.



These calls of the chapter outline the vocational identity of the lay Marist who shares the charism with the Brothers, promotes vocational complementarity and shares with them the challenge of *helping to bring about the dawning of a new Marist life* and strengthening the one that exists, making it more creative, faithful and dynamic. (see EMM 169)

## We are aware of our fears

We must recognize the fears that both lay and brothers feel regarding the lay Marist vocation:



- ✓ Fear that the lay vocation creates different categories of lay people, according to their commitment, especially among those who are hired. Fear of creating differences and categories of lay people.
- ✓ Fear that some "show their vocation" only to get to top positions, have the favour of

the brothers or keep their jobs. How to manage work contracts and lay Marist vocation? How to combine management and spirituality?

- ✓ Fear of public commitments of the lay Marist vocation. Fear to propose them.
- ✓ Fear of establishing a bond or belonging to the Institute.
- ✓ There is a false concept of "freedom" in these themes about vocation and commitment. We shall not forget that Jesus "called" his disciples. And so did Marcellin. To manipulate, condition and try to cheat is something different.

**Secretariat of Laity  
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