C

HARISMATIC FAMILY

A number of institutions and groups of believers united by a single foundational charism or *charismatic root* – although living different life styles and nuances of the same charism – constitute a *charismatic family*. Its strength does not come from a dominant body dragging the others but from the communion between its different institutions and groups at the service of a shared mission, which the particular charismatic nuances of each group enrich. The foundational charism takes root as a pivotal point around which the relations between consecrated and lay people revolve within the charismatic family. The outcome is a group of communities with the same charism but with different existential or vocational projects[[1]](#footnote-1).

We can define a charismatic family as “a part of the Church – understood as the People of God in communion – that includes different vocations and life styles, none of which rises above or overlaps with the others, since they walk together in life complementing each other for the good of all and at the service of the Kingdom”[[2]](#footnote-2). The concept of charismatic family, sometimes called *evangelical family**[[3]](#footnote-3),* began to develop at the end of the last century when the Church realized that charisms take concrete shape through different life styles that share the same mission. We must bear in mind that charisms are not theoretical abstractions, but spiritual gifts that develop within a given context, involving people who live in a concrete time and space. At the end, the notion of charismatic families is an effect of the Ecclesiology of communion that took hold in those years.

From this perspective, charisms become characteristic expressions of the Church because groups of people with particular profiles assume them[[4]](#footnote-4). The charism, thanks to its specificity and originality, becomes a meeting point and a source of identity. We are presently going through a process involving experience and reflection that is interpreting the Marist Institute as one expression of the foundational charism among others. In other words, this new time for consecrated life and for the laity we are living in the Church requires every possible effort of creative fidelity in order to bring the Gospel to our hearts. In this sense, we are currently discovering new structures, which bring into communion all those who live under a vocational perspective and share the same charismatic gift.



Lay people who join a charismatic family do not intend to participate in the mission and spirituality of the religious Institute associated to its historical origin; they wish to partake in the charismatic family’s foundational charism, which they see as a specific way of living the Christian identity all the faithful share. Indeed, baptismal identity must be the departure point to recover the foundational charism, which is actually a gift enabling us to live that identity, to incarnate the Gospel with a global perspective that implies a particular way of bringing about the Kingdom of God and belonging to Christ and the Church. We must certainly rediscover the foundational charism in the light of the Founder’s evangelical journey, but also through the reflection and dialogue carried out by the lay and religious groups that are living the charism, in order to avoid confusing it with any of the projects through which it takes shape[[5]](#footnote-5).

Given that the charism is as a perspective from which we contemplate the entire Gospel, a *charismatic family* amounts to an *evangelical family*: it offers a face of the Gospel to the Church and society by harmoniously highlighting certain attitudes of Jesus or values of the Kingdom, becoming a concrete mediation of God’s salvation. This distinct evangelical face takes shape through different life projects along the ecclesial communities that make up the charismatic-evangelical family. Each life project, with its ecclesial and social dimensions, becomes a channel for the different personal charisms, and tries to incarnate the foundational charism through religious or lay ways of life. The final message of the *II Marist International Mission* *Assembly* ofNairobi tells us: *“On the threshold of the bicentenary of the Marist Institute, we have started to write a new story together, one in which our being prophets and mystics in a spirit of communion will become the characteristics by which we recognize ourselves as Marists of Saint Marcellin Champagnat (…). We are a charismatic family with new and diverse expressions of community”.*

1. Cf. Antonio Botana, *Las familias carismáticas en la Iglesia Comunión.* He also states: “When a foundational charism ‘captures’ people, it affects their life entirely, including their relationship with God and his Kingdom, their identity in the Church, their life options and ways of being part of society. The charism becomes a vocation and people respond to it through a life project. A charismatic family brings together and structures people’s personal projects within the ecclesial communities that make up the family”. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. José María Arnaiz, *Vida y misión compartidas. Laicos y religiosos hoy*. PPC, Madrid, 2014, p. 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bernardette Delizy proposed this term in *Vers des «familles évangéliques» : le renouveau des relations entre chrétiens et congrégations*, Les Éditions Ouvrières, Paris, 2004. She understands evangelical families as community networks whose relations revolve around a concrete ‘face’ of Jesus Christ. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Vita consecrata*, 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Cf. Antonio Botana, *Bases para un modelo actual de Familia Lasaliana*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)