



YEAR XXXVI - N. 52 - JUNE 2023

Message

Marists of Champagnat

Breath of the Spirit

The Lay Marist vocation

The vocation
and the mission
of the lay Marist

The Lay Marist
vocation in
today's world

The International
Forum on the Lay
Marist Vocation

Journeying together as a global family

As Marists of Champagnat, we are a global charismatic family, living an integrated spirituality and are passionately committed to an innovative mission without borders, at the service of children and young people, especially the most vulnerable and excluded.

Credits

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Marists of Champagnat

The core of Saint Marcellin Champagnat's vision of mission was "to make Jesus Christ known and loved". From this principle flow the particular characteristics of our style of educating: presence, simplicity, family spirit, love of work, and following the way of Mary.



2.500

Marist Brothers: Brothers in Christ, brothers to one another and brothers to all, especially the poorest and most needy.

8.000

Lay people: committed people living a Marist charismatic vocational process.

650.000

Accompanied children and young people: in schools and other educational structures, we look to the future with audacity and hope.



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Message Marists of Champagnat



Index



5



12



35

■ Editorial

- 3. Br. João Carlos do Prado y Luiz Da Rosa

■ Presentation

- 5. **Celebrating and giving thanks for the gift of our Marist vocation**

Br. Ernesto Sánchez Barba

■ Chapter I

The vocation and the mission of the lay Marist

- 12. **The historical journey of the Lay Marist vocation: its recognition, reflection and organisation**
Ana Sarrate and Pep Buetas
- 17. **Marist mission and life in a spirit of communion and co-responsibility**
Carole Wark
- 21. **“Gathered around the same table”, a gift of the Spirit to multiply Marist vocations**
José María Pérez-Soba Díez del Corral
- 25. **The Lay Marist vocation in the current context of the Marist charism**
Sara Guadalupe Sánchez Vicuña
- 29. **Guidelines for accompanying people working through their vocations**
Nohemy Pinto de Reyes
- 32. **The Marist Charism, Ruah for the Church**
Ana Saborío

- 34. **Future Prospects: organisational structures**
Manuel Gómez Cid and Raúl Amaya Rivera

- 38. **The marist vocation of brothers and laypeople**
Br. João Carlos do Prado and Agnes S. Reyes

■ Chapter II

The lay marist vocation in today's world

- 44. **The lay Marist vocation in the charism of Champagnat**
Luiz da Rosa
- 48. **Lay Marist Life in Africa**
Alida Masters Bodomanitra
- 50. **Different ways of being Marist laypeople in the South American region**
Marcos Broc
- 52. **The marist lay vocation in Asia**
Elma Rafil
- 55. **Various expressions of Lay Marist Life in the Arco Norte Region**
Pedro Chinchilla
- 58. **Lay Marists in Europe: vocation, shared life, spirituality and communion**
European Lay Team
- 61. **Different Expressions of Marist Laity in Oceania**
Matthew Pearce



38



61



96

- 64. Lay bonding to the Marist charism: a response to the call of God**
Ana Gómez Haro
- 67. Marist laypeople and bonding**
Claudia Aida Rojas Carvajal
- 70. Living Marist Life from Canberra to La Valla!**
Mark O'Farrell
- 73. Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family**
Josmari Pauzer
- 76. The future of the Lay Marist vocation is bright!**
Pete Marti
- 78. The call to live in community**
Sabatino Abate
- 80. Marist Spirituality Pathways**
Eladio Díez Sancho
- 82. Perspective on lay marist global family**
Salome Ifeoma Nnamani
- 84. A Young layman with a revolutionary heart**
João Gabriel Soares Sedrez

■ Chapter III

Breaths of the Spirit, International forum on the lay Marist vocation

- 88. International Forum on the Lay Marist Vocation Context, process, current situation and prospects**
Manu Gómez Cid

- 91. "Ruah, the Spirit of God"**
Br. Toni Torrelles
- 93. We are a Global Charismatic Family!**
Augusto Fabião Mahumane
- 96. My pilgrim experience**
Jaime Godoy Rivera
- 99. Spirit of prayer and contemplative listening**
Maureen Hagan
- 101. On the road**
Elma B. Rafil
- 104. Signs of personal joy and an open heart for global understanding**
Wolfgang Hacker
- 106. Learning about expressions of commitment to the Marist Vocation**
Jessica Bryan
- 108. A feeling of belonging to the big Marist family**
Br. Nguyen Viet Bao
- 110. The joy of being Marists**
Br. Jaime Comabella Callizo
- 113. A first look into the abyss... Parabolic elements for an in-depth reflection on the best juridical structures for our lay Marist reality**
Br. Josep Maria Soterias
- 117. Final message of the 3a phase of the International Forum on the Lay Marist Vocation**
Presentation of the Secretariat of Laity



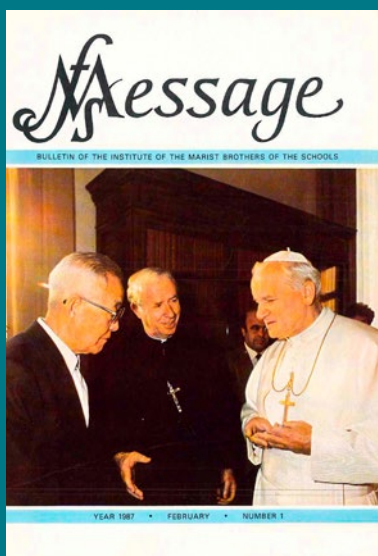
Editorial



Br. **João Carlos do Prado**
Councillor General
and **Luiz da Rosa**
Director of Communications

Number 51 inaugurates a new phase of our magazine, signalled by a change of name: from now on it will be called “The Marists of Champagnat Message”.

This magazine began in February 1987, carrying on the Institute’s communication tradition which started with the publication of the Circulars of the Superiors General, followed by the Bulletin of the Institute (1909-1968), and then by “F. M. S.”. In 1986, the General Council appointed a commission to study the question of publications and communications. It was this commission which suggested the creation of FMS Message to the General Government: “a regular magazine combining the serious reflections which characterised the Bulletin with news from the Marist world, previously communicated by F.M.S.” (Editorial of FMS Message 1). In the first article of the magazine, Br Charles Howard, then Superior General, said that the “most important purpose in publishing the magazine is to be a messenger and witness to the life of the congregation everywhere”. The magazine pursues this mission to this day, having become a means of animating the Marist charism, as expressed in the lives of consecrated Brothers and of lay men and women who embrace the dream of Saint Marcellin Champagnat.



Fms Messaje n.1 (1987)

Marists of Champagnat

Acknowledgment of the richness of the Marist vocation, now evident in different forms of life, and the increasingly active participation of non-consecrated persons in the life and mission of the Institute, has led to the coining of an expression that encompasses every vocational form linked to the ideal of our Founder: Marists of Champagnat. This phrase defines all those who follow Saint Marcellin, whether through consecrated or lay life, within the Church.

An important moment in this awareness-raising process was the creation of the logo of the Institute’s General Administration, approved by the General Council in September 2018. It is composed of a symbol and a name. The symbol is formed by the union of three elements: the cross, the globe and the “M”. The second element of the logo is the name “Marists of Champagnat” which includes both brothers and lay Marists.

These developments pointed towards a name change for the magazine: ‘Marists of Champagnat Message’ is the title approved by the General Council in February 2023. This change has led the com-



munications team to rethink its graphic image. The logo of the Institute's General Administration is now integrated into the magazine's logo. The layout has been given a new look and the articles will be enriched by additional content, accessible to the reader through images with QR codes, easily scanned by means of most mobile phones equipped with a camera. Also, a legal registration or ISSN, the code assigned to serial publications by the Italian ISSN Centre, has been adopted.

Lay Marist Vocation

This historic milestone for our magazine takes place on the occasion of an issue dedicated to the vocation of the lay Marist. The choice of theme is closely related to the Year of Marist Vocations, being celebrated in the Institute from 20 May 2022 to 6 June 2023. The last issue of the magazine was dedicated to the vocation of the Marist Brother. In this way the Institute enthusiastically embraces each Marist vocation in its specific character, promoting a broadened culture of vocations.

Another important element which led to the choice of this theme is that it lines up with the process currently being led by the Laity Secretariat: the International Forum on the Lay Marist Vocation. This is a four-year journey (2021-2024) intended to reflect on and discern what the Marist vocation is, particularly the lay Marist vocation, formation pathways, the accompaniment of processes of vocational growth, bonding to the charism, and possible juridical structures for Marist laity.

Fraternity of the MCFM of
Aparecida de Goiania,
Brasil Centro-Norte



This issue hopes to make a contribution to this Forum process. The first two chapters deal with the vocation and mission of Marist laypeople present in today's world. The third chapter summarizes the experience of participants during the third stage of the Forum, the face-to-face meeting in Rome, which brought together about 90 lay people and brothers, representing almost all the Administrative Units of the Institute. It reproduces the final message that this group prepared for reflection and action in the Institute during the next few years. ■



Presentation

Br. Ernesto Sánchez Barba
Superior General



Celebrating and giving thanks for the gift of our Marist vocation

**Communion,
co-responsibility,
structures
and processes.**

Saint Marcellin Champagnat succeeded in following the intuitions of the Spirit throughout his life. It was through him that the Church and the world received the gift of the Marist charism, of which we Marists of Champagnat are beneficiaries. In our turn, we are co-responsible for keeping it alive and passing it on to future generations. It is a charism which prompts and encourages us to be continually guided by Mary, whose name it is our privilege to bear.

In the journey of Marist life, each brother and layperson has his or her own unique vocational story and way of responding to the gift of the Spirit. As brothers and laypeople, we want to keep



the flame of this gift
alive and pass it on
through our per-
sonal, commu-
nity and family
witness.

On the occa-
sion of the
Year of Marist
Vocations, cel-
ebrated in the
Institute from 20
May 2022 to 6 June
2023, I have invited
you to celebrate and give
thanks for the gift we have re-

ceived as Marists of Champagnat, and I have also invited you
to again take up the theme of Marist vocations with vigour and
enthusiasm, from the perspective of a renewed culture of voca-
tions.



We all have a place at the table of La Valla

In the last issue of FMS Message, we focused on the vocation of the
Brother. This issue is dedicated to the vocation of the lay Marist, as

**Journeying together,
in communion, as passionate
and fully committed Marists
of Champagnat, is an important
and vital key to the future
of the Marist charism.**

part of the process of the Forum on the Lay
Marist Vocation that has been taking place
in the Institute in recent years. We know that
there are several components of this charis-
matic gift that we hold in common and, at
the same time, we are aware of the specific
character of each of these vocations. Hence
the importance of knowing more about
each one, conscious that we all have a place
at the table of La Valla, where Champagnat

and the first Marists began this beautiful project for the children
and young people of the world.

The document *Gathered Around the Same Table*, a reference for the
lay Marist vocation, states: “Within this broader church communion,
the Spirit has caused charisms that originated in religious institutes
to now blossom among laypeople. The gift of a shared charism in-
augurates a new chapter, rich in hope, in the journey of the Church.
The charism of Saint Marcellin Champagnat is expressed in new



forms of Marist life. One of these is that of the Marist laity” (*Gathered around the same table*, 7).

Over the last few years, we have been on a significant journey in relation to the Lay Marist vocation. We still have a long way to go. Today we have a large number of lay men and women who are discerning about their way of living the Marist charism and committing themselves to it. Some belong to the fraternities of the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family. Others are members of various groups or Associations. Many have given years of service to our mission. There is a group that has made a type of commitment within some Provinces. We know that there is a core group among them all, who are living their Christian and Marist vocation with all their hearts.



Pilgrimage
West Central Europe Province
La Valla 2023



The specific vocation of lay men and women in communion with the brothers

The XXII General Chapter stressed communion, co-responsibility for Marist life and mission, structures and processes. Journeying together, in communion, as passionate and fully committed Marists of Champagnat, is an important and vital key to the future of the Marist charism.

I have made the point that all of us, brothers and laypeople alike, should firmly believe that God is continuing to inspire Marist vocations to the Brothers in our days. There is also a call for all of us, brothers and lay people, to firmly believe that the Spirit is inspiring lay Marist vocations and that we should invest more energy and resources in accompanying and nurturing their growth.

Monte Cucco, Rome
International Forum





I have sometimes commented that it is up to lay Marists to discover what it means to be a lay Marist. We Brothers can share our experience and attest to our experience as consecrated men. It is up to lay men and women to translate the Marist charism into their lives, following the inspiration of the Spirit, the same inspiration that moved Marcellin's heart from the beginning.

The lay Marist vocation is emerging and growing on the five continents at different rates, depending on contexts and cultures. As a Global Marist Family, we welcome and embrace diversity as a gift and support each other in continuing to awaken, welcome and

It is up to lay men and women to translate the Marist charism into their lives, following the inspiration of the Spirit, the same inspiration that moved Marcellin's heart from the beginning

grow lay Marist vocations as an inspiration and gift of the Spirit. Champagnat was a person of vision and action, of an attentive and sensitive outlook, and of unconditional dedication to the most needy and vulnerable young people. Despite difficulties and opposition, both in his vocational journey and as the Institute developed, he had the capacity to respond. We are being invited to respond with the same courage and passion in our own day.

The synergy resulting from our being together as Marists of Champagnat, brothers and lay-people, has had a positive impact on Marist life and mission: there is great value in being Marist today, as Marcellin said of the brothers in his time, and as we also say today of the lay Marists.

May Mary, our Good Mother, who was able to say yes and be open to the new, inspire us and accompany us on our journey. ■





Chapter I

The vocation and the mission of the lay Marist





**Share
and live with
boldly the
Marist charism**



Ana Sarrate
Province Iberica
Pep Buetas
Province L'Hermitage

The historical journey of the Lay Marist vocation: its recognition, reflection and organisation

Message Marists of Champagnat



When something new appears, there is usually a three-step progression. This is what we find in the birth of the lay Marist vocation as well:

1. The first step is the recognition that something is being born, that it is emerging forcefully, and that it is real and has life.
2. The second step is usually one of reflection on this life, its essence, its significance in the world, in society and in the Church.
3. The third step is the organisation of this life so that it can grow and flourish to its full potential.

Recognition of the Lay Marist vocation

The lay Marist vocation was recognised in an official way by the XXI General Chapter of 2009 in its final document which expressly stated:

"We recognise and support the vocation of Lay Marists. We believe this is an invitation of the Spirit to live a new communion of brothers and lay Marists together, bringing greater vitality to the Marist charism and mission in our world. We believe it is a "Kairos" moment, a key opportunity to boldly share and live the Marist charism, together forming a prophetic and Marial Church."

This event confirmed that there are people who live their Marist vocation as lay people and who, for some years now, have been trying to respond to this call through their commitment to the mission and communities that make the charism visible.

In this regard, we cannot forget that, in 1990, we began to talk about this phenomenon when the *Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family* was launched. This gave rise to many small communities or fraternities made up of lay men and women, with the aim of living a spirituality and lifestyle inspired by Mary that we had come to know through so many Brothers who had shared their lives with us. This was the seed, along with other similar groups that were born in other contexts, for this lay vocation to grow.

We recognize and support the vocation of Lay Marists. We believe this is an invitation of the Spirit

Reflection on the Lay Marist Vocation

In the aforementioned Chapter, the document *Gathered Around the Same Table*, the vocation of the Lay Marists of Champagnat was presented. This was to be accepted as a reference document for understanding this new reality.

On the previous page:
Detail of Goyo's painting.
"The Marist Family",
at the General House



Having reference documents helps us to have a broader and better understanding because it gives us a common language that makes it easier to position ourselves with regard to the new reality. When, in addition, a document originates from the life stories of many people who are already living this vocation, its authenticity and authority is indisputable. This is what happened in the drafting of *Gathered Around the Same Table*.

Something similar gave rise to the more recent document entitled ***Being a Lay Marist***, which gives guidelines for accompanying vocational growth and proposes formation pathways for laypeople. In this case, account was taken of the experiences and reflections which were already taking place in various Administrative Units of the Institute in this field and which had been encouraged at the international level through Joint Formation programmes.

The experiences of joint formation, which began with an international meeting in Les Avellanes (Catalonia) in 2007, were replicated in Quito (Ecuador) and in France, and from there multiplied at regional and province levels. Their aim was to bring Marists together, brothers and lay women and men, to reflect on and share about their two vocations. Sharing from lived experience allowed us to discover that both gain focus and are mutually enrich-

Meeting of the Commission
of the document *Gathered
around the same table*
General House, 2008





ing through their specificity and complementarity. Today there are still many treasures to be discovered through this type of formation. The forums held at the level of the whole Institute and of the various regions should be highlighted. In particular, the meeting of Provincials convened by the General Council in 2014 in Rome to reflect on Marist Lay Partnership and Belonging. There they shared the processes that were being carried out in different places, learned about the experiences of other congregations, and began to study what a “common structure” for Marist laity could be at the international level. This was followed by the international meeting of lay animation commissions at the Hermitage in 2016 and now the International Forum on the Lay Marist vocation (2021-2024). All this is part of a process of discernment that is taking place at local and global levels on the lay vocation, its forms of expression, the idea of bonding to the charism, and the possible creation of some form of association, always in communion with the Brothers.

Meeting of commissions
for lay animation at the
Hermitage - 2016

**To propose a way
for laypeople and Brothers
to be “in communion” for there
to be a new era in which the
Marist charism will flourish**





Organisation and structuring of the Lay Marist Vocation

With the intention of facilitating this search process, the Secretariat for the Laity was created in the Institute in 2003. This structure has evolved over the years. It has sponsored a number of formation programmes and forums for dialogue, and encouraged the development of lay leadership. Progressively,

Above:
Forum in Rome - 2014.

Below:
Extended Secretariat
June 2022

laypeople have taken on a greater role in both the running and the leadership of the Secretariat. This is a sign of the maturity felt in this journey, both on the part of the lay Marists and of the Brothers' Institute itself.

At present, the Secretariat is working on carrying forward the intuitions reflected in the above-mentioned documents. The aim is to establish the "lay" vocational pathway including the necessary formation processes involved, and to propose a way for laypeople and Brothers to be "in communion" for there to be a new era in which the Marist charism will flourish as a gift for the Church and for today's world. ■

Marist mission and life in a spirit of communion and co-responsibility

Invitation to
become
“living water”.

Carole Wark
Province Star of the Sea



One of the most deeply moving Marist memories I have is of a visit in 2010 to the newly renovated Hermitage in France where I had the opportunity to sit and pray alone in Marcellin's bedroom with the window open onto the sounds outside of the River Gier. Living water flowing across the centuries and into my heart... It was and remains for me a very personal experience of being in Marcellin's company, and a special invitation into Marist mission and life here at home in Sydney, Australia. The experience is one of those significant Marist reference points, shared by many of those fortunate enough to visit the Hermitage from across our global Marist family. So, in a very particular sense, the experience when it is shared calls all of us into a spirit of communion with other Marists, who have visited or not, and who today long to bring to life in their own places the same dreams for Marist mission that fuelled Marcellin's imagination so long ago.

As Brothers and Lay Marists we have been exploring what it means to live out our Marist mission and life in “a spirit of communion and co-responsibility” for quite some time now. 2007-2009 were rich years for progressing our shared understandings of the new ways



Sri Lanka

and new language in this space, with joint formation experiences and publications like *Gathered Around the Same Table*. It was interesting to read in *FMS Message 50* Br Óscar Martín, General Councilor, proposing new ways and new language to speak about the term “vocation”. The recent meeting held in Rome in November 2022 will be another rich reference point for our global family. New ways and new language will continue to emerge, especially around vocation, how we live out our mission and life in a spirit of co-responsibility and communion, and the structures we develop across the Institute to associate as Marists of Champagnat.

Other reference point events have been challenging us here in Oceania last year: the third National Assembly for the Association of St Marcellin Champagnat in Australia; the restructuring of our Oceania region into the new Star of the Sea Province; our Brothers’ first Chapter in the new entity. So, as Marists of Champagnat in this part of the world, we have been living some of those questions asked by Br. Óscar (*FMS Message 50*): what is our “core business”, what and who defines my identity and my purpose right now, how do I reveal God, what is my great dream, what do we do with the growing realisation of God’s great dream for us? How do we do all that together co-responsibly and in communion as Marists of Champagnat locally, across an enormous, inaccessible geographical expanse, amid increasing secularism, a faltering trust in the Church, the ongoing impact of colonisation and climate change, many dif-



ferent languages, cultures, time zones and limited resourcing? How do we honour emerging but quite different structures for Brothers and Lay together in the region as well as the canonical demands of structures for Brothers only? How do we become streams of living water with all that ocean between us? Are these even the right questions to be asking?

After all the hours of dialogue here are my reflections on “Marist mission and life in a spirit of communion and co-responsibility”.

1. I believe that our understanding about the cyclical and interdependent relationship between mission and life has deepened. I think we recognise more fully that growing our mission relies on also growing our Marist life as individuals and as communities. There is a deepening understanding that we are not just another educational enterprise with a “mission statement” or “core business”. Being “Marists of Champagnat” is not about brothers and lay as some canonically separate but connected workforce partnership. As the number of believers, not just Brothers, diminishes, we cannot remain true to the intuitions of our Founder without a genuine commitment to growing Marist life in our people, providing them with excellent ongoing faith formation, our brothers and our lay, preferably shared, so that the reference point for their passion for mission is God, in making Jesus known and loved in Mary’s way. Faith fuels mission, mission fuels faith. And faith shared is what gives the Holy Spirit the raw material for the very special living water that the Marist charism is to the Church and to the world.

2. I believe that we still have a way to go to achieve genuine co-responsibility in the diversity of our Marist communities. The language of co-responsibility used to be more about management and getting the tasks of mission done, but it’s not simply about the workplace and who gets to be involved in the decision-making that happens there. Nor is it just about fostering a sense of belonging and cooperation. Co-responsibility is a Magnificat attitude of scattering the proud and exalting the lowly. Co-responsibility is a new awareness of being respectful of culture, gender, race, language and the diversity of barriers people have to overcome to participate. It’s also about a new humility, educating yourself and recognising your own biases and privilege. We’ve done a lot of talking in our part of the world about the transformative power of finding new and creative paths to inclusiveness.

**Growing our mission
relies on also growing
our Marist life as individuals
and as communities**





**It is important that
our Marist families
offer us safe places
for challenge,
growth, healing,
and acceptance**

3. The concept of home continues to be a very important one for Marists of Champagnat. Our recent experiences of gathering as Marists here have affirmed Marcellin's intuitions of the value of growing family spirit and even though the language is now a little outdated, *Water from the Rock* articulates the value of the inter-generational family as a model for authentic communion (*"As Brothers and Lay Marists, we try to develop a quality of communion that allows families, religious communities and other forms of community living to become homes where the young are helped to mature, where we take care of those aging, and are especially kind to the weak; places where we forgive one another and heal wounds, where we joyfully celebrate the life we share together"* – *Water from the Rock*, 110). In a world where the algorithms determine what we find when we search for answers to our questions, it is important that our Marist families offer us safe places for challenge, growth, healing, and acceptance regardless of age. Ongoing personal and communal formation remains so very important, especially in the context of growing families of faith, communities of mission, homes of light.

Let's sit and pray for a while, open the window, listen in new ways, and take up the invitation to become "living water" together. ■



“Gathered around the same table”, a gift of the Spirit to multiply Marist vocations

José María Pérez-Soba
Díez del Corral
Province Ibérica



It is now more than three decades since the publication, with the support of the XXI General Chapter, of the document “Gathered around the same table”. This has been long enough to see that its fruits are already spreading around the world:

from Oceania to the

The Vocation of Champagnat’s Marist Laity

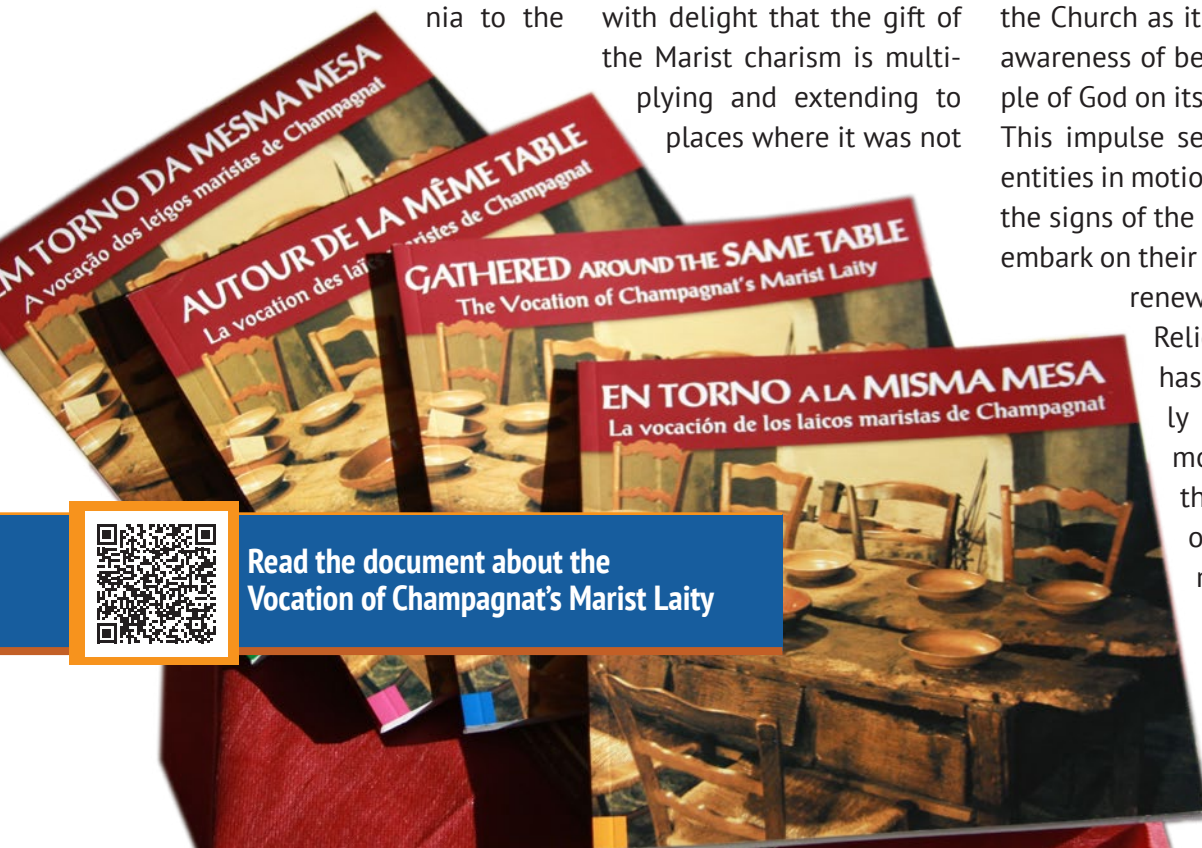
Americas, the text has inspired hundreds of lay people to discover what God is asking of them, while helping hundreds of Brothers to discover with delight that the gift of the Marist charism is multiplying and extending to places where it was not

present before.

The document was not born in a flash of inspiration, but is the crystallisation of a much longer process. Its origin is undoubtedly the prompting of the Spirit that Vatican II was for the Church. The Council encouraged the renewal of the structures of the Church as it regained its awareness of being the People of God on its pilgrim way. This impulse set all Church entities in motion to listen to the signs of the times and to embark on their journey with

renewed vigour.

Religious life has also joyfully joined this movement of the Spirit and one of the most obvious fruits it has dis-



Read the document about the
Vocation of Champagnat’s Marist Laity



covered is that founding charisms do not belong to them alone, that they have not received them in order to confine them within four walls, but that they are a gift for the Church and for the world. For this reason, many religious institutes, eager to live the Church-as-community of the Council, have discovered with satisfaction that their charism is revealing itself in fresh ways among laypeople.

The General Council of the time echoed this movement in the Church and brought together an international commission to listen to the Marist world and write down what they were hearing. The commission, made up of seven lay men and women from five continents and three Brothers, was given total freedom. They had but one goal: to listen to people with a lay Marist vocation.

To meet this objective, the commission felt that the first thing to do was to ask lay people around the world what they were feeling, what 'Marist' meant in their lives. Ninety-two testimonies were received, which were the starting point for the commission's work. The reading of these texts revealed a surprise: in the vast majority of cases, across multiple

languages and cultures, lay men and women stated that for them 'Marist' was not only about working or collaborating with the Marist world, that they not only sympathised or were enthusiastic about that world, but that they 'were' Marist, made so by God, Marist. Being 'Marist' was their identity, their way of being Christian; it was not a question of 'doing' but of 'being'. They did not simply refer

Children's and young people's needs inflame us

to the affection or the gratitude they felt for the Brothers, which they also expressed, but 'Marist' described their life commitment.

From these testimonies the commission became aware that the intuition of the General Council was real: what was happening was that God was calling lay people from all over the world to be a real presence of the charism in the world, working with and accompanying young people. The Commission discovered a treasure of life, begging to be recognised, begging to be given the words that the millennia-old Christian tradition had for it: vocation, discern-

ment, mission, spirituality...

In fact, it is clear that if the Marist charism is for the world, it is the laypeople who will decide, following their own conscience, in which aspects of the charism they want to participate. Thus, some want to collaborate in our mission as teachers or as volunteers; others want to participate in prayer groups, in Christian celebrations, in soaking up the Marist atmosphere; others want to participate in youth groups or in one or other of the various groups of parents, teachers, etc... that are open to them. And all this is good and should be supported and recognised.

Alongside all of these, there were others, as evident in the testimonies, who felt something else. What they were claiming was that their Christian spirituality was Marist. This led them to embrace the Marist mission as their own and to commit their whole lives as members of the Marist community. They identified with Marist spirituality, mission and community life. These were like three colours blending together to form a single ray of light: what they felt was that the Marist charism was fully alive in them, integrating their Christian life.



Therefore, “Gathered around the same table” echoes the reality of lay Marist vocations by saying on their behalf: “We Lay Marists are Christian men and women, who in the course of our lives have listened to the call of God to live the charism of Champagnat and, from our lay state, we respond to it.” (12).

about experiences of mission, of spirituality, of life lived in common...It implies making decisions, undertaking a serious, life-encompassing discernment accompanied by a mentor, because a vocation, in the Church, is never for oneself, but for others. There is only one Christian mission that God calls us to

had sent more labourers to work in the field.

Listening to the testimonies from all over the world, the commission became aware that the lay people all agreed that in affirming their vocation they were not looking for a life separate to the Brothers. They were adults and neither wanted nor needed to depend on the Brothers; but it was a simple fact that they had learnt brotherhood from them. The laypeople wanted them as Brothers, forming a true Marist family together with them, a communion of vocations that would show the world a face that is both diverse in its features yet one whole, like that of God.

Therefore, there was a clear awareness that we want to be together because the two vocations are mutually enriching: ‘your radicality reminds me of and encourages my radicality’. Radicality in Christianity means to recognise where my roots are, the centre from which my life derives its life: God. Sharing the journey helps us religious and lay people in our respective vocations. It reminds us that the call is to nothing less than holiness and full happiness in God. In this way, each vocation feels responsible for the oth-



Lay bonding to the Marist charism in Ibérica - 2016

If a lay Marist vocation exists, it is a Christian vocation. It does not depend on any emotional attachment to the Brothers or employment connection. It is not a matter of recognising a person’s commitment to mission, but it depends on God. When we speak of vocation, we are talking about personal pathways, resulting from listening to God. This implies reflecting on and praying

accomplish: to make present the Reign of the God of Life in the world. Therefore, when we speak of vocation, these personalised processes lead to a public decision, recognised by other Marists and making visible a person’s commitment to God’s call. In this way, the Marist charismatic family becomes wider, more diverse, and richer. In biblical language, we can say that the Lord of the harvest



er: lay people love and care for the religious vocation of the Brother who walks with them, just as much as the Brothers love and care for lay Marist vocations.

Brothers and Laypeople responsible for the Marist charism

Now, if we lay Marists and Brothers have been called by God to live the one charism, we are both jointly responsible for its care and vitality and for offering it to a wider group of people. Such a family would require new structures that would make co-responsibility in the charism a reality: co-responsibility in spirituality, in mission, in community life. In the light of this, International Mission Assemblies affirmed in later years that the time had come to enlarge the tent; even more, to create a new tent that would wel-

come under its canvas the whole Marist community to help it to take care of itself and, above all, to multiply its presence among the young. Because at the heart of all this is a face: that of the young Montagne. Today, our Marist mission is more urgent than ever in a world that is more unjust and unequal than ever, in a violent world, with a common home ravaged by exploitation, in a world lost in consumerism, indifference and sceptical and hedonistic individualism. Our presence among the young, announcing the Good News, is imperative. The world is thirsty for the Good News of the brotherhood of God, of real hope in a more just world, which cares for women, for children, for the Earth, which turns

swords into
plough-
shares

and which invites us to the banquet of humanity... We cannot remain silent: "the needs of children and young people inflame us". (Open Letter, p. 102)

So, more than three decades after the publication of "Gathered around the same table", hundreds of lay people around the world have already committed their lives publicly to the Marist charism and hundreds more feel called to discern why their hearts are set on fire when Jesus speaks to them through the Marist world... Three decades on, hundreds more Marist men and women are creating joyful moments, teaching, counselling and accompanying more and more young people in need of Good News. ■





The Lay Marist vocation in the current context of the Marist charism

Sara Guadalupe Sánchez Vicuña

Santa María de los Andes province



A Gift of the Spirit

Beautiful words from the document *Gathered Around the Same Table* that express the experience of many lay women and men in the world: over time, the Marist charism “*has sprouted new shoots among the laity*”. It has put down roots that transmit the Marist sap to our lives, a sap that nourishes us, and makes us grow as full and happy people.

We lay women and men, in discovering our Marist vocation, recognise that it is “simple and engaging”. We feel “as if this vocation has been designed specifically for us”. Being Marist defines our identity beyond our work and defines our way of following Jesus. We feel that being Marist is our way of life.

The recent meeting in Rome, in November 2022, attended by Brothers and lay people from all parts of the Marist world, showed us that the Spirit, the *Ruah*, which “blows where it wills”, which creates and generates Life, has blown and continues to blow in these times, giving to the Marist Institute, and to the Church in general, the gift of the Lay Marist vocation, which is newness, richness and challenge.

The charism of St Marcellin Champagnat, present in the Institute of the Brothers, has sprouted new shoots among the laity. God has touched the hearts of some of us and given us a Marist heart. For sure, it has been God taking the initiative, more than any decision of ours. We cannot live any other way: We are Marists.

(Gathered around the Same Table, 4).

A gift which continues to be “newness, richness and challenge”

Every novelty brings changes that often break new ground and take time to be understood and reveal the riches they are bringing to life.

The Spirit has given us a wonderful novelty: the Marist charism which “came to us through Saint Marcellin and the first Brothers” and which used to be considered as an option only for religious. Today, we see it embodied in the world of the laity. We speak, then, of a “vocational response of the consecrated Brother” and of a “vocational response of lay women and men” who, after a process of discernment, discover that God is calling us to be Marists in our different family, work and social contexts where we want to respond with freedom and commitment.

We have been journeying together for some years now, brothers and lay people, wanting to welcome and better understand the “Lay Marist vocation”. We have learned that this process is influenced by the social, cultural, religious and church contexts of our Marist presences. This means that we have a great diversity of realities which pose a challenge for us as we seek to find ways of communion.

International Forum,
Rome 2022





Progressively, there is a shift from recognising that many lay people “*are attracted*” to the Marist charism and “*share our mission, our spirituality and our life*” and that there is a need to “*deepen our specific identities as brothers and lay people*” (20th General Chapter, 2001) to recognising that there is a lay Marist vocation: “*We recognise and support the vocation of the lay Marist. We believe that it is an invitation of the Spirit to live a new communion of Brothers and lay Marists together, bringing greater vitality to the Marist charism and mission in our world*” (21st General Chapter, 2009). Further, that there is a need to promote “*appropriate strategies for formation, accompaniment and belonging*”, with reference to the documents of the Institute such as *Gathered Around the Same Table, Being a Lay*

Peru *Marist and The Project of Life in Fraternity* (Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family).

In today's context

The road we have travelled has left us with important lessons and, I would also say, a little more clarity to continue this journey in communion, in which brothers and lay men and women recognise that we help each other and make ourselves co-responsible for the vitality and transmission of the charism wherever we are. This is the

road along which the same Spirit that inspired Saint Marcellin and animated the first brothers is leading us today. At a time when fragilities seem to be becoming more evident, as a Marist Institute we are also living a time of grace, a *Kairos*, resulting from two important events: the International Lay Marist Vocation Forum and the Year of Marist Vocations which invites us to become captivated and passionate again about our own vocation. This is the starting point for all of us.

In line with the inspirations that the Spirit gave us during the Forum, we must welcome once again, with simplicity and gratitude, the message of the 20th General Chapter: “*We recognise and support the vocation of the Lay Marist*”. This gift “*brings vitality to the Marist charism*”, a vitality that is enriched by the presence of women.

God is calling us to be Marists in our different family, work and social contexts where we want to respond with freedom and commitment

Our lay Marist vocation is a precious gift that we must care for, live with joy and commitment in the different settings of our lives (family, world of work, society in general). We lay men and women must take responsibility for our own vocation, care for it, and provide the means for the Marist charism to permeate all of our life settings. A crucial issue is the accompaniment and formation of those who are engaged in lay vocational growth programmes, as well as of the lay men and women doing the accompaniment. Lay vocational processes have different rhythms and characteristics from those of the brothers. In this field of formation, arranging some experiences of joint formation of brothers and lay people together would enhance our appreciation of the vitality of the charism.

**Santo Domingo,
Ecuador**

We are being invited to continue on our vocational journey, hand in hand with Mary, our Good Mother. ■





Guidelines for accompanying people working through their vocations

Simplicity, trust,
generosity,
forgiveness and
mutual help

Nohemy Pinto de Reyes
Central America province



The table at La Valla reminds us of a style for accompanying people as they work through their vocations. It is characterised by simplicity, trust, generosity, forgiveness and mutual help on the journey, in an experience in which we grow as people and followers of Jesus and where we are all invited to share faith, life and mission. This is how the document **Being a Lay Marist** in chapter three presents a formation programme to help laypeople discover their own vocation and their call to live in Mary's way, based on Champagnat's charism.

Such a programme has to help laypeople to:

- Engage in activities aimed at personal growth from a vocational perspective
- Experience the dimensions of the charism (Spirituality, brotherhood, Mission) as laypeople and in a progressive way.
- Journey together with others, a community experience.
- Deepen the communion/ relationship between laypeople and brothers.
- See ourselves as belonging to a charismatic family.



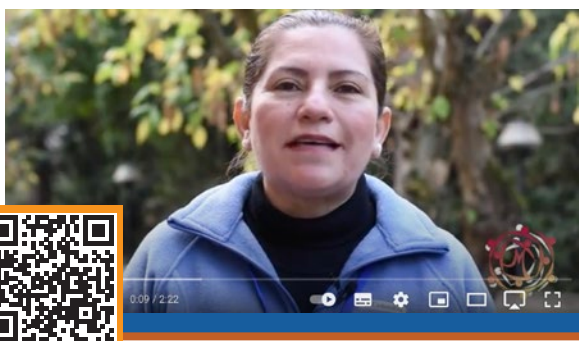
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In order to implement such a programme in Administrative Units it is necessary to create conditions such as:

- That it be a choice of the administrative units, assumed by the Institute leadership.
- That it be carried out in collaboration and communion with the Brothers.
- That it be facilitated: instructional material, programmes, experiences, resource people.
- That an investment is made of human and financial resources.

Ideas for Administrative Units

Five concrete decisions need to be taken by Provinces and Districts to help laypeople discover their own vocations.



1. Establish a pastoral team

It is necessary to establish a team capable of **accompanying people and communities** that are following formation programmes (ideally team members should have time available and some experience). The functions of this team will be: to design the programme; to organise experiences, means and formation activities; to train leaders; to accompany

the whole process; to evaluate progress made.

2. Design the programme based on what is being proposed by the Institute

- **Simple and practical**, within the range of skills possessed by members of the pastoral team.
- **Flexible**, making **adaptations** to what suits each person and to the **rhythms** of life of laypeople.
- Facilitate a trajectory that is **not linear but spiral** where personal discoveries, discernments, and choices become fresh starting points. The main components of the journey are present in all the stages, but with different emphases.
- **Cyclical and integrating**: considering the **anthropological, Christian and Marist** implications, as well as the charismatic dimensions of **fraternity, mission and spirituality**.
- A **process of growth**: the recurring question raised is: **How am I being called to respond as a person, as a Christian, as a Marist?**
- **Duration**: some times are **suggested** but the **personal rhythms** of those making the journey must be **respected**. There are no



fixed times for each stage but people need sufficient time to take in the experiences, means and content in a gradual manner. There may be some **symbol** or rite to mark the passage from one stage to another. People need to be **free to choose** if they want to progress. They can decide to remain at a certain stage. There is no need for everyone to proceed to a public commitment or bonding.

- Be clear about the **modalities** to be used in the formation process: personal, group accompaniment, community experience ...
- Prepare **handbooks** or **worksheets** to enable the person to engage more deeply and the person accompanying him/her to have a good sense of where the process is going.
- Work out the **key questions** needed to round out each step in the process.
- **Personal accompaniment**

3. Personal accompaniment

Accompaniment is considered to be a **requirement** in a true process of vocational growth and discernment (moments two and three). It is through accompaniment that one discovers one's own vocational path and discerns God's will.

To make personal accompaniment possible, it is necessary to:

1. Identify mentors. These should preferably be people who have gone through the formation journey themselves and been accompanied.
2. Set the frequency of accompaniment (systematic: once a month is recommended).
3. Establish a programme of induction, training and ongoing follow-up for mentors.

First Lay Assembly
of the Province of Central
America - 2019

4. Developing a regional sense

1. Dialogue with similar experiences in other administrative units, pooling efforts.
2. Pay attention to forming formators who will continue what has been initiated.

5. Evaluation of the Process

The pastoral team should systematically check what is happening. ■



The Marist Charism, Ruah for the Church

Ana Saborío

Province Central America



**To be more
connected
to live the
Marist charism**

The 3rd phase of the International Forum on the Lay Marist Vocation was a milestone in our Marist history. Gathered in Rome, we reviewed basic and fundamental themes that allowed us to continue our reflection: the identity of the lay Marist and Formation Pathways with a vocational focus.

Since the Second Vatican Council, we lay people have been recognised as having a vocation. In the first instance a vocation to life, then a Christian vocation and then a vocation to live that Christian life in a particular way, depending on the charism that is moving each of us. In our case, some of us lay Marists have chosen to live our Marist life as our vocation.

This has meant that in several Administrative Units work has been done on developing formation pathways that involve various experiences as a first contact with Marist life and, then, others of greater depth to come to know and encounter the charism that could become our option in life. The document “Being a Lay Marist” lays out very clearly the steps in which we are invited to discover the charism from its origins and then to move on to make a commitment to follow Jesus in the style of Mary, according to the intuition of Saint Marcellin Champagnat.

It is clear to us that all lay people who wish to respond to the invitation to follow the pathway will go on a personal journey, at their own pace, and will find answers for themselves as they go through their own discernment.

Accompaniment, at this stage of the journey, is fundamental in order to engage in a discernment of one’s own vocation. Once lay-people have decided that their vocation is to live a Marist way of life, they have the opportunity to deepen connections with their respective Province in order to live the charism publicly. This implies a commitment to take on the Marist values of love, family spirit, simplicity, solidarity, following Jesus, and to live the charism by making Jesus Christ known and loved among children and young



people, and especially among those most in need.

At this stage of the International Forum on the Lay Marist Vocation, we were able to note with enthusiasm and hope that we lay Marists want to be more connected in order to continue to live the Marist charism. This is a charism of the Church that welcomes diversity and internationality. For this reason, we have taken on as our main challenge of growing in our connectedness by creating a network as a first step. This will be a network in the form of an “international community”, as our companion Pep Buetas put it, which wishes to bring the charism to life wherever we are and at the same time to be nourished by this great community which accompanies us in faith.

**We have the challenge
of making the life
of this international
community a reality**

We have the challenge of making the life of this international community a reality, of taking firm steps in the discernment of our Marist charism, of responding personally to the call of the Lord with a heightened commitment as reflected in the possible act of bonding to the charism. We also have the outlines of an associative structure on our not so distant horizon, intended to secure the vitality of the charism. Marcellin Champagnat, Br François Rivat and the first Brothers managed this in their day, and our large group of Brothers and lay people today have the same enormous and beautiful responsibility. ■



Future Prospects: organisational structures

**The vocation of
the Lay Marist
was recognised
at the XXI
General Chapter**

**Manuel Gómez Cid
and Raúl Amaya Rivera**
Secretariat of Laity



For many Marist laypeople, the possibility of bonding or belonging to an associative structure is one of the main challenges for the future for the vitality of the charism and the strengthening of the lay vocation.

The inspiration to create some kind of formal structure for the organisation of the Marist laity is the consequence of the many years of the lay Marist journey, from the first steps of the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family (MCFM) more than 35 years ago to the emergence of various expressions of lay vocations since then. The vocation of the Lay Marist was recognised at the XXI General Chapter (2009); valuable documents were drawn up, expressions of life, which continue to guide our journey and which are the fruit of the shared reflection of many laypeople and brothers [*“Gathered around the same table. The vocation of Champagnat’s Marist Laity”* (2009) and *“Being a Lay Marist. Guidelines for accompanying vocational growth and proposing formation pathways”* (2017)], plus a specific one for the CMMF, the renewed *“Plan for Living in Fraternity”* (2017); various provincial, regional and international meetings have been organised in which the meaning of the lay vocation has been explored in greater depth; structures for the animation of laypeople have been created in the Administrative Units and Regions to create pathways and accompany vocational growth; formation programmes have been developed to train lay leaders in vocational accompaniment; and various experiences of bonding laypeople to the charism have been initiated in some Provinces, as well as possibilities for creating different types of associative structures.



On this journey, the calls and suggestions of the XXII General Chapter resound strongly. Among other statements, it affirmed that *“The future of the charism will be based on a communion of fully committed Marists”,* and that, *“We need new structures and processes that recognise and support our different vocational paths as Marists”* and that *“Each administrative unit should have a plan to promote the different ways of living Marist life, including appropriate strategies for formation, accompaniment and linkage...”*. In addition to this, initiative 2.1.5 of the Strategic Plan of the General Administration states, *“To explore and consolidate forms of charismatic commitment, bonding and association, and to share reflections and experiences in this field. To continue to animate various groups and forms of association, such as the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family”*.

To explore and consolidate forms of charismatic commitment, bonding and association

Considering the journey of the Marist laity and the calls of the XXII GC, where is the Spirit leading us? What does the Spirit want us to be and to do? At the experience of the International Forum on the



Lay Vocation held in Rome, one of the promptings of the Spirit was to organise ourselves in some way in order to be more fruitful. Some voices warned that creating a structure would stifle the charismatic aspect and therefore it would not be a good idea; it would be better to continue as we are now, without any formal organisation. The history of the Church, of many apostolic charisms and the path of the Marist Institute itself refute this assertion. Certainly it is the Spirit who leads; the Spirit initiates and places a gift in the hands of good people. But that gift needs to be cared for, strengthened, enriched and multiplied for it to go far beyond the present and be at the service of the Church and the world for many generations to come. This was Marcellin Champagnat's understanding, and hence his efforts to achieve both civil and canonical recognition of the fledgling Institute of the Brothers.

Meeting of the Champagnat
Movement's Fraternities of
the Brasil Sul-Amazônia
Province

A future full of Hope

The future that can be glimpsed, with the existence of a possible lay Marist structure, is very positive and hopeful. Being part of





Where is the Spirit leading us? What does the Spirit want us to be and to do?

an associative structure would imply a sharper awareness of belonging and commitment to the vitality and future of Marist life. It would guarantee an identity and sense of belonging, surer of its distinctive values, collaboration and a sense of community at local, regional and global levels. It would favour interdependence and greater communion with the Institute of the Brothers, in order to create synergies and have a greater capacity and more opportunities for mission and Marist life. It would also help us to position ourselves as our own entity in dealings with the Church and civil society.

Marist laypeople would feel stronger in their commitment to develop all the dimensions of the charism (mission, spirituality, shared life) in response to the promptings of the Spirit, in creative fidelity, as laypeople, within the Church and in communion with other Marists, laypeople and brothers. The sense of being disciples and missionaries, sent to be multipliers would also be strengthened. This implies a readiness of heart to assume possible leadership roles or services, arrange formation

programmes, be co-responsible, live in community, foster communion, feel the internationality of our global charismatic family and invite audacity and creativity in mission. The existence of some type or types of associative structures, civil and/or canonical, would provide a formal organisation ensuring the legitimacy and recognition of this vocation. It would give stability and future promise, and would encourage all kinds of efforts to live and communicate Champagnat's charism to the next generations.

There is still a long way to go regarding this inspiration, but the first steps have already been taken. We have some examples of other ecclesial charisms that have progressed along this path and that inspire us as points of reference. We will have to be very attentive to the type of structure that is appropriate for our reality and needs and its implications for leadership, decision-making, economic stability, organisation and functioning, always ensuring unity within the great cultural diversity that we have. ■



The marist vocation of brothers and laypeople

**We celebrate
our shared
Marist life**

Br. João Carlos do Prado

Councillor General

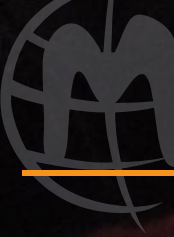
Agnes S. Reyes

East Asia province



The International Forum on the Lay Marist Vocation and the celebration of the Year of Marists Vocations provide opportunities for us to reflect, nurture, and celebrate in so many creative ways the gift of our being Marists. There could not be, at this time, a stronger stimulus than the Forum and the Year of Marist Vocations to help us become aware of the essentials of being called Marists: Brothers and Lay.

Our continuing reflections on our vocations as Marists connect us with the message of Pope Francis during the 59th World Day of Prayer for Vocations with the theme “*Called to Build the Human Family*.” Pope Francis says that when we speak about vocations, we are speaking about “*making God’s dream come true*.” Hence for us, being a lay Marist and Marist brother is a realization of God’s dream for us, respectively.



The foundation through which the vocation of the laity is deeply anchored lies in the gift of baptism where the laity becomes partakers of God's priestly, kingly and prophetic roles manifest in their obligation to renew the temporal order. The document *Lumen Gentium* (31) vivifies the call for the laity to engage in temporal affairs and direct them to God's designs. In this way, lay Marists live and carry-out God's mission in the daily circumstances of life, aware of the distinctive charism bequeathed to them by Saint Marcellin. In their own context, they live the values of simplicity, love of work, family spirit, quality presence, in the style of Mary and always attentive to the presence of God in their families, workplaces and

in the contexts of the society in which they live. The document "Gathered Around the Same Table" (12), defines lay Marists as Christian men and women who throughout their lives have heard the call of God to live Champagnat's charism and, from their lay state, respond to it.

The Marist Constitutions (C. 2), emphasize "being brothers" as a fundamental element of the identity of the Marist brothers. According to this document, the vocation of the brother in the Church is to be prophetic reminders of the common dignity and fundamental equality of all the People of God, remembering that in Jesus Christ we are all brothers and, with the Marist laity, called to build greater fraternity in the Church and in the



world. The brothers' way of living the Marist vocation is through public profession and living the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience.

The 22nd General Chapter took a prophetic stance in affirming that *"the future of the charism will be founded on a communion of fully committed Marists, brothers and lay"* and that, in this communion, *"all Marists are co-responsible for Marists life and mission."* These thoughts encapsulate the reality that the specificities of the Marist vocations of brothers and lay Marists are further enriched when they are shared to nurture and revitalise Marist life and mission. With this thought, lay Marists and Marist brothers are called to participate in God's mission of service to chil-

The Marist vocation in its expression of brothers and lay Marists, Marists of Champagnat, are gifts of the Spirit to the Church and to the world

dren and young people, to be builders of fraternity and to reveal the Marist face of the Church in the world. Together,

as the Spirit of the 22nd Chapter directs, they assume in communion and co-responsibility, the future of the Marist charism.

We can say that as Marists our vocations are intertwined in the richness of our identity grounded in baptism and shared in our common way of living the Christian vocation inspired by the Marist charism. As we deepen



our awareness and appreciation of our vocations, we celebrate with it our shared Marist life for greater vitality in fulfilling God's mission in the way of Mary and as exemplified by Marcellin! In our ongoing journey as Marists, we hold in our hearts Pope Francis' prayer, "Let us implore the light of the Holy Spirit, that we all may find our own place and give the best of ourselves in this great divine plan!"

The Marist vocation in its expression of brothers and lay Marists, Marists of Champagnat, are gifts of the Spirit to the Church and to the world. The Marist Constitutions (C. 6) points out that together, brothers and lay Marists



form a global charismatic family called to be the fraternal and maternal presence of God among children and young people. Together they share the gift of their specific vocation and commit themselves to building communion, offering mutual support, accompaniment, sharing spirituality and community life, participating in joint formation and solidarity work, and promoting co-responsibility for Marist life and mission. For it is in communion that their specific identities are nourished and strengthened.

To live this moment in the history of the Marist vocation is to be committed to a new par-

adigm of the Marist vocation. That is, brothers and lay people in communion and co-responsible for the Marist life and mission. Brothers and lay work together to give birth to this new moment of the Marist charism which will contribute strongly to its vitality and perpetuity.

The Marist vocation needs to be lived with joy, prophetism, and deep commitment in our responding to the needs of the children and young. And with the Spirit's inspiration, we continue to open our hearts to the many creative ways we are called to live the "joy of the Gospel" as *Marists of Champagnat* in our world today! ■



Chapter II

The Lay Marist vocation in today's world





Luiz da Rosa
General House

The lay Marist vocation in the charism of Champagnat

There are about 8,000 lay people experiencing some kind of vocational process

The history of the lay Marist vocation has its roots in the very charism of Champagnat, who wanted to found a lay institute. However, many decades passed since the foundation of the Marist Institute before laymen and women began to enter in a significant way into the reflection on Marist life and mission. The most significant step was in 1985, when the General Chapter officially recognized the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family. A commission appointed soon after the Chapter by the General Council worked for two years, from 1987 to 1989, soliciting suggestions from many brothers, lay people and alumni associations, and thus arrived at the text “Life Project of the CMMF” presented at the General Conference of Provincials in 1989 in Veranópolis, Brazil. At the conclusion of the year which celebrated the bicentenary of



the birth of Father Champagnat, on July 16, 1990, Brother Charles Howard presented this document, approved by the General Council, to the whole Institute: *“Let us consider this document as a first step that you yourselves will complete in future years”* (Circular of Brother Charles Howard: “Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family” - October 1991)

The Chapter of 1993 was marked by dialogue with 14 lay people who were committed to living Marist spirituality and, to this end, were invited to spend some days with the capitulants. On that occasion, the will to integrate the laity in all the activities of the Marist institutions, including the management, became evident: *“Let’s make real partners of everyone who wants to share in our spirituality and our*

**Let’s make real partners
of everyone who wants
to share in our spirituality
and our Mission
XIX General Chapter**

Mission. Let’s take the risk of losing a little power and be daring enough to collaborate freely with lay people, not because there are far fewer of us now, but because we recognise their vocation and mission as baptised Christians” (Message, 19).

For the first time in a General Chapter, two of the five calls to the Institute are for the brothers and laypeople at the same time:

- *“We feel called to deepen our understanding of the specific identities of Brothers and Lay Marists, in sharing life: spirituality, mission, formation...”* (3rd call: Choose Life, 26.)
- *“Go forward, Brothers and Laypersons together, in a clear and*

On the previous page:
Commission for the renewal
of the CMMF

General House, 2015

On this page:
XXII General Chapter

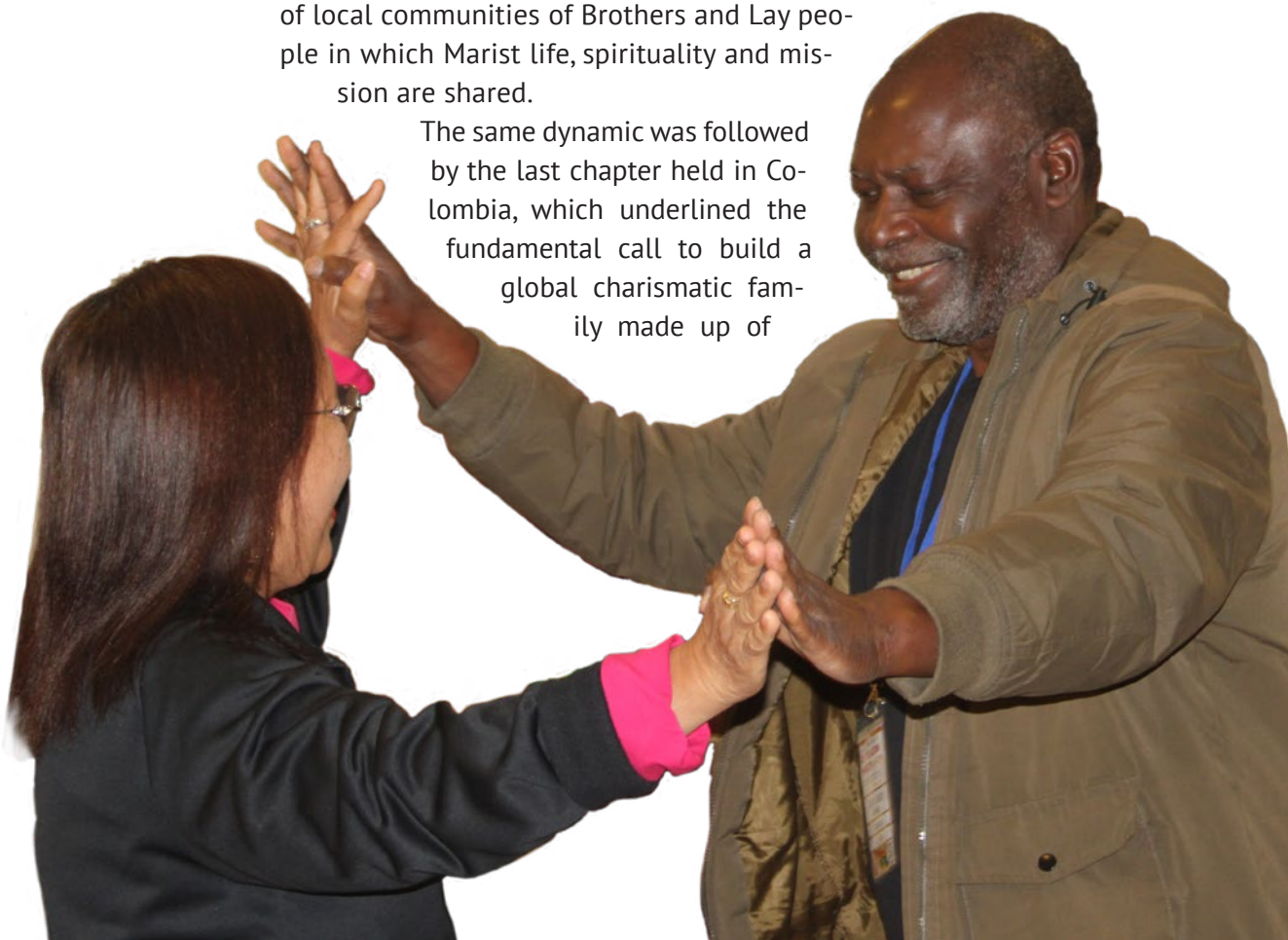
decisive way, drawing closer to the poorest and most marginalised of young people, through new ways in education, evangelisation and solidarity.” (4th call: Choose Life, 31)

In the final message of this Chapter there are 20 recommendations and petitions on the subject of the laity, addressed to the brothers, the communities, the administrative units, and the General Council. One of the latter reads: *“The General Chapter recommends that the General Council establish, in the next few years, a process and the necessary structures (studies, meetings, networks, Secretariat, International Commission ...) which will help brothers and laypeople to make their Marist identity more explicit – what they have in common, what is specific and what is complementary in our vocations – and to clarify the different ways of being a lay Marist”* (Choose Life, 47.2),

In the message of the 21st Chapter, celebrated in 2009, the second horizon of the fundamental calls refers explicitly to “a new relationship between Brothers and lay people, based on communion, searching together for a greater vitality of the Marist charism for our world today”.

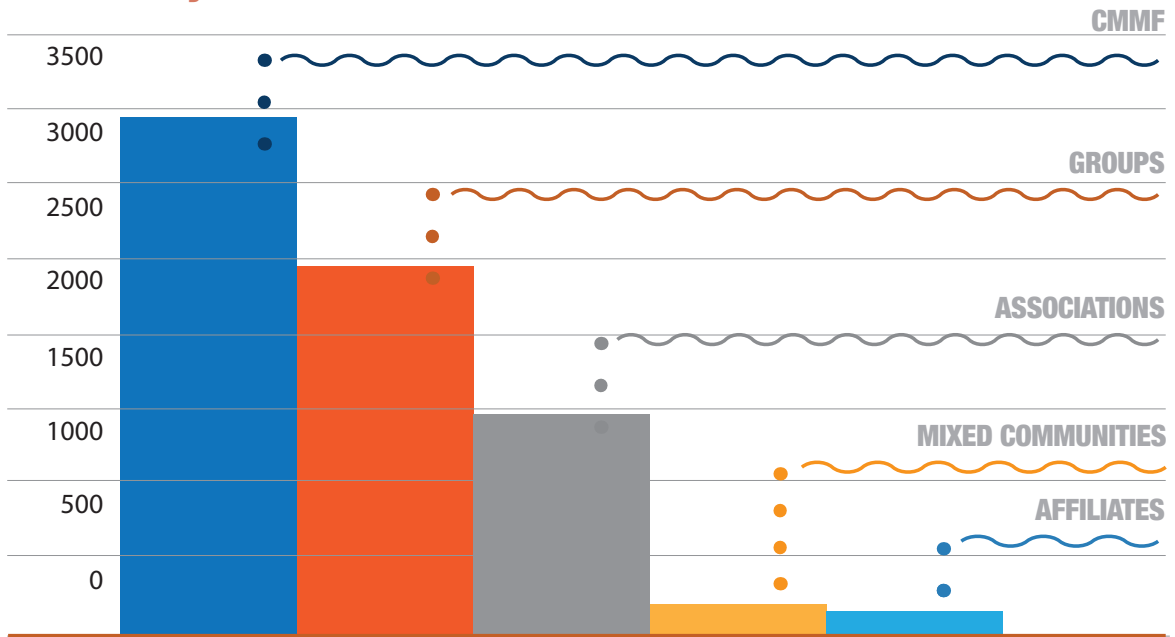
The Chapter recognizes the value of the lay marist vocation. It envisions the Marist future as a communion of persons in the charism of Champagnat, where specific vocations will be mutually enriching. It proposes to favor the development of local communities of Brothers and Lay people in which Marist life, spirituality and mission are shared.

The same dynamic was followed by the last chapter held in Colombia, which underlined the fundamental call to build a global charismatic family made up of





Marist Laity



consecrated men and lay people. It is this dynamic that led the Institute to ask the Secretariat of Laity, led since 2018 by lay people, to organize a period of reflection on the lay Marist vocation, inaugurated in March 2021, the International Forum, a journey that will conclude in 2024.

Marist Laity around the world

Each Administrative Unit has its own history in the implementation of the reflection done at the global level during these last decades. Therefore, today the Marist lay life is multiform, expressing itself in different ways, formed by groups with their own dynamics. Despite this plurality, lay people try to discern which organizational process to embrace so that the lay Marist vocation can flourish to its fullest potential.

It is estimated that there are about 8,000 lay people living some kind of Marist charismatic vocational process. Members of the CMMF represent the largest number, with about 3,400 members. There are also many lay communities, with about 2,500 participants. There are several other groups and associations, with about 1,500 people. There are even mixed communities of brothers and lay people, with about 200 Marists around the world. There are other lay men and women who are affiliated to the Institute (about 150) and several people who are currently on a vocational discernment path. ■

Lay Marist Life in Africa

We share life experiences while exploring the charism



Alida Masters Bodomanitra
Province Madagascar

The Lay Marist vocation in Africa is still in its infancy compared to other regions of the Institute. Its development is still

slow, and this for many reasons. It should be noted, however, that various groups have started up in the African Marist world.

Marist Youth, in particular. This group provides a privileged time to meet, pray, study together, and undertake some charitable activities, while remaining connected to the Marist charism. They are our successors because the leaders are already shaping and preparing them to become Brothers if they are attracted to the consecrated life, or Lay Marists if they choose to start a family.

There are also ex students who are grateful for the many benefits they received from Marist education. They want to show their gratitude by contributing to improving the infrastructure of their former school and supporting Marist mission in general.

Then, there are the families of the Brothers, who want to be a moral support for Marists and who help them in one way or another, such as through participating in Marist events.

And finally there are the Lay Marists who feel called to live the Marist spirit and try to nourish, develop and care for their response to this call from God through prayer and reflection on Marist





books such as “Gathered around the same table” and “Being a Lay Marist”. They share life experiences while exploring the charism in greater depth.

Each of these groups has its own organisation and activities. However, there are times when they meet and work together. For example, on the 2nd of January, Foundation day,

or the professions of the Brothers, or other Marist feasts or events, these different groups join with the Brothers in the Eucharist and other celebrations. In some countries or Provinces, they have recollections or retreats together during periods like Lent or Advent, but this does not prevent each group from having its own activities. Nonetheless, it should be noted here that there is some confusion among the groups who consider themselves Marist. Apart from the groups mentioned earlier, people who work with the Marist Brothers and all who are in contact with the Brothers, think that they are automatically lay Marists too. In Africa, fellowship and family life are important and people think that when a group lives together with a certain degree of closeness, everyone should be on the same footing, and feel part of a family. This is often referred to as the extended family. This is also what happens in the Marist context. However, it needs to be explained to the different groups that being a lay Marist is a vocation, a response to God’s call, and ‘lay Marists’ are those who want to live this vocation deeply with the charism of St. Marcellin Champagnat and are expected to follow an appropriate formation process for that.

Another challenge to be faced is at the level of motivation. Someone interested in Marist life will first ask, “What do you do in the Lay Marist group?”. The person will be positively motivated when the activities of the group correspond to his or her interest. But that’s not enough; steps still need to be taken to draw their attention to the importance of Marist spirituality. An important task of formation is to achieve a balance between spirituality and Marist mission. ■



**African representatives
meeting in Rome,
November 2022**

Marcos Broc
Province Brasil Sul-Amazônia



Different ways of being Marist laypeople in the South American region

“Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Get up and go towards the south-^[a] to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go over to this chariot and join it.’ So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, ‘**Do you understand what you are reading?**’ He replied, ‘**How can I, unless**

There are 1,800 people who belong to some kind of lay group

someone guides me?’ And he invited Philip to get in and **sit beside him.**” (Acts 8: 26-39)

It may be that many people who see us or read something about Marist life do not know much about us or about what is really driving us to be who we are. That is why we need to be sensitive, to be aware of possible misunderstandings about us and to establish a way of ‘guiding’ these conversation partners, adopting the attitude of the disciple-student (Lk 6:40). This leads us to establish a relationship, enter into their mentality, and be

on a par with them so as to see life as they do, to identify and understand where they are coming from and, from this position, to engage in a dialogue, encouraging and informing them to make a discernment to live the ‘mission’ of Jesus, inspired by the characteristics of the Marist charism.

There are 1,800 people who belong to some kind of lay group in the five Provinces of the South America Region. Such a number perhaps points to the remarkable intuition of the Institute in offering lay people a more genuine way of living the Marist charism. It is also true that there are many other people seeking to live the charism but who are not in lay groups. They live as Marists in their own way without belong-



ing to any organised group with its regular meetings and agreed shared practices. Such diversity in the way of being Marist is a good thing because Christianity would not be truly Christian if it did not welcome different ways of contributing to the building of the Reign of God.

“To be a Marist of Champagnat is, then, a way of living one’s Christian vocation, sharing in the charism entrusted to Saint Marcellin and strengthening the composition of a Global Charismatic Family” (Year of Marist Vocations, 2022, p. 7). This is where the importance of journeying in groups comes in and going down a collective path, because these can offer more professional and meaningful formation path-

ways more likely to move people from words to action. Members undertake a discernment, join with others and live in fraternities, communities and groups that go by different names: e.g. a Marist Brother; important Marist places of origin in France or in the Province to which they belong; a city where members live; biblical characters; mottoes of meetings or chapters at Institute level; or Marist symbols, such as the violet, for example. What inspires and sustains all these initiatives is



the Marist charism, the gift that Saint Marcellin Champagnat received, cultivated and displayed to the world as a sign of the Holy Spirit. Special mention should

be made of instances in each of the provinces of the Region where the ‘group’ focus is on young adults. In fact, in our part of the world, there are initiatives of young lay-people who are making their presence felt, setting out on their Marist journey and getting organised with some support and encouragement. The challenge is to let the vision and needs of young people come to the fore, avoiding any adult-centrism. Examples exist of initiatives aimed at people over 18 years of age with some common parameters in the Provinces of Brazil Centro Sul and Brazil Sul Amazônia. These examples drawn from across South America point to the possibility of spreading the charism further and of realising in our time the desire of Saint Marcellin Champagnat to be in all the dioceses of the world. ■

Meeting of the Laity Network of the América Sur Region in Paraguay



The marist lay vocation in Asia

Different realities in the three administrative units





Elma Rafil

Province East Asia



The lay Marist vocation in Asia presents different realities in the three administrative units. In the Marist District of Asia (MDA) there is no organized lay group but the Brothers are working on growing the seeds of Marist lay vocation. In the other two Provinces some groups are already organized and there is a great effort to make them stronger. For example, there is ongoing process of growing the Marist lay group in Malaysia and Singapore.

The Marist Lay Association in Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan – South Asia

In Sri Lanka, there are 120 lay people who are members of the group they call the Marist Lay Association. These lay groups are in Negombo, Thudella, Haldanduwana, Champagnat Vidhu Piya-sa Evening School, and Colombo Nugegoda. The lay people are engaged with programs and activities like ecological awareness, interfaith dialogue, peace and reconciliation, and social response. In addition, they are involved with youth and bible study activities. In India, lay people have a group they called La Valla Teachers Association in La Valla Evening Study Centers. There are 14 members in this group. In Trichy, there is a newly formed group with 40 members. While in Pakistan, there is a team of 15 lay people and in Sargodha, there are 10 members.

The Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family in Philippines, East Asia

The Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family (CMMF) currently has 125 members in the Philippines. The members are inspired by the spirituality and sense of mission inherited from St. Marcel-lin Champagnat. There are spaces of encounters for the on-going formation, sacred time, reflection, and prayer. Through the CMMF, members are offered with a regular group to anchor and a sense of spiritual identity and belonging to a Marist community. They build a strong sense of communion through their spiritual journey and involvement in mission and outreach activities. Members enhance greater awareness and responsiveness to the Church's task of evangelization and mission and in collaborating with the Marist Institute of the Philippines in their various missionary activities.

The MarEx, Philippines

The MarEx is a group of Marist laymen who are former Marist



Brothers. They call this group MarEx because of their background, that is, having previously lived a Marist Brotherhood life. They had been Brothers and had undergone the formal formation program for brotherhood, but they had left the Congregation and are now pursuing the lay life. Their uniform experience in the past makes them a distinct lay group.

The New Marists in Mission, Philippines

The New Marists in Mission is an emerging group of young professionals in the Philip-

pines who have dubbed themselves the “New Marists in Mission.” This group is composed of young employees, some are employed at Notre Dame of Marbel University while others are employed in the public and private sectors. This group started last December 2017, extending help to the marginalized children, particularly belonging to the indigenous group: (Koronadal, Philippines). Currently, there are 12 members under the accompaniment of CMMF members.

**We continue to believe
that this is our call:
a family in in the midst
of diversity, jealous participants
in the divine mission**

The Friends of Marcellin, East Asia

The Friends of Marcellin is a program aimed at promoting Marist life in East Asia and beyond. This is the initial stage of accompanying the participants to learn about the life of the founder, St. Marcellin Champagnat, and the Marist charism. In the series of initial formation programs, participants are exposed to Marist spirituality, communion, and mission. Plans are in place to organize those who have undergone the program. ■



**A widespread
Marist presence
that is life-giving
for the region**

Various expressions of Lay Marist Life in the Arco Norte Region

Pedro Chinchilla

Province México Central



There are many possibilities for the development of lay Marist life in this region. Laypeople have been formed and become co-responsible for the Marist charism, in both life and mission, practically without noticing it, in the last few decades. Gradually, since the 80's, they have been incorporated into the different pastoral structures of the region, until today they make up the great majority in each of them and so represent a widespread Marist presence that is life-giving for the region.

One of the lay structures or groupings with the largest membership is the fraternities of the CMMF, which have been present since 1986 when Br. Basilio Rueda Guzmán invited some families to form the first fraternity. They subsequently have held national meetings of the fraternities of the two Provinces of Mexico starting in 1995 when the first meeting took place at Quinta Soledad in Mexico City. At present our region has



Marist fraternities of the CMMF in 5 of the 6 Administrative Units. We also have a solid structure of Marist Youth Ministry in the region with groups of lay people and Brothers coming together to animate a variety of groups of children and youth. There is a training programme for those involved in youth ministry (teachers, university students, former students, etc.), a Diploma in youth ministry, based on Church and Institute documents that speak of forming children and young people towards a civilisation of love. At the different levels, hundreds of children and young people are being accompanied in the Marist ministries of the Administrative Units.

Another example of lay involvement is that of young people finishing high school (around 17 years old) who, before entering university, volunteer one year of their lives to do social service in marginalised regions of Mexico, in a project known as “Jóvenes por el Servicio” (“Youth for Service”). The aim of this project is to develop the solidarity of young adults through

voluntary service for those who need it most. The existence of this group of young people presents us with an opportunity because when they return from their service they are eager to continue their Marist formation. With them, we can build up a group of young adults who could get together to share their concerns and continue their formation. There is also a group of young lay Marists in the Province of the USA, known as Young Adults,

who meet to accompany and form each other in their growth as individuals and as a community. In other Administrative Units in the region there is a similar type of volunteering with young Marist graduates from our schools.

Another group of laypeople are the graduates of the various formation programmes for laypeople, such as Formar I and II in Central America, Formarme in Mexico, Lay Formation in Norandina, etc. These courses have been running in the region for over 20 years, fostering Marist identity in the people who work in our ministries (teachers, administrative staff, employees and directors), providing life experiences that develop not only a solid knowledge of what it means to be Marist (foundation, origins, mission, spirituality, pedagogy, shared life) but also the possibility that graduates can identify with, fall in love with or find their vocational paths based on the Marist charism as their way of following Jesus in the style of Mary. In most of the Administrative Units of the region we are preparing

There are many possibilities for the development of lay Marist life in this region. Laypeople have been formed and become co-responsible for the Marist charism, in both life and mission

On the previous page:
International Forum
Participants in Rome
November 2022



courses and talks aimed at promoting a culture of vocations at all levels and in all ministries. We are also persevering in developing vocational discernment pathways for laypeople, implementing ways of bonding to the charism within the Administrative Units, and in developing associative structures for the laity. Fortunately, we have Provinces in the region where the training of people for vocational accompaniment, the development of vocational discernment pathways and bonding with the Marist charism have been a reality for some years. They serve as inspiration and guidance for the other Provinces of the region in their implementation.

So we have groups of lay people accompanying vocations, groups of formators in the area of vocations, groups of lay people undergoing formation and vocational discernment, as well as groups of lay people bonded with the Marist charism. We also have in the region the Association of the Laity in Canada which is helping us to implement associative structures in other provinces of the region. There are also some mixed communities in the region, especially in marginalised areas, where brothers and lay people are sharing some specific life and mission project adapted to the place where they are. ■

International Forum
Rome, November 2022



Europe: vocation, shared life, spirituality and communion

The lay Marist vocation, shared life, spirituality and communion

European Lay Team

The word “*emergence*” refers to “*an action or effect of emerging (sprouting, coming to the surface of water or other liquid)*”; “*emergency*” refers to “*a situation of danger or disaster that requires immediate action*”. In this sense, the call of the XXII General Chapter to “*respond boldly to emerging needs*” can be understood in this twofold sense: emerging needs can be those that are related to the new life that is emerging, but also those that require a response because of their urgent nature.

What might this reflection have to do with the reality of Lay Marists in old Europe?

It is more as an intuition than as an absolute certainty, but we believe that the steps being taken in the European Provinces in relation to the vocational growth of lay Marists have such a twofold meaning.

Answering the questions the Chapter asked itself: *Who does God want us to be in this emerging world? What does God want us to do in this emerging world?* is the key to understanding what the





future of Champagnat's charism will look like. If we are convinced that our future will have to be as "*a communion of fully committed Marists*", the paths being explored by lay Marists in Europe must be focused on that dream, because we are being called to reveal a new face of the charism.

**The future will
have to be as a
communion of
fully committed
Marists**

Some of the most significant experiences that are taking place in Europe in response to these big questions have to do with four areas: the lay Marist vocation, shared life, spirituality and communion. All of these experiences make sense because they are concerned with Marist life and must impel us to Mission in this fragile and turbulent world.

For people to grow in their **lay Marist vocation**, there is an increasingly clear and well-defined program of vocational discernment on offer. In a more focused way, these discernment processes are intended to lead lay Marists to publicly express their bonding to the charism, as a sign of commitment. There are already some examples that are beginning to have a solid structure and others underway. Also, we are moving towards having common programs for the whole Region of Europe. A major challenge, we have found, is to have people trained and available to accompany others in their discernment and in their life journeys.

Representatives of Europe in
the International Forum
Rome, November 2022

Regarding **shared life**, we recognise the different types of community in which lay people have been present over many years: Fraternities, Lay Communities, Marist Life Groups, Marist Spirituality Groups (GEM), Marist Encounter Groups (GME), Marist Identity Groups... In



Who does God want us to be in
this emerging world?
What does God want us to do
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charism will look like

a number of places on our continent there are mixed communities, in which brothers and laypeople share life and have a community life plan, including living under the same roof in some instances.

Because they are new, it is worth mentioning the Marist Christian Communities of Reference (CCMR) or the Marist Communities Animating the Charism (CAC), in which laypeople and brothers, in communion, take initiatives to ensure the future of the charism in various Marist ministries and to enthuse others to make it their own.

In a deeply secularised and de-Christianised continent, another great challenge for Marists in Europe is to help people develop an **inner life** and grow **spirituality**. Through formation activities and other initiatives taken by schools and communities of spirituality, this is an area in which many lay men and women are engaged, with brothers, to offer Champagnat Marists occasions to probe the meaning of life and to encounter God personally.

Finally, we can highlight the **communion between brothers and laypeople** as something tangible and increasingly widespread. This is evident in the examples mentioned above, in joint formation experiences, family gatherings, shared retreats, Easter celebrations... ■

Reference Marist Christians
Communities - Meeting in
Burgos, in Spain
March 2023.





Different Expressions of Marist Laity in Oceania

Personal and local experience of belonging

Matthew Pearce

Star of the Sea Province



As we grow in our region to encompass the new Star of the Sea Province, we look to create new ways of gathering and a renewed sense of belonging and connection with one another in our Marist Charism and Catholic tradition. I would like to share with you my own personal and local experience of this sense of belonging.

In Australia, the Marist Association of St Marcellin Champagnat was established in 2015 and has grown to over 900 members who

make up over 50 local groups. Each local group uniquely expresses their desire to be Marist today. For example, in my local group in Central West, NSW, we have over 20 members who gather, pray, share and listen to one another. We began as lay staff and Marist Brothers from local schools, however, we recently welcomed new members from local parishes,



including our local clergy and our Bishop, and those who previously disconnected from the faith. Our members are involved in a range of school, community and parish celebrations and ministries. Our members serve wherever there is a need. For example, we have fundraising and awareness programs for Marist Solidarity projects in the Marist communities in Giasnogor, Bangladesh and Timor Leste. Locally, we also work with the St Vincent de Paul Society to help those who need assistance. Spiritually, some meet for weekly scripture study groups and Communion services. We gather once a month to either connect online with the wider Marist Association or physically come together to listen

St Marcellin Champagnat was a wonderful example of how to accept this gift as he knew how to teach young people to look beyond and open themselves to God and trust Mary's work.

to guest speakers. We reflect on the Gospel or rediscover Marcellin's letters and discuss how these can be lived out today in our local context.

At the regional and national level, I am truly grateful to the Marist Association for offering formation resources, a calendar of events and opportunities, online sharing platforms, and a governance and communications team.

I joined as soon as the Marist Association was announced because the fire in my heart needs to be fed and all I want to do is spread the joy and enthusiasm of being a Catholic Marist to all! I am inspired by the breaths we take as a local, provincial and global family as we seek to follow and deeply trust God in the way of Mary. For the Marist Association, it's about the laity creating spaces where people of faith belong and creating a shared sense of the sacred. We sense the sacred within us as we follow the example of Jesus. Our Marist Association is one of many ways we can experience the Gospel as the early Christians experienced. Being a Lay Marist means being open to God's calling every day. It means we have one heart and one mission; to allow the spirit to work through us as we journey together as brothers and lay.

A highlight for me in 2022 was the Marist Association National Gathering where many members, of a variety of ages, gathered together in Sydney (Images attached of the event). We were asked to explore how we may "listen to the Spirit", and "shine among them like stars in the sky" (Philippians 2:15). Br Peter Carroll, Provincial of the Star of the Sea Province, asked attendees to consider our Association's culture, and if this culture is what we desire it to be. He asked us to remember our underpinning values of being Christ-centred, Marist, and connected to Church whilst exploring



what it means to be inclusive, reaching out and nurturing.

**Good Mother of
Br. Santamarta
General House**

For me, the laity in our region is in communion with Br. Ernesto Sánchez's opening address at the International Forum on the Marist Lay Vocations in Rome, 2022. Br Ernesto invited Marists to remain open and attentive, welcoming and embracing diversity of

our charism as a gift from God. St Marcellin Champagnat was a wonderful example of how to accept this gift as he knew how to teach young people to look beyond and open themselves to God and trust Mary's work. With Mary, our Good Mother, we couldn't be in better hands as we are blessed to have her at the heart of our charism. We need to trust Mary will be present with us as we retain our rich history and continue to build communities of faith.

We lay Marists in our region are inspired by the brothers and the church to journey together, committed to making God known and loved. We are invited to be aware of the spirit within us and be the face of Christ in our daily work and encounters, and the way we seek justice and dignity for all. I am personally excited to see where the Holy



Spirit will lead us as we navigate the new waters together in the Star of the Sea province and explore new ways for lay vocations to be expressed across our new Province.

In conclusion, let us pray. All of us, Marists of Champagnat, entrust ourselves to you, our good Mother of Fourvière, pilgrim of faith. With daring and generosity, may we be signs of your tenderness and mercy, and may we be faithful to our mission to make Jesus Christ

known and loved. ■

For more information about the Marist Association in Australia, go to www.maristassociation.org.au.



**The QR code offers more information
about the Marist Association in Australia**

Lay bonding to the Marist charism: a response to the call of God

I want to
celebrate what
I am already
living

Ana Gómez Haro
Mediterranea Province



In the Gospel of John, Jesus has a conversation with a Samaritan woman and in that conversation Jesus offers her “living water”. Whoever drinks of it will never be thirsty again. The Samaritan woman can only say to Jesus: “give me this water”.

Saint Marcellin Champagnat, in his life journey, had the defining experience of the young Montagne, who died at the age of seventeen without knowing anything of God’s love. That experience was a vocational call to Marcellin. He was confronted with the situation of young people who were neglected, and he responded by founding the Little Brothers of Mary.

Vocations are dynamic. They are calls and defining moments that occur throughout life. We have to be attentive to respond and to drink the living water that God has for each one of us at every moment, responding to the needs of our time as Saint Marcellin Champagnat did with young people.

And you, what are you thirsty for?

In the International Forum on the Lay Marist Vocation, one of the objectives is “To reflect and propose possible ways to bond with the Marist charism”. In this objective it is evident that the Marist charism is a gift for the Church that we brothers and lay people share and live as a response to a call that God makes to us to build God’s Reign as Marists. God’s calls and responses can be very diverse, and it is noted that there are lay people who may have a call to bond with the charism, leading to a public celebration in order



to underscore, commit themselves, and emphasise some of the aspects of their lives as Marists.

Bonding with the Marist charism requires, therefore, a process of discernment, being accompanied and living in community so that the lay people who feel this call can place what is moving within them in God's hands and give a response. This challenge of bonding is already a reality in Provinces such as Ibérica and Norandina, which already have discernment processes and lay people bonded

to the charism. At the Forum it was noted that it is something to continue working and exploring further for it to become a reality in the whole Institute.

In my personal experience, I already feel committed to the charism by how I live and by the choices I have made, but until now there has not been this possibility of bonding in my Province of Mediterranea. At the moment, the possi-

bility is already there of participating in a programme called "Being Marist Today". This aims at helping people discern the call that God is making to them through being Marist. At the moment I am following the programme and it is clear to me that I want to be bonded to the charism. But many people ask me: "Why do you want to make such a commitment?" I want to say YES to being bonded with the Marist charism for the following reasons:

We have to be attentive to respond and to drink the living water that God has for each one of us at every moment, responding to the needs of our time



- I want to celebrate what I am already living: a fundamental choice for life as a Marist. For 5 years I have belonged to a mixed community of brothers and laypeople which is enriching and transforming me and where I am putting a lot of myself and my day to day life at the service of my province by fostering spirituality among young people between 25 and 35.
- I also want to celebrate this fundamental option with my community, with the people who love me and to commit myself to my day-to-day reality as a Marist.
- I want the bonding to be a new beginning that stirs me up and leads me to new paths as a lay Marist in the field of mission. In short, to continue deepening my relationship with God and to continue discovering God's will for me.
- I want to give witness to others that living radically in the Marist way is possible in many life situations, particularly my own as a married lay Marist with two young children.



This YES has many pending and unresolved challenges such as my relationship with my province after the bonding, the conditions and criteria for renewing the commitment, and many more open questions that you can imagine... But I sincerely believe that now is the moment to launch myself, to embark on this journey, and to be open to what God has prepared for me. For me the commitment presupposes an answer to the question, "What are you thirsty for?" I am thirsty to communicate the Gospel to young people in the style of Marcellin; I am thirsty to build

a more just world; I am thirsty to build a domestic Church of the apron, down to the small details.

This year of Marist vocations is an opportunity to see what is moving within each one of us and to discover the call that God has for us. Perhaps it is the time for you to ask yourself: And you, what are you thirsty for? ■



Claudia Aida Rojas Carvajal
Norandina Province



Marist laypeople and bonding

The Second Vatican Council, in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (LG) on the Church, affirmed categorically that all the baptised make up and are the Church of Christ and form the new people of God, in which there is diversity of functions and services, but equal dignity and importance. (LG 32). In the Marist family, which had al-

ready been experiencing a radical evolution and greater participation on the part of many lay people, a new path opened up.

Some documents reflected this lay growth and continue to inspire this commitment. *Gathered Around the Same Table*, 12, states that: "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."; and in article 14: "The lay Marist vocation, like all vocations, originates and is developed by viewing one's life in the light of the Spirit. This discernment has different stages; and so each person should be accompanied while



respecting his or her personal rhythm". Later, in 2017, *To Be a Lay Marist* gave concrete guidelines for accompanying vocational pathways.

Certainly, when this document came into the hands of many lay people, we saw in it a reflection of our own vocational journeys. There had been an initial moment of invitation and from there, we began to sense that our Christian response could be lived through the Marist charism; we joined with companions on the journey in a community of life - perhaps a fraternity, a group of lay people, or a lay community - with whom we sought to deepen our faith and hence our encounter with Christ and his Gospel.

On this journey, many of us have become aware that we cannot be anything other than lay Marists. And in the case of some of us, the Spirit has not only helped us to become aware of the gift of our vocation, but has also inspired us to want to publicly express our commitment to the charism through some act witnessed by our administrative units: a commitment or bonding as a lay Marist.

A text that encouraged and above all accompanied my discernment prior to my vocational bonding was the text of Matthew 3: 13 - 17,

the Baptism of Jesus. In visualising the context, I find a Jesus who is discovering who his father was, through prayer, many experiences and his community life with his disciples. We, lay men and women, also after periods of reflection, of prayer, of discernment, of living with our communities, of relating to Marist religious life, have been discovering ourselves as lay Marists. On the other hand, John Baptist, his re-

Many brothers, many friends, relatives and others have also said to us: "You are Marist and even more Marist than I am"

lative, affirmed Jesus in his identity, and even suggested to him that it was he who should be baptised. Many brothers, many friends, relatives and others have also said to us: "You are Marist and even more Marist than I am"... Even so, Jesus wanted to show us, by his example, a new baptism, a new way of relating, of Being and Doing. Through our discernment

experience that has led us to make a public commitment to the charism, we are seeking to give witness to and explore new ways of BEING and DOING as lay Marists, without wanting to be pretentious. Such a bonding has led us to take on new avenues of responsibility, of communion, and of being new faces for the mission that we have inherited from Champagnat and the first Brothers, in a world that demands us to be creative in the way we 'make Jesus Christ known and loved'.

In the recent history of the Church, various forms of promoting lay leadership have been encouraged and put into practice. In 1985 many lay people were attracted by Champagnat's charism and certainly the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family was a breath of fresh air in Marist life more generally. The establishment of the movement allowed many men and women to find their place in the Church through the fraternities.

Today the Spirit is surprising us with Marist lay people who choose to bind themselves to the charism. These are men and women who have experienced a strong call from the Spirit to feel that they are to be active in



the life and mission of the Church through the Marist charism. For some of us it is no longer enough just to be committed as members of a community or to feel personally Marist. Now our inspiration, our challenge and our audacity may be that, in addition to belonging to a community that supports our vocation, our response to the gift of this vocation is to be more radical and inspiring. We are ready to give our generous YES to the charism in

the presence of a community that is witness to this commitment and that will remind us of it in times of joy, but also in times of difficulty. It is clear that the understanding of the commitment of laypeople and their relationship with Marist religious life has gone through different phases and we could say that we are at a new moment. What is happening is a gift of the Spirit: many lay people feel called to live the same spirituality, to share the same

mission and to be co-heirs of the same charism; bonding ourselves to the charism makes us more aware of our common charismatic vocation and of the value of the different specific vocations within the same charismatic family. We lay Marists, after a process of formation and discernment, feel called to be the heart, memory and guarantee of the charism, and, together with the brothers, to give shape to the charism into the future. ■



Living Marist Life from Canberra to La Valla!

My Marist
journey has
been a rich one
that continues
surprising me

Mark O'Farrell
Secretariat of Laity



During the International Forum on the Lay Marist Vocation in Rome we discussed and reflected on the different ways of linking people's lives to the Marist charism. We spoke at length, and we listened to individual stories that voiced words such as bonding, public commitment, belonging and associations that have been developing across the global family to better understand this diversity of connection. There was also much in common that united us and the **Marist charism** came to the fore as a unifying force. The word charism in all the languages was easily understood by all. We prayed, sang, painted and even danced with the presence of 'Ruah', the breath of the Holy Spirit, the charism, alive in each of us. For me, the gift of the Marist charism in my life simply allows me to be who I am. I felt this was common with many Marists I met during these days together building communion. Let me explain this concept further with a few reflections from my life.

My Marist journey has been a rich one that continues surprising me and at the same time unfolding before me in new and exciting ways like this Forum. I keep wondering how a young boy from a little school in Canberra could find himself walking across the rugged hill country of La Valla. In simple terms I have been greatly blessed in my life and I put this down to three factors, each one contributing to who I am and who I feel God is calling me to be:

- My parents for nurturing the gift of my **faith**;
- The **Marist Brothers** for providing the gift of my **education**;
- My family who shows me daily what unconditional **love** is.

I think my parents would have got on very well with Marcellin's.



There was also much in common that united us and the Marist charism came to the fore as a unifying force

My dad was in the military, busy defending the country and my mum cared for me and my four brothers and educated us in the faith. Mum helped me pray the rosary, attend daily mass with her, and receive the sacraments. She loved telling me stories about the apparitions of Mary and later in life she visited Lourdes and brought home a bottle of holy water as a gift for her children. This summed up Mum's faith. She lived with gentleness and faith and continues to be **Mary for me today.**

I first met the brothers as nine-year-old in Canberra where I attended the Marist school. My earliest connection to the story of Marcelin was in 4th grade reading a book in class one day. I was instantly drawn to the image on the cover and the amazing story of Father Champagnat and wanted to be a teacher and missionary just like him. Years later this dream came to life for me as a Marist educator. And yes, I still have the book!

The Marist Brothers taught us at school our goal in life as young Marists was to give back and help others who were not as fortunate. My parents reinforced this with Lenten projects at home. Without realising it at the time, I suddenly had **faith** and **mission** in my life.

This connection and knowledge of Marcelin's story grew as I got older, and it helped deepen my faith.

The **vo-cation** of teaching allowed me to meet many hundreds of stu-





Br Ben Consigli
and Mark with his
wife and daughter

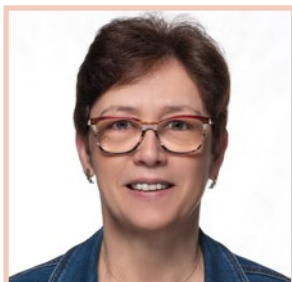
dents and to reinforce the same Marist values I had grown up. As a religion teacher I had to find a language, like Marcellin did, to engage the young with their faith, not always an easy task but I found the resilience and persistence Marcellin had, the trust in God, and this inspired me to continue the work.

Marcellin became another teacher for me, a life coach to use modern language, about God and the gospel of life. I cherished simplicity and practicality growing up, just like Marcellin did helping to raise up the young children in Lavalla to give them a view of the world that offered hope. My wife and I have continued doing the same educating our daughter. The Marist charism is now being planted in her heart and I hope it flourishes for her like it did for me.

I felt these days together at the International Forum and the overwhelming sense of **belonging** and **communion** the participants experienced was a renewed connection to the place of the Marist charism in our lives. It was a beautiful call to receive and participate in and a reminder of the original dream of Fourvière, to be a family that does the work of Mary for our world. ■



Josmari Pauzer
Brazil Center-Sul Province



Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family

“As an Institute, and in our Administrative Units, we continue to discern how best to support the development of movements, such as the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family, and other duly approved entities, each with its own statutes and structures”

(Constitutions 6.1)

The Movement, since its launching in 1985, at the XVIII General Chapter of the Marist Brothers, was and continues to be a valuable aid for the growth, deepening and attachment of many people to the Marist charism. It was born as a response to the desire of many lay men and women to live their Christian vocation. The witness of their lives made it grow and develop. They are the *raison d'être* of the Movement.

As its name indicates, the Movement helps to spread the Marist way of being in families and communities. Therefore, shared life, mission and spirituality are the pillars of this group. For this reason, the moments when members gather to share their experiences, their achievements and ideas on how to move forward are important.

In fraternity

Fraternities are the unity of the Movement: they are small communities where members meet periodically, share their faith and life in a family atmosphere, where they cultivate the Marist vocation and increase their experience of faith, charity and commitment to the world. The life of the fraternity is the responsibility of each of its members. Its members are open to invite and welcome all those who wish to join the Movement. While the lay role is valued, the participation of the brothers in the fraternities



Champagnat fraternity of
Uberlândia, Brasil Centro-Norte



is a great advantage. Their presence as companions on the journey is the image of a Marian style of accompaniment in fraternal life. Living our lay vocation in fraternities leads us to consider our whole life in terms of relationships of communion and participation. All members find a place at the table. We follow Jesus in Mary's way. We are Christians, Marists of Champagnat, and in the fraternities we put our faith into practice, carrying out concrete actions of love, mercy, charity and forgiveness.

We enjoy living together, celebrating important dates, praying together, studying topics proposed by the province, conversing, celebrating life and participating in the meetings of the Movement.

We also share frustrations, indignations, the pain of our brothers, the difficulties of our country, the conflicts of the world and moments of disagreement, since all this is part of life in fraternity.

In this context, the challenges consist in leaving aside individualism, our convictions, the need to go out of ourselves to create communion, to establish relationships that generate life. "There is no life when one pretends to belong only to oneself and to live as islands: in these attitudes death prevails," Pope Francis teaches us. To overcome the challenges, it is necessary for people to trust one another, to be humble and committed to the pursuit of the common

good. An essential element in this process is the need for a certain level of maturity to engage in group processes of discussion and debate. Practicing synodality is everyone's task.

In the fraternities, instead of seeking confrontation, we need processes that allow us to express differences, listen to them

and develop them, so that, in this way, we can walk together, without the need to leave people behind.

Looking beyond

As Champagnat Marists, we are invited to look beyond. Beyond being accustomed to the sterile margins of comfort, beyond that ad-

Proyecto de vida
en fraternidad

Movimiento Champagnat
de la Familia Marista



Read the document
"Life Project in Fraternity"





CMMF Fraternities Meeting
Mexico, March 2023

dicted look that never breaks the crust of equality. To look beyond is to reach the deepest part of ourselves. To look only outward characterizes a mark of contemporaneity and makes the human being stay away from himself, from his conscience, from his ego, from the sacred place where truth does not accept disguises.

Our mission is fundamentally to live and work in love. To do this we need to follow the example of Marcellin Champagnat and the first Brothers, to allow ourselves to be shaped by Mary and with confidence and determination to fulfill God's plan. This presupposes that we can establish a deep and spiritual contact with the people the Lord puts in our path.

As Marists of Champagnat, we are united and enlivened by a charism, a mentality, an affectivity, a sense of values, a way of reacting, a will and common goals of truth and goodness. Moved by the Spirit, we look to our future with the same confidence as Mary and Marcellin. At the heart of the Champagnat Movement is the union between Brothers, lay men and women. In our relationships there is something profound because we seek God.

Our spiritual experiences are a path that sustains our existence and aligns the meaning of the life we live. Let us walk then, since life is not a passing time, but a time of encounter. Only in the encounters of the paths of life, we are enlightened, we grow, we lighten and illuminate the path. Finally, we become humanized! ■

The future of the Lay Marist vocation is bright!

Pete Marti

United States Province



The opportunities to live out the Lay Marist vocation in the United States have expanded exponentially over the past few years. With the introduction of the USA Marists of Champagnat, we have created a strong network of Marists who can share life and mission in meaningful ways. Since the United States is a geographically large country, and as Marists we are spread far apart, technology and planning have been vital to staying connected. We have successfully organized groups by interest that meet and pray together virtually multiple times a month. This has really given people an opportunity to nourish themselves regardless of where they live and how many Marists are physically close to them. While technology has been a big help, it is also important to share each

United States Marists
in La Valla, France





other's physical presence. Wherever there is a concentrated group of Marists, there are also local groups that meet in each other's homes for prayer and fellowship. These same local groups gather to serve the needs of their respective communities. To enhance the solidarity of all Marists in the province, there are also projects that serve the least favored that are available to all. We are serving migrants from Central America on the United States border and serving the rural poor in Kentucky as just a few examples.

Personally, the structures for the Lay Marist vocation that exist in the United States allow me to live out my Marist charism to the fullest.

We are serving migrants from Central America on the United States border and serving the rural poor in Kentucky

Day in and day out I get to serve young people in our Marist schools. I feel supported by my local Marists in mission and feel connected to them through our prayers and gatherings. Outside of the schools we have been able to make a positive impact in our local community by providing food and supplies to victims of Hurricane Ian on the west

coast of Florida. That area was decimated and we have been able to step up and respond not just by providing material support, but by being physically present to those who have suffered the most. The technology that is available allows me to meet with Marists across the country that share similar passions and interests with me. These

Marist Young Adult
United States

structures and opportunities make me feel connected to something greater than myself and I am sure St. Marcellin would be proud of the new and diverse ways Marists are living out their lives in order to build God's kingdom by making Jesus known and loved. The future of the Lay Marist vocation is certainly bright! ■



The call to live in community

**In Giugliano
there are
4 brothers
and 9 laypeople.
We have
drawn up our
community
life plan**

Sabatino Abate
Mediterránea Province



On the next page:
Marist Community
of Giugliano, Italy

I am 56 years old. I am married to Lena and we have two children. I am an ex-student and member of one of the three fraternities in Giugliano (Italy - Mediterranean Province). I am a Marist layman who does not work in any Marist ministry, but who feels he is living out his Christian vocation in the style of Marcellin, within the Marist family. The Marists and our Good Mother were my guides as a child and as a former student. Marcellin, however, has captivated me as an adult.

Along my path as a Marist lay person I have served in the Secretariat of the Laity of the Province of Mediterranean and currently in the Marist Life Group of Italy.

I have always shared my faith with the person with whom I

share my life, Lena, also a Marist. Two years ago she decided to dedicate herself to the children in a centre for “at-risk” minors.

Faith and the pursuit of fraternal love has always been fundamental pillars of our family life and today we have added another, that of being Marist.

Starting this year, we are embarking on a new experience as members of a Community to animate the Marist Charism. This new Community experience was initiated by the Mediterranean Province, aimed at ensuring the presence of Marcellin’s charism in our ministries, regardless of the presence of brothers.

The province decided to experiment with such new Communities in Giugliano and in Jaen (Spain).



**I firmly believe that
the personal call to
live my faith and my
search for God can only
be lived in community**

In Giugliano there are 13 of us,
(4 brothers and 9 laypeople). We

have drawn
up our com-
munity life
plan and re-
ceive group
accompani-
ment from
the Provin-
cial Council

through periodic meetings.

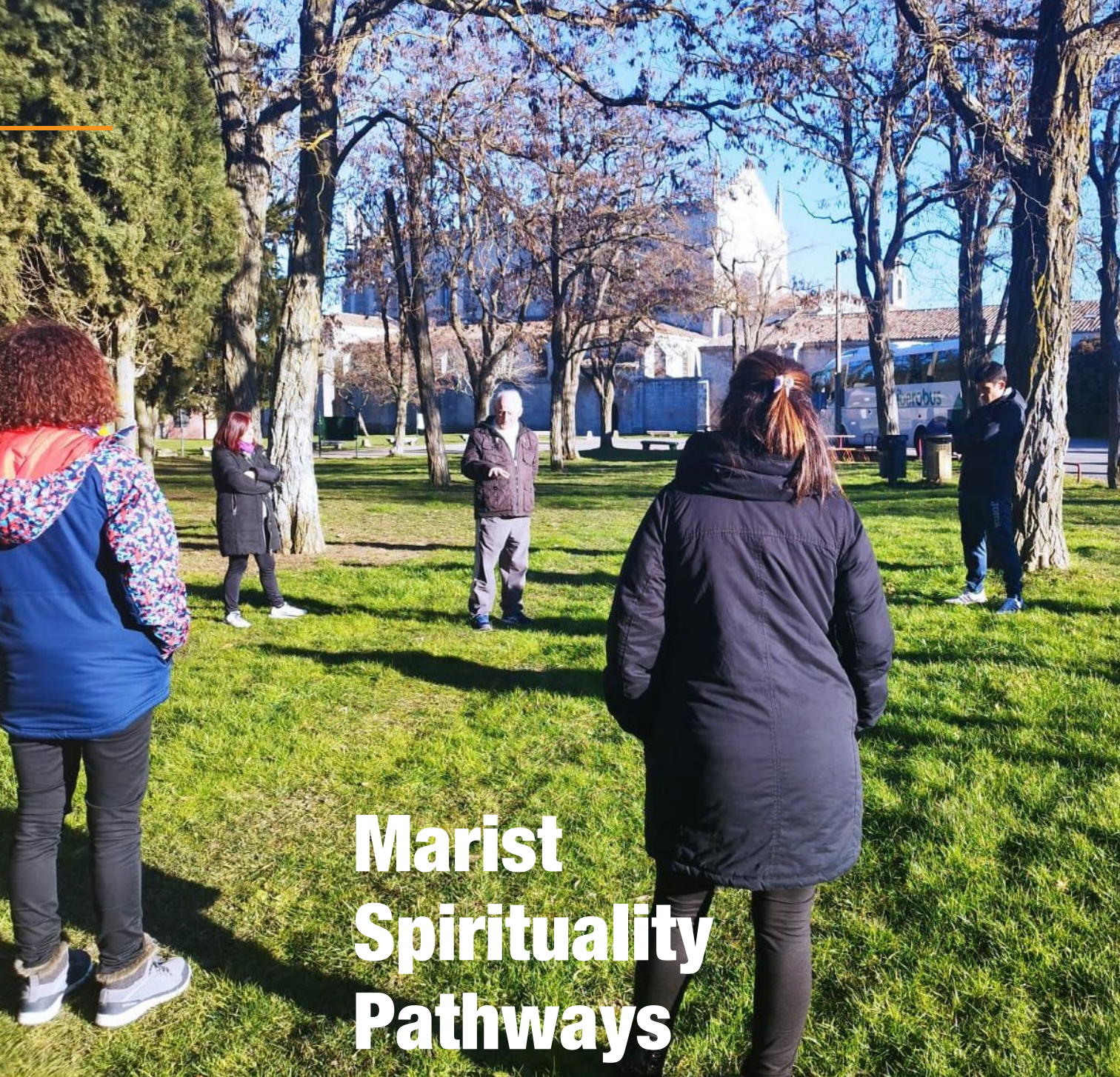
For now we are building the
Community, developing deeper
relationships, and sharing experi-
ences, while not living under the
same roof, with a dream and a
common purpose that unites us.

Before us lies a road to build,
travel and explore and the
beauty of it all will be the jour-
ney itself.

I strongly believe that the per-
sonal call to live out my faith
and my search for God can only
be experienced in community.
So I am delighted to join this
new Animation Community tak-
ing up Marcellin's dream of be-
ing at the side of young people
and those in need.

For the future we can only rely
on the breath of life of the
Spirit (Ruah) to act in us and
encourage us always to press
onward. ■





Marist Spirituality Pathways

Eladio Díez Sancho
Compostela Province



Those of us who are today working with lay Marists in Compostela are indebted to those who have preceded us since the new Province was created in January 2004 in the areas of Mission, Youth Ministry and Spirituality.

From the very beginning of Compostela, brothers and laypeople have been eager to explore new avenues of spirituality that would touch the lives and hearts of people, beyond a more or less systematic explanation of Marist spirituality. In this regard, we developed Marist Spirituality Pathways (IDEM) as a way of helping many brothers and laypeople to walk together as Champagnat Marists for more than a decade.



Marist Leadership
and Spirituality Silent
Experience in Miraflores

A fruit of this history has been the emergence of Marist Spirituality Groups (GEM). A GEM is a group of people who give themselves the space, time, and setting to “reconnect” with sources of Life, with Meaning, and with God; in other words, a place where spirituality can be nourished and expressed in a Marist environment.

At present, there are 13 such groups in our Province, with 123 people (mostly laypeople) actively involved. The GEMs function basically in two ways. On the one hand, there are those who are linked to a local school; they usually meet on a monthly basis. On the other hand, there are groups of people involved in Youth Ministry, i.e. from MarCha; they usually meet on a monthly basis online and in-person each term.

The GEMs provide a space for fraternity, encouragement to stay on the journey of Marist spirituality, and help to practice strategies of personal and spiritual growth and development.

In the last 2 or 3 years, the IDEMs have given way to the MARIST LIFE PATHWAY, which is now in its second year of roll-

out. It is a programme aimed at growing as vocational Marists; brothers, teachers, office and ancillary staff, members of the GEMs and people interested in the Marist charism take part.

There are more than 100 participants, and a team of more than 20 mentors are leading them through a process that is both personal and Marist. The programme aims to respond to the need felt by lay Marists to discover more about how to live out the Marist charism as a gift shared with the Brothers. Thus, in addition to the community focus that is part of our experience in the GEMs, there is a focus on personal work and discernment. Our dream is that the laypeople who complete the process and opt to make a commitment to promote Marist life and spirituality will themselves become core generators of Marist life throughout our Province. We dream that they will be witnesses of “life in abundance”, and choose to care for and generate more Marist life in Compostela. ■

From the very beginning of Compostela, brothers and laypeople have been eager to explore new avenues of spirituality that would touch the lives and hearts of people

Perspective on lay marist global family

Living the
Marcelin
Champagnat's
charism and
spirituality in the
way of Mary

Salome Ifeoma Nnamani
Nigeria Province



The International Lay Marist Vocation/ Identity is universal and a gift from God. The experiences I have show me how much God loves the world and in a special way, myself. The fostering and living the Marcelin Champagnat's charism and spirituality in the way of Mary by the Marists globally, proves the real manifestation of God's love upon me, His people, and the Universal Church. God's love has no boundary as it exposes me to be among those that benefitted and shared in the Marist life, loving, supporting, mentoring and sharing of family spirit.

Ever since I encountered and embraced the precious life of Marist vocation, the realities of God's love are with me. During the preparatory period of the International Forum of the Lay Marist Vocation (IFLMV) that took place in Rome, I received the free gift of pregnancy from God after a space of twelve years of my last baby. Despite my condition, I, my National Coordinator (Rev Br Elias Iwu) and Br Michael Okutachi travelled to Abuja, Nigeria to purchase and process our visa. On our way, we encountered a very big flood that took many lives, but we became safe by His Grace, after spending three days and nights without food there.

Moreover, I was privileged to be nominated from Nigeria, my country to represent my province in the III phase of the IFLMV, to be a part to share and enjoy the Marist global family in Rome. Hence, I encountered God's anointing and a glimpse of the Eucharistic Magnitude inside the church in St Peter's Basilica Rome, Italy. There, I was covered by the goose pimple. I experienced soothing hands of



God. I was overshadowed by God's anointing, and I became unconscious of my environment.

I experienced soothing hands of God. I was overshadowed by God's anointing, and I became unconscious of my environment

Furthermore, at the Marist General House, Rome, one of the Marist Brothers in a special way prayed for me and my unborn baby. I assumed he was directed by the Holy Spirit to pray for me and the baby in the womb by asking me to place my left hand at my protruding stomach and my right one on our blessed Virgin Mary's protruding stomach too, when she was pregnant of our Lord Jesus Christ. I was chosen to be one

of those that planted plant for Marist life during Mass celebration. The movement of lay Marist global family today and beyond is already filled with God's gladness, smiles, joy, happiness, breakthrough, favour, a way to heaven and above all, the sharing of the realities of God's love. In order to uphold these firmly, there is need to be positively fight and defeat every existing opposition for its greater advancement in future. RUAH! RUAH!! RUAH!!! ■

Participants of the
International Forum
Rome, November 2022



A Young layman with a revolutionary heart

Evolution, revolution, crisis, stagnation, and battling through in my vocational growth

João Gabriel Soares Sedrez
Brasil Centro-Sul Province



I am 31 years old and I have already lived countless experiences related to the Marist charism, as a student, former student, co-worker and, now, as a lay Marist. The ground I walk on and the life that pulsates in me is in Brazil, in the state of São Paulo to be exact, in a very small town called Santo Antônio do Pinhal, where the Marist presence only exists through me and my family.

I don't remember very well the exact moment when I felt I was a Marist or when I was called by God to be a presence in the world bearing the Charism bequeathed by Father Champagnat and the first Brothers. It seems to me that it happened without any need for me to make it 'official'. Those values were the basis of our lives. In our group of Young Laypeople we often say that the Charism is like "a pair of glasses" that we were taught to wear, and through these, we see the world with the colours of these values, the edges and the loves. I think this reflects how I feel.

As a young Marist, there have been times of evolution, revolution, crisis, stagnation, and battling through in my vocational growth. But most importantly, my journey has always been filled with people, whether brothers, lay people, or even (and not surprisingly) people of other faiths. The young João was and continues to be stitched together like a patchwork quilt, where each person has left and continues to leave some fragment in me. Perhaps the experience that most enhanced my vocation and, indeed, my understanding of vocation, was the period when I was a co-worker in a Marist school. I was doing what I loved most, being with people, especially children



The Marist Charism functions independently of markets, regardless of the most negative contexts in the world, separate from all the social sins

and teenagers. However, similar to what many others have said, I experienced a number of disappointments in the school/company that was made up of humans, imperfect just like me. I found myself working with people who had never lived nor felt what being Marist meant to me; they did not work in the way I expected them to. This caused me to question my choice to be Marist.

But it was there, in the midst of this tremendous tempest, and with my heart constantly spinning, that I came to understand, with the

help of a few people, that my vocation is linked with the Charism itself, and the Charism does not disappoint. The Marist Charism functions independently of markets, regardless of the most negative contexts in the world, separate from all the social sins that we commit? It just is!

Because it simply exists, I choose to live it every day: in my relationships with people, in my political choices, in my spirituality, in my group of young laypeople, with my partner Patricia and our children Catharina and Samuel (yet to be born). Not because it is something easy, without contradictions or straightforward, but because I believe in the idea of a Marian Church, which models horizontal relations, is welcoming and capable of showing the world where Jesus is pointing: love and human dignity. With my young and restless heart, I hope to embody the Marist charism in the world! ■

Meeting of the Young
Laity Curitiba





A.C. Kuroki

R. H. 12
Kelly

Rome 11-11-22

Barry

Mary Margaret
He-mal

Alan

Nyang Gladys

Margie
H. M. 12
John
Fredrick

John
B. John
B. John

Christine
Dana

John
B. John

John
B. John

John
B. John

Can you please make some more

Nathan
with love!

John
B. John

John
B. John

John
B. John

Fredrick
Mexico

John
B. John

Sebastian
Italia

Rini

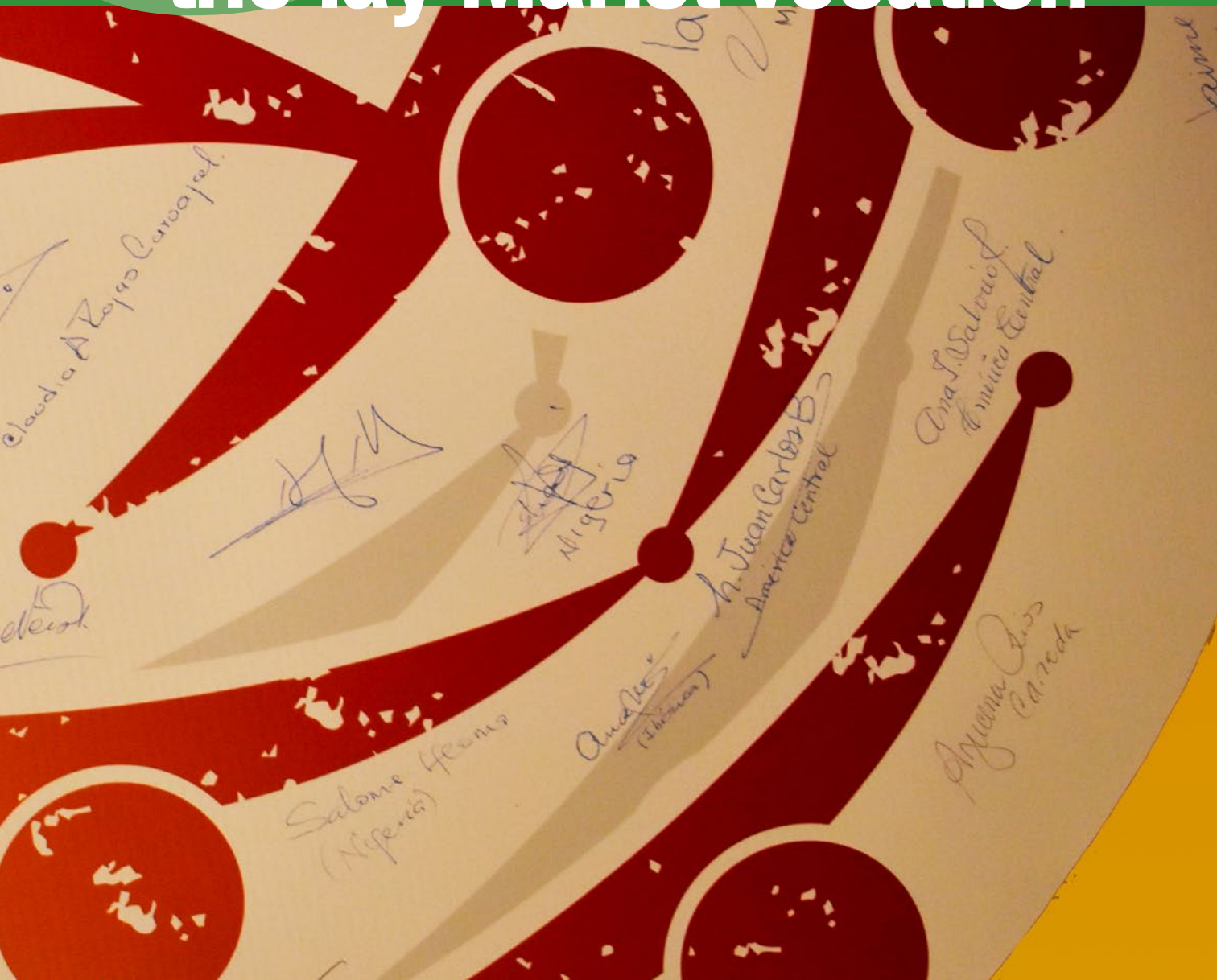
Lanna

John
B. John

John
B. John

Breaths of the Spirit

International forum on the lay Marist vocation





Manu Gómez Cid
Secretariat of Laity

International Forum on the Lay Marist Vocation Context, process, current situation and prospects

**A multi-stage
process between
March 2021 and
November 2024**



In these lines we are going to try to take a closer look at the experience of the International Forum on the Lay Marist Vocation (IFLMV) to help us better understand the lead-up to this event, its purpose, where we are now, and where we are heading.

First of all, this event should be placed in the context of a history that has its origins in the life and vocation of many lay Marists after Vatican Council II, and with the recognition and highlighting of this vocation by the Marist Institute at its last General Chapters. This has meant an effort to provide a clear framework for vocational identity, the development of formation pathways and the accompaniment of vocational growth processes, as well as the many experiences, whether personal, community or organisational, which have helped to express the lay face of the charism and make it visible.

Related to this, the calls, beliefs and suggestions of the XXII General Chapter noted that *“as Marists of Champagnat for a new beginning we need new structures and processes that recognise and support our distinctive vocational paths as Marists”*. This conviction is made concrete in the Strategic Plan of the General Administration (2017-2025), when the General Council entrusted the Secretariat of the Laity with the task of developing an initiative around lay commitments: *“to explore and consolidate forms of commitment, bonding and charismatic association, and to share reflections and experiences in this field widely”*.

The Forum: a single process in various stages

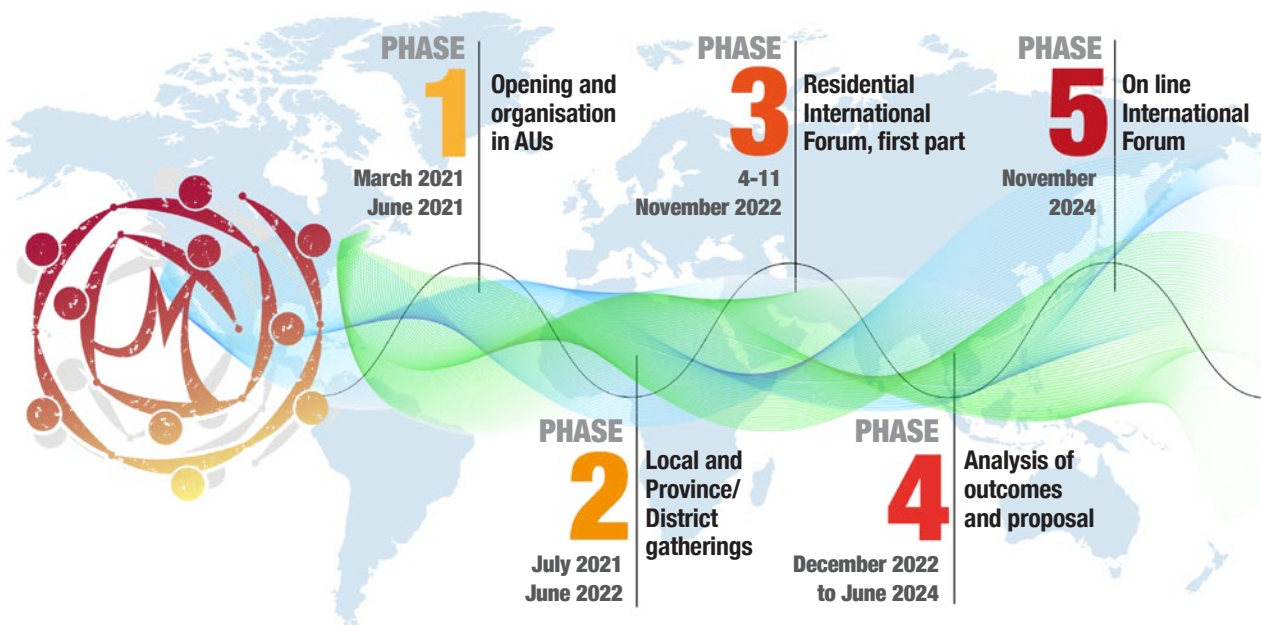
It was within this framework that the IFLMV was designed, with the backing of the General Council and organised by the Secretariat of the Laity. It was to be a multi-stage process between March 2021 and November 2024. After the design of the process (phase 0), on 19 March 2021 (the feast of St. Joseph), the official launch took place of the journey to come, and time was given for lay leaders and pastoral / formation teams of the different Admin-

istrative Units to get to know one another better (phase 1). Between July 2021 and July 2022, reflection meetings were organised at the different local and province levels

(phase 2), which concluded with the election of those to represent their AU in phase 3. This phase, an in-person international gathering, took place in Rome from 4 to 11 November 2022, bringing



The QR code offers more information about the Forum process



together more than 90 participants, lay people and brothers, from all the AUs of the Institute.

This face-to-face Forum concluded with the message “Ruah: Promptings of the Spirit for lay Marists”, which will inspire the next steps regarding the four themes that set the objectives of the process: a deeper understanding of the lay Marist vocation, formation processes and pathways and accompaniment of the lay vocation, bonding with the Marist charism, and juridical structures for lay Marists.

We are currently in phase 4, which will last for the next two years, until November 2024. In this phase, several working groups will be formed around these four “promptings”, made up of participants of the Forum held in Rome. A number of instruments will also be developed to encourage the participation of all. Some themes will require the presence of experts to shed light on the work to be tackled. The results of these working groups will be presented and refined in phase 5, at a virtual Forum in November 2024.

Finally, the conclusions and proposals of this whole process will be submitted to the General Council. They will consider how to present them to the next General Chapter of 2025 for possible ratification and subsequent implementation.

May the Ruah, the Spirit of God, continue to blow and inspire the ways forward that the Spirit is dreaming and desiring for lay Marists of Champagnat. ■



“Ruah, the Spirit of God”



Br. Toni Torrelles
L'Hermitage Province

As I recall, we were at a meeting on 3 November 2022, in Monte Cucco, Rome. It was the final meeting of the Secretariat of the Laity to prepare and launch the International Forum on the Lay Marist Vocation. The animation team for prayers and celebrations presented their suggestion for the first morning prayer for 4 November. The prayer was to invoke the presence of the Holy Spirit at the Forum. Four songs in the four official languages had been chosen. Suddenly, Brother Graham Neist and Mr. Vanderlei Soela, facilitators of the process, made us stop and reflect with a challenging question: “Why invoke the Holy Spirit if the Spirit is always with us, if the Spirit is already at work in us? Wouldn’t it be better to sing a song to affirm this, rather than keep invoking the Holy Spirit over and over again...? I searched my musical repertoire but could not find anything. I know songs about the presence of Jesus among us, but not many explicit songs about the Holy Spirit being present and active in the ecclesial community.

Vanderlei passed me a short text from Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini:

“It is our conviction that the Spirit exists and is present, is active, precedes us, is doing more than we can and better. We don’t have to sow the Spirit or wake the Spirit up; let’s

simply recognise, welcome, help, make room for and walk behind the Spirit. The Spirit exists and is never discouraged by the prevailing circumstances; on the contrary, the Spirit smiles, dances, invades, enfolds, and goes where we would never have imagined."

RUAH, GOD'S SPIRIT

Ruah, Ruah, Ruah, uuuhhh

*You fill the story with your light; you embrace me with your faithfulness.
I walk along despite the doubt, with your song as company, ruah.
O spirit of life.*

*In every moment you are there; my heart ponders your great kindness.
Always inspiring all i do, making me proclaim my "yes", ruah.
O spirit of faith.*

Ruah, Ruah, Ruah, uuuhhh

*I see your face in love sincere, shown by those whose heart is where you dwell.
You are with me i am not alone, leading me on righteous path, ruah.
O spirit of peace.*

*You are the breath i take each day; every plan and action speak of you.
Moving in rhythm the dance of life, there is joy and harmony, ruah.
O spirit of god.*



Here the video
of the song



My Marist vocation, my call and my response initially grew out of the context of the Charismatic Renewal in Spain at the end of the 1970s. Those of us in the Kairoi group (a Marist community) participated in its spread. But we continue to be Marists, first and foremost. On many occasions in my life, I have recognised the inspiration and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

On the afternoon of 3 November, while the commission continued its final preparations, I exchanged poetic texts in Spanish with Vanderlei by e-mail. And an easy-to-learn melody for verses came to mind. And so the song was born. On the morning of 4 November, the word Ruah found its place at the beginning of the song, like a refrain, like a presence. "Ruah, Spirit of God."

The assembly welcomed this brand new song with enthusiasm. This Ruah, Creative Breath, very present throughout the Bible, was to animate the work of the Forum. It was to be sung at specific moments, for example, at the beginning of our sessions on the first few days or as the psalm between the readings of the final Eucharist. It was the assembly itself that gave it its final form, little by little, "with joy and harmony", as the English version puts it. The translations into the other 3 official languages of the Forum would subsequently present very interesting nuances with additional suggestions. For this I thank Brothers Antonio Ramalho, Lindley Sionosa and Jean-Pierre Destombes. ■



We are a Global Charismatic Family!

Augusto Fabião Mahumane
Southern Africa Province



To describe the experience lived during the Roman phase of the Forum on the Marist Lay Vocation is to describe a journey in which consecrated brothers and laypeople from all continents, with one voice, declared themselves to be a global charismatic family. Many of us came with the idea that there would be moments of solemnity and plenary sessions for decision-making on matters to be tabled.

It soon became clear that the attention of the Forum would focus on four pillars, namely:

1. To deepen our understanding of the Marist vocation with particular emphasis on the lay Marist vocation
2. To review and offer forma-

tion and mentoring processes and pathways for laypeople to grow in their vocation.

3. To reflect on and propose possible forms of bonding and belonging to the Marist charism.
4. To know, reflect, explore and propose possibilities of juridical structures (civil and canonical) for Marist laypeople

The first great surprise was the massive presence of consecrated brothers and lay people coming from all parts of the world, with different cultures and languages.

Everybody thought that this phenomenon was bound to be an obstacle, but nothing of the sort happened. Instead of being an initial meeting,

it was more like a reunion. It was a reunion of brothers who, for the most part, had never met each other before but who already knew each other because they had always been united around the one charism of Champagnat in spite of their multiple ways of expressing it. Nor did our linguistic diversity at any time constitute an obstacle to communication. We all felt close to each other, and felt others close to us all the time. We all felt that the others were a gift from God to us, and that each of us was being given as a gift from the Lord to everyone else. It was a great family of lay people and brothers who merged and blended together like a spiral, with the

breath of the Spirit moving us along.

On our way like the disciples of Emmaus

It was an eight-day journey, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus. A Eucharistic journey in which the presence of Jesus was evident in the joy that reigned in our midst, in the atmosphere of deep and lasting contemplation and in the discovery of the revelation of the Spirit of the Lord. Each one of us personally, looking inwards, listening in pairs, in fraternities, in small groups at tables within the assembly and in the assembly itself.

Each day was an offering to the Lord leading up to the

closing celebration when Christ would break the bread and send us all out on Mission.

A number of elements contributed to making the Forum a conducive environment for this significant journey.

The way the organising team prepared the meeting down to the smallest detail; the methodologies and strategies used to run the meeting; the flexibility with which adjustments were made to the programme, as different things came up; the promptness of the translators; the presence of Brother Tony with his guitar always ready to create a joyful atmosphere with singing and dancing in times of prayer, relaxation

and fun; the welcoming and prayerful atmosphere of the venue. Everything combined into a symphony that would enrapture the most hardened of hearts.

A true atmosphere of fraternal communion developed between lay people and Brothers, of prayer and the inspiration of the Spirit of the Lord, such that in the end we all felt that what was at the epicenter of what we were constructing was not the Lay Marist vocation, but the Marist vocation. The light of the Spirit made it clear that it is Christ who calls each one of us, touching each one in different ways, but always with the same purpose: to follow Jesus in the manner of





Champagnat, within a global and charismatic family.

When the moment came to acknowledge the presence of Christ, who encouraged us at every moment on our journey towards Emmaus, and to be commissioned by Him to go out to every part of the world to bring the Good News, we were already

on the mission ahead of us as we returned to our familiar surroundings.

How can we not thank God who has called us and who, through the breath of the Spirit, always encourages us on our journey? How can we not thank Mary, our Good Mother, who always joins us as we share the wine of joy?

The light of the Spirit made it clear that it is Christ who calls each one of us

How can we not give thanks to Champagnat and, through him, to the Marist Brothers who, through

missing one another even before we left. We felt a very confusing mixture of wanting to stay longer and, at the same time, wanting to leave

their presence in our lives, give real attractiveness and meaning to our vocation?

How can we not thank all those who, with heart and

soul, have made such an effort to make our Forum a reality? How can we not thank all those who came with open hearts to make this Emmaus journey and who brought a taste of love and fellowship with them? And how could we fail to thank all the preparation and support teams? And we also thank the Sisters of the Spiritual Retreat House, Nostra Signora Madre della Misericordia, whose house is a place where every detail has an immeasurable value for contemplating the wonders of the Lord.

May Mary, our Good Mother, and Saint Marcellin continue to lead us forward and never let us falter. ■





**Walking in
community,
always
with others**

My pilgrim experience

Jaime Godoy Rivera

Santa María de los Andes Province



There are some places in the world that are not just good destinations to visit, to soak up their history and culture or to take a break. There are places that have something special and to which we go on pilgrimage rather than simply travel. Rome is one of those places that has its historical and touristic side but also summons us to an experience of the heart, to an experience of personal, communal and transcendent encounter. Participating in the *International Forum of the Lay Marist Vocation*, which brought us to Rome for its in-person stage, has meant, for me, experiencing life as a pilgrim.

The launch of the Forum, the stage of discernment in communities and fraternities, the province meetings, and attending to the details, documents and meetings prior to the journey, were warm-up exercises before setting out on the pilgrim's path. With my heart full of hope through what we had already experienced personally, collectively and at provincial level, I headed off and

Message Marists of Champagnat



met many other pilgrims, lay people and brothers, coming from practically all corners of the Marist world, to walk together and experience community. This was truly an experience of deep communion, an experience of Pentecost. Some were able to share in different languages, and we were all helped by the dedicated translators. But more than this, we were introduced to contemplative dialogue, listening with the heart, being interested in the fresh idea that the other was communicating to me, remaining silent before reacting with words; taking time to go beyond the ideas so as to recognize the person in front of me as a sacrament, as the presence of God who is communicating a Grace to me, as someone who touches me, moves me, challenges me... It was truly a week in which we recognised the action and presence of the Spirit of God (Ruah) uniting us in communion. In this regard, I feel that on the afternoon when we heard the testimonies of lay Marists, we had a powerful experience of contemplative listening. Many of us in the assembly felt challenged or affected, questioned or confirmed in some of our intuitions by the personal or even anecdotal things that were shared. It was not just the words or the life stories, but our willingness to listen with the heart to how the Spirit of the Lord was speaking to all of us through each other's lives, discernments and choices. Likewise, when we listened to the reflection and experience of the brothers who were with us during this stage of the Forum; they provided us with new keys to interpret the road map of our pilgrimage: to walk in community, always with others.

Another very important sign that I felt during the week was the harmony that was a feature of our discernment. Coming from different backgrounds, each one of us faces different challenges and logically we also respond differently and do not think alike. Yet, we were always able to express our feelings, to be listened to not only with respect, but also with openness of mind and heart. We saw

new possibilities for moving forward together. In each fraternity, at the work tables and in the times of relaxation, we felt animat-

ed by the one and same Spirit, a single heart.

I was able to share this particular experience with a number of participants who also sensed this harmony that was encouraging us to dream big. This feeling of harmony was greatly helped by another very powerful sign that I saw in the presence and participa-



**Video of the 3rd Stage of the
International Forum on the
Lay Marist Vocation**





**In each fraternity,
at the work tables and
in the times of relaxation, we
felt animated by the one
and same Spirit,
a single heart**

tion of the General Council during the whole week. This gave witness to a firm option to walk towards these new horizons as a global Marist family where there is a communion of vocations (lay and religious). Their presence showed that, just as the Marist charism is a gift for the Church and the world, this journey of communion is a powerful witness to a new

way of being Church.

These signs along the pilgrim's path are ultimately what we celebrate and treasure in order to rekindle our Marist vocation and live it for all to see. I am convinced that the heart of the Marist family is on fire because the Lord is with us and walking alongside us. We now move confidently into the next stages of this Forum, in all simplicity, in community, attentive to the needs of our world and responding to them with creativity, following the example of Champagnat. ■



Spirit of prayer and contemplative listening

Maureen Hagan
United States Province



A group of 96 good-hearted well-intentioned people from around the globe came together to ponder, share and work on this idea of the Lay Marist Vocation.

The thing that struck me the most throughout our days together was the thought and planning that went into making sure our work was done in a spirit of prayer and contemplative listening.

When we began with Ruah, Breath of God, inviting the Spirit into our hearts, I felt already that we were beginning on the right foot. Ruah accompanied us throughout the days, as we periodically invoked Spirit again and again.

The work is what we were about, but I was so grateful for the way it was set up each day. Friday set the tone. We spent time on setting our intentions –

what are we about here? What do we hope to accomplish? And more importantly, *how* will we go about accomplishing it?

Br. Ernesto asked us to listen to our hearts and to “look beyond”. For me, that meant seeing things in a new way, looking for new structures and new ways of thinking. Sensible, prophetic, global, inclusive and hopeful – words for us to consider as moved forward to work on the four objectives.

The prayer each morning helped us to focus on our hearts, rather than just our minds. Vanderlei Soele and Br. Graham Neist kept us on track with the Theory of U, through the lens of the Emmaus story. With the U Theory, Graham asked us to use the skills of seeing, sensing, presencing, crystalizing (pondering with vision) and prototyping (sharing and communicating). This was encouragement to continue our practice of deep contemplative listening. In this way, we could put our hearts and souls into the work, not merely just to get things done.



Author interview



There is much work to be done. And there is also hope and energy and goodness and joy and peace – our fruits of the Spirit.

The aspects that really stood out to me were the prayerful atmosphere – we danced, we sang, we chanted, we worked with clay, moved to music and got our hands blue! This helped me to stay in my body and be more mindful.

Celebrating Eucharist on Sunday at the General House was a beautiful experience of communion. Our closing Liturgy, too, was a joyful celebration of being Marist in this world that is so much in need of a Marial face.

The themes that were most important for me were 1) the fact that we are a global family – that there is room for everyone at the La Valla table. That requires work to make sure our structures allow everyone to

see the view, not just the few fortunate ones who live in the high-rises. We needed to see our diversity as a treasure, opening our eyes to the realities of life in different parts of our world. Hearing about how the Marist documents don't necessarily apply to many outside of the Western Hemisphere was a definite eye-opener for me. These are important considerations as we move ahead.

2) Manu's last words to us were that we need to share the message, yes - and we also need to BE the message. God's love is present through us. Our message of love, inclusivity, and sharing will be carried forth from the Forum though each of us. There is much work to be done. And there is also hope and energy and goodness and joy and peace – our fruits of the Spirit. And the prayers of this group go forth with us. ■





On the road

**The journey
was slow,
long, intentional,
and profound**

Elma B. Rafil
East Asia Province



I am happy at this opportunity to share my experience of being part of the International Forum on the Lay Marist Vocation. I came to the Forum bringing with me the richness of the reflections and sharings from Asia and a load of hope that the diversity of the contextual realities of Marists around the world would provide very extensive and deep materials for the objectives of this Forum. The path of the Forum developed in a way that we call “The U in the Journey to Emmaus.” It is with this process that I want to refer to my journey as “On the road,” which also forms the basis of my reflection. We were on the road in the Forum as families of Marist Brothers and lay people hoping to accomplish something for the vocation of lay Marists. The U Theory allowed us to embark on some sort of pilgrimage, for which one plans and prepares, looks forward to, and anticipates with excitement.

Our journey began with a commitment or a renewed commitment from our hearts to dedicate our entire presence to active listening with fresh eyes and perceptive senses. We did so in an atmosphere of empathy and a conviction to stay



faithful to the giftedness of each person. We attempted to find ways to open to the presence of Christ in our midst, and we entrusted everything to the breath of the Holy Spirit—the Ruah!

It was a journey—not alone, but together. The participants, just like the two disciples, walked away from their “Jerusalem,” moving away from their own contexts to be able to listen to and understand the contexts of others. We dialogued not to agree or to win a certain point but to understand and appreciate one another’s stories and experiences of living Marist life. This process allowed us to move away from something and move towards something to

be able to see the reality and context of the Marist lay all throughout the world.

Our realities in Asia are relatively diverse: our culture, tradition, and faith. That means we encounter various expressions of culture, tradition, and faith in our schools, in our communities, and in other Marist ministries.

Many personally claim that they are Marists, notwithstanding their cultural orientations and religious affiliations. Thus, we are challenged to deepen and broaden our understanding of who the Marists are. In this forum, this Asian reality was heard and listened to. Each voice had the chance to be heard, not only during the plenary and small group sharing sessions but also during the fraternity time. It is in presencing, in listening and sharing, that we saw the beauty and uniqueness of the reality of state of Marist laity. Our dialogue drew us into the experience of the transcendent

Our attempts are not perfect, but we have learned that our Marist family is a charism of unity and rich in mutual gifts





dimension of life of Marist lay vocation.

The journey was slow, long, intentional, and profound. We attempted to identify the features of Marist laity who are engaged in the process of vocational growth; endeavored to propose formation and accompaniment processes and pathways; reflected on possible forms of bonding to the Marist charism; and explored possible juridical structures. Our attempts are not perfect, but we have learned that our Marist family is a charism of unity and rich in mutual gifts. In the end, like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, we ended excited running with joyful optimism for the Marist lay vocation. The Marist life is full of hope for the future not only in Asia but also in the whole Marist world.

For me, the warmth, spontaneity, and genuineness of the involvement of each of the participants - both the Brothers and the lay, - served as “inspirational spark.” It was a commitment that is not only personal but also collective. This led to a result, marked by mutual understanding and appreciation of the diversity of Marist lay vocation’ unique reality. ■

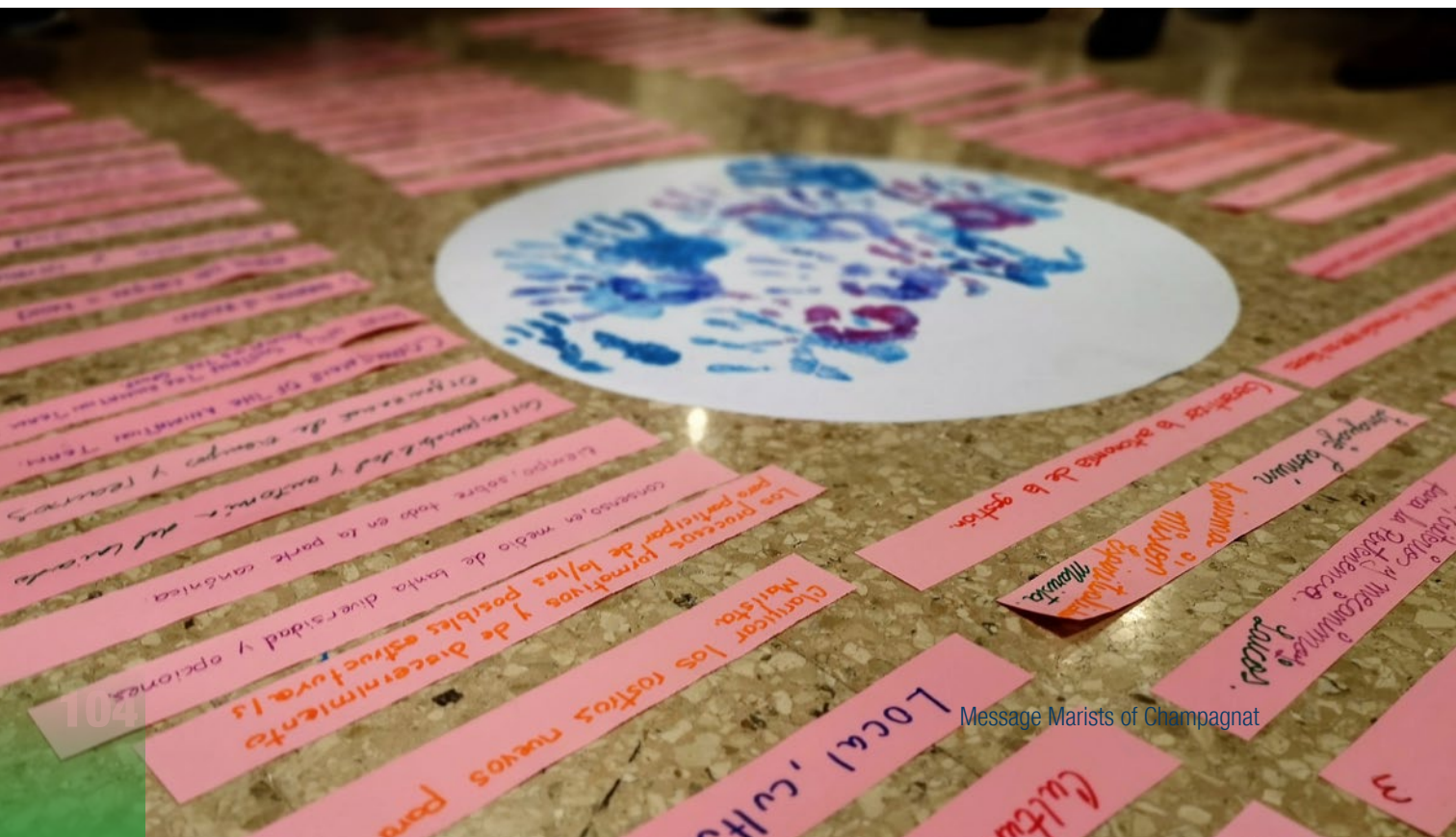


Enriching were the many gifts brought from the individual provinces

West Central Europe Province



The world-famous Marist welcoming culture also awaited me in Rome. I felt warmly welcomed in many languages when I entered the Spiritual Retreat House “Nostra Signora Madre della Misericordia” on Monte Cucco. Immediately a lively exchange with old companions and an interested meeting of new faces began. This multicultural dialogue and the willingness to communicate with each other were a tangible and visible sign of personal joy and an open heart for global understanding.





After a day of getting to know each other, the work on the main topics stated on Saturday. This process was only interrupted by the Sunday excursion to Vatican, Ancient Rome, and the subsequent visit to the General House. The cordial invitation of Superior General Ernesto Sánchez – “the house is always open to all Marists” - was clearly concluded by a joint lunch, an interesting tour of the house and the impressive Eucharistic celebration in the evening.

In the following week, the focus was on intensive exchange in small groups and the plenum. Here, the many personal contributions and testimonies of Marist life on the ground enriched the struggle for substantive syntheses.

The efforts to find a common path that includes the broad diversity of Marist life were loosened up by musical devotions, loosening dances, meditative exercises, and creative elements with various materials.

The cooperation will be significantly improved by the fact that we are now dealing with well-known companions with whom we can share

Enriching and motivating at the same time were the many gifts brought from the individual provinces. The work on the four focal points progressed well due to this encouraging abundance of impressions.

The prevailing diversity of cultures was not felt as a hindrance that separates us from

each other, but rather the participants enjoyed the different experiences in the provinces of this world as an enriching element that broadens their personal horizons.

Purposefully steered by the competent management team, it quickly became clear that the broad basis of the opinions submitted could not be conclusively presented within a week by a document and draft resolutions for the four topics to be dealt with could be taken! The event with the motto “Welcoming, nurturing, living and sharing” was relieved of the time pressure.

With the help of the example of a running relay, it was pointed out that optimal conditions should be created here in Rome, which must be adopted and further worked on in the following two years, worldwide in the local provinces.

There is no question that in the phase of the subsequent, two-year online consultations, the cooperation will be significantly improved by the fact that we are now dealing with well-known companions with whom we can share beautiful memories sustainably.

Many thanks to all those who contributed to the success of this forum. ■

Learning about expressions of commitment to the Marist Vocation

Jessica Bryan

Star of the Sea Province



To deepen our understanding of the Lay Marist Vocation.

I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to attend The International Forum in Rome. After participating in the online course for Leaders of the Lay Vocation, I was excited to be able to gather with people from around the world to deepen our understanding of what it means to be a Lay Marist. I was especially thrilled to meet and make connections with people in real life that I had previously only seen through a computer screen!

For me, one of the highlights was the special blend of people from a range of cultures and contexts. Learning about how each person uniquely expresses their commitment to the Marist Vocation, whether they are a Brother or Lay person was truly inspiring. A real point of interest for me was how in some places, the whole family is involved in Marist life, not just the individual.

It was also evident that in order for the Lay Marist Vocation to be a success, there is a desire and need for co-responsibility between Brothers and Lay Marists. We were fortunate enough to have many Brothers join us for the forum who shared their own experiences and ideas with us all. The wisdom, guidance and support that the Brothers provided was pivotal to the success of the forum.

Throughout the week, we discussed four objectives to deepen our understanding of the Lay Marist Vocation. The fourth objective looked at potential structures for Marist Laity. Having had our own experience of this in Australia with the Marist Association, it was fascinating to hear the experiences of others, particularly those who currently don't have any structures for Lay Marists. One thing that was evident from these discussions where people shared their stories is that we can't have a 'one size fits all' approach. I found this to be particularly important as we move into the culturally diverse new Star of the Sea Province.



We need to ensure that we embrace all cultures and experiences in order for the lay vocation to thrive. It is therefore vitally important that we share and listen to each other's stories to provide a rich understanding of what it means to be a Lay Marist in our own contexts.

The Forum has also inspired me to think more broadly about the Lay Marist Vocation in my own context as a teacher and Local Coordinator. Seeing how, in many places, the Lay vocation extends beyond the school setting and how it plays a vital role in family

One thing that was evident from these discussions where people shared their stories is that we can't have a "one size" fits all' approach

life inspired me to think of ways in which we can broaden our horizons here in Australia. This may be a challenge as many of our Lay Marist groups are formed within schools, however I do believe there is a way to reach people beyond this setting.

There are still two years left of this process, and my hope is that we can make some good progress before it is over. I look forward with great joy in seeing what the Lay Marist

Vocation can achieve as we embark on the journey together, as Region of Oceania, in the Star of the Sea Province. ■



A feeling of belonging to the big Marist family

Nguyen Viet Bao, fms
Asia District



**The Spirit of
Champagnat
being lived
among us,
shared
with others**

We came together follow the Spirit, shared our dreams and passion for Marist Charism and challenges of the different realities; it was at these moments of sharing that we form the bonds with one another. It has been a joyful heartfelt experience, a feeling of belonging to the big Marist family. As a Marist Brother, follower of Marcellin Champagnat, the Forum not only helps me to deepen my understanding about Marist laity vocation, but also through the bonds, and moments of sharing of so many committed Marists, it nurtures and strengthens my vocation. Even though I have been a Marist Brother for only a relatively short amount of time, I have always thought of my vocation journey as somewhat of a blessing. It has

been a great encounter with committed Marist around the globe.

What I would like to stress is the fact that the Forum played a critical role in the Marist laity vocation, it is a renewal and continuation of the dream of Marcellin by means of the education of youth, especially the least favored. Truly, I am also challenged by what I learned from the Forum, challenged to think about what will I do when I go back to my country and District, because honestly, we don't have that much to do when it comes to Marist association, or federation at this moment.

My desire is to see our Marist Charism and the Spirit of Champagnat being lived among us, shared with others and spread into the other lands of the world. I realize that we



come with differences in our realities, each regions have their own challenges but that I am not alone in this mission in Asia. I do believe that if we stay

united, we grow stronger. May Mary continue be the source of our inspiration as we follow Champagnat's dream today. ■



The joy of being Marists

We discovered the profound joy of recognising one another as Marists.

Br. Jaime Comabella Callizo,
Iberica Province



“It is a blessing and a joy for the Brothers to see our Founder’s charism developing in the hearts of people and causing new sources of life to spring up. It is a blessing and a joy for us, Brothers and lay persons together, to share our common richness and to live together an exciting spiritual and apostolic venture.”

(Circular, Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family. A grace for us all)

It was in 1991 - more than thirty years ago now - that Br Charles Howard, Superior General, wrote this circular to the entire Marist Institute. In it, he presented the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family as *“our response to a call which is being heard more and more clearly in and from many parts of the world”*.

This blessing and, above all, this joy of which Br Charles spoke, is the greatest gift we received from the recent International Forum on the Lay Marist Vocation. For eight days we reflected on formation pathways, we discussed the best way to accompany processes leading to vocational growth, we discerned ways of bonding

to the charism, and we even began to intuit possible juridical structures to sustain lay Marist life and vocation. But, above all - or below, depending on how you look at it - and as a constant life-giving tonality, we had a good time together, singing and dancing, praying, sharing life and we discovered the profound joy of recognising one another as Marists.

I believe that this is the ideal basis for glimpsing the future of our ‘communion’ that lies just over the horizon. Well-framed ideas, magisterial words, handouts and reflection papers – all essential in such a process - have to



make way for life. For sure, we have to continue dialoguing and discerning together, but with an eye to what lies beyond. So one of the most important challenges we now face is to transform all

“Lord, it is good that we are here; if you wish I will make three dwelling here”

(Mt 17:4)

this ‘in-house’ enthusiasm into building new community structures that will spur us on to frontier missions among those most in need. Seen from this perspective, a risk we run is to turn all the life we have generated into warm feelings for one another. This would be something similar to what happened to St. Peter on Mount Tabor: “Lord, it is good that

we are here; if you wish I will make three dwelling here” (Mt 17:4). The joy and happiness of being Marists, brothers and laypeople, must serve to re-launch us outwards, to deploy all our potential in



the world around us and to recognise the call of God to us today. It is the task of all Champagnat Marists to continue refreshing the Marist charism, renewing our desire for belonging to a community, our mission among the young, and our Marian spirituality.

Called to live in fraternity

One of the great contributions to the future that we Marists can offer the world is precisely our brotherhood. “We need brothers,” Marcellin said then. I am sure that today he would speak of brothers and sisters. We are called by God to live in

Our fraternity is even more necessary in the midst of conflict situations

fraternity. Our way of living and understanding relationships as between equals is something we have to offer this increasingly divided world and this Church which, at times, appears overly hierarchical. We are being invited to embody and witness to a church where relationships are horizontal and equal. Our fraternity is all the more necessary in the midst of

conflict situations, as is palpable and evident in many places where we are present. I am thinking, for example, of Syria and the Blue Marists.

In mission we also have much to contribute from our distinctive vocations. It is a fact that laypeople are widening the field of vision in regard to mission, with innovative, novel and contemporary ideas. The Brothers, by our choice of consecrated life, must make the radical contribution that our vows allow us to make. Between us, we have to provide for our days the radical and prophetic response that Marcellin began after his meeting with the young Montagne.

Finally, as Marists, we must continue to cultivate our Marian spirituality, one that is related to a Church of the poor. It is a grounded spirituality that is born from the least, the suffering and the discarded, and from them discovers how to relate to God and to the world. This is what Mary did. From her condition as a lowly slave - as she defined herself in the Magnificat - she came to lead the nascent Christian community, at the foot of the cross of her son and of so many other crosses that she had to face.

If this is how we live, if we can unleash the strength and passion of our Marist vocations, different but complementary as they are, we will undoubtedly share in the joy of being Marists. ■



A first look into the abyss...

Parabolic elements

for an in-depth reflection on the best juridical structures for our lay Marist reality

Br. Josep Maria Soteras
Councillor General



Evoking the essence

Despite living in a world beset by individualistic tendencies, the echo of our innermost essence still resounds in the human heart and within our societies that we are destined to live with others, weaving interpersonal relationships that

shape us, in turn, as individuals. We become ourselves together with others; and we understand this profound perception of what it is to be human from our Christian faith, as a reflection of the divine nature itself. God, while remaining one, is at the same time a communion of persons: One and triune, God

is community! A family, a choir, a parish or an association basically emerge as an expression of this nature that radically configures us. Contemplating this profound reality fills us with hope and shows us the way for humanity to have a future.

Discovering the conditions

There are horizons



that can only be reached with others. Soloists can create an extraordinary musical atmosphere with their own voices, but they will hardly be able to achieve the harmony and nuances of an ensemble of voices, let alone the universe of sound that emerges from a symphony orchestra. The greater the artistic horizon, the greater the degree of organisation it takes. In the end, this everyday evidence merely reflects what is already

to the vital needs of the organism. Too big, it crushes; too small, it prevents growth.

A preview in the form of a parabola

The melody that Marcellin Champagnat began to play with his life in the middle of the public square gradually attracted many people. Some of those who were inspired by his music wanted to belong to his band, enriching this universe of sound with their

own lives. Marcellin founded a “conservatorium”, to train all those who wanted to join his melody and play certain instruments together. But others who remained in the square, also enchanted by his music, gradually felt called to add other tones and instruments to give even greater brilliance to the notes that came from the origin. At some point, these too will need the right conservatorium where they can rehearse, nurture their own contribution and tune their instruments, in harmony with the whole of that



present at the biological level. Invertebrates are flexible, supple and relatively simple, but their growth is limited. When an organism reaches a certain size, it must generate some kind of “structure” to support, organise and protect the function of the various organs and prevent them from crushing each other. Life is not in the skeleton, but in the organs which, without a skeleton, would not have the vital space necessary to carry out their function in the service of life. From biology it is important to learn the wise balance that governs all healthy development: nothing is good or bad in absolute terms. The skeleton must be strictly proportional

wonderful symphony that never ceases to attract more and more people. A large group of them, whether from the conservatorium, with its various rooms and instruments, or those who are simply in the square accompanying with their feet, whistling, humming or clapping their hands, feel compelled to go out to other squares where the melody has not yet sounded, to summon and serve all those who would never have been able to enjoy it if someone had not reached out to them. Some access the symphony through education, others through sport, others through solidarity or pastoral action, others through shared living in groups... The access is multiple, multifac-



eted, but once their ears have been opened to the wonder that sounds behind the door, they all find themselves enjoying the same music, sharing, connecting and ending up enriching in some way the sound they can hear through their own contribution.

First thoughts on structures

When the time comes to create a structure, “seeking balance” remains the rule to somehow resolve the tension that arises between “autonomy” and “integration”, whether at the personal, couple, family, group, organisation, or society level.... When autonomy is accentuated, integration tends to be less. In the extreme case, absolute autonomy (i.e. independence) corresponds to absolute disintegration. And in the opposite direction, absolute integration corresponds to total de-

pendence.

On a personal level, this tension appears whenever one joins any kind of group. However, it is also interesting to note that a healthy relationship often affirms and develops per-

sonal identity. Therefore, these two elements, apparently in tension, are not necessarily in radical opposition. In a constructive relationship, they can help each other. The same is true at the global level. The apparent opposition between global and local engage-

When the time comes to create a structure, “seeking balance” remains the rule to somehow resolve the tension that arises between “autonomy” and “integration”



ment is nowadays already being evened out through mutually stimulating syntheses such as: “think globally and act locally”, or “local action with global vision” or the like. This has given rise to a new term for expressing this synthesis, “glo-cal”, generating a common space between the two that is particularly suitable for innovation, broadening perspective, talent, diversity and inclusion, networks, influence, values and meaning, among many other areas.

A derivative of this opposition arises when faced with the question of whether to seek some kind of recognition from outside the group itself (from the state, the church, some institution or other body...) or to avoid it and remain in the “anonymity” of the domestic, the private and the informal. Often, the balance is

tipped according to the group’s perception of the “outside”: if it seems friendly, welcoming and comfortable, one tends to seek that “recognition” which, in a way, means “integration” into the outside world; on the other hand, if it seems threatening and hostile, the temptation to take refuge in the informal and to isolate oneself is almost irresistible.

In this sense, it should be noted that the Marist lay reality has already been organised in many local or province contexts for some time now, with even some cases of formal recognition at the local level. However, the challenge it faces in the coming years is to define whether it is to develop an international structure and whether it seeks some kind of external recognition at this international level. ■



Provincial Coordinators Assembly of Marist Life and Mission of the Norandina Province



Final message of the 3^a phase of the International Forum on the Lay Marist Vocation

**Agnes Reyes,
Manu Gómez
and Raúl Amaya**
Directors of the
Secretariat of Laity
December 2022



Dear Marists of Champagnat:

We are happy to offer you a simple message that emerged from the shared life and work of the participants in the 3rd stage of the International Forum on the Lay Marist Vocation, which took place in Rome from 4 to 11 November 2022. It was a real experience of the Spirit (the Ruah), which allowed us to continue to explore possibilities for strengthening intuitions and pathways related to the lay Marist vocation.

After the first year of this process which began on 19 March 2021 in the different Provinces and Districts, the delegates of each Administrative Unit of the Institute continued the reflection which had started in their places of origin, but now, in this phase constituting themselves as an expression of our global charismatic family.

This message does not contain definitive conclusions. They are rather “promptings of the Spirit” around the





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of discernment ahead
of us to arrive
at concrete
proposals**

four objectives set for the whole Forum process. We have two years of discernment ahead of us to arrive at concrete proposals for the virtual Forum in November 2024. So, the purpose of this message is to provide a snapshot of our reflections during the face-to-face Forum, to help us stay connected to the themes of the Forum, to offer you ideas and guidelines to support our re-

flection and discussion at Administrative Unit and Regional levels, and to contribute to the building of a consensus on the four promptings.

The participants of the face-to-face Forum in Rome will continue to contribute to the reflection and preparation of concrete proposals to be presented at the international virtual Forum in November 2024. Your support, reflection and input can be of-

ferred directly to the representatives of your Administrative Unit.

We are grateful for all the support received, the expressions of gratitude and the prayers from everywhere there is a Marist presence. We will continue to be attentive to the “promptings of the RUAH” that urges us to “welcome, care for, live and share our vocation”.

In this time of Advent, which opens us to hope and to welcoming “the Light that shines in the darkness”, we walk hand in hand with Mary, a woman who was totally open and available to the action of the Spirit. May she continue to inspire and encourage us in our quest. Fraternally,



RUAH – BREATHS OF THE SPIRIT FOR LAY MARISTS

With open hearts we arrived at stage 3 of the International Forum on the Lay Marist Vocation with 48 lay men and women from all the AUs of the Institute and 33 Brothers as support and companions on the journey. Since its beginning, the experience of the Forum has been one of true communion where we have shared life, moments together, concerns and dreams in relation to the lay Marist vocation. Moved by the Spirit, we have looked to our future with the same hope and confidence as Mary and Marcellin.

As a global family and aware of the common gift we share, we let ourselves be challenged by exploring the issues that touch our life, mission and organisation. It is with joy that we share with all our brothers and sisters in the Marist world the breaths of the Spirit in this phase of the Forum.

This message you hold in your hands is not intended to be a document with conclusions from the Forum. Rather, they are themes connected to the four objectives of the Forum (the vocational identity of lay Marists, formation processes and pathways, linking to the Marist charism, and civil or canonical juridical structures for Marist

laity) and which we will continue to study and shape into concrete proposals to be put to the Virtual Forum to be held in November 2024.



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BREATH ONE

TO EXPLORE OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE MARIST VOCATION WITH A PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON THE VOCATION OF LAY MARISTS

We worked on a common understanding of the lay vocation that includes and embraces the whole person. This implies embracing and integrating all dimensions of such a vocation, leading us to transform our hearts, our minds, our wills... in short, our whole lives, based on Marist principles and values.

We understand the lay Marist vocation as an invitation, a gift from God to live our lives inspired by the Marist charism. We accept this invitation freely and voluntarily. Our experience is respectful of all cultures and faiths and is rooted in our own experiences and realities.





The Spirit is inviting us to further probe the language and meaning of the terms ‘inclusion’, ‘vocation’ and ‘formation’ for us as lay Marists.

As an open question for further reflection, the question arose as to how people from other religious or spiritual traditions can live as Marists, in line with our desire to be inclusive and welcoming of all people.

BREATH TWO

REVIEWING AND OFFERING FORMATION AND ACCOMPANIMENT PROCESSES AND PATHWAYS FOR THE LAY VOCATION

We recognise the importance of having pathways and criteria for the discernment of lay Marist vocations. Vocational processes require personal accompaniment that is respectful and appropriate to the rhythms and realities of each person.

We commit ourselves to continue exploring criteria, suggestions and formation pathways for carrying out vocational discernment processes adapted to contexts and cultures.

At both the personal and institutional levels, we will make efforts to guarantee financial and human resources for supporting and promoting lay Marist vocations.

Besides continuing what is happening at local and province levels, we will share and strengthen lay formation initiatives at the global level.

BREATH THREE

REFLECTING ON AND PROPOSING POSSIBLE WAYS OF BONDING TO THE MARIST CHARISM

■ Understanding of the phrase “bonding of laypeople to the Marist charism”

We embrace the diversity of lay Marist life and the different moments of the spiritual journey in which we find ourselves.

We recognise the call to live the Gospel in Mary’s way and choose to incarnate the Marist charism in the Church and in the world.

We come to this conviction through a process of discernment which, if it ends with the recognition of God’s call to a Marist vocation, leads to a formal commitment and attachment to the charism. This new vocation is welcomed and celebrated by the Marist community as a gift from God.

There already exist in the Marist world different ways of expressing this commitment and attachment to the charism (mission, commu-



nity, spirituality), from a lay perspective, which are mutually recognisable.

We understand this link to the charism as our public witness to the Marist vocation and our sense of unity and belonging to a global charismatic family, following a process of vocational discernment. We feel challenged to explore some aspects of such bonding further.



■ **Forms of bonding to the charism**

Those among us who have chosen to bind ourselves to the Marist charism have done so intentionally and freely through a public commitment, as a result of a process of vocational discernment and accompaniment.

This choice implies a profound co-responsibility for the future and vitality of the Marist charism. The approach to bonding differs according to the diversity of cultures and contexts of the Marist world. Before us lies the challenge of clarifying the terms used to define what we mean by “forms of bonding”.

■ **What is needed to support and encourage the processes of lay people who feel called to move towards such bonding?**

To support and encourage the processes of lay people who feel called to move towards such bonding, we see it as necessary to:

- Make personal invitations to begin a process.
- Generate networks, teams and resources to accompany those engaged in this process.
- Design pathways based on different prior levels of formation (that are accessible and flexible).
- To train mentors who are inspiring, give personal witness and promote communion.
- Grow in autonomy (e.g. decision-making and finances) and develop structures with lay leadership.
- Develop common guidelines for the formation processes.
- Be sensitive to cultural differences.
- Provide opportunities to live our charism both personally and in community.

BREATH FOUR

TO KNOW, REFLECT ON, EXPLORE AND PROPOSE POSSIBILITIES OF JURIDICAL STRUCTURES (CIVIL AND/OR CANONICAL) FOR THE MARIST LAITY.

■ **Contribution of associative structures to Lay Marist Vocations**

The existence of associative structures can contribute in the following ways:

- **In the vitality of the Marist charism**
 - Continuity and charismatic growth;
 - It gives us a body;
 - It facilitates our connection with the Institute;
 - It encourages the commitment of members and the growth



of our charismatic family as a response to the actions of the Spirit.

- **In giving visibility to the lay Marist vocation**
 - Visibility in society and church;
 - Sustaining formation, programs and overall organisation of the life of lay Marists;
 - Brings a degree of formality, structure and organisation;
 - Ensures the legitimacy and recognition of this vocation.
- **In regard to identity**
 - Ensures a sense of identity and belonging (adopting values, collaboration and community)
 - Gives a sense of something bigger than oneself for sharing



- Different challenges emerged that will have to be taken into account over the next two years as such associative structures are considered.

May Mary our Good Mother continue to enlighten our vocational journey as Marists.





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