



LIVING MARIST LIFE IN A GROUP

Secretariat of Laity

Marist Groups

Without strictly falling under the term *community*, there are community dimensions presently being developed by brothers and lay people together. These dimensions may refer to faith processes, reflection meetings, apostolic activities, and/or moments to share life experiences. The Marist groups of the Hermitage, Ibérica, and Compostela come from this vision.

These groups promote meetings to share faith, discuss ongoing formation topics, or carry out apostolic tasks. This is done with great flexibility, according to the members' possibilities, and without requiring stable structures. They offer a new way to live the Marist charism in communion with others.

Marist Life Groups – The Hermitage

1. MOTIVATING DOCUMENT

The Marist charism, a shared gift. Living Marist life in a group.
A path of communion for laity and brothers

The present document on “The Marist charism, a shared gift” is a first attempt to concretize the laity’s path and facilitate its expression and experience at the personal and group levels. It will clearly need adjusting and adaptation according to the lessons that experience will gradually teach us.

On the other hand, although the document offers elements to guide the Marist laity’s life option, the path of communion it presents is also, and especially, addressed to the brothers and communities, and, at large, to all those who, regardless of their walk in life, live out the Marist charism and want to share it with other people by living a deep sense of communion. The present proposal, therefore, is aimed at helping everybody to be a better Christian and live life thoroughly.

Signs of identity in the Marist life groups

The signs of identity in the Marist Life Groups (MLG) are present in the areas of fraternal life, spirituality and mission.

We feel called to share our life and gifts with the group. We acknowledge the group as a privileged space for human, Christian and Marist growth.

Rooted in everyday life, like Marcellin, we find a sense of transcendence in every concrete area of our existence. We feel that Marcellin’s personal traits are also our own: compassion, gratuity, simplicity, prayer life, family spirit, and enthusiasm in serving and working for others.

We help the new generations discover the face of God so that they may have life abundantly (Jn 10: 10). We are a seed of transformation, and make the Kingdom of God present wherever we are, in the contexts of our family, community, and society.

Characteristic elements of the Marist Life Groups

a) The life of the group

The group is a favorable setting encouraging its members to share reflection, prayer, and life experiences, in order to grow as a testimonial community. The group is dynamic and follows its own growth process.

b) The initial constitution of the group

A group is made up of a variable number of people and may include different ages, life options (religious, priests, married or single people, engaged couples) and backgrounds (teachers, families, members of the PAS social program, pastoral animators, and former students). The group determines its gathering place, and is advised to meet at least once a month.

c) The group meeting

The group meeting is a real hub for its members. It is a warm and fraternal time for sharing, an expression of genuine love which is demanding for everyone. It requires a climate of mutual trust, and becomes a safe and welcoming environment for all members.

d) Life outside the group and beyond the meetings

On the initiative of each group, the dynamics of dialogue, prayer, listening, reflection, and sharing continue between meetings. Deep friendship among members is a fruit already developing.

e) Evaluation meeting

In the last meeting at the end of the school year we assess what we have lived together, the process we have experienced personally and as a Christian and Marist group. We can also consider new challenges or projects regarding our growth process as a group.

2. GROUP IDENTIFICATION

✚ Marist Life Group – Barcelona



- **Members:** 4 brothers and 7 lay Marists (2 married couples; 9 from Marist works; 1 travel agent).
- **Starting date:** January 2012.
- **Meeting frequency:** monthly, three hours.
- **Dynamics: meetings** take place in the different houses and communities. The host animates the meeting. We first have dinner together, and then share a participative prayer service. This is followed by a study topic in tune with the Province guidelines and in keeping with the path of communion between brothers and laity. We end by sharing our personal and vocational growth process.

- **Social/pastoral projects:** there are no group projects. The individual mission of each member is shared by the community.
- **Special moments as a group:** meetings with other Marist Life Groups.

✚ Marist Life Space – Llinars



- **Members:** 2 brothers and 6 lay Marists (1 married couple; 4 from Marist works; 2 in liberal professions).
- **Starting date:** February 2012.
- **Meeting frequency:** a day-long gathering once a month.
- **Dynamics:** we meet at the Marist house of Llinars del Vallès (Barcelona). We begin by sharing dinner, and then have a participative prayer service. We stay in the community overnight and carry on with the meeting in the morning, reflecting together about a topic in tune with the Province guidelines and in keeping with the path of communion between brothers and laity. We end by sharing our personal and vocational growth process.
- **Social/pastoral projects:** there are no group projects. The individual mission of each member is shared by the community.
- **Special moments as a group:** meetings with other Marist Life Groups.

✚ Marist Life Group – Badalona

- **Members:** 2 brothers and 7 lay Marists (1 married couple; 5 from Marist works; 2 in liberal professions).
- **Starting date:** April 2013.
- **Meeting frequency:** a day-long gathering once a month.
- **Dynamics:** we meet at the brothers' community house. We start by reflecting together about a topic in tune with the Province guidelines and in keeping with the

path of communion between brothers and laity. We pray together, share our personal and vocational growth process, and have dinner together.

- **Social/pastoral projects:** there are no group projects. The individual mission of each member is shared by the community.
- **Special moments as a group:** meetings with other Marist Life Groups.

✚ Marist Life Group – Girona



- **Members:** 2 brothers and 5 lay Marists (4 from Marist works; 1 professional).
- **Starting date:** March 2012.
- **Meeting Frequency:** a day-long gathering once a month.
- **Dynamics:** we usually meet at the school. The meeting begins with a prayer moment, after which we reflect on a topic in tune with the Province guidelines and in keeping with the path of communion between brothers and laity. Then we share a moment of prayer, our personal and vocational growth, and have dinner together.
- **Social/pastoral projects:** at the pastoral level, we participate together in celebrations organized by the diocese, talks, etc.
- **Special moments as a group:** meeting with the brothers' community at full. School Eucharist on the feasts of the Immaculate and Saint Marcellin. Meetings with other Marist Life Groups.

Other longstanding Marist groups which have consolidated their own vitality:

✚ Mustard Seed – Barcelona



- **Members:** 6 lay people (1 married couple; 4 from Marist works; 2 in liberal professions). Always accompanied by the other 4 members' partners. Some brothers have participated with more or less regularity over the years.
- **Starting date:** Pentecost 1997.
- **Meeting Frequency:** weekly, 2 hours.
- **Dynamics:** we meet in the light of the Gospel and of day-to-day reality. Reflection on Marist themes.
- **Social/pastoral projects:** animation and personal accompaniment of people from the school and other places. Exchange with other similar groups and with the nearby communities of brothers.
- **Special moments as a group:** participation in provincial meetings; an annual outing.

✚ Pilgrims of the Desert – Lleida



- **Members:** 13 lay Marists and 1 brother (3 married couples; 2 from Marist works, and 9 in liberal professions).
 - **Starting date:** 1997.
 - **Meeting frequency:** monthly.
 - **Dynamics:** we share prayer and reflection with a family spirit. We generate a fraternal atmosphere by sharing meals in the house of each family by turns. We also organize more intense and lengthy gatherings to share as a community.
 - **Social/pastoral projects:** community animation of Easter celebrations in rural parishes.
- Special moments as a group:** two weekends every year to share more deeply and build fraternity.

✚ Utopia is Possible – Barcelona



- **Members:** 13 lay persons associated with Marist Youth Ministry (2 from Marist works; 11 are studying or in liberal professions).
- **Starting date:** 1997.
- **Meeting frequency:** weekly, for 3 hours.
- **Dynamics:** sharing dinner, day-to-day life, prayer.
- **Social/pastoral projects:** monthly group commitment to volunteering in the social dining room of Sant Oleguer. Some members are Youth Ministry animators. Collaboration with Alandar, a religious magazine, through in-depth articles.

Marist Encounter Groups – Ibérica

1 ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE GROUPS

ORIGIN

The *Marist Encounter Groups* were born from the reflection groups created in the Province of Ibérica to study the document *Gathered Around the Same Table*. This study process lasted a year, which began with the presentation of the document in all the Marist centers, and concluded with a Forum on the Marist Lay Vocation.



OBJECTIVES

These groups claim to be a space to share life and reflection, deepen Marist values, and create community links between people from different Marist settings. Therefore, they wish to become an answer for people who have expressed their desire to continue sharing life and Christian experience in community spaces, connected with their day-to-day life and mission.

DEVELOPMENT

The Laity Commission initially presented this proposal in each Marist center. They contacted leading people who had participated in the study of *Gathered Around the Same Table* (GAST), asking them to act as link persons in order to organize the groups. The Laity Commission helped forming the groups, registering the participants, and invited the members to participate in other formative proposals which were taking place at the moment.

The reflection material was organized by content blocks and each group was able to plan its own schedule: spirituality, Marcellin Champagnat, mission, celebration of the liturgical times, and also a guideline for the first and last meetings. The process included twelve meetings designed to last between one-and-a-half and two hours each. The guide for each meeting contained an introduction to outline the reflection, and a closing moment to pray and enrich each member's life project.

There was also a provincial meeting of these groups intended to make them visible to one another, besides generating communication, discussion, and a sense of Province which goes beyond the local dynamics. In some of these groups we spotted people with a longstanding and well discerned Marist experience, to whom we offered the possibility of participating in a Conference on Marist Vocation (vocational discernment), so as to help them deepen their option, and find out what kind of vocational accompaniment they needed.

During the 2012-2013 school year, 19 Marist Encounter Groups were formed, which included 216 people from around the Province, both brothers and laity. They belong to 14 Marist centers. Only 3 of the centers in the Province have not promoted these groups. In addition to them, there are also 10 fraternities of the CMMF. In some places there have been joint meetings of the two groups.

Local leadership from brothers, fraternity members, or other lay people who are trained for this purpose is considered as an essential support for these groups. Without such local leadership, it would be difficult for the proposal to spread within the Province.

CENTER	GROUPS	MEMBERS	COORDINATORS
01 E.U. ALCALÁ	1	11	Chema Pérez-Soba
02 BILBAO	2	5 + 12	Izaskun Ugarriza Andrés Gil
03 DURANGO			Iñaki Ruiz del Portal
04 FUENLABRADA	1	14	Iñigo García Blanco
05 GUADALAJARA	1 (ó 2)	27	Carmina Hernando Pilar Urbina Nacho Hombrados
06 LOGROÑO	3	10 + 4 + 13	José Angel Bartolomé Esther Lasa Elena Herrera
07 MADRID – CHAMBERÍ	1	15	Patxi, Pablo Beltrán
08 MADRID – SAN JOSÉ DEL PARQUE	2	18 + 10	Beatriz Estellés Ricardo Villafañe
09 MADRID	1	6	Pepe Nacho de Alberti
10 NAVALMORAL DE LA MATA	1	15	H. Jesús Rodríguez
11 TALAVERA DE LA REINA	2	5 +	Piedad Fernández Guillermo Díaz-Cardiel
12 ZALLA	1	15	Nekane Villar
13 ZARAGOZA			H. Carlos García
14 VILLALBA	1	29	José Seijas Montserrat Martín
15 PAMPLONA	1	7	Lorenzo Peñasco
16 ERANDIO Marta Espiniella	xxxx		
17 TOLEDO José Félix Martín	xxxx		
	19	216	

Marist Spirituality Groups

Compostela

1. INSPIRING DOCUMENT

MARIST SPIRITUALITY GROUPS (MSG)

0. INTRODUCTION

We try to meet a need felt by many lay people (who are involved in the Marist works, such as teachers, animators, volunteers, etc.), Marist brothers, parents of students, and others who have come into contact with the Marist setting¹.

They need to find companions to walk along with, as they search for this “life in abundance” that Jesus is offering us. In fact, people with similar experiences in the search for meaning who have savored the Marist style² (family spirit) as a way to interrelate and organize life, find a symbol of this connection in the La Valla table.

On numerous occasions, this need has emerged in conversations like the following: “When we are together for example in the *Marist Spirituality Itineraries*, the *Spanish Marist Conference*, or the *Hermitage School for Educators*, we discover many things and dream about following the path of spirituality; but when we get back home, with all the routine and things to do, our experience gradually waters down, we lose stamina and become disconnected from the “source”. If we could only do something in our cities to help us persevere and keep going...”

1. DEFINITION

An MSG is a group of people who find the space and time to “reconnect” with the Source of Life, with Meaning, with God; that is, a place where they can nourish and express their spirituality³ in a Marist setting.

All human beings are called to follow the path of spirituality because it responds to our deepest longing. Living in connection with the Source (God) is the fruit of the spiritual path: “I have come so that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn 10: 10). And although we must follow this path individually as we listen to our “inner guide”, it is essential that we are accompanied by other people and rely on the support of a community.

¹ “The communion between Lay people and Brothers complements and enriches our specific vocations and different states of life. There is not only a place for both at the table, but we need each other at our side” (Gathered Around the Same Table, 79).

² “The strength of this family spirit gathers us who live the Marist charism into a new family of followers of Christ, through the example of Mary. The table of La Valla is a symbol of the relationship that unites us” (Gathered Around the Same Table, 78).

³ “Spirituality wants to live at the root, not only on the surface. The human being open to spirituality discovers that each instant is a time of opportunity. He is able to maintain hope in happiness and pain, he commits to living fully each second of this wonderful and difficult existence. This is not to be confused with a ritualistic religiosity, but as leading to a true change of life” (Gathered Around the Same Table, 101).

In this regard, a local MSG can offer group accompaniment, incentive to stay on the spiritual path, and support to actually use the means of development and growth available.

2. FUNCTIONING

According to the document *Gathered Around the Same Table*: “*This sharing requires times together. Around the table people gather to speak, to laugh, to be together. It is necessary to seek out those moments and spaces for communication in depth, meetings of a quality that unite us in what is essential. Thus it will be easier to understand the different ways of thinking and living, and accepting our own and other people’s limitations in a climate of true brotherhood*” (*Gathered Around the Same Table*, 80).

a) **Typical activities:**

- Time for interiority: silence, listening to the inner world, meditation, and prayer.
- Moments to share our life experiences.
- Consciousness practice, listening to life and to the Word: “Amanecer, Hora 0.”
- Formation time: including readings and discussions that help clarify in what direction we are moving.
- Strong time: days of conviviality for the local group; participation in the *Marist Spirituality Itineraries* or other related programs.
- Playful time: weaving together selfless relationships, which promote the sense of humor and celebration.

b) **A Marist family attitude and atmosphere,**

which is our way to live in communion, not only because it is a typical Marist trait, but for the reason that this family space is necessary to bring about personal growth and development:

- a welcoming space, open to all;
- a place where communication is simple and authentic;
- a warm space for tenderness, where weakness is an opportunity to show and feel unconditional love;
- a “home” where you can “walk in slippers”, feeling at ease;
- a space to share and express our spirituality;
- a place where life as such, and the Marist Mission in the Church and the world become the horizon.

c) **Group animation:**

As in any group, we need a person or two serving as coordinators who can animate the process. They are annually elected by the group, and their service can last three years at the most.

3. CRITERIA TO CONSTITUTE AN MSG

- That it stems from a need which is felt and shared by a group of people.
- That the Local Animation Team (in case the emerging group is linked to a Marist center) or a Marist community (if this is rather the point of reference) know about the group and accompany its initial stage.
- That the potential members participate at least once in the Marist spirituality activities at the Provincial level – such as the *Marist Spirituality Itineraries* or the *Hermitage School for Educators* – as a way to ensure a minimum homogeneity of criteria and expectations. (If someone has not, his or her participation without delay would be suitable).
- That the birth of the new MSG and its activities are publicly announced, and that those who may be interested are informed.

4. RELATIONSHIP OF THE MSGS WITH THE PROVINCE AND INSTITUTE

- In order to give a certain unity to the new groups, the Province will foster some kind of relationship between them so that they can get to know each other and feel part of Compostela.
- In addition, meeting with similar groups from other Provinces in order to strengthen the sense of belonging to the Marist charism beyond our Province would also be desirable.

5. A TYPICAL PROCESS OF HOW AN MSG GROUP BEGINS (BY WAY OF EXAMPLE)

1st. A community or a Local Animation Team (LAT) gets to know that some people are interested in this topic and brings them together to propose the beginning of a group process. It could also happen that the group of people who are interested gets in touch with the community or Local Animation Team.

2nd. Once the decision to start is made, the community or LAT spots other people who may be interested and personally invites them.

3rd. In the first MSG meeting, it is important to share about each person's spiritual background.

4th. Without much delay, a slightly more in-depth gathering to strengthen the motivations and ties within the group is suitable.

2. GROUP IDENTIFICATION

Group of Lisbon

Integrated by 10 people who meet once a month.

They discuss the New Testament and other books on spirituality in the meetings.

They meet in different places within the school of Lisbon: chapel, catechesis room, school yards, etc.

They feel supported by the School Pastoral Coordinator.

Group of Carcavelos



Integrated by 12 people who meet twice a month.

There is a coordination and animation team. Each meeting is prepared by two members of the group on a voluntary basis.

They carry out the following activities:

- Meetings, including the discussion of a Gospel text or an episode of Champagnat's life, and time for sharing, meditation and prayer.
- Easter celebrations, participation in Masses, vigils, and sharing with students at the school.
- They also cherish their moments of conviviality, the closing party at the end of the year, and a day-long retreat session.

They meet in the brothers' community chapel, and feel supported by the School Pastoral Coordinator and by a person from the provincial team of communion between laity and brothers.

✚ Group of Salamanca

Integrated by 20 people who meet once a month.

They meet at school or in a small community of brothers.

The Group initially gathered a few parents who were first-communion catechists in the school, plus some teachers and brothers.

They carry out the following activities:

- Meetings always include participative prayer and a reading from the document “Gathered Around the Same Table”.
- Christmas and Easter celebrations.
- They also cherish their conviviality moments, like the camping trip for the final evaluation meeting, in which other members of the families can participate.

They feel supported by the School Pastoral Coordinator and by a person from the provincial team of communion between laity and brothers.

✚ Group of Valladolid (Rosey Fraternity)



Integrated by 12 adults and 5 children who gather every 3 or 4 weeks during the school year.

They meet at the school of La Inmaculada.

They carry out the following activities:

- Meetings around a guiding book, with prayer, etc.
- Different Eucharistic celebrations, prayer with the community, Easter celebrations.
- Other activities: commitment to a scholarship program, meeting with other fraternities, sharing an afternoon snack, etc.

They feel supported by a brother.