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EFERENCE COMMUNITY

Reference communities are associated with the charismatic dimension of Marist works, projects or centers. Their members can be either lay people, brothers or both[[1]](#footnote-1). They emerge when a group of people feels the need to share the experience of the Marist charism, ensuring a continuous Marist identity of the work, project or center in the future. Within a Marist setting, reference communities prompt, among other things, a Marist vocational culture, reminding the people who work in the Marist center about their Marist identity, expressing the Marist tradition and way of being in a joyful way, and a particular style of evangelization.

Until now, a community of brothers linked to the work guaranteed this charismatic dimension. At present, the fact of not having communities of brothers in all the centers, and the emergence of so many lay people who feel the call to share the charism according to their own life style, are the factors bringing about these Marist reference communities[[2]](#footnote-2).



The Marist Mission and its concrete projects, whether they are educational centers or other works, involve many people. All of them form a wide community, and have different leading roles in each center’s project. Some of these people also bring their faith and willingness to participate in our evangelization mission. A smaller group see themselves as Marists, give an accounting of their Marist identity, and witness their commitment to the charism. Marist reference communities draw their members from the latter group.

Each reference community revolves around a particular Marist project that shapes it and generates a specific model of community living, but the common denominator is the fact of being a Christian community that lives and celebrates the faith, cultivates Marist spirituality, and connects to the other communities of the Province. Reference communities ensure and give continuity to the charism in the Marist center, and become its charismatic memory. They also feel part of and collaborate with the Local Church.

The creation of these communities involves a number of demanding attitudes, such as openness of mind and heart, mutual respect, a constructive approach, commitment to the mission that a concrete Marist work develops, availability to engage in it, simplicity, a spirit of communion, and a sense of being responsible for the transmission of the charism[[3]](#footnote-3). The dynamism and development of a Marist center will depend on the quality and richness of its reference community experience.

The Institute is in a stage of reflection regarding this topic. There are no solid experiences yet that can become a landmark in this process, but the characteristics and the meaning of these communities seem to be important for the future of the charism, as a point of reference regarding Marist fraternity, spirituality and mission. Life itself will gradually tell us how to construct them, the way in which they should relate to the Marist work they animate, how they should link with the Province and other Marist communities, and what formation process they need. If we see the future of the Marist mission as a shared endeavor between brothers and laity, we should obviously take into account Marist reference communities.

1. ‘Brothers and lay people’ is a generic expression, which does not exclude priests. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Province of Ibérica has carried out an interesting reflection in this regard: *Marist Reference Communities in Our Educational Works,* September 2013. The Piarists have also studied the topic, and believe that *“reference communities bring the taste and smell of the Piarist charism and the Christian spirit to the works”.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. According to the Piarists, the Christian and Piarist identity of their schools become more visible thanks to the members of these reference communities: *“It is easier to maintain and promote our typical traits, global education project, and identity if there is a community of people that lives out all these things, assuming them as their vocation and mission”.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)