T

HE CHAMPAGNAT MOVEMENT OF THE MARIST FAMILY

The Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family is described in the Constitutions of the Brothers as “an extension of our Institute; it is a movement for people who wish to share more fully the spirituality and sense of mission inherited from Marcellin Champagnat. In this movement, affiliated members, young people, parents, helpers, former students, and friends deepen within themselves the spirit of our Founder so that they can live it and let it shine forth. The Institute animates and co-ordinates the activities of this movement by setting up suitable structures.”

The Chapter of 1985 echoed the call of Vatican II, as well as the statement of Paul VI, *“this is the hour of the laity,”* launching the Champagnat Movement. With the movement, the members of the Chapter sought to respond to the inspiration of the Spirit. The 1987 Synod on *“The vocation and mission of the laity”* and the post-synod apostolic exhortation of Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles laici*, repeated the call of the Council to a greater involvement of the laity in the mission of the Church. And then a committee of the General Council together with brothers from around the world launched the project of the laity. After three years of reflection and consultation, the *Life Project* was published in 1990 which is like the Movement’s identity card.

The main axes of the Champagnat Movement are easily recognizable: to be apostles of Jesus in the environment and during one’s own state of life; to love and imitate Mary; to meet in small groups to share the faith in Jesus and the experience of apostolic action; to bear witness, through one’s way of life, to the spirituality of Marcellin Champagnat. The Project gives freedom to build from one’s own lay experience. It gives the possibility to decide what organization or structure will be best for the group, in accordance with the province.

Br Charles Howard, during the time as Superior General, published a circular in October, 1991, titled “*The Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family. A grace for us all*”, presenting the Life Project and giving an account of the origins of the Movement[[1]](#footnote-1). For Br Charles it means the participation of laity and brothers, of the same family and of the same Marist house.[[2]](#footnote-2) He states: “I welcome you in the Institute as a gift from our Good Mother.”

The Champagnat Movement is an opportunity for participating in the same gift received from the Spirit, the Marist charism. It becomes “a blessing and a joy for us brothers and for you lay people, to feel called to share our mutual wealth and live together a fascinating spiritual and apostolic adventure. It is a blessing and a joy especially for you young people, who are the future of society and the Church, to be able to find an answer to your deepest longings and a scope for your generosity in the Champagnat Movement.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

The General Chapters have emerged in various ways in relation to the Movement: inviting each administrative unit to promote it,[[4]](#footnote-4) recognizing it as a valid way to live Marist spirituality,[[5]](#footnote-5) identifying it as a sign of vitality recognized by the Institute,[[6]](#footnote-6) and prompting its continued support.[[7]](#footnote-7) The document *Gathered around the Same Table* says that the Movement has provided many fruits in spirituality and mission, and has increased Marist vocations and it is a hope for the future of our charism.[[8]](#footnote-8) This same document outlines some of the challenges that it is facing in these new times.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Lay men and women themselves started an updating process 25 years after the creation of the Champagnat Movement. This process seeks to recreate the Life Project with the language of the laity and to meet the new standards of the Church and the Institute. These are the words of Br Charles to the laity, which come true: “We are aware that the ‘final document’ should come from your own hearts, from your own faith, from your own experience, your experience of Champagnat’s spirituality. By carrying out this project, you will go deeper and have a broader view of his original intuition, and the brothers will emerge enriched in their understanding of the charism of the founder, through your ideas and your experience”[[10]](#footnote-10). The Movement has several thousand members, organized into fraternities. It is present in different continents and generates its own organizational structures and leadership.

1. Br Charles showed a profound conviction of lay leadership: “We are at a significant moment in history, in which the rediscovery of the full role of lay people in the community will not only invigorate the Church in efforts for the “New Evangelization,” but it will gradually help it be more humble, following in the footsteps of Jesus.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Br Charles writes: “I would like to say a final word to emphasize something you already know: that you are welcomed at your Marist house. For a long time, you were in it, because of your way of living, feeling and doing. Now, you have chosen to live the faith and the ministry more profoundly, being other Champagnats in your own environment, starting in your own home.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. Br Charles Howard, Circular the *Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family*, p. 415 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. XIX General Chapter, 1993, *Our Mission* 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Idem*, Relation with the Laity* 2. This Chapter asks that the Br Superior General and his Council support the development and autonomy of the Champagnat Movement, encouraging, above all, the formation of its members and communication among the Fraternities [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Cf. XX General Chapter, 2001, 43.10. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Cf. XXI General Chapter, 2009, *Brothers and Laity* 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Cf. Gathered Around the Same Table 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. EMM, 88: “Its *Life Project* is a fruitful way to develop community life and a source of inspiration so that the Movement can face the challenges that it has in these new times: to grow in autonomy and responsibility within the

   Marist lay vocation; to enter into relationships with new generations; to convey the passion for the Marist vocation, both as a brother and as a lay person; to engage in new forms of mission; and to articulate itself more effectively with other realities of the Marist world”. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Charles Howard, Circular *Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family*, 1991, p. 416 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)