C

O-RESPONSIBILITY

The term co-responsibility is simply defined as a “shared responsibility”[[1]](#footnote-1). That is, we want to point out that responsibility on an issue is between two or more persons that, therefore, share a commitment on this issue.

This concept prevails in its biggest form today in the Church. Based on the definition of the Church as ‘people of God in communion of vocations, Vatican II accentuates the awareness that the responsibility in the evangelizing mission of the Church is not exclusive to anyone, but is shared by all. So in a message sent to participants of the international forum of Catholic Action, Pope Benedict XVI says that co-responsibility requires a change in mindset that particularly concerns the role of the laity in the Church. He emphasizes the importance of a “mature and committed” laity that can contribute from its state of life to the mission of the Church.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Similarly, the Institute of the Marist Brothers feels called to deepen this ecclesial reality. The 21st General Chapter, regarding the subject “Brothers and Laity in a new spirit of communion,” states that “the value of co-responsibility as an element for the development of Marist life, spirituality and mission”[[3]](#footnote-3) must be deepened and the First International Assembly of the Marist Mission (Mendes) affirmed that “as Marists of Champagnat, we believe God is now calling us to share life and mission, with co-responsibility, men and women, in a spirit of trust, understanding and mutual respect”[[4]](#footnote-4). In this way, co-responsibility, as a Christian value, covers all work between brothers and laity. Marist mission, in ecclesial terms, becomes a shared mission.

This shared mission can be experienced in many ways: the relationship between brothers and laity regarding the mission can take different forms, and so the way this responsibility is lived will be different.

At first glance, one can see that there are people who share a professional work with the brothers or live within a Marist work environment respecting their values and ideas, but not really involved in the Marist way of life. Others, however, live their work as a Christian mission. Confessing Christians share their evangelizing mission with the Marist family.

So, in Marist works, they all share a common interest in the work’s success and “we feel co- responsible with those in positions that have the responsibility to plan, encourage and evaluate our work.

Those who exercise managerial tasks promote co-responsibility by distributing the work and establishing structures to coordinate our efforts and ensuring wide participation in decision-making.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

This implies that the laity and brothers who hold positions of co-responsibility should have professional capabilities, together with a permanently updated formation, and must be characterized by respect and solidarity with the people and by a deep experience of spiritual formation[[6]](#footnote-6). Being co-responsible for the mission, they must demonstrate readiness to take on tasks that are required, according to their capacities and life situations, treating them as a service without becoming attached to them. [[7]](#footnote-7)

And there is more. Ecclesial communion has also generated other fruits: the recognition that the Spirit has brought new Marist vocations among lay Christians[[8]](#footnote-8). Based on acceptance of Brothers and laity, we have received the gift of Marcellin’s charism and therefore we are companions in the Marist mission, co-responsibility, as an overall value, and the following is deepened: that as Brothers and lay Marists we are sent by God to multiply the vocation and Marist mission. Together they are responsible before God for carrying it out. [[9]](#footnote-9)

From this perspective, co-responsibility involves all levels: decision making, planning, implementation and evaluation. This means that, in fulfilling the mission, lay Marists also assume the charism, spirituality and Marist life, and shares with the Brothers the wealth that the gifts of each one and the various states of life contributes to the common mission.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Co-responsibility in the mission has multiple expressions among us: it has given impetus to assemblies, chapters and provincial commissions and teams where lay people and brothers work side by side. In other places, it has created structures where administration and provincial animation are shared. Laity are not only involved in the mission but participate in its joint planning. Enlarged provincial councils, which work together to respond to current needs have also been established.[[11]](#footnote-11)

1. Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Cfr. The Pope’s message to the Sixth Ordinary Assembly, International Forum of Catholic Action. Aug. 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cfr. Document of the 21st GENERAL CHAPTER. Future Horizons. A new relationship between Brothers and Lay Marists, lookoing together for a greater vitality. Oct. 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cfr. Final document of the Assembly of Mendes. Marist Champagnat in a shared mission. Sept. 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Cf. In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat: A Vision for Marist Education Today No. 47 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid., No. 54 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., No. 56 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Cfr. Gathered Around the Same Table. No. 10 and 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Cfr. Gathered Around the Same Table. No. 45 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid., No. 46 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid., No. 95 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)