C

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The term *community* is used in different contexts to designate very different realities, but always with a common denominator: it speaks about a group of people.

Christian life is community based. Since the Kingdom of God amounts to the fraternal relationship between the sons and daughters of the same Abba-Father, you cannot be a Christian on your own. Fraternal and community life are necessary to live the faith.

And this need is expressed in several ways:

* In Marist religious life, the brothers form a community around Mary, as members of her family[[1]](#footnote-1). The XIX General Chapter invited us to see the community as a family gathered in the name of the Lord, that is, as a theological reality, a place where the experience of God can be achieved fully and communicated to others[[2]](#footnote-2). Therefore, this Chapter assumed the commitment to build communities that are prophetic, simple, and open to young people in a special way[[3]](#footnote-3).

The General Chapters of 2001 and 2009 invited us to create new styles of community, welcoming the creation of mixed communities integrated by religious and laity, and establishing international and interprovincial communities which would be open to Marist Brothers and Lay Marists serving in the vanguard of new areas of mission[[4]](#footnote-4).

* And the laity’s life, as an expression of Christian life, is also community based. Lay people experience community life by participating in different structures, commissions and groups, giving a special flavor to the various expressions of the Marist charism[[5]](#footnote-5). Community is a concrete expression of a Christian fraternity that assumes its mission. It essentially differs, therefore, from a team, a reflection or prayer group, although a community can integrate all these aspects. The Assembly of Mendes stated it clearly: “We are called to work together in radical ways to announce God’s Kingdom to children and young people, especially the marginalized, promoting opportunities for sharing life, developing different ways of community life (…), creating Marist communities of life that visibly and effectively evangelize through their family spirit and commitment to mission”.

There are various forms of community life in the world of Marist laity today: the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family, mixed communities of laity and brothers, and different lay Marist groups. We find ourselves in many different social contexts, and the concrete ways of living in community are also diverse. The model of a community under the same roof sharing everything in common is just one possibility that is open to us, but not the only lay Marist ideal[[6]](#footnote-6).

We should note that the emerging lay Marist communities are offering a renewed Marist life scenario, a new charismatic framework which can give new impetus to the mission. Lay Marist life generates its own wisdom. Sharing faith in community and reflecting on it strengthens their Christian and Marist vocation. In this sense, lay communities must become educational communities[[7]](#footnote-7).

There are presently a significant number of Marist communities in which brothers and laity share life as they gather around the mission. Some of them have been organized in order to assist in the vocational discernment of young adults; others carry out a work of social integration, or develop different projects based on their shared life and mission. Some are temporary, some are more stable. All of them are an example of rich community life generated by people from different states of life[[8]](#footnote-8).

Establishing a new community requires following different stages of formation and growth. Each stage implies spending time together in a truly human way, which is at the same time deeply spiritual, Christian and Marist[[9]](#footnote-9).

We could point out some of the features of a community experience, although not all of them need to be present in every case: the experience of living a process, a common search, a journey to undertake; the experience of sharing life rather than being part of an organization; the central role of dialogue, of communicating from the heart; being committed to sharing our personal qualities for the benefit of others; recognizing, respecting, and appreciating the differences and needs of each person; the reference to a community life project including community integration and relations, spiritual growth according to each person’s vocation and life stage, mission and celebration[[10]](#footnote-10).

1. Cf. Constitutions 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. XIX CG 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. XIX CG, Solidarity 17, 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. XX CG 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. GAST 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Cf. GAST 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Cf. GAST 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Cf. GAST 90. Cf. *Living the Marist Charism with Others*, Secretariat of Laity, 2012. This document refers to various community expressions such as the family, the religious community, mixed communities, lay communities, extended communities, intercongregational communities, communities of lay people inviting the brothers, communities of brothers inviting lay people, the meaning of an animating group in a community setting, fraternities of the Champagnat Movement, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. “The first stage in the formation of any Marist community involves the experience of simply coming together. The community gathers. Subsequent stages include working out differences among community members, establishing norms for the group, and eventually getting on with the task of living and serving together” (*Wonderful Companions*, p. 43-44). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Cf. *Living the Marist Charism with Others*, Secretariat of Laity, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)