



SPIRITUALITY IN MISSION AND MISSION IN SPIRITUALITY



**MESSAGE FROM THE MARIST
INTERNATIONAL MISSION COMMISSION**



A heart that listens, meditates, ponders and discerns is the ideal place for radiating light and, consequently, for letting God's light shine through us. Such a heart has the capacity to reduce the force of our ego because it makes greater room for the presence of God.

(Br. Ernesto Sanchez, Homes of Light, pp. 16)

There are many conceptions of spirituality. In our case, spirituality is intimately connected with our Christian and Marist tradition. We find the meaning and explanation of our existence in the reference to and the experience of the living person of Jesus Christ and his Gospel, and from Mary's inspiration.

Indeed, spirituality is a universal human experience that involves the recognition of a feeling or belief that there is "something" greater than ourselves. It is an experience that often involves a search for meaning or purpose in life. In other words, spirituality involves knowing that our lives have meaning in a context beyond ordinary everyday existence. And this is what saints and spiritual masters have come to remind us: that we are much more than our tangible bodies.

Spirituality speaks to us of life, integration and perspectives. Spirituality is not fundamentally a space of dogmas but of experiences, of "come and see" (Jn 1:43-51), of wonder and awe (John 1:35-42), of stillness and following (Jn 14:1-14), of passion and action (Mk 1:14-20), of tenderness and mercy (Mt 9:35-36), of contemplation of the Father (Mt 5:43-48), of transformation and



metanoia (Mt 5:43-48), of fullness and Kingdom (Mt 25:34-40), until we reach the mystical experience and unity contained in Jesus' desire: "that they all may **be one**; as you, O Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us" (John 17:21-23). Spirituality is intuitive and allows us to see and feel God's action, his presence and his Spirit at work in all things, in our midst.

We invite you to think about yourself and your current mission as you read these lines. This reflection is neither a treatise on spirituality nor a systematic exposition. For that, we have very valuable documents, such as *Water from the Rock* and numerous *Circulars* of the Superiors General, as well as books and materials of our own and of other authors that can be of use to us. It does, however, want to be a powerful invitation to all those involved in Marist mission to live, express, integrate, and encourage spirituality in every aspect of our action: That all the spaces of mission transpire and facilitate a vital, contemporary, and Marist spiritual experience that allows everyone a real contact with the Spirit of God and the Gospel, alive and present.

WHAT ARE WE DOING WELL TO NURTURE AND FOSTER SPIRITUALITY IN OUR MARIST MISSION?

The mission of our Marist works is to help children and young people to have an experience of humanity, faith and vocation. We want to live two **fundamental aspects of the mission**: "*To make Jesus Christ known and loved*" and to help them to be "*good Christians and virtuous citizens*". Our hearts, minds and actions are focused on making this a reality, through constant dialogue with the experience of children, young people and adults, their spiritual needs, their ways and means of connecting with God, with the world, with others, with creation and with their cultural and religious traditions. We also do this pastorally, when we enter into dialogue with the experience that some of them may have of secularisation and unbelief. With Champagnat as our inspiration, we seek the best ways to reach out to young people and to pass on to them the treasure that lies at the heart of our mission.

In all our works, we make a particular effort to develop spirituality and interiority¹ as part of a **transformative and contemporary educational model**. Our mission among children and young people is the fruit of a spiritual experience and we invite them to live it in a variety of ways and expressions. To this end, we have established initiatives at local, provincial and regional levels. Our ed-

¹ Spirituality proposes a worldview, an ethic, processes, and, by developing itself, exercises interiority. Interiority is the space between my active self and my deep self. Interiority is understood as enrichment of the inner world of the person and spirituality, as openness to transcendence (Lluís Ylla, in <https://jesuitas.lat>, Friday, 22 September 2017).



educational works in particular take care of specific physical spaces and times to facilitate the encounter with God and interiority.

We are responsible for an integral formation in this field. This formation is well developed and well resourced: programmes, courses, conferences, seminars, pilgrimages, celebrations, liturgies, retreats... We promote a multi-faceted formation: aimed at nurturing (a) personal faith/interiority; (b) community or relational partnership and co-responsibility with other Marists; (c) and Marist-style professional/ministerial/academic knowledge and expertise. In a number of places, we have actively used the documents *Water from the Rock* or *Marist Educational Mission* to inform formation pathways and illuminate our own spiritual identity. For example, in some Provinces we promote formation, retreats and meetings for teachers and support staff, as well as for the students themselves and their families.

In Marist formation programmes, the spiritual dimension plays a very important role and **is intimately linked to our institutional identity**. Our formation programmes respect the human person, foster solidarity and create opportunities to experience a sense of transcendence. Our schools and works are Catholic and Marist, and convey our spirituality in both actions and words: *“Let it be known to all who enter here that Jesus Christ is the reason for this school, the unseen but ever-present teacher in all its classes, the model of its faculty, and the inspiration for its students”* (Marsha Jordan, 2015). To develop this vision, we offer



programmes of initiation (or induction) and ongoing formation in spirituality, charism, identity and heritage for different groups and target groups. In several places, we have established offices or departments that deal with the spiritual formation of the community. In our school system, spirituality/religion is at the core of the curriculum. Conscious of the important role of visual language, our mission sites are well set with symbols and images that connect art to spiritual experience and Marist identity.

In the university field and in other Marist works, with a view to offering a holistic formation to young people as well as to our companions, we offer **in-depth courses** in theology and Marist charism, as well as an interesting proposal of campus ministry (service-learning programmes and retreat offers). We work together to meet spiritual and personal needs. Our works offer **community outreach** opportunities where our staff and students are encouraged to get involved in pastoral work outside the school. Community service and outreach are all activities that connect Marist spirituality, service and life.

We are increasingly aware of the **intimate relationship between mission and life**. We seek to ensure that our programmes and experiences touch and serve life. We actively seek to ensure that formation in spirituality does not only include theoretical concepts to be known, but offers opportunities for people to experience concretely a life-giving encounter.

Our spirituality drives us to develop a **global mindset** that, sustained by compassion and empathy, moves us to participate in collective responses to crisis situations around the world, such as natural disasters, humanitarian and political crises. Likewise, volunteer work is a concrete expression of our commitment and love for others, especially the most vulnerable.

Finally, we highlight the existence and presence of very active and committed **groups of Marist life**. There are fraternities, associations (e.g. in France, Canada, Australia, etc.) and Marist movements (such as the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family, the groups of vocational lay people, committed Lay Marist...; or the Youth Ministry Movements such as REMAR, MARCHA, MYM, GVX, Scouts, FAJMACOR, between others) that have been enriched by our spiritual heritage and the diverse experiences of Christian faith of their members.

All of the above is an expression of an important commitment with a clear intention: to communicate, experience, celebrate and strengthen spirituality at an educational and apostolic level, in order to express and live our Catholic and Marist mission.



LIVING, EXPRESSING, INTEGRATING, ENCOURAGING AND BRINGING TO LIFE GOD’S MERCIFUL FACE AND HANDS

While we appreciate the actions already underway to live our Marist spirituality, we still need more space to ensure that the values of the **Second Call of the General Chapter** help us to live an in-depth, life-transforming spirituality (such as prophecy, mercy, fraternity, interiority, daily life, joy, inclusion, wholeness, witness, unity, etc.). We need to make them come alive. To this end, we offer some ideas.

Our **institutional educational model** has at its core the facilitation of the spiritual development of all the members of our communities. For this, it is necessary to specify how the experience and formation in spirituality or interiority is articulated in the ordinary or special educational processes, in the explicit and implicit curriculum, in the general educational environment or in the optional deepening experiences. The school, pastoral centre, university or social work needs to “speak” about spirituality to its members, in an inclusive and clear, explicit way, while continuing to dialogue about other dimensions of human, cultural and educational life.

The role of **leadership** in mission is paramount in developing transcendent values. Marist leaders are needed who are able to invite, embody, articulate and inspire people in the Marist spiritual style. It is a leadership capable of strengthening spirituality in mission areas and, vice versa, the depth of mission in spirituality. It is important, therefore, that leadership is properly trained and understands their role as leaders of a charismatic community. Having staff who are willing to share this experience will be decisive in creating school communities that live Marist spirituality. Care should be taken, therefore, to ensure, as far as possible, the recruitment and training of staff with the capacity to embody these values.

We invite you to continue to creatively renew and facilitate **regular**



formation programmes on spirituality and interiority for faculty, students, children, young people and staff. These programmes can connect the external mission, in the key of mercy and compassion, with one's own vocation and sense of personal life. They help to experience God's love for each of us. To enrich them, from time to time, critical reflection and evaluation at both individual and institutional levels is necessary.

There is an abundant and rich **production of resources and materials** in Marist Provinces, Spirituality Networks and Regions. Resources and prayers for various situations or occasions, for meetings, staff gatherings or school assemblies, are very useful. They facilitate the integration of our spirituality, the Gospel and Champagnat's inspiration into the everyday or the exceptional.

The best way to educate is through **witness**. Therefore, an important step is to encourage and remind each other, all Marists of Champagnat (brothers and laity), to be conscious and consistent in our way of living Marist spirituality. We Marists seek to be people who witness to an encounter with Jesus Christ and his Gospel, personally, communally and in mission situations. This path is not perfect, but we strive to build it every day, not only from "should be" but from love and humility.

To facilitate the journey of our local communities, the understanding and living of spirituality can be fostered through **concrete experiences** in the living of values (*fraternity*, expressed in our educational community activities and intergenerational welcoming; *Marian experience*, shown in prayers and also in service to others like Mary; *respect for diversity*, integrated in activities with diverse cultural, social, ethnic or religious groups; *promotion of the culture of encounter*, through open dialogues with groups of different mentalities, or through experiences of service and contact with people in realities of exclusion). Perhaps we need to be more proactive in **exploring the spiritual challenges and languages** of today's secularised societies and connecting with their cultural context. All this, properly elaborated, lived, reflected and celebrated, facilitates a spiritual experience connected to the **service of life**. Social ministry, youth ministry, volunteering and adult ministry are excellent means to facilitate this integration and to enrich people's faith.

Language and signs are very important. We make constructive criticism of our terms, which may not be attractive to the young people of today. It is good to develop an updated vocabulary or language to express the Marist spiritual experience, so that different generations and cultures feel part of it and can be challenged by it. It is important to facilitate experiences and processes (or "sacred" places, "liminal" experiences) of interiority and spirituality, with



contemporary languages. This facilitates the personalised experience of faith through the different educational or pastoral processes, movements or Marist associations. We take care of the physical spaces. We use contemporary and understandable language to facilitate the experience of faith. We do not hesitate to take advantage of the media and social networks to make the spiritual experience of our brothers and sisters richer and more accessible.

To inhabit spirituality is to **inhabit a “sacred space”**. We invite children, adolescents, young people and adults to deepen their faith experiences, to live their prayer vitally and to acquire a transcendental meaning that gives ultimate meaning and purpose to their existence. We connect the Gospel with their lives so that they enter into a meaningful dialogue. We help them take steps to recognise God as present and not as a distant concept. We make this journey an authentic personal relationship. We take care of prayer times and liturgies with special care and creativity.

We help people to connect life with **God’s mercy**, through solidarity and liberating charity towards others. We have a clear awareness of the challenges of the world we live in. For those who seek it, we offer volunteer opportunities in places or situations of need. We make explicit their connection to the Gospel



and faith experience, whenever appropriate. In this way we help to build bridges between the concrete human experience, sometimes lived in vulnerability, and the spiritual dimension.

We can live with open eyes and open hearts. In places where different religions and cultures exist, it is important to strengthen **interreligious or interfaith awareness** and to empower young people to be peacemakers. It is significant that children and young people learn to engage effectively in inter-religious dialogue (cf. Fratelli Tutti). Perhaps we should be more daring and propose wider experiences of communion in Marist groups so that they can be beacons of hope and build bridges with other spiritualities and other sensibilities.

Every step can be prophetic. Our spirituality invites us to be the arms of God's tender mercy. In the world in which we live, marked by dark clouds (cf. Fratelli Tutti), the Christian prophecy of universal brotherhood is a contradictory sign. When we move forward in realising the images and icons of the XXII General Chapter, we are inviting to live in the key of prophecy, at times counter-cultural and challenging. In this way, we place spirituality at the centre of apostolic action and in harmony with mission. We seek to live in this way the prophecy of the Gospel, clear and understandable, for our contemporaries.

AWAKENING

Perhaps some ideas can encourage us along the way, without being a “must be” but a “walk together”, inspired by the way of the disciples of Emmaus: to *converse, to contrast, to pause, to create intimacy, to “awaken” and to burn* are the verbs indicative of spiritual growth. Thinking of our young people and adults, they can also mean a proposal for spiritual development, based on a new pastoral pedagogy based on three dynamics: *listening, understanding and proposing*.

Awakening to the unity of mission and spirituality. Mission comes to life together with the spirituality that nourishes it and takes care of its attitudes. Spirituality embodies its dynamism in mission. For this, we need to consciously dedicate time to spirituality and the experience of God without separating it from the experience of mission. Mission and the experience of God should be two “recurrent” cores, two constant driving forces, in our daily life and in our conversations.

Awakening to meaning. It is important to learn to “have a **conversation**” about the experience of life in order to deepen the meaning of events. This reinforces our attitude of spiritual search, of going beyond, learning and teaching to





“look beyond” (Pope Francis, Brother Ernesto) in relation to the purpose of life. It is an inner conversation and also a dialogue with the other. We need to foster experiences to achieve meaningful conversations. The starting point could be the awareness of our own reality, of our vulnerability and that of others, which finally invites us to open ourselves and others with arms of mercy.

Awakening to silence and interiority. In a world characterised by so much noise, it is worthwhile to provide opportunities for silence, for all, children, youth and adults. This “*stopping*” and “*creating intimacy*” is enriched by experiences of interiority, discernment and spirituality for groups and especially for leaders in mission.

Awakening to Marian attitudes. As Marists, we have an extraordinary richness in our Marian spirituality. It animates multiple dimensions connected to Mary’s

attitudes, which allow us to “*burn*” inwardly, such as listening, contemplation, joy, self-giving, discernment, availability and simplicity.

Awakening respect. In all our works, we need to “*contrast*” our experiences to create a non-judgmental environment that encourages spiritual discourse and respects cultural diversity. We need to remember what is most essential for us as a Christian community: to offer inclusive and engaging experiences of prayer, of faith sharing. We embrace the importance of the Eucharist and Scripture that are central to our living out, while making respectful and pedagogical approaches to the diversity of audiences. We also have the opportunity to connect with current research and faith sharing such as ecology, inter-religious dialogue or contemporary spiritual expressions.

“Samaritan” awakening. We add a degree of depth to our mission when we foster a servant Marist spirituality, from a “samaritan and open Church”, that helps people to encounter God in reality and that allows us to transform reality from God. Mercy, compassion and service become spiritual and human attitudes that connect us deeply with the Gospel, the Kingdom and our God.



LIVING OUR MISSION PROPHETICALLY TODAY

Mission and spirituality are two powerful arms to shake our Marist way. They are also two great challenges. Responses to today's world cannot be made without a deep commitment in fidelity to the voice of the Spirit. We are an apostolic Institute. We seek to facilitate an encounter with God and with the Gospel, especially on the part of children and young people. We are convinced that this encounter is transformative and prophetic, meaningful and liberating. We are therefore committed to building bridges between them and the heart of our good God. Daringly, we try to ensure that our mission is a living spirituality and that our spirituality is a mission without frontiers.

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On behalf of the Marist International Mission Commission

If you wish to share your ideas, reflections or experiences with the Commission as a result of these messages, you can write to the email fms.cimm@fms.it

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