

Marist ECHO

Institute of the Marist Brothers

Number 47 – Year 17 – March 2004

CHOOSING THE ROAD TO CONVERSION

The theme of Pope John Paul's Lenten Message for 2004 – "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me" (Matthew 18:5) – invites us to reflect on the condition of children. Parents and educators show great generosity in this regard. Sad to say, we know there are those who do not "welcome" children into their midst, profoundly hurting them by violence: sexual abuse, forced prostitution, involvement in the sale and use of drugs; children forced to work or enlisted for combat; little ones caught up in the obscene and deadly trafficking of organs and persons...

The Pope asks, "What evil have these children done to merit such suffering?" From a human standpoint, it is impossible to address such an upsetting question. Only the light of faith can help us penetrate such a bottomless pit of pain and sorrow.

In confronting these harsh realities, Marcellin's charism is starkly relevant. As brothers and lay Marists, we cannot sit back and watch this heartbreaking panorama unfold. Lenten conversion means our recognizing Jesus in countless boys and girls who are suffering, and coming to their aid the best we can.

Lenten sacrifice

Br. Seán D. Sammon, Superior General

While visiting a school in South Australia a few years ago, I spoke with a group of students about vocation promotion. "Help me understand," I said to them, "why so few young people in this country and my own and others are coming to religious life today."

One young man named George was quick to speak up. "Sean," he said, "part of the problem is that your generation no longer speaks to ours about sacrifice." His answer surprised me. George went on to say, "Your life is one of sacrifice. You need to be clear about that fact. If it is just like any other life, why would I give the gift of my life to it?"

Sacrifice! Some might dismiss it as an old-fashioned virtue. But the passage of years teaches us that, old-fashioned or not, sacrifice lies at the heart of any life lived well. The parent awakened in the middle of the night by the cry of an infant knows that sacrifice is a timeless virtue. So also does the athlete, the dancer, or the teacher.



Success, the result of self-discipline and hard work



Brother Seán, Superior General

Marcellin Champagnat knew a great deal about sacrifice. This virtue wove itself into the fabric of his life and helped him to put first things first. He had a dream and through sacrifice and hard work he turned it into a reality.

Tradition associates sacrifice with the Church season of Lent. Prior to Vatican II, the practice of Lenten sacrifice was uniform and universally applied. This Lent, when the sacrifices associated with the season are usually left up to each one of us, let's keep in mind this basic principle: Sacrifice lies at the heart of any life lived well. Let's act accordingly. ♦



I N E L P I N A R D E R U B Í , S P A I N

A Volunteer's vivid experience

Kary Lumbreras, The Share Association, inspired by Marcellin Champagnat - Rubí, Spain



Facing the future filled with hope

Manuel, an eight-year-old boy. He appeared to be sad and distant, hard-to-reach, yet at the same time he wanted our attention any way he could get it. He sought our affection, hugs, and kisses. I asked some neighbors about his family and I found out that his parents were separated, that the mother had abandoned her children and left them with their unemployed, alcoholic and drug-addicted father...

Manuel survived the best he could. When he had nothing to eat, he would show up at a neighbor's house using any excuse at all. That's how he and his sister survived. One day he turned up at our Center, pockets bulging with trinkets and candy, and carrying the latest in video games. All of us were dumbfounded – we had no idea how Manuel got a hold of all this.

One day I went to the barrio during school time so I could speak to his father. I was shocked to find Manuel and another boy with a group of young adults pushing packets of cocaine. Manuel was the middleman or distributor, and he always got coke for his father. That's when we found out how he could afford the video games and sweets. Here I was – a 43-year-old – and Manuel was able to show me how to survive in a world where delinquency,

It's been about ten years since some friends and I connected with Marist High School in Rubí arrived in "El Pinar", a barrio on the outskirts of our city. That's when I met

prostitution, desertion, drugs, and alcohol were his daily bread. His faithful companions were malnutrition, lack of hygiene, precarious health, and a little mop of hair teeming with lice. And Manuel was no different than any other of the sixty boys and girls who come to our Share Center from family backgrounds similar to his own. He was a child born into a society in which we adults mouth pious platitudes about everyone being equal and enjoying the same freedoms and rights. What on earth are we talking about?

As you've noticed, I've been referring to Manuel in the past tense. Two years ago he was knocked down and run over on the street, his true home... Manuel will always be in our hearts. That's why my companions and I continue to do what we can so that situations like Manuel's will not be repeated. Something clicked in me that made me realize that these children were going to be my children, our children. I thought about Marcellin, his work, and the Montagne boy, whose story I had read so many times. I don't know if I lost my mind, but I decided to dedicate my life to these children. Because of all this, now I am also work-



ing at the Casal de Ca N'Oriol in projects dedicated to families and young children at risk in society, and at Caritas as a social worker, welcoming these people when they first arrive. Nowadays, I can't see myself working anywhere else – this is my life. ♦



To bring joy and happiness to children

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INSTITUTE OF THE MARIST BROTHERS

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Brother François: living portrait of the Founder

Bro. Lluís Serra interviews Bro. Giovanni Bigotto

Brother Giovanni Maria Bigotto, 65 years old, was born in San Giorgio di Nogaro, Udine, Italy. He worked for 33 years in Madagascar and 7 in Nairobi, Kenya. At present, he is Postulator General in Rome, in charge of the causes of holiness of the Marist Institute.



Gabriel Rivat – Venerable Brother François

WE ARE CELEBRATING THE YEAR OF BRO. FRANÇOIS. WHO WAS BROTHER FRANÇOIS?

Gabriel Rivat (Brother François) was born in 1808. At age ten he became the sixth Brother in the Congregation. At age 18 Marcellin called him to the Hermitage to be Director of the house. In quick succession he became his secretary, his counselor, his replacement. From 1839 to 1860 he guided a congregation in full expansion. Then he was again Director of the Hermitage. He died in 1881.

WHAT ASPECTS OF HIS PERSONALITY ATTRACT US THE MOST?

First of all, the love he had for the Brothers; his letters show it often, and with him the Congregation goes from 280 Brothers to 2086. Then, the will to be the living portrait of the Founder. François translated Marcellin's charism into solid structures: Rules, Constitutions... Open to culture, he left thousands of pages in which we once again find the Founder and our origins. Capable infirmarian,

both doctor and mother, he cultivated medicinal plants and protected birds.

DOES HIS SPIRITUALITY HAVE SOMETHING TO TELL THE BROTHERS AND LAY MARISTS: MEN AND WOMEN?

Under the style of those times we discover his passion for Christ, his great confidence in Mary, his fraternal feelings. Attentive to the poor, he visited them, brought them medicines and advice. He was a mystic, and he told us the joy of meeting God. He launched devotion to the Founder and made the Hermitage the Marist shrine.

DON'T YOU THINK PEOPLE KNOW VERY LITTLE ABOUT THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF BROTHER FRANÇOIS?

Yes, and they also have prejudices. It's true that aspects of his style have aged, but not his tenderness, nor the energy he put to serve the Congregation. At 52 he was exhausted, like Marcellin who died at 51.



Brothers Giovanni and Diogène with our Malgache brothers in Nairobi

WHERE DOES BROTHER FRANÇOIS' CAUSE STAND?

The title of Venerable recognizes that he is a path to the Lord, a man of love, of service, of self-effacement, a model for every Christian. That's a lot. We are now waiting for a miracle for his beatification.

IS IT WORTH MAKING SO MUCH EFFORT TO OBTAIN HIS CANONIZATION?

Are we making so much effort? His canonization would be a great grace for our family: a Marist Brother canonized, he would be the first!

IS THERE ANY SENSE MAKING A NOVENA TO BRO. FRANÇOIS?

A novena requires an adult faith, a deeply human heart that loves the person we're praying to and which is familiar with the saint being invoked.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF THIS YEAR OF BROTHER FRANÇOIS?

To rediscover Brother François and the freshness of our identity as Brothers;
To pray for Marist vocations;
If God so wills, a miracle for the beatification...
in 2008?

Brother Giovanni Bigotto, Postulator General



“WHY HAVE YOU BEEN LOOKING FOR JESUS AS

Mary and Joseph are returning home from the feast in Jerusalem. Jesus, their twelve-year-old son, is not in the caravan. Unable to find him, they hastily return to the city. Their anguish ends on the third day – they find him talking with scholars of the Law. His reaction mystifies them: “Didn’t you know I have to take care of my Father's interests?” They keep his words in their hearts. As Marist brothers and teachers, we too have anxious moments when it seems we can’t find Jesus and, like Mary and Joseph, we need to go looking for him.

MAKING LIFE’S JOURNEY WITH GOD

Let me begin this simple article by a short quotation from the gospel according to John.

Martha said to Jesus: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died”

In the very week that I am putting pen to paper, the people of Portugal and football fans the world over have come face to face with a dreadful happening transmitted live on TV – the death of a player in the prime of his life.

Shocked by this event, folk began searching for explanations. At the core of many an answer would have been the same challenge posed by Mary to Jesus two thousand years ago. But in the end, the only reasonable and proper answer to the mystery of this unexpected death is silence.

With this introduction, I wish to emphasise that, when it comes to the question of searching for God, we are confronted with mystery. At times the mystery of God seems to be very close, at others the only word that adequately describes our experience of God is remoteness. It is faith alone which offers us some light enabling us to continue our search for God, a search that is complex and always a struggle.

I wish to stress that God is present in the simple happenings of my daily life, not only in grand events. I am continually grateful for my friends, my joys, my work, my family and many other unanticipated occurrences.

At times, it is true, I do ask God for special favours. But in my view, any request I make to a friend simply increases the bond between us – and it is as a friendship that I experience my relationship with God.

All the same, there are times when I don’t have any sense of closeness with God at all. In such moments of darkness, Martha’s question is very real. It seems that God has forgotten my very existence.

Often enough, I wonder whether the forgetting isn’t on my part. Perhaps it is a general thing – that those who experience darkness do so because they forget God.

My faith tells me that God is constantly reaching out to me. Such a pity that I am not always aware of it! But isn’t it this very predicament which makes me more human, sharing our common lot?

Eurico Santos

Teacher at the Marist Day School, Lisbon
Province of Compostela

“DONE THIS TO US?”

MARY AND JOSEPH DID

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. As Mary did, have I lived through a time of spiritual desolation? How did I manage to overcome it?
2. What does Brother Réal's story mean to me, and what consequences do I see flowing from it?

VITALITY REDISCOVERED

I start with a story you probably know. A monastery was going through a rough time. There were only five monks left, all over 70. Not far from the monastery a Rabbi of the neighboring city had set up a small hermitage. One day Father Abbot, who was disconsolate over the imminent death of his congregation, had the idea of visiting the Rabbi to ask him if he had some advice to give him to save the monastery. The Rabbi could only sympathize with him over the clearly visible fate of the monastery, and he told him: “The same thing is happening in my city. Almost nobody comes to the synagogue.” After having commiserated together, they read certain passages of the Torah. Before leaving the hermitage, Father Abbot once again asked the Rabbi: “Can’t you give me the least bit of advice to help me save my congregation?” “No, I’m very sorry,” the Rabbi answered. “I have no advice to give you. I can only tell you that the Messiah is one of you.”

When he returned to the monastery, the monks surrounded Father Abbot and asked, “So, what did the Rabbi tell you?” “He wasn’t able to help me. He just told me a very strange thing: the Messiah would be somebody among you. I don’t know what that means.” During the weeks that followed, the old monks thought about the Rabbi’s words over and over again. Thinking thus, they started showing deep respect in their dealings with one another, just in case one of them was the Messiah. Everybody began to treat the other with infinite respect. Without knowing it, the monks seemed to radiate personally and transformed the spirit of the place. There was something attractive about the phenomenon. People came more often to the monastery. Then, a few young people came to visit the monastery and renewed acquaintance with the monks. One of them asked if he could join. Then another.

Thanks to the Rabbi’s gift, the monastery once again became vibrant with spirituality and light.

These monks had found, once again, a vitality they never suspected they had.

WHY? HOW?

It’s up to each person, man and woman, to ask themselves that, in the secret of their heart.

Réal Cloutier fms

Provincial
Province of Canada

Fraternities, a style of Christian life today



Marist fraternity, teamwork

St. Marcellin's spirituality and mission are a wellspring of inspiration for many Christians. The Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family offers some basic guidelines and a way of life that enables men and women to share their faith in small groups called fraternities. Fraternities have been steadily springing up in countries all over the world.

A person's spirituality and his or her commitment to society find fulfillment in a Marist fraternity. This fosters working together with others who share similar aims and ideals.

Marcellin Champagnat is our model, energizing us to live our faith in a secular and multicultural world. Human values such as love, faith, and solidarity are so basic that they spring to life in the heart of every culture. That is why Marcellin's personality is so attractive to people in different

countries and historical eras. Life, firmly rooted in reality, requires no translation or commentary. It speaks for itself. Marist fraternities let St. Marcellin show them how to live their Christian faith with greater fullness in today's world.

An ecumenical group of the CHAMPAGNAT Movement

A group of reflection, sharing, and prayer at the Lycée Léonin de Patisia, Athens

It's almost two years now since a small group of us Brothers and lay colleagues decided to leave the schoolyard and classrooms in order to see ourselves a bit differently. The group was made up of professors teaching different subjects: language courses, Greek literature, mathematics, etc. Some of us follow Catholic doctrine, others Orthodox doctrine.

What led us to band together was the vital need that we felt to understand our students, to help them discover their personality and their hopes, and to enable them to overcome their difficulties, in a word, to accompany them in their maturation. What appeared very positive to us was

that in our short discussions followed by prayer, we were cultivating our trust in Mary, discovering our Founder more fully, living more closely to Christ.

All the members of the group are motivated by a sincere and profound desire to get as close to our students as possible, especially the most needy, to listen to them, and share their concerns, inside school and outside. To let them understand that "God loves them and loves them all equally." The most moving time of our meetings is without a doubt the time of shared prayer. All the members go home more motivated, more at peace and more strengthened to fulfill their mission to the children.

We hope that other colleagues, and even students, will come to increase our group. We hope that the seed we are sowing will bear fruit.

Kostas Barkoglou

*professor of French,
member of the group*

Marist Cityhouse, Sydney, Australia

Marist Cityhouse is a rather unusual Marist community. In our community we don't have any Brothers but our purpose is sim-



SIMPLICITY AND HUMILITY

The practice of the virtues of simplicity and humility was the third essential element of the founder's spirituality. Simplicity characterized Marcellin Champagnat. He was direct, enthusiastic, confident. He encouraged his brothers to develop the same traits.

As a man, Marcellin was also humble: as he grew to maturity, he came to know and accept himself. The founder was not a man of pretense. Similarly, he challenged us, his brothers, to be sincere and unpretentious.

The founder's relationship with children readily illustrates both qualities. His love of children and young people was expressed in refreshingly straightforward ways. He was considered an excellent catechist, speaking directly to the hearts and concerns of the young. He was concerned about both their education and evangelization, and was often heard to say, "I cannot see a child without wanting to let him know how much Jesus Christ loves him and how much he should, in return, love the divine Savior."

Br. Seán Sammon, *A revolution of the heart*, p. 57-58



St. Marcellin, lighting up our world

ilar to any Marist community around the world and that's to make Jesus Christ known and loved. Cityhouse is a community of six young adults who live and pray together. We are either studying or working fulltime. Our mission is to be a community of welcome for other young adults. Our mission statement states this clearly.

Cityhouse is a Marist Community of young adults, endeavouring to support others by providing a place of welcome and belonging, where the spirituality of each is valued and nourished.

Once a month we have Open house where we invite young adults and Brothers to join our community for a prayer or Eucharist or a guest speaker. We choose topics that are relevant to our lives and that sometimes fit in with the Church's Seasons.

Colloquium on the Marist Mission in Europe

An enriching encounter at Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage

At the end of 2003 we had the opportunity to take part in a colloquium on the Marist Mission in Europe, organized at the Hermitage from December 26-31 by the Commission on Mission of the General Council. It was for all of us, Brothers and laity, an occasion to commemorate the centenary of the Combes Law, a difficult moment for the Institute which, nevertheless, helped the Marist "Mission" to flourish in new countries, which leads us to be really thankful to the French Marists.

Consequently, during these four days of intense and fruitful work, helped by meetings and proposals from the group or the Province, we reached a final synthesis which shows our aspirations and viewpoints on the Marist mission, facing the future, and on the Continental level.

At the end of the colloquium all of us who took part in this enriching encounter turned towards Heaven to give thanks for the precious gifts which the Lord has offered to youth: Saint Marcellin Champagnat and the Marist Institute.

Angela Sestrini

Lycée Léontin of Patissia Athens



WELCOMING CHILDREN

Here I would mention those parents who willingly take on the responsibility of a large family, mothers and fathers who, rather than considering success in their profession and career as the highest value, make every effort to pass on to their children those human and religious values that give true meaning to life.

With great admiration I also think of all those committed to caring for underprivileged children and those who alleviate the sufferings of children and their families resulting from war and violence, inadequate food and water, forced immigration and the many forms of injustice present in the world.

Together with such great generosity, however, a word must be said about the selfishness of those who do not "receive" children. There are young people who have been profoundly hurt by the violence of adults: sexual abuse, forced prostitution, involvement in the sale and use of drugs; children forced to work or enlisted for combat; young children scarred forever by the breakup of the family; little ones caught up in the obscene trafficking of organs and persons. What too of the tragedy of AIDS and its devastating consequences in Africa? It is said that millions of persons are now afflicted by this scourge, many of whom were infected from birth. Humanity cannot close its eyes in the face of so appalling a tragedy!

Papal message for Lent 2004



Brother Seán speaking at the Colloquium on Marist Europe

Champagnat, a Man of Real Compassion

Brother Eugène KABANGUKA, Provincial - Province of East Central Africa, Kigali – Rwanda

Compassion is a good virtue, but it is sterile if it does not lead to action against injustice and everything that degrades humanity. Marcellin Champagnat knew that well. In his first days at school the brutality of one of the teachers revolted him. In his small head burned the question-program: "Can we have teachers who educate through love rather than force?" Consequently he was going to put forth later the pedagogical principle according to which "To educate children we have to love them." A principle concretized in "The Pedagogy of Presence." He is against everything that humiliates the child.

While still a seminarian, Champagnat spends his holidays confronting religious ignorance in the children and youth after the Revolution. He cannot see a single one of them without wanting to teach him catechism. The decisive event of 29 October 1816, at the bedside of the young Montagne in agony with no hope of meeting a loving God, serves as starter to group around him a few young men who will become the first Marist Brothers.

Financial difficulties, the sharp criticisms of confreres and even of the ecclesiastical authorities, the suspicions of those who think he's founding a new sect, the threats of dissolution facing the infant Institute, the bad times, the excesses of the Revolution, etc., nothing can discourage him. He's convinced of his project: "God wills it." He repeats to his Brothers, "When God is on our side, when we count only on Him, nothing is impossible."

His absolute confidence in Mary whom he calls his "Good Mother" brings him vocations and his work continues. The "Sowers of Hope," Brothers and laity, continue to prove that compassion must be active if it draws upon the heart of God.

A man of heart and action, Champagnat insists today on the call of the 20th General Chapter: **"Go forward together, Brothers and Laity, resolutely and openly, drawing ever closer to the poorest and most deprived children and youth, by new paths of education, Evangelization, and solidarity."** (Message, N° 31) Let us have a creative sensitivity in confronting the needs of the children and youth of our times. Where families and governments give up, let us create la joie de vivre. And the more we give joy to others the more we have it. The less we give, the less we have. And like Champagnat, let's have a rather broad horizon: "All the dioceses of the world enter into our plans," he used to say.



Statue of St. Marcellin in Guadalajara, Mexico

PUBLICATIONS

Marist apostolic spirituality

An international Commission consisting of 14 members from 5 continents met in Rome February 12-16 to lay the foundations for a document that will offer a basic outline of Marist apostolic spirituality.

General Council visits

From March until May, the General Council will visit the brothers, communities and works of the Pacific region. From May 12-15, a session of the expanded General Council will take place in Brisbane, Australia.

New web site for the Congregation

You will find the new web site of the Congregation of the Marist Brothers at www.champagnat.org. It comes in the four official languages – English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese – and contains the latest news as well as important documents.

Marcellin's dream – Live it today!

This is the slogan that has been chosen to promote the Marist Vocation Year, which begins with the celebration of Mary's Birthday next September.

Marist Bulletin

This news Bulletin, which appears on the net at least once a week, is sent free of charge to everyone interested in receiving it. Subscribe to it on our web site at www.champagnat.org.