

## The Hermitage house of hospitality

The house and property of the Hermitage are Champagnat's bequest to all his followers. He built the house with his own hands. In May 1824 Champagnat purchased the land, in October the same year the main work was completed, before the advent of winter the roof was in place, and in May 1825 the community of La Valla moved into the new building.

The first brothers spent there part of their youthful energy and moistened the rock with their sweat. It is also the reliquary which protects the remains of Marcellin and the first brothers.

Marcellin faced the challenge of investing money, which he did not have, to have a house large enough to receive the young lay men who wanted to be part of his project as Little Brothers of Mary. At the same time as he was building the house he was laying the foundations of a community of brothers.

Today this Marist sanctuary is being arranged to welcome new generations of brothers and lay people who feel themselves inspired by Marcellin's charism. Marist News will dedicate some issues to presenting the new Hermitage. Today we have the first installment.

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## The Notre-Dame de L'Hermitage Project

In September 2005 the Brother Provincials and District Superiors, together with Brother Superior General and his Council, gave their approval to the project of updating the program and renovating the physical space of Notre-Dame de L'Hermitage. As we might recall, this initial

go-ahead for the project took place in the context of the General Conference taking place in Negombo, Sri Lanka.

In an effort to put this decision in perspective, it would be helpful to look at a timeline.



**1817** - Foundation of the Institute of the Marist Brothers by Marcellin Champagnat, a young priest, age 27.

**1824** - Beginning of construction of the house at Notre-Dame de L'Hermitage.

**1858** - The General Administration moves to St. Génis; Notre-Dame de L'Hermitage ceases to be the General House of the Institute, which is already spreading to other continents.

**2004** - Launching of the reflection process on the future of the "Marist places" of our origins.

**2008** - In March, the beginning of the work of renovation.

**2010** - projected completion date, setting up of the community and welcoming the first pilgrims to the renovated spaces.

**2017** - celebration of the bicentenary of the foundation of the Institute of the Marist Brothers.



# The renovation project

Little by little, with the help of the Central Commission and of a wonderful team of architects, the renovation project has included 80 rooms with a capacity to house more than 100 guests and a central dining room with a seating capacity of 250.

In the original building:

- 20 private rooms reserved for the local community and their visitors
- 27 private rooms for guests

In Le Rocher (the former scholasticate):

- 31 double rooms for guests

A dozen meeting rooms, located in three different areas, to allow for simultaneous use –without interfering with one another– of two resident groups, plus a third group that might be meeting for a day’s event, but would not spend the night.

Two of these areas include a large

meeting room, with a capacity of about 100 and 160 respectively (in Le Rocher and in the new building).

The third set of meeting rooms is in the original building.

The "Champagnat Tour": a series of exhibits and reflections on two floors designed to lead pilgrims to a meeting of hearts with St. Marcellin and his first followers.



# The project is moving along



During the first months, from March to June of 2008, work was concentrated in two projects prior to the reconstruction and the construction of the new buildings.

The first was the demolition of the complex of buildings called "Cèdre" which was towards the front of the property to the right of the main chapel as you're coming from St. Chamond.

The second was to vacate the spaces of the original house and of "Le Rocher" that were not strictly speaking historical. "Le Rocher" is located between the house built by St. Marcellin and the first Brothers and the cemetery.

In the second stage, the work advanced in three areas simultaneously:

- Transforming former spaces and opening new spaces. Examples of the first are the substantial changes made to the interior patio. An example of the second is the opening of a vertical space to make space for a new elevator.
- Transforming the interior spaces of the "Le Rocher" building. Two significant elements of this are:
  - \* The creation of 31 double rooms where before there had only been a large projection hall and the old

classrooms, adjoining dormitories and library.

- \* A new vertical arrangement of the floors which permits passing from a ground floor and two storeys to a ground floor and three storeys, without changing the available space.
- The preparation of the ground and the laying of the foundations for the new building. This building will house the new reception area, a large conference room, the central dining hall, the kitchens, offices, garages and mechanical rooms.



In the third stage, where we are now, the three fronts are advancing at different rates:

- The original building still needs considerable work in reinforcing walls and floors that requires a complicated and well-thought-out network of reinforced concrete with partitions in steel as well as an interior wall parallel along the length of all the existing exterior walls. Only when this delicate work is completed can they begin to build the new partitions for the bedrooms, conference rooms, library, exhibit halls, etc.
- Work on the "Le Rocher" building is

progressing quickly and already practically the entire partitioning of the bedrooms is completed.

- The different sections of the new building are beginning to rise.

The foremen frequently express their admiration for what St. Marcellin and the first Brothers, with the help of a small group of bricklayers, were able to build and the record time in which they did so.

In February of this year, 2009, an electric saw was used to cut approximately two cubic meters of rock to make space for what will be the base of the

vertical box of a new elevator. This operation took place at the continuation of the same rock that in 1824 Marcellin and the Brothers and other workers had cut according to the needs at that time. Recently, what should have taken two or three days ended up taking two weeks. First the drills, then various saws, finally explosives... The foreman told us he can't understand how those Brothers had been able to cut so many cubic meters of rock using only picks and shovels.

The architects as well as the foremen work with an admirable spirit and dedication on a project which is posing quite a challenge. **NM**



# The new community for Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage

The new community will consist of 8 Brothers and 4 lay men and women.

Those who have to learn French find themselves already "in community" in the Marist house at St. Paul Trois Chateaux. Br. Henri Vignau, former Councilor General, acts as their coordinator. A female professor—expert in teaching French as a second language—directs their efforts in the not so easy task of becoming proficient in the beautiful language of Molière. Br. Toni Aragón of the Province of the Hermitage is

part of their community and is always available for practice as well as helping to respond to whatever difficulty might arise. The Brothers of the "third age" community at St. Paul accompany the students with help practicing the language during meals and periods of free time.

The students are:  
Bro. Allan de Castro from the Philippines,  
Mr. Ernesto Spagnoli from Argentina,  
Mrs. Norma Spagnoli from Argentina,  
Mrs. María Elida Quiñones from Mexico

Beginning in April, Bro. Neville Solomon from Australia.

Until June, Bro. Damián Raúl Provens from the Province of Cruz del Sur will also be part of the group and follow the classes in preparation for his work in Ivory Coast.

Periodically, about every two months, we will be sending, via "Marist News", information on the development of this challenging project in its various aspects: the program, the community and the continuing work on the buildings. **NM**

# Live Testimony

## Recollections of Brother Adorator



*Brother Adorator gave an account of the first steps of the Marist work in Brazil. The first years from 1879 to 1917 were recorded for posterity in the book "Vingt ans de Brésil". Adorator was the first Brother Provincial of the future Province of Central Brazil. Among his recollections of his years in formation, he describes his first experience of what the Hermitage meant for him.*

On 22 June 1871, Brother Ulfrid took me to the Hermitage. I had the happiness of spending the first four months of my postulancy in this Marist atmosphere. How strongly I feel, how much I value the immense good fortune of having lived next to the saintly Brother François and having been influenced by the emanations of sanctity rising from all the graves of the Hermitage, but especially that of our holy founder.

My impressions on arriving at the Hermitage were very different from those produced in me by St. Genis-Laval, seeing that St. Genis-Laval could be converted into something distinct from a monastery with only a few changes in the structure of its buildings. But if the Hermitage became something else, it would drain the blood from the hearts

of all Marists, and the nature of the place would be profaned by a wicked sacrilege. May God protect us from this disgrace while the Marist family exists on the earth. The house, the site, the solitude, the interior, everything there speaks of silence and retreat, prayer and meditation; the religious house is present in its proper surroundings. Everyone wants to go back.

The porter who opens the door is a welcoming religious. He introduces us into the interior. We are going to make some visits. Brother François, like a kindly grandfather, exercises the authority of superior and gives the tone to the religious discipline of the house. For all the brothers he is a precious relic of the past. He is completely filled with Father Champagnat, his words are an echo of the holy founder. We are about to see him. With my guide,

I prepare for this visit. I can still see his open face, his heavenly smile, and his air of beatitude. We receive his blessing with great respect. He speaks with us. In a fatherly tone, he asks me about my home area, my family, and my state of health. He inspires me with such confidence that I have no concern at all about the new life which I am going to embrace. We have also to visit Brother Azarias. What can I say about the effect which this first visit produced in me and during the whole time of my relationship with him? His tone of voice left a great impression on me. It was in perfect harmony with his appearance and air of holiness and with all the ascetic doctrine he taught us.

Br. Adorator, *Vinte Anos de Brasil*  
 Editoria Universitaria Champagnat  
 Brasil 2005, p. 279.

