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With Mary, go in haste to a new land!

Letter of the XXI General Chapter to the Brothers, lay Marists and young people



"Behold I make all things new" (Ap. 21:5)

We came together here in Rome, leaving behind the routine of our daily lives, figuratively climbed a hill and set up a tent. We lived together as brothers and sisters who enjoyed being part of the same family, the family of Marcellin Champagnat.

The diversity of our vocations and cultures enriched our discussions. We give thanks to God for the variety of lifestyles and ministries that express the charism of Marcellin in the world today. A spirit of discernment, prayer and sharing enabled us to listen to God who transforms our hearts, opening them to read his presence in the signs of the times and in the lives of our sisters and brothers.

Dear Brothers, Lay Marists, and young people,

Warm and heartfelt greetings from the XXI General Chapter! May the presence of Jesus, the tenderness of our Good Mother, and the boldness of Marcellin Champagnat accompany our life and mission.

For some months now, we have been on the move preparing for the Chapter. We arrived in Rome carrying with us the enthusiasm of many Brothers, Lay Marists, and young people who participated in the process: *new hearts for a new world!*

Now we direct this message to you, Brothers, Lay Marists, and young people. To share with you the good news that we have experienced and to pass on our passion and hope. With Mary we say, *Magnificat!*

For the dynamics of the Chapter we were seated around tables. This arrangement helped us to listen to one another in the spirit of the Gospel, to enter into fraternal dialogue, to take decisions and put them into practice. The richness of our community life made us aware of the joy of living together in simplicity and joy as brothers and sisters. It's worthwhile to be Marist today!

We are happy and give thanks to God for the election of Br. Emili Turú as our new Superior General and his new team

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for the animation and government of the Institute.

Mary made her presence felt in our assembly. She took us by the hand, revealing her maternal love and urging us to go in haste to a new land.

A God who surprises us... (Lk. 1: 29)

God has a dream for each one of us, for humankind, and for our Institute. By listening to our hearts, we discover the love, mercy, and tenderness of a God who is both Father and Mother. At the same time, we acknowledge our weaknesses and inconsistencies.

It was a similar experience of God's love that drove Marcellin to be enterprising, daring, and to take risks. The essence of his dream was "to make Jesus Christ known and loved by children and young people". We desire to carry on his dream: as men and women of God, prophets of fraternity in a dehumanized world searching for meaning and thirsty for God. In the light of this Chapter experience, we feel called to respond, as brothers and sisters, witnesses to the loving and maternal face of God.

... and transforms our heart (Ez 36:26).

We have heard the call of the Lord:

"You must be born again" (Jn 3: 7). Jesus invites us to conversion of heart. This implies making a firm decision to be open to the grace of God and to be transformed. Only if we are open in mind and heart can God change us and teach us to live with God's eyes and heart. God's love urges us to conversion, to re-discover the heart of our respective vocations. The world thirsts for authentic witnesses, people who risk their lives in order that the Good News is announced to everyone. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mk 1: 15).

We have looked realistically at our potential, and also at our limits and failings. We see hearts hardened by routine and conformity. The aging and diminishment of our Institute weighs on us. We ask questions about our identity and the future of our style of life. We find it hard to form communities that are truly prophetic. Restructuring has still not been wholeheartedly accepted. Our spiritual poverty is still a concern; we can't seem to place Jesus and his Gospel at the centre of our lives. And our changing world continually challenges our structures and projects.

But God has surprised us with a visit, just like the Angel did with Mary at the Annunciation. For us, God has asked us to go out into a new land.



Little and weak that we are, we've asked: "How can this come about at this stage of our history?" But our hopes have been buoyed by recalling Marcellin's favourite psalm: "If the Lord does not build the house ..." We realize that no matter how small we are, God is standing tall beside us. It is in our weakness that we experience God's tender embrace and strength.

Together we have dreamed about our future and have discovered the fundamental call that God has for us today:

With Mary, we go in haste to a new land!

We feel driven by the Spirit of God to go into a new land, to facilitate the birth of a new epoch of Marist charism.

This presumes a willingness to move on, to let go of the familiar, to embark on a journey of both institutional and personal conversion over the next eight years.

We travel this road with Mary, guide and companion. Her faith and openness to God's will inspire us to undertake this pilgrimage.

This "new land" is an authentic renewal of the Institute; it asks of us a genuine change of heart.



The Spirit of this XXI General Chapter, the closeness of the Bicentenary, and a deeper consciousness of our internationality all urge us to:

A. A renewed sense of consecration firmly rooted in the Gospel, urging us to new ways of being Brother.

During this Chapter, the Spirit has called us to welcome a 'new way of being Brother'. We need to recover the originality of the name that Marcellin gave us - *Little Brothers of Mary*.

- Brothers, sons of the same Father, called by God to give our lives totally through our religious consecration, anchoring our lives in Jesus Christ. Each Brother is the artisan of his own formation and process of conversion.
- Brothers among Brothers, signs of the Kingdom by our simple style of life, by sharing life and faith, with a renewed spirit of prayer and mutual forgiveness. Brothers in a community, visible and

open, inspired by the enthusiasm of the first community at La Valla, and appropriating for ourselves the boldness of those who built L'Hermitage. Brothers, encouraged by the faithful witness of our martyred Brothers.

- Brothers to poor children and young people, present among them as they search for meaning. Brothers with a passion to be signs of God's love, and bold enough to move to areas where others do not go.
- Brothers without borders, open and available in welcoming the diversity of our Institute. Called to go beyond our borders, allowing ourselves to be evangelised by others.
- Brothers of Mary, walking with her, invited to discover her in the Gospel - the first person to tread the road of faith. Like Marcellin, for whom she was mother and model. *"From that time on, the disciple took her into his home"* (Jn 19:27).

Let us recover the heart of our life as Brothers, as consecrated religious to become for the world living reminders of the Gospel.

B. A new relationship between Brothers and Lay Marists, based on communion, searching together for a greater vitality of the Marist charism for our world.

We acknowledge and encourage the vocation of the Lay Marist. We believe that the Spirit is inviting us to live in a new communion of Brothers and Lay Marists. Together we will promote greater vitality of the Marist charism and its mission in our world. We consider this to be a "Kairos", a key opportunity to share and live with daring the Marist charism, forming together a prophetic and Marian Church.

- The International Marist Mission Assembly in Mendes enabled Brothers and Lay Marists to live an experience of communion. To-

gether we felt called to revitalize our lives and our Marist mission: *One Heart, One Mission*.

- We welcome with appreciation the new document *"Gathered around the Same Table"* as a source for reflection and discernment in the coming years.
- We believe in formation processes and experiences involving both Brothers and Lay Marists. These will ensure a solid preparation and help us to be faithful to the intuitions of our founder.
- We support the *Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family* and we welcome other new expressions of Marist life and belonging that are emerging in diverse forms in different parts of the world. At the same time, we feel the need to develop processes that allow all Marists to be co-responsible for our life, spirituality and mission.
- Brothers and Lay Marists, we share the responsibility for seeking new Marist vocations. The cry of Marcellin Champagnat, *"We need Brothers!"* continues to urge us on. May each of us, Brothers and Lay Marists, be daring and invite young people to join us and become Brothers or Lay Marists.

C. A highly significant presence among poor children and young people

Look at the world with the eyes of poor children

Let's go in haste - with Mary of the Visitation - with Marcellin Champagnat rushing to the side of young Montagne. Bringing Jesus Christ to the young, especially the poorest, *"in all the dioceses of the world"*. In their faces, we will find the face of God.

- To you who are working in our educational and social works, we invite you to encourage your students to transform their hearts, their lives and actions, so that they grow to

be persons with respect for life, committed to the building of a just and solidarity-oriented society. Teach the students the importance of ecology, and encourage them to be willing to work towards a better and sustainable world. Realize that the idea of going out to a new land carries some implications: sharing the responsibility for mission, giving priority to evangelization, giving preference to the poor and least favored, and transmitting the Marist charism to a new generation of educators.

- We are promoting intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, based on respect, mutual growth and relating as equals among different religions, cultures, and ethnic groups (cf. Mendes).
- We are developing an international and intercultural mindset towards our Marist mission. The Ad Genes Project invites the Institute to recapture its missionary spirit.
- We remember Mary and Joseph fleeing to Egypt to protect the child Jesus. This image urges us to become experts and advocates for the rights of children and young people; speaking bravely and prophetically in public forums. We feel ourselves impelled to challenge social, economic, political, cultural and religious practices that oppress children and young people. Now is the time for us all to join in the work of the Marist Foundation for International Solidarity (FMSI).

- As an international congregation of Brothers, we are all responsible for our Brothers living in difficult economic situations. We are called to enact this responsibility and live solidarity by sharing both material and human resources.

With Mary, go in haste to a new land. (Lk 1: 39)

At this stage of our Marist history, God has provided us with the special opportunity of this General Chapter to return to the fundamentals of our charism. After the experience of this Chapter, we feel like the disciples at Emmaus: "Were not our hearts burning while he spoke to us on the way" (Lk 24: 32).

We have been transformed and are now sent to tell the good news to the Marist world. This part of our pilgrimage is over, but the journey continues. The message of the Chapter needs to take root throughout the Institute. So now, we the members of the XXI General Chapter say:

- to you, *senior Brother*, who has given the best part of your life to the mission of the Institute, thanks for your fidelity. You have an honored place with us on the journey. We continue to count on you - your witness, your presence, your joy, and your prayer.
- to you, *our Brother in mid-life*, continue on the pilgrimage. Don't be afraid of the new ways that lie ahead. Jesus, Mary, Marcellin and your Brothers are walking with you. Time is short, go ahead and

discover your new heart for a new world!

- to you, *our young Brother* who is beginning Marist life, live in joy and hope for a future where the gift of the sacrifice of your life for God will change the world of children. We are counting on you, your dynamism, and your faith. The future of Marist life is in your hands!
- to you, *young one in formation*, postulant or novice, live generously the gift of your life to which God is calling you. God is faithful and loves you always. Be happy being a Marist!
- to you, *our brother or sister Lay Marist*, who, in your heart, desires to live out the fullness of your baptism within the charism of Marcellin Champagnat - let's walk together!
- to you, *our young Lay Marist*, who dreams of a better world, take time to open your eyes to the realities of the world around you. Listen in your heart to what God is saying to you. Come, join us on the journey!

Mary and Marcellin have lived this pilgrimage. Now is the time for us to undertake the journey together.

New Marists towards a 'new land'!

Faternally,
Marist Brothers of the XXI General Chapter

October, 2009 Rome, Italy

