

[www.champagnat.org](http://www.champagnat.org)

## Updates

**22/09/2010:** Brazil - Inauguration of the Marist Centre for the Defence of Children

**21/09/2010:** Guatemala - 4th Youth Pastoral Continental Congress

**21/09/2010:** Manzianna: Spanish and Portuguese course for brothers of the 3rd age

**20/09/2010:** Meeting of teachers from the Marist schools in Italy

**20/09/2010:** Postulants of the Province « Brasil Centro-Norte »

**18/09/2010:** Ad Gentes: the experience of internationalism

**17/09/2010:** Deceased Brothers: Javier Ibarra Araiza (México Central); Jean Silvestrini (L'Hermitage); Victoriano Hernando Garcia (Ibérica)

**17/09/2010:** Remarks of Br Maurice Berquet at the celebration of the Centennial of the presence of the Marist Brothers at the Monastery of Les Avellanes

**17/09/2010:** Colombia - Experience of interprovincial renewal for the Brothers animating communities

**16/09/2010:** New Marist link: Marist Studies Wiki: Letters of French Catholic Missionaries in the Pacific 1836-1854 (France); Diary of a missionary (Bangladesh)

**16/09/2010:** 2nd European Assembly of the MCHFM

## The renovated hermitage: an icon and a challenge

Br. Emili Turú, Superior General

These are the words of Br. Emili Turu, Superior General, during the inauguration of the new Hermitage, on 22 September 2010.



My Lord, messieurs the civil authorities, dear Brothers and friends, dear guests. Today, with the inauguration of the renovated Hermitage, a new stage has been achieved. The idea of this renovation was launched in 2005, during the General Conference held at Negombo, in Sri Lanka. Then, towards the end of 2006, the General Council and the Provincial Council of l'Hermitage, together took the decision to renovate some of its buildings and transform others.

After a period of study and consultation, the green light was given by the General Council in February 2007. And a year later, in May 2008, work began. Today, we have the joy and satisfaction of being able to admire a work well accomplished; a new stage in the history of our first Mother House.

I dare to imagine Saint Marcellin, hidden among the trees, closely observing the work site, the plans, the workmen, the works in progress, and asking himself: What are my Brothers doing? He, who bought

this property in May 1824, by using much simpler means than the ones we have used, was able to inaugurate the original building scarcely a year later, in August 1825.

I believe that our Founder, thinking of the difficulties of the work, carried out laboriously by skilled masons, with valuable assistance from himself and the first Brothers, is smiling at us now, for he knows well enough that, behind this « enterprise », is a gesture of love for him, a desire to keep alive and adapted to the present times, all he dreamed for Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage.

The heart of St Marcellin, the hearts of his first Brothers, our pioneers, are bursting today with joy and gratitude. And I would like, personally, in the name of my Council, and in the name of all the Brothers and Marist laity scattered around the world, to say a great thank you, and express my congratulations to all those responsible for making this renovated Hermitage a possibility.

### MARIST NEWS

N.º 119 - Year III - September 23rd, 2010

**Director:**  
Br. AMEstaún

**Production:**  
Mr. Luiz da Rosa

**Redaction and Administration:**  
Piazzale Marcellino Champagnat, 2  
C.P. 10250 - 00144 ROMA  
Tel.: (39) 06 54 51 71  
E-mail: [publica@fms.it](mailto:publica@fms.it)  
web: [www.champagnat.org](http://www.champagnat.org)

**Edit:**  
Marist Brother's Institute  
General House - Rome

- Thanks to the members of the former General Council, particularly Brothers Seán and Luis, and to the Council of the Province of l'Hermitage, who imagined the Project, studied, planned, and brought it to completion.
- Thanks to the Provinces of the Institute who gave this Project an enthusiastic welcome and contributed financially to its realization.
- Thanks to M. Joan Puig-Pey and his team of architects, technicians and experts, as well as the specialised workmen who played the difficult role of transforming without betraying, and who maintained the delicate balance between conserving and modernising. I appreciate that for Joan, this project, besides bringing into relief his professional qualities, has been a profound life experience. Thank you.
- Thanks to the new community, formed of persons coming from the four corners of the world, to whom has been confided the delicate and compelling mission of being the heart of the Project. A community for welcoming and accompanying Marist pilgrims and visitors. Thanks for your effort in building up your Christian and Marist community and transcending your differences of sex, race, culture and nationality.
- And finally, thanks to the Friends of Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage, to the volunteers and so many persons who, in one way or another, have contributed their grain of sand to this work: let us think simply of the works of removal, of surveillance, cleaning, furnishing, decoration, transport... So many services, great and small, often hidden but always important and well kept in mind in our Marist tradition.

Dear friends, « *When one dreams alone, it is only a dream; when one dreams with others, it is already the beginning of a reality; a shared utopia, the springboard of history* », said the late Brazilian Bishop Helder Camara. And I am convinced that, in the same way as the construction of l'Hermitage by Fr. Champagnat, the renovated Hermitage we have before our eyes, signifies an act of faith in the future.

In the words of Victor Hugo, "*the future has many names: for the weak, it cannot be grasped; for the fearful, it is the unknown; for the courageous, it is an opportunity and a chance*". We have dreamed of the Hermitage Project, but not as an idle fancy, still less as an illusion or a mirage.

For us, to dream of the future is rather to march towards utopia, creativity, imagination. The dreams speak to us of vision, aspiration, hope and ideals. In brief, we want the Hermitage Project, newly born and just become a tangible reality, to be oriented towards the future, like a sign, a symbol, and an icon of our Marist life and mission, shared by Brothers and Laity and open to the richness of peoples and cultures.

This is not a matter of a nostalgic effort to cling to the past and create a museum to show the triumphs of times that have gone. The renovated Hermitage speaks to us, cries to us the deep conviction that our charism and our mission are more relevant than ever, and that the Institute has a future full of hope. And it is for that reason that I would like to further develop what I mean in speaking of the renovated Hermitage as a sign and an icon for the future of our Marist life.

### 1 . The renovated Hermitage is a sign, an icon of a Church-communion, a Church with a Marial face.

The house of the Hermitage is certainly the House of Mary; it is the presence, inspiration and recourse to Mary which indelibly impregnate its walls. For St Marcellin, it was the protection of Mary which prevented any accidents during the construction. It was the singing of the Salve Regina which protected the house during the revolution of 1830. It was around the image of the Good Mother that important decisions were taken. And it was « *close to our Good Mother [that the first Brothers] grew steadily in the sense of brotherhood, of devotedness, and of self-renunciation in the service of one another* » (Const. 49).

In following the Founder's example, Br. François attributed to the maternal care

of Mary the protection of the house from the dangerous inundations of the Gier. And the statue of Notre-Dame des Victoires is still there to remind us that it was she who obtained for us the legal recognition of the Institute.

The renovated Hermitage is an invitation to live this rich Marial heritage of our charism and our tradition with greater intensity, and make it present with greater force. A short time before the last General Chapter, Br. Seán published his last circular in which he speaks of Mary as « *source of renewal* ». During the chapter, the participants were conscious of Mary's presence; they said that she had entered the Chapter Hall through the main door.

This is an invitation to rediscover all that Mary signifies for us, Marists, and the place she occupies in our lives, communities, charism, identity, spirituality and mission. We translate this reality by the expression « *Marial Church* » or, in other terms, Marial Face of the Church or Marial Principle of the Church.

In doing this, we are responding to the invitation made to us by the Pope in his message to the four Marist branches: "*It is up to you to manifest, in an original and specific way, the presence of Mary in the life of the Church and in the life of mankind*". This is also the appeal launched by Vita Consecrata to be « *brothers who cause a greater brotherhood to prevail in the Church* », and the call of the General Chapter urging us to build a Church-communion taking hold of Mary's hand, journeying with her, in haste.

« *We live a new relationship between Brothers and Lay people, based on communion, searching together for a greater vitality of the Marist charism for our world* ».

And again: « *We believe that we are in the presence of a "Kairos", a chance to share and live with daring the Marist charism, forming together a prophetic and Marian Church* ». (XXI General Chapter)

The renovated Hermitage becomes a living sign of this Church with a Marial



face, especially through the community which welcomes and accompanied all the pilgrims, present and future. Brothers, Laity, chaplain are a living nursery of this Church inspired by Mary, a prophetic sign of a brotherhood which, by the very fact of its international character, breaches the boundaries of language and culture. By its life and service, the community is already announcing « *in prophetic fashion, a new way of being Church, more communitarian more participative, a family of brothers and sisters, each with his/her own proper charism* » (XIX General Chapter)

This Marial icon of the «new Hermitage» is also a challenge for all our communities and our educational works everywhere in our globalised world, a true crossroads of races, cultures and creeds. Inspired by Mary, and « around the same table », we are called to be a sign: another way of being Church is possible.

## 2. The renovated Hermitage is a sign, an icon of an authentic Marist apostolic spirituality.

It was at the Hermitage that Fr. Champagnat lived the greater part of his life; this is where his urn-reliquary is venerated; this is where Brother François and the first generations of Brothers gave shape and character to Marist life, spirituality and mission; this is where

one finds the little cemetery in which their remains lie. All this speaks to us of the lived experience of an apostolic spirituality which gave their lives meaning.

For years we have tried to find the balance between action and contemplation, to integrate in our lives, in our day to day activities, the demands of our consecration and those of our community and our mission. To be contemplatives in action like Mary, like Marcellin and his first disciples, is for us a task we cannot avoid, a challenge as necessary as it is urgent if we want to safeguard our specific identities, whether brother, lay person or priest.

Let us look back, at the beginnings of the Hermitage.

- On one side, the Brothers working hard to build their house, dirtying their hands and loading heavy burdens on their shoulders; and, at the same time, these same Brothers gathering very early in the morning in the improvised chapel, celebrating Mass, singing to Mary, and astonishing the people on their way to work along the little road descending from La Valla to St Chamond.

- The Hermitage is described as a busy hive, where the Brothers give themselves to all sorts of manual

work: the vegetable garden, the various trades useful to the house, the tending of stock... and, at the same time, these same Brothers passing hours in the main chapel or saying their rosaries as they walk along the paths.

- The Hermitage was a centre of formation; here the youngest took their first steps in learning to teach, and the more experienced came for refresher courses; between these walls, the Brothers allowed their hearts to be touched by the deep and paternal discourses of the Founder; but, at the same time, these same Brothers, under Fr. Champagnat's crook, burned with zeal for the mission. From this house the Brothers set out to take charge of the surrounding schools and offer poor children the benefits of an integral education. It was from here that the Founder, embracing all the dioceses in the world, sent out the first brothers to Oceania.

Here, my dear friends, is the icon of the Hermitage, the icon of an apostolic spirituality, centred on Jesus, inspired by Mary, open to the needs of our world, especially to the most neglected youth; a spirituality of discernment, shared in community.

St Marcellin knew how to discover the signs of God's presence in the solitude of the place, in the peace of silent contemplation; but also in the pastoral visits to the sick, like the young Montagne, or on his administrative errands in the very heart of Paris. In following in his footsteps, we want « *to see the world through the eyes of poor children and young people, and thus change our hearts and attitudes* » (XXI General Chapter).

The waters of the Gier, which continue to flow alongside the house, evoke « *the Water from the Rock* », springing up in the tradition of Marcellin Champagnat. This document situates Marist apostolic spirituality in the place of preference it should have in the life of each of us and of those coming to know and love the Founder as did his first disciples so many years ago (Cf. *Water from the Rock*, presentation).



### 3. The renovated Hermitage is a sign, an icon of the work of renewal going on in the Institute.

With these words, the previous General Council, in the report presented to the Chapter, envisaged the new project for the Hermitage. And it added: « *In this time of general crisis which has profoundly affected us, the Institute finds the energy to carry out its mission, not without suffering, sometimes paying a heavy price, particularly on the personal level* ».

The construction of the Hermitage and its development constitute an enterprise strewn with difficulties and contradictions. It is the journey of a group of men, guided by a clairvoyant leader, rooted in faith and with a vision of the future full of hope, who were capable of going against the current, of dreaming together of a better world for poor children and young people.

- We are well acquainted with the contretemps endured by Fr. Champagnat, at the time of the construction as later on. The clergy of the period found it difficult to understand how a priest like Marcellin could work with his hands, thus neglecting the « priestly dignity ». He was judged presumptuous for embarking on so ambitious a project.
- The criticism came from people who knew him; to human views, what Marcellin was undertaking at the Hermitage was crazy; he was accused of taking useless risks in committing himself to a project without the necessary means. Even those closest to Marcellin, his friends and his Brothers, made him suffer: there were desertions, conflicts, discouragement.
- Some months after the official inauguration, in August 1825, Champagnat had to take to his bed; he was exhausted, at the end of his strength. The doctors were pessimistic; he was advised to make out his will... And it was in this context of suffering that Marcellin was to have the deepest experience of God's centrality in his life. The famous « *Nisi Dominus* » becomes a recurrent theme.

The renovation of the Hermitage certainly had its problems to confront. Those who were closely involved would be able to tell us about them: schedules sometimes not respected, unexpected obstacles, negative comments, and indeed the skepticism of certain ones. But today's inauguration is proof that they were able to overcome them.

The renovated Hermitage remains and will remain an icon, a living sign of the importance of assuming in our lives the reality of the Paschal mystery: to die in order to live. The last General Chapter reminds us of the call of Jesus: « *conversion of heart, which implies making a firm decision and being open to the grace of God, in order to be transformed by Him... God's love urges us to conversion and to rediscover the heart of our respective vocations* ».

One would prefer things to be done another way, to our liking: that vocations flow in great numbers, that we recover the renown of old, that enthusiasm for our vocation be more evident... Today consecrated life continues to move against the current. And the icon of l'Hermitage reminds us that God has his own ways, his own thoughts. It is for us to set out on the road, with Mary, pilgrim of faith, and pursue our course of personal and institutional conversion. "With Mary, go in haste to a new land!"

#### Conclusion: a challenge

Dear Brothers and friends, the physical renovation of the Hermitage is complete. It is a master work which brings us joy and inspires us to sing a hymn of thanksgiving. But we well know that it is only a stepping stone, a new stage open to a radiant future. What will allow us to advance towards this goal will be fidelity to the objectives which inspired this work and openness to the signs of the times which present themselves. There is the great challenge.

The Hermitage built by St Marcellin was not a work finished once and for all; in the course of 185 years of history, l'Hermitage has known many transformations, new buildings have been constructed, others converted.

This house was a postulancy, novitiate, scholasticate, infirmary... Le Cèdre and Le Rocher are some fruits of this renovation.

The Hermitage has equally been a provincial house, a place of research, a youth centre and also – I would like to emphasize-, a place of encounter between the Little Brothers of Champagnat and the Society of Mary; from the beginning, there have been Marist Fathers who have exercised their ministry here.

The Hermitage, a place for universal vocation, is also a centre in communion with the local Church, the diocese of Saint Étienne. Saint Marcellin is a saint of the whole Church, but he is equally a man of the country, a son of this region. May the renovated Hermitage be also a centre of radiation for the diocese, together with other already existing sanctuaries such as Notre-Dame de Valfleury, Notre-Dame de Bonson, Notre-Dame de Pitié and Le Rozey.

Dear Brothers and friends, we are walking with Mary towards the horizon of the year 2017, which will mark the bicentenary of the foundation of the Marist Brothers. May the renewed Hermitage remain faithful to the same spirit of universality, daring and creativity that animated Father Champagnat, the novices and the Brothers who began this enterprise.

My sincere and fraternal encouragement to this international community which has taken up the challenge to welcome and guide the pilgrims who arrive, to create spiritual itineraries which help them become impregnated with the spirit of the Hermitage, not only those who can come personally, but also, thanks to modern means of communication, persons and groups who are geographically distant. It is possible! And it is a great service that we, the Marists of the five continents, expect of this community.

May Mary, Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage, bless us all; may she bless this house.

