



## HERMITAGE: CONTINENTAL COMMISSIONS MEETING

OCTOBER 3 - 8

Fifty participants, members of the Laity Continental Commissions and guests, gathered in Notre Dame de l'Hermitage from October 3 – 8 to define proposals on the life of Marists of Champagnat that will be presented at the 22nd General Chapter.

### 1st day: Monday, October 3

The first day of the Laity Continental Commissions meeting in Notre Dame of Hermitage began with a prayer inspired by Asian spirituality. Then the group received practical information about life in the house. Pep Buetas and Tony Clark, co-directors of the Secretariat of Laity, presented the meeting. Pep underscored that the participants are "co-creating a dream" and questioned what would have happened if Marcellin had had a group like this one.

The participants were then divided into group tables. They introduced themselves and stressed what they felt that is coming to light into the Institute. Each participant placed his own photo on the map, indicating his place of origin, a symbol of the Marist community presence worldwide.

Next, the four Continental Commissions presented themselves, speaking of their own reality, the dynamics they lead and the challenges they experience.

For more information on the meeting, including documents and pictures, click here:

<https://goo.gl/hKS1Dx>



The second morning session was marked by the presentation of superior general Brother Emili Turú. He highlighted three elements that coincide with the preparation for the Institute's bicentenary celebration: we were born for a mission; the church needs a living community; we have a root. [You can watch his whole speech here in Spanish.](#)

After lunch, participants were divided into two groups and were given the opportunity to get to know the Hermitage house, with its various spaces that recall the beginning of the realization of Champagnat's dream.

Back in the meeting room, Brother Javier Espinosa, director of the Secretariat of the Laity, presented the pro-

gramme for the week, speaking about the "working document" that will be discussed throughout the days of the encounter.

It is a collection of proposals from the continental commissions on the six themes suggested by the Secretariat of the Laity: proposal of the General Council (Global Framework); initial and ongoing formation for lay people and brothers; lay bonding and belonging; updating the CMMF process; a communion pathway; structures and animation. Br Javier reminded the participants that these elements express the need to move and highlighted Br Emili's assertion during the morning that "the presence and commitment of the laity in the Institute is irreversible."

## The presence and commitment of the laity in the Institute is irreversible

Before the break, general councillor Brother Antonio Ramalho gave an overview of the current historical moment, characterised by a pre-chapter process, which began on Sept. 8 with Br Emili's convocation letter, "A new La Valla".

Br Antonio outlined the letter's main points, pointing out that the question one should ask is "what does God want from us?"

He said the Chapter seeks to answer this question through a fraternal dialogue and that this lay meeting expresses this. In fact, the encounter's goal is to bring concrete proposals to the Chapter.

After the break, there was a moment of animation that invited everyone to express himself through art. Par-

ticipants were asked to feel free to dance and then each one expressed, through a drawing, the process that he is personally experiencing.

The drawings were joined, replicating a mosaic, and everybody became aware of the richness of the Marist charism throughout the Institute.

The day's programme ended with a community meeting organised by the community of brothers and laity that are currently living in Hermitage (six brothers and three laity).

They offered a cocktail welcoming the group of lay people and also the Brothers that are participating in the formation course "Amanecer" for Portuguese and Spanish speakers, that travelled yesterday from Rome to visit Marist places.

## 2nd day of the encounter: Tuesday, October 4

During the second day of the Laity Continental Commissions Meeting, participants worked on the proposal of the General Council about a Global Framework for Lay Marists and the revitalisation process of the Champagnat Movement of Marist Family.

The day began with a morning prayer, prepared by the encounter's group

from Brazil, around the Gier river. Back in the meeting room, Raúl Amaya and Eliana Rojas gave a testimony on the charismatic process that is being experienced in the Santa Maria de los Andes Province, highlighting the experience of itinerary, formation and accompaniment that is lived in the administrative unit.

Pep Buetas, Joe McCarthy and Raúl Amaya then offered a reflection on the document "Being a Lay Marist. Process and pathway".

This text responds to the General Council's wish to present the upcoming general chapter with a framework for the identity of lay Marists, who feel called to live by the charism.

According to the Council, this implies the recognition of this identity through some sort of international association.

At the request of the General Council, the Secretariat of Laity organised a consultation process to draft the document that the Continental Commissions analysed and is now, in its second draft, under discussion to be presented to the chapter.

Participants discussed some of the document's key issues that seek to define common elements of the Marist laity's identity worldwide and help recognise them as such.

A very emphatic question arises as to whether or not it would make sense to establish an association of lay people internationally.





The morning concluded when the assembly was invited to suggest proposals for the document itself, the lay Marists formation process and its application in the administrative units.

The theme of the afternoon was the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family.

Around 3,500 lay people live the charism of Marcellin through the CMMF. After 30 years of life, a renewal is necessary, using a common criteria for the Marist lay identity.

This revitalisation process was conducted by an international team coordinated by Ana Sarrate, who presented the theme with other team members.

She described the process lived by the Commission of Revitalisation, which resulted in a draft of the new "Project of Life in Fraternity", still "under construction". Ana stressed the criteria used by the Commission to elaborate the Project

and emphasized the beliefs that guided her work, for example, the need of a systematic formation process.

The participants heard the testimony of Elma Rafil, from the Philippines, who presented her experience of participating in a fraternity of the Movement, emphasizing how the Marist vocation transforms her everyday life.

After this, work was given to the groups, asking each team to point out three concrete proposals to be presented at the chapter.

The suggestions were written on paper and fixed on the walls. Then the assembly elected the most significant ones, which would later be collected and prepared to be presented at the chapter.

The day's activities concluded with a moment of contemplation, in small communities, sharing what participants had experienced during the first two days.

### 3rd day of the encounter: Wednesday, 5 October



**Linking and associating with others allows us to develop mission projects, have a single voice in the Church, lead process of vitality for the charism**

The pilgrimage to Fourvière shrine and the work around the theme of bonding, belonging and association were the main topics of the third day of the Laity Continental Commissions Meeting taking place this week in l'Hermitage.

The Morning Prayer, animated by some participants of the African continent used a rock, a key element in the history of the mother house of the Institute and in the lives of the first Brothers, as its theme, to symbolise the strength, stability and connection to the land.

The morning work was coordinated by Linda Corbeil, from Canada, and Elizabeth Falconer, from Australia. Participants were invited to reflect

on the topics of bonding, belonging and association.

The working document, which was prepared before the meeting, states that the Marist charism is lived out of the heart, and it does not necessarily imply an association structure.

However, it is also true that linking and associating with others allows us to develop mission projects, have a single voice in the Church, lead process of vitality for the charism, and give continuity to Champagnat's intuitions.

It stresses that the Lay bonding stems from a personal process of discernment. It is a personal and free choice that has to do with the



person's vocational process. A possible association would express the notion of a family charism, according to which different groups organise themselves around the same charism.

[A video showing a flashmob organised by Banco Sabadell](#) was proposed in order to motivate the discussions and emphasise the beauty of the music that is born from the work of an orchestra and a choir.

Then, Joseba Louzao (Spain) presented the bonding experience that two groups of the Iberica Province in the past two years in order to give participants concrete examples of the existing experience throughout the Marist world.

He showed how the Province creates space for those seeking to discern the proper role within the Church. He made it clear that it is not possible to be a lay Marist without the support of a community.

Linda then began to work with the group stressing that the participants' mission is to give clues that show how to place the "new beginning" and recalled that they are all co-creators of the Marist dream.

Elizabeth began her presentation highlighting key words one uses to work: linking and belonging. She invited the groups to reflect on possible ways of belonging and asked that they underscored the essential elements.

The participants' answers included words such as vocation, charism, community and commitment.

Then, giving space to show the kind of life the Marist world has, Linda and Elizabeth briefly presented the two experiences of association that currently exist in Canada and Australia.

The next step was the group work that was carried out to try to gather four concrete proposals for the next General Chapter related to the topic.

After lunch, the group headed to Lyon, on pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Fourvière, where young clerics made their promise to establish the Society of Mary 200 years ago.

The group in the small chapel next to the great basilica, also made their promise of fidelity to the charism of the Marist Family, following the dream of Saint Marcellin Champagnat.

Participants were given time to take walks and experience community life until 9.00 p.m. there in Lyon.

They also celebrated the birthday of two participants: Claudia Rojas (Norandina) and Heloisa Almeida (Brasil Centro-Norte | N. D. de l'Hermitage Community).

## 4th day: Thursday, October 6



Two elements marked the fourth day of the Laity Continental Commissions Meeting in Hermitage: the reflection on the theme "lay articulation" and the pilgrimage to the birth place of Marcellin and the place where he has encountered the young Montagne.

The morning prayer was coordinated by Br Ventura Pérez (Mediterranean) that, with the reading of Romans 12, invited us to look toward the top and recognize the many gifts received. The group also gave thanks God for the gift of vocation of Br Daniel Martin (Central America), that has celebrated 25 years of religious profession in this day.

The work of the participants continued the theme of bonding, belonging and association, underlining the issue lay articulation. The focus of the activities started from the will that was evidenced during the preparation process to this meeting: to promote structures that encourage communion and develop participation. The morning work was coordinated by Mike Greeff (Southern Africa), Marta Portas (Hermitage) and João Luis Fedel (Brazil Center-South).

Two very striking experiences served as inspiration for the group: Mike Greeff told his life, emphasizing how his life gained full meaning when he has approached to the Marist experience and he began to "live with the heart", being overwhelmed by the love for the mission, finding himself in community with a spirituality. Then Gustavo Balbinot (South Amazonian Brazil) told the group about his intense personal experience and has showed how Jesus is his strength and how the Marist community was by his side in difficult times and makes him feel the presence of Champagnat, showing him that in life is very important to know for who one awakes everyday.

Then the team responsible for the work forwards the discussion on the lay articulation.

The experiences served to show that the most important thing is the heart, which must give meaning to any structures.

Considering this fact, the basic question that was released is: How we help the life we lead to be a real life? Or in a more purposeful way, what do we need to generate more life? The Assembly of Mission in Nairobi was already asked that could be recreated the structures that we need for a service of greater vitality to the charism.

Entering the concrete work, the team summed up in 4 points the proposals for lay articulation. The groups began to analyze them and propose changes, trying to improve the proposals.

There were many open questions, from the language to the discussions, for example, how to encourage communion among Brothers and lay people preserving at the same time the uniqueness of the lay life.

Another reflection that worth mentioning is the difficulty of talking about a structure for the laity, because isn't clear what kind of structure is wanted.

## 5th day of the encounter: Friday, October 7

The penultimate day of the Laity Continental Commissions Meeting was marked by the theme of Brothers and Lay communion. It was assumed that the Marist future is based on a community of people around the charism of Champagnat, where the specific vocations of lay and consecrated people are mutually enriched.

The initial prayer was held in the room used by the first Brothers of the community of Hermitage and animated by Pedro Chinchilla (Central Mexico) and Matt Fallon (United States). Using elements of North-American native tradition, the group was invited to integrate all the elements of life, the 4 cardinal points, along with looking at the ground, the air and the interiority.

The first part of the morning was led by Marta Eugenia Martínez (Notre Dame of Hermitage), Br Sylvain (Madagascar) and María Torres (Norandina) and dealt with the Brothers and lay communion. Br Sylvain questioned the group, asking if it is possible to live an integration among Brothers and lay people.

Marta told to the group her life experience in the mixed community of Hermitage and the difficulties and values that they experience living this lifestyle.

Concluding the morning, all the proposals by the working groups were added to the four points and gathered on key issues. These considerations will serve to the team that will reformulate the proposals to be presented to the chapter.

After lunch, the group took the bus to go on pilgrimage to other important Marist places. First it went to Rosey, the birth place of Marcellin Champagnat.

The proposal was not only make a visit or a pilgrimage, but also provide a time for further discernment about what was lived these days. That's why privilege was given to silence and meditation, which were especially experienced walking from Rosey to Marlhés.

Finally, the participants went to the place that reminds the meeting of Marcellin with the young Montagne, an emblematic sign of the Marist mission.



Before moving to work in groups, [a video showed how collaboration lets us reach the goal easily.](#)

The team summarized the discussion on the theme "Communion way" into 5 proposals, which were shared with the groups: charismatic family in communion perspective, promotion of concrete forms of communion, pathways to lay autonomy and maturity, centers or schools of spirituality that promote communion, and charismatic and economic sustenance.

The groups were invited to consider the proposals, suggesting changes or approving them.

During the second part of the morning, was continued the theme of communion among Brothers and lay people, focusing specifically the initial and ongoing formation processes. Participants were helped by Agnes Reyes (Philippines), Br Tony Leon (Secretariat Brothers Today) and Br Teo Aller (Compostela).

The starting point was the principle that the following of Jesus in the Mary's way is a unifying element of the identity of laity and Brothers, so must be there common formation spaces where both of them enrich each other and support themselves in their specific vocations.

Two testimonies served as motivation for reflecting on the proposals to be presented to the next chapter: Moisés Beltrán told his experience as a lay Marist in Ecuador and Claudia Rojas, from the experience of her family, pointed out that to invest in joint formation is bet on the vitality of the Marist charism.

Before moving to the groups, Br Tony proposed a reflection taking as a basis the theory of "Borromean rings", which is a composition of three interlocking rings in such way that if one of them is taken away, the other two become incomplete.

As this composition, various elements of Marist life don't makes sense without the others: the Trinity; mission, community and spirituality; the three levels of the La Valla building; the three years of preparation for the Bicentenary...

Then, in groups of Brothers and lay people, were analyzed the four proposals pointed out by the Forum Initial formation for a new beginning, held a year ago at this same place:

creation of a Formation Guide, joint vocational animation, preparation of Formators and international centers of on-going formation open to laypeople.

The morning work ended with a circular dance, reminding "the dance of the mission".

After lunch, the group visited the La Valla house, place of birth of the Institute, 200 years ago.

It was a special moment, characterized by prayer, meditation and sharing of Marist history.

The community prayer was made in the old chapel of Our Lady of Mercy, that can be considered the place of the first vocational crisis of the institute.

There the participants prayed asking for the Marist vocation not cease ever to grow into the people's hearts.

The walk to Hermitage, followed by a time of sharing in small communities, crowned the sixth day of the meeting.

## 6th day of the encounter: Saturday, October 8

In the sixth and last day of the meeting, the members of the Laity Continental Commissions and guest participants dedicated themselves to reflect on the synthesis of the themes discussed during the week, highlighting especially the topics that still need to be more depth.

The morning prayer was animated by Br Iwu Elias (Nigeria) with a Marian focus, before the image of Our Lady of Victories.

Were remembered the Marcellin's words saying that "without Mary we are nothing and with Mary we have everything, because she always has her adorable son in her arms or in her heart".

The morning works had several dynamics in different spaces.

First, the continental commissions met to the task of indicating which discussed aspects need to be further reviewed and which priorities the region should choose, considering its reality.

During the pause, the Secretariat of Laity gathered the observations of the five commissions and grouped the subjects into two blocks: lay autonomy and communion with the Brothers; and possibilities of association.

These are two issues interrelated and which need further reflection.

In the following plenary each participant could express his own opinion about the Brothers and laity re-



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ble son in her arms or in her heart**







relationship. Pep Buetas, co-director of the Secretariat, concluded this stage highlighting that the discussion points that the Marist Brother and Marist lay lives are two sides of the same coin: there is a common core for the two ways of life, that is the Marist charism given by God.

He finally remind an idea of Superior General Brother Emili, who said that is not necessary to give permission to lay persons live their vocation and that they need to see by themselves if they are prepared to take on a project.

So the group was asked to write two concrete suggestions that express the way how the autonomy of the laity could be achieved.

The suggestions were grouped into three blocks: personal and formative processes, co-responsibility and institutional expressions of lay Marist life. In the afternoon, participants met again to deepen the theme

Association. After a conversation in pairs, the opinions were shared.

Thinking about the words of Brother Emili, who said he does not believe that the Marist walk can go back, but only move forward, Tony Clark, co-director of the Secretariat, asked the group what is the most effective way to continue building the being a Marist lay, in order to give a face to the lay bonding and belonging.

What kind of bonding and belonging should be introduced at this time, after so much path taken?

In plenary, it was noted that the most important thing is the vocational process but nevertheless all way of life needs a structure, however simple it could be.

Currently there are several local structures.

Considering an international structure, the feeling is that it is still not the time to create something that can cover all existing expressions.

The proposals for the Chapter will be defined in the next meetings of the Secretariat of Laity and any reflections on the continental commissions.

After a moment of evaluation, the participants attended a thanksgiving mass hold by the Marianist Priest Antonio Pacheco, who participates in the course "Dawn" with the elderly Marist Brothers, and animated by João Luis (Brasil Centro Sul).

In one of the most significant moments of the celebration, all participants gathered at the tomb of Father Champagnat and put their own signature on the meeting poster, as a sign of commitment to continue faithful to their vocation of Marist lay or Brother.



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