



# Mary of the “yes” encourages and accompanies us

Greeting from Brother Superior General to the Institute in Times of Crisis by COVID-19

Dear Marists of Champagnat,

Today, on this “special” March 25, we are encouraged by remembering and celebrating Mary’s “YES” given at the Annunciation. This year, such a celebration has a unique meaning for each one of us and for the whole world in the face of the rapid spread of the COVID-19.



Clearly, it is a time of uncertainty and fear. These last weeks have been a time of great pain for those who have suffered or are suffering from the disease, many to the point of death and also an unimaginable pain for those relatives who cannot accompany their loved ones in their illness, or in their last moments or even at their funeral.

Italy, where we find those brothers and lay people who are at the service of the General Administration, as well as several Marist communities and ministries, has until now been one of the countries most affected by the pandemic. A similar situation is occurring in other countries of Europe and around the world. At present, many of the countries where the Institute is present have been affected by the crisis. I am pleased to see the various positive reactions in the Provinces and Districts seeking to collaborate with society, governments and the whole world to aid those who are at great risk.

Many of us are self-quarantining in our local communities or with our families, working to avoid either being infected or to avoid being agents of contagion. This situation is presented to us as a burden yet, at the same time, as an opportunity. I am sure that we all have received daily brainstorming and messages (sometimes, I don’t know if it is all too much) offering us creative ways to live this present reality.

Today, I think of Mary, that young woman from Nazareth who was put in a situation of surprise, of fear in the face of the unexpected and the unknown... wondering what this new situation, this new reality would be like. And yet, after the encouraging words, “for nothing is impossible with God”, she gives her YES: “Let it be done to me according to your word” (cf. Lk 1:28). She then, “got up and left quickly...”. (Cf. Luke 1:39). In the face of uncertainty and fear, there was faith, trust, passion for God and for humanity...

This scene of the Annunciation offers us three interesting steps that perhaps may encourage us to respond to the crisis in the way of Mary. At first, like Mary, we sense the doubt, the uncertainty, and feel the fear, and we ask God, “How? Why all this?” Then, we recognize that we are small in God’s hands and we trust in Him. Let it be done! And finally, we get down to work collaborating where we can, serving others.

It is difficult to predict what the future holds as a result of all that is being experienced amidst this pandemic. Just as there are forecasts of economic and societal crises, there are, at the same time, very positive lessons to be learned in line with familial and social harmony as well as ecology and solidarity. We

are a world with a connection far beyond the imagined, and that connection will have to be the strength needed to react as a global world family, seeking the good of all. While we are correctly told these days to distance ourselves physically for our own safety and for the safety of others, we should always keep in mind that this distancing seeks health and not selfish protection. Therefore, on another level, the call for social distancing links us and brings us closer together as a human family. We recognize that we are all connected. Like Mary, in the face of uncertainty and fear, we need faith, trust, and passion for God and for humanity, as solid foundations to go forward. From our moments of reflection and prayer, let us discover the new learning that this experience is offering us.

We recently held the annual meeting of Provincials and District Superiors in Rome. This year's theme focused on "care", and by all accounts, the gathering went very well. The great majority of our brothers have already been able to return to their Provinces or Districts, and almost all have spent or are spending a period of quarantine for the good of all. I thank all of them for their positive, faith-filled attitude and the initiatives that are being taken in their AUs to support the current situation. And I also appreciate the responses, gestures and solidarity of all the Champagnat Marists throughout the world.

Let us pay special attention to the elderly in our communities and in our families. If any of us experience contagion and illness, let us consider the sick person as a blessing, as Champagnat told us, and let us give that person all our fraternal attention and care. While abiding by the necessary medical protocols, may our attitudes and responses to those who are ill be both evangelical and Marist.



During these days, I also remember with special affection those of you –brothers and lay Marists--who are living the mission in international communities and projects or in provinces or countries far from your family and loved ones.

Mary of the "YES" encourages and accompanies us in these difficult moments of uncertainty and pain. Our Good Mother holds us by the hand. Today, we know her as a loving mother and as a sister, as a companion on our journey and in our suffering, and a companion of all the people of God. With her and Saint Marcellin, let us live this special Lent in an attitude of prayer, united in communion with so many people throughout the world who are more directly victims of this pandemic.

Let us pray in communion with the leaders of our countries and of the Church, so that we all have the wisdom that comes from the Spirit to act and respond according to God's will. Let us keep in our prayer the medical professionals, the many religious and priests, and so many others who are at the service of the sick. We join with Pope Francis who, in the Eucharistic celebration of these days, is keeping these various groups of people in mind and inviting us to care attentively for each other, especially the sick.

Receive my fraternal greeting and embrace, along with the greeting and embrace of the General Council and the General Administration.

Rome, 25 March 2020

**Br. Ernesto Sánchez Barba**

Superior General

Handwritten signature of Ernesto Sánchez Barba in black ink.