



Sharing

THE LAY
MARIST
VOCATION

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From Asia

**Give praise to the Lord, proclaim His name;
make known among the nations what he has done (Ps. 105:1)**



Elma B. Rafil
Chairperson, Asia Laity Commission

Greetings from Asia, the cradle of the world’s major religions, the birthplace of many religious traditions and spiritualities, and the home of multifaceted indigenous life and its creative expressions!

Fully aware of the rich, diverse, and complex realities of the region, we, the Champagnat Marists in Asia endeavor to bring forth and nurture among us the wealth of our Marist charism enriched by the plurality of cultures and religions.

Today, we see hope. People, especially, the young, are showing signs of great vitality along with the thirst for renewal and spiritual values, no matter what they call their religion. We meet people of different religions desiring to engage more with the life we share with them in a culture of encounter.

Our being in communion with them in their longing for depth and meaning leads to our own anchoring into the depth of our own Marist tradition.

This 3rd issue of the Laity Bulletin “Sharing” captures mostly our stories here in Asia Region. It tells of our journey in growing deeply in our Marist life respectful of our distinct context. We share testimonies of the richness of our vocation and the profound concern we have for this new emerging need of our time: the cry of our common home. Sharing with you in this issue is our way of “giving praise to the Lord” and “making known what He has done to us”.



EACH ISSUE OF SHARING IS PREPARED BY ONE OF THE SIX REGIONS OF THE INSTITUTE,
UNDER THE COORDINATION OF THE BUREAU OF THE LAITY.
THIS MONTH'S ISSUE WAS PREPARED BY THE ASIA REGION.

TOLLE ET LEGE!



Jose O. Nacianceno
Philippines

Pope Francis issued his landmark encyclical *Laudato Si'* in 2015. It was aimed to address the ecological crisis. The encyclical, like no other church document, focuses on Earth, our common home, and all creation. It goes beyond climate change and social justice issues and concentrates on the good of

the whole Earth community.

Laudato Si' calls for “ecological conversion”—one that is so “radical”, “profound” and “urgent” in our understanding of who we are as humans and our relationship with other-than-human creatures. The XXII General Chapter of the Marist Brothers’ Institute echoes the appeal of *Laudato Si'* when it called for a movement from “ego” to “eco.”

At this juncture, the calls of *Laudato Si'* and the General Chapter invite soul-searching:

- How has *Laudato Si'*, in its radicalness, converted the whole Institute? Has it affected the

identity, formation and ministries of Brothers and lay Marists?

- How has it changed the vision and mission of the schools, colleges and universities? Has it changed their curriculum (especially in theology/religious education) and programs? Are we still educating the young “as if there were no planetary emergency” (David Orr)?
- Is the Institute joining the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform (inaugurated by Pope Francis on May 24, 2021)? Can it embrace the *Laudato Si'* goals? Can our schools, colleges and universities be *Laudato Si'* institutions? Can the Champagnat Marists be a *Laudato Si'* congregation?

The magnitude of the ecological crisis, which is worse than the pandemic, cannot leave the work on ecology to commissions, committees and individuals. The whole Institute has to harness its resources and power to help address the crisis. What a potent force the Institute is—with 2,900 brothers, 7,200 lay people, 654,000 children and young people in 81 countries!

It also needs to tilt its direction toward a preferential option for the Earth. The encyclical describes Earth as “among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor” (2). In the life of the Institute, loving and protecting Earth, our common home, has to take primacy. Option for the Earth complements very well the Institute’s options for the children, the young people and the poor.

The Institute may read *Laudato Si'* closely and take seriously its profound challenges. *Tolle et Lege*—Take and read! --words that asked St. Augustine to “take and read” the Bible and prompted his conversion. May the Institute, by reading the encyclical, be led to deep ecological conversion.



SRI-LANKA’S MARIST JOURNEY FROM “EGO TO ECO”

“The ecological conversion required to create lasting change is likewise a community conversion.” (Laudato Si', 219)

As Lay Marists in Sri Lanka, we recognize the sense of darkness of this environmental devastation taking place, not just in our country but globally. It was noted that our country exhibits a remarkable diversity of forests where it has become one of the highest density of species diversity in the world. Today, however, we are beset with an alarming concern for the fast denudation of

our forests. We could not remain indifferent to the dangers posed by the accelerating rate of deforestation. Right before our eyes we see the threatening reality and guilt feeling haunt us as we face this unsettling question: “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” (LS, 160).

In tune with the thrust >>

Jude Fernando
Chairperson, South Asia Laity Committee



HOW I LEARNED THE MARIST WAY



I began my Marist journey as an intern at the FMSI (Marist International Solidarity Foundation). The work that engaged me with the concerns of children’s rights led me to understand the Marist mission. That is, to care and love the children and the young people, especially the least favoured ones.

When I first joined the Marists, I was asking myself a lot of questions: What does it mean to be one? How to be one? And the worse question I asked myself was, Am I worthy of being one?

What led me to a growing understanding of being Marist are those stories of brothers and lay who witness by their examples: I was touched by a brother who took a student for lunch because he wants to listen and understand the child’s difficult situation.

Sounds like a simple gesture but done with a big heart. This is quality presence for me.

Seeing an elderly brother climb a steep and slippery road to deliver food supplies and be present with the poor, taught me love of work and commitment to mission.

Every time I stay with the Marist communities, no matter how simple the communion is, the welcoming experience makes me feel the warmth of Mama Mary’s love.

It is my dream that more people discover and live out the values of the Marists. It is a precious gift. And for this, I would like to express my gratitude to all brothers and lay people I have met, for sharing Marist life with me. I shall then share with others, too.

Qalista S. Dohny - LA VALLA 200 Volunteer from Malaysia

of the 22nd General Chapter of the Institute of the Marist Brothers, we took steps to concretize our care for our common home. Brothers and laity collaboratively decided to “light a candle than to curse darkness”. We did so by initiating a program inspired by the idea of a Marist journey from EGO to ECO.

Maris Stella College in Negombo, a school run by the Marist Brothers, will celebrate its centenary next year (2022). In view of this celebration, we have organized a tree planting project. This project aims to plant 100,000 trees throughout the country. Three thousand (3,000) plants were collected from students celebrating the World Children's Day in 2019. Bro. Michael De Waas, the Principal of Maris Stella College, initiated a tree



planting campaign in the college premises that day. One thousand five hundred (1500) trees were planted in the coastal area close to the college. Five hundred (500) seedlings were distributed to some schools around the college with the assistance of the Scouts of the District.

True to being Marist, we continue to do our best in preserving and improving our natural environment.

“Each of our communities and families, as the homes of light we want to form, can be an active laboratory for the care of our great common home” (Homes of Light, p. 48)



The current ecological issues in Sri-Lanka which was presented during a webinar convened by the Kithusara Team, gave us an alarm. The recent floods, the highly endangered elephants which hold symbolic, cultural, and economic importance in Sri Lanka., the importation of sub-par quality organic fertilizer, deforestation with its long-term repercussions and the environmental disaster created by X-press pearl cargo ship which caught fire on 20 May 2021 and sunk into the sea subsequently, were discussed in relation to the culture, socio economic and political background of Sri-Lanka. We, lay Marists who attended the webinar, have been greatly disturbed by these. For me, this reflected the lamentable state of mother nature, giving us further insights to revamp our Marists “Ego to Eco” programs to new avenues to protect and conserve the natural environment.

Chalana Pragnaratne - Lay Marist, Sri Lanka

*NEW WINE IN NEW WINESKINS***THE VIET NAM EXPERIENCE**

The first of the “Asia Mission Ad Gentes” Brothers arrived in Viet Nam fourteen years ago and, within a short time, candidates for the Marist Brothers began to knock on the door. The concept of religious consecration or the priestly vocation was already well embedded into Vietnam’s Catholic culture.

And the Lay Vocation? Perhaps not to the same extent. Therein lay the challenge!

It seems that, in countries with a long-standing Marist presence, the lay Marist vocation originates from among ex-students, parents of students, staff of Marist schools or long-term associates. In Viet Nam, the situation is quite different. While other Marist District of Asia countries benefitted from the presence of international Lay Marists, this was not the case in Viet Nam. Accordingly, with the Marist presence still in its infancy, an ‘eco-system’ which would nurture Marist Lay vocations would likely be quite different! And so it proved to be! It was an opportunity to develop new wineskins.

The foundation of a lay movement has proven to be somewhat different from previous models. Potential Marists in Viet Nam have come predominantly from a younger age-group comprising current and former adult students, those who have participated in Come and See programmes, former formands and people who have come to know the Champagnat spirit after some years of contact with the brothers. The families of young local Marist Brothers (currently there are 16 professed brothers, 5 novices and



3 postulants from Viet Nam) could potentially become more closely aligned to the Champagnat spirit.

In hindsight, perhaps we were too hasty in trying to formalise a Marist Lay movement. Efforts to form a pilot Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family were unsuccessful, as were tentative requests for recognition of individuals as lay Marists. So, it was back to the drawing board! “If this work should fail...”

A different approach was clearly needed. It was decided to return to the grassroots at local levels, leaving the administrative issues and broader District-wide developments to take care of themselves at a later date.

Currently, there are two significant Marist groups in Viet Nam, the Champagnat Marist Volunteers and Giao Dan Duc Maria. There is also a strong informal network of former formands, some of whom are members of the two aforementioned groups. The Champagnat Marist Volunteers range in age from early twenties to mid-thirties and assist with the Marists of Champagnat Project among the stateless children and young people in southern Viet Nam. They serve as volunteers for periods ranging from 6 weeks to a year, living in community with the brothers du- >>

Lay Marist
Giáo Dân Đức Maria

ring their service. To date, more than twenty young people have been part of this programme, some returning more than once to help out. Some of these volunteers have gone on to formation as Brothers while others continue to keep in regular contact with the Tan Chau community. Giao Dan Duc Maria is made up of about twenty married and single lay people. Shared recollections have taken place but, because of current travel restrictions, not as often as we might like.

It has been decided to focus the initial formation programme for laity less on the Marist aspects (although those who have been in formation with us already have a very good understanding of this) and more on the broader understanding of the lay vocation. Programmes have been developed to promote a contemporary appreciation of vocation, whether it be the common call of all baptised Christians, the state-of-life

vocational call as laity, clerics or consecrated religious, or the unique call of God to each individual. These programmes have also been made available for those involved in the formation of brothers, hopefully fostering a deeper appreciation of the value of each vocational type in the eyes of God, the Church and our own Congregation.

A lack of a Marist “history” in Viet Nam might prove to be both a weakness but also a strength. We remain confident that the Spirit will prevail, both despite and because of our combined efforts, and that Champagnat’s charism will be increasingly apparent in the life of the Church in Viet Nam.

Michael Potter
On behalf of the MDA Lay Sub-Committee

INSPIRATIONS IN MY MARIST JOURNEY

The late Brother John Lek was definitely a source of inspiration in my journey as a Marist Educator. He was the epitome of what it meant to live out the Marist values of simplicity and presence. Bro. John’s faith and trust in God and in Mary was clearly the driving force in his life. Through him, I was able to see and personally experience the real meaning of simplicity and presence when I witnessed how he continued to give of himself, whether to the students, to his work or to God even as he fought on in his valiant battle with cancer, without a word of fear or sadness.

Personally, knowing that we Marists (religious, staff and students alike) here in Singapore are part of the greater Marist Family of the whole wide world is such a thrilling idea that I have always been proud to be associated with. I take great pride in sharing this fact with our students. In more recent years, we have had greater collaboration with other Marist schools around South East Asia, with the LaValla School in Cambodia and the Marist schools of Hong Kong and Malaysia. These are indeed exciting new adventures that the Marist Family is heading towards; so, my hope is for our young Marists to continue in the spirit of Champagnat to be beacons of faith and respond boldly in the post-Covid-19 world that we will now all slowly have to rebuild.

Audrey Chong - Teacher-in-charge of Spiritual Formation Programmes
Maris Stella High School -Singapore



INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON THE LAY MARIST VOCATION

July 2021 sees the beginning of STAGE II, inspired by the text of Luke's Gospel: "HE STARTED TO WALK WITH THEM" (Lk 24, 15). This stage emphasises REFLECTION MEETINGS AT LOCAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT LEVEL. It lasts one year and ends in June 2022.

This phase includes the study and deepening, at personal and community level, of the proposed themes arising from the four objectives of the Forum. The dynamics will be developed in small groups made up of brothers, mixed communities, lay men and women with a vocation, fraternities of the MCFM or other movements face-to-face, where possible, or virtually. It is important to stress that each Administrative Unit will schedule this stage according to its internal programming possibilities, which means that it is not necessary to cover all the months assigned in the proposed year.

- Publicise the proposal: July 2021
- Generate small group dialogues: July 2021 to May 2022
- Select 3 representatives: July 2021 to May 2022
- Hold Provincial/District Forum: July 2021 to May 2022
- Submit findings of the Administrative Unit: by 30 June 2022

A. From July 2021 to May 2022 each Administrative Unit:

- Publicise the proposal of the International Forum.
- Generate dialogue among all the participants, in small groups (communities), in person or



virtually, according to the guidelines given by the Secretariat of the Laity.

- Participatory selection of representatives (two lay people and one brother) to attend the International Forum. Their participation will be in November 2022 (Rome, in person) and in November 2024 (virtual).
- It will hold a Provincial/District Forum or a similar face-to-face or virtual event in which representatives of the local phase will participate. Each AU organises this experience according to its reality. The three representatives of the AU will be sent to the Forum.

B. By 30 June 2022, the provincial Lay Animation Teams will send to the Secretariat of the Laity the conclusive documents in which the results of the local and provincial/district process and the representatives are consigned.

REFLECTION SHEETS FOR COMMUNITY MEETINGS

To support the dialogue of the communities, the Enlarged Bureau of the Laity has prepared a series of instruments both to guide the animation of the Provincial or District Teams and to help in the reflection of each fraternity or community of lay people and brothers and sisters. It consists of a series of cards to animate the meetings and which touch on each of the objectives of the



Forum, with the intention of generating reflection and dialogue among all the lay people and brothers involved in this process and of formally welcoming their opinions and contributions to the Forum. The Provincial or District Teams responsible for the Forum in their respective Administrative Unit will animate this stage and distribute this material according to the calendar which each one has organised. [You will find the forms in the Froum's page.](#)

Raúl Amaya - Director of the Secretariat of Laity

A TESTIMONY ON THE VALUE OF THE VOCATION OF MARIST LAITY

Recently, I had the honor of testifying to the extraordinary life of Dr. Isabelita Bona, PhD., in her life as an outstanding lay Marist in the Philippine sector in the on-line and newsletter eulogy during her wake in Koronadal City. She died on February 12, 2021, on the same date of her birthday.

Fondly called “Ma’am Bing” by the Brothers, her fellow administrators and students, she devoted practically all her life to serving the Brothers’ schools, ministering in the various school and non-school ministries, promoting our Marist vocation and was a strong support for our Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family (CMMF).



Dra. Isabelita Bona

In her school ministry she held several key positions of responsibility. In the province affair, she was actively involved in several committees formerly assigned particularly to Brothers. She was among the five chosen to represent the lay in 1992 General Chapter. Their valuable presence opened a wide venue for the participation of lay Marists in the succeeding chapters.

In 1997, she was chosen among 4 other outstanding lay Marists to be invited for the Province Affiliation. Her being an affiliated member really made her “one of us” ... Marist by heart and attitude, highly steeped in Marist spirituality, zeal, on-going formation, and a worthy example in the various committees she was invited in as a member. She even went to Rome to attend St. Marcellin’s canonization in 1999. From then on, her involvement went on to the international circle of Lay Marist activities.

As a Marist religious, I looked up to her as a present personification of Mary, a lady whose heart goes easily to the poor, whose presence could command high respect and deference, just like Mary among the disciples at Pentecost, and whose words of wisdom issued at gatherings and prayer meetings clearly mirrored her humility and deep sense of prayer, particularly in Jesus.

She died quietly and without display of mourning easily seen in dramatic deaths. In fact, she died at the time of the Covid-19 pandemic where just a few could visit her wake. The virus had nothing to do with her death, but her mid-seventy age and enduring heart sickness took toll of her fragile body.

I personally believe that if Mary were to exist in this day and age, she would be personified in Ma’am Bing. Her spirit of enthusiasm continues to live among our devout lay Marists, and we know that she spent her life, showing us how to be Marists in heart, mind, and character. She has paved the way for our present lay Marists to tread.

Br. Ted Fernandez, FMS

THE MARIST LAITY: A COMMON INHERITANCE OF THE MARIST FAMILY

Our journey towards the International Forum on the Vocation of the Marist Laity has just begun. These days, the Extended Secretariat of the Laity has opportunities to listen to the experiences of lay people affiliated to other congregations. Our virtual encounters with them evoked in me a sense of curiosity as I think of our own: “Where did this vision of the Marist Laity begin?”

This article is an attempt to capture the salient ideas in the book, *The Marist Laity, Finding the Way Envisaged* by Fr. Colin, written by Frank Mckay (Rome, 1991). I find it interesting to unearth the wealth of the vision of Fr. Colin and to consider this in our reflection for the Champagnat Lay Marists. After all, the first reference to Fr. Colin’s plan for a Third Order is in a letter of Marcellin Champagnat to Bishop Devie in July 1833. Marcellin wrote: “Father Colin’s idea of the Third Order, I find rather pleasing. I believe that, as Your Excellency envisages it, it will succeed” (p.104).

Marcellin’s strong affirmation of Fr. Colin’s



Agnes Segovia Reyes
Co-Director of the Secretariat of Laity

work on the laity further ignites my interest of knowing the foundational vision of the Marist Laity and how it is appropriated in our time. Can it be said that the proposal of Fr. Colin also holds true to the desires of Mar-



Volunteering in Cambodia

As Marist lay volunteer, being simple and humble in any way possible helps me get through life. It grounds my decision-making and roots my actions in a purpose greater than myself. It helps me become the more authentic version of myself. The values of simplicity and humility always remind me to go back to my core – a Marian and a Marist at heart.

I became a volunteer to try new things, to explore and see different viewpoints in life – a diversion from my usual routine. But things changed when I started to see that being a volunteer is far from what I had imagined. It is more than that. It is a journey of inspiring others in simplicity.

I believe that this is how we build a life of purpose: when we transform kindness to action, and compassion to service. Volunteerism is more than just a part-time commitment; it is a lifelong journey of love, kindness, and service.

Kimberly Camiring - From Philippines, volunteering for Marist Mission in Marist Education Centre - Pailin City, Cambodia



cellin for the Champagnat laity? I keep this question open...

The first attempt to form the Marist Third Order connects with the existence of some fourteen young women who called themselves *Les Vierges Chretiennes* in Lyon (1845). Fr. Colin designated Fr. Pierre-Julian Eymard to direct this group. Not only did Eymard direct the group, but he also organized them, outlined programs, and prepared the documents for the group's recognition by Rome. The nucleus "Third Order" group had three guiding rules for their life: the laity as religious living on the world; its goal is to imitate the poor and hidden life of Mary of Nazareth; and the emphasis to live in secrecy.

Against the odds and the interplay of drama and tension between Fr. Colin and Fr. Eymard, the Third Order received approbation from Rome in 1850. Fr. Gabriel-Claude articulated the characteristics of the Third Order as viewed by Eymard, as a "Third Order" that is "not only a simple confraternity...it is above all the extension of the religious life to the secular state." (Tableau, p. 147). Eymard's views, however, was vehemently denied for it was unacceptable to Fr. Colin and there were intriguing reasons why this was so.



P. Colin

Father Collin finally defined the rule for the Third Order in its printed form "Constitutions of the Confraternity or Sodality under the Protection of the B.V.M. for the Conversion of Sinners and the Perseverance of the Just". In order to distance his concept from that of Eymard, he did not use "Third Order" in his most considered statement on Marist laity. With its publication, Fr. Collin defined the historic destiny for the lay Marists. For him, the Marist Laity is an organic part of the Society with "the same spirituality, the same spirit, and the same mission."



Frank McKay, the author of the book delineates in Chapter 3, the principles of action which, for me, are sound references for our reflection about our Champagnat Marist life. They are as follows:

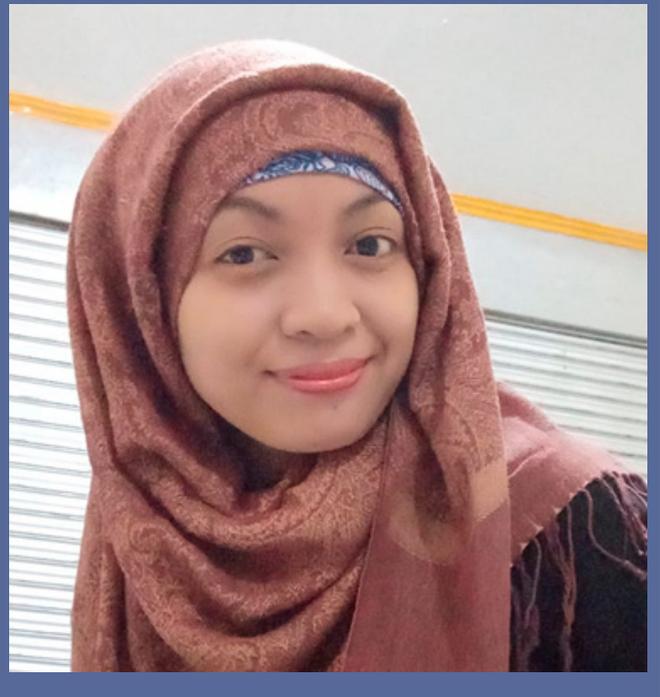
- **Principle 1:** The Marist laity is a manifestation of the intrinsic dynamism of the Society and co-extensive with it. This means that the “Marist Laity is not a mere appendage to the Society but goes to its very core.”
- **Principle 2:** The Marist Laity is to be seen primarily as evangelizing. The emphasis in the work of the laity is evangelization.
- **Principle 3:** The scope of the Marist Laity is as wide as the world, so a truly evangelizing, lay movement must be ecumenical.
- **Principle 4:** Marist Laity is to be seen as an initiative of the whole Marist Family. Fr. Colin envisaged that the Marist Laity for all branches is one manifestation of the common commitment of the first Marists who made their pledge in Fourviere. (Cf p. 106)

Appropriating the vision of Fr. Colin to our time, the author wrote proposals for strategies to establish Marist Laity. First was the need for a new name for the old “Third Order”; second was to work with the laity themselves; third, the importance of being affiliated to a group; fourth, the need for good formation for laity; and fifth, the identification of effective animators in the province. (cf. pp 110-141). Though this was said in the context of the Society of Mary, we can allude to the above as we reflect on the process we are undergoing in the dynamics of forming Champagnat Marist life.

The book in its conclusion pointed out the three core themes of the materials being studied about Fr. Collin’s vision of the Marist Laity. The first is an affirmation that in the tradition of the Marist, there is, indeed, a Marist vision of the laity. The second point emphasized is evangelization. It stressed that all the work of

In a Marist institution, I feel at home. The family spirit is alive in the school. My co-workers embrace me fully. As a Muslim Filipino, I feel that in my Marist community my religion is not an obstacle. Joining the Marist Formation sessions allow me to know things and learn from them. These help me to respect others’ faith as I feel respected sharing my own with them.

From Aimee C. Abdul,
Assistant Professor, Notre Dame of Marbel University



the Marist laity is being directed to mission done in the way of Mary. And third, Collin’s vision of the Marist laity highlights pluralism which means an openness to the surge of creativity that leads to the many ways of formation and identification of the Lay Marist.

What is the implication of connecting ourselves to Fr. Collin’s vision of the Lay Marist? For one, it gives us the reason to believe that our desire to find our rightful place as Lay Marists in the Institute is rooted in a living tradition. And where we find our roots, there is the promise of growth and fruition.

SOCIAL NETWORK

MARIST LAYTY

We invite you to share your experience as a Marist lay person on social media by posting texts, photos and videos using the hashtag **#MaristLayVocation**.

It will help us to develop an internet identity for Marist life worldwide.

At the same time, the Secretariat of Laity has created a public group in FaceBook: "[Laicos Maristas / Marist Laity - Global group](#)". It is a place to build an online community of Marist Laypeople and to share our emotions and experiences. You are invited to subscribe to the group and to start posting and gathering online with other members of our global family.

www.champagnat.org

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[V MESSAGE FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR MARIST MISSION](#)

[III MEETING OF FORMATION AND EXPERIENCE – INTER-AMERICAN NETWORK OF MARIST SPIRITUALITY](#)

[LAVALLA200> COMMUNITY AT HOLGUÍN, CUBA](#)

#LayMaristVocation

THE NEWSLETTER WILL BE ISSUED MONTHLY. EACH TIME, A DIFFERENT REGION WILL OVERSEE IT. THE NEXT ISSUE WILL BE SENT ON JULY 26TH, PREPARED BY THE MARIST REGION OF *AMÉRICA SUR*.

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Institut of the Marist Brothers - Secretariat of Laity

Piazzale Marcellino Champagnat, 2 - Rome, Italy - comunica@fms.it

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