



# FORM GOOD CHRISTIANS AND VIRTUOUS CITIZENS

## MESSAGE FROM THE MARIST INTERNATIONAL MISSION COMMISSION

*As Marists of Champagnat “we believe in the cultivation of contemplative practices which give meaning to life, and of being brothers and sisters to offer a prophetic sign in a turbulent world”.*

*(Message of the XXII General Chapter)*



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## “Form good Christians and virtuous citizens” - a challenge for our time.

Marcellin Champagnat invited his first Brothers to form good Christians and virtuous citizens. Today, and more than ever, this invitation still defines our mission as Marist educators, whether we be Brothers or lay people. This two-fold injunction might appear contradictory, if not impossible to achieve in a globalised world which promotes individualism, rivalry, tribalism, and a culture of waste. Pope Francis urges us to sense “*the challenge of finding and sharing a “mystique” of living together, of mingling and encounter, of embracing and supporting one another, of stepping into this flood tide which, while chaotic, can become a genuine experience of fraternity, a caravan of solidarity ...*”<sup>1</sup>.

About this positive tension between ***good Christian and virtuous citizen***, we need to highlight the fundamental anthropological fact of **fraternity**, that emanates from a fundamental theological fact that we are all children of the same Father, whatever our cultural, religious or social differences. A humanity linked to our origins, more a matter of the objective identity of humankind and of all creation than of moral duty. From that perspective, the two actions of forming good Christians and virtuous citizens intertwine and become inseparable for an integral and inclusive education.

***“We want to form homes of light with young people.  
They bring light to us.”<sup>2</sup>***

Training programs in contemplative living have been developed in some of our provinces. We have also developed a clear evangelising identity in our works through appropriate programs to strengthen Christian and Marist identity.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 87

<sup>2</sup> Brother Ernesto Sánchez Barba, *Homes of Light*, p. 109





We have created programs for religion, sacraments, catechesis, youth and children’s ministry, family ministry, movements of young teachers. Solidarity services exist in most of our Marist works and areas of presence.

Civic education at school takes place through both curricular and extracurricular activities. This training includes going out into the community as well as awareness of political and democratic structures. Our works are recognised within society for the quality of their service and the identity of the community.

The presence of Marists in various areas of social, religious, professional, cultural and political life represents a recognised positive contribution at local and international level. Our schools, our works and our communities are spaces which open up to interact with their environment.

Many initiatives already exist throughout the Institute to enable children and young people to experience and engage in volunteering, social commitment and service. International Marist volunteers serve at various levels – local, provincial and institutional – and are appreciated by the institutions with which they work. “Immersion” experiences carried out in our schools and works allow us to develop this sense of global citizenship and solidarity.

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*“Education will be inadequate and ineffectual unless we strive to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature”.<sup>3</sup>*

To educate for citizenship and to evangelise mean understanding the complexity of the world, the processes of interdependence and sustainability, and to **promote a culture of encounter**<sup>4</sup> in order to work and build together. It means enabling children and young people to engage with humanity, to develop positive and critical thinking. It means offering ways of participating at all levels: local, national and international, and at the same time assisting in the discovery of the personal inner life in order to be able to welcome difference.

To educate for citizenship and to evangelise necessitates the conviction that academic and ethical programs are intimately linked. The values that underpin Marist education demand that we face reality and engage in a process of transformation for a more human, more united and more compassionate society.

To educate and evangelise means allowing children and young people to develop the values and attitudes that build cooperation, peace, respect for others and for creation, freedom, equality and universality.

*Promoting education as service, through service and example.  
Education in solidarity and responsibility.*

The evangelists Luke, Mark and Matthew recount the institution of the Eucharist during the Last Supper. John does not refer to this but

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<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical Laudato Si, 215

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, 220

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emphasises instead the Washing of the Feet. The Last Supper and the Washing of the Feet, both highly symbolic, are perfectly complementary, not to say inseparable: *“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me*



*will never go hungry*”<sup>5</sup>. This Bread of life, with which we will be satisfied, we also find in the other. It is in serving the other that we find this Bread of life. To educate and evangelize is to form for service through service. We are created not only to live with others, but also to be of service to others. And it is precisely this willingness to be of service that accomplishes the full realization of that humanity common to all. The first act of evangelisation requires silent witness through action. Our way of dealing with one another, in a welcoming and open attitude, will create favourable conditions for young people to in turn develop such attitudes. *“We have to understand that integrity in life does not mean perfection but rather transparency and genuineness.”*<sup>6</sup>

To be a citizen of the world and a Christian is to feel responsible by conviction and in solidarity, to be involved in the resolution of problems related to the common good and the care of creation, in neighbouring communities or those more distant. Solidarity imposes the burden of feeling responsible for each other.

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<sup>5</sup> Gospel of Saint John (6, 35)

<sup>6</sup> Brother Ernesto Sánchez Barba, Homes of Light p. 92.



Freedom alone is only part of the truth. *“That is why I recommend that the Statue of Liberty on the East Coast be supplemented by a Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast.”* To educate for solidarity and responsibility, we need to facilitate the emergence and growth of young leaders by encouraging involvement by young people, give children and young people a voice and implement processes and initiatives that will enable them to take responsibility. To educate and evangelise is to work for the greater empowerment of people and in particular of children and young people. It means facilitating the promotion and expression of individual qualities and capacities.

In a world saturated with ‘fake news’ and reactions (more than opinions), the use and management of social media and other technologies represents a crucial challenge for educators. We need to help young people develop a critical awareness that is demanding and constructive with regard to the media, and allow them to build a political conscience in the most virtuous sense of the term – politics as ‘the organisation of the city’ – so that the common good is served and social inequalities reduced.

To educate and evangelise is to form people who see clearly what is happening in society and in the Church and who are in constant search

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<sup>7</sup> Dr Victor Frankl.

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of adequate responses to societal and environmental problems. People capable of recognizing the equal dignity owed to every human being and of defending the fundamental rights which flow from this dignity. People capable of taking care of creation and of our common home. *“We seek also to develop eco-environmental commitments that ensure the ecological sensitivity of our new ways of being Marist today”<sup>8</sup> .*

***By constructing the educational village we sign up  
to a global covenant on education***

Paradoxically, globalisation has not created a greater sense of being sisters and brothers. The COVID-19 pandemic, which has affected our planet for more than a year, could well have compounded the temptations to isolation and selfishness. Mandatory health measures such as lockdowns and social distancing, are all accelerators of isolation. This humanitarian catastrophe is asking us questions on to find new ways of being present to each other or of how to experience relationships in education. Beyond this, it also poses questions about the frantic pace imposed by a society of overconsumption and the corollary, a culture of waste.

The young people of this century intuitively feel the need to build a more just, more united, more human world. A world that would be more respectful of creation and the planet, a more humble world. They are already developing an ecological and civic awareness which asks questions and challenges us. As Pope Francis declared in January 2020: *“Education requires entering into sincere and genuine dialogue with young people.”<sup>9</sup>.*

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Strategic Plan of General Administration 2017-2025, Project 18.

<sup>9</sup> Address to members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, 09 January 2020



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In addition, educating and evangelising moves us to join in what the Holy Father calls the *construction of the educational village*. That is to say, enabling the whole of society to contribute to the education of future generations, knowing full well that the future of the social project depends on them. And if the family is to retain its primary role in education, as Marists of Champagnat we subscribe to *“the right of Churches and social communities to support and assist families in raising their children.”*<sup>10</sup>

We believe in the concept of an integral and inclusive education which does not wish to be confined to the classroom but which embraces a variety of life experiences, learning processes, and educational and pastoral events where the other is welcomed in their difference – be it cultural, social, ethnic, religious or gender – in order to *“discover in that person the splendour of the image of God.”*<sup>11</sup>

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For the International Commission of the Marist Mission

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<sup>10</sup> Address to members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, 09 January 2020

<sup>11</sup> Pope Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*, n°165

If you would like to share your thoughts, reflections or experiences with the Commission on this message, please write to [fms.cimm@fms.it](mailto:fms.cimm@fms.it)

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