



Thanks to the Holy Father

Br. Ernesto Sánchez Barba, Superior General

Audience of the pope Francis to the participants of the General Conference – 24 March 2022

Dear Holy Father, Pope Francis:

May I begin by thanking you from the bottom of my heart for the opportunity to meet with you today at this Audience. Thank you very much for your kind welcome.

The General Council is present here together with all the Provincials and District Leaders of our Marist Institute. During the General Conference we have taken time to dialogue and discern about our present and future, seeking to listen to the voice of the Spirit in order to respond to the reality of our times.

Saint Marcellin Champagnat, whose statue you no doubt frequently see outside St. Peter's Basilica, just in front of your house of Santa Marta, founded us as a Congregation of Religious Brothers, at the service of the education and evangelisation of children and young people, with special attention to those most in need.

Champagnat gave us the name of Mary, "Marists", to inspire us in our spiritual life, in our fraternal life and in our mission. Today we would like to offer you as a present, an image of "Our Good Mother", as Saint Marcellin called her, a replica of the statue he kept on his desk and which he often contemplated with love. It is an image



that shows the tenderness of Mary, lovingly embracing Jesus, and that shows the total trust of the child in his mother's arms. For us Marists, it is a continuing invitation to be a Marian face in the Church and in the world. Holy Father, we want to thank you for your witness of personal warmth to the Church and to the world, as well as for your prophetic voice encouraging us to be God's tender and merciful presence in the midst of a world in a state of continuous turbulence. Our educational mission among young people and those most in need is of fundamental value in these times. We carry it out in communion with you and with the whole Church, and very much in harmony with the principles of the Global Education Pact (I will give you a parchment with the signatures of all of us as a sign of our commitment) and of the synodal process that you are promoting. We are also aware of our fragility and vulnerability and of the need to act together, as Church, with other religious congregations and educational institutions. We are looking for ways to provide better accompaniment and formation for the many lay men and women committed to our Marist charism.

We come before you, in all simplicity, to ask your blessing for all the Brothers as well as the lay people involved in the life and mission of the Institute, and for all the young people in our educational and social works in 78 countries, and their families.

Thank you, Holy Father, for your personal witness, which I saw at firsthand when I participated in the Synod on Youth and the Meeting on the Protection of Minors. I have always been struck by your servant and prophetic leadership, like that of Jesus. We pray in communion with you. Thank you very much.

Ernesto

