

SALUDO AL INICIO DEL FÓRUM INTERNACIONAL DE LA VOCACIÓN MARISTA LAICAL

Opening Address of the International Forum on the Marist Lay Vocation

Bro. Ernesto Sánchez Barba, SG / Rome, November 4, 2022

Good Morning

I would first like to begin by thanking each of you for your presence, in this, the third stage of the International Forum on the Lay Marist vocation.

We have reached this third stage, by coming together, in person, after having made a journey of reflection and discernment at the local level, by Provinces and Districts.

Thank you to all the people who have participated in these earlier stages. Thank you for your organization and for the accompaniment that many of you have offered.

I would like to express my gratitude to those who have prepared this gathering, especially the Secretariate for Marist Laity, to the facilitators, brothers, lay men and women and to the various teams (translation, travel, organization, etc.) that offered their services throughout these days.

I would also, like to thank Bro. Luis Carlos, Vicar General, the brothers of the General Council who are present, here, throughout these days of the forum, and to Luiz da Rosa, who is representing the lay men and women serving on the General Administration.

"To journey as a global Marist family" is the invitation of the XXII General Chapter. This process of the international forum is a concrete way of carrying out this journey, as is this meeting. As are so many other meetings, networks, etc. that take place in the Institute.

I believe that throughout these days, we can live this sense of togetherness which in turn can connect us to *Gathered Around the Same Table*. The table at LaValla, where Champagnat and the first brothers lived and shared their experiences, is the same table that we share today, the many people who identify with the Marist charism, who feel and live the same inspiration that was received by St. Marcellin. A table where everyone is welcomed. This is the wonder of this gift, for both the Church and the world, that makes us feel a part of this large family and the Marist charism.

In the circular *Homes of Light*' (3rd chapter) expresses the following ideas:

- Each of us has our own vocational story, which is unique and different. Perhaps the Spirit used a small detail to attract our attention, and, over time, we began to discern and confirm the call, seeking to give our best response (p. 124)
- The document *Gathered Around the Same Table*, referring to the Marist lay vocation, states: "Within this ecclesial communion, the Spirit has made charisms spring up among the laity that were originally born in religious institutes. The gift of a shared

charism inaugurates a new chapter, rich in hope, on the journey of the Church. The charism of Saint Marcellin Champagnat is expressed in new forms of Marist life. One of them is that of the Marist laity". (MARIST BROTHERS, Gathered Around the Same Table.: The vocation of the lay Marists of Champagnat, Rome, 2009, n 7) (p. 125).

- Throughout the last few years, we have made an important journey in relation to the lay Marist vocation. We still have a long way to go. Today we have many lay men and women who are discerning about their way of living and committing themselves to the Marist charism. There are those who belong to the fraternities of the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family. Others are part of various groups or Associations. Many have been involved in the mission for a long time. There is a group that has made some kind of commitment within some Provinces. We know that, among all of them, there is a core group who live their Christian and Marist vocation from the heart (126).
- The XXII General Chapter insisted on the goals of communion, co-responsibility for Marist life and mission, with its structures and processes. In this call of walking together, in communion, Marists of Champagnat, are passionate and fully committed, which is an important and crucial aspect for the future of the Marist charism. (127)
- I have insisted that, brothers and laity alike, we could deeply believe that God continues to call individuals to the Marist vocation of brother today.
- And it is also for all of us, brothers and laity, the call to believe deeply that the Spirit is awakening the lay Marist vocation and that we should put more energy and resources to accompany it and strengthens its development.

I have sometimes commented that it is up to you, lay Marists, to discover the lay Marist face. We brothers can share our experience and give witness to our life as consecrated. It is up to you to apply the Marist charism in your lives, following the inspiration of the Spirit, the same inspiration that moved Marcellin's heart from the beginning.

- Perhaps in some parts of the world the emergence of this vocation is more readily welcomed. In other places, it would seem that there is still not enough clarity. So, we do little to encourage, welcome and make the gift of the laity grow within the Institute and the Church. (128)

I invite you, during these days, to have an attitude of attentive and open listening, to welcome and embrace diversity as a gift (and not as an obstacle). To face the challenge of linguistic and cultural diversity; there are always ways to communicate and understand each other, since we have the same gift of the Marist charism.

I invite you to listen in the depths of our hearts to the intuitions that the Spirit is offering us during these days, so that we can express the themes and guidelines that will allow us to

continue deepening and advancing in the area of the lay Marist vocation. Thus, in the stages that will be carried out in the next two years, we will be able to have conclusions and suggestions to be presented to the next General Chapter, in 2025.

At the General Conference, I reminded our Brother Provincials and District Superiors of Marcellin's ability to "look beyond". And I invited them to reflect upon the times in which we are living, with its challenges, and to also have the ability to "look beyond".

I also extend this invitation to you, as a group, today. Throughout these days, let us try, through our imagination, dialogues, reflection, and prayer, to encourage one another to "look beyond".

Pope Francis, in his homily of February 2, 2022, speaking of looking, said:

"To take a new look at ourselves, at others, through all the situations we live, even the most painful ones. It is not a naive gaze, no, but a sapiential one: the naive gaze flees from reality or pretends not to see the problems; it is, on the contrary, a gaze that knows how to "see within" and "see beyond"; that does not stop at appearances but knows how to enter also into the cracks of fragility and failures to discover in them the presence of God."

And during our gathering in March, he said to us:

Saint Marcellin Champagnat, he knew how to "look beyond", and he knew how to teach young people to "look beyond", to open themselves to God, to the horizons of love according to the Gospel. He was guided by the example of the Virgin Mary, the "Good Mother", as he called her.

If, in these days, we can "look beyond" we can also return to our Provinces and Districts with the ability to help others to have that look....

As I had mentioned at the General Conference, may our gaze be sensible, prophetic, global, inclusive, and hopeful.

I also remind you that this call to live and deepen the Marist charism supports our mission and commitment to children and young people, especially those most in need.

Let us live these days, like Mary at the Annunciation, with a heart that is free and open to newness. Let us be attentive to the inspirations that the Spirit will give us during these days. And let us live this meeting in an attitude of service to our Institute, as a global Marist family.

Thank you.