

# SCHOOL CATECHISM, EDUCATION IN THE FAITH AND SACRAMENTAL CARE



MESSAGE FROM THE MARIST  
INTERNATIONAL MISSION COMMISSION



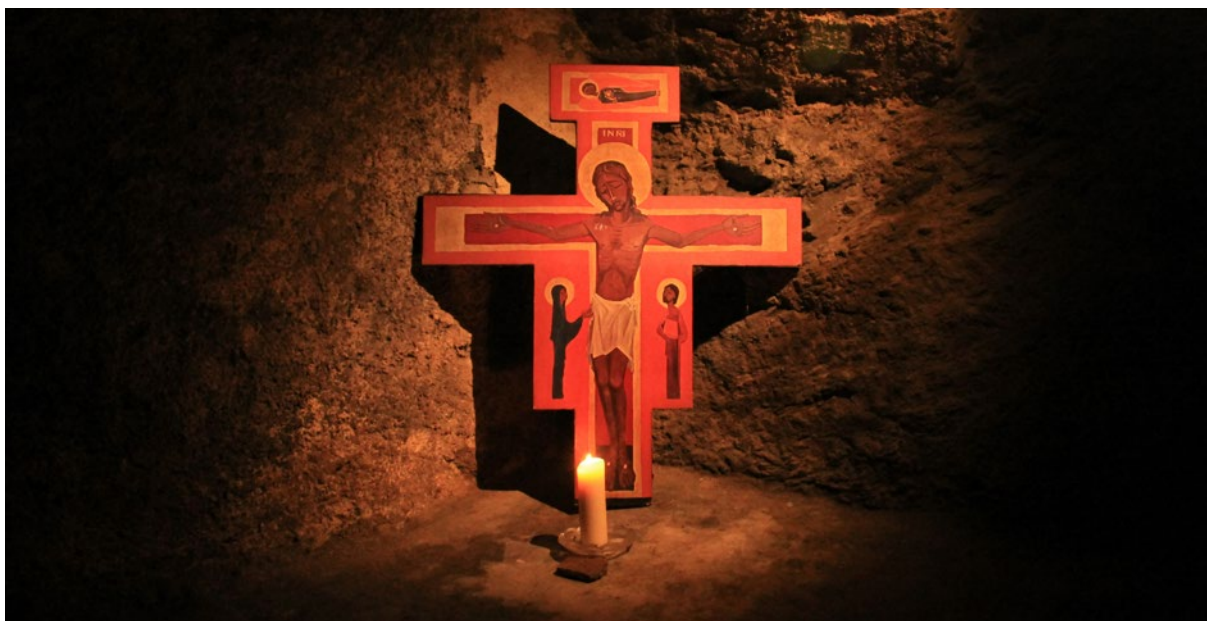
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## INVITATION

The content of this reflection is on catechesis in general and particularly during a student's primary/secondary school years. We recognise the different realities of the Institute and of the countries where we are: in some places, catechesis is part of the religion class or is offered in addition to the school timetable; in some dioceses, catechesis must take place in parishes; in others, catechesis can take place totally or partially in the school or educational centre; in some places it is part of the general curriculum for all students, and in others, it is only for those who wish it; in some places, catechesis is part of a majority Catholic population, and in others, it is a minority. With all these factors, we invite you to read and adapt the principles and reflections presented here to their own context and make the most of them.

## BEING MARIST: WHERE DO OUR FEET TREAD AND HOW DOES THIS AFFECT THE WAY WE WALK?

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* points out in its first pages, "Faith is man's response to God." The perception that the desire for God is an intrinsic feeling of human nature is sensible and profound. Because this feeling dwells in the human heart, it must be understood and experienced before grappling with an understanding of liturgy, morals and prayer. The pedagogy of the Catechism,





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right in its strategy, also affirms that the journey of faith is part of the process of human development and that this journey must be nurtured and accompanied. This will ensure that the intimate and vital relationship that unites people with God is not lost in one's own personal journey.

Perhaps for us, brothers and lay people, involved in the Marist educational mission, this is the great challenge of our daily life: to constitute educational communities that harmonise faith, culture and life<sup>1</sup> in the midst of a turbulent world with different emerging realities.

On this path, modernity seems to bring new challenges to which we cannot yet respond with clarity. Today, we live in a globalisation that shows signs of malaise; we are at the mercy of a more accelerated and hectic lifestyle; we suffer from the fluidity that exists in interpersonal relationships; we see the rise of divisions and conflicts; we revel in the advent of a digital culture, sometimes without fully understanding the price we will have to pay; we live in the hope of an interreligious and intercultural dialogue, knowing that it will need time and calm to consolidate.

In such a dynamic, challenging, beautiful (and, at the same time, risky) scenario, it is not unexpected that doubts and fears arise in the most diverse spheres. The concern that permeates these new times also reaches Catholic educational works. This makes it necessary to reflect on and strengthen the care of the evangelising experience we offer children and young people in all its dimensions and experiences.

The Church is clearly aware of this situation. The Vatican's Congregation for Catholic Education receives information from different Catholic educational works. Social changes are perceived to reinforce conflicts and calls arising from different interpretations of the traditional concept of Catholic identity in educational institutions<sup>2</sup>. As Marists, this is also a challenge that our educational works face and to which they must be prepared to respond, to ensure the mission of making Jesus Christ known and loved by our children, adolescents and young people.

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1 INTERPROVINCIAL COMMISSION ON MARIST EDUCATION. **Marist Educational Mission**: a project for our times. Translation Manoel Alves; Ricardo Tescarolo. São Paulo: SIMAR, 2000. p. 57.

2 VATICAN: **The identity of the Catholic school for a culture of dialogue**. Rome, 2022. Available at: < <https://bit.ly/vaticano-identidade>>. Accessed 30 October. 2022.

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## THE MARIST WAY OF BEING AND THE CATECHISM IN OUR EDUCATIONAL WORKS

What was burning in Champagnat's heart on the way back to La Valla after the meeting with the young Montagne? This question invites us to a profound reflection on Champagnat's meeting with the young Jean-Baptiste Montagne, which we commemorate every 28th October. The story is well known: called to confess a sick young man, he was astonished by the boy's ignorance of the principal mysteries of the faith, of the existence of God and of the Church. With patience and love, Champagnat took two hours to instruct him in the sacraments and to hear his confession. On returning to the young Montagne's house, after visiting another sick person, he discovered that he had died. At that moment he was glad he had arrived in time to be with the young man, but he feared that this was the reality for many children and young people throughout France.

Beginning this brief reflection with Champagnat's encounter with the young Montagne has a concrete intention: to recognize the passion of Saint Marcellin to give the students the opportunity to feel it too. Also, to recall how the Marist mission is based, from its origin, on actions that promote and are articulated with catechesis, education in the faith and sacramental care.

In *The Life of Saint Marcellin Joseph Benedict Champagnat*, Jean Baptiste Furet offers us a beautiful synthesis of this idea. According to Furet (1999), Saint Marcellin did not intend only to provide primary education when he



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founded the Institute. Nor did he intend “only” to teach the truths of the faith. Saint Marcellin’s vision of the future was based on a holistic education, an education that would discover and provide the means to reach the beautiful destiny that God has in store for us. As the great Brazilian sociologist Florestan Fernandes also argues, this would be the opportunity to provide the means for our children, adolescents and young people to “beautify their destinies”. Furet has a beautiful passage in his book that helps us to understand this intentionality:

*If it were only to teach the young the human sciences, there would be no need for Brothers; the other teachers would be sufficient. If we intended to give only religious instruction, we would limit ourselves to being simple catechists, gathering the children together for an hour each day to impart the Christian truths. Our aim, however, is broader. We want to educate the children, that is to say, to instruct them in their duties, to teach them to practice them, to inculcate in them the spirit and sentiments of Christianity, religious habits, the virtues of the Christian and the good citizen. To do this, it is necessary that we be educators, that we live among the children and that they remain with us for a long time<sup>3</sup>.*

Many scholars of Saint Marcellin point out how this evangelizing practice was present throughout his project of Christian education. Marcellin believed that the basis of a sound primary education would include both a strong composition of learning and scientific knowledge as well as a Marian inspired guide to catechism, religious instruction, and formation. The dynamics of these two movements (learning and catechesis), with their own structures and sensibilities, must work together to form an individual who seeks perfection according to Jesus Christ. Perhaps the actualization of this call is our great challenge. Today, we find it in the dualism between a results-oriented (technical) education and a “humanistic” education, as if technology were not in itself a human creation.

It is interesting to think also of how visionary St. Marcellin was in the area of education. By using the content and subjects of primary education as connecting “links” to understand the dimension of religious life, St. Marcellin was already taking the practical steps towards what today we call interdisciplinarity, a way of connecting content in a way that allows children and young people to develop a broader vision of reality. Drawing on the symbolism and knowledge of life that already existed in the children and young people who listened to

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3 FURET, Jean-Baptiste. *Life of Saint Marcellin Joseph Benedict Champagnat*. São Paulo: Marist Interprovincial Secretariat, 1999.



his catechesis was St. Marcellin's strategy for conveying God's love and making Jesus Christ known and loved by all.

Although each of us has our own experience of what it is to be a Marist educator in the tradition of Marcellin, as the text - *In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat A Vision for Marist Education Today* - points out, it is important to be attentive to this foundation that underpins the daily practices of the educational work and the Marist mission fronts around the world, always attentive to being expressions of creativity, dynamism and life for the Institute.

## THE PAINS OF SOCIETY AND THE CHALLENGES OF CATECHESIS

If the Marist mission is beautiful and necessary, it is also challenging and based on hard work and perseverance. It is important to reflect on the limitations that education itself has at its core, and how cultural, social, economic and technological transformations affect this process. If Christian education sows the seeds of a more purposeful life, the space of our children's or students' daily lives presents itself as fertile ground for its cultivation. If the seed finds poor, stony, or weedy soil, the good seed will have difficulty growing.



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And what is the everyday living space that students and teachers tend to find in contemporary times? Many scholars have addressed this question. On the one hand, we have a fluid and uncertain scenario<sup>4</sup> where the construction of individual and collective identity undergoes intense and challenging transformations. In this scenario, objects and values have a rapid obsolescence. The capacity for permanence and immutability over long periods is no longer considered an asset. What gave security and strength for the future is questioned and often disrupted. A nostalgic look at the past is becoming more and more common, as a form of retrospection<sup>5</sup>, a lack of hope for building a future.

This sense of fluidity is accompanied by a kind of time compression, which gives us an impression of acceleration<sup>6</sup>, in which our way of dealing with time has changed. Generational crises have become intra-generational, the transformation time of reality engulfs us and life becomes a professional career where anxiety, stress and lack of time are increasingly constant. This reality seems to constitute an interesting paradox: at the same time that technology allows us to gain time with virtuality and digital culture, we have less and less of that gained time and we live in a tired society<sup>7</sup>, which lives in a constant self-imposed burden. This increasingly digital and informative society<sup>8</sup> cannot assimilate the technological transformations at the same speed as they are “...made available



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4 BAUMAN, Zigmunt. *Modernidad líquida*. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Ed., 2001.

5 BAUMAN, Zigmunt. *Retropia*. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Ed., 2017.

6 ROSA, Hartmut. *Acceleration: The transformation of temporal structures in Modernity*. São Paulo: Unesp, 2019.

7 HAN, Byung Chul. *Society of Fatigue*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Vozes, 2015.

8 CASTELLS, Manuel. *La Sociedad Red*. Tomo I. São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 1999.

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to it; we struggle to assimilate the vast amount of information that is inserted into our lives.” We are delighted with the possibilities, but we cannot measure their cost. As Søren Kierkegaard said<sup>9</sup>, “Is there anything more fragrant, more scintillating and intoxicating than the possible”?

In the face of the existing challenges, we identify that there are many forces competing with the process of religious formation of our students, as there were also in St. Marcellin’s time, albeit in different formats. An interesting exercise would be to think about how to carry out catechesis also taking into account these questions: How can we involve families in the faith journey of their children? How can we use technology to open new spaces for reflection on religiosity and faith? How can we reflect on the faith and the life project of each one? How can we create an experience of welcome in a journey of religious formation that responds to our changing times?

Finally, there seems to be a consensus that new generations of children and young people are looking for an authentic relationship in their faith journey. Engaging this new generation in a journey with Jesus Christ requires building bridges and authentic relationships, always based on listening, empathy and trust. For this new generation, it is not enough to be an observer in their formation journey. If you wish, you could use the phrase that children and young people wish to become “artisans of their own formation”.

By paying attention to these dimensions, however complex, we approach Pope Francis’ call to consolidate the Global Education Pact, rebuilding relationships between institutions, families and individuals, putting people at the centre, listening to the new generations, promoting the feminine, giving responsibility to the family, opening up to welcome, renewing the economy and politics and caring for our common home.

## **RESPONSES THAT REINFORCE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN MARIST EDUCATIONAL WORKS**

There are many challenges and many realities in which the Marist educational mission unfolds. Even so, the results obtained in the more than 600 Marist educational works around the world in their objective of making Jesus Christ known and loved are evident.

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<sup>9</sup> KIERKEGAARD, Søren. *The Concept of Anguish*. Madrid: Alianza, 2012.



This result can be seen in the daily work of Brothers and lay people and in their concrete presence at the service of thousands of children and young people; in the involvement of thousands of catechists in the Christian education of children; in the organisation and collaboration of the Marist Provinces of the world in this area; in the foreseeing of the creation of a Marist Youth Ministry Network at a global level; and also in the various actions and works carried out on the mission fronts involving volunteering work, education in solidarity, children's rights, ecology, social works and the development of projects working on issues such as immigrants, refugees and indigenous peoples.

All these actions and projects represent an important concept present in our Marist educational works: that we grow in community. By working on the sense of belonging and community, we involve families in the journey of growth in faith of children and young people. This involvement takes place through participation in volunteer projects and service to others, daily prayer, support in building good family values, daily family life and effective participation and attendance in Church.

In this sense, it is important to highlight the relationship with the Church in these processes. Many of our presences and apostolates are carried out in collaboration with other congregations and with nearby parishes. Many Brothers and lay people collaborate with these ecclesial realities in their localities or in inter-congregational projects. As Pope Francis advocates, "synodality must lead us to live ecclesial communion more intensely, in which the diversity of charisms, vocations and ministries



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are harmoniously integrated, animated by the same baptism, which makes us sons in the Son<sup>10</sup>.”

As we listen to Brothers and lay people reflect on religious education, there is consensus that each Province needs a plan of action for the development and preparation of our teachers and catechists working in religious formation in our Marist educational works and places. This development increasingly incorporates new signs, new times and existing methodologies, ensuring the presence of the Marist mission in their daily activity.

In the same way, we can see that the curriculum of religious education has a recognised place in our educational works, with resources, time, contents and structures that strengthen the result of a systematic and well-established process of evangelisation. This process, frequently revised and methodologically updated, considers the different sociological and religious realities to compose the integral formation of our children and young people.

The attention given to the preparation and celebration of the sacraments is also evident, as are the commemorative experiences and the existence of rich spaces for the integration of spirituality, interiority, a sense of community and expressions of life. These spaces allow for a participatory process that enables students to express their needs and contribute to the creation of a formative itinerary that responds to their life project.

Considering the multicultural dimension of the Marist mission, present in some 80 countries, it is understandable that the existing diversity and capillarity tend to a greater decentralization of the forms and processes of catechesis. However, it is always possible to perceive the basic elements that underlie and characterise the “Marist Educational Mission”. This alignment and richness are possible mainly through the sharing and exchange of experiences and experiences carried out in the various spaces made available by the Marist Institute and by the existing Provinces/Administrative Units. This practice, lived in a common way among Marists, only reinforces the invitation made by the **XXII General Chapter** when it reflected that “all Marists of Champagnat belong to a single body or charismatic family, and that we are called to act as such”<sup>11</sup> .

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10 VATICAN: Pope: Synodality must lead us to live ecclesial communion intensely. Rome, 2022. Available at: < <https://bit.ly/vaticano-sinodalidade>>. Accessed 20 December. 2022.

11 INSTITUTE OF THE MARIST BROTHERS. *Message of the XXII General Chapter*. Colombia, 2017. Available at: < <https://bit.ly/3Vfbxw1> >. Accessed 25 October. 2022, p. 3.

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## LET’S WALK TOGETHER AS A GLOBAL FAMILY

Our diversity imposes on us a broader perception of the theme because it embraces and is concretised in diverse cultural experiences. “Let us walk together as a global charismatic family, a beacon of hope in this troubled world<sup>12</sup> “. With this invitation made by the XXII General Chapter, we live, in an increasingly familial way, the spirit of the Marist family. We live this spirit in the development of the different networks existing in the regions and Provinces; in the numerous interprovincial and interregional projects; in the constitution of the different spaces of internationality and interculturality shared by Brothers and lay people throughout the world; and in the journey of ecclesiology and synodality which exists between the other congregations and the Church.

It is in this “openness” to simplicity and availability that **Marist educational works** have been able to strengthen and expand their catechetical work and other existing actions in their educational mission. As Brother Benito Arbués said:

*Surely, we need a little patience and skill to overcome the mistakes we may make, for we all need to learn to make our “partnership in Mission” flourish.*



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12 INSTITUTE OF THE MARIST BROTHERS. *Message of the XXII General Chapter*. Colombia, 2017. Available at: < <https://bit.ly/3Vfbxw1> >. Accessed 25 October. 2022, p. 3.



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*Above all, we can help each other to grow in the educational spirit that we have inherited from Marcellin Champagnat<sup>13</sup>.*

Where do our feet tread and how does this affect our journey? We tread a terrain of great cultural diversity and we carry out our mission from this diversity. The challenge of Marist education, as an opportunity, is to take up this diversity, to seek a specific response to the local and, at the same time, to understand and welcome the global dimension. From this perspective, a catechesis is born as a mosaic of various specific faces, but which find unity in a semblance of Jesus Christ. This invites us to continue to build a house of light and to be passionately involved in the creation of a family life open to all, as Marists of Champagnat.

*Leonardo Humberto Soares<sup>14</sup>*

*for the International Marist Mission Commission*

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<sup>13</sup> INTERPROVINCIAL COMMISSION ON MARIST EDUCATION. **In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat A Vision for Marist Education Today**. Translation Manoel Alves; Ricardo Tescarolo. São Paulo: SIMAR, 2000. p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat A Vision for Marist Education Today

If you wish to share your ideas, reflections or experiences with the Commission as a result of these messages, you can write to the email [fms.cimm@fms.it](mailto:fms.cimm@fms.it)

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