



**CHAMPAGNAT, a MAN with
ATTENTIVE EARS
and a DARING HEART**

Message of Br. Ernesto Sanchez Barba, Superior General
Feast of St. Marcellin Champagnat
6th June 2023

Dear Marists of Champagnat,

This June 6th we are happy to celebrate once again the feast of Saint Marcellin Champagnat. As always, it is an important occasion to give thanks for the life and mission of our Founder and for the gift of the Marist charism which has been entrusted to us. This is a gift of the Spirit to the Church and to the world, something life-giving which we are being called - in our turn - to keep alive and share. Our Institute has an amazing history, and we are part of it. Our story began with a young priest, just 27 years old, who was able to read the signs of the times, discern the promptings of the Spirit, and forge ahead with a creative response. In a post-revolutionary context, Marcellin became aware of the needs of the young people of La Valla and its surroundings and confirmed his intuition of founding an Institute dedicated to the education and evangelisation of young people, particularly the most vulnerable and the most in need, which he had sensed during his seminary days.

Marcellin, a leader who cared for life and generated new Marist life.

History reminds us that, in the early days of the Institute at La Valla, Marcellin's time was taken up with the running of the brothers' house where he spent his free time and any other moments he could spare from his parish duties. At some point, he recognised that there was just not enough time to provide this fledgling community of religious educators with the accompaniment it needed. So, moved by the great affection he felt for his brothers and by the need to be more present among them as a guide, he decided to live with them. When he told the parish priest about his plans, the pastor spared no effort to dissuade him... Yet, Marcellin knew that becoming one with his "little brothers" and being the first to practice what he was telling them would be the best way to get them to love their vocation. Therefore, with the permission of the bishop, he moved out of the presbytery and took up residence with the brothers. (Cf Life, pp. 76-77. This initial action of our Founder has left its mark on us. We have inherited a style of leadership from Marcellin which



focused on what God was telling him in his heart, as well as on the people in his care. He did not place his needs before this. He was a true 'servant leader,' devoted to caring for life and generating new life, thus the motto we had chosen for this Year of Marist Vocations which began on 20 May 2022. We can learn from the experience of our Founder who was enthusiastic and determined in how he encouraged, accompanied, and formed those who felt God's call to live a Marist vocation. In times of crisis, and there were many, he was able to press onwards, showing his total trust in God and in Mary, our Good Mother. Let us not forget that a little over two hundred years ago, between 1819 and 1822, there was a crisis in the lack of new vocations, but then a revival. Marcellin continued to heed the promptings of the Spirit in his heart, and even when problems, obstacles, and resistances came his way, he was able to keep moving forward with great faith and trust, thanks to his "attentive ears and daring heart". He always recognized that this Institute was not his own work, but the work of God and Mary. These historical memories are a gift and inspiration for us today. We are living through challenging times, in both the Institute and the Church, as well as in the world, and we are invited to give our utmost attention to discern the promptings of the Spirit and to press onwards, as Marcellin did. This means continuing to deepen our inner lives and spirituality, both personally and as a group. The Constitutions remind us that, "in meditation we foster interior silence that allows us to listen to God in our innermost being." (Const. 48). As a leader, Marcellin cared for the lives of both the brothers and the children and

young people in their ministries. He provided for the care of the communities and schools that were being founded. He paid special attention to the sick, as well as to any vulnerable young person he encountered. His tireless dedication was a source of enthusiasm and commitment in those he met. Through his witness and action, he was able to generate new life.

The Year of Marist Vocations

Throughout this Year of Marist Vocations, various activities have been organised in the Provinces and Districts to increase care for Marist life and to generate new Marist life. A number of ongoing formation programmes have been held for Brothers of all ages. The in-person stage of the International Forum on Lay Marist Vocations was held in Rome this past November, with about one hundred

Brothers and Lay Marists attending. New sorts of connections and networks are appearing, aimed at animating Marist life and mission. We have reflected on how to walk with the youth of today and, as an expression of a culture of vocations, we are looking for ways to support each young person in his or

her vocational search, paying particular attention to those who feel a Marist vocation. All this with the aim of "rediscovering the original passion that inspired us to be Marist" which leads us to affirm, "There is great value in being a Marist today!" I thank the Brothers Today and Laity Secretariats for their leadership of this vocational year, as well as all the groups and individuals in Provinces and Districts who have been involved in vocation ministry. Let us continue to work together, sharing ideas and activities, so that we



can continue to be a support to each other. As we conclude this Year of Marist Vocations, I invite you to keep its momentum going, to continue to care for life enthusiastically and energetically and to look for ways to generate new Marist life. The best way to generate new life is to care for our own vocation and that of others, otherwise it will be unlikely that anything will result from our efforts.

Living our mission in life with passion and creativity

We believe that the gift of the Marist charism is still fresh and relevant in our times, and that we are being called to adapt it to today's world. Let us continue to be open to the promptings of the Spirit, in our present contexts, and through the signs of the times in which we live. Let us not be afraid to welcome what is new and to change and transform what is necessary, both in the way we live our vocation and in the way we carry out our mission.

Young people expect us to be living, transparent witnesses of Jesus who are close to them. We are being called to continue our mission among young people with passion and creativity, trying to make each of our educational and social centres a home of light that cares for life and generates new life. We are called to pursue this dream and this community of Champagnat with enthusiasm and generosity, at the service of those most in need, the young we find today who are suffering because of war, the Covid pandemic, the loss of meaning in life, no opportunities for education, and alienation among others.

In Mary's hands

Let us entrust the life and mission of our Institute to Mary, Our Good Mother. She continues to be our inspiration: "True to



the name that we bear, let Mary shape and inspire your spirituality" (Rule of Life, 28). She was able to discover God's presence within herself and to reflect it outwards in her daily life, feeling strengthened especially in moments of uncertainty and pain. As Marists of Champagnat, Mary encourages us, inspires us, and makes us feel her presence close to us. As Saint Marcellin so often said to us, let us remember that "this is her work."

Today, let us feel Saint Marcellin close to us, living on in each of us, inspiring us with his attentive listening and daring heart. Happy Feast of Saint Marcellin!

Ernesto

