



Sharing

THE LAY
MARIST
VOCAATION

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PHASE 4. INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON THE LAY MARIST VOCAATION

Secretariat of Laity

The meeting last November 2022 at the Monte Cucco Centre in Rome marked the end of stage 3 of the **International Forum on the Lay Marist Vocation**.

From that moment on, we began to design **stage 4** of the process, which extends from the beginning of 2023 until we reach the fifth and final stage, with the holding of the virtual Forum in November 2024. The Extended Secretariat of the Laity of the Institute will be leading the discussions and coordinating the proposals to be presented to the General Council and, if necessary, to the General Chapter of 2025.

For this stage 4, the General Council appointed **25 delegates** from the Administrative Units, who also participated in the November 2022 meeting.

Meeting of the delegates

After a first virtual connection on 1 June, we met at the General House **in Rome from 7 to 12 July**, with some brothers from the General Council in attendance.

This face-to-face meeting was designed around the following steps: reconnecting, imagining, planning, agreeing and projecting. We organised ourselves into



a single team working on two areas of reflection: 1) the Lay Vocation and 2) Juridical Structures. These areas are divided into **five working groups**: 1) Lay Identity, 2) Formation pathways and accompaniment, 3) Bonding, 4) Civil structures and 5) Canonical structures.

The work was inspired by the Forum Message “*Ruah: Breaths of the Spirit for Marist Laypeople*”; the reflections and contributions contained in number 41 of the magazine *Message : Marists of Champagnat*, dedicated specifically to the lay Marist vocation; and various reference documents of the Institute: “*Gathered around the same table*”, “*Being a Lay Marist*”, “*Life Project of the Champagnat Movement*”, “*Constitutions and Statutes of the Marist Brothers*” and the “*Rule of Life*”.

Each area and work group has had a **guide** offering **orientations and steps** for the coming months, with different desired **outcomes** at the end of the journey in each of the themes of reflection.

During this week of work we have been guided by what we call an “**Emmaus methodology**”. Each dialogue and meeting focused on a process of deep listening (to others and to the Other), discernment and celebration. In the same perspective, we were inspired by the proposal of “**conversations in the**



Spirit” adopted as a methodology in the Synod “For a Synodal Church: communion, participation, mission”, [Synod 2021 - 2024](#).

Ruah: harmony, light and life

The work we had to do involved a great deal of effort and, above all, allowing ourselves to be guided by the Spirit. Symbolic language helped us on our way. It inspired us to realise that, at the beginning of the Creation story, everything was “**chaos, darkness and disorder**” (a feeling we had when we started working on such a complex project). But we knew that if we really gave space for the “**Ruah**”, the “**breath of God**”, to take the lead, all our labours would result in “**harmony, light and life**”. May this be the case on the road ahead.

We also took inspiration from the “**metaphor of the polyhedron**”, employed by Pope Francis in [Evangelii Gaudium](#) : in the chapter dealing with



The International Forum is a four-year journey (2021-2024) of reflection and shared discernment among laypeople, laywomen and brothers. The themes of the Forum are pertinent current and future issues related to the vitality of the charism and our journey of communion as a Global Charismatic Family: Lay Marist identity, Formation and accompaniment, Bonding to the Marist charism, Civil structures and Canonical structures.

“the common good and social peace” (# 217-237). We were invited to live by the four principles enunciated by the Pope: *‘time is greater than space, ‘unity prevails over conflict, ‘the realities are more important than ideas, ‘the whole is greater than the part’*. When writing of this last principle, Francis tells us, *“The whole is greater than the part, but it is also greater than the sum of its parts. There is no need, then, to be overly obsessed with limited and particular questions. We constantly have to broaden our horizons and see the greater good which will benefit us all...”* (#235) *“Here our model is not the sphere, which is no greater than its parts, where every point is equidistant from the centre, and there are no differences between them. Instead, it is the polyhedron, which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness...”* (#236) This vision is a clear invitation to build a project with a global and international perspective, which is capable, at

the same time, of embracing all the diversity of our Marist reality.

Vision of the future

The methodology of the meeting was varied, with

The representatives from different realities of the Institute were divided into working groups as follows:

- **Lay Marist identity:** Ana Saborio (América Central), Br. Damiano Forlani, Mediterránea), Elma Rafil (East Asia), Josmari Pauzer (Brasil Centro-Sul), Marcos Broc (Brasil Sul-Amazônia).
- **Formation and accompaniment:** Alida Bodomanitra (Madagascar), Ana Gómez (Mediterránea), Br. Jaime Comabella (Ibérica), Nathan Ahearne (Star of the Sea) and Pedro Martí (EUA).
- **Bonding to the Marist charism:** Ana Sarrate (Ibérica), Christine Dispa-Lenertz (West Central Europe), Br. Isidro Azpeleta (Santa María de los Andes), Raúl Amaya (Santa María de los Andes) and Rita Silva (Compostela).
- **Civil structures:** Danai Anagnostopoulou (L’Hermitage), Br. Lisardo García (Compostela), Mark O’Farrell (Star of the Sea) and Nohemy Pinto (América Central).
- **Canonical structures:** Claudia Aida Rojas Carvajal (Norandina), Br. John Bwanali (África Austral), Manu Gómez (Mediterránea), Pep Buetas (L’Hermitage) and Sara Sánchez (Santa María de los Andes).



personal time, in pairs, by tables, in full assembly, by areas of reflection or by working groups. In each moment of the process, we maintained a sense of community, the cross-cutting nature of our reflections and the connection between the topics addressed.

If we were to make a simple summary of our meeting, we could say that:

- Each group worked on a vision of the future, looking ahead 15 years or so. They considered the steps to be taken to achieve this vision, as well as the strategies and challenges to be faced in relation to the focus of their work. We have also come up with an index of themes and sub-themes that will lead to a final cohesive proposal. To this end, we have set ourselves a work agenda over the coming months, with virtual connections to continue making progress.
- We agreed, as an assembly, on some important ideas to support the thinking of each group and/or area. We share them here in reverse order to the objectives and contents of the overall Forum process, to help us better understand how the proposals are taking shape:
- In relation to the theme of “**juridical structures (civil and canonical)**”, some options for further discussion towards future proposals have been confirmed: 1) That such structures be for the care and generation of Marist life and vocations with a lay face; 2) That they be international in character, while having their distinctive expression at lo-



cal, provincial, regional, national levels...; 3) That they guarantee both the autonomy of the Marist vocational laity and their communion with the Institute; 4) That they entail a double recognition, canonical and civil, the latter allowing for diversity and different types of community relations.

- In relation to the theme of “**bonding to the charism**”, we have decided to explore how to welcome and express some form of public sign (promises, commitments...) common to the whole Institute, as well as the redefinition of some terms to help our communion in this area and give a sharper expression of the experience.
- In relation to the theme of “**formation and accompaniment**”, we decided to continue working on global proposals that go from invitation and attraction to discernment and making a choice, as well as offering formation programmes and personal accompaniment for those joining.
- In relation to the theme of “**lay Marist identity and vocation**”, we decided to focus on the need to clarify who are *vocational* lay Marists, men and women, as well as the role and relationship of other people with the Marist charism.



ESCANEA EL QR PARA ACCEDER A LA PAGINA DEL FÓRUM INTERNACIONAL SOBRE LA VOCACIÓN MARISTA LAICAL

A challenging experience

Sara Sánchez - Santa María de los Andes

In this Fourth Phase of the Forum, I am part of the group working on the theme of Structures, Canonical, and Civil, for the lay Marist vocation. The theme itself is a challenge: it is something new that is being born in the Institute, a gift that the Spirit gives us in these times; like everything new, it awakens questions, uncertainties, and fears...

It is up to us to help this new thing that the Spirit is awakening in the Marist world to grow, and to do so, to dream and look boldly to the future (the image of Marcelin looking at the valley beside the river Gier and glimpsing the house he had not seen before comes to me).

We shared a time of reflection and work in a fraternal and sincere dialogue climate, in which we all expressed ourselves freely. We listened carefully to the enlightening words of Brothers Josep Soteras and Luis Carlos regarding the concrete alternatives to the canonical and civil structures; as in the “listening” of silences. Like Mary, we have been trained to “keep in our hearts” that which we do not understand, so that it may rest and decant there, to review it in silence and prayer.



feel that the Ruah has always accompanied us; we have invoked its presence in moments of “chaos”, where everything was unclear and very confusing; the Ruah has given us light and has brought order amid the “chaos”.

I believe that this gift that the Spirit gives us invites us to live processes of community discernment that give birth to decisions that help us to maintain and safeguard communion with the Institute.

Peace and joy are fruits of the Spirit’s presence; peace and joy we have experienced, and you could see

it on our faces as we reached agreements, as we envisioned the path to follow in the coming months to carry out the mission entrusted to us.

We are grateful to all the members of the group for the shared life, for the sincere search for what God is asking of us, and for the commitment to continue with the work entrusted to us.



The continued vibrancy of St. Marcellin's charism

Pedro Martí – United States

As Marists of Champagnat, Brothers and laypeople, gathered together in Rome to continue developing the future of the Institute during phase four on the Forum for the Lay Marist Vocation. We were broken into working groups to further develop the topics of Marist identity, formation, commitment, and structures (both canonical and civil). It was exciting to get to contribute to this work as it is critical to the future of the Institute and for the continued vibrancy of St. Marcellin's charism. We worked towards a vision of co-responsibility between Brothers and the laity and envisioned a future where lay people make up a new branch within the Institute that runs parallel to the Brothers and operates with autonomy. All of us who were doing this work felt great pride and satisfaction, but also felt a sense of urgency and responsibility.

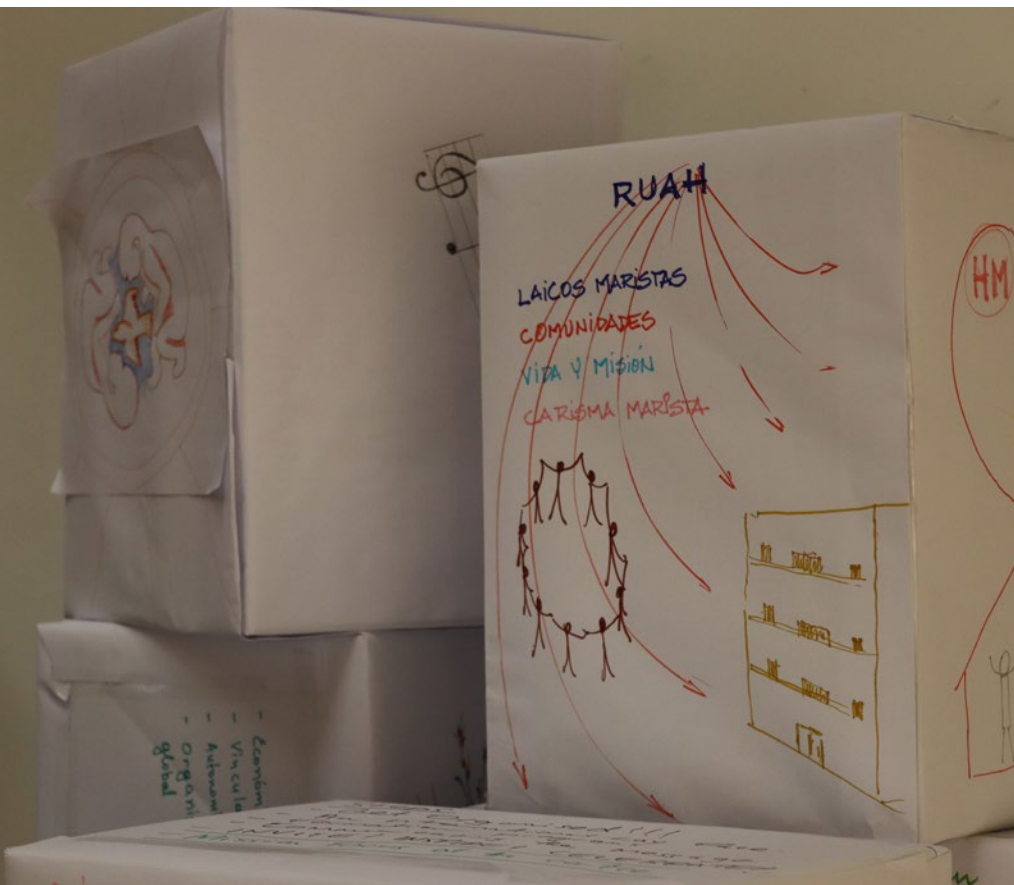
I worked on the team that was fleshing out the vision for Marist formation programs. It is important that any formation program is inviting and inclu-



sive, but also has the depth and breadth to work towards a commitment to the charism. Journeying with those who are being formed with strong spiritual accompaniment is a pillar in our vision of a complete formation process. Language and context is also important so that no matter where in the Marist world someone may be located, we are all working towards the same objective. There is a

lot of work to be done in unifying our vocabulary across the diverse spectrum of Marists around the world. We left our time in Rome with a detailed work schedule in preparation for the Virtual Forum in the fall of 2024 to present all our work before the General Counsel.

With so many passionate people working towards this future, I believe we will take the Institute to new horizons and carry out the mission in new and exciting ways. I look forward to the work ahead and am confident that, together, our work will bear great fruit.



A Marist accolade

I was delighted to receive and accept the invitation to return to Rome for this next stage of the International Forum on the Vocation of Lay Marists. I arrived in Rome eager to continue the work we began last year and to meet up once more with the delegates coming from all over the world. It was such a pleasure to be together again.

We 25 delegates, lay and brothers, divided ourselves into groups of 5 to work further on the results of our November meeting.

We reflected on the vocation of lay Marists for our time, even daring to imagine ourselves 5, 10 and 15 years into the future. In this, we dared to revisit the past as a springboard for the future. We dreamt of our identity as lay Marists, envisioning formation pathways to ensure that our charism retains its rightful place in our days.

We envisaged a form of bonding of laypeople to the charism and spirituality of Marcellin Champagnat. We want this dream to become a way of living out the call we have received from God, urging us to take up a mission of being and bearing Good News as Champagnat did.

Of course, to carry out this mission successfully, we need civil and canonical structures for this dream to become a reality in the world for the sake of today's children and young people. Such structures will allow lay Marists who commit themselves to the legacy of Marcellin to feel and be recognised by the Marist Institute and the Church.

All this in co-responsibility with the brothers in one global Marist family. Nevertheless, there are a good number of challenges to face. One such is language, of which there are 4 in the Institute. We will

Christine Dispa - Belgium, Province of West-Central Europe



have to find a lexicon that best expresses this dream of Marist life for tomorrow. This task is more daunting than it might seem, as we have already spent many hours trying to find the right words.

But the adventure is exciting and the delegates are all extremely well-motivated, ready to give all their love during this 4th stage. We have every confidence in the presence of the Holy Spirit guiding us in our quest. We call on our Good Mother to be at our side and on all of you to remember us in your prayers.

I warmly thank all the members of the team, brothers and laypeople, for what we have achieved together so far.

For the moment, I send you my warmest regards. May God's mission continue through us ...



The crystallizing moments

Elma B. Rafil – Province East Asia, Philippines



Embarking on the beginning of the journey of the 4th stage of the International Forum on the Lay Marist Vocation taking part in the meeting in July in the General House was a profound experience for me.

I gained further insights and experiences that are very enriching to me as lay Marist.

The unfolding of ideas and perspectives about lay Marist life was inspired and guided by the output of the 3rd Phase of the International Forum, which are strong and rich narratives about the identity, vocation, spirituality, communion, and mission of lay Marists, particularly in today's world. The existing documents about lay Marist vocation like *Gathered Around the Same Table* and *Being Lay Marist*, to name a few, were inspirational. These documents became some of the sources for reflections and discussions. The processes of our sessions brought about enhanced consciousness and insights, new visions and perspectives, deeper understanding, and

challenging objectives. These are the foundations of our work.

Navigating this process of deepening the understanding of Marist identity and Marist vocation and visioning the future entailed stepping into some degrees of uncertainty and taking risks. The key to seeing the light at the end of the tunnel was trusting the process and the work to be done. Above all, the process itself was enhancing in nature, that is, trusting the team and the breath of the Spirit.

There was a need to be sensitive to the signs and movements that seemed to guide us towards the path. These signs and movements exposed affirmations of being on the right track and provided inspiration and further aspirations for our envisioned future for the lay Marists.

The journey was not just work to be accomplished. Rather, it gave me spaces for self-reflection that helped me further clarify and/or uncover my pas-

sion, values, and purpose that truly resonate with my being as a lay Marist.

We have re-viewed our past journeys toward being the lay Marists of today. All of the work done on the Marist identity and vocation is being crystallized into what we want to be in the future. We owe so much to those who have worked hard to make the vocation of lay Marist recognized and appreciated, and I would like to personally say that the work in this 4th stage of the Forum is a concrete recognition and appreciation of their hard work.

The days of work could have been heavy without the warmth of family spirit exuded by my companions

in the journey, lay and Brothers, my Marist family. We have shared dreams and hopes and trust each other that our work will bring bountiful fruition to advance lay Marist life.

It remains a way to go for the lay Marist toward the envisioned future. But I am certain that the way we are treading has been made ready for those who are on the road. With Mary and St. Marcellin and an attitude of openness to the breath of the Spirit, we will be crystals soon!

PRAYER FOR THE INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON THE LAY MARIST VOCATION

God our Father-Mother,

You wanted St. Marcellin's life project
to be distinctive in expressing brotherhood and
simplicity,
embracing a Marian and apostolic spirituality,
and having a deep love for young people.

Today, there are many of us Marists of Champagnat
who follow in his footsteps with audacity and hope,
who day by day enrich our distinctive vocations
as followers of Christ,
and who dream of a Marist future of being united
in the service of the Church and the world.

We know that in Your mercy
You make all things new (Rev 21:5)
and that we are all invited
to share at Your table as brothers and sisters.

We turn to You and entrust to You

the International Forum on the Lay Marist Vocation.

We ask especially for Your blessing for the Marists
who participate in this journey of dialogue and
discernment.

Help us in welcoming, nurturing, living and sharing
our vocation.

Send us Your Spirit so that we may know how
to read the signs of the times,
to discover the ways in which you want to lead us,
to value our diversity, recognizing that
each of us is a dwelling place of the Spirit of Your Son
Jesus,

to respond faithfully to Your calls
and to grow strong as Global Charismatic Family.

Amen.

Mary, Our Good Mother, pray for us.

St. Joseph, our protector and guide, pray for us.

Words of Brother Luis Carlos Gutiérrez, Vicar General, during the missioning mass



On behalf of Brother Ernesto Sanchez and the General Council, I reiterate our gratitude for all the effort and dedication offered during these days and for all the passion you put into your different services in the Provinces and local communities. Your presence here has been an oxygen of life and an encouragement of a present and future full of possibilities, in fidelity to the Spirit, to contemporary history, to an emerging Church and to a diverse and visionary Marist world. This gratitude is particularly important for the Secretariat of the Laity, the Extended Secretariat and its link Brother João Carlos, who were involved in the organization of these days. I also take this opportunity to thank the significant presence of Brothers Ben and Josep Maria who have accompanied us during this time.

We have lived these days **a special time** of meeting and reflection, of fraternity and prayer. It has also been a time of poetry and creativity for what will be the Marist lay house, for what will be the new Hermitage of an Institute that grows and advances in history with hope, communion, daring and commitment.

At the end of these days, **we have confirmed and clarified** a project that is born from a wide echo throughout the Institute, gathering the life and vi-

ality of the multiple experiences of the Marist laity.

We have felt the Spirit. Perhaps in small, humble proportion, but we have felt the emotion of the Spirit of God, as He creates and recreates things, in His generous and constant cycle of creation and life. During these days we have walked between ideas and possibility, life and reality, dreams and concrete matters.

Perhaps there are three words that can resonate in us at this Mass of sending forth, and they could also be three whispers of the Spirit for this new shared journey:

- **Communion.** In every conversation, we have always tried, almost like a mantra, to find the space for everyone to feel good in this new house that we are building. Communion to make a common path. Communion to integrate the diverse experiences of Marist life. Communion to insist always on communion as the way to reach our dreams and make our decisions concrete.
- **Daring.** Daring, to venture on a new path for all of us. Daring to overcome uncertainties, insecurities, pitfalls, fears and doubts. Daring to lay the foundations of a more consolidated charismatic family. Daring to discern and to do it in depth. Daring to concretize dreams into real possibilities. Daring to attend to the Spirit in his movements in the midst of our brothers and sisters. Daring to dream and to serve.
- **Commitment.** Commitment to make Jesus Christ the center of our lives. Commitment to decenter ourselves from ourselves and place at the center the God of life, the agent of all transformation. Commitment to care for others, particularly in their vocational journey. Commitment to continue searching for ways, forms and processes that build bridges. Commitment to each lay Marist vocation to find a nurturing space, a space of care so that it may grow and germinate.

We are grateful for what we have lived and for us, the words of the Rule of Life have a special meaning, which gently indicate to us:

*[95] God always faithful,
we thank you in a special way for the charisma we
have received through Marcellin Champagnat.*

*With him, you have enriched the life of the
Church. and so many Marists today.*

*Thank you for the growing number of lay Marists,
women and men called by the Holy Spirit
to live their Christian vocation and share the same
mission, in communion with the brothers.*

*Thank you, Holy Spirit, ...
because you never cease to amaze us opening new
horizons in the Institute.*

Today, brothers and sisters, **we are sent** back to our Provinces and places of life and mission to be Marists in Communion, Daring and Commitment. May the good God and the good Mother help us to communicate, reflect and advance in all the aspects that we have glimpsed in these days. May we be a beacon of hope in the Marist lay journey. May we transmit the strength and illusion that the Spirit has made us

feel, when He moved us, as in Genesis, from chaos to creation, from confusion to realization, from disorder to the experience of generating life, generating possibility, agreeing on ideas, visualizing forms and structures, and communicating passion.

We also accept the challenge of an unfinished road, of dialogue that will follow, of proposals that need to be matured.

I close with an excerpt from Mario Benedetti's poem: **No te rindas**

*Don't give up, that's what life is all about, Continue the journey,
Pursue your dreams, Unlock the time, Run the debris,
And uncover the sky.*

*Open the doors, Remove the locks,
Abandon the walls that protected you, To live life
and accept the challenge, Recover laughter,
To rehearse a song,
Let your guard down and stretch out your hands
Spread your wings
And try again,
Celebrate life and retake the skies.*

With Mary of Nazareth, mother of new paths and unexplored life experiences, we place our trust and proclaim:

*Maria, woman of action,
make our hands and feet
move 'in haste' toward
others, as you did, to
bring to them the charity
and love of your Son
Jesus
and bring the light of
the Gospel to the world.*

Amen.

I wish you all a happy return and a blessed time. God bless you.



SOCIAL NETWORK MARIST LAYTY

We invite you to share your experience as a Marist lay person on social media by posting texts, photos and videos using the hashtag #MaristLayVocation.

It will help us to develop an internet identity for Marist life worldwide.

At the same time, the Secretariat of Laity has created a public group in FaceBook: "[Laicos Maristas / Marist Laity - Global group](#)". It is a place to build an online community of Marist Laypeople and to share our emotions and experiences. You are invited to subscribe to the group and to start posting and gathering online with other members of our global family.

WHO IS A LAY A MARIST?

- The lay Marist vocation is a gift that the Spirit has poured out on many people who have found their special way of following Jesus in living the Marist charism.
- The reference text, *Gathered Around The Same Table*, puts it this way: "Lay Marists are those people who, after a personal journey of discernment, have decided to live their Christian spirituality and mission in the manner of Mary, following the insight of Marcellin Champagnat." (GATST 11)
- As is true for all other vocations in the Church: "The initiative for our vocation comes from God. God loves us and wants our fulfillment, which is why God invites each one to follow a unique path (...) It is a personal call to a specific way of being disciples of Jesus." (GATST 13)
- You do not become a lay Marist by just working in a Marist ministry, or by length of service, or by being a friend of the brothers. You become a lay Marist because you live a profound experience of faith and engage in a process of vocational growth leading to a personal decision to live the Marist charism consciously, fully and co-responsibly.

#LayMaristVocation

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