



Sharing

THE LAY
MARIST
VOCATION

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THE MISSION - LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

The journey of life is often unpredictable. We do not really know what tomorrow brings even if we have calendar events scheduled. Life is full of moments that challenge us, our beliefs, and ways of thinking and living. Often, these moments confuse or disappoint us because life is not responding the way we would like it. Life does not always follow a straight line. There are twists and bends in the road, and ultimately, we must find a path to travel, a mission to live.

“The lay life originates, as does all Christian vocation, from the response to our encounter with God, who loves us infinitely. It is the fruit of our baptism which directs all of us to that unique Christian mission: to give witness of the Kingdom of God in this world”

(Gathered Around the Same Table, 5)

The spiritual life and our encounter with God often

helps ground us on this journey, especially through these moments of challenge. The signposts on the journey is the Holy Spirit accompanying us, but we still need the ‘eyes to see and ears to hear’ God’s daily presence in our life, much like taking time to appreciate the beauty of a morning sunrise or listening to your child or partner talk about their day. A life in the spirit is a choice to live and be in the world. It is a journey that constantly asks: How do I seek God? What is my place in the universe, in God’s plan for me? How can I share this and respond to the invitation God is placing before me?

In this Sharing I want to briefly reflect on the theme of mission as our personal and communal response and the work of Lay Marists in the world focusing on the current project of the International Lay Marist Vocation Forum. What is this work revealing and responding to?



Initially I want to put before you two questions to contemplate:

- *How does God invite you daily into the 'fullness of life'?*
- *As a Marist how do you express and live the mission of God in your ministry and place?*



It is timely to reflect upon our work and connection of our Christian story from Jesus, to Marcellin and the broader International Marist mission to our church and world today. The past fifty years following Vatican II has seen sweeping shifts in the church increasing roles for many lay people to contribute in new ways to God's mission, many through their work in schools and social ministries, and all through their vocational witness and commitment to live this in local parish and church communities. Former Superior-General Br Charles Howard and his Council recognised this new movement early for the many Lay Marists attracted to the charism of Champagnat from the mid 1980s saying in a letter addressed to all Lay Marists:

"This attraction has led some of you to want to commit yourselves to developing the same kind of spirituality and sense of mission in your own daily lives in a regular and organised way."

The current International Lay Forum has been reflecting on this humble statement and the many lay assemblies and documents since through a process

to further clarify and develop the role of this large group broadly known as Lay Marists. It's good to reflect on and connect this fairly recent Lay Marist movement to the two-thousand-year-old story that takes us from Galilee and Judaea to nineteenth century France and the foothills of Lavalla, in the aftermath of the French Revolution as young Marcellin begins his mission. Marcellin was responding to a call to have teaching brothers, the Little Brothers of Mary and we see in this moment clearly two motivating elements in his life:

- His **vocation** to share the love of Jesus with the young;
- The **public commitment** and promise made before God at Fourviere to honour Mary.

The Marist Mission

The inspiration and story of "*We must have brothers*" is one we know well as Marists. Marcellin's vocation and promise to found a teaching order of brothers was to be his life's work and would require all his

energy and focus to bring it to reality. He began the structure in 1817 but would not live to see the canonical recognition from the Vatican. The journey he took was not an easy one and it took constant faith and trust in Jesus and Mary to continue building the kingdom of God through each school that opened and brother he accepted to work in the mission. Marcellin's humanity, resilience and personality dealing with the many challenges of life is a big part of the inspiration that continues to inspire our work, our shared mission in the world today in 80 countries.

Put simply, Marcellin's mission was to help young people find God. It was more than a 'good education' in subjects and more about forming young people to be good people for their time and place. Even close to death in 1840 Marcellin reminded his brothers of this. To be good citizens and good Christians meant learning how to love God and be role models of the gospel like Jesus' first disciples, "*see how they love one another.*" And at the heart of being a good Christian is our personal experience of

being loved by God and sharing this love, the good news with others. It continues as our mission, God's mission today.

Br. Séan Sammon in his 2003 circular, *A Revolution of the Heart* invited his brothers to continue this revolution of mission which is at the heart of all we do. I believe the International Forum is part of this renewal and it is also an invitation to all Lay Marists twenty years later to renew their Marist vocational call and commitment to continue growing and building the lay spiritual family as a response to the times we live in and this requires updating Marcellin's language for Marists today; "*We must have committed lay Marists for the mission.*"

The words from Sean could easily be heard as Saint Marcellin's voice speaking to us today echoing the clarion call of the XXII General Chapter in Colombia for the vitality and co-responsibility for mission that all Marists share in:

So I invite you to join me...

*I can promise little in return except hard work, a steady diet of self-sacrifice, and the possibility of being part of nothing less than the rebirth of our Institute. Yes, the possibility of being part of nothing less than the rebirth of this Institute and **mission that we love so well.***

Lay Marist Vocation

Recently in Rome for the [Sources and Streams Colloquium](#) Br. Michael Green opened his talk using Rembrandt's painting of the Nativity. He reminded us Marcellin took Joseph as the patron of the Institute and in the painting you see Joseph holding a lamp near the baby Jesus. Michael said:

"Like Joseph we (Marists) are called to bring the light where it needs to be shed, where it needs to be. It's all about Jesus. As Marists we are all about Jesus."



It is a nice way to think about mission and our Marist vocation to bring the light of Christ to our world. Listening to the talk it reminded me it is good to never forget that the mission of God, like faith, lives and develops first within, the interior life, but ultimately finds expression in community in the world. The faith and prayer life that grounded Marcellin daily manifested itself in the mission of the Marist Brothers of the Schools that he founded. Marcellin is a contemporary role model for following Christ, and our eyes should always be fixed on Jesus.

Our Marist spirituality is rich in many images similar to Goyo's painting showing the centrality of Jesus to our mission. The table of La Val-la and the 200 year old house at L'Hermitage are powerful symbols also that embody the gift of God passed on to us by Marcellin and they continue to be for us a source of inspiration for recreating the Marist charism in our day. Sharing bread and building a home, we feel that Marcellin is inviting, us today, to be a community for the mission. (Water From the Rock n.31). How will you respond to this challenge?

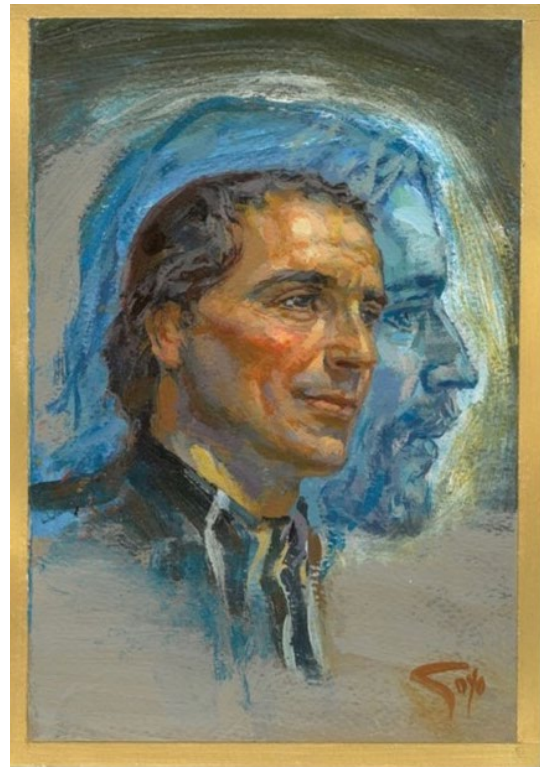


“Our grace today is to be its inheritors, and to be responsible for continuing the integrity and vitality of it and today amongst a much wider family (of lay Marists) than just the brothers.”

(Br Michael Green)

Many Marists would be familiar with the artist Goyo, widely known in the Marist world for his paintings of our founder. In 2023 he released his latest painting of Champagnat that exemplifies Michael Green's point. It immediately captivated many, including me. Marcellin did not walk alone or work in isolation. His eyes were fixed firmly on the world of tomorrow built on the faith and trust of Jesus and Mary who accompanied him every step of his journey. Perhaps take a minute now to gaze on the image to take it in.

- *What are you drawn too?*
- *What is Goyo revealing to you about Marcellin's relationship to Jesus?*
- *What does it stir in your heart?*



Marist mission in Madagascar

Alida Bodomanitra, Province of Madagascar

When St Marcellin Champagnat was in front of a dying young man who didn't know anything about God, he felt pity and exclaimed "We need Brothers". It was the impetus for the foundation of the Marist Brothers congregation. The Marist mission was born from his dream to make Jesus known and loved by all children and young people. Later this mission is shared with Lay people who are motivated to collaborate or even to live the Marist Charism passed on by Marcellin. Marist education does not only give knowledge but also wisdom and love of God.

In Madagascar, we continue the mission started by Marcellin Champagnat. We have 7 schools in which we educate children and young people in primary and secondary schools. We prepare them to have access to

university studies. In all our schools, we allocate time for human formation, religion studies and experience of prayer. The students have the habit of prayer in their classrooms and Eucharist celebration in the Chapel. We organize different activities that promote friendship and family spirit. This is done through extra curriculum activities in the school at regular basis and moment of recollection or outing outside the school from time to time. Formation in living cultural values is encouraged, such for example the day dedicated to Malagasy costume (see photo).

Personally, I enjoy participating in



this Marist mission. As mother and wife, I feel natural to take care of the children. My main responsibility is in the primary school with the little ones. But I give also some Religion classes and human formation (Education à la Vie et

à l'Amour) in the secondary section. Besides the work in our school, I give Catechism classes at the level of the Parish to prepare young people for Sacraments of first communion. I appreciate the Marist Pedagogy, which is educating with Love!! Beyond school, I am also asked to animate the Lay Marist Vocation in Madagascar and at the level of the African Region.

Dreaming about the future *Jaime Godoy Rivera, Province of Santa María de Los Andes*

It is often said that it is good to dream because it does not cost anything and it relaxes the mind. When dreaming, everything is possible and there are no obstacles of any kind; even the laws of nature can be suspended in the imaginary world we envision and desire. However, there is a type of dreaming that besides being creative and raising our hopes, mobilises us to action and construction with others. When we dream about the future, we become energised and look for new companions and ways of engaging in mission. This is exactly what happened to us, a group of work colleagues and friends, when we started dreaming about the future. We were reflecting on an invitation we had received to form a lay Marist community. We understood that the experience of the charism

that each one of us has received is not an inheritance to be hidden in our hearts, but that we are invited to share it and to witness to it like the talents in the parable. Thus we began this shared Marist dream which has been a space of fraternal communion, spiritual renewal and charismatic vitality, starting from the simplicity of a table, like the one in La Valla, like the one in our family, like the one of the Eucharist. From this experience of the shared table, new dreams of the future have arisen that move us to share this experience with others. Just like the first Christian communities that, from the small, the simple and the everyday, found their



way of being church, I feel that our Christian life needs many small communities that share their daily life from a position of faith. I have also been able to share this experience with a number of lay men and women who are

genuinely looking for new ways of being church and who come together with the same interest and availability to support one another. I have witnessed the same thing among young people who are grateful for their contact with the charism and who want to join in and follow through with others on their dreams as they plan their lives.

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

- The "Sharing" newsletter is an initiative of the Secretariat of Laity.
- Subscribe to email lists by entering [this link](#).
- The next number of Sharing will be sent on June 17th



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