



# INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON THE LAY MARIST VOCAATION

STAGE II  
July 2021 - June 2022

WELCOMING, NURTURING, LIVING AND SHARING OUR VOCATION.

Theme 1 - Anex 1  
Marist Vocation

## MARIST VOCATION AND THE MARIST LAY VOCATION

### IDENTITY OF A LAY MARIST

[From "Being a Lay Marist"](#)

#### 1. THE MARIST LAITY

##### Lay vocation

As is true in every Christian vocation, lay life is the response to an encounter with the God of Jesus, who loves us without measure. It is a fruit of our baptism, which sends us out on our common Christian mission: making the Kingdom of God present in this world.<sup>1</sup>

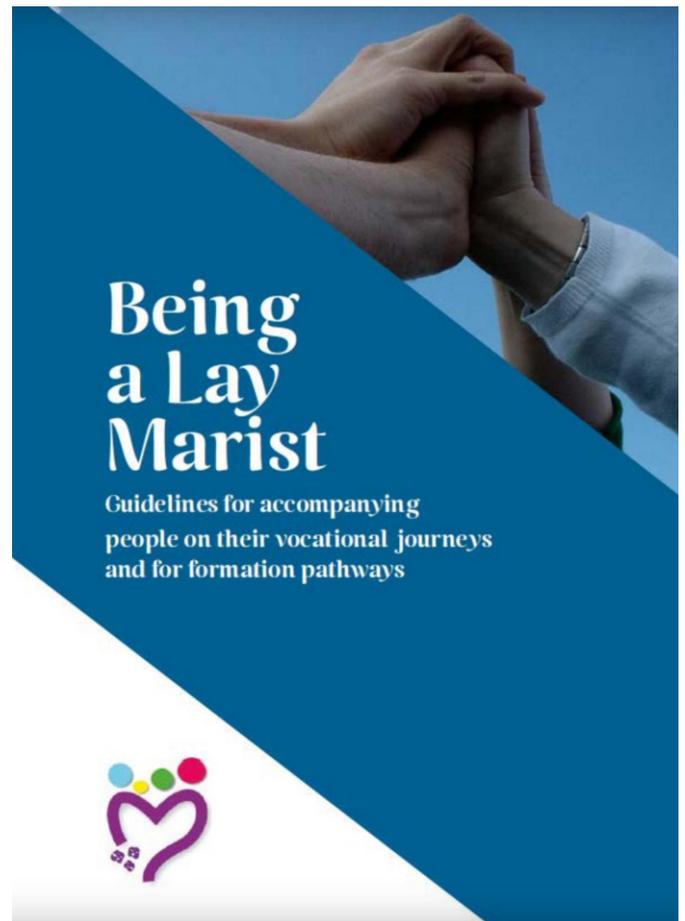
Lay life looks at the Church as a home for all, a school of communion, a place where all share the same faith, hope and love in the service of its evangelising mission.<sup>2</sup>

The Holy Spirit remains active and present today in the Church and in our religious family. Indeed, the Marist lay vocation is a reality among us. It is a specific way of being disciples of Jesus in the manner of Mary, following the insights of Marcellin Champagnat.<sup>3</sup> The various expressions of Marist life that are now given in the Institute are opportunities for the development of this lay vocation.

##### Marcellin Champagnat and the Brothers

Marcellin Champagnat personally experienced Jesus' and Mary's unending love for him. This experience became the source of his spirituality and apostolic zeal, and made him sensitive to the needs of his time.<sup>4</sup>

Being the practical man he was, his encounter with a



1 Cf. *Gathered Around the Same Table*, 5.

2 Cf. *Christifideles Laici* 8.

3 Cf. *Gathered Around the Same Table*, 11-12-13.

4 Cf. *Constitutions Marist Brothers*, 2.



dying young man who knew nothing about God moved him to consider how to open the heart of children and young people to feel God's love. He frequently repeated: "I cannot see a child without wanting to teach him the catechism and let him know how much Jesus Christ loves him".

In La Valla, with this very spirit, he founded the Institute of the Little Brothers of Mary on January 2, 1817, aiming at the Christian education of children and young people, especially those who are most neglected. Since then, his Institute, blessed by the Spirit, has spread across the world.

In 1863, the Holy See approved the new Congregation as an autonomous Institute of pontifical right. While respecting the original name, they called it the Marist Brothers of the Schools (Fratres Maristæ a Scholis, FMS). Further, the Church proposed Marcellin Champagnat as a model for following Jesus in proclaiming him a saint in 1999.

Since the beginning, the first Marists dreamt of the Society of Mary as a large tree with different branches: priests, brothers, religious sisters and laypeople. The project did not receive approval from Church authorities. But its origins remind us that religious and lay people are called to build the Marian face of the Church.<sup>5</sup>

Today, we feel that we are both, brothers and lay, heirs and bearers of the charism of Marcellin. This charism, that was originally received by the brothers, is lived out today by lay people as well and is enriched by the nuances they add.

## The marist lay movement

In 1985, the General Chapter of the Marist Brothers, becoming aware of the richness of sharing the Marist charism with lay people, launched the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family.

Over the years there have been different lay initiatives in the Institute that strengthen the conviction that the charism is a gift of God for the whole Church and that the laity enrich it from its lay vocation.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. THE MARIST CHARISM

The charism of Champagnat is a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church and the world. Receiving this gift as laity and brothers makes us partners, and co-responsible before God for living it out and sharing it with others<sup>7</sup>.

Faithful to our lay vocation, we feel called to contribute, from within like yeast, to the building of a better world.  
<sup>8</sup> We are in a privileged position to understand the signs of the times and thus to keep the charism relevant.

Living the charism as a lay person is the challenge for all Marist lay men or women.

5 Br Emili Turú, *Circular: He gave us the name of Mary*, p. 29, Rome 2012.

6 Cf. *Gathered Around the Same Table*, 86 to 99.

7 Cf. *Gathered Around the Same Table* 45.

8 Cf. *Lumen Gentium* 31.



## a) Spirituality

Spirituality makes us live in God and from God. We experience the power of the Spirit who gives meaning to our existence, drives our actions, keeps us hopeful and helps us live each moment as a new possibility.<sup>9</sup>

Our spirituality, like that of Champagnat, has its roots in the love that God has for us, and grows in our service of others. It is a spirituality with a marian and apostolic character.

### Following Jesus in the style of Mary

Father Champagnat gave us the name of Mary so that we would live by her spirit.<sup>10</sup> As our sister in faith and first disciple of Jesus, she inspires our way of being and acting. Following the model of Marcellin, our lives are defined by these distinctive characteristics:<sup>11</sup>

- Experience of the loving presence of God
- Love of Jesus and his Gospel
- Family spirit
- Simplicity
- Effective and responsible solidarity with the poor
- Love of work with its aspects of service, being industrious and selfless<sup>12</sup>.

Throughout these characteristics we are adding the value of the feminine dimension of the Marist spirituality. Mary, a woman, believer and disciple, is our inspiration to show a different face of the Church<sup>13</sup>.

Thereby, Marcellin Champagnat's spirituality is a source of grace and inspiration in our effort to build the Kingdom of God. It is up to us to incarnate it in our local cultures and situations<sup>14</sup>.

### A spirituality that encounters God in everyday life

We do not equate our experience of God with the moments of prayer or the reference to "sacred places". We experience God's love every moment of our life Like Champagnat did<sup>15</sup>.

For us, our family, work activities, social relations, and involvement in the world have a sacramental value. They are privileged spaces of communion with God.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, we express a spiritual depth that underlies day-to-day life, and by doing so we give witness to Jesus and his Gospel<sup>17</sup>.

9 Cf. *Gathered Around the Same Table*, 100-101.

10 Cf. *Constitutions*, 4.

11 Cf. *Water From the Rock* 26-36.

12 Cf. *Water from the Rock* 40

13 Cf. *Water from the Rock* 102, 103, 131

14 Cf. *Water From the Rock*, introduction letter.

15 Cf. *Water From the Rock* 64.

16 Cf. *Water From the Rock*, 75-76.

17 Cf. *Gathered Around the Same Table* 37.



## A spirituality of passion and compassion

The lay Marists are to integrate faith and life, that is, to take care of our mystic and prophetic dimension. It makes us live in God. Our spirituality is incarnated in our life and it is expressed in the mission. The passion for God drives us to the compassion for the others<sup>18</sup>.

For that reason, inspired by Champagnat:

- We set aside quality time and space to deepen our sense of who we are, so as to give meaning to what we do<sup>19</sup>.
- We cultivate silence and an interior life. This mystical dimension of our lives gives us a sense of being one with God along with all of creation.
- We try to become prayerful persons and fraternities in order to let God's face shine through us and create humane spaces in our world.
- We regularly feed on the Word of God that we share to discern our commitment in the world.
- We feel called to engage with the world and to contemplate it with the eyes and heart of God.<sup>20</sup>
- We cultivate personal relationships as spaces where God becomes especially present.
- We share with non-believers or other religions who wish to deepen their own religious experience or their commitment to humanity.<sup>21</sup>

## B. Shared life

Being Marist happens in community. In living the Marist charism we discover what community is and its many different forms and styles: as a theological place, where we can reach fullness in our relationship with God; as a place that humanizes, where we understand each other; as an occasion to offer the testimony to the world, being prophets of fraternity.

In any of the different ways of sharing life with others as Marists (lay communities, mixed communities, fraternities, Marist groups, etc.) the members meet regularly, sharing faith and life as a family, growing the Marist vocation, the personal and communal of God's presence and a commitment to the world.

in keeping with the family of Nazareth

Both in La Valla and at the Hermitage, Marcellin Champagnat invited the brothers to develop the same family spirit that Mary lived at home in Nazareth. It encompasses simplicity, trust, joy, generosity, tenderness, forgiveness and mutual support.

The spirit of Nazareth finds a home in our family. In it we grow as persons and followers of Jesus. In it we mature as spouses and in the care of our children. We work for our members to stay united so that all can live in dignity and each one can find his or her place.<sup>22</sup>

This same spirit we try to live in our community experience, helping us to fully live our diverse life choices (marriage, religious life, priesthood, single life ...) and welcoming us in the diversity of family situations. Like the first Christian communities, we share faith and life, and even material goods, when God invites us to do so.

We also celebrate the love of God among us as a community, either through sacraments (Marriage, Baptism, Eucharist, Anointing of the Sick...) or daily life events (birthdays, anniversaries, feasts...).

We live our family spirit not only in pleasant and joyful moments when everything goes well but particularly when there is trouble, sickness and pain. In these circumstances, each member gently tries to come close and offer effective support and comfort.

18 Cf. *Water from the Rock* 1, 126

19 II Marist International Mission Assembly. Nairobi, September 2015.

20 Cf. *Water From the Rock*, 89-90.

21 Cf. *Gathered Around the Same Table* 82, 127, 168

22 Cf. *Gathered Around the Same Table*, 73.



## a family living in communion

The strength of this family spirit gathers we who live the Marist charism into a new family of followers of Christ in Mary's way. The table of La Valla is a symbol of the relationship that unites us<sup>23</sup>.

When we, Brothers and Laypeople, share life, mission, and spirituality, we get to know each other better, and realize with joy that we are a gift from God for each other.

Our specific vocations are complementary and shed light on each other<sup>24</sup>, and therefore we are called to grow together through offering reciprocal help and shared hope<sup>25</sup>.

The reality of being a family invites us to be creative. We need to set aside time for deep sharing, learning to forgive each other, arranging moments of formation, as well as promoting and care for our respective vocations.

## Prophets of communion

As Marists, we build fraternity by being a source of peace and communion in our professions and daily lives. Living in God's presence, we face difficulties with serenity and peace, trying to unite instead of dividing.

Led by the Spirit, we feel that sharing the same faith and same charism as brothers and laypeople is helping a new model of Church to be born: one where there is equal dignity accorded to each Christian vocation and the image of the Church is that of the People of God in communion.<sup>26</sup>

As prophets of communion we engage in the local Church, and we also open ourselves to the people who work for a more just and humane world.

## C. MISSION

Like Jesus we recognize within us the urgent invitation of the Spirit, which moves us to bear witness to the Good News. That Good News is God. God is mission. Thus the mission has a Church, an Institute and has us each one of us. As Marist laity we join the God-mission proclaiming his project of life for humanity and looking at the world with compassionate eyes.<sup>27</sup>

## Witnesses and apostles

Jesus is the source of every apostolate. Lay Christians are called to be evangelizers of the world by the quality of their witness<sup>28</sup>. Your life becomes a mission. This mission is an integral part of the mission of the Church.

"Making Jesus Christ known and loved" is the essence of our Marist mission, which makes us particularly sensitive to the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people.

Thanks to our faith experience, the different professions and tasks pertaining to lay life become an opportunity to remain united in the same Marist mission. This diversity enables us to search together for new ways to carry out the mission, and enriches the charism with new and unexpected approaches<sup>29</sup>.

## Within our family

The family in all its different expressions is our first mission field. We promote communion and participation

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Gathered Around the Same Table* 78.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Gathered Around the Same Table* 17.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Open letter about *Gathered Around the Same Table*.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Gathered Around the Same Table*, 144.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Gathered Around the Same Table* 124

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Gathered Around the Same Table* 37.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Gathered Around the Same Table* 47.



so that love may flourish in our homes. We make sure that fraternities take into account our different family circumstances, paying attention to needs and concerns.

We raise our children as Christians and help them discover their vocation and respond to it. Family prayer keeps the family united.

We enable families to go beyond themselves and generate life outside their borders. At the same time, we try to honor our domestic, professional and social responsibilities, without neglecting or disregarding them.

### **Within the marist community**

The Marist community or Marist core group is another privileged field where we live mission. We set aside the time to know each other, listening and helping one another in times of trouble, and sharing our joys together. We place our talents at the service of the others, and gradually learn to love each other with our limitations and differences, fulfilling the words of Marcellin in his Spiritual Testament: "Have the world say of us 'see how they love one another!'"

So, the community is a place in which we take care of one another, helping each other to become a better person, and sharing the courage to face the challenges of everyday life.

### **Within society**

We attempt to be faithful to the spirit of Champagnat, going about our lives in an honourable and courageous way, with a spirit of solidarity and service. Through work and human relationships, we build a more fraternal and reconciled world, where the greatest is the one who makes themselves the servant of others<sup>30</sup>.

As lay people, especially connected to social and political structures, we can be agents of transformation. In whatever we do, we are sensitive to justice and notice the needs around us. We particularly care for the wellbeing of children, youngsters, vulnerable families and poor and neglected people.

### **Among young people**

Our Marist being invites us and encourages us to be present among the young people with the witness of our life. We promote meetings providing a warm welcome by being open hearted. We try hard "to ensure that the new generations discover the face of God and have life in abundance"<sup>31</sup>. We help them to find the meaning of their lives and to assume their lives with responsibility in the light of the faith.

### **Within the church**

We are the Church and as such we share the mission of evangelising with all the People of God. Therefore, we live in communion with our Local Churches, and collaborate with other ecclesial movements and groups. We participate in the life of our Parish churches. Together we get involved in promoting all Christian vocations.

Our personal witness promotes the Marian face of the Church: a Church portrayed in the image of Pentecost where the disciples gathered around Mary are an expression of a community that is fraternal, that values dialogue, that promotes service of others and is open to diversity.<sup>32</sup> We are available, like Mary, to serve, welcome and maternally care for a wounded world.

From the standpoint of our mission in the Church, we try to be points of reference and support in nearby Marist works.

30 Cf. *Gathered Around the Same Table* 38.

31 *Gathered Around the Same Table* 42

32 Br Emili Turú, *Circular: He gave us the name of Mary*, p. 54, Rome 2012.



## On the peripheries of the world

Inspired by the mission of Jesus, we are called, personally and as a community to generate life and hope in the peripheries of society.

Wanting to respond to this call:

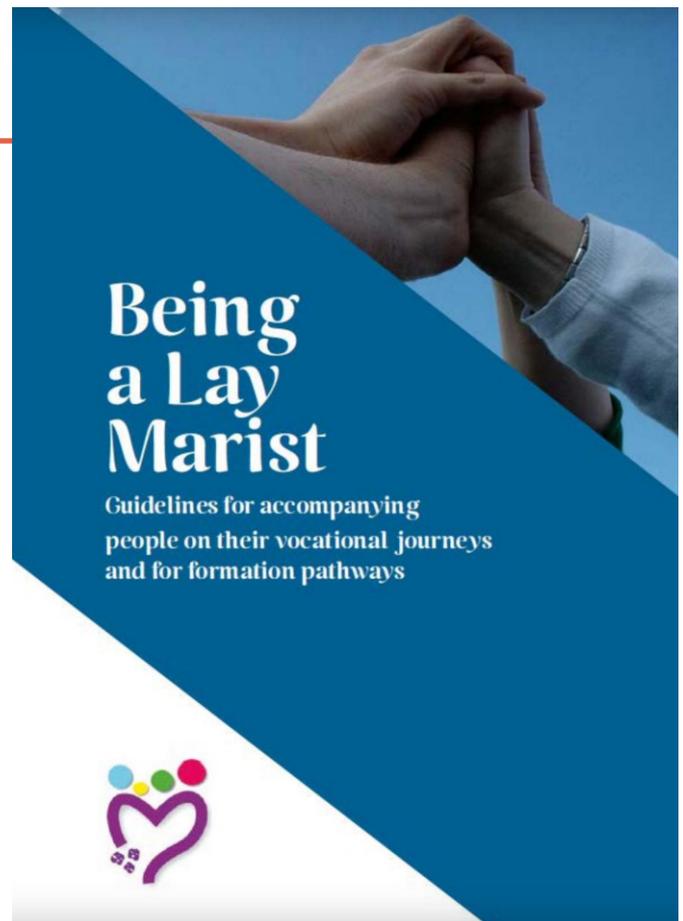
- we discern the possibility of participating in mission projects in frontier situations, and we accompany members who offer themselves for such mission with our help, support and prayer;
- we discern how we use our personal assets and conduct our affairs responsibly and by taking solidarity seriously;
- we participate in the promotion of the rights of children and young people;
- we seek to be better informed in matters of solidarity and take part in immersion experiences which bring us close to vulnerable people.
- we show our sensitivity towards injustices in society and initiate ways of denouncing their causes.

This document *Being a Lay Marist* will be a great support and help for the Provinces and Districts, since it will facilitate the implementation of the suggestions which came from the Chapter for the next eight years concerning the Marists of Champagnat:

- to discern, favor, and accompany concrete forms of promoting communion;
- to have a plan for promoting the different manners of living the Marist life, including adequate strategies for formation, accompaniment and linking;
- to strengthen structures where leadership and the responsibility in the life and mission are shared;
- and to create itineraries which respond to the reality of each country, at the same time, favoring the exchange of experiences of the processes which already exist.

Br. Ernesto Sánchez, Superior General

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