

Reflection from the Superior General

We celebrate the Feasts of both Corpus Christi and of our confrere Marcellin Champagnat this June 6. In the Eucharist the Church nourishes her people with the Word and the Bread of Life, and in her missionary labours in education she nourishes our people with the Truth of the Gospel.

From our Marist beginnings, from the time of Jeanne-Marie Chavoin, Marcellin and Jean-Claude, the ministry of education has been at the heart of the Work of Mary. Father Jean-Claude, in 1838: "I would say that nothing is more meritorious, nothing greater, than education". He even considered a fourth vow by which we commit ourselves to education.

We Marist Religious are disciples of Jesus Christ who was often addressed as "teacher". His message was "good news for the poor". He preached the Kingdom of God. We continue his mission in our education ministry, inspired by Mary, Seat of Wisdom.



Marist education is always a response to contemporary challenges. For the early Marists the ministry of education was a courageous, measured and prophetic response to the traumatic and violent upheavals within the church and society in the Europe of their own time.

Today we face new challenges. The Covid crisis has dramatically challenged the world of education. Also, the scandals around boundary-issues call into question our confidence in the whole enterprise of Religious ministry in schools. Today there are very few Religious vocations making it impossible to sustain our own former commitments. Another challenge is that sometimes the

joy and radicality of our Gospel way of life and the core values of the Kingdom of God have been compromised by striving to meet the intense expectations of vast and "successful" institutions and administrative systems.

Since the 1800's many Marists, with their remarkable faithfulness and generosity, have dedicated years of their lives to formal education. Now many of "our" schools are being conducted by equally dedicated lay people who, in their turn, are invited to embrace the rich Marist tradition of education.

Some of us may feel we "have run our race. We can leave it to others now". Whatever our stage of Marist life all of us can inspire others by our intelligent interest, compassionate engagement and by our shared faith. The witness of a Marist life, on fire with the Spirit of God, as Mary before us, continues to be the best educator. This witness of a joy-filled, authentic Marist life simply matures over the years.

Marists today address the challenges of our own time, different, but no less demanding, than the times of the early Marists. We discern the best way we may be able contribute now and into the future – it may be with management boards, with staff, students and their families in formal or non-formal education, or with chaplaincy teams. Formation programs encourage "integral human development - striving to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature" (*Laudato Si'*, 215). The latest means of social communication help us teach the Good News of the Gospel in new and creative ways. When we are passionate about the message of the Gospel we will always want to teach it "to the ends of the earth".

The times change. Jesus' call to teach the Good News is ageless. Like Jeanne-Marie, Marcellin and Jean-Claude we re-commit ourselves to nourishing Gospel discipleship through all forms of education.

Question: Marists are called to "devote ourselves to all forms of education, especially among the young" (Constit. 13). What could this call mean where I/we find myself/ourselves today?

Saint Marcellin Champagnat, pray for us.

Mary, Seat of Wisdom, pray for us!

John Larsen s.m.