



Welcome to Module 1B - The Marist Story

The Marist Project



Opening Prayer

Let us pause and call to mind
God's presence within and among us,
today and always.

Brief pause

God of mercy and infinite love,
we place ourselves before You.
Help us to be open to Your Word,
responsive to Your Spirit,
and alert to Your call.
May Your peace be with us.

We make this prayer through
Christ our Lord.

Amen.



Introduction

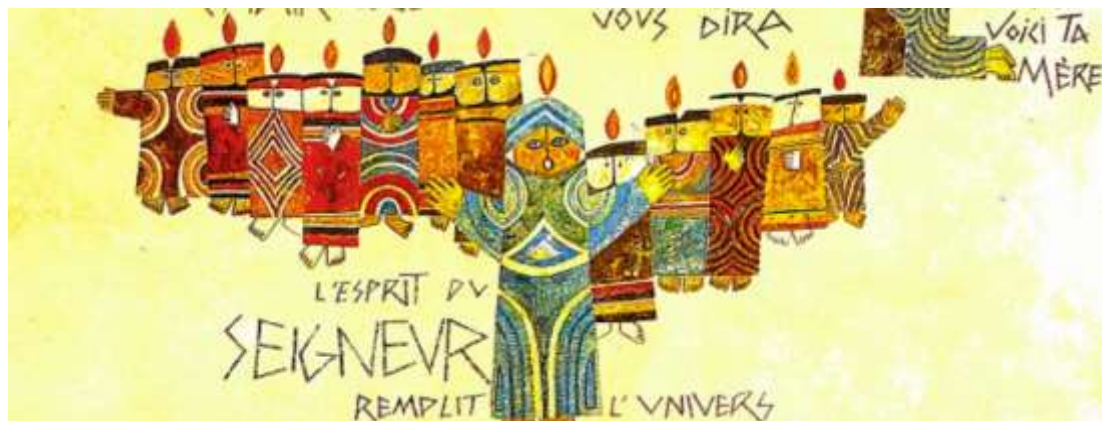
In this module we will reflect upon the Mission of God, the good news of Jesus and connect it to the **Marist Story** as a contemporary expression of the good news in the world today. We will reflect on this story as a **gift of the Holy Spirit** at Pentecost to the Catholic Church.

It is a **gift** given to you today in your roles as members of Marist Boards to ensure that future generations of youth come to know the story of **Saint Marcellin Champagnat*** and the **MaristBrothers***.

There is more to simply knowing the story. The exciting part of being a Marist* is how the story captures you and draws you into the life of Saint Marcellin. It is a story that calls you **'as Marist'** to see the need for change in the world and to **act upon it**.

Marcellin unleashed the 'fire' of his faith on his teaching brothers that gathered in the tiny house in LaValla* and inspired them to go out and **proclaim the good news** in the hamlets and hillsides of rural France to the young who did not know God.

The love of Jesus and Mary that first inspired Marcellin, continues to inspire Marists today as we work together for a better, more just world **for all, gathered around the same table of the Lord.**



A fresco on the wall of the Marist Fathers Chapel - La Neyliere, France.

A Gift of the Spirit

The beautiful biblical image in the Acts of the Apostles of **Mary** with the disciples in the Upper Room in Jerusalem is central to understanding the origins of the Marist Story. The 'fire' of the Spirit that filled them at **Pentecost** was the breath of Jesus, alive in God, now living in their hearts. This was the same Spirit that was breathed into the first Marists at Fourvière* 1800 years later.

Jesus **breathed new life** into each of them, including Mary, and this new life would slowly begin to take shape as the Church was proclaimed to all nations and peoples.

Let us recall that moment in the Upper Room and imagine ourselves amongst Mary and the first disciples at Pentecost as we read:

Pentecost - The Coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4; 42-47)

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other

languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.



Reflection

What is the gift or gifts which you bring to your role as a member of a Board?



The Early Marists

A group of young men gathered in the Chapel of Our Lady on **Fourvière Hill** in Lyon on 23 July 1816 to commit themselves to a work of the church, fired with the same zeal as the first disciples at Pentecost. This group was pledging themselves to live the Gospel in a '*certain way*'; **the way Mary lived it.**

This group would become known as '**Marists**' (**Mary-ists**) and their vision was to '*be Mary*' for the world. One Body in Christ but with a multiplicity of gifts of the Spirit given at Pentecost to be shared with all. This was the birth of the **Marist Project***.

The Marist Project was an ambitious dream this group of brave pioneers had for a **Society of Mary** expressing the **Marian Face of the Church** to the world. The Project was likened to a tree with many branches which would include Marist Fathers, Marist Brothers, Marist Sisters,

Marist Missionary Sisters and the Laity. It was to be missionary and inclusive of all.

The dream was also a **response to a real need** in post-Revolution French society to find a new way forward for a Church in crisis. The Marian Church was to be the response of the early Marist founders to this need.

Craig Larkin SM says the *dream* of **Fourvière** was:

To be Marist ...

is to have

Jesus always as our centre

committed to the Church

Inclusive...priests, brothers, sisters, missionary sisters and laity,

a Marian Church...in the way of Mary... to think, feel, judge and act as Mary did.

(Larkin, C. *A Certain Way*)



Marcellin Champagnat



Br Sean Sammon, former Superior-General of the Marist Brothers wrote a small book titled, *A Heart that knew No Bounds* in 1999, the year of the canonisation of Marcellin Champagnat.

Listen to Sean describe this modern-day saint to the world:

We know that he was a priest of the Society of Mary, and the founder of its Little Brothers of Mary, recognised worldwide today as the Institute of the Marist Brothers.

Yes, he was all of those things, but he was also so much more. This book sets out to uncover the message that his life and mission hold for us today.

The story of this young priest takes us back to late eighteenth and early nineteenth century France. Get ready to walk its roads, and to cherish the terrain he so loved, to meet the people who shaped him, to suffer through the adversity that strengthened him, and, in the end, to be seized by the God who was at the centre of his life.

*Marcellin Champagnat loved young people. They, in turn, found his enthusiasm and energy contagious. Three elements fuelled his passion for life and shaped his spirituality: **an awareness of God's presence**, an unwavering confidence in Mary and her protection, and the two uncomplicated virtues of **simplicity and humility**.*

As a founder Marcellin was young, aged twenty-seven years, when he invited his first two recruits to join him. He gave his Little Brothers a clear mission. Proclaim the Word of God directly to the young, he said, and among them, particularly to those most neglected. He knew that to teach young people you had to love them first. Marcellin guided his life and work by that principle and expected his brothers to do the same.*

So, turn the page, and begin to walk alongside this man whom our Church calls a very modern-day saint, an apostle to youth. Marcellin Champagnat was both for his time in history; he is no less for ours today.



Reflection

How did you first come to hear the story of Marcellin Champagnat?
What is one thing that captures your attention about the life of St Marcellin?



The Dying Child – “We must have Brothers!”

Marcellin always had the vision and saw the need for a group of teaching brothers as part of the Society of Mary. Part of this came from his own experience of the lack of provision for schooling in France, particularly in rural areas. But he was not simply concerned about educational opportunities for young people. He was preoccupied with helping foster their religious development and experience of God's love. Not long after being appointed to his parish at La Valla, Marcellin had an encounter whilst visiting a sick young boy that was to greatly shape the rest of Marcellin's life and allow him the opportunity to realise this vision for teaching brothers.



Marcellin saw the need and responded practically with the cry **“We must have Brothers!”**. Within three months of this encounter the Little Brothers of Mary (Marist Brothers) had begun on 2 January 1817 with the first two recruits.



Apostles to Youth



*The encounter with the dying child was for Marcellin a summons from God. His compassion aroused him to immediately put into action his foundational insight, **We must have Brothers!** The needs of young people and his responding vision for a group of dedicated evangelisers was now confirmed. They would bring the good news of Jesus to people on the margins of church and society. He had been a priest for just four months. (Water From the Rock, #, 9)*

Marcellin Champagnat knew how to recognise the needs and fears, hopes and plans of the young.

Being a man of prayer and action, he summed up their visions and dreams in the words well-known to us: *“May they become good Christians and virtuous citizens.”*

For Marcellin, that was God's dream for every young person (*Evangelisers in the Midst of Youth*, #207). He wanted to bring the face of a loving God to young people, especially those on the margins of society. Marcellin sent the first Brothers to New Zealand in 1836. In 1876 they opened the first Marist school in Wellington and many were to follow in the next 20 years.



A Vision for Marist Education Today

The way Marcellin would bring children to God was through education. His teaching brothers would be **Apostles to Youth** through their lives and presence amongst young people in schools and other social settings.

Marist Education today draws on the Christian vision of the development of the young person holistically in mind, body and spirit. With the active cooperation of the young people, a Marist education seeks creative ways:

(Source: In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat)

- to develop their self-esteem and inner capacity to give direction to their lives.
- to provide an education of body, mind and heart, appropriate to the age, personal talents and needs of each one and to the social context.
- to encourage them to care for others and for God's creation.
- to educate them to be agents of social change, for greater justice towards all citizens in their own society, and for more awareness of the interdependence of nations.
- to nurture their faith and commitment as disciples of Jesus and apostles to other youth.
- to awaken their critical consciousness and assist them to make choices based on the Gospel.



The Marist Mission Continues

The Marist charism was transplanted to New Zealand in 1838 and Champagnat's mission and vision has continued through many who have gone before us for over 180 years. The story continues to evolve and express itself in new ways.

As the numbers of Marist Brothers decline, the torch has been passed to a new generation of

Champagnat Marist lay people. It is incumbent upon each of you as Members of Champagnat Marist Boards to breathe new life into Marcellin's vision and mission to youth.

Marcellin Champagnat took seriously the Good News of Jesus Christ. He was a holy man because he lived his ordinary life exceptionally well, and did ordinary things with extraordinary love. Having discovered the joy of the gospel and letting it transform him, he wanted to share with others, particularly the young, all that he had seen and heard.

(Sammon, A Heart that Knew No Bounds)

“**To love God**”, Marcellin often said, “and to labour to **make God known** and loved – this is what a brother's life should be.” It is a practical vision for us today as disciples of St Marcellin Champagnat to be a **prophetic voice** for our world, especially for youth, the poor, and the marginalised.

Sustained by hope, as Marists we gather around the Lord's table with a place for all, to follow in the footsteps of Marcellin walking forward into a future **pledging to continue working to bring Christ-life to birth in our world, in the way Mary did.**



Prayer

Lord, in experiencing your loving presence Marcellin felt a powerful urge to live the way of the Gospel as Mary did.

Through the 'Montagne experience' you moved him to respond to the crying needs of his times by gathering together the first Brothers to evangelise young people in need.

May we, too, feel the power of your loving presence.

May we learn from Marcellin to think as Mary thinks, feel as she does, love with her, and do, as she would have us do.

Marcellin, we ask you, to refresh in our hearts the spirituality that was given you, the charism that inspired you, so that we may continue to build up the reign of God.

Mary Our Good Mother, pray for us.

St Marcellin Champagnat, pray for us.



REFERENCES

Larkin, C. (1995). *A Certain Way: An exploration of Marist spirituality*. Rome: Center for Marist Studies. www.acertainway.info

A HEART THAT KNEW NO BOUNDS

https://www.champagnat.org/e_maristas/marcelino_biografia/Champagnat_Sean_HeartNoBounds_en.pdf

EVANGELISERS IN THE MIDST OF YOUTH

https://www.champagnat.org/e_maristas/Documentos/PJM_en.pdf

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT

https://www.champagnat.org/e_maristas/Documentos/missaoEducativaMarista_EN.pdf

WATER FROM THE ROCK

https://www.champagnat.org/shared/documenti_maristi/AcquaRoccia_EN.pdf

*More information is available in the glossary of *Water from the Rock*:

- Fourvière, page 97
- La Valla, page 105
- Little Brothers of Mary, page 108
- Marist, page 111
- Marist Project, page 112