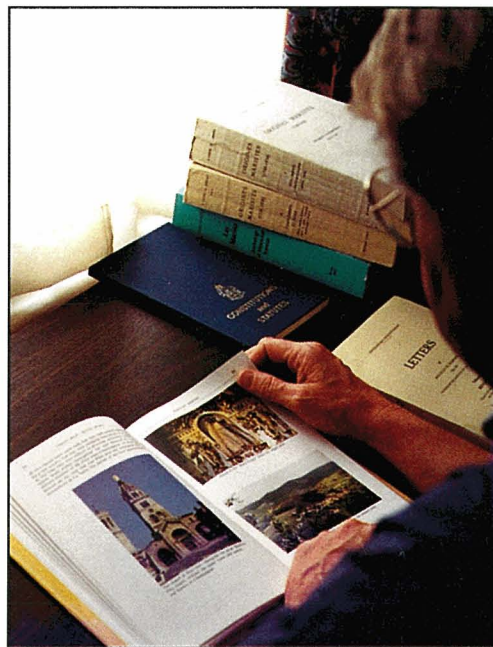


A dream or a certain way?

It's hard to explain the heroic commitment of the Founders to a plan which came to light among a small group of seminarians in 1815. It's hard to account for the extraordinary growth of the Marist project in its early years. But it's also impossible to avoid the facts as they present themselves. Less than five months after his arrival in La Valla, Marcellin Champagnat had drawn the first recruit to his plan for Brothers. Within a year there were seven young Brothers. And by the time of his death in 1840, Champagnat could count 421 young men who had joined the enterprise, of whom 280 were at that moment working in 48 schools in France and Oceania. When Jean-Claude Colin was elected Superior General of the Society of Mary in 1836, 20 priests took their vows. By 1854, when Colin resigned as Superior General, there were 258 priests and brothers of the Society of Mary working in 25 houses in France, Oceania and London. Within a year of the approval of the Marist Sisters, nine young girls had joined Jeanne-Marie Chavoin; and in one month in 1824, another seven arrived from the villages of Jarnosse and Coutouvre, whose combined population was just 3,000. A similar incredible story can be told of Françoise Perroton and the Pioneers in Oceania. From the start, three young girls had lived with Françoise, then more, till within three years she had as many as a hundred girls living or staying with her. A Bishop later noted that one of the Pioneers had formed families of 90, 150 and 200 young women where she was working. Nothing but the power of God in human weakness could explain how these unprepossessing seeds should grow into trees of such size and fruitfulness. The Marist story is a witness to the Christian truth that when a simple idea, rooted in the Gospel and lived out with conviction, meets the spiritual needs of people, a real power is generated, a real energy is released which will take people to the most dangerous places, and even to the ends of the known world for the sake of that idea. It will give those people the courage to spend their lives and even shed their blood for what they believe to be something significant for themselves and others. Right up to our own day, followers of the Marist life have given evidence that this Marist way was not just a certain way of living the Gospel, that is, just one way among many; but also a sure way, a sure path that would guarantee genuine holiness to those who followed it. The Marist project is not just a dream: it is a certain way.



Fermenting in the blood

You will have to ponder the Marist writings for yourself in meditation and prayer. Only if they ferment in your blood will the Spirit use them to transform you into the sort of Marist apostles the times demand. Like all classic texts, the Marist writings have the power of renewing themselves in contact with each generation. I believe too they are not to be seen as a kind of Koran – a sacred and unchanging text, but rather like the Gospel itself, as points of departure for a new age.

In the day to day fulfillment of your duties it is important to carry in your hearts something of the vision briefly suggested. You must be able to see past the appearances. What was said of Moses must be said of you: *"But Moses walked as if he saw the invisible."*

Frank McKay, sm



The tongue has said all it can.
The rest must come from the thoughtful heart.

St Augustine

The Spirit of Mary is something most delicate and most profound, obtained only through sustained meditation and prayer.

Jean-Claude Colin