

The Life of Jean-Claude Colin

Founder of the Society of Mary

Jean-Claude Colin was born in a small village in France.

He had seven brothers and sisters.

His family house was near a forest in the hills.

Because of troubles between the Church and the government Jean-Claude's father used to help the parish priest hide from angry government officials.

They would sometimes go into the forest to hide.

Before Jean-Claude turned five both his parents became very sick and died, so his kind uncle began to look after him and his brothers and sisters.

Jean-Claude moved to the nearby village to live in his uncle's house, quite close to the parish church.

Even though he was a shy boy Jean-Claude loved to help the priest at Mass.

At other times he would spend quiet time alone in the forest.

When he was fourteen Jean-Claude went away to boarding school.

Most of the boys there were planning to become priests. Jean-Claude wondered whether he would be one, too.

He went to two other high schools in the following years. He was a very good student but sometimes got quite sick.

Eventually he went to the main city to continue his studies to become a priest.

An idea was coming into his mind -- that Our Blessed Mother, Mary, was asking him to form a new family in the Church.

Jean-Claude became part of a group of twelve young men who dreamt about this new family which would be called the Society of Mary.

There would be priests, sisters, brothers and lay people in it, a tree with several branches.

The day after Jean-Claude was ordained priest, the twelve young men went to a small chapel and knelt in front of a statue of Mary and Jesus.

They promised they would form Mary's society as soon as they could.

They would be called 'Marists'.

The young Father Jean-Claude was now sent to a small parish in the mountains where his brother was the parish priest.

The people of the town grew grapes to make sparkling pink wine.

As Father Jean-Claude got to know and love them he became less shy and more confident.

Father Jean-Claude continued to think a lot about the Society of Mary and to pray about the first rules and ideas.

He sent a letter to the Pope to ask his blessing.

The Pope wrote back an encouraging reply.

Father Jean-Claude got to know the bishop very well and told him of his plans for a group of Marist missionaries.

The bishop invited him and some of his new Marist friends to come and live at the boys' high school.

From here they could go as missionaries to the neglected people of the mountain parishes.

The first Marist missions were in the rugged and snow-covered mountains.

Father Jean-Claude and his companions brought new hope and faith to the people there.

The bishop asked Father Jean-Claude to take over the school.

And so the Marists became teachers as well as missionaries.

Father Jean-Claude then made the long journey to Rome to get approval for the Society of Mary.

The bishops there thought the plan was too big: one Marist tree with many branches.

Eventually the Pope said "yes" to the group of Marist priests, just after Father Jean-Claude agreed to send Marist missionaries to the people of the Pacific islands.

Father Jean-Claude was elected leader of the Marists and he and the whole group made their promises to live the Marist life.

Father Jean-Claude soon farewelled the first group of missionaries as they left for the faraway Oceania missions.

In the following years many young men joined the Marists and Father Jean-Claude was able to send more missionaries to the Pacific and to open more schools in France.

Finally, Father Jean-Claude handed over to another Marist leader so that he could spend more time in prayer and writing.

He went to live in a quiet place in the countryside where he kept working on the rules and spirit of the Marists.

When he was an old man he died peacefully.

Today he is remembered lovingly by his Marist family as their founder and father.

www.jeanclaudecolin.org