

AD MAJOREM DEI GLORIAM  
ET DEI GENETRICIS HONOREM

**LIGHT FROM OUR ORIGINS**

*a meditation and a dream*

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60. This letter is long enough and yet it is too short! The particular themes I have put before you could have been expanded and nuanced, and other equally important matters could have been included. My hope is that this letter helps you to derive something important from our roots and stimulates you to reflect, both privately and in community, on what it says (and what is absent). We have a big task before us and I ask the Lord to give his Spirit in abundance, to give us the insight, wisdom and courage to know and do his will and that of Mary for her little Society.
61. I encourage all of you to read this letter in a meditative fashion. Taking it section by section, use it in your prayer so that through it the Lord may do his work. Finally, a special word of thanks to the members of the general council for their participation in the development of this letter especially the vicar-general, Larry Duffy.

Rome, 2 February 2012

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us to regard in a special way these virtues, to cultivate them and come back to them. In our efforts to re-found the Society today is it not worth taking a personal look at these four virtues: humility, obedience, brotherly love and poverty, as they are explained in the Constitutions, and evaluating our commitment to them in practice?

## An Invitation

Light from our Origins

*Confreres,*

*In this letter I want to speak to you brother-to-brother about things which from my perspective are central to Marist Religious Life.*

*I want a Society of Mary that:*

- creates a community environment conducive to seeking God;*
- allows union with God and mission to be the dual focus of Marist life;*
- commits us to the struggle against the unspiritual self;*
- gives passion for life.*

*I want a Society where each community:*

- operates out of the mind and heart of Mary as our first and perpetual superior;*
- provides a Rule of life which enables members to live in community, faithfully, joyfully and creatively;*
- generates a deeper love for our Society and its Founder;*
- is a rich haven from which a vigorous mission flows.*

*It is my earnest wish that this meditation on aspects of our roots will stimulate reflection both privately and in community on what it means to be a Marist today.*

## The Unshakeable Cornerstones

Light from our Origins

1. In 2011 an international theological seminar on Religious Life held in Rome expressed remarkable confidence in the intrinsic value of the religious life as the lived expression of a profound experience of God. As such it will continue to have a significant place within the life of the Church and in a world in constant flux.
2. For our part, we in the Society of Mary, can ask ourselves what we have to offer to this constantly changing global reality - can we move into the future with a renewed energy, vision and confidence that expresses itself concretely, in a way which is more than mere aspiration and desire? In its realistic appraisal of our manner of living, with a great deal of courage and hope, the General Chapter of 2009 asked for important changes in the life of the Society of Mary. These changes are significant and touch on many areas – our identity, mission, government, finances, solidarity in resources, formation.
3. The words of the General Chapter in its *Statements & Decisions*, n. 6 cause me to ponder:  

*“We must name our resistances. In doing so, we are challenged to learn how to make better use at all levels of the Society of our profoundly practical spirituality evident in our Constitutions and in our Colinian spiritual traditions. In this, we will be able to move beyond resistance into hope and bold action”.*
4. In my first two letters I have tried to outline a practical plan for the implementation of many of these calls for change. In the last two years I’ve had the opportunity to visit many of you, while the assistants general have visited most of the units. We’ve been privileged to listen to you, to see where and how you live, to

57. I find the wording of Constitution 218 interesting in that it speaks of the four particular virtues that Jean-Claude Colin *came to see* as the cornerstones on which the Society stand:

*“Alert to the dangers from within and without that may threaten the very existence of the Society, Marists, on their part resolve to practice the four virtues which their Founder came to see as the cornerstones on which the Society would be firmly established: humility, obedience, brotherly love and poverty”.*  
*(Const 218).*

58. The Founder called them “*unshakeable cornerstones*” (Cf. Const 1873, 422). Again this view of the Founder was born of his experience. The particular emphasis here on these particular four virtues is their importance for the ongoing life of the Society, most especially in avoiding those dangers that threaten the very existence of the Society.
59. While we recognise the priority of grace - as a work of God in the world the Society is sustained by the Holy Spirit’s action and that is the principal matter - we too have our part to play. Jean-Claude Colin saw that there are forces that can threaten the very existence of the Society and that some of these can come from within. His proposed ways of keeping us on track, of protecting the Society and making it prosper were many – a faithful religious life, a rule, prayer for the Society, etc. But he does ask

his intercession. We can also encourage more lay people to do the same.

56. It is our intention to develop further tools to foster a deeper understanding of the spiritual message of our founder in the coming years. There is a hidden treasure yet to be unfolded. We hope to consecrate 2013 as *A Year of the Founder* when his spiritual heritage and its implications for the Society will be further explored. Several specific actions are already in play and of interest to all: the beatification process as a means to a deepening of our knowledge of our spiritual heritage and its implications, especially by way of a rallying call to renewal; the writing of the icon on the founder, expressing beautifully his founding intuition; the writing of a biography of the founder, together with further studies being done by other Marists - all culminating in a deeper understanding of the founder and his spiritual heritage.

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***“It is time to deepen our appreciation of our founder as a spiritual master, to recognise more explicitly the heritage of his spiritual teaching - not only on our spirit and charism but also on the living of the spiritual life.”***

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know better your struggles and your hopes. It is with these treasured memories that I now invite you to take a reflective walk with me along the pathways of some of the essential aspects of our identity – “*some elements of our Constitutions and Colnian spiritual traditions*” as the Chapter says.

5. I offer this letter as a meditation, arising from my own experiences and what I have seen and heard from many of you. These experiences have given rise to convictions that I want to share with you. Our identity as religious and our ways of living as Marists must be rooted in our original charism and must be brought into open dialogue with the world of today and tomorrow. We need creative fidelity to look afresh at what will help to make us, the Society of Mary, grow and serve our mission.

## Spiritual life

Light from our Origins

6. We are apostolic religious, called to serve the people of God by active ministry. About this there is no doubt. But what makes an apostolic Marist religious?
7. In all the parts of the Society that I have been privileged to visit I have found men who are apostolically active, and in many cases very busy. They are living in circumstances which make great personal demands. Life presses on them in so many varied and different ways. It is easy to become engaged in ministry and be busy at many things. I sometimes wonder what spirit and spirituality lay in and behind our myriad activities. Is it not too easy for our activity to topple over into activism - a way of life without sufficient prayer and reflection?
8. There are those, on the other hand, who are less engaged in mission than they might be. Their apostolic activities are limited as they allow other interests to take over - there are so many stimuli available at the click of a switch or a mouse. How is it that some of us have settled for less? Have we lost our zeal?
9. In order to be active men with a fruitful ministry we are above all meant to be specialised men of God in the Church - God seekers and God communicators, *'totally dedicated to God,*

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***"We are above all meant to be specialised men of God in the Church."***

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*loved beyond all things'* (LG, 44); men who have been seized by the living God. The Trinitarian God has taken hold of us with this ever-greater love.

## Our Founder as a Spiritual Master

Light from our Origins

53. I invite you to take courage, to have confidence in the Lord and the special role of Mary, to kindle a real love for the Society. If we have less physical energy we can still do much for the Society by our prayer and the witness of our life. Where we still have energy for mission and are in contact with young people, do we still have the confidence and courage to invite them to join us?
54. A second point that is quite striking in the letters of the Marists written from Oceania is their appreciation for Jean-Claude Colin as a spiritual father. We believe the Society arose providentially in history through the work of God and Mary. There were numerous people who contributed to its foundation and expansion – Pierre Colin, Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn, Marcellin Champagnat, Denis Maître-pierre, Julien Favre, Victor Poupinel, and many others. Yet it is Jean-Claude, in spite of his limitations, who stands out as the point of reference for these early Marists from the spiritual point of view – for their view of Mary, for counsel on living the religious life and arriving at sanctity, for their rule of life.
55. I think it is time to deepen our appreciation of our founder as a spiritual master, to recognise more explicitly the heritage of his spiritual teaching - not only on our spirit and charism but also on the living of the spiritual life. The renewed focus on the process of beatification of Colin is an opportunity for us to keep penetrating his spiritual message and to ask for blessings through

One could say that the Society had a ‘soul’ that moved it forward and animated it, which was infectious in eliciting commitment and attracting new members, and that there was a collective dynamism that brought the organisation great life.

51. Certainly those Marists of the early years were typical men with their failings and temptations, their difficulties with getting on in community, their discouragement and even disillusionment; yet, the group, even when small (only about 200 at the time of the resignation of Jean-Claude Colin as general in 1854), had this vital sense of the Society and a real and effective love for it. This continued under Julien Favre in terms of attracting members and of the expansion of the Society. The consciousness of belonging to one Society and identification more with the whole Society than with the individual part in which a member actually lived seemed to be very strong.

***A Charism Tailor-Made for our Time***

52. It is a well-documented fact that groups tend not to keep the same drive that was present in the privileged early days of their life. Our congregation is no exception to this rule. There is always the temptation to disillusionment and to a sort of resignation to what one thinks is the future of the Society. There’s always the temptation to throw in the towel regarding the mission given to us. However, I would like to recall this for your reflection: We do have a charism and spirit that is tailor-made for our times; there are young men from about twenty different countries in our formation houses; there are congregations in the past that revitalised themselves and began to attract new members when their membership was down to less than ten.

This truth must always be primary. If we give priority to something else we are not talking about religious life anymore.

10. We must be men who have a passion for the absolute love of God made known in Jesus. 

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This deep desire to want God above all and in all things is basic: if it gets submerged, neglected, pushed to the side, if it is not constantly fostered and struggled for, then we have lost our centre, no matter how good we may be at our work.
11. Necessarily linked to this is another conviction born of experience - if we really wish to put God first in our lives then we will be men of prayer, profound prayer. It is noteworthy that the Vatican Council II reminds bishops that the ‘*first duty*’ of all religious in building up the Church is found in ‘*prayer, works of penance and the example of their own life.*’ (CD 33). Yes, men of prayer, prayerful men. Our Constitutions speak of this.
12. Referring to the 1873 Constitutions to see what they say about prayer or ‘*spiritual exercises*’, I counted up the times that some form of prayer was recommended daily in order to live fully the Marist life. It is substantial: we are dealing with a minimum of three and a half hours daily.
13. We know Jean-Claude Colin understood that this programme of prayer was not always possible and not all Marists, even in the early days of first fervour of the Society, were always faithful to it. However, we can bear in mind that in 1873, even after years of experience of the Society’s life, this text stood before the Marists as a call, an invitation, even a demand. The Constitutions were partly the fruit of Jean-Claude Colin’s

intuition and a lifetime of experience, and were approved by the general chapter of 1872. While these Constitutions are no longer directly in vigour for us, we can let ourselves be questioned by them, nevertheless.

14. Is this degree of a call to prayer too much for active religious? Can we dismiss it as 19<sup>th</sup> century spirituality or too monastic? Even if not all the forms of spiritual exercises have the same relevance for today, the extent to which such a degree of prayer is called for seems to me to be perennially valid. What lies behind all this - is there something we can learn from this for our day?
15. Our own 1987 Constitutions are less specific, but we can note the following: the spiritual life is nourished and sustained by the Word of God (Const 118); community prayer (including new forms) is vital for undertaking a spiritual and apostolic venture together (Const 119); fidelity to prayer requires at least one half-hour of private prayer a day (Const 120); the celebration of the Eucharist is considered the *'high-point of each day'* (Const 121); regular spiritual reading and examinations of conscience assist spiritual growth (Const 123); Marists give a special place to praying the Liturgy of the Hours (Const 124); and the special practices in honour of Mary (Const 144). It is inescapably evident that a strong, consistent round of daily prayer is asked for from every Marist – a prayer life which demands of us a considerable amount of our time.
16. The core point is not the number of hours to be spent in prayer,

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***“A consistent daily prayer...  
to keep us rooted in God, in  
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above all, unselfish love.”***

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## Love for the Society - Heroic Generosity

Light from our Origins

49. In reading the letters of the early Marists from Oceania I have been struck by two recurrent features, which are not unrelated, to which I would like to draw your attention. First, love for the Society - it shines through in so many ways: in a desire to belong; an appreciation of the graces it brings; a feeling of belonging to Mary in a special way; an interest in its projects, failures and successes; a sense of participating together in an important work of God; an availability for its mission; and a readiness to move across the world to serve ... the list could go on. There was a real sense among many Marists of having a common spirit and of belonging to one body which drew a total commitment and a longing to give oneself to its work and mission.
50. Obviously there is something here of the kind of vitality that characterises new movements, new projects – a certain *esprit de corps* which brings forth enthusiasm and even heroic generosity. Many men gave their life to the mission of the Society without personal considerations, with a self-sacrificing mentality. Pervading much of community and personal life was their love of the Society which existed at the level of sentiment but which was much more – an availability to work for its welfare without counting personal cost.

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reorientation of our ‘insertion points’. Even if our numbers are small, with a good community base there are a whole range of alternative ministries that are available to us depending on the social, economical and cultural context where Marists live. We can also be open to real partnership with laity in our ministry and sharing in a prudent way something of our community life.

but rather the insistence of our Marist tradition and documents on a consistent daily prayer life, communal and personal, to keep us rooted in God, in faith, solid self-knowledge, virtue, and above all, unselfish love.

17. Let us delve further into one aspect of the above, linking it to the whole life of the Marist - religious profess lives marked by continual conversion. Constitution 114 says:

*“By his profession every Marist commits himself anew to the conversion begun in baptism, a daily dying and rising with Christ. This attitude permeates his every thought and action”.*

18. The Marist is to respond to the baptismal grace of death to egotism, to all that is not of God, in order to be free to respond to God’s will and to be moved by the Holy Spirit in his ministry. *“He knows that such forgetfulness of self in the service of others always finds its source in God alone”* (Const 54 - speaking of the person in formation). By this is meant the daily struggle against the “unspiritual self” as St Paul calls it (Romans 7:14), against self-preoccupation and selfishness so that one can belong wholly to God. This profound change is to permeate everything in our lives.
19. For Jean-Claude Colin this change was not possible without a strong and well-disciplined interior life. In fact, the 1873 Constitutions speak of the *“truly interior life which ought to be the very hallmark of the Institute”* (37). What a strong statement! Behind it we can trace the strong spiritual tradition of *purity of heart* which goes back to the early centuries of the Church. Without such attitudes and practice we can never be effective ministers of the Lord, except in a superficial sense.

20. I find it instructive that Jean-Claude Colin saw the second novitiate as an opportunity for a more intensive opportunity to attend to the “*inside*”, to purify motivations, to be reinvigorated with the spirit of faith. Gabriel-Claude Mayet attributes to him this remarkable comment: “*Once this novitiate is made, then we shall have some men of God*” (FS 121,8) – worth pondering!
21. In the words of Pope Benedict religious are by vocation “*seekers of God*”. An apostolic man of God will be drawn to a serious interior life of prayer, to a deep communion with God which will be transforming of the person; he will be drawn and allow himself to go where he meets and surrenders to the living God and his word – thus he will be more docile to the Holy Spirit in order to be a more zealous servant of the people of God. It is not a question of producing monks but rather effective apostles.
22. Some of the difficulties that Marists over a number of years have experienced during their life and ministry (e.g. loss of “fire”, burn-out, difficulties with alcohol, celibacy, identity) are surely explicable in some instances to a lack of a durable interior life backed up by an adherence to a definite rule. Concretely, we must pay much attention to what is often called “the spiritual life” – which in practice encompasses participation in the Liturgy, community prayer, meditation and other spiritual exercises, the sacramental life, observing the vows faithfully, spiritual reading, spiritual direction, devotion to Mary, surrender to God and growth in the Spirit, etc.

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***“An apostolic man of God will be drawn to a serious interior life of prayer, to a deep communion with God which will be transforming of the person.”***

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development of a “*network of selected city-centre churches*” with a focus on evangelisation and Church renewal.

46. If we look to the mind of Jean-Claude Colin and the early Marists, articulated in the 1873 Constitutions, we find the ministries to be undertaken by the Society clearly specified: (1) missions among the faithful, especially country people and *apud infidels* (this included a whole range of activities: confessions, catechising, giving spiritual exercises, visits to prisons and hospitals and other such works of charity); (2) Christian education in colleges; and (3) training of those destined for the priesthood in major seminaries (this to be undertaken cautiously and with the greatest prudence). This was a neat enough schematisation that fitted the time of our foundation.
47. One ministry is clearly absent, and surely conspicuous by its absence – nothing about parishes. In fact, we know the strong objections of Jean-Claude Colin to accepting parishes (for a sample of Mayet’s report of Colin on this I ask you to read *A Founder Speaks*, doc 129). He believed that, apart from areas of mission *apud infidels*, we should be very reluctant to accept parishes, and he followed this, though of course not rigidly. I believe we need to be more faithful to this insight which he called one of the fundamentals of the Society.
48. The past few general administrations have had a concern about the degree to which the Society is involved in parishes, which has been expressed in various documents. I have come to believe that our re-foundation calls for a further shift from parishes and a

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***“Our re-foundation means a further shift from parishes and a reorientation of our ‘insertion points.’”***

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be available to insert myself in the work of the Society. “A person enters the Society of Mary in order to share with others a project of apostolic religious life” (Const 33).

**Reorientation of our Insertion Points**

42. From this perspective, I would like to offer some reflections on our ministries. From my experience of Marists and listening to so many people, our work as Marists in ministry is by and large well appreciated, and is imbued with the Marist spirit to a high degree. This is a great gift to the Church and is also a legitimate tribute to ourselves - that we have preserved and lived the spirit of Mary in different countries and cultures for so many years.

43. However when we do come to consider the question of our

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**“My own ministry is a participation in and expression of the three missions: of God, of the Church and of the Society of Mary.”**

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ministries from another point of view I think there are some basic parameters we need to take seriously, and which pose penetrating questions - questions which are not easy for us today to answer - in terms of what I might call “insertion points”: what kinds of ministries should we be involved in today?

44. I think we cannot find a universal answer to that question for the whole Society. This is an area in which we need to show creative fidelity. We have, of course, excellent pointers in our Constitutions, which offer us some specific guidance and I don’t need to repeat these here, but I would ask you to ponder again nn. 12, 13, 14.

45. One positive point of guidance for us has been offered by the General Chapter of 2009 as it helpfully asked for the

23. Renewal periods devoted to the study of our spirit, to theological updating, to counseling, are important but they are no substitute for what we might call “applied spiritual theology” – the single-hearted pursuit of union with God and holiness of life and the taking of those steps that help to that end. Marists are to “*spend themselves for their own perfection and the salvation of their neighbour*” (Const 7).

24. Without the passion for God and the gradual purification of the person, which allows divine love to take over more and more, an essential element of our identity as Marist apostolic religious is lacking. We will be spiritually the poorer. If we flee into mere activity on the one hand or neglect the mission on the other, then we can lose the very essence of what we are meant to be.

25. I will add one practical point. I was struck by the words of Pierre Rougeron writing in 1847 from New Caledonia to Jean-Claude Colin ‘*Send us a copy of the rule. Without it we shall lose our religious spirit*’. (LRO 5 Doc. 593, 5) - necessary to our spiritual development is

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**“If we are to rediscover our identity in a more profound way we need to be profoundly faithful to the spirit of Mary and all that means for our particular Marist way of being in the Church.”**

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the Marist rule. Our present Constitutions give us our rule which each Marist and community needs to take with seriousness and to concretise further according to the local situation. In recent years Marists have come to appreciate more and more the need for a rule incorporating the essential elements of our daily lifestyle which we want to live as individual Marists and as members of a community.

26. The title “communities” covers a multitude of topics, but I wish to focus on one point with some of its ramifications. We are “religious”, consecrated people who lead a fraternal life in common (cf. Vatican II, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 15). The norm for us is a common life under one roof, even though we accept there may be legitimate exceptions to this for various reasons.
27. We know Colin’s early work on the rule had a heavily monastic flavour, and he changed much of this over the years as he learned about religious life from other congregations and through his own experience. But throughout his thinking and decision making we do find a strong emphasis on the common life and the elements of what we call today “community life” – a regular fraternal life in community from which we go out on ministry. But even more, so it seems to me that our Marist Society has a special place for community life that is not present in all apostolic congregations founded in recent centuries.
- “Our Marist Society has a special place for community life that is not present in all apostolic congregations founded in recent centuries.”***
28. The document on *Fraternal Life in Community* (Congregation for Religious, 1994, 59b) makes a helpful distinction when it says: “Among ‘apostolic communities’, some are more strongly centred on common life so that their apostolate depends on the possibility of their forming community. Others are decidedly oriented towards mission and for them the type of community

38. The fundamental mission is the *missio Dei* – the mission of God to all people of all times. This is wider than the mission of the Church, the sign and presence, *the sacrament*, of God’s mission in saving love. The Church is a sign and instrument of God’s Kingdom which is as wide as transformed creation. Here our Marist mission finds its home and has a form, given by our spirit, which we believe is most appropriate for the sensibilities of today.
39. This new world being born is a world which stresses personal dignity and freedom and at the same time is torn by division, inequality, injustice, the marginalisation and isolation of many and the destructive exploitation of creation. We are to be an effective presence of Christ’s love and justice in Mary’s way.
- “We are to be an effective presence of Christ’s love and justice in Mary’s way.”***
40. When we think of mission we should not first or only think of particular ministries but rather of the bigger picture of God’s saving plan and then of our little Society being sent now to our world today. I encourage you to reread and study the *Declaration of Mission at the Beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* of the 2001 general chapter which was reaffirmed by the 2009 chapter. This shows us the need for ongoing reflection on and attentiveness to theology, the signs of the times, cultural changes and collaboration.
41. So, as a Marist thinking about my own individual ministry, I need to see it in this wider triple perspective of the *Missio Dei*, the mission of the Church and the mission of the Society of Mary. My own ministry is a participation in and expression of these three missions. I gave my life to God in the Church so to

## Community - Mission Relationship

Light from our Origins

35. The General Chapter looks for us to live revitalised consecrated life together. We know that mission and ministry are essential to this.

*“The mission sustained by a strong experience of God, by a robust formation and by fraternal life in community, is a key to understanding and revitalizing the Consecrated Life” - Pope Benedict XVI to the Union of Superiors General, 26/11/2010.*

36. As I have tried to stress above, community is so important for us, but of course it is not separable from mission - both mission and community have a priority in different senses. Our communion and community in the Society are for mission, and in the final analysis mission is for community – a reconciled people who can live in justice and peace, glorifying and thanking God, and so participating in the life of the Trinity. Our communities are meant to mirror this first and it is from this mission-in-community that our ministries are carried out.

### ***Marists are called to be an Effective Presence of Christ’s Love and Justice in Mary’s Way***

37. The concept of mission has changed considerably from the time of our foundation when it was very much concerned with the salvation of souls, and with a certain idea that the salvation of men and women depended in a radical way on our ministry. Today we need to locate our mission in the context of contemporary missiology.

*depends on the type of mission”.* I believe the ideas of our founder place us closer to the first group than to the second. Within this framework, community life for Marists is intrinsic to mission - our mission has to be compatible with community life and not vice-versa. The meeting point of our community life and our mission is our discipleship of Christ and from that font of grace Marists go out on mission. The inevitable tensions that may arise can be creative, so as *“to cultivate simultaneously both the disciple who must live with Jesus and with the group of those following him and the apostle who must take part in the mission of the Lord”* (ibid, 59c).

***“Community life for Marists is intrinsic to mission.”***

### ***Interaction and continuity of Community Life***

29. From our point today, where we often minister from communities of two or three, it is quite striking that when we look at the 1873 Constitutions we find in n. 32 the requirement of *“at least six religious living together over above the temporal coadjutors”* for a constituted community. I believe there is an important message here for us about the nature of the Society – if we ignore this message we risk losing something essential to our identity. While recognizing that the founder himself did not always follow this ideal so tightly, when we look at how the Marist communities carried out his proposals for the Society in terms of living and ministry, we find for the most part colleges with a number of Marists living together, and residences for missionaries *apud fideles*. The missionaries were to spend some months of the year preaching missions in small groups and then the other months living a community life together in prayer and study – resting, recreating together and preparing themselves for

their future work. We are well aware of the Founder's struggles in Oceania with the bishops to get even a minimum of community life for his confreres, and the lack of this disturbed him profoundly.

30. In our own Constitutions, chapter II is titled '*Forming a Communion for Mission*'. The theme is a wide one concerning members entering a society of religious that forms a communion and is oriented to mission. When we come to the specific elements, then we see that the themes of common life and community life are clearly present at the more local level. The Constitutions even go as far as to say that "*The ministry of loving service to each other in community is a primary apostolate.*" (127). This community living was always a priority in the mind of Jean-Claude Colin for the Society.
31. The present Constitutions say nothing of numbers in the community, but over the past years there has been a growing concern in the Society over communities of only 2 or 3 members. The last General Chapter (quoting CS2005 3,2), asks that "*we aim at communities of a minimum size of 4/5 to allow for sufficient diversity, interaction and continuity of community life*" (SC 26). I believe that this is a key point of our Marist identity. To take this seriously and to act on it means that in some units major revisions will need to be made and a whole new perspective taken up, which may involve quite a reorganisation of how we plan and do things.
32. I don't believe we can have a healthy re-foundation without such a strong community-mission relationship. Constantly we have to ask the question: is it the Society of Mary – spirit and body – that we are making present? In fact, Marists have been paying great attention to our spirit and to our ministry (rightly so

and with fruit) but I think we have not yet as a Society adequately taken sufficiently in hand the question of the size of our communities.

33. I have heard the objection from some that their experience of a large community was not positive while their experience of a small one was good. While this cannot be denied in particular cases, we should not let individual negative experiences determine how we should structure the Society. Certainly size without quality is not what we are looking for - in all circumstances quality should be our primary aim. Can we really take on board all that this implies?

#### ***The Ideal Picture***

34. May I attempt to paint a type of ideal picture – something to dream about and aim at - even if in the real world it falls short: communities of at least 4/5 members where the members really care for each other; where there exists a regular prayer life together and meals are normally taken together; where there is found a transformative contemplative base both to the members' personal lives and to their common life; where ministry is understood by the members to spring from their common mission and the depth of their spiritual and communal lives. All the better if the community has some common work where the Marists work as a team and in some partnership with the lay faithful in the Marist spirit.

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***"I don't believe we can have a healthy re-foundation without a strong community-mission relationship."***

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