**Marist Education Forum, Toulon 2023**

**We form one body, serving with simplicity,**

**and each with his or her own charism!**

The ninety delegates at the European Education Network Forum, Toulon, were inspired by the person of Mary as the first disciple, the first to have faith, as were the founding generation of Marists.

The education tradition they launched almost 200 years ago, is a heritage still respected and valued by this generation of educators who in their turn, serve the mission of sharing the Good News to their contemporaries.

The Marist vision focuses on the central importance of the task entrusted to them: educating young people as Christian citizens and the value of every young person as a unique individual. The pressing question at the Forum was not are the mission and vision still valid, but rather how can we best organise ourselves to fulfil the mission of being educators in the manner of Mary, most effectively for future generations.

The responsibility to continue and grow establishments guided by Marist values is accepted as a call to collaborative action by Marists, both lay and religious. The reflections and statements, the fruits of the Forum, can nourish Marist identity in our establishments and be the foundation of firm and effective actions to ensure continuity in this mission for the future.

The Marist contribution to Catholic education as perceived by the delegates at the Forum, includes the following:

**Educating in the manner of Mary implies a maternal concern for each student.** She was a woman of complete trust in God in all things including in her responsibilities of being the mother and first educator to Jesus. Her discreet and modest presence may have been understated but it was, nonetheless, very real, embracing the reality of the world no matter what challenges she faced.

**We are called to focus on the quality of relationships,** creating in the school community, a sense of family and home. The young people in our care meet the church alive and find there, a sanctuary, a safe haven, in which to develop and grow, personally and spiritually. Here, they can reveal themselves and discover that they are more loved than they may believe.

**Each student is both accepted as they are and challenged to be the best version of themselves.** While accompanying them on their journey in life, our desire is to promote excellence tempered by humility. Motivated by a spirit of empathy, Marist educators listen to the students in their care and respond with respect.

Marist educators become examples of God’s desire that the lowly and humble are raised up and honoured, and the proud and self-sufficient who have no need for God, are no longer in control. **Inspired by Mary’s song, the Magnificat, Marist educators give special attention to care** “for the needs of those who are poor in the goods of this world or who are deprived of the assistance and affection of a family or who are strangers to the gift of Faith” (Education Gravissimum Educationis, 1965).

The Superior General, Fr John Larsen sm, reminded delegates during the celebration of the Eucharist at La Seyne sur Mer. “The first generation of Marist missionaries set out on their journey to the ends of the earth from Toulon. Perhaps we can consider this Forum yet another Toulon-moment of Marist mission!”

*Odile de Villenaut, Provincial Secretary*

*Frank Dowling, Provincial Delegate for Education*

*Martin McAnaney, Chair of Marist Education Authority Schools, Ireland.*

*16.10.2023*