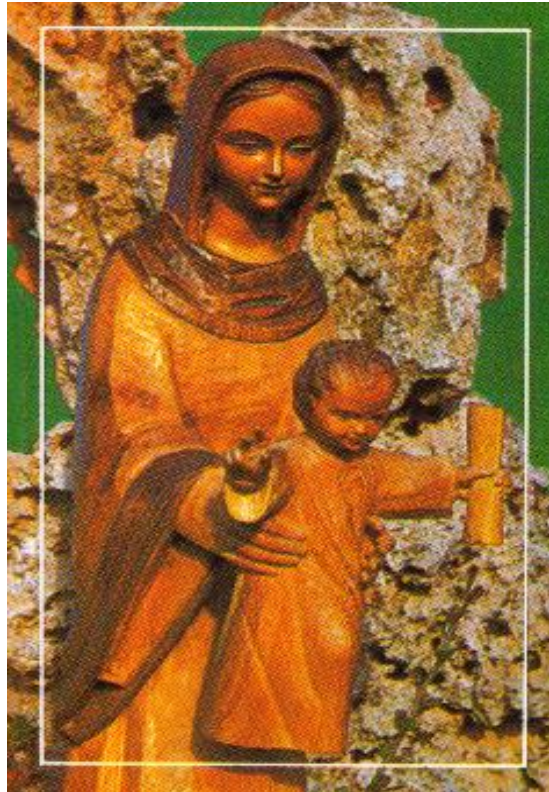


MARY, MOTHER OF OUR COMMUNITY



Our consecrated commitment finds its concrete and historical model in MARY.

Mary precedes us on our journey and accompanies us as a sister. We accept her as the perfect follower of Jesus, by virtue of her absolute and constant identification with the redemptive mission of her Son.

Because at the Annunciation, Mary received and accepted a mission. One that will be fulfilled at the foot of the Cross. Between these two moments, she accompanied her Son throughout his mission of evangelization, supporting his criteria and choices, sharing his attitudes and identifying with him in his persecution, in his solitude, and in his martyrdom.

Thus, Mary is the only one, like no one else ever before, who has gradually understood the mystery of Jesus, his Kingdom, and his liberating task of redemption. Mary alone understood the meaning of the Cross and of faith for the building of the Kingdom. She is the only one who, like no one else ever before, has truly and firmly believed in His Resurrection.

Mary is the Mother of God made flesh and given to us for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Therefore, she is also the Mother of our community of believers and of our mission. Therefore, we place this project in her maternal hands.

MARIST RETREAT

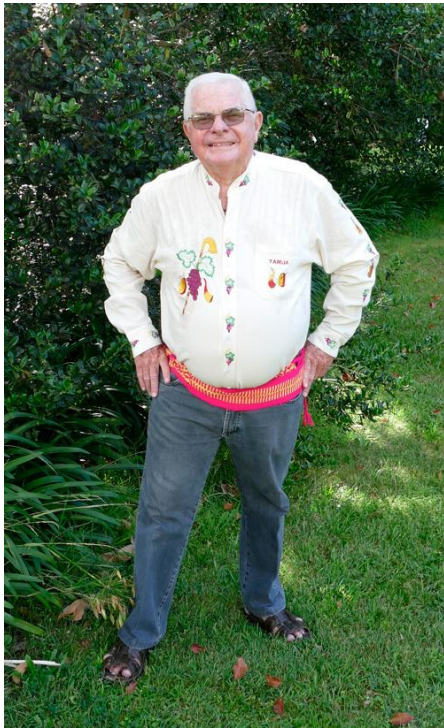
“DRINK FROM ONE'S OWN WELL”
-OUR MARIST LEGACY YESTERDAY & TODAY



FOURVIERE, FRANCE



YANACACHI, BOLIVIA



1/1 - REFLECTION ON THE BEGINNINGS OF THE ORIGINAL MARIST PROJECT

The Fourviere Pledge

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
All for the greater glory of God and the greater honour of Mary,
Mother of the Lord Jesus.

We the undersigned, striving to work together for the greater
glory of God and the honour of Mary, Mother of the Lord Jesus,
assert and declare our sincere intention and firm will of
consecrating ourselves at the first opportunity to founding the
pious congregation of Marists. That is why by the present act and
our signatures, in so far as we can, we irrevocably dedicate
ourselves and all our goods, to the Society of the Blessed Virgin.
We do this, not childishly or lightly or for some human motive
or the hope of material benefit, but seriously, maturely, having
taken advice, having weighed everything before God, solely for

the greater glory of God and the honour of Mary, Mother of the lord Jesus.

We pledge ourselves to accept all sufferings, trials, inconveniences and, if needs be, torture,
because we can do all things in Christ Jesus who strengthens us and to whom we hereby promise
fidelity in the bosom of our holy mother the Roman Catholic Church, cleaving with all our
strength to its supreme head the Roman pontiff and to our most reverend bishop, the ordinary,
that we may be good ministers of Jesus Christ, nourished with the words of faith and of the
wholesome teaching which by his grace we have received.

We trust that, under the reign of our most Christian King, the friend of peace and religion, this
institute will shortly come to light and we solemnly promise that we shall spend ourselves and all
we have in saving souls in every way under the very august name of the Virgin Mary and with her
help.

All this is subject to the wiser judgement of our superiors.

May the Holy and Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary be praised.

Amen.

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History

Lyons, France, 23 July 1816. It is early morning, and twelve young men are climbing the 800 steps
leading up to the ancient Marian shrine of Fourvière on top of the hill that dominates the city.
Five of them had been ordained priests the day before; the others had not yet completed their
studies for the priesthood. During the preceding months, they had formed a group and made a
commitment.

The early meetings of the first recruits They would tire one another with enthusiasm about how
lucky they were to dedicate themselves to the '*success of such a fine work*'. Two themes recurred in
their discussions: their happiness to be the '*first children of Mary*', and the '*great need of the peoples*'.
They would also have discussed the ways in which, as Mary's sons, they proposed to meet that
need. Now, they were about to separate. The group decided to draw up an act of commitment,
which they would sign, promising to '*pursue this work with all one's power*'. Not all those who had

hitherto belonged to the group signed the document. But, before they broke up, they wanted to seal their act of commitment before the venerated statue of Our Lady of Fourvière.

The act is *couched* in the first person plural, We. Its authors formally identify themselves as '*We the undersigned*' - which would indicate that our text is a document to be signed rather than read out (when one would expect something like '*We assembled here*'). The fact that it is drawn up in Latin, together with the use of a number of formal and emphatic expressions, testify to the desire of the aspiring Marists to invest it with the highest degree of solemnity of which they were capable. At the same time, the document betrays - even in its insistence that its authors were not eating 'out of some whim of callow youth' but seriously, after mature consideration, and listening to the advice of others' - that they were still young and able to be suspected of rashness and imprudence. Their self-dedication was not, however, a vow or even, properly speaking, an act of consecration, but a declaration of intent.

Their self-dedication was total and envisaged even martyrdom. They were confident that 'under the government of the Most Christian King, favorable to peace and religion', the Society would shortly come into being.

The young men did not specify any apostolic work or works to which they would devote themselves but promised to 'spend ourselves and all we possess in saving souls by every kind of apostolate under the sacred name of the Virgin Mary and with her protection and help'.

Thus, the multi-branched Society of Mary, envisaged by the seminarians at Saint-Irenée and the object of their act of commitment consecrated at Fourvière on 23 July 1816, gradually took shape. Time would tell how it would fare.

Reflection

July 23, 1816: On that day twelve young men, fresh out of the seminary, some of them priests since the day before, decided to go up to the chapel of Fourvière. They had all been witnesses to, and sometimes the victims of, the revolutionary havoc in their country, in the Church. They could not be satisfied with simply observing, much less passing judgment on, the misfortunes of their time and then sinking into despondency - and yet, there were reasons! But God was there, as present on the day, as before and after the Revolution. And they could not or would not leave a place where God is present. Their minds were made up. The time had come to roll up the sleeves, to get to work, to invent, to do things differently, to go forward. This was the challenge. They took the decision to devote themselves "*irrevocably*", "*seriously*", "*maturely*", ready for all eventualities, including "*torture*", to "*save souls*" in Mary's name.

No assurance of success. This is a getting under way. One needs to go to where God stands. They dare the adventure, with Mary.

It was two hundred years ago, at Fourvière.

The text and the gesture move us. Even more so when one knows the difficulties of all kinds they had to face later on to 'keep the Promise'.

We are making this Retreat at a time when Marists today are celebrating 150 years the death of its founder- Jean Claude Colin [15 November 1875]. What shall we make of this anniversary? A commemoration of the founders? A historical evocation? A 'beautiful page' from the Marist epic? Does their promise commit us today? For us -men, women, religious, laity, - we who say that we are and want to be Marist: can the commitment they took two centuries ago, still be our own? And if so, how? Today, what are they, the young men of Fourvière, telling us?

1/2 – TODAY, WHAT ARE THEY, THE YOUNG MEN OF FOURVIÈRE, TELLING US?

The initial feeling is that of the gap between the event and ourselves. So many things have changed: It has been a while since the Society of Mary has counted on the "Government of the very Christian King, the friend of peace and religion", to accomplish its mission! One may even wonder about the appropriateness of such an act. Certainly, the approach is moving; it affects us, as would the photograph of a family reunion. But then comes the time to close the yellowed photo album and to return to more serious business, to the "problems" of our own time. We look around and we see that the Church in the world of the 21st century is a far cry from the Church and the world of our elders!

And yet...

"*We solemnly promise*" what audacity or what naivety? "*Saving souls... in every way*"? But how?... The commitment is simple: "*we irrevocably dedicate ourselves and all our goods ... that we shall spend ourselves and all we have*" -to the extent of our possibilities.

Are we capable today of making such a promise? And they, the pioneers, were they?

For them, as for us, the only guarantee for the promise is the gift they make of themselves, without being assured of what they will become and what they will be able to accomplish. A very strong affirmation for the present; an uncertainty just as strong for the future - only that it will not be like the present.

From the outset, our elders have shown us a way: open to what may come but without knowing what that might be, with no other assurance than their personal and collective fidelity - and a boundless confidence. They can't assure anything. They do not know what tomorrow may bring. They don't even know what they themselves will become tomorrow. What they make at Fourvière is a leap into the unknown: the unknown of what they are letting themselves in for, the unknown of what will become of them. They promise that over which they have no control. It is a far cry from a "*career plan*"! More like a bet on the unknown... they invite us take the same approach, with the same risks.

"How shall this be?"

How can one make this bet? And yet avoid irresponsibility?

How is it possible to take such a leap into an uncontrolled future - to jump without a parachute! What makes these pioneers hold on, the foundation that justifies the gift they make of themselves, is love, and the trust that love gives. Love of God, love of life... There's a great similarity between this commitment and the commitment a man and a woman make to each other, without knowing what they will become. There is the same madness, when we give, we give to one another that which we do not yet have, that which it is not yet, for the present and the future; no money-back guarantee, in trust alone. The glory of God and the honour of Mary" seem to these pioneers a sufficient guarantee for risking their lives. After all, they know, as we do, these words of Jesús "I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full (John 10:10). They love life and believe in life: apparently this was sufficient for them to dare the adventure.

Perhaps what makes their gamble possible is the certainty of a strong relationship with the God in whom they believe. They can do all things in Him who makes them strong.

"*We, us, our*" This wave of plural statements catches our attention! The terms of the promise rest on the solid foundation of the group. No difference between them: a group which speaks with

one voice and where each one finds the source and the confidence for his own personal word. A philosopher said this in a beautiful way: "it is in the continuous encounter with others that the person becomes and remains a person. The place for this process is the community" (Paúl Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, p.119 -120).

What has been promised together must be held together. From the outset, we know all the difficulties linked with their meetings, the geographic dispersion, the withdrawal of two-thirds of the signatories, the difficult relations in the dioceses and communities, the differences of opinion on the project and the efforts they made to get together again... not to mention the sometimes difficult personal relations. And we know well, from experience, how much this "being together" is important to keeping the promise. It binds us across continents, commitments, beyond the members of the family'. It connects us to our brothers and sisters from the past: we remember those men and women who told us, most often without words, just by their life, what a Marist life was, who taught us to taste it: we know what we owe them. It links us to the youngest who join us. "Religious truth is not amassed. It can only be shared. It shares," wrote Michel de Certeau SJ (*Weakness to Believe*). Apparently the first Marist religious lived it by interpreting the promise, by ascribing to every word their achievements, their way of living that seemed to them in accordance with their commitment. They discovered, deepened, invented and formulated a way of living and commitment. They were bound by their gesture and their promise. They have not done it in our stead. They have proposed it to others: freely. Apparently, they were sufficiently compelling to convince more than one to join them. It is now our turn to continue the journey. And of course, we assess, as the days go by, the importance of mutual trust in our communities for holding together, for advancing in Marist life, for accomplishing our mission, for inventing today the modalities for today, for encouraging us in faith.

"And the Virgin's name was Mary"

The signatories of the formulary did not skimp on the name of Mary, the honour of Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesús, the very august name of the Virgin Mary and finally... the name of "Marists" with this incongruous insistence on spelling: they need to "dot the i's and cross the t's", as it is said in English, when it comes to insist and not hesitate on membership!

It is easy to assign this explosive fervor to "the spirit of the time". And at the same time to relativize it. There were in France at this time dozens of male and female congregations which bore the name of Mary. Was then the name of Mary a religious 'stamp' fashionable to the point of making this century "the century of Mary"? Was it really that simple?

This persistent reference is very closely linked to the project of the founders. This is not the place to mention the works and activities of the future group. The time has not come to talk about education or catechism or missions to the end of the world or service to the sick. No, for the moment it is only a question of a family that bears the name of Mary, which will work for her honour, under her protection.

This text, which we may find maladroit, somewhat ponderous, simply indicates to us the only way to follow: that of Mary; the sole patronage to invoke: that of Mary; the only way to act, Mary's way.

Since 1816, so many things have been written on this.

This work of resembling Mary is not that of one particular moment, of the period of initial formation or ongoing formation, the yearly retreat, let alone an initial declaration. It is a work that is inscribed in daily life, in the community, in the pastoral and professional commitments of each one. We need to "embrace wholeheartedly our Marist identity". (Statements and decrees of the 2009 General Chapter of the Marist Fathers.)

The companions of Fourvière chose to take the name of Mary and to pass it on to us: It is for us to see how we have understood this choice and how we make it our priority and how we

implement it. The name one bears says something essential about the person and the group to which it relates. We perceive well what lies behind the name of the Poverello of Assisi: a Franciscan! religious says something about poverty, about the proximity and the respect for nature. Similarly, from the followers of Vincent de Paul, true charity is expected. These names save us the trouble of asking for an explanation of the commitments made by those who bear them. To bear the name of Mary is both a reference to an origin and a personal and collective responsibility to justify this choice by our manner of living.

1/3 – AND NOW...? WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH THIS EVOCATION “MARISTAS”?

What shall we do with this evocation? Admire the generosity of these young founders? Fall into depression? Where is the enthusiasm today? What remains of this beautiful project? To look back, is taking the risk of clinging to a bygone era.

Make gloomy comparisons? Look what they did, what audacity, what successes, what adventures! See how they attracted young people, in large numbers, all the works, all the missions they founded... and what about us?

Where are we? Closing houses... aging... gloom... we are dwarfs next to these giants! Let us beware of these visions in black and white.

We should not take the first Marists for what they are not: supermen. They are simple people and their spontaneity makes even stronger the message they left us. Let us cease these comparisons that always put the present down, in comparison with the time of the origins which we imagine more perfect, more accomplished than ours. All in all we would only be pale copies of these true Marists from 1816!

And let us hold on to that which is more precious of what they have bequeathed us: the beginning. Their inheritance, their promise, their determination to make their own the plan of God, and their trust in God: all this keeps us. We cannot act as if nothing had happened. You can never do away with the origin because it is what makes us. But let us rather look at this word: the beginning! Everything else is past, venerable past, but past nonetheless.

To truly honour these first confreres, means to dare after them, to start the Society of Mary. Knowing where we come from, we can better orient ourselves and decide where we want to go. These first Marists have not traced us the path ahead: they invite us to invent, to continue the story they started.

We need to begin. Not just repeat, not only re-fresh, update to the taste of the day. There is freshness in the beginning. But we, we rather see around us fatigue, uncertainty, weariness. This is not about a start or beginning anew, but about a beginning. We never finish beginning, as we never finish loving. Our forerunners have not given us, let alone forced, a program on us. They gave us a direction.

It is not enough to hang the formulary of Fourvière on the wall of our bedroom or community room. To begin is not to draw a balance sheet, rather it is to do as Abraham did, of whom a Christian author said he left not knowing where he was going, and that is why he was going in the right direction!

Somehow the promise of Fourviere is before us, not behind. We need to make this promise with our own words. It is up to us to discover the truth, the fruitfulness it holds for us today. We do not know what the future holds: Neither did they.

We do not know what each one of us will become in the coming years. Neither did they. What we do know, what we do believe is that we must like them let ourselves be configured by Mary. That we need to reach out to others in loving them, in loving Life. Our commitment together, in body and soul, will be the best way to honour the Promise of Fourviere.

This is not about arriving, but rather about setting out!

1/4 – AUDACITY OR FOLLY? – “HIDDEN AND UNKNOWN”

This final reflexion for our first day of our Marist Retreat brings us to one of the most beautiful, yet one of the subtlest facets of our Marist charism, “*hidden and unknown*”.

The first Marists report that the expression “*hidden and unknown*” came up frequently in Colin’s ideas and talks. “*The whole spirit of the society is there,*” he used to say. “*We must not attract attention to ourselves.*” “*We must not provoke it*”. We are not on mission for benefit. We are first of all and only on mission to serve the proclamation of the Gospel.

We now ask ourselves is the formula “*hidden and unknown*” still relevant today? So how can we translate this expression for our contemporaries in a way that still suggests a real and concrete presence?

The attention that we pay to the other person presupposes a patient and active listening to what it is that brings the person life, that hurts him, that gives him hope, and perhaps even what his deepest fears are. So, we take the time to welcome another person as he presents himself, without judgment or rejection, and we acknowledge him in his uniqueness, without trying to put him in a manageable category or stick a label on him. The encounter becomes a message. We can certainly call all that “*hidden and unknown*”, but what it means essentially is getting closer to the other person, sharing that we are just as vulnerable as he is, just as subject to doubts as he is. And we are free to speak of ourselves, of what is going on within us and where we draw our joy in living.

And we should certainly ask ourselves whether this attitude of “*hidden and unknown*” has prepared us, in the long stretches of silence and patience and in deep prayer, to welcome God “*unknown and as if it were hidden*”.

[In our living of the Marist Spirit and Charism today we use the terms *Acoger/Escuchar/Acompañar/Celebrar – Welcome/Listen to/ Accompany/ Celebrate.*]

Colin saw that adopting this attitude, Marists will “*begin a new Church over again*”. This sentence certainly gives us a jolt. And Colin does not tone it down much by emphasizing that it is not really revolutionary. Nonetheless, he insists, “*We must begin a new Church*”: “*The Marists must begin a new Church over again. I do not mean that in a literal sense, that would be blasphemy. But still, in a certain sense, yes, we must begin a new Church. The Society of Mary, like the Church, began with simple, poorly-educated men, but since then the Church has developed and encompassed everything. We, too, must gather together everyone though the Third Order [Marist Laity] -heretics alone may not belong to it*”.

A new Church must *point back to the origin*, to Pentecost, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. The first community of the Church is born from the Spirit descending at Pentecost. We must not so

much remember this as an historical event, but as an event that continues to occur in our times, in our world, in our Church and in our lives. According to Colin's vision, *the Church gathers together*.

"Hidden and Unknown" is not meant to be a moral guideline, nor is it a strategy for someone to infiltrate the world like a mole working deep cover in a spy network.

What we want to proclaim is not ourselves, but the Good News-the Gospel.

This new Church is a Church always in process of being *"begun over again"*. And so today we ask is it a valid goal for today? In Colin's time the Church certainly suffered grave difficulties. As a message and as a promise, he received this *"revelation" from Mary*: *"She was the support of the Church in the first times, she will be so as well at the end"*.

Today, can this same *"revelation"* produce new life and enthusiasm in us?

Will we share Mary's love for life. Will we proceed *"in haste"* to the place where life is born, rather than weep over what has been disappearing or dying?

Marist tradition can continue to be a living reality only if it offers an experience of the Gospel similar to that of Jean Claude Colin and his companions.

Successive generations make the tradition their own by praying and reflecting on the events crucial to the foundation of the Marists. And the foundational Marist experience can be seen as symbolized in the Promise made at Fourviere, the spiritual experience lived by Jean Claude Colin at Cerdon, and the missions of the first Marists.

Jean Claude Colin was convinced that the stories of the beginnings of the Marists should be repeated, remembered, and reflected on. In this way subsequent generations would be able to breathe in and breathe out the spirituality of the beginnings.

The Marian Church rejoices and sings. Instead of bemoaning its fate and the world's woes, she is in wonder at the beauty there is on the earth and in the human heart, as she sees what God is doing there....

The Marian Church despairs of no one, and does not quench the smoking flax. When she sees someone on the side of the road wounded by life, she is moved by compassion and with infinite tenderness tends to their wounds. She is the safe harbor who is always open, the refuge of sinners, mother of mercy.

2/1 – RETURNING TO OUR PROJECT OF THE MARIST MISSIONARIES

INTRODUCTION

A Call to Build Community

1. Our identity is that of a community of believers, inspired by Mary, the first among believers, whose mission is to build communion and sharing among the poor and marginalized.

2. We want to be welcomed and accepted by them, and to experience the joy of true friendship.

We want to love them, share their lives, and live a deep communion with them. Our mission will not be so much one of speaking, but of living.

We will invite them into our lives. We will sit with them, entering into a real, contemplative friendship with them.

This contemplation will lead us to the desire to fight for justice in the world and to realize the Kingdom of God. We will seek to help those whose lives we want to share; to be completely and totally responsible for the Kingdom.

3. Ours is a call to open the door to the one who knocks and yearns for the liberation of all creation. (Rev. 3:20)

4. We accept the call of our Church in our time, to the challenge of a NEW EVANGELIZATION, an Evangelization that is NEW in its fervour, NEW in its methods, NEW in its expression.

5. We recognize that this call demands fidelity and boldness.

The Foundations of Our Spirituality

a) We believe in the fundamental fact that God loved us first; He seeks us, desiring to enter into communion with us; He wants our growth, that we may be more than we are today. We recognize this fact and seek how to respond to this love of God, which seeks to humanize and sanctify us.

Therefore, we identify with God's plan for creation, which is in the Kingdom of God and His justice (Holiness). We seek to bring this Kingdom to ourselves and to others. Through faith, God is found to the extent to which we seek Him.

b) For those who accept a God incarnated in history, a crucified God who, in His abandonment and death, transforms slavery, misery, and injustice into means of liberation, everything is illuminated.

c) We believe that the only way the light of Christianity penetrates is through the evangelical life of a person of faith.

d) We believe that our God reveals Himself gradually, according to the faithfulness and contemplative growth of the believer. Our God is the biblical God, the God of Abraham, Moses, and the prophets. This God, who is fully revealed in the God of Jesus, is also a God of justice, concerned about the suffering and oppression of His people; He is a liberating God. Furthermore, He is a God jealous of sin, of all evil and idolatry. It is to this God that we must convert.

e) We believe that being converted to Him means becoming our neighbors through the practice of charity, justice, and mercy.

f) We believe that to reach Him and understand Him, we need a change of life and heart.

g) We believe that God revealed himself to us in his total fullness and purity in Jesus Christ. The historical God becomes history; the God of the poor becomes poor; the God of justice becomes a victim of injustice. The God of promise gives his life to complement it, and the God of hope gives us security forever.

h) Therefore, we believe in the God of Jesus Christ, who reveals the essence of the Christian God to be pure love, active, dynamic, and unlimited mercy. Since God is Love, he is committed to his people. Because he is love, he is faithful to his promises. Because he is love, he is justice and liberation for the poor, hope and refuge for sinners. Because he is love, he is jealous of the idols that distort his love and, with it, the individual. Because He is love, He is in solidarity with human history to the point of His sacrifice on the cross. Our God, out of love, makes Himself vulnerable... He truly becomes the Father of each person and identifies with the most unfortunate among us.

i) For us, the only way to seek and find God is through knowing and following Jesus Christ, whom we know to the extent that we follow and imitate Him.

The Model of Our Life

a) We follow Jesus of Nazareth as disciples, one like us in all things, except sin, and in whom resided the fullness of God. We follow a Jesus who had a story like ours; who lived our experiences; who made decisions; who dedicated himself entirely to a cause for which he suffered. Who had successes, joys, and failures for which he gave his life. In this Jesus, God reveals himself to us, almighty, yet at the same time poor and suffering for love. Absolute, yet also someone with our human history, someone close to every person.

b) We will come to discover what prayer, what fraternity, and obedience are, in the way Jesus comes to know these values. Following him should be for us an encounter in faith and love. This will mean knowing the Lord, whom we follow contemplatively with our whole being, especially with our heart, as a disciple, as a follower. c) Like Jesus, we will be people committed to the Father, who seek the Father's face and will, to the point of dedicating ourselves to our lives, who seek to live in absolute intimacy with the Father, and who constantly strive to express this intimacy with the Father in prayer and worship. Therefore, we will strive, as He did, to relate to others in fraternity and love, to bear

witness to and fight for truth and justice, and to have a preferential option for the poor and suffering. We value the cross, poverty, and humility.

d) We not only seek to follow Jesus (Christ as the Way), but at the same time to live the life of Jesus (Christ as the Life) through the Spirit. Through the Spirit (the Life), we not only imitate Christ, but are also transformed in Christ and, like Him, into sons and daughters of God. Therefore, we seek to live a life in accordance with the Spirit. This means living according to God's criteria and perspectives, which have been embodied throughout time in the life and teachings of Jesus.

e) For us, the privileged place and land of the Spirit is the Church community. This is where the Spirit exists and acts, because the Church is the Sacrament of Christ and the following of Him. This is the primary place for the encounter with the Father. Therefore, we fully commit ourselves to participating in the life of the Church, its sacraments, its communities, its preaching, and its service to others.

f) We will joyfully participate in the communal celebration of faith, in the sharing and study of the Word of God, in the common search for Christian commitment and in the renewal of life. Ours will be a communal experience of fraternity, love, and solidarity. Together in the Ecclesial Community, we will help and guide one another to live according to the Spirit.

g) In this search, we recognize Mary as the perfect follower of Jesus. From the angel's announcement to the foot of the cross, she guided herself unreservedly through the life of the Spirit.

h) Mary's absolute fidelity is interwoven amidst the complexities, darkness, and conflicts inherent in faith. Like Jesus, she experiences temptations and the cross; and through this, she identifies with the redemptive mission of her son, Jesus. For this reason, she is our best model for discipleship.

i) Mary is also our sister and companion. By accepting her as our model, we want to show everyone in the world an experience of God's maternal love for us. Because in her, we experience in a particular way the feminine aspects of God's love: its delicacy, tenderness, emotional closeness, depth, and mystery. By accepting Mary as our sister, we recognize her as a person who lived the routine of life in her time, in the poverty and obscurity of Nazareth and in the darkness of faith. We know that She is the sign of hope, that God's promises will be fulfilled in us, because She has preceded us and has reached God's vision. Those whom She has sent us to serve the poor and those who suffer on earth will feel in Her the loving solidarity of the God of the poor and the justice that lifts up the humble and dethrones the powerful.

We commit ourselves to a community of life and love; bearing witness to those around us of the Gospel call to make each other brothers and sisters and to be a prophetic reminder of life in the Kingdom.

a) Therefore, we agree to share our lives, talents, and resources together.

b) We will primarily be ministers to one another, seeking to become true friends; confirming and affirming; helping and correcting one another, respecting each other's gifts and talents. To promote harmony in the community, we will strive to be open to each other and make decisions by consensus. This will require dialogue and honesty, trust, and the acceptance of responsibility. We will strive to build one another up, and when, through human frailty, we offend or are offended, we will humbly reach out in understanding and forgiveness.

c) We will schedule special times to be together and celebrate life and the important events in our lives.

d) We will carry out our tasks in the ordinary chores of a house.

2/2 - OUR WAY OF LIVING

The Witness

Our consecration will require of us a life of prayer and contemplation, fraternal charity, and daily asceticism to restrain all desire for power and greed, until we completely identify with Jesus, naked and abandoned on the cross.

1. Through our way of living, people will see that the dream of a better world where each person will be a brother or sister to another will not be an unattainable utopia, but a process from birth.
2. Through our witness, we will be a sign of hope, revealed in the risen Christ, that the future does not belong to those who oppress, marginalize, and accumulate wealth, but rather belongs to those who share, liberate, give of themselves, and come together as brothers and sisters.

The Prophetic Sign

We seek to live according to the Kingdom of God in all its radicality and in all its fullness, to facilitate the creation of a society more in accord with the Kingdom. We must make ourselves an eschatological sign of the life of the Kingdom.

1. Then our presence in the world will be a prophetic sign. Our value will not be so much in what we do for the people, but rather in who we are, signs of God and of the meaning that everyone, consciously or unconsciously, seeks.
2. We must make ourselves a sign, or an ideal, of a world where the exploitation of one person by another never exists, and where total reconciliation (in the Kingdom of God) occurs.
3. We identify with the poor, who are par excellence the sacrament of God and the messengers of Jesus. Leaving the realm of the poor and as poor people ourselves, we address all others.
4. Through such a way of living, we will become a prophetic sign, accusing the world immersed in power and riches.

Presence and Critical Spirit

We must be signs that question God's manipulation, where special interests are monopolized by the powerful at the expense of the poor and marginalized. We cannot allow our way of life and our mission to accept the values imposed by the social system.

1. Through our freedom of speech, action, and conscience, we denounce the unjust situations surrounding the poor and live out a more promising and effective alternative.
2. We need to be critical, not naive. We must be constantly alert to the constant manipulation by the state and others who will try to use us and silence our consciences in order to appear as true servants of the world of the poor. This will require a critical spirit that prevents us from becoming entangled in the system and thus becoming an unconscious cause of its legitimization.
3. The Gospel does not allow us to harmonize or conform to the world, but rather to have a critical spirit ready to detect the structural evil in society and capable of discerning the voice of God amidst human voices.
4. Our critical presence implies, on the one hand, denouncing the structural situation that contradicts God's plan and the Gospel message, and on the other, proclaiming a true fellowship, sharing goods and tasks equally.
5. We must be capable of criticizing prevailing ideologies and proclaiming other values that support and enable the participation of all, a new meaning of fellowship, and a more equitable distribution of cultural and economic goods. Thus, we need to be attentive to the events occurring in the country and elsewhere, to know how we can interpret them from a contemplative vision of reality.

The Test

Our way of life will be the necessary test of the authenticity of our mission.

Objective

Our basic task is to create a favourable climate for an authentic experience of God.

1. The call to experience God is a call to grow in fraternity and to surrender to Jesus in prayer, and a call to learn to encounter Him in the service of fraternity.

Prayer and Contemplation

Our prayer is an opening of ourselves in praise and gratitude to God who created all things with such goodness and love.

1. For us, what is important is that we pray; what we pray is secondary. Our concern for the beauty and content of the prayers belongs to this secondary level.

2. For us, prayer is a means of loving, and loving is seeking union. When we love another, we think of that person continually; No matter where we are, where we go, or what we do, our thoughts always turn to our loved ones and unite us to Him. To pray, then, is for us to rest in God, to walk with Him, to feel united to Him.

3. God is only real and meaningful to us when He emerges from our experience. At the root of all things is an encounter with God, not apart from, within, or beyond the world, but together with the world.

4. Our contemplation is to become fully and totally aware that Jesus lives in us, and that we and He are one.

5. Through this contemplation, others will find us more loving, more patient, more capable of understanding them, more interested in their problems. They will increasingly recognize us for who we are.

Contemplation and Friendship

Our experience of God is also an experience of our brother and sister in the community of faith.

1. A true experience of God occurs in the commitment to ensuring the rights of the oppressed, to combating poverty, illiteracy, and marginalization. Our experience of a God who raises Jesus from the dead is incompatible with accepting a society that condemns the poor to death.

2. When others feel welcomed by us, when others see all of creation as a gift and feel they are at the center of the great adventure of friendship, then this is good news. This is the gospel we must proclaim.

2/4 - OUR EXPERIENCE OF COMMUNITY

1. Community Life

Our community exists only when we encounter one another as persons, not simply as individuals, but as brothers and sisters. This is the sign by which the Kingdom of God will be recognized.

Our community life cultivates receptivity to the Kingdom of God and also proclaims it. In this reception and proclamation, our community will be built as a community.

The form of our community will be one of transparency, a spirit of fraternal love, participation of all, freedom in relationships, and mutual respect, rather than the servility and disrespect that is illicitly given.

The heartfelt support of the community is essential for this journey of faith.

2. Prayer, Contemplation, and Community

Our fraternity is essentially contemplative. Our prayer in community should generally be short and simple, in the style of Jesus. Rather than many words, God desires our humble hearts and our complete and unconditional submission.

Generally, this cannot be adequately expressed in formulas without violating the intimacy of the mystery of each person. This is from silence, from which each creative word is born and reveals itself to be a better form of communication and a better attitude of prayer for us.

3. Community and Celebration

The preeminent form of our community life is realized in our community celebration. In this celebration, we do not feel the passage of time. The only true purpose of our celebration is to rejoice together, to be one with each other and in harmony, fraternity, and love. Our celebration reconciles everything. To truly rejoice and thus celebrate together, we need to be able to say YES to everything, to every moment, and to everything in life. Thus, our celebration becomes a privileged moment where the hidden meaning of life leaps forth, incarnated and concrete. From this celebration, we emerge to better confront the daily routine and the other demands of life.

We will try to find the joy and happiness of the feast or celebration, which will make us truly aware of the meaning of human life. They are privileged moments or means to renew the rest of our lives.

4. Eucharistic Celebration

Our breaking of the bread is at the same time the point of departure and the point of arrival of our community. Through this, profound communion in human suffering and joyful recognition of the risen Jesus are expressed, who gives life and raises the hopes of those gathered as a Church through his words and deeds. Here in this Eucharistic community, our hope in the Lord is nourished.

1. The thanksgiving that is our Eucharist expresses the confidence that the communion of life, which, although not yet existing among us, can become a reality.
2. Our Eucharist, then, is the foretaste and celebration of the banquet of the Kingdom—the eschatological moment of communion and fellowship in the good things of God's kingdom. Every time we eat Jesus' Supper together, the Kingdom of God is anticipated and realized.
3. The symbols of Jesus' Supper are symbols of martyrdom, the surrendered body, the blood that is about to be shed. A concrete action is being carried out. Jesus actually surrenders himself and truly dies, out of love for sinful humanity.
4. The first Eucharist was an act of service, an experience of radical and interpersonal communion. Our Eucharist cannot be celebrated in the spirit of Jesus unless it is accompanied by a hunger and thirst for justice.
5. Jesus did not cling to life; he made himself a gift to others. To communicate with him, we must be like him, making ourselves a gift to others. Our celebration of the Eucharist in memory of him requires that we truly give ourselves to others, even to the limit (Jn. 13:1). Our Eucharist must become a sacrificial reconciliation with God and with each one of us.
6. As long as we live, we must strive to protect the sanctity of our celebrations. Thus, we will always be able to fulfill its threefold purpose: it will remind us of that event of a bygone age—Jesus's self-

giving and total gift of himself; it will accomplish the action that will forever be repeated—the unification and reconciliation of human beings with one another and with God; and it will direct our gaze to that happy outcome of history when God will be fully in us and we will be fully in God, and the universe itself will be a Eucharist of thanksgiving.

3/1 – OUR MISSION

Liberating Dimension

Our mission is based on a state of exodus, of liberation, which is a particular form of death to self and of following Jesus.

1. To effectively fulfill our prophetic mission, we must not be confined to overly institutionalized structures. We are not called to provide a predetermined type of pastoral care, whether official or organized. But we do enter into pastoral endeavour, but with sovereign freedom.
2. To be faithful to our mission, we need to be ready to take a critical stance, avoiding adopting a neutral position. We need to be vigilant so as not to run the risk of becoming a force that preserves the old humanity with all its slavery to selfishness and oppression. Ours must be a liberating, not an oppressive, role.
3. We cannot have a spirituality of mission without a Christian identity, without conversion, without the experience of God, without fraternal love, without love for the poor and marginalized, without poverty, and without the acceptance of persecution and the cross.

Mission and Contemplation

To be authentic, our action must be penetrated and inspired by contemplation, that is, it must spring from the fullness of the contemplative life. The alternations of our life (mission among the poor and the experience of God in the desert) mean that they must be carried out simultaneously, as two inseparable dimensions of the Christian life. We are called to synthesize, to unite the courage of prophetic commitment with the contemplative experience of God.

1. The motives and basis of our mission come from our faith. But our faith is not a collection of abstract ideas. Our faith is an experience. The evangelical values that motivate our mission must be part of our life. This requires us to be people of prayer. Christian prayer, in any of its forms, is the only place where our faith becomes an experience of God, of his message, and of his Kingdom. Without this prayer, our experience of God is unravelled. God cannot be encountered on the path of our mission unless we have encountered him on the path of our prayer. Our mission rediscovers in a new way the presence of Jesus, whom we have discovered and experienced in prayer.
2. In our mission, action and prayer form a single, coherent whole. Our missionary activity cannot replace the effectiveness of our prayer, nor does our prayer replace our missionary activity.
3. We must not entrust to our prayer what is a matter of human effort and intelligence, a matter of what God expects of the faculties He has granted us.
4. We will need the capacity for reflection, for interiorization, for "being still" in our inner depths. For this, we need a certain personal discipline, a certain self-mastery in the area of feeling and

affectivity. We must remain in control of our own activity, which will have a tendency to pull us at times to the point of enslaving us. Even our work, our activity, can become an idol and pervert the evangelical quality of our mission. Thus, we are called to summon the courage of a prophetic commitment to the contemplative experience of God.

Mission and Witness

We place ourselves where God chose to pitch his tent with us, sharing the plight of the poor.

1. Praying but not changing our situation and behaviour toward our poor brothers and sisters is certainly a waste of time. Our celebration of the Eucharist means our song of thanksgiving to life. We feel grateful for life when we feel we are in communion with our brothers and sisters, when we feel welcomed by them.

2. Our trust in the work of the Spirit of Jesus in our mission is manifested through our respect for each person, through our non-imposition, through our recognition of truth and goodness wherever they are, through our humility, and our selflessness. This evangelical style of mission is part of our witness, which makes it credible and acceptable through patience and the cross.

This witness will be the sure and urgent proof of the authenticity of our mission.

The Task of Evangelization

Our mission contains the same dimensions as Jesus' mission. We must evangelize all dimensions of human existence. No dimension of individual or social life is beyond its reach.

1. Our way of evangelizing must be a creative and prophetic task that will be defined by the signs of the times and that more adequately translates the Gospel into contemporary language and witness.

2. When our evangelization responds to reality, human aspirations, and culture, then it must recognize that the only reality and the only common aspiration of all human realities and cultures is the desire to be happy. When we unite the message of Jesus with the human search for happiness, then we are evangelizing. When we unite the hopes of humanity with the promises of God, we are evangelizing. Thus, our evangelization, by its very nature, is God's program for happiness.

3. Evangelization is the revelation in which happiness, humanization, and the purpose of life are found. In a world infested with misery, sin, and unhappiness, they are a gift from God given to us in Jesus Christ; and by accepting this gift, we will have happiness and life fully in the current reality of the world in which we live.

4. To evangelize, it will not be necessary to carry out a specific missionary task. Our own life is evangelizing because of our special way of making God and Jesus the center of our lives. In this way, we become signs and sacraments of God's presence in the world and among us.

Evangelization and Solidarity

1. We cannot proclaim the Gospel without engaging with and among the people. It is necessary and urgent for us to build communion and discover the Gospel as the revelation of the Father, who is glorified in this search for communion. The Gospel leads us to a knowledge of the truth and to putting it into practice. Therefore, evangelizing the poor and entering into a process of liberation is possible only if we put ourselves in their shoes and abandon the position of the rich. We cannot evangelize the poor if we are rich or use the discourses composed by the rich.

3. Only through a life dedicated to the poor, sharing their lives, their struggles, their hopes, can we discover, together with them, the essence of the Gospel message.

Missionary Availability

We must assiduously avoid all useless observations that attempt to occupy our time instead of nurturing our growth and commitment. Our availability should not be impeded by unchanging and

enslaving schedules. Such availability should not be for our own convenience or convenience, but for the service of the brother or sister who seeks help and advice.

3/2 - WARNING OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF OUR COMMITMENT

Temptations

We must be alert, as Jesus warned us, against the temptation of siege, of becoming discouraged in the face of persistent evil, of becoming impatient with the constant confrontation between good and evil, between the Gospel and sin, present at every turn, and the added difficulty of distinguishing one from the other.

1. Every kind of temptation is inherent to the mission. It is part of the inner persecution (inner conflict). Our temptation will be to seek "another kingdom," a substitute for the Kingdom of God, to replace evangelization with something "more or less good," with a caricature of evangelization. We will be tempted to abandon the criteria, options, and demands of the Kingdom with the criteria, options, and demands, but in harmony with a temporal existence.
2. On our journey through the desert, we will surely experience failures and the temptation to turn back, but also successes and, above all, hope in God who liberates and gives life.

Conflicts

We will encounter conflicts on our journey due to our fidelity to our commitment. Conflict will often arise when, in trying to be faithful to the Gospel and the Church, we take positions that are sometimes considered suspect or do not agree with the prevailing opinion.

1. In the face of conflict, we need an attitude of patience. We must believe in God's own timing, that there is a time when He always appears. We must value the time factor and discern when time should contribute to the resolution of a conflict or when it is appropriate to intervene to lessen it.
2. Our poverty in the mission will be to accept crises of insecurity and the many forms of rebirth without losing our Christian identity. This impoverishment will require a considerable degree of maturity from us.

Persecution

Being a prophetic sign implies that we can expect to encounter persecution, because prophecy is a love that separates and sets three against two.

1. The various forms in which the cross and persecution present themselves along the path of our life of fidelity to the justice of God's Kingdom are inherent parts of our mission in its very being. They are proof that our evangelization is Christian. They are signs of the persevering effectiveness of our mission.
2. Following Jesus means choosing his path. We must consider the real possibility of persecution, slander, imprisonment, and even death itself for love of the people as normal and logical. We freely choose sacrifice and the creation of ourselves as outcasts.
3. Knowing that we will be slandered, denounced as subversives, and contradicted should not surprise us, because Jesus and his apostles were slandered and accused of all these things. This is the price of a liberating freedom.
4. Our consecrated life of commitment to the poor is a prophetic life, and therefore a life capable of challenging what the institution has crystallized and elevated to the absolute; and therefore ripe for persecution, misunderstanding, and stoning. This is the price of prophecy.

Loneliness

Our journey toward community life can often take an unexpected turn, a passage through a painful experience of profound loneliness.

1. The passage through this desert is a journey of pure faith, with only God's support and guidance. In this loneliness, God speaks to us lovingly (2:14), calls us to fidelity, and comforts us.
2. Another cause of our interior suffering will be the loneliness that comes from misunderstanding and misunderstanding with others. For Jesus, in the hour of his affliction, the interior conflict of being totally alone was the greatest of all. Today we can understand and accompany Jesus, because in his solitary martyrdom, we were won over by the Spirit who resides in the Church, the Spirit whom Jesus said, "He will teach you all things and will remind you of all that I have said to you" (Jn 4:26). In our solitude, we can live with hope today, because Jesus died abandoned. Because in this abandonment, the Father embraced all abandoned and rejected people.

Loneliness and Abandonment

The particular abandonment to which we will be vulnerable will seem to come when we least expect it and from the least expected place.

1. Loneliness and abandonment, as the highest form of interior persecution, teach us to follow Jesus in the most fruitful phase of his mission, the giving of his life. Even though the one who sowed the seed of the Kingdom, first with the crowd and then with his disciples, could not make it take root until he gave his life, so too, regardless of any missionary strategy we may employ, we will never see the seed of the Gospel mature and bear fruit until we first give our own lives for the cause of the Kingdom day by day, even in the face of misunderstanding, failure, and loneliness.

Loneliness and Communion

Like the Jewish people in the desert, we travel this road in great loneliness. This loneliness is a central factor in our experience of God, for it is in the desert that God speaks to us.

1. This experience of solitude provokes a hunger for communion among people and prepares us for it. God does not call us to the desert to wander endlessly, but to cross it to reach the Promised Land. This journey creates a community flowing with the milk and honey of the brotherhood of those who recognize God as their Father.
2. Without this experience of solitude, there is no communion, no union with God, and no sincere sharing with others.

Itinerancy

We are called to take up the challenge that comes from our mission of evangelization, to make real in the world and in the Church the ongoing conversion demanded by the Good News. This conversion makes us itinerants, always leaving our homeland to seek other lands, where others are and where we must proclaim the presence of God and his liberating grace.

Final Consequence

Even if our life seems hard, like those on the outside, with fervour and the grace of God we can endure it, because we want to give ourselves and surrender ourselves completely to the Lord Jesus. How can He fail to keep the promises He has made to those who abandon everything for Him?

- a. We will not see during our lifetime that new society and that new human being for whom we work, expend ourselves, and commit ourselves. However, a profound introspection of the experience of God can transform hope from a hope against hope.
- b. We will make our lives a seed of great hope, working with determination for the birth of that new future that will come after us. Like Jesus, we will continue preaching to the people, calling them to conversion, never losing hope for the future triumph of justice over injustice, of love over hatred, of brotherhood over division. Such sacrifice will be radically liberating and purifying, since it forces us to transcend our own achievements and enables us to live a life of pure faith. Finding joy in life and

the strength to commit to something that ordinarily has no immediate prospect of success means bearing witness among the poor.

c. When we have nothing to lose (prestige, career, security), only then will we be able to maintain fidelity and thus maintain a spirituality of hope.

3/3 – THE LAST WORD: RADICAL COMMITMENT

When we made our initial consecration as Misioneros Maristas we declared before God and one another our intention to live out our baptism more fully. We chose to follow Jesus more closely by a radical commitment to the spirit of the Beatitudes in a community has one heart and one mind. We consecrated all that we are and have to the service of the Gospel and the Kingdom wherever we were to be sent in the name of the mission that we were to assume.

By our consecration, we committed ourselves anew to the conversion begun at our Baptism, a daily dying and rising with Jesus. This attitude has permeated our every thought and action.

Jean Claude Colin and his companions believed that, in God's plan, the Marists came into existence because Mary wanted it. Like them, we Misioneros Maristas are convinced that the Lord and Mary, whose work we do, will care for us, project it, and make it grow.

We must learn from the first Marists to find in the presence of Mary at Nazareth and Pentecost, in the early Church and at the end of time, the secret of our own presence in the Church and the world of today: a presence attentive to God and vibrant with zeal, so that while doing great things for the Lord and the Kingdom, we may seem to be unknown and even hidden in the world. This was Mary's way; this is Mary's work. It is expressed for all Marists in the words of Jean Claude Colin:

"Let us always bear in mind that they belong by a gracious choice to the family of the blessed Mary, Mother of God, from whose name they are called Marists, and whom they have chosen from the beginning as their model and first perpetual superior. If therefore they are and desire to be true sons of this dear Mother, let them try constantly to breathe her spirit of humility, self-denial, intimate union with God and the most ardent love of neighbour. So they must think as Mary, judge as Mary, feel and act as Mary in all things, otherwise they will be unworthy and degenerate sons".

In his commentary on the Marist Spirit, Colin wrote:

"The Marist Spirit will never be grasped except through personal and communal effort of its members to take seriously their belonging to Mary and the responsibility it puts upon them".

This responsibility is to live a simple life, stripped of any artificiality, and to keep in touch with the living tradition of the Marist Project. This Spirit cannot be separated from the body it contains, from the living tradition of the Marists.

"Therefore, following in the footsteps of their Mother, let them above all be far removed from any worldly spirit, and from all greed for earthly goods, and completely emptied of all self-interest. Let them strive to deny themselves completely in all things: seeking not their own interests, but only those of Jesus and Mary; considering themselves as exiles and pilgrims on earth, indeed as worthless servants and as the refuse of the world; using the things of this world as if not using them; strenuously avoiding in their buildings and living quarters, all that suggests display and ostentation, or a desire for attention: loving to be unknown and subject to all, without deceit or cunning; in a word, acting always with such great poverty, humility and modesty, simplicity of heart, and lack of all vanity and worldly ambition, and moreover so combining a love of solitude and silence and the practice of hidden virtues with works of

zeal, that while they must uptake the various ministries by which the salvation of souls may be furthered, they may appear unknown, and even hidden in the world.

Let them all cling to this spirit in the knowledge that it is the pivot and foundation of their whole Society”.

We must be convinced that we cannot speak of fidelity to our founders if we do not seek above all to keep alive the body they founded. A body animated, of course, by a spirit...but a body which accepts that it is a body and consequently is concerned not to decompose, concerned about what concerns it structures and nourishes it. Yes, to learn once more...to love afresh our Marist corporate body, to give it features and form, there is the task that awaits us, if we do not wish it to disappear.