



St Peter Chanel

Norena

Apr 19-27

St Peter Chanel

... was martyred on the very remote Pacific island of Futuna on 28th April 1841. He was a founding member of the Society of Mary – Marist Fathers. This religious society was approved by Rome just a few years before that on 29th April 1836.

His courageous, faith filled life is what Marists continue to celebrate and especially at this time of the year. We look to his example and inspiration in doing “Mary’s work” today.

The Constitutions of the Society of Mary are the best we can do to formalise just how we live out our Marist Spirit. We also have a wonderful history of Marist stories where St Peter Chanel and so many other Marists lived out that same spirit. During this Novena, we will share some of both our constitutions and these stories.

Father Jean Claude Colin together with another eleven young priests and seminarians made a promise at Fourvière, Lyon in France on 23rd July 1816 to form a society under the name of Mary to serve the church with her spirit. The Society they both dreamt of and formed is a “tree with many branches” and that spirit is lived out by Priests, Brothers, Sisters and Laypeople.

Novena

The custom in the Society of Mary is that the nine days leading up to the Feast of St Peter Chanel are dedicated to prayer for vocations to the priesthood and the religious life. You are invited to pray during this novena for Vocations to the Society of Mary and the whole Marist family. Feel free to use these reflections and prayer individually, in a group setting or as a part of community prayer.

Prayer to St Peter Chanel

*Use the prayer on the **back page**
at the end of each day’s reflection.*

The first day: Apr 19

St Peter Chanel and the early Marists waited for the official approval of the Society of Mary.

As the church throughout the world awaits the completion of the Easter Triduum with the glory of the Resurrection, we Marists recall the period from the Promise of Fourvière in 1816 to the approval of the Society in 1836. During this period, those young men worked tirelessly to carry out the promise as they were convinced that they were responding to a wish of the Mother of Mercy, which found expression for them in the following words: “I supported the Church at its birth; I shall do so again at the end of time”. Marist Constitutions #2.

From the beginning, Marists have been inspired by two convictions.

The first conviction is that the Society of Mary exists because Mary wants it. This was a firm belief of Jean Claude Colin and his companions at the beginning. In 1848 he said: “The words ‘I was the mainstay of the new-born Church; I shall be again at the end of time’, served us, in the very earliest days of the Society, as a foundation and an encouragement. They were always before us.

The second conviction is that Jean Claude Colin was the man chosen to give shape to this body call the Society of Mary. The rules he laid down for the Society, approved by the Church, are what constitute us as a body in the Church.

“What brought us together binds us together.”

The second day: Apr 20

St Peter Chanel was a part of a new family in the church.

This work of Mary was shared by Jean-Claude Colin and the Marist Fathers and Brothers, Marcellin Champagnat and the Marist Teaching Brothers, Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn and the Marist Sisters, and later by the Marist Missionary Sisters, as well the Third Order of Mary spread throughout the world. All these groups have been regarded from their beginning as belonging to the one Marist family. Marist Constitutions #4

Marist Sisters

“Our Lady will protect the Society of Mary ... provided we remain simple, humble and unassuming. Always be a bond of union between your sisters so that they all may have but one heart and soul.” *Last Testament of Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn.*

Marist Brothers

“What a consolation we have, to remember that we have lived in favour of Mary, and in her own Society.” *Last Testament of Marcellin Champagnat.*

Marist Missionary Sisters

“I am very happy and proud to have launched the movement: my 13 years of trial will be counted among the best times of my life.” *Letter of Françoise Perroton*

Marist Laity “... it must not be forgotten that we are united with the whole order of the Marists.” *Minutes of the meeting of the Third Order of Mary (Marist Laity) 27th October 1837.*

The third day: Apr 21

St Peter Chanel delighted in the Marist Spirit

Because they bear the name of Mary, Marists desire to be like her and follow Jesus as she did. Contemplating Mary in the mysteries of Nazareth and Pentecost and her role at the end of time, they come to share her zeal for her Son’s mission in his struggle against evil, and to respond with promptness to the most urgent needs of God’s people. Marist Constitution #8.

As Marists, they desire to breathe her spirit to be humble and obedient, and to deny themselves for the love of God and their neighbour. Marist Constitution #9

Marist story...

During his years as the first superior general (1836-1854), Jean-Claude Colin sent 121 missionaries to Oceania in 15 groups: 74 priests, 26 Little Brothers of Mary, 17 coadjutor brothers, three laymen and one laywoman (François Perroton). Soon after the departures of the first groups of missionaries, the news of death, deprivation and disease reached Colin and the Society in France: Fr (to be canonised Saint) Peter Chanel murdered on Futuna in 1841, Bishop Epalle murdered on Isabella Island in 1845, Br Blaise murdered in New Caledonia in 1847, three Marists lost at sea, sailing to Tikopia, two Marists lost at sea in New Zealand. Many Missionaries suffered early death through deprivation or illness. Marists needed a robust spirituality to support a most difficult life.

The fourth day: Apr 22

St Peter Chanel was called to be missionary.

Marists are called to establish the Church where it does not exist and to renew existing communities rather than to participate in its activities in places where it is already established with sufficient resources. The Society is no longer true to its calling whenever it becomes so caught up in particular works as to cease to be available for more urgent needs to which it may be called by its mission.

Marist Constitution #14

Marists seek inspiration in the tradition phrase, "hidden and unknown in the world". For Jean-Claude Colin it best captured, in the light of his spiritual and pastoral experience, Mary's presence in the Church. Marist Constitution #22

Marist story...

Jean-Baptiste Bréhéret was 28 years of age when he left France for Oceania in 1843. After a few months on the Island of Wallis, he was sent to Fiji as a member of the first Marist community to be established there. He remained there for the next 54 years until his death in 1898. Bréhéret built his own boat, made his own sails, and spent most of his life on the sea. He covered thousands of miles among the 250 inhabited islands of the archipelago. By 1861, he counted 4000 catechumens and 500 baptised Christians. In 1887, the number of converts had grown to 14000.

When someone told him that he should write his memories, he replied, "I have written them with the keel of my boat on the moving waters of the Pacific."

The fifth day: Apr 23.

St Peter Chanel gave his life to serve the church in humility.

While Marists are willing to undertake any ministry that will help build up the church for the sake of the world, they work in such a fashion that no one, as it were, notices their presence. Marist Constitution #25

Marist Story...

Jean-Antoine Seón probably did more than any other Marist to transfer to the Antipodes the richness of the Founder's spirit, yet we hardly know anything of him.

He was one of the first 20 Marists who made vows in 1836. He left France for Oceania in December 1840, arriving in New Zealand in 1841.

Because he was willing to undertake any ministry anywhere, he was asked to do many things for which he was not prepared or suited. He wanted to minister to the Maori and spent much effort learning the language, but found himself ministering to French and Irish immigrants. He found loneliness difficult, yet was asked to live along and isolated from his confreres. He was asked to be the bursar for the mission that was in deep financial crisis, a task for which he was not suited.

His ministry took him to almost every part of New Zealand. He journeyed overland mostly on foot and often barefooted to save his shoes.

He died at the age of 70, leaving little behind but a reputation for unusual sanctity and the fruits of his apostolic work.

The sixth day: Apr 24

St Peter Chanel lived the gospels in the spirit of Mary.

Marists are called, above all, to make their own a Marian vision of the Church. To achieve this, nothing will be as effective as a re-living of the founding experience of the Society. Like the twelve young men at Fourvière they respond to a special call. By “tasting God” as Father Colin did at Cerdon, they realise the radical opposition between the spirit of Mary and the spirit of ambition, covetousness and the lust for power... Marist Constitution #92

Marist story...

Fr François Marc was professed as a Marist in 1968. He lived through the years of hope and conflict that European society in general and the Church and the Society of Mary in particular experienced at that time. His years of ministry were spent as a chaplain in Marist schools in France. He died at the age of 47 after a long battle with cancer. His confidence in God and his love for his Marist vocation are reflected in the well-known reflection he wrote on “The Marian Church”. He begins his reflection: “I would like to plead for a Marian Church; not for a church which multiplies processions and blesses huge statues, rather a church which ‘lives the Gospel after the manner of Mary... 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 and tends their wounds. She is the safe harbour who is always open, the refuge of sinners, mother of mercy.

The seventh day Apr 25

St Peter Chanel knew the importance of tasting God in prayer.

At Cerdon Jean-Claude Colin became convinced that the idea of the Society of Mary came from God. In prayer and meditation on the mystery of Mary’s presence at the birth of the Church, he discovered how the Society should be present in the church of his time.

In the same way, a Marist novice learns to ‘taste God’ and discover for himself in prayer how, by belonging to her Society, he must live the spirit of Mary. By the time of his profession, he will have made sufficient progress to begin to discern the action of the Holy Spirit in his life. He is aware of the obstacles within himself that he uses the means to remain united with God in all that he does. Constitutions number 53

Marist story...

One day, when Fr Colin was speaking of the need to ‘taste God’, he held up **Jean-Pierre Frémont** as an example: Father Frémont is a man of God. When he was first sent to La Favorite (the novitiate), he suffered a great deal at the change of circumstances... Then he tasted God, he made his novitiate as a man of God.”

In letter after letter from his mission in the Solomon Islands, Frémont has tragic news to report to the superior general: the departure of two Marists from the team, the murder of Bishop Epalle, the death of Cyprian Crey, the death of Bishop Collomb and of Grégoire Villien, the constant ill-health of the missionaries, discouragement and dissention among the missionaries, minimal results after five years of mission work.

His letters reveal that he sees these things in the light of faith. Having tasted God, he seems able to find God in all the circumstances of his life.

The eighth day: Apr 26

St Peter Chanel was greatly concerned for all the members of the Society of Mary.

Every Marist concerns himself with the community of the province to which he belongs or in which he works, and shares in the responsibility for its undertakings. Constitutions 131.

Marist Story ...

Pat Reynolds believed that commitment to the Society was a two-way process, and that each individual has the responsibility to forge links with his confreres and his province. He lived this belief all his life.

From the province of Australia, Pat was ordained in 1955. For five years after his ordination, he taught in Marist colleges; but he wanted to go to the Marist Mission in Japan. At the end of 1960, he received an appointment to Nara Prefecture, Japan. However, at the same time, he began to experience the first symptoms of multiple sclerosis. His mission posting was put on hold, and was never realized.

The multiple sclerosis took further hold of Pat, reducing his mobility more and more until he was confined to a wheelchair. But he continued to find ways of exercising pastoral ministry, and he adapted his life and his ministries as his mobility decreased. Pat accepted his condition but he resisted the temptation to withdraw from Marist and community life.

The ninth day: Apr 27

Spiritual Testament of Jean-Claude Colin – Lyon, 6th May 1870.

For your part, dear Marists, read this rule, absorbing ever more the spirit I have tried to express in it. It is my hope that you will recognise there, the true dispositions which Mary, our noble and most holy Mother, wishes to be the inspiration of all the members of her little Society.

Marist Story...

In 1990, in one of his last public talks, **Jean Coste** said of Father Colin: “He was one thing only, but he was that to the fullest extent possible: a founder.”

As a founder, Colin gave to the Church a religious congregation. Its Rule and its Constitutions gave it a body. Its spirit gave it a soul.

Twenty-seven years after writing his commentary on the Spirit of the Society, Coste warned the Society “the most insidious temptation for us today would be to become indifferent to the body in order to concentrate on the spirit.” He alerted the Society to the danger of separating the spirit from the body. “The separation of body and spirit has a name,” he wrote. “It is called death.”

“I am really convinced ... that we cannot speak of fidelity to Colin if we do not seek above all to keep alive the body he 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 preserves its structures and nourishes it.”



Prayer

St Peter Chanel, you left your homeland
to proclaim Jesus, Saviour of the world,
to the peoples of Oceania.

Guided by the Spirit of God,
who is the strength of the gentle,
you bore witness to love,
even laying down your life.

May God grant that, like you, we may live our daily life
in peace, in joy, and in fraternal love.

May your prayer and example
call forth from our midst
many workers for the Gospel
so that God's Kingdom may reach
to the ends of the earth. Amen.

Pray this prayer at the end of each reflection of the novena.