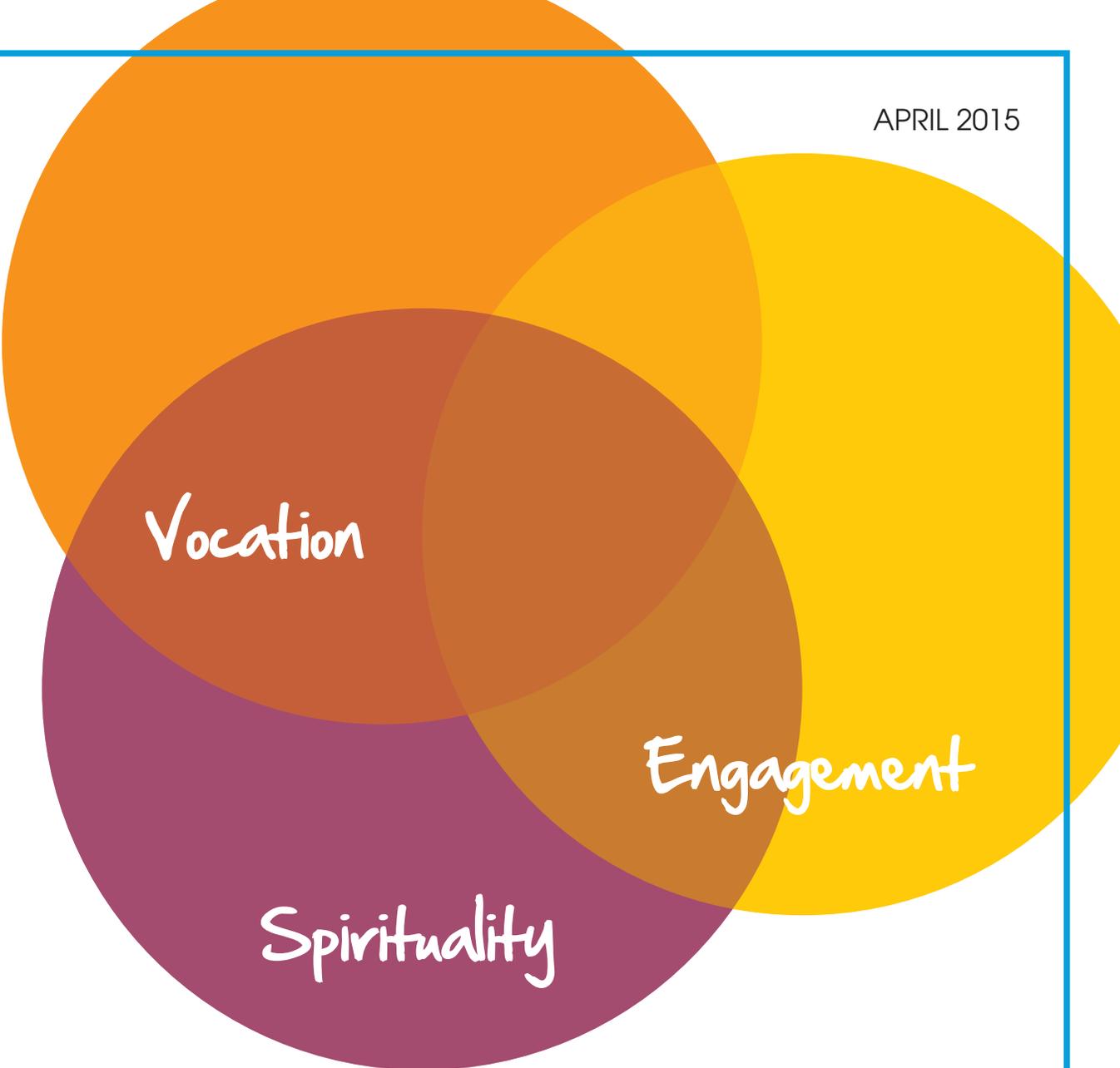


APRIL 2015



Vocation

Engagement

Spirituality

CHAMPAGNAT

AN INTERNATIONAL MARIST JOURNAL OF CHARISM IN EDUCATION

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Inside:

- The Montagne Myth
- International Year of Consecrated Religious Life

Champagnat: An International Marist Journal of Charism in Education
aims to assist its readers to integrate charism into education in a way that gives great life
and hope. Marists provide one example of this mission.

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Champagnat

An International Marist Journal of Charism in Education

Volume 17 Number 01

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EDITORIAL:

Christian identity is the key issue within the context of any discussion devoted to the most compelling theological issues affecting Catholicism and the Catholic Church in the twenty-first century. Anselm Min, Professor of Religion at the Claremont Graduate University in California, asserts that Christian identity is a dialectical, historical matter, an identity that:

...consists of a certain core or depth of being, a certain set of fundamental tendencies and sensitivities...a certain spirit out of which Christian communities think and act, which are also external, objectified, and institutionalised.¹

Such a statement, in his opinion, part of a living tradition.² For Min, his central thesis is that such identity is being 'deconstructed' or destroyed under the quadruple threat of:

1. internal institutional problems;
2. the secularization that followed in the wake of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment;
3. the relativization of the churches as institutions; and
4. "the culture of nihilism" that is a prominent feature of late capitalist postmodernity.³

It would be easy to stay with such an analysis, accept defeat and drift to whatever emerges as this century unfolds. To adapt Oscar Wilde's famous words, capitalism is that form of life which knows the price of everything but the value of nothing. Such words partly explain the current phenomenon of religion and religious commitment being looked upon as a matter of consumer choice, as when we hear such expressions as "cafeteria religion" where the consumer "mixes and matches religious beliefs, symbols, and practices to his or her satisfaction".⁴ However, as men and women who align ourselves with the Risen Christ, who seek Jesus through

Mary, who are disciples of Champagnat, we are called to be people of hope. While Anselm Min's analysis may be correct, while there has been an eroding of our Christian identity, we are the only ones who can actually do something about changing the situation. Christians have to be people of action. Followers of Champagnat have to be people of action, just as he was when he responded to the needs of those around him in his lifetime. Like Champagnat it is never too late.

Of course there are times when we identify with the analysis provided by Anselm Min. However, it is at those moments in our lives, those points of history, where God does not leave us. Instead someone emerges who can carry our cross, who is able to give us hope. Marcellin Champagnat was undoubtedly one of these people. The election of Jorgè Bergoglio as Pope Francis clearly provides a significant ray of hope for a troubled Church that at times struggles to shed its imperial pretensions and its pomp so that it can become "the leaven in the dough".⁵

The present moment calls us to acknowledge that a new era is dawning. Our call, our seeking to renew our Church, our Marist identity and life, requires us to be part of building God's house anew, where the household is transparent, where we actively engage with a spirit of hope and imagination with the new possibilities before us. Such active engagement allows us to build up God's Kingdom while at the same time to confidently address those things that work against such a reality.



2014 | 2015

Montagne

1 Min, A. "The Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Christian Identity in a World of *Différance*" in Min, A. (ed). 2014. *The Task of Theology*. Maryknoll, New York. pp. 33-45.

2 *ibid.* p.34.

3 *ibid.* p.34.

4 Prabhu, J. "São Paulo 1 or Vatican III" in *The Task of Theology*. p.59.

5 *ibid.* p.64

The papers in this edition of the *Champagnat Journal* all contribute to the discussion on how we best respond to the world around us: how we respond as Marcellin responded to the young man in what we call the ‘Montagne Experience’. The question for all of us in our ministries is how well do we respond to the Montagne’s of today?

Our gratitude to those who have written for this publication:

Br Michael Green is a member of the Provincial Council for the Australian Marist Province. He is the National Director of Marist Schools and Ministries in Australia, and he is based at the Marist Centre in Brunswick in Melbourne. His paper in this edition looks again at the Montagne Story from a very different perspective and has the potential to provoke further discussion as we journey to our Bicentenary in 2017.

Three writers reflect on the International Year of Consecrated Religious Life all with a different lens, but all enriching our understanding of such a commitment. **Brother Robert O’Connor** is a former Principal of three of our Marist colleges in Australia. He is currently a Spiritual Director and Consultant, he works with the Mission and Life Formation Team, and he is based in Sydney.

Brother Brendan Geary is the Provincial of the West Central Europe Province of the Marist Brothers and is based in Nimegen in Holland. This province includes Ireland, Britain, the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium. **Brother Mark O’Connor** is the Director of Evangelization for the Archdiocese of Melbourne. He worked for the Australian Bishops Conference for some years, and was instrumental in his organization of many of the original Marist Youth Festivals held in Melbourne.

All three reflections suggest the importance of the Montagne Story for all Marists – both said and unsaid – but central is how we respond to God and our neighbor.

Our final paper is from **David McInnes**. David has held several senior positions in Catholic education, and he is the Principal of Champagnat Catholic College at Pagewood in Sydney. David’s paper focuses on the centrality of charism in renewing the life of a school: a renewal that is about vision, faith, the well-being of staff and students, about bricks and mortar, about forming good citizens and about hope for tomorrow.

Br Tony Paterson
April 2015

THANK YOU

Our gratitude to those who have contributed papers to this edition, and to the proof-readers and to those who have assisted with the peer-review process. The Management Committee.

MICHAEL GREEN FMS

The Montagne Myth

An archetype of Marist ministry

As the first phase of a three-year strategy to help Marists to prepare themselves for their 2017 bicentenary, 2015 has been designated as the “Montagne Year”. In this article Brother Michael Green considers how the early accounts of Saint Marcellin’s encounter with a dying child have developed into the Montagne story of today, and how and why it has been somewhat mythologised in the process. If the story is to continue to help contemporary Marists to define their identity and to choose their priorities in mission, then Brother Michael argues it is important for them to have a critical understanding of the way that Marcellin and his first followers understood its significance, and to bring these intuitions to the needs of young people of today’s world.

DRAWING ON MARIST ‘DEEP STORY’

The written communiqué from last year’s Marist International Mission Assembly¹ carries an imperative that has become a quite familiar expression over recent decades: the delegates call on their fellow Marists around the world to seek out the “Montagnes of today”. No fewer than four times is the phrase employed in text. In the introductory remarks we read the delegates’ description of their experience in Nairobi as a “new Pentecost”:

... the Spirit set our hearts on fire, and prompted us to dream of new horizons of greater vitality for the Marist charism, prompting us to dance to the rhythm of drums, and directing our steps towards the *Montagnes* of our day.

They then propose that Marists will be recognised as credible prophets in a distinctively Marist way only if and when they are “purposefully reaching out to the *Montagnes* of our day, to be a significant presence among and with them. Among the key challenges and questions they pose for Marists is this one:

How can we go in haste to the peripheries of poverty and exclusion to be with the young *Montagnes* of today? How can we help people to understand that getting to know Jesus Christ and his Gospel is a right for children and young people? How can our educational works be spaces that guarantee the rights of children and young people? What plans and projects should be our priority in order to engage in social transformation? How can we defend the rights of children in social and political forums?

They affirm that one of the key opportunities for generating “greater vitality” for Marist spirituality and mission is the role of “the agencies and networks of solidarity and volunteering within the Marist world that are responding to the *Montagnes* of today, who are the reason for our mission.”

It is a particularly strong expression, that last one: the “*Montagnes* of today” are our *raison d’être*, the reason that the Marist project exists at all. So it is well for us to ask ourselves who these *Montagnes* might be. Who are these young people, to whose needs and rights Marists are being called to respond in prophetic ways? The answer would seem to be a self-evidently important one for contemporary Marists to find. Many of them may think that they intuitively know the answer already; indeed the text of the Mission Assembly’s communiqué suggests this, simply because nowhere does it really define the term “*Montagne*”. There are several traits at least strongly implied: that the *Montagnes* will be found on the peripheries of society, that they will be in poor circumstances, that they may have their human rights denied them. Are these the defining characteristics of who is to be a *Montagne*? Are there others? What can we learn from considering the situation of Jean-Baptiste Montagne, the youth whom Marcellin is described as visiting in 1816?

It is helpful for us to revisit the original story, not simply to get in touch with its historical facts and context – although these may prove enlightening in themselves – but to look at what it was about the story that cemented its place so prominently in the early discourse of Marcellin's followers. Certainly, from the time of the founding Marist generation, Marcellin's encounter with a "dying child" has been a much recounted event, often being positioned as the galvanising event for Marcellin's founding of the Brothers. For those of a Jungian bent, the story has assumed the place and function of a "myth" – as it carries something of the deepest truths, yearnings and dreams of the group.² Without doubt, it has become a prominent thread of what some writers might describe as the "deep story" of the Marists.³

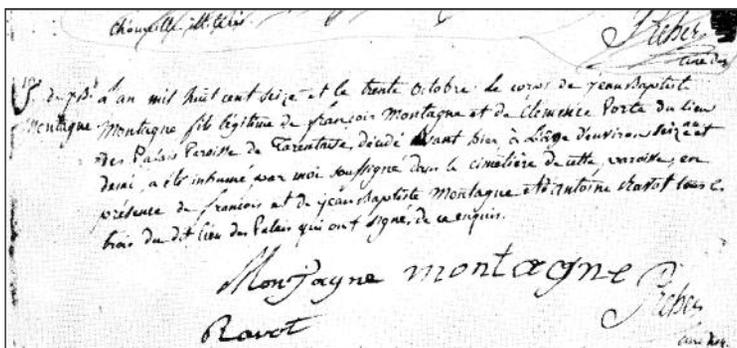
THE ORIGINAL CONTEXT

Marists of today typically believe that they know well enough the basics of the Montagne story. What they may not realise is that it is an event that has been re-constructed relatively recently in Marist history, using a seminal story that was told from the beginning and connecting it with other data that have come to light in the last sixty years. It may surprise many Marists to learn that there is, in fact, no proven link between the original story and death of Jean-Baptiste Montagne, or even that Marcellin visited the Montagne home on the night in question. Indeed, the naming of the "dying child" as J-B Montagne did not happen until 1966 when Marist scholar, Brother Gabriel Michel, linked the death and burial records of this boy with the old story that had been with us from the time of Marcellin.⁴ It is a plausible link, as we shall see, but there are also difficulties with sustaining an argument

for it. For the moment, let us re-call the story as it has come to be told by modern-day Marists:

During the afternoon of 28th October 1816, just ten weeks after his arrival as curate in Lavalla, Father Champagnat responded, apparently without delay, to a sick-call from a family that lived in the hamlet of Les Palais, near Le Bessat, located on the top fringe of the parish – up on the Pilat plateau. A boy, Jean-Baptiste Montagne, born on 10th May 1800 and therefore sixteen years of age, was close to death. It was a steep two-hour climb on foot from Lavalla up to Le Bessat, and Marcellin arrived to find Jean-Baptiste very low. Not permitted to hear the boy's Confession because of Jean-Baptiste's apparent ignorance of even the most rudimentary elements of the Christian faith⁵, Marcellin spent two hours with him, comforting him, offering him some basic catechesis, and bringing Jean-Baptiste to the point where the boy offered some simple prayers, made an Act of Contrition, and was anointed. Jean-Baptiste died reportedly just after Marcellin left him to visit another sick person in the house next door, something that the Founder was extremely sad to learn on his return to the Montagne house later that evening. At six o'clock the next morning, Jean-Baptiste's grief-stricken fifty-seven year old father, François, and his uncle, also called Jean-Baptiste, presented the body of their son and nephew to the mayor of Lavalla, Jean-Baptiste Berne, so that the death could be duly recorded and the burial take place. This happened two days later in nearby Tarentaise where the newly appointed Curé of that parish, M. Préher, officiated.⁶

Marcellin, presumably having made arrangements for the funeral with the nearby parish clergy at Tarentaise⁷, wasted no time in going down to the hamlet of La Rive where there lived a barely literate twenty-one year old former soldier, Jean-Marie Granjon, who worked as a servant. He was already known to Marcellin through his practical concern for



The record of J-B Montagne's burial at Tarentaise on 30 October 1816, signed among others by his father and uncle.

the needy of the parish, and had actually brought the newly appointed curate to another sick person in the hamlet of La Rive earlier that month. Marcellin invited Jean-Marie to consider being one of the first members of a new group of catechist-teachers that he intended to start without delay. Within four days, Marcellin had had similar discussions with Jean-Baptiste Audras from the hamlet of Le Pioré⁸, a boy still just short of his fifteenth birthday but whom Marcellin undoubtedly knew well as his confessor and knew to have a spiritual maturity beyond his years. Within weeks he had made arrangements to rent a house from a M. Bonner on the top edge of the town, not far from the presbytery. Around his many other duties as parish curate, Marcellin readied the house and welcomed Jean-Marie and Jean-Baptiste as its first occupants in the middle of winter, 2 January 1817, the date traditionally celebrated as the Foundation Day of the Institute.

The above synopsis can be reconstructed from cross-referencing a range of primary and secondary sources. Some of these documents, however, also serve to bring a degree of confusion to the story. For example, all of the early accounts (among them the *Life* by Brother Jean-Baptiste Furet; the Memoir of Brother Sylvestre; and the Notes of Father Bourdin which recorded the actual words of Father Champagnat⁹) speak of the seminal event taking place with a child in *foothills* of Mt Pilat whereas, of course, Les Palais is up on the plateau. None of them names the child. The Bourdin notes are additionally interesting because of the sequence in which he orders the events. This entry in his notes seems straightforward enough:

What made the work urgent: a child sick in the foothills of Pilat, needed the sacraments ... Goes to a neighbour for a moment, returns, child dead, reflection: "How many children far from the means of salvation ... if instructed, know how to repent, know..."

But Bourdin – quoting what he has heard directly from Father Champagnat own lips – lists this encounter after Marcellin's recruiting Jean-Marie and two other brothers, his buying the

house, and Lavalla's pre-existing "drunken schoolmaster" leaving town. This all takes us well into 1818, eighteen months after the death of J-B Montagne. Perhaps Bourdin does not mean to imply a chronology in his notes but the order is curious, nonetheless, especially when considered against other inconsistencies among the accounts.

Another question is prompted by the age given to the sick child in the different documents. While Brother François, in his notebooks, describes the young person's age at seventeen, all other accounts – including the official version of the *Life* by Brother Jean-Baptiste – have the child at eleven or twelve. We know J-B Montagne was sixteen when he died. Even though chronological age was regarded to be of less importance at the time than level of maturity, it is another inconsistency. Taken together, and from French writers known for an often pedantic accuracy, it is not easy to explain away, let alone to reconcile, these apparently varying accounts. Gabriel Michel argues that the boy could have been malnourished and so appeared to look younger than he was. Perhaps this was the case, but there is no cogent reason for saying so, and it is stretching credulity to say that a young man of that age, in that place, at that time, would not have made his first Holy Communion. Brother Gabriel does not attempt to address the problem of Les Palais being in a different place from that of the encounter of Marcellin with a "dying child" in the early stories.¹⁰

A clue to understanding discrepancies such as the differences of age, and perhaps why they did not seem to be important at time, can be found in another document written by Brother Laurent Audras, the third man to join the community. Shortly after Marcellin's death, and in response to a general invitation from Brother François, Laurent penned – in language as economically written as it was poorly expressed – his own brief memoir of the Founder. It is, in its raw brevity, the oldest testimony we have. He begins thus:

In 1818, Monsieur Champagnat, a priest, who was then the curate in La Valla, was heartbroken to find the ignorance that reigned in the parish, especially among the young people. He discovered **some children aged between 10 and 12 years*** of age who didn't know why they were on earth, or even

* Emphasis added

that there was a God. So he resolved to form a society of young men whom he instructed himself and formed in all the virtues, so that they could instruct the young ones, that is to say, the poor children of the countryside.

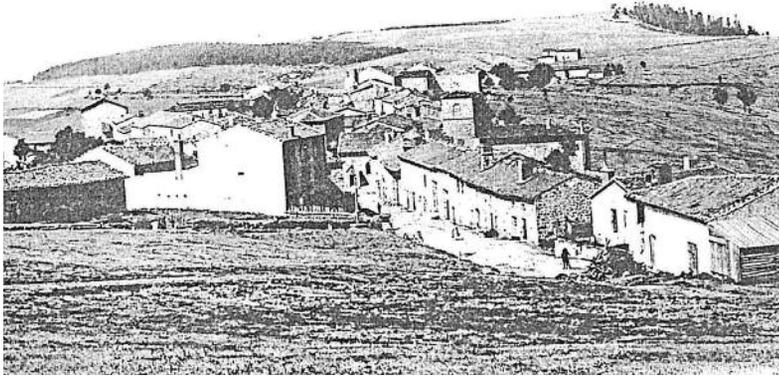
The thing to which Laurent draws our attention is that the plight of Jean-Baptiste Montagne was far from unique and Marcellin was growing in his appreciation of the extent of this problem for at least two years after taking up residence in Lavalla. The civil registers indicate that seven relatively young people over the age of seven died in Marcellin's first year at Lavalla, coming from six different hamlets¹¹. Interestingly, one of them (J. Tardy, aged eleven) also came from Les Palais, dying in January 1817, just three months after the young Montagne.¹² There were others in subsequent years, one in particular in 1819 who was of an age and in similar circumstances to J-B Montagne.¹³ There may, therefore, have been something of a later conflation of a number of events, even in the mind of Marcellin, as evidenced by what he tells Bourdin in 1828-29. This is not surprising, perhaps, given the intensity of his feelings about things at the time. His biographer, Brother Jean-Baptiste, chooses strong words to describe Marcellin's emotional response to the predicament of these young people. He writes that he was sorely afflicted by it, and the idea to found a community of catechist-teacher brothers was something that "pursued him". Laurent uses the very same word as Jean-Baptiste, *affligé*, to describe Father Champagnat's emotional state.

As the Marist founding story began to crystallise, it was a single encounter with a "dying child" that came to encapsulate the wider problem that Father Champagnat sought to address. In more latter years, after the article of Gabriel Michel, we have sought to give it specific time and place and personality. So, let us return to this event, as we have come to accept it, in the small hamlet Les Palais, and to Marcellin's response to it, seeing them as emblematic of a deeper story that can continue to speak to us today as we determine the shape and priority for Marist life and mission.

Who was Jean-Baptiste Montagne? What were the circumstances of his time, his place and his family? If we see him as representative of wider needs, what can we glean from a greater knowledge of his particular situation?

First, let us consider his hamlet of Les Palais. It was no more than a small cluster of houses, only four families, just a kilometre or so from Le Bessat, on the plateau of the Pilat ranges. The twenty-seven feux of Le Bessat (average household size, four to five persons) made it the second biggest population centre in Lavalla. It is worth noting that ninety percent of Lavalla's people lived in its sixty-six hamlets and only about ten percent in the town itself. Although Le Bessat was part of the commune of Lavalla and the canton of Saint-Chamond (as a result of its being under the control of the Marquis of Saint-Chamond before the Revolution), it tended to orient itself more towards Saint-Etienne as its major town. Despite its having something of a reputation as a remote place and having an altitude of 1200m, Le Bessat was in some ways less isolated than Lavalla itself, as it was close to the main road between Saint-Etienne and the Rhône Valley, and situated in flatter, more open country. In that respect at least, it was more like Marcellin's hometown of Marhles than the hillside town of Lavalla. From a detailed census taken of Lavalla completed in 1815 and a record of the amounts that individual families were able to contribute to the requisitions being made by the occupying Austrian troops, we have a good insight into the wealth of the people of the town, and can see that they were a little below the mean for the commune, but were comparatively homogenous – no extremes of richness or poverty. A large number of the men were named as *journaliers* (day labourers, and therefore likely to be of more mediocre means) rather than being *cultivateurs* (farmers), but there are four or five men who were of more considerable wealth as they were listed as *laboureurs* (that is ploughmen – men who had sufficient resources to maintain their own oxen, cattle or even a horse, and with yolk and plough). Lavalla had a range of wealth across its hamlets, from those better-off ones nearer to Saint-Chamond (and including François's Maisonnets), to quite poor ones tucked up in the recesses of the valley, to those of more average means. Le Bessat was more in the last category. Indeed, it was secure enough to be able to hold two trade fairs each year¹⁴, something that did not happen in Lavalla.

Its people grew some crops and kept animals, and carried out the typical cottage industries of the region especially during the winter, but one of the



Le Bessat at the time

principal industries was timber. This was a contentious matter. Gaining momentum in the years of the Revolution and continuing for decades, the great communal forest of Pilat was anarchically plundered for timber by the local people. It gives an insight into the ruggedness and the independent, strong-willed mentality of the people of Le Bessat. They were tough people. Such lawlessness did not, however, translate into faithlessness. Although, they were not a stand-alone parish, there had been a chapel in the town since the sixteenth century (sold during the Revolution but bought back by 1807). Its people petitioned to become a parish with a church and priest just ten years after the death of J-B Montagne. The success of Brother Laurent as a catechist of both children and adults in the years 1818-1819 indicated an openness to religion, even though the snows and bad roads denied people much Sacramental ministry for a good part of the year. We know that during the years of the Revolution, when the Archdiocese of Lyon effectively suspended its parochial structures and organised its priests into undercover teams of missionaries – the so-called Linsolas missions – that the Pilat plateau region was not neglected. This was a “white” area, a resistant area, and fugitive priests would have been welcomed and sheltered.

François Montagne was a carpenter, and therefore profited from the felling of the forests that had been taking place. He was literate, as we can see from his signing of his son’s record of burial.¹⁵ He was probably conservative in his politics, suspicious of the new order – as is suggested by his not signing his name (rather, making his mark) on his son’s death certificate in the civil register of Lavalla, but apparently feeling

free to sign his name in the Church register at Tarentaise just two days later. Their house seems to have been a comparatively solid structure as the accompanying pictures show, indicating a family of apparently secure means. It is no hovel, and the family is not destitute. The photographs are taken at different times during the last century before the house’s demolition about thirty years ago.

As to Jean-Baptiste’s apparent total ignorance of religious matters, let us first remember that the boy is only two hours from death when Father Champagnat is supposed to have encountered him, and likely not to be at his sharpest. Was his family irreligious? Perhaps, but the circumstantial evidence would suggest the contrary, both because of the tenacious and underlying peasant faith of the region, but also because the family sent some distance for a priest to attend him; it was apparently important for them that Jean-Baptiste receive the Sacraments at his death. So, perhaps we should not exaggerate his being far from the faith. The point of the story can be gleaned more insightfully from the age that is given in the accounts of several of the early Marist chroniclers: twelve. This was the age by which a child would have normally made his or her first Holy Communion. And the place that children would have just as he was when he responded to the needs of those around him in his lifetime. e been prepared for this event ideally would have been the school, by a teacher. Indeed, the making of one’s first Communion represented something of a rite of passage and, for many, the culmination of their two or three years of formal schooling during the winter months. There was no established school at Les Palais, or Le Bessat, no suitable teacher to undertake this work.

The positioning of the encounter with the dying child in most accounts of Marcellin’s life links it directly and causally with Marcellin’s decision to found the Brothers. This is quite important. In this sense, Jean-Marie Granjon is at least as important a figure in the story as Jean-Baptiste Montagne. From Bourdin, we learn that Marcellin had “long held” the conviction that there was a need for teacher-catechists and that Marcellin felt called to establish



such a group, just as other priests were doing. He had confided as much to his fellow seminarian Duplay as early as 1810 when they were still at the minor seminary at Verrières. From Brother Laurent and others, we know that Marcellin became sharpened in his resolve to do this after his arrival at Lavalla when he found so many children at the age of first Holy Communion ill-prepared to do so. It was something to which he gave urgent attention. These testimonies from women who as girls were prepared for their first Holy Communion by Father Champagnat at that time (recorded when his cause for canonisation was introduced in the late 1880s) capture something of the passion with which the curate went about this work:

I still remember Father Champagnat, who prepared me for my First Communion in 1817. It was the first time he had the pleasure of preparing children for First Communion. I will never forget the touching exhortation he gave me before giving me absolution for the first time; I could hear his deep faith in his earnest words. It was as though he poured his whole soul into them. He taught catechism in his surplice, standing in the middle between us and the boys. Everyone's eyes were riveted on him. He was strict with those who didn't know their lesson, but he was also very just. (Catherine Prat)

I went to Father Champagnat's catechism lessons, and though I was very young, I loved to listen to him, and especially to see the church full of grown-ups who followed his explanations so carefully. He spoke simply, so that the most uneducated could understand, but he said such beautiful and moving things that he delighted everyone. People used to say, "Let's go to the catechism lesson; Father Champagnat is giving it." And the church

would be full. (Françoise Baché)

As for his catechisms, we hurried to them, and despite the cold, the snow, the terrible roads and the distance (it took us over an hour), we were always the first to arrive. Then he would tease our friends from the town, telling them, "You're lazy! Look at the children from Saut-du-Gier: they have to walk more than an hour, and they're always the first ones here. You're a couple of steps away, and you're always the last." He made us feel very proud of ourselves. (Louise and Marie-Anne Duvernavy)

We can see that Marcellin ministered to people of all ages, just as later he agreed for his Brothers to be involved in evening classes for adults and in trade-training with disengaged young men and in teacher education, but his heart was most especially drawn to children, to open to them the joys that he knew from his faith. It was their God-ordained right, and he was passionately driven to making it happen for them. Indeed, he felt a responsibility to do so, for the alternative meant that – in the prevailing theology of the time – they risked eternal separation from God. The Montagne story needs to be refracted through this lens.

THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF THE MONTAGNE STORY

Just as the story of Marcellin and the dying child was self-consciously seminal for the founding Marist generation, so it can be for Marists of the twenty-first century. From the foregoing discussion, four threads of what we have come to call the Montagne event seem to be of its essence.

a. Marcellin's passion and compassion

The Marist spirituality document *Water from the Rock* begins by proposing that Marcellin's "passion for God and compassion for people" have

been the defining factors in the development of Marist spirituality. This is obvious nowhere more poignantly than in the Montagne story. Reference has been made above to the contemporary writers' use of the word "afflicted" to describe Marcellin's emotional response to the kind of ignorance, specifically ignorance of a loving God and their eternal destiny, which is exemplified and personified in the young Montagne. Such affliction at the sight of a young person's religious ignorance has to spring largely from one's own deep religious experience. The Constitutions of the Marist Brothers put it this way in describing the core of Marcellin's "charism":

Led by the Spirit, Marcellin was seized by the love that Jesus and Mary had for him and for others. His experience of this, as well as his openness to events and to people, is the wellspring of his spirituality and of his apostolic zeal. It made him sensitive to the needs of his times, especially to the ignorance concerning religion among young people and the poor circumstances in which they were placed. His faith and eagerness to do God's will led him to realise that his mission was to "make Jesus Christ known and loved." He often said: "Every time I see a child, I long to teach him his catechism, to make him realise how much Jesus Christ has loved him." It was this attitude that led him to found our Institute for the Christian education of the young, especially those most in need.¹⁶

Although Marcellin was passionate about evangelising the young, and unmeasured in giving himself to it, this was not borne of the kind of religious fanaticism that can sour the taste of religion for many people – both then and now. The evidence of Marcellin's impact on people does not reveal in any way someone who imposed himself or his convictions on others forcefully or disrespectfully. Indeed, a recurrent theme of his conferences and the early Marist documents is it would be through affection, charm and inspiration that the hearts and minds of young people would be most compellingly won.¹⁷ His starting point, as we know well, was love for young people. It is important, in this context, to see the Montagne story as an example of Marcellin's gentle engagement with a real person, open to the needs of that person; it is not some detached or cerebral

commitment to the education or evangelisation of the needy. The story reminds Marists that, whatever words and concepts they may choose to put around their identity and focus, if they are not in touch with the lives and needs of real people in real time, then they are not living the kind of Christian life that Marcellin would have wanted them to live.

b. Evangelisation through education

The action into which Marcellin launches himself is essentially educative. This is key for understanding Marcellin and his project. What does he do with young Jean-Baptiste? What is his intuitive response? Yes, it is to sit with the boy, to care for and comfort him. But it is more than that: he seeks to bring the Gospel alive in him, and to do that by instructing him, bringing him to the point where the boy himself can verbalise his own prayers. So, it is not the kind of evangelising that might happen at a parish mission or a revivalist meeting – the kind that may tap only into the heart. It is also the head with which Marcellin is concerned. The two go together for him: education and evangelisation. This is amply evident in his actions over the succeeding three years: his employment of a former de la Salle Brother, Claude Maisonneuve from his home region of Marhles, to teach children first in the hamlet of Les Sagnes then to take charge of the school in Lavalla itself; his getting Maisonneuve to train the Brothers in the simultaneous method of teaching and Marcellin's own training of the Brothers in the Sulpician method of catechising; his sending them first on Sundays to catechise in the hamlets of the parish; and within two years to have taken over the town school in Marhles and also in Lavalla. The sisters Duverney quoted above, and who were girls in Les Sagnes in 1817, recalled in 1888:

Once a month the curate came to see his little school, examined it, gave rewards to the boys and girls who had earned them and gently reproved those who were not working hard enough.

Intuitively, Marcellin was a teacher. He was also by nature very solicitous, unfailingly kind, and quite practical in caring for people in material need. But when it came especially to young people, it was not enough for him to offer care and sustenance; he wanted to educate them. Jean-Marie Granjon, his first recruit, may have been drawn to a broader

scope of ministry. Indeed, it has been suggested that until the demise of Jean-Marie's influence in the mid-1820s, there was a wider focus to the Brothers' work – care for the poor as much as schooling – but from at least 1824 and the building of the Hermitage, the chief concern became increasingly centred on education.¹⁸ This was Marcellin's chosen priority. Later on, when orphanages were taken on, programmes for the hearing impaired introduced, and other projects accepted at least in principle in his letters, the primary place of education was always inherent.

For Marcellin, there was a natural and healthy symbiosis between education and evangelisation. Having Brothers as catechists was not enough; they were to be teachers. He believed in schools as a privileged place to engage with young people, and that needed to be run by teachers of religious faith. The itinerant teachers (*les instituteurs ambulants*), on whom the more remote regions of France depended for the schools that ran during the winter months, had a very poor reputation in some quarters. They were caricatured – perhaps unfairly – as heavy-drinking men, of questionable personal morality, often associated with promulgating secularist and anti-religious sentiment, and poorly trained in the craft of teaching and so given frequently to capricious cruelty in their treatment of children. As a priest, Marcellin would have had first-hand experience of the duplicity of such men as they tried to get their Certificates of Good Conduct and Manners which came to be required for them to have a teacher's *brevet*.¹⁹ There were, of course, many exceptions to this rather negative caricature – Maisonneuve himself being one of them. There was, nonetheless, after the Revolution a general caution among both the clergy and town mayors towards teachers “without home or place” as also being “without faith or law”.²⁰

As the nineteenth century went on, and the tide of secularist and anti-religious opinion grew in many quarters, the integrated role of teacher-catechist, undertaken by people who lived what they taught, came to be seen as even more at the core of Marcellin's project. This was certainly the case when many of the foundational Marist documents were being written and edited, and the Institute was growing. The significance of the encounter with the dying boy was consequently enhanced. The story pivots on its being an

evangelising event, and explicitly so. In the Montagne event, the unambiguously core need of young Jean-Baptiste that Father Champagnat addresses is the boy's ignorance of a loving God and of the meaning of human existence²¹. It was the Founder's attending to this duality of need, and then his response immediately to recruit Jean-Marie Granjon, that were placed at the centre of the story by the first Marists.²²

c. A distinctive style

A characteristic Marist style is also evident in the Montagne story, reflecting traits that continue to mark the distinctive way that Marists go about their work of evangelisation through education. First is Marcellin's readiness to go out from his own place, to make the somewhat demanding journey up to Le Bessat, and to enter the home of Jean-Baptiste and to sit by his bed. This three-faceted disposition is Marian: to be like Mary who set out in haste, who went into the hill country, and who entered the home of her cousin to greet her. It represents a willingness to change one's perspective and one's heart-space to that of the other – the one in need – to go into their space and to meet them there. It is apostolic and other-focussed in its intuiting: I will go to out to you; I am not waiting in my own securities for you to come to me. Teachers who work with young people of another generation, and even more so those of another culture or another socio-economic group, are called to do this continually. Then, like Elizabeth in whom new life stirs as a function of her encounter with Mary, the main action happens for Marists through their actual relating with the young people. Marcellin remained with young Jean-Baptiste for a full two hours. He was present to him, directly and personally. He related with him in a person-to-person way, no doubt sharing something of himself with the boy, something of his own heart. Marists talk about “presence” and “simplicity” to describe such an approach – two concepts that Marcellin adopted from the writings of St Francis de Sales and made his own.

To be readily available to young people, to walk in their shoes (being empathetic rather than sympathetic), to work with them simply, personally and relationally, and to seek to make a difference in their lives through the Gospel, are all qualities which Marists continue to honour in one another.

To these we should add the qualities of creative

pragmatism, of decisiveness, and even of audacity, three Marist traits that we can also see in the story. In each of the accounts that have come down to us, the encounter with the dying boy is immediately linked to Marcellin's founding of the Brothers. Within a week he had signed on two recruits. Within a month he had a house for them. Within three months he had built some furniture with his own hands and had installed them in it. Within six months he had given them a religious/teacher's costume, and he had employed someone to train them professionally. Within twelve months he had gone into debt (with Courveille) to buy the house, and was soon to take over two town schools. Who was he to do all that – a country curate without means, in an unlikely corner of France, with numerous doubters and cynics among both the senior clergy and the civil authorities, and with recruits who through both age and education seemed ill equipped for the project? Creatively pragmatic, decisive, and even audacious. Marists still like that about one another.

d. Inclusivity

Possibly a more contentious question to address in the story, as we have reconstructed it, is to ask how we should categorise Jean-Baptiste Montagne or, more pointedly, the extent to which we should categorise him at all. There are some who see Jean-Baptiste as poor, and that it is his poverty which most obviously defines him. It follows, in this line of thinking, that the "Montagnes of today" will be primarily those young people who are poor. Others understand that Jean-Baptiste's significance is to be found principally in his being on the margins of Lavalla and the neglected peripheries of French society; so it is among the marginalised youth, those at risk and on the edge, that Marists will find the Montagnes of today. Others may point to his ignorance; others to his lack of education in faith. Some may take the perspective that the spirit of the times – liberty, equality, fraternity, each of which his circumstances clearly denied him – meant his basic human rights as a young person needed addressing, and that Marcellin's actions struck a blow for young people in such situations.

A dispassionate analysis of the story, in the broader context of the time and place, does not really support any of these claims exclusively, or a contention that the figure of Jean-Baptiste Montagne

should be too narrowly defined. Perhaps the major criteria for Marcellin's attention were that Jean-Baptiste was young, that he was there, but most critically, that he was lacking in his sense of a loving God. His religious ignorance and Marcellin's response to that are put in rather strong terms in the story, perhaps even exaggerated for the sake of emphasising this key element of the boy's need. But, let us consider some of Jean-Baptiste's other characteristics in the context of their time and place.

First, the Montagne family was hardly wealthy but neither was it especially poor, at least not in the context of that region. The family seems to have been secure enough, both financially and socially. Admittedly, they were located in a part of the parish that was below average, but there were other poorer hamlets. In cities such as Lyon, and closer at Saint-Etienne and Saint-Chamond, the industrial revolution was creating an urban poor that was in more dire circumstances than many of the people in rural areas. We can be sure that Marcellin would have personally seen such people, including young people, in each of those places. Additionally we can note that, within the Le Bessat area, François Montagne was relatively well placed since he was a tradesman. Second, Le Bessat (and therefore Les Palais) was not desperately remote or cut-off from the life and commerce of the region; indeed it was less so than was Lavalla. It is true that it was quite a distance from Lavalla itself, but that was a problem more for Marcellin in getting up there, rather than for the people of Le Bessat themselves. Depending on the time of year, they had relatively good access to the main road to Saint-Etienne in one direction and down to Annonay and the Rhône in the other. Third, there is no doubting that Jean-Baptiste was not well educated. But in this, he was in much the same situation as a large number of young people of the time and region. There would have been young people situated both more and less advantageously than him. Last, while it is of course undeniable that as a function of their overall circumstances, he was not enjoying the freedom and the fullness of human life to which they had a right, he was only typical.

So, how and to what extent should we categorise young Montagne? To resolve this particular question, it may be helpful to recall once again that the story has some degree of conflation about it. Jean-Baptiste is emblematic of a wider problem

that Marist chroniclers tell us that Marcellin felt driven to address: that young people – represented perhaps most poignantly by those who were approaching the age when they should be joyfully making their first Holy Communion, and finishing school to learn a trade or follow some other course of life as good citizens and good Christians – were often woefully positioned to do so. It is to Marcellin's response over the ensuing twenty-three years that we need to look, as much as to his immediate response at Lavalla after the incident with the dying child. Marcellin, in fact, established schools and projects – over fifty of them – in a wide diversity of situations: smaller and larger towns, richer and poorer ones. The fourth school he took on, for example, was a large one in the comparatively well-heeled and centrally-located government town of Bourg Argental. Later, when Marcellin agreed to take on the management of some orphanages in major towns and cities such as Lyon, it was to address the situation of young people in even worse situations than those in some country areas. Other projects to which Marcellin was attracted in the 1830s – for example Bishop Devie's invitation to take over an agricultural training facility in the Diocese of Belley to cater for the growing numbers of unskilled therefore unemployable young men or, in the last letter he ever wrote, for the Brothers to work with disengaged urban youth in a suburb of Paris²³ – suggest that we should be cautious about placing overly narrow limits on Marcellin's choices in mission. A considered examination of such choices suggest that Marcellin was in fact quite broad in the cast of his endeavours, and there is ample evidence to indicate his pastoral engagement among better placed people as well as his special efforts for those in poor circumstances. The telling point is that he proactively included disadvantaged young people, having them in the same schoolroom as those from families of bourgeoisie, civil servants and well-off farmers. It is his inclusivity that is defining, and was in fact somewhat counter-cultural. To become a good Christian and a good citizen was the right of all young people.

CONCLUSION: THE MONTAGNE STORY AS AN ARCHETYPE OF MARIST MINISTRY

The story of Marcellin's encounter with the dying child is, like all good myths, a tale that one

generation should continue to pass onto the next, as a way of maintaining integrity and identity, and of defining deeper purposes. But such myths also risk being read simplistically. A key for Marists in their unlocking of the Montagne story is for them to see it in the context of its origins. First, it is to recognise that, while the story has some basis in fact, from the time of Marcellin one event was somewhat conflated with others to distil a narrative that was emblematic of a more general situation, one concerned with young people on the threshold of adult life. Arguably, J-B Montagne's greatest claims for the Founder's attention are simply that he was there in Marcellin's parish and that he was young. Second, it is important to see a passion for evangelisation of the young as the chief motivating factor for Marcellin, born of his conviction that no young person, irrespective of his or her personal situation, should be denied the liberating knowledge of Jesus and his Gospel. The story turns on evangelisation, and Jean-Baptiste's need for it. The approach to this evangelisation is intrinsically educative, directed to the mind as well as the heart. It is prompted by an intuition that it is insufficient only to bring comfort and care to young people in need; it is also important to empower them to grow, both in their faith and in their capacity to become engaged members of society.

As the story of the encounter with the dying child came to gain significance among the founding generation, it was this purpose that grabbed them and, even more importantly, their vocation to be personifications of a living Gospel for the young people in their care. It is in this context that a nascent Marist style of education and evangelisation is evident in the story: one sparked by empathy and passion, grounded in an affective and relational approach to young people, and marked by an unaffected simplicity, personal presence, creative pragmatism, profound respect and, when needed, a bold audacity. Through all of this, it is a ministry undertaken by people so affected by their own experience of the love of God that they cannot but live it and share it. While no young person, whatever his or her circumstances, should be excluded from such ministry, no effort is spared for those most especially in need of it. In this sense Jean-Baptiste Montagne is all young people, wherever we may find them. Like Mary, however, we remain especially ready to set out to

find those in particular need, and to feel at home with them in their space.

As we contemplate the Montagne myth, it is not Jean-Baptiste, in the final analysis, on whom we should be focussed; indeed the early Marist chroniclers did not give a name to the “dying

child”. That child represented all young people whose circumstances meant they had a diminished capacity for appreciating who they were as a son or daughter of God and what the Gospel of Jesus Christ could mean in their lives. The focus is, rather, on those who respond to this need and what is

- 1 The Second Marist International Mission Assembly (MIMA II) was held in Nairobi, Kenya, in September 2014. Organised under the auspices of the Marist Brothers Institute, it was a representative gathering of Marists – lay, religious and ordained – called to reflect on Marist life and mission in the world today, and to name the priorities and strategies for moving forward. The full text of its communiqué can be found on the Marist Schools Australia website: msa.edu.au/msa-news/2014/10/27/messagfe-from-mima-ii
- 2 Roberto Clark in a study of Marist documents associated with the Montagne story and the significance of the story for Marists, also describes it has a myth in this sense. See Clark, R. [unpublished] *An Icon of the Marist Mission: The Montagne Teenager*.
- 3 The expression comes from Lee, B. (2004) *The Beating of Great Wings: A Worldly Spirituality for Active, Apostolic Communities*. Mystic, CT: Twenty Third Publications. For a consideration of how the concrete may be applicable to a Marist context, see Hall, D. (2010) *Forming Australian Marist School Leaders in Uncertain Times: Friends of a Compelling God*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Catholic Theological Union, Chicago.
- 4 Michel, G. (1966) *Bulletin de l'Institut*, No.204.
- 5 Diocesan guidelines for pastoral practice then in place in Lyon precluded priests from giving absolution to people who failed to meet a number of criteria. One of these was “ignorance of the principal mysteries of the faith”.
- 6 The question naturally presents itself: why didn't one of the two priests at Tarentaise, just a fifteen minute walk away, attend to the dying Montagne boy. In answer to this question we can only hypothesise. The parish priest Péhrer had not long taken up his appointment, and the curate even more recently – perhaps a matter of days – so they may not have been known to the family. Les Palais was technically in Lavalla parish, the Tarentaise cemetery was obviously much more convenient located for the family to have the burial, and it was established practice for the people of that region to be buried there.
- 7 The newly appointed curate at Tarentaise was in fact Jean-Baptiste Seyve, not only one of the famous twelve fellow-Marist aspirants who with Marcellin had made their pledge at Fourvière just three months previously, but someone from his home region (born at St Genest-Malifaux) and of the very same age. They were close friends. Although we have no record of it, would be surprising did Marcellin did not call on him that evening if, indeed, Marcellin had been at Les Palais.
- 8 Spelt “Péorey” today.
- 9 Father Bourdin replaced Father Séon at The Hermitage in the vacations of 1828. He was already seeing himself as something of an historian of the Society of Mary, and so took it upon himself to interview Father Champagnat about the first years, and make notes of these conversations. These notes (and copious others) he kept only for them to discovered on his death many years later, without his long-promised history of the Society ever coming to be written. His notes were not, therefore, available to Brother Jean-Baptiste when he wrote the Life.
- 10 Brother André Lanfrey, in private communication with the author, has pointed out the deficiencies in Brother Gabriel's hypothesis. Roberto Clark (op.cit.), on the other hand, accepts fully the argument of Brother Gabriel Michel (op.cit.) and claims “the historical authenticity of the Montagne story is unquestionable”.
- 11 For a more detailed discussion of this, see Lanfrey, A. (2013) *The Troubles of the Revolution and those of the Empire, Marist Notebooks*, Vol. 31.
- 12 As there were only four houses in Les Palais at the time, it is reasonable to wonder that, if indeed Fr Champagnat did indeed attend Jean-Baptiste on the evening of 28.10.1816, then this may have been the other person which Brother Jean-Baptiste says the Founder visited after spending two hours with the dying child.
- 13 This death of a boy (also aged 16) took place a couple of years later on 29 December 1819. Although, again, we do not know if Marcellin was in attendance, we do know that Jean-Marie Granjon was. In fact it was a young cousin of Jean Marie – Antoine Granjon, son of Paul-Gabriel and Jeanne-Marie Granjon, who lived in the town where Jean-Marie was born on 22 December 1794: Doizieu, in the hamlet of La Terrasse. Brother Gabriel Michel has given an account of this event, drawing from information in the civil register of Lavalla. See Michel, G. *op.cit.*
- 14 These were at the beginning and at the end of summer. The first was on the feast day of the town's patron saint, St Claude (6 June), and the second on the feast of the

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- Transfiguration, then celebrated on 6 August.
- 15 The ability to write was, at the time, seen as a relatively high skill. Many people were only able to read, but not to write. It is not known if Clemence Porta, the mother of Jean-Baptiste, was also literate.
- 16 *Constitutions of the Marist Brothers*, #2.
- 17 See, for example, the last four chapters of *Avis, Leçons, Sentences* where such sentiments are numerous, or Chapter 11 of *The Teachers Guide* on the topic of *Discipline*.
- 18 Marist historian, Brother André Lanfrey, argues this way.
- 19 Brother Pierre Zind in his articles *Sur les Traces du P. Champagnat* cites a number of reports from school inspectors that support this view of the itinerant teachers.
- 20 The couplet in French: “*sans feu ni lieu / sans foi ni loi*”
- 21 For the latter point – “the meaning of human existence” – see Marist Brothers’ Constitutions #164, which itself draws from *Gaudium et Spes* #12, 22.
- 22 The duality of need – for the child to appreciate both the love of God and the meaning of life – reflects exactly the first sentence of Brother Laurent’s memoir (quoted in the article) in which Laurent describes the source of Marcellin’s affliction, and what prompted him to act.
- 23 See Letters 28 and 339 for revealing Marcellin’s openness to these two projects. To support the idea that his involvement with orphanages was as much about education as it was about care for abandoned youth, see the agreement he made with the board of the Denuzière orphanage in Lyon, which accompanies Letter 306.
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BR ROBERT O’CONNOR FMS

‘Follow Me!’ is the Invitation from Jesus that Echoes Through the Scriptures

But Where Would He Have Me Go?

While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head.

⁴ But some were there who said to one another in anger, “Why was the ointment wasted in this way?” ⁵ For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” And they scolded her. ⁶ But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. ⁷ For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. ⁸ She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. ⁹ Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in

the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.” [Mk.14:3-9]

I recall some years ago hearing Fr Tony Gittins C.S.Sp. break-open this Gospel event, explaining it as a portrayal of the first Christian believer in Marks’ gospel; nameless and female she demonstrates profound discipleship: Jesus is scandalously eating and socialising in the home of a former leper – unheard of in the culture of the time; Jesus is seated, she is clearly standing above him as she pours costly nard over his head, thus assuming the superior position in the story. She is typically judged by “some who were there” probably disciples, who as guests are ungracious and struggling with their understanding of discipleship at this stage! Then, quite dogmatically all are told by them what ‘should’ have happened. Jesus upbraids them and thanks the woman for the “good service” she has done him and for her

courage and risk taking; and proclaims her as one to be remembered for her service – and above all for her deep faith. Both Jesus and the woman challenge the 'status quo', and he affirms her stance and initiative. The event challenges us as disciples to ask what has been/will be my legacy?

Each of us who has been called to live the consecrated life, was captured at some stage of our journey by the 'divine whisper' from the lips of Jesus. 'Come follow me!' he invited and so we have.

Perhaps our initial attraction and subsequent life journey was focussed specifically on following Jesus in our various ministries, as had those giants on whose shoulders we stand, and who in many cases had inspired us to follow their example. Certainly as well as our work in these ministries, there was also our engagement in community life and prayer.

We were passionately committed to following Jesus in the tradition and practices of our Founding 'holy ones'. We helped to create a hospital system, an educational system, an outreach of compassion, a missionary endeavour that has enriched our world.

But with the advent of Vatican II the Church and all of us involved in its life and its soul, faced a groundswell of challenge and encouragement to reach back and to rediscover the foundational spirit and energy that had spawned us. Each of us no doubt could trace the highs and lows of our early halcyon years in ministry and community; and the subsequent tremors of discomfort and encouragement that 'aggiornamento' called us to.

From the outset all of us knew that the call to the consecrated life was a call to discipleship and to evangelisation; to making Jesus Christ better known and loved. The way we did so was by way of our charisms, those treasures of the Spirit, gifted to us by our 'holy ones' – Benedict, Catherine McCauley, Mary MacKillop, Ignatius, Angela, Francis, Mary Ward, De La Salle, Dominic, Edmund, Nano Nagle, Marcellin and a thousand others.

Returning to our roots, brought us up against the seminal question raised by all of our founders: To what does Jesus invite us? In a nut-shell, we saw more clearly than ever before, that he invites us to follow him; to do what he did. The journey to and from Vatican II had allowed a stripping away of much of our preoccupation with the 'doing' as consecrated persons, to a greater awareness of the call to 'being' the face of Jesus to our world; to in

fact, learning not about Jesus but learning from Jesus, to really hear him speak to the heart as he reveals to us his 'Abba'.

In this year of consecrated life, each of us who has chosen to follow him, need not only return to the prophetic stance and mysticism of our founders, our 'holy ones', but indeed, to the treasure chest of our charisms, so richly manifest in the story of our founders and their early disciples. But like them, also to seek to unlock the seminal treasures of the gospel story in which Jesus reveals to us his 'Abba' the God of surprises.

It is striking that two of the most repeated statements in the scriptures – "do not be afraid!" and "they did not recognise him!" provide us with an insight and portal into seeking an ever deeper relationship with Jesus and the God he came to reveal to us. Fear and blindness often seemed to trip up the disciples, so it is not surprising perhaps that we too suffer similarly: fear, uncertainty, confusion, missing the point, blindness.

The scriptures show us Jesus as pilgrim and wayfarer, constantly on the move. He is radically itinerant. "Indeed the son of man has no-where to lay his head" [Lk.9:58]. So often in the scriptures [eg. Lk.4:1; Jn.1:28; Mt. 3:13; Lk.8:26; Mt. 8:5; Mt.14:34] he is seen taking his disciples to places beyond their comfort zones and often to places they would rather not go.

"In the gospels we see that Jesus accompanies the disciples across the mountains to the north, to Tyre and Sidon, to the Mediterranean sea, exposing them not only to sea breezes but to new horizons in every sense. We see Jesus entering with the disciples into the 'no-go' area, the place of heretics called Samaria. Jesus guides the disciples up Mount Hermon to get a glimpse of heaven itself and a sighting of the passion. On his final journey Jesus leads the disciples across the desert of testing – there is no other way from Jericho to Jerusalem except through the desert of the Judean wilderness, the primordial liminal space. Jesus takes his disciples across the numinous threshold of the Mount of Olives, the brink of Jerusalem." [Mayes Andrew D. *Beyond the Edge*]

In many of Jesus' parables and encounters, it strikes me that he seeks to emphasise what he is saying to us with a challenging call: 'Behold!'

'Listen!', 'Watch!'. His voice, as it were, demands to be heard, [Deut. 6:4-9; Ps.29:3-11] and we are challenged to really listen, with the ears of our hearts. This call to hear the Word, the voice of God, is powerfully told in the stories of:

Samuel: [Sam. 1:3] "...speak Lord your servant is listening...";

Isaiah: [Isaiah 6:4-9] "...say to the people, keep listening, keep looking"; and

Mary of Nazareth: [Lk.1:26-58] "...how can this be...my soul magnifies the Lord..".

In each case the voice of God is heard, listened to, allowed to gestate and then acted upon.

How well do we, who have chosen to follow the Word of God, hear, ponder and act, even when called to do so courageously at times?

Let us consider for a moment Jesus' encounter with Mary of Magdala after the resurrection [Jn.20:1-18]. The event places before us another reminder of how easily we can lose sight of Him, who is the very purpose of our lives. Mary's fear and anxiety at his loss is evident in her tears, and Jesus' poignant questions to her "why are you weeping?" and "who are you looking for?"

These are relevant, indeed universal questions for all of us too: what causes me to 'weep', to be hurt, to lose confidence, to trip-up? And have I inadvertently and too often been looking for the 'what' instead of the 'who' it is that will fulfil my deepest desires? "You have made us for yourself, Lord and our hearts shall never rest until they rest in you!" [Augustine]

Jesus teaches us the measure of our discipleship, of our on-going call to evangelisation. It is a call to learn from him. Let us consider four simple but profound ways in which Jesus evangelised: He encountered real people in real time eg.[Emmaus (Lk.24), the Samaritan Woman (John 4), the ten lepers (Lk.17)]. He frequently ate with others, and engaged with them around a table at which everyone was on an equal level; [Matt.9; Mark 1] no head was above another. He knelt below head level ,to wash feet [John 13]and constantly drew his disciples to follow him - crossing borders into new places, sometimes uncomfortable places of ministry and encounter.

ENCOUNTER : the Emmaus story in Luke 24 is a story of disappointment, of failure. It manifests disciples 'running away'! It is in this very act of desertion that they encounter Jesus, though they

did not recognise him! He invites them to retell their story of disappointment. As they listen to him and hear with new ears, their hearts are opened to the scriptures. They 'rush back' for they have 'seen the Lord!' Jesus encounters people one by one, by one, not in categories, not generically but individually and personally.

What is my story of encounter? Who have I encountered today and do I know their names?

TABLE FELLOWSHIP: sharing a meal as Jesus so often did, all are seated at the one level; all are equal, all are welcome. Jesus' arrest and death essentially resulted from his frequent commitment, as one writer puts it 'to eating with all the wrong people, in all the wrong places at all the wrong times!' Jesus demonstrates radical inclusivity! No one is omitted. His "scandalous" behaviour becomes the norm.

What is my story of radical inclusion? With whom would I not be prepared to sit at table?

FOOT-WASHING: To do this service you must go down on your knees to serve. Your head must be lower than the one you serve. Jesus' gesture in John's Last supper event clearly demonstrates that his act of service and deep love, is essential to any who would follow him. And equally such servant discipleship requires that you then wash each other's' feet.

Whose feet am I prepared to wash? Whose feet would I never dream of washing?

BORDER CROSSING: Jesus was always on the move: 'looking for troubled people, with troubled lives and troubled bodies'. People such as lepers, marginalised women, prostitutes, tax collectors, the blind and lame and deaf, are his focus.

The main boundaries Jesus crossed apart from the obvious geographical ones, were boundaries of inclusion, privilege, security. Always radically inclusive Jesus opted always for radical equality.

"...we can find ourselves in a space where we may long with nostalgia for old, familiar certainties and securities, for the traditional safe and sound. But we find instead that it is precisely here, in the risky and dangerous place, that Jesus waits to meet us, to reveal himself to us." [Mayes, Beyond the Edge]

How open am I to crossing into new and challenging, even frightening experiences? When did I last reach out beyond my comfort zone to people I do not know and have yet to meet, as Jesus

so often did?

The Year of Consecrated life, will give each of us the opportunity to ponder, as Mary did, all that the Lord has done for us and where he would have me 'follow him'. Her insight "Do whatever he tells you" demonstrates her mature discipleship at Cana. She, like us, has grown: from feisty teen with searching questions, to confused pregnant young woman, to anxious parent, to our sister in the faith at Pentecost. May our fidelity to our charismatic cultures and commitment to Jesus, The Word of God, continue to enrich our communities and our Church.

Sir Francis Drake, explorer and mariner [1540-1596] wrote this prayer before departing for the west coast of South America. It may be an evocative reflection for us as we embark on the Year of Consecrated Life.

Disturb us, Lord, when
We are too pleased with ourselves,
When our dreams have come true
Because we dreamed too little,
When we arrived safely
Because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when
With the abundance of things we possess
We have lost our thirst
For the waters of life;
Having fallen in love with life,
We have ceased to dream of eternity
And in our efforts to build a new earth,
We have allowed our vision
Of the new Heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,
To venture on wilder seas
Where storms will show Your mastery;
Where losing sight of land,
We shall find the stars.
We ask you to push back
The horizons of our hopes;
And to push back the future
In strength, courage, hope, and love.
This we ask in the name of our Captain,
Who is Jesus Christ.

Br Robert O'Connor FMS Marist Life and Formation Team Mascot acknowledging insights from Fr Tony Gittins C.S.Sp. and Andrew Mayes in Beyond the Edge.

BR BRENDAN GEARY

The Gift of Being Brothers

Dear Brothers and Marist Friends,

Over the past few months a number of things have happened to me that have led me to reflect on our identity and vocation as Brothers. I want to share some of those thoughts and experiences with you in this letter.

Last year I was having a coffee with a woman who has worked as a therapist with priests and brothers, and who currently works as a lecturer in social work at a university in Ireland. We were talking about the issue of clergy sexual abuse of children, and at one point in the conversation she asked me if I had ever thought about becoming a priest. A few months later, in early July, I spent a day working with another woman who had done a doctorate on the permanent diaconate. She had

used some research data that I had collected while working in England, and we met to discuss how to share our research with a wider audience. She also asked me if I had ever thought of becoming a priest.

I suspect we have all had similar conversations. At times the question is tinged with certain assumptions that suggest that being a brother is somehow less than being a priest. As we know, being a priest confers more status in church and society, and many people assume that those who are able, intelligent or gifted would naturally want to aspire to priesthood. Both of the people I was speaking to were respectfully curious, and were interested in my answer.

In between these two conversations, I was involved in the conference organised by the

General Council on the Protection of Children. Three of the presenters involved in the conference were not Marist Brothers. They were: Marie Collins, a victim of sexual abuse by a priest in Ireland; Fr. Barry O'Sullivan, a priest from England who has worked in the area of child protection for many years; and Professor Joanne Marie Greer, a psychologist from the United States who has written on issues related to child abuse and sexual violence.

As the conference unfolded Joanne commented on the way the participants greeted each other as they arrived. There were lots of hugs, genuine delight at seeing Brothers who had met each other at The General Chapter, or other meetings, and lots of laughter and conversation. People were instantly at ease with each other. Fr. Barry did a role-play with me where I played the role of a brother who was accused of abuse. As we acted out the scenario it became clear to the brothers involved that Barry's way of responding was much more formal, "legal" and detached than we would expect from a Brother Provincial meeting an accused brother in a similar situation. As the conference unfolded, Barry said to us that he could see a clear difference in how we, as brothers, manage this issue. He said, "You have something special in the relationship between brothers and the provincial. We don't have that as secular priests. What you have is quite precious." Marie Collins had spoken at the Colloquium held at the Gregorian University in February, at which Brother Emili and I were also present. Without going into details, Marie could not get over the difference she experienced in speaking to and meeting the Brothers at the Conference in the Generalate.

Listening to these observations from three people who do not have a lot of experience of Marist Brothers, but who have many years of experience of leadership in the Church, caused me to reflect on the wonderful gift of brotherhood that we have. I am also struck by the assumptions we make, and that I experience on a regular basis, about the relationship between the Brothers and the person who is asked to take on the role of provincial. With the older generation of Brothers in particular, I often feel quite humble at the attitude of respect and gratitude that I experience. I am aware that this is not something I have done anything to earn personally, but is an inheritance I

receive from the Brothers who have exercised their leadership in a distinctively Marist and "brotherly" way in the past.

It can be very easy to be critical of the Brothers with whom we live. As Brother Joe McKee pointed out, now that most of the Brothers in the Province are retired, we spend much more time in each other's company than we did when most of our day was spent in our classrooms or offices, and evenings and weekends were spent with corrections, preparations or activities. Suddenly finding ourselves with more time together is a challenge, and it can be easy to focus on the things that irritate us rather than the gifts we bring to community.

It is in this context that I want to highlight the wonderful tradition of brotherhood that we share, and that we sometimes take for granted. As happened at the Conference that was held in Rome, it often takes someone outside of our Marist world to notice how unique our brotherhood is, and to point it out to us.

Some time ago I was told that the Prior General of the Hospitallers of St. John of God had written to Pope Benedict to say that he was in danger of presiding over the demise of the vocation of the religious brother in the Church. As a result of that letter the Pope asked for a document on the vocation of the religious brother to be prepared by the Congregation for Religious. I was told that the first draft was rather poor, but that two De La Salle brothers have worked on the draft and that it is much improved.

I began this letter by sharing two stories of recent conversations. I want to finish with a story of a conversation I was involved in over 20 years ago, this time with the Mother General of a Congregation of Sisters. During dinner the Mother General turned to me and said, "Of course the problem for brothers, is that, unlike the priests, you don't have a sense of your own identity." I was a bit taken aback by the assumption that I would agree with such a proposition. I can assure you that my response was polite, but I was told later that the Mother General was not pleased. (The sudden change in her facial expression told me that too). I replied that on the contrary, I think that Brothers have a clear sense of their identity. What we lack is a highly developed theology that articulates that identity.

I believe that our life and vocation as brothers is quite precious. I believe it is a refreshing and prophetic gift for the Church and for society, and I also believe that we are prone to underestimate and undervalue what we have. Some people do not understand our vocation, and others, especially those who get close enough to us to feel confident

enough to ask, are curious about the choice we have made. I look forward to the new Vatican document, whenever it gets published, and encourage you to read it. Hopefully it will open our own eyes to the gift that we have, and also enlighten others about the precious gift we share.

MARK O'CONNOR FMS

The Year of Consecrated Life: A Call to Humility

There is a memorable line taken from Irish playwright Brian Friel's classic play 'Philadelphia Here I Come', spoken by the character Gar 'O Donnell as he reflected on his intended journey to the United States.

'IT'S ALL OVER - IT'S ALL ABOUT TO BEGIN'.

It's a line that captures the essence of what it is we believe about life and death. Perhaps, it also true about the future of the vocation to consecrated life in the Australian church. It is certain new paths will be trodden as consecrated life is lived in new ways into a new century. A new apostolic collaboration of lay and religious is emerging that points to a deeper living of the Gospel for our times. Our tradition, after all, is a living river, always dynamic! The Spirit was promised us by Jesus to teach us many new things. (cf John 16).

This is a reason for rejoicing! For at the heart of Christianity and the charisms of our founders there lies the paradox; that in letting go there is finding; in departing there is arriving and in death there is life.

At the same time, we also take heart, direction and inspiration from our heritage as consecrated religious. All of us know in our faith journey so many wonderful witnesses to the joy of the Gospel. Our sisters and brothers who have gone before us have shown us the way forward.

I think of two Marist brothers in particular. When I entered initial Marist formation

at Bendigo 43 years ago, I came to particularly admire the two older brothers living with us - Brother Albertus and Brother Prosper. Neither one of these lovely old men seemed capable of bearing a grudge.

Later, I learnt that they had actually both experienced their fair share of difficulties in religious life. But by the time I came to know them, they each had arrived at the 'evening' of their lives with a quality of graciousness and simplicity that was almost luminous.

Apparently, at some points in their lives, they had both received considerable 'fraternal' criticism because of their so-called 'eccentricities'. I have since come to appreciate that you get a great deal of that type of reaction, in subtle or not so subtle ways, wherever people live in close contact. As Pope Francis tirelessly points out: gossip and negativity are very real dangers for Christian life especially amongst religious.

Given the human condition, this is understandable and unavoidable. However, humble brothers like Albertus and Prosper would respond, after a moment's confusion or perplexity, with smiles, friendliness and kindness - as if nothing had happened. One might say that, for them, *no thing* had really happened. When people are truly humble, not just working at it, it is virtually impossible to insult them. There is nothing there to insult.

And so for us. Whatever is to come in the future experience of consecrated life - we do know the Spirit of Jesus is always present in holy, authentic and humble people. That is a constant that will never change. The grace of humility might well be the one thing we religious pray for in this special Year of Consecrated Life.

Yes, religious have contributed greatly to the building up of the Kingdom here in Australia. The dedication and self sacrificial loving service of so many has worked wonders in the lives of so many Australians - especially the young, the poor and the suffering.

Yet we also know, only too well, that as part of the Church in Australia we religious are in constant need of conversion. In recent decades we have become vividly aware of the scandal of our sinfulness. Especially our mistakes and failures in the area of sexual abuse are immersing us in the Paschal mystery whether we like it or not.

Perhaps we are now on the road to true humility. We, disciples of Jesus, are all called to arrive at an inner poverty of spirit, an inner nothingness and openness to Christ. Whether we arrive there as a result of our sins (more usually), or as a result of our virtues, matters not at all, provided we become poor with the poor Christ. Struggling through this 'becoming' process, with our eyes fixed on the poor Christ, is a large part of our inner journey in a special year like this.

Martin Laird OSA, in his book *Into the Silent Land*, describes it poetically as 'the liturgy of our wounds'. Unquestionably, it is a long and demanding task for most of us. It certainly is for me. For there is a deeply ingrained tendency to recoil from my own brokenness, to judge it as others have judged it, to loathe it as I have been 'taught' over a lifetime to loathe it. In doing this I

avoid what God, in Christ, draws close to and embraces. In my experience of religious life, such self-hatred is not uncommon. Some are just better at 'hiding' it than others.

Thomas Merton expresses all this movingly: "The Christ we find in ourselves is not identified with what we vainly seek to admire and idolise in ourselves - on the contrary, he has identified himself with what we resent in ourselves, for he has taken upon himself our wretchedness and our misery, our poverty and our sins. ... We will never find peace if we listen to the voice of our fatuous self-deception that tells us the conflict has ceased to exist. We will find peace when we can listen to the 'death dance' in our blood, not only with equanimity but with exultation because we hear within it the echoes of the victory of the Risen Saviour."

God meets us then at that precise point where we are most in need, in our poverty and brokenness, especially in what we resent most in ourselves.

Georges Bernanos, in *The Diary of a Country Priest*, put it this way: "How easy it is to hate oneself! True grace is to forget. Yet if pride could die in us, the supreme grace would be to love oneself in all simplicity - as one of those who themselves have suffered and loved in Christ."

Br Albertus and Br Prosper were humble men who did just that. They were each able to love themselves in all simplicity.

I pray that in this special year all consecrated women and men are given this grace of humility and love of themselves and each other. May future generations who live the Gospel through following our founder's charisms - be blessed with the same gift from the Risen One. For the Spirit goes on breathing....

DAVID MCINNES

How does the existence of a charism in a school provide stability during times of uncertainty?

A Case Study: Champagnat Catholic College Pagewood.

INTRODUCTION

Times of uncertainty! In the school context this might be manifest and expressed in a number of ways, including falling enrolment numbers, unsatisfactory student results in external examinations and possible closure. What might the future hold? Is there any future at all? What can be done to arrest the trends and set about instilling a sense of stability back into the school community?

One would argue that as a catholic school a critical dimension that should be a constant is faith; in good times and in bad. Celebrating the successes, addressing the disappointments and at all times acknowledging the presence of a loving God that provides.

Instilling and professing faith in the students and staff is at the heart of every catholic school community. The demonstration of this faith is central to the mission of the Church. I maintain that it is in this area of faith belief that a school struggling with an unknown future can both call on and demonstrate a belief in an optimistic future, one that will be strengthened through providence.

Catholic religious orders use the word charism to describe their spiritual orientation and other special characteristics of their mission or values that are exhibited as a result of the vows that they have taken and the orientation of the order to which they belong. The Catechism of the Catholic Church offers the following commentary on charism: "Whether extraordinary or simple and humble, charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefit the Church, ordered as they are to her building up, to the good of men, and to the needs of the world."

In the context of a school experiencing uncertain times, can the existence of a charism, 'the grace of

the Holy Spirit', be utilised as a means of displaying faith in a reimagined future that provides a more certain outlook? If so, how is it then that, when a school experiences times of uncertainty, is it able to use this gift of the Holy Spirit, expressed through the spiritual style of the religious order associated with it, to navigate back towards a more certain existence?

THE CONTEXT

Champagnat Catholic College Pagewood was founded by the Marist Brothers in 1961 as a primary school and in 1964 became a Year 7 to 12 College to provide Catholic secondary education to the boys and families of the parish of Our Lady of the Annunciation, Pagewood. It is currently a College serving not only its own parish but that of families of 9 other parishes in the southern end of the Eastern Suburbs of Sydney.

The College experienced strong student enrolment numbers throughout the 1970s and 1980s when it was then known as Marist Brothers High School, Pagewood. The Brothers withdrew from the leadership of the school in the mid-1990s with the appointment of the first lay principal. The College at this time was renamed Marist College Pagewood. A decline in the number of catholic teenage students in the area combined with the closure of the Marist Brothers upper primary feeder school at Daceyville contributed to falling numbers at the College in the latter half of the 1990s.

In the early years of the third millennium, there was conjecture that the school might close. The falling numbers of enrolments and the enrolment of boys from other Christian denominations and other faith backgrounds provided a concern in the Church that perhaps the existence of three other

boy's catholic systemic schools and one non-systemic school provided adequate opportunities for a catholic education for catholic boys of the area.

The question of evangelisation and a 'new evangelisation' was being discussed in the early 2000's in terms of the mission of Catholic schools. The Bishops of NSW and the ACT released a pastoral letter in 2007 that attempted to clarify the role of the Catholic school in terms of evangelisation. 'Catholic Schools at a Crossroads' acknowledged the need to extend the evangelisation mission more broadly where possible: "It is for this reason that the Church remains committed to ensuring that there is a 'critical mass' of Catholic students in our schools, even though we also readily welcome students from other religious backgrounds".

The decision to relax the oppositional view of enrolling non-Catholics in Catholic schools provided the opportunity to review the viability of Marist College Pagewood as a school able to build enrolments and return to the more certain times of its earlier history.

Throughout these uncertain times the presence of an explicit Marist identity was a constant at the College. The inclusion of a Marist Brother on staff, combined with a strong representation of Brothers at significant gatherings such as masses and formal assemblies, helped the College re-establish its identity as a Catholic school with a strong Catholic identity striving to make 'Jesus known and loved' to all in the community.

The College at this time was deemed to be underperforming on a range of measures. Falling student enrolment numbers, less than acceptable student performance in external examinations and a frustration amongst staff of a learning culture in the school that was viewed as undervalued, highlighted many of the concerns held for and by the school.

At the same time however, the religious dimension of the College, in particular its catholic identity, was celebrated and acknowledged. The Catholic Education Office, Sydney noted in its report to the College in 2011 that:

It is heartening to observe the commitment of so many students and staff to the school's liturgical and social justice initiatives. There appears to be a vibrant prayer life that is real and active. School celebrations are imbued with a deep Catholicism grounded in the charism of Saint Marcellin Champagnat. The commitment to regular parish masses, immersion programmes and social justice

speaks of the generosity of students and staff. There is a deeply established parish network partnership with the local pastors.

The constant at the College at the time, which appears to have underpinned this positive view, was the input and involvement of the Marist Brothers. Community celebrations, such as masses and major assemblies, involved Marist reflections and prayers and the attendance of Brothers and personnel from the Marist Ministries Office. Staff and student formation programs were facilitated by the Brothers, which kept the charism alive and indeed provided a strong link with the past and optimism for the future.

It was in these times of uncertainty that the presence of the charism, the gift of the Holy Spirit, manifest itself in the work of and connection to the Marist Brothers, provided a level of stability and direction for the College to move towards a more optimistic and certain future.

THE CURRENT REALITY

Once the decision was taken to not to close the College in 2004, resources were made available by the Catholic Education Office to ensure that the necessary physical requirements of a school looking to grow were put in place. Central to this need was the provision of a school hall, a place where the community could gather and where guests to the College could be welcomed in a manner that would impress, inspire confidence and allow celebrations to be held on site instead of having to access outside venues.

The new hall would be named 'The Hermitage' in recognition of the Mother House Marcellin Champagnat built in 1825 in Lyon France to house the Brothers of the Institute. The Hermitage at Pagewood too would become a mother house of the charism whereby Marist symbolism was displayed through images and statements that allowed students, families and other guests the opportunity to see both a link to the past and a vision for the future.

The Hermitage is a place to pray, to play, to gather for assemblies, to conduct the Year 12 Graduation and to celebrate our faith and the gift of the Marist Brothers. It is one of the first places in the school that prospective students see and one of the last the exiting Higher School Certificate students in Year 12 experience as they complete their secondary studies. The Hermitage is the manifestation of community, for it is in this space

that we live who we are: Christian, Catholic, Marists, living and learning together.

In 2011 the College celebrated its Golden Jubilee. A number of celebrations were held throughout the year designed to acknowledge the work of the past and the aspirations for the future. Celebrations to mark the occasion of 50 years of Catholic, Marist education at Pagewood centred quite deliberately on events that included students, the community and ex-students. Each of the three celebrations acknowledged the involvement of the Catholic Education Office, Sydney, The Marist Brothers and the many families and community members who had contributed to the school throughout its history. In the major celebration, being the Jubilee Mass and Dinner, the theme was used: 'It takes a Hermitage to raise a child'. This statement alluded to the fact that present in the Hermitage that evening were representatives from all the key bodies that had played a role in both the establishment and development of the College. The most significant representation on the evening were the presence of over 20 Marist Brothers which provided yet another example of the commitment and influence the Brothers have had in both good times and in bad.

Throughout the past ten years the College has attracted increasing enrolments, assuring its continuation as a provider of quality Catholic education in the area. Over this period the College has deepened and extended its educational offerings, grounding the spirit of its community in the Marist tradition of *"Love of work, simplicity, humility, presence, family spirit, in the way of Mary"* in educating young men.

Demographically, the College is one of the needier in the eastern suburbs of Sydney and provides an oasis of calm and educational endeavour for parents who are striving to provide their sons with an optimistic future. The College attracts students from a wide variety of backgrounds and its socio-economic status is marginally lower than the average for Catholic schools in the Archdiocese. The College has a strong reputation for supporting marginalised boys and their families. The College boasts an indigenous enrolment of approximately 7% of the total school population.

Over the past decade there has been a strong focus on pastoral care at the College, which is widely recognised and valued in the community. The implementation of pastoral care initiatives has

developed a sense of connection between students and across families that has provided a very sound basis for building community. The undeniable link between the pastoral and the academic has refocussed the efforts of staff to provide their students with educational experiences that represent the best opportunity for their future.

The decision was taken by the College, in collaboration with the Catholic Education Office, Sydney and the Marist Brothers, to rename the College in 2014 as Champagnat Catholic College Pagewood. This was one of the outcomes of a comprehensive review process that was known as the 'Pagewood Project'. This review commenced after the Cyclic Review process in 2011 and culminated in 2103 with the new features of the College to be launched in 2014.

THE FEATURES OF CHAMPAGNAT CATHOLIC COLLEGE

As a proud Marist school, Champagnat Catholic College. Pagewood presents itself today as a Year 7-12 boy's school with an enrolment of 680 students. This number will grow to 720 in 2015, a number that will remain constant into the future.

The school comprises a middle school (Years 7, 8 and 9) and a senior school (Years 10, 11 and 12) with a vertical pastoral system that sees the students join a mixture of boys from other year groups in the House Group. The framework adopted to capture the formation of the students at the College includes Ministry, Learning and Wellbeing. It is within these three domains that the student's focus and efforts are centred. Leadership of the three domains sits with the College Executive Leadership Team which is overseen by the College Principal.

MINISTRY

This domain is the religious dimension of the school that includes Catholic identity, the formal Religious Education Curriculum and social justice outreach initiatives undertaken by the students. The Marist identity of the school finds itself expressed in this domain. The Religious Education Coordinator of the College takes responsibility for the College Ministry Plan which looks to coagulate the curriculum, teaching and learning and solidarity initiatives.

Students are challenged to demonstrate their knowledge of faith and how they will enact it in the course of their lives. Ministry weeks are held

twice a year where each boy is required to detail how they have reached out to others in need. It may be through a community group, Church agency or in fact their family. The work of the boys is recorded then reflected upon to heighten their awareness of the difference they can make in the lives of others. The outcomes of the Ministry Plan include developing informed, committed Catholic, Marist young men that are able to go out into the world and reach out to those in need.

LEARNING

Providing a contemporary learning culture and environment that meets the individual needs of all students is a priority for the College. Students construct an Individual Career Pathway (ICP) plan at the start of the year in collaboration with their parents and House Group Leaders. Here they set goals and targets for the coming year, identifying strategies that will assist them in reaching these goals.

Students in the middle school (Years 7 – 9) are encouraged to gather information and data that will assist them in subject selection and therefore pathway design in the senior school. Students sitting the Higher School Certificate (HSC) will have chosen a pathway that suits both their aspirations and abilities. Those seeking university entry from school will undertake an ATAR (Australian Tertiary Admission Rank). Students working towards vocational or trade post-school careers will undertake a Non-ATAR pathway which works on obtaining competencies that will articulate into TAFE courses post school.

The appropriate pathway selection will enable students to achieve their goals more effectively and ensure that all complete their HSC with a clear view of what will eventuate post school. The leadership of the Learning framework is discharged by the Curriculum Administration Coordinator with the Middle School and Senior School Learning Coordinators.

WELLBEING

The introduction of a vertical house system was viewed as central to meeting the wellbeing needs of the students. House groups comprising students from Years 7 -12 form the basis of the wellbeing program. Within these groups formal and informal pastoral initiatives that feed into academic, emotional and social care are conducted under the guidance of the House Group Leader.

The predominant benefit identified in the

wellbeing framework is the mentoring opportunities that eventuate in the vertical system. Students in older year groups are able to assist the younger students in various ways. Areas such as navigating the school site with the new Year 7 cohort, study hints, examination and assessment preparation, and other issues arising can be addressed on a daily basis either formally or informally.

The leadership of the wellbeing framework sits with the College Assistant Principal in collaboration with the four House Coordinators and the College Councillor.

THE PILLARS OF THE CHARISM

The fundamental traits, sometimes referred to as the pillars, of the Marist charism, are well established at Pagewood in terms of identity and practice. These five domains connect extremely well into the framework of Ministry, Learning and Wellbeing outlined above. Therefore these traits are seen as a part of, rather than an addendum to, the life of the College. It is my contention that during the most uncertain times that the College experienced it was the exalted and lived examples of the pillars that provided a level of stability and hope for the future.

PRESENCE

“We educate above all through being present to young people in ways that show that we care for them personally”. This statement from ‘In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat’, captures the need to personalise the learning of all those in our care. Being ‘present’ is both a physical and emotional concept.

During the time of the College’s history where uncertainty prevailed, the falling student enrolment in fact provided an opportunity to be present to a smaller student population. This presence is demonstrated from the schoolyard, to the study hall, to retreats and the myriad of other extra-curricular activities that define the holistic educational landscape of the school. Whether it teaching, supervision or the many informal opportunities to ‘just be,’ the physical presence of the College leaders and staff amongst the boys informed the planning of pastoral programs and academic support to best meet the needs of the students.

More critically though was the emotional presence provided to the students that facilitated the personalisation of the learning environment. By knowing the details of each student more

intimately, in a smaller school setting, the students particularly who were in great need of intervention to address significant learning or pastoral needs were supported greatly. This aspect of the College was well recognised by the community. The reputation of the school to go 'above and beyond' what was generally expected in terms of student care and well-being is often commented on by parents and members of the broader community to this day. This element of pastoral care is ongoing, but with a clearer focus on the need for academic care that equals the previous in terms of time and focus by staff.

SIMPLICITY

A spirituality and a manner of simplicity is a valued feature of Pagewood. There is a sense of honesty in the relationships between teachers and students which is based on trust. The absence of arrogance or entitlement builds a community where a genuine appreciation exists in the minds of students and families for the work of the teachers. Equally the staff value the good nature of the students and their preparedness to be open and honest in their dealings with them. The sense and appreciation of humility is apparent within the community. This approach of simplicity is best modelled by the staff for the students: "Approaching others with openness and gratitude, we accept them as they are, and readily

listen to how they experience us. We willingly offer forgiveness and take the first step toward reconciliation" (Water from the Rock #37).

In the Australian vernacular, one might term such a down to earth approach as 'fair- dinkum'. This, 'what you see is what you get' phenomenon leads to transparency and trust which deepens the relationship between staff and students. When dealing with boys in particular there is a feeling that they 'listen to what you do and watch what you say'! If the students and their families, and indeed the wider community, value the educational offering here at the school then it is within this simplistic humble approach that the College is best regarded.

FAMILY SPIRIT

Marcellin and the first Brothers were united in heart and mind. Their relationships were marked by warmth and tenderness. In their discussions about living together as Brothers they found it useful to compare the spirit of their community life to that of a family. Like

our early communities, we are inspired by the home of Nazareth to develop those attitudes that make family spirit a reality: love and forgiveness, support and help, forgetfulness of self, openness to others, and joy. This style of relating has become a characteristic of our way of being Marist. (Water from the Rock #30)

A key feature of the College is the alignment to family; an explicit response to the level of diversity of family backgrounds that exist in the school. Single children, siblings, blended families, separated families all walk through the gate at the start of each day. For some the work at school is *in-simpatico* with that of their family, for others the school represents their knowledge of family, for some the school replaces family. Students are encouraged to understand the complex nature of any family and the need to demonstrate both rights and responsibilities within any family, including the family model of school. This understanding extends to the real meaning of love in terms of support and challenge, the need to be sensitive to the needs of self and others and the reality of compromise.

The vertical house system provides the opportunity for a more comprehensive model of student mentoring, 'big brother, little brother' interactions to be realised. Many schools implement peer support programs to provide guidance for younger students by those in older years. These programs can be somewhat limited in their implementation in terms of day to day monitoring and reinforcement. The model at Pagewood sees students from six years groups meeting each day both formally and informally, providing opportunities for the students to interact and learn from each other. This presents a family type scenario in the daily life of a student at the school.

LOVE OF WORK

The ability to 'roll up one's sleeves' is both well regarded in society and an intended outcome of any educational pursuit. As a Marist school, there is an explicit value placed on hard work. Rigour in all that is undertaken. Marcellin himself is presented to the boys as the model of hard work. The building of the Hermitage from the rocks extracted from the local mountains surrounding the Gier River valley, demonstrates a perseverance and commitment that is acknowledged and admired. Images depicting the reality of such hard work are presented to the students as a way of reinforcing the good that comes from pure hard work.

Through a pedagogy of serious effort, we seek to help young people develop a strong character and resilient will, a balanced moral conscience, and solid values on which to base their lives. We develop a sense of personal planning and motivation that shows itself in their good use of time, talents and initiative. (*In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat #116*)

The need to develop a strong work ethic in all students is paramount. Their ability to realise their ambitions will be based on results attained through hard work. For many students though the need to develop and maintain dignity in their lives will be strengthened by their ability to find and maintain meaningful work. This in itself is a sound outcome of instilling the love of work ideal into young people.

The key to developing a culture of hard work is found in the modelling provided by the teachers. Students respond favourably to, and are reassured by, those teachers who value hard work by their actions as much as their words. It is not enough to espouse the virtue of hard work without demonstrating it in your own practice.

IN THE WAY OF MARY

Mary as the first disciple is presented to the boys as a model of faith. ‘All to Jesus though Mary’ is a mantra that is a part of the College. Mary as a mother, as a woman of strength and as one who suffered, provides many opportunities to connect boys to their life challenges, their families and an optimistic view of the future.

Our attitudes towards young people find their inspiration in Mary. In contemplating Mary in the Scriptures we impregnate ourselves with her spirit. We go without delay into the “hill country” of the lives of young people, bringing them news of the justice and faithful mercy of God. By relating to young people in a Marial manner, we become the face of Mary to them. (*Water from the Rock # 27*)

Throughout the year occasions such as the month of May and the Feast of The Assumption are celebrated at the College as a way of drawing attention to Mary. Constantly referred to as ‘Our Good Mother’, Mary provides a segue to the relationship the boys have with their own mothers and indeed females in general. The strength of love, caring and support over the stereotypical view of physical strength leading to intimidation is constantly presented to the boys on these occasions.

Mother’s day is a time when the strength, love and care of women and the need to reciprocate it is placing firmly before the boys.

KEY DECISIONS TO GROW THE SCHOOL

Champagnat Catholic College Pagewood today is a vibrant school experiencing growth in student enrolments, improved results in external examinations and an increased level of confidence from the local community. In the last 12 years a number of key decisions were taken by the diocese and the school that have contributed to the school returning to more ‘certain times’. These decisions independently might appear to be fairly mundane, however in unison they have provided a platform by which a message of hope and optimism for the students attending the school and the school itself.

BUILDING PROGRAMS

The building of the College hall, The Hermitage, provided the school with an attractive multi-purpose meeting space as well as signalling to the community that the school was viable into the future. The recent additions of new Industrial Technology and Trade facilities has also sent a positive message to the community, in terms of contemporary learning spaces that will meet the learning needs of all students.

The physical development of the College site, along with further beautification programs such as landscaping improvements, has been well acknowledged by the community and contributes to the pride the students feel for their school.

THE PAGWOOD PROJECT

The implementation of the Pagewood Project in 2014, following two years of critical reflection and planning, has played a key role in consolidating the growth of the school. The introduction of personalised learning pathways, known as the Individual Career Pathway, has provided a mechanism whereby students and their families are able to set targets and goals at the commencement of each year, along with specific strategies to achieve these goals. These are evaluated throughout the year and reflected on to provide direction and challenges for the students and their own learning.

The vertical house structure and the construction of the middle and senior school is seen as a response to providing a learning culture and environment that both supports and challenges each boy with a view to them developing 21st

Century learning skills that will enable them to achieve their post school goals.

EX-STUDENTS

Providing opportunities for ex-students to visit the College and experience the growth of the school and the establishment of new buildings and resources was a key factor in the growth of the College. For many ex-students their understanding of the College's recent history was formed from 'word of mouth', much of their information outdated or simply incorrect. A good number of these ex-students were young fathers starting to look at secondary school options for their sons. Often their partners had misinformation about the school that needed to be challenged if the family was going to choose Pagewood as the school to educate their boys.

A number of functions were held to allow the families to visit the school and see firsthand the growth of the College and the educational product on offer. These opportunities taken up by the ex-students lead to a greater attendance at Open Evenings where the increased number of parents attending once again demonstrated the increased level of interest in the community.

IMMERSION PROGRAMS

The introduction of an Immersion program at the College has provided an opportunity for Catholic social teaching to be further developed. Immersions to Mabiri in Bougainville and Yulara in the Northern Territory are undertaken by Year 11 students each year. Whilst the groups attending number 10 and 8 students respectively, the awareness raising activities held across the whole school provide a great opportunity for each student in the school to contribute on some level.

The raising of funds for each community within the context of their own needs provides a wonderful opportunity for the entire student population to be part of the immersion program. The stories of each community are relayed to the school at assemblies and house meetings by the students undertaking the immersions. One of the great messages conveyed to the students is the deep spirituality of these communities and the optimistic way they live their faith in a very simple lifestyle. This provides a great point of reflection for our own community where we are immersed in a heavily consumer driven lifestyle which conflicts with the experiences of the immersions.

The immersion to St Joseph's College, Mabiri in

Bougainville, being a Marist school, provides a great opportunity to highlight our Marist heritage and solidarity to our own community. To those holding a connection with the school in the past, the opportunity to support a Marist community abroad is highly regarded. The sharing of these stories with the parents at our school and the wider community through newsletters and presentations at local feeder primary schools, has given depth to our Ministry Plan at the school.

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP LEARNINGS

Celebrating the successes of the past, acknowledging the challenges of the present and dreaming opportunities for the future has been the strategy adopted during the recent uncertain times of Marist College Pagewood. Now as Champagnat Catholic College, the school moves into a new phase of its story resolute that the past has informed the future.

The learnings of this recent journey from uncertainty to relative stability are many.

FAITH DEVELOPMENT IN ACTION

The fundamental learning in escorting the College through difficult times has been faith development in action. This response, during the time of uncertainty for the school, was demonstrated in two ways. Firstly, the commitment to the faith development of the community and the need to make Jesus known and loved was paramount. The presence of the charism allowed this to be explicitly demonstrated through the support of the Brothers in their presence at the school and the faith formation initiatives lead by Marist Ministries.

The other dimension of this faith development was faith in action itself. The faith the leadership team of the school and the Catholic Education Office displayed in the College, providing the vision and energy needed to re-establish the College as an important provider of Catholic education in this area of Sydney. The Catholic Bishops at the time made their point.

Faith, like a seed newly planted in the soil of the human heart, needs water and light. That is why our schools must deepen and instruct the faith once received. Faith must also be supported by the Religious culture of the school so that it will be practiced in worship, vocation and action in the world.

The water and the light, provided during the

darker days of the school's recent history, came from the hard work of those leading the community and the great support of the Marist Brothers in ensuring that the spirit of Marcellin Champagnat remained a strong feature of the school.

AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

In rebuilding the College, re-establishing a positive relationship with and reputation in the local community was critical. With a school losing enrolments and a limited amount of new resource being injected into the school, the community developed a view that the school was doing something wrong and therefore not the preferred school for their son.

An authentic acknowledgement of and response to this view was needed. The community would learn that the wellbeing of their sons, academically, spiritually, socially and emotionally remained at the forefront of the College's efforts. Celebrations recognising the efforts of the students highlighted the great work being undertaken at the school. Coupled with this was the honest appraisal that many things needed to be done differently with higher learning outcomes being the fundamental goal to be achieved. Sergiovanni (2007) champions this need for an authentic approach to leadership. 'The need for educational leaders to bring together head, heart and hands in their practice because leadership is, essentially a moral craft. The direction taken by the leadership team was a moral imperative; provide the best possible educational experience for all students regardless of the current situation the school found itself in.

BUILD THE STORY (PROVIDE THE WHY)

Simon Sinek in his TED talk entitled, "How Great Leaders Inspire Action", refers to a model of leadership that puts 'why' at the centre of its work. Sinek proclaims that it is companies such as the Apple Corporation that sets themselves aside from their competition because they address why they are worth investing in, other than just the 'what and how' of their work.

I see a similar situation having occurred at Pagewood where the community, the students, parents and staff were explained the why. Why the educational provision had to change, why it would be beneficial for all and why it would work. Once again a good deal of faith involved with extremely strong intent, based on confident belief, packaged up in a very clear vision for the school.

The 'what' and 'how' were also important. The sense of community that prevails, where all are respected and valued, was a strong outcome based on a sense of belonging by the students. Feeling part of the Marist family, the Marist story portrayed in images, song and sacramental celebration was something that appealed strongly to all and which was evidenced in the pride held for their school; an intrinsic sense of worth and something worth fighting for.

CONCLUSION

The growth of Champagnat Catholic College Pagewood as a school of great optimism and hope has been the result of a journey that has seen the school experience uncertain times.

It was during these times that the presence of a charism of the Church, a gift of the Holy Spirit, enabled the school to navigate into more certain waters. The Marist Brothers were the 'water and light' that provide connection to the past, support for the present and hope for the future.

In all the daily grind and busyness of contemporary school life, we remain people of hope, encouragers of the young. To all of us, ourselves as well as our students, we hold out the invitation of faith, of becoming "a new creation" people of imagination, commitment and love. (*In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat* #166)

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