

Co-nurturers of the Charism: the Marist lays

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ABSTRACT

The article investigates the laical experience within the Marist charism, highlighting its specific elements according to 26 participants of the Lay Animators Course conducted by the Secretariat of Laity of Marist Institute in 2015. The González Rey's Qualitative Epistemology was used as reference to analyze the data. Information has been grouped into three zones of sense – mission, spirituality and shared life –, from which it is discussed the place and roles of the laity into the Marist mission; traces of the Marist spirituality that mark the lay experiences and practices of faith; the spaces and dynamics of sharing life; the characteristics which identify the laity, according to the lay people; the meaning of recognizing oneself as a lay Marist; and the lay contributions to the vitality of the Marist Charism. According to the research, the lay Marist life emerges from a vocational calling that structures a peculiar lifestyle, commits the laity into the mission, demands interaction with the Brothers, gives sense of institutional belonging, promotes personal fulfillment, develops the co-responsibility for the life of the Institute; and adds contributions to the relationship between Brothers and Laity, to the vitality of the mission, to the formation processes and to design the future to the Marist world. The lay persons are understood as co nurturers of the charism, a neologism created with the meaning of joint nurturing and to clarify that they not only feed in it their vocation, mission, spirituality and life options, as well add to it vitality, growth and perpetuity.

Keywords: Lay people. Marist laity. Marist Institute. Marist charism. Champagnat.

RESUMO

O artigo investiga a vivência laical do Carisma Marista, destacando seus elementos específicos a partir da experiência de 26 participantes do Curso de Animadores Laicais, realizado pelo Secretariado de Leigos do Instituto Marista, em 2015. A Epistemologia Qualitativa de González Rey foi utilizada como referência para analisar os dados. As informações foram agrupadas em três zonas de sentido – missão, espiritualidade e vida partilhada –, a partir das quais se discute o lugar e papel dos leigos na missão marista; os traços da espiritualidade marista que marcam as vivências e práticas de fé dos leigos; os espaços e dinâmicas de partilha de vida; as características que, na visão do grupo, identificam o laicato; o sentido de reconhecer-se como marista leigo; e as contribuições dos leigos para a vitalidade do Carisma Marista. Segundo a pesquisa, a vida

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laical marista resulta de um chamado vocacional pessoal que estrutura um estilo de vida peculiar, compromete os leigos na missão, demanda interação com os Irmãos, confere sentido de pertença institucional, favorece a realização pessoal, desenvolve a corresponsabilidade pela vida do Instituto e aporta contribuições para a relação entre Irmãos e Leigos, a vitalidade da missão, os processos formativos e o desenho de futuro para o mundo marista. Os leigos e leigas são compreendidos como conutridores do Carisma, neologismo criado com o sentido de nutrir conjuntamente e para explicitar que não apenas alimentam no Carisma sua vocação, missão, espiritualidade e opções de vida, como também lhe aportam vitalidade, crescimento e perenidade.

Palavras-chave: Leigos. Laicato marista. Instituto Marista. Carisma Marista. Champagnat.

RESUMEN

El artículo investiga la vivencia laical del Carisma Marista, destacando sus elementos específicos desde la experiencia de 26 participantes del Curso Animadores Laicales, realizado por el Secretariado de Laicos del Instituto Marista en 2015. La Epistemología Cualitativa de González Rey fue utilizada como referencia para analizar los datos. Las informaciones fueron agrupadas en tres zonas de sentido: misión, espiritualidad y vida compartida, desde las cuales se discute el lugar y rol de los laicos en la misión marista; los rasgos de la espiritualidad marista que marcan las vivencias y prácticas de fe de los laicos; los espacios y dinámicas de vida compartida; las características que, según el grupo, identifican el laicado, el sentido de reconocerse como marista laico; e las contribuciones de los laicos para la vitalidad del Carisma Marista. Según la investigación, la vida laical marista, resulta de un llamado vocacional personal, que estructura un estilo de vida peculiar, compromete a los laicos en la misión, demanda interacción con los Hermanos, confiere sentido de pertenencia institucional, favorece la realización personal, desenvuelve la corresponsabilidad por la vida del Instituto y aporta contribuciones para la relación entre Hermanos y Laicos, la vitalidad de la misión, los procesos formativos y el diseño de futuro para el mundo marista. Los laicos y laicas son comprendidos como conutridores del Carisma, neologismo creado con el sentido de nutrir conjuntamente y para explicitar que no sólo alimentan en él su vocación, misión, espiritualidad y opciones de vida, sino que también le aportan vitalidad, crecimiento y perennidad.

Palabras claves: Laicos. Laicado marista. Instituto Marista. Carisma Marista. Champagnat.

1. Introduction

For almost the whole Marist history, the charism was considered a property belonging to the Brothers, who were responsible for living it and keeping it alive. Since the Vatican II Council, whose ecclesiology set an active place for the laity in the Church, the Marist Institute has valued the presence of the laity into the Marist life and mission, to the point that today it is inconceivable

the continuity of the Institute without the contribution of them. Still more recent is the recognition that the Marist laity have a vocation that identify themselves with the charism received by Champagnat and that obviously experienced it from the lay life, with a lifestyle different from the institutional religious life of the Brothers.

However what does mean to recognize that the laity also live the Marist charism? It puts the question of difference, since the consecrated life and the lay life have different dynamics and are developed in distinct spaces and times. If, on the one hand, the relation of the Brothers with the Charism takes place from the tradition that has shaped their lifestyle since the beginning of the Institute, the lay men and women live it in the professional, familiar, community, ecclesial, religious, cultural, socio-political and Marist spheres. If the Charism is the same, but is lived into different life options, what is specific and common to these experiences? Which shades these lay experiences add to the Marist mission, community life and spirituality? How do lay people elaborate and give meaning to their experience of a Charisma that was born into a religious institute?

There are many books, articles and researches focused on the life and the mission of the Marist Brothers, but very few focused on the Marist laity, even because the laity is a relatively recent phenomenon in the history of the Institute. Thus, this article aims to investigate the laical experience of the Marist charism, establishing relation with the Marist life of the brothers, but highlighting the experiences, perceptions and specific perspectives of the laity.

For this, it was conducted a survey with a group of participants of the Course for lay animators promoted by Laity Secretariat of the Institute, from May 19 to June 2, 2015, in the General House in Rome, in order to "empower lay men and women to take responsibility in the animation of lay formation processes at the local, provincial and international levels". There was 55 lay people directly involved in lay animation of 27 Administrative Units (AU's), i.e. Marist provinces and districts. After the course, participants were given a questionnaire on Google.docs format in three languages – Portuguese, Spanish and English – with questions about their experience of the Charisma. The participation was spontaneous.

26 questionnaires were completed by 09 lay men and 17 lay women from 19 Administrative Units: District Paraguay, Province Rio Grande do Sul³ and Brasil Centro-Sul (Southern Cone and Brazil regions); Norandina, Central America, Western Mexico, Central

³ The Province Rio Grande do Sul and the District Amazonia became the Province Brasil Sul Amazonia in December 2015

Mexico, United States and Canada (North Arc); West Central Europe, Iberian and Compostela (Europe); Southern Africa, West Central Africa and District Madagascar (Africa); East Asia (Asia); Australia and Pacific and Melanesia Districts (Oceania).

Data analysis was based on Qualitative Epistemology, which defines subjectivity – its most basic element – as a "complex system capable of expressing, through the subjective sense, the diversity of objective aspects of social life that compete for their formation" (González Rey, 2005, p. 19). The perceptions of the subjects, even not being objective, enable to understand objectively a phenomenon. According to the author, knowledge is a human construction made possible by the definition of zones of sense, which are the intelligibility spaces produced by scientific research, and comes from the data collected with the subjects and also from the epistemological organization used by the researcher to systematize them.

As the Marist Institute defines the laity by the dimensions of mission, shared life and spirituality, these three zones of sense were the benchmark for analyzing the data obtained, comparing the institutional conception with the meaning attributed by the laity to their own Marist experience.

2. The Marist Institute after the Vatican II Council

In order to understand the place of the laity in the Marist Institute, it is necessary to retake the ecclesiology of Vatican II (1962-1965): the Church is the People of God equally formed by the clergy, consecrated life and laity; all of them express specific vocations and ministries, but united by the same baptismal dignity (cf. LG 30). The spirit of the Council asked to the Church an *aggiornamento*⁴ of its identity and mission, so as to retake its origins, seeking the dialogue with the contemporary world in order to find its place into it. According to Botana (2005, p 11-12), the Council left to the whole Church “a complicated and not easy task: to replace an ecclesial system represented by the pyramid, for another one based on the circle and this, horizontal; to move from a Church defined as ‘perfect society’, perfectly hierarchical, to another Church defined as ‘communion’”.

Congregations and Institutes of Consecrated Life have lived through that time in a paradoxical way: as they retake their foundational sources and assume a new position in the contemporary world, in dialogue with the new socio-political, economic, cultural, ecclesial and

⁴ Literally “bring to nowadays”

religious context, they faced a huge evasion of the religious men and women, who failed to assimilate these changes. The Marist Institute, as well as others religious institutes, has had at this time the largest amount of Brothers and, since then, that number only decreased. The laity, by contrast, began to develop their formation, organization and ecclesial and social participation in a growing movement over the following decades.

Within the Marist Institute, the XVI General Chapter – GC (1967-1968), carried out in order to respond to the calling of *aggiornamento* made by the Council, has begun to give more emphasis to the theme Charism and hence the issues of identity and mission, which were deepened in the following Chapters. It is in this context that takes place the movement of updating the Marist institutional identity and apostolic purpose. The understanding of the Charism, that is vital to the *aggiornamento* proposed by the Church, was been adapted to the new ecclesial and world situation, where the place and mission of the Brothers are reflected in the light of the Council and of the changes that the Institute was facing. Thus it has been drawing a new understanding of vocation, identity and mission of contemporary Marist, as well as the charism that gave rise to them.

While the XVII GC (1976) was more concerned about the new Constitutions, approved *ad experimentum* in order to be submitted to the Holy See, the XVIII GC (1985) also highlighted the theme of Marist mission and is often remembered, mainly with regard to the laity, by the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family (CMMF). The next Chapter (XIX, 1993) brings two significant innovations: the presence of lay people invited to this assembly, in which took part until then only the Brothers; and the recognition of the "strong call to share with the laity our spirituality and charism, which enriches our [Brothers'] own experience" (XIX CG Acts, II.10). The Chapter members said they believed that "we participate in the charism of Champagnat and are called to interpret it today, wherever we are, and in union with the laity" (*ibid*, II.20); for this, they commit themselves to "transmit the Marist charism and spirituality to the lay people and accept that they enrich us with their way of living the Christian vocation" (*ibid*, V.34).

It's notable that so far the way is one-sided, an one-way highway from the Brothers towards the Laity. The reciprocal relationship is outlined from the XX CG (2001), which recognized as a sign of life that the Marcellin's charism is spread by the Spirit of God in many lay people "who are attracted by your project and share our mission, our spirituality and our life" (XX GC Document, 10). The delegates welcomed the calling to "deep our specific identity as brothers and lay people in sharing life: spirituality, mission, formation ..." (*ibid*, 26), in order to

widen the space of the Institute's tent to accommodate the Marist laity. Then there is the realization that the charism does not belong to the Institute, but to the Church, especially after the canonization of Saint Marcellin Champagnat, two years earlier. In his closing speech of the Chapter, Brother Sean Sammon, elected Superior General, said:

Our Marist charism is a gift of the Spirit given to our Church. In living out our consecrated life within the Institute, we have a special responsibility to cherish and promote this charism, but it belongs neither to us nor to the Institute exclusively. Its proper home is among all of God's People. (Institute of the Marist Brothers, 2001)

The XX GC also demanded that be accomplished international forums of the Marist mission (Final Document, 48.6), which originated the I Marist International Mission Assembly (MIMA), that took place in 2007 in Mendes, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. 156 brothers and lay people from 54 countries gathered for the first time to jointly reflect on the Marist mission in the contemporary world. Among the highlights, the affirmation of the evangelical identity of the Institute; the deepening of Advocacy for the rights of children and young people, assumed as the fourth dimension of the Marist mission in 2010; and the use of the expression "Marists of Champagnat" to designate Marist Brothers, lay men and lay women. The reflections of MIMA echoed in the XXI GC (2009), held two years later and preceded by two important documents: the circular *Making Jesus known and loved*, about the Marist mission and contemporary apostolic life, and *Water from the Rock* (2007), about the Marist Spirituality.

This General Chapter maintained the presence of guest lay people and recognized as fundamental appeal the feeling of being "impelled by God to go out into a new land, to facilitate the birth of a new epoch for the Marist charism". Thus it defined three urgencies, one being the construction of "a new relationship between Brothers and Lay people, based on communion, for the sake of greater vitality of the Marist charism for our world today", since the future of the Institute is seen "as a communion of people in the charism of Champagnat, where our specific vocations will be mutually enriching" (XXI GC Final Document, p. 36).

Throughout this time of reflection and maturation about the contemporary identity of the Institute, there were crescent changes referring to the laity: in the sixties, there are employees, those who were in schools collaborating with the Brothers for the Marist education; in the following decade the expression "Marist family" includes family members of these employees in the activities of integration, formation and celebration; in the eighties, the Champagnat Movement has begun as a way of grouping the laity who wanted to deepen their experience of the charism; "In the footsteps of Marcellin", document published in 1998 about the Marist

mission, sees evangelization as a joint effort in which the Marist mission is shared by Brothers and Laity (Secretariat of Laity, 2012).

Estaún (2012, p. 7) deepens the use of the expression “Marist Family” into the circulars of the Brothers Leónida, General Superior from 1946 to 1958, and Charles Raphaël (1958-1967), as well as into the writings of Brother Virgilio León “who saw new horizons for our Marist family for which he was an apostle and champion”; according to the author, the meaning of this expression was widening itself: first it refers to the Marist religious family, the four branches of the Society of Mary; later it designates the families of the novices brothers, which were also responsible for their vocational fidelity; and finally came to include persons “very in tune with the Brothers’ charism, spirituality and mission, even though not linked to it by any legal or juridical commitments” (Estaún, 2012, p. 42-43). It is in this sense that the Institute considers the lay men and women, some decades later, especially in the 2000’s, when the evolution was faster: “to expand the space of the tent” (XX GC, 2001), in order to put Brothers and lay people together and in communion; later “charismatic family”, recognizing that the laity are more than employees, but they live the charism from the state of lay life; nowadays the lay vocation is recognized and it’s been discussed the possibility of bonding and belonging of lay people to the Institute. Botana (2005) points out that the strength of the charismatic family does not come from a relationship based on dominance and power, “as happened in past times, but from the communion among the various institutions and groups, the communion to serve the same mission is enriched by the particular charismas of each group”. In the case of the Marist Institute, this strength is based on the experience of the original Charism as Marist family, made up of Brothers and Lay people.

The different expressions used throughout the decades reveal the changes over the conception about the laity and their place into the Institute, coming to the document *Gathered around the same table*, about the vocation of the Champagnat Marist laity, prepared jointly by Brothers and Laity. Here there is an accurate summary of the contemporary situation of the Marist laity: “Experience seems to indicate that we not only need to widen the tent of the Institute, but also to build together a new tent where everyone, Brothers and Lay people, may find our place.” (GAST, 145).

3. The Marist charism and the laity today

According to Estaún (2012, p. 32), Br. Virgilio León “saw the Marist family as a communion of persons born out of the fruitfulness of the charism received through Mary and Marcellin”. Charisma is theologically understood as “a functional grace communicated by the Holy Spirit to a member or an agency of its Church”, that “applies it in a specific activity for the good of the Mystical Body (Rom 12,14; Eph 4,11-12, LG 45)” (Moral Barrio, 2012, p 189). There is a vital relationship between the Marist Brother and the charism received by Father Champagnat: through generations of Brothers, the spirit of the Founder came to the Marists today (*Circulaires*, T. 24, p. 78) and the original Charisma “lives and gets extended in time and space through the institution, since the beginning of the Institute until our days” (Moral Barrio, idem).

To Br. Seán Sammon (2006, p. 25), Charism is “a free gift of the Spirit given for the good of the Church and the use of all”. Paredes (2014, p. 41) adds that the charism “is not only a task to be done (attention to the poor or education or health tasks), but above all a way to feel our God and feel ourselves before Him”; it’s recognized “as a gift of the Spirit that we have inherited and which now it’s extended and expanded between us”. Green (2014) points out this movement of expansion on Champagnat:

The distinctive ways in which Marcellin responded to his experience of the love of God and the manner of his sharing this love – what we might call his personal charism – was not only inspiring others to be attracted to do likewise but was already being articulated and developed by them in consistent and characteristic ways. (Green, 2014, p. 10)

Currently, this gift can be understood into the Marist Institute from four components: the way of being and its own pedagogy; the spirituality; the mission; and the ways to live as Champagnat Marists. The *way of being* is defined by the values of simplicity, humility and modesty and the pedagogy, by the traits of presence, simplicity, love of work, family spirit, and in the way of Mary. The *Marist spirituality* is apostolic – centered on Jesus Christ and lived in the mission – and Marian, inspired by the way that Mary lived her missionary discipleship. The *mission* consists of four dimensions: Education, Evangelization, Solidarity and Advocacy for the rights of children and young people. All of this is lived by *Brothers and Lay people* with similarities and peculiarities, according to each vocation and direct contribution to the vitality of the charism. These four components define the institutional identity because explain who are the Marist, why they exist, how they live and how they develop their Christian mission.

Also according to Br. Seán Sammon, the charism given to the Church and to the world through the mediation of Saint Marcellin Champagnat is more than the work we do, the

spirituality we cultivate or the qualities of our Founder: it is the action of God's Spirit, willing to act on each Marist for having the courage, foresight vision and boldness that made Fr. Champagnat to dream the Marist Institute as Good News to children, adolescents and young people. He finishes: "Today the Spirit that was so active in our founder longs to live and breathe in you and me" (Sammon, 2006, p. 42).

This is an inclusive vision about the laity. To recognize that the Marist charism is lived by lay men and women is a novelty, because since its beginning the Institute has been put forth by the Brothers, whose life and mission were inseparable. Although the Institute has started out with an apostolic group working in schools, around 1820 these young people already understood themselves as "not only a normal school, but also a religious community subject to a superior; not an apostolic group developing a series of parish functions, but a community with an educational vocation" (Lanfrey, 2014, p. 158). I.e., vocation, fundamental option and apostolate were already imbricated on the life of the first Brothers. When it stated that the laity live the charism as well as the Brothers, but in another way of life, what are the implications?

Firstly, it's necessary to understand who the laity are. According to the Church they are the faithful "by baptism made one body with Christ", "constituted among the People of God (...), in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world" (LG 31). The document of Aparecida Conference (2007) complements this concept explaining the specific field of lay evangelizing activity: the complex world of work, culture, science and arts, politics, media and the economy, as well as the spheres of family, education, professional life, particularly in contexts where the Church is present only through them" (DA, 174).

Hence, it reaches the concept of Marist laity. Just as in the Church there are the faithful who participate in religious services and lay people who take on their vocation and contribute actively to the evangelizing mission, the Institute has collaborators and laity. Collaborators are professionals who "are willing to perform their tasks well but have little or no interest in making their own Marcellin's vision or his spirituality" (Sammon, 2006, p. 50); their contribution to the mission is technical in the sense of developing a professional activity necessary to carry on the institutional mission.

The Marist laity also contribute professionally – or as volunteers – with the mission of the Institute, but go beyond because they are "Christian men and women, who in the course of

our life have listened to the call of God to live the charism of Champagnat, and, from our lay state, we respond to it” (GAST, 12). Their answer involves a commitment to the three Christian and Marist fundamental dimensions: mission, shared life, and spirituality. These dimensions integrate the laity and brothers vocation and life options and are “inseparable: spirituality lives in and for the mission; the mission generates and encourages the shared life; the shared life is, in its turn, the source of spirituality and mission” (GAST, 34). Thus these three ones can be considered as a key to comprehend the relationship between the Marist lay people and the Charism; the main reference is the history built by the brothers, but specifically addressing the contemporary laical experience.

4. The lay men and women into the Marist mission

Initially it’s necessary to understand that the Marist mission is an offshoot of the Christian mission; according to Brighenti (2006), this one covers two trinomials imbricated one each other. The first is *Jesus Christ-Disciple-Mission*: “discipleship refers to the Master Jesus of Nazareth and the mission, to the continuity of his work”, and there is no “implicitly and explicitly Christian mission that is not the continuity of Jesus’ work in history, in the dynamism of the Spirit of Pentecost”. The second trinomial is *Church-Kingdom of God-World*: “there is no Church without the Kingdom of God and out of the world, just as there is not the Kingdom of God out of the world, to which belongs the Church”. So evangelizing

it is much more than a mere proclamation of the *kerygma*. It is rather a process of transition from less human conditions to more human ones, through the witness (*martyria*), announcement (*kerygma*), catechesis (*didaskalia*), theological formation (*krisis*), liturgy celebration of what is expected (*leitourgia*), the service, especially to the poorest (*diakonía*), in a spirit of communion with brothers and sisters on faith (*koinonía*). (Brighenti, 2006).

Thus the Christian discipleship takes place “in view of a mission in the world, since the Church exists for the world, continuing the work of Jesus, which was to make present and increasingly visible the Kingdom of God in history” (idem). The Marist mission is a specific way to carry on the Christian mission, and Champagnat Marists are firstly disciples of Jesus. Making Jesus known, loved and followed among children, adolescents and young people, especially the poorest, was the way that Champagnat has understood in his time the need to incarnate the Gospel into the rural realities of France. Today this mission is developed in schools, social units, universities, youth centers and ecclesial communities, as well as initiatives in other

areas and fields. The presence of lay people in these spaces is evident, even performing strategic and management functions that were exclusive to the Brothers until some time ago.

It is important to note that the mission has a deeper meaning than the mere performance of employment duties. The first ecclesial decree about lay mission, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (1965), states that “the apostolate of the laity, since it emanates from his own Christian vocation, can never cease to exist in the Church. The Holy Scripture itself demonstrates abundantly how spontaneous and fruitful such activity was in the early church (Acts 11,19-21; 18,26; Rom 16.1 to 16; Phil. 4.3).” To Turú (2015, p. 4), “we do not say that the Church or the Marist Institute has a mission, but rather that the mission has a Church, that the mission has the Marist Institute, that the mission has me and has you”. Therefore, the contribution of lay men and women can only be understood through the prism of the Christian mission developed in the Marist space and times.

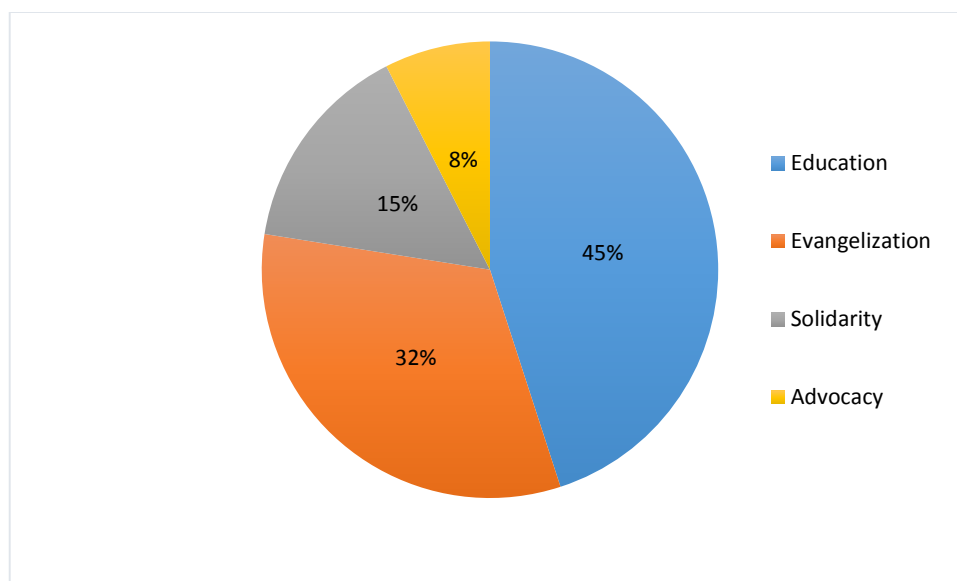
So it is interesting to know the places where the laity are in the Marist mission, with whom they work and which is their particular contribution to the mission of the Institute.

4.1 The mission places

The presence of laity and collaborators in Marist mission is the most visible part of the lay experience of the Charism, once the professional performance is the gateway to many men and women find themselves as Marist laity. All research participants recognize their work as part of the Institute’s mission, but this understanding results of their experience as Marist laity. The professional contribution to the institution does not constitute by itself the Marist mission. This one is understood under the perspective of the Christian mission, the ecclesial nature of the Institute and the sense of community that involves brothers and lay people to carry out the apostolate started by Champagnat.

Inquired about its involvement with the dimensions of the mission, the group replied as follows:

Graph 1: Involvement of the lay people with the dimensions of the Marist mission



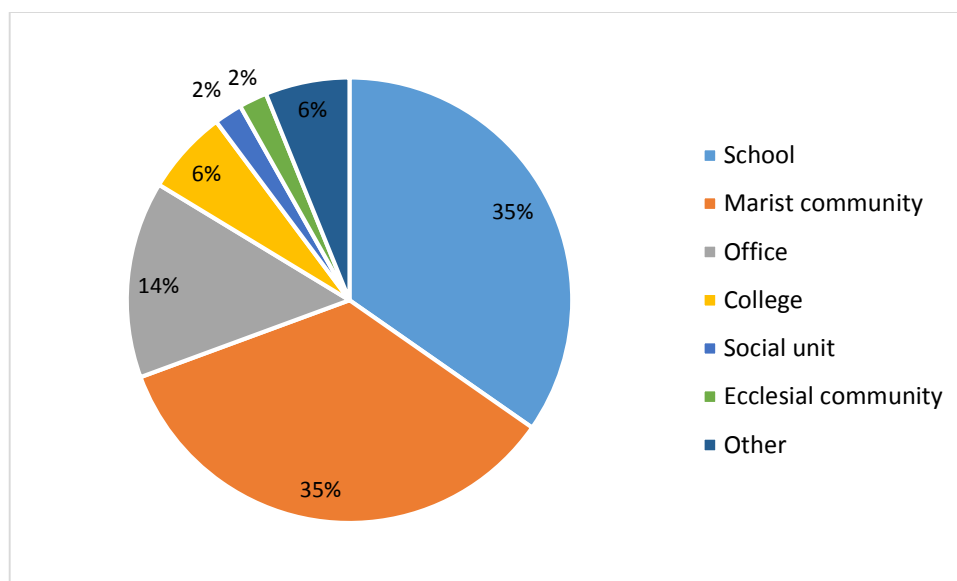
Source: The author

It's evident that they're are involved with these dimensions unequally. There are reasons for this. First, the division in dimensions is more didactic than practical: given the ecclesial identity of the Institute, one cannot be involved in Marist education and solidarity, for example, without be also involved with evangelization. Then, schools were the first *locus* of the Marist mission and remain as its main space in most AU's; social units, maintained by funds from schools and colleges or partner organizations, usually exist in lesser number. The Advocacy for the rights of children and young people, in turn, was the last dimension recognized as part of the Marist mission; until 2010 it was considered only the other three.

Moreover, acting in defense of the rights occurs more in public spaces such as forums and rights councils, than in specifically Marist spaces. Therefore, it is understandable that many AU's have advanced less in being presence in spaces of social control and political incidence. There are finally issues related to the research format – participants could select more than one option; 10 selected only “education” and 05, only “evangelization”; the other 11 selected two or three options.

In addition to identifying itself with each dimension, the group said the place from where they contribute to the mission, as the following chart.

Graph 2: Areas where the laity develop the Marist mission



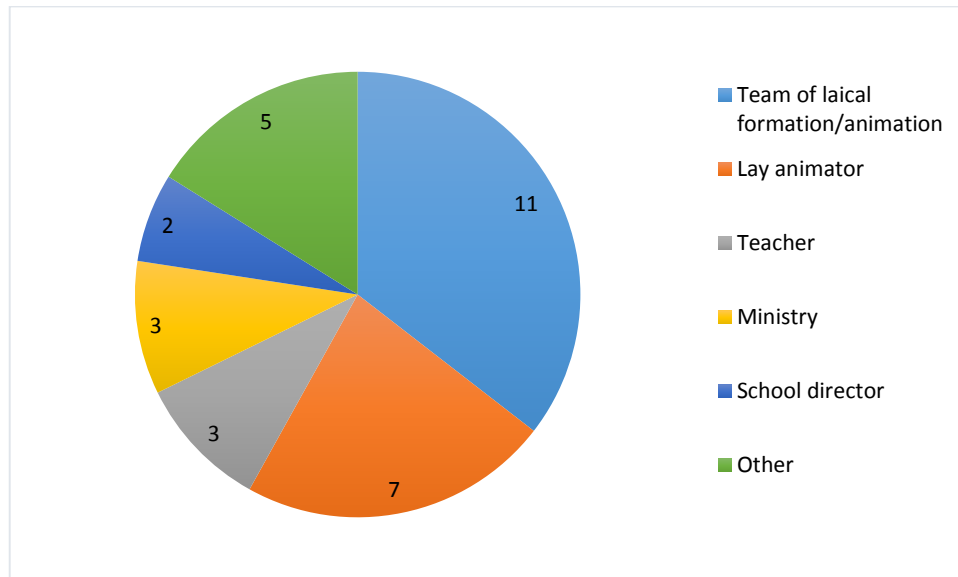
Source: The author

Given the percentage of participants who work in schools, it makes sense that the more pointed dimension is education. The research group has great interaction with the school environment in functions of teaching, management, ministry and institutional, charismatic formation. They are also in the Marist community, as in the sense of religious community as in the broader space around which are the Brothers and Lay. Those that selected “office” refers to the central instance from where the provincial initiatives are developed; they are the main responsible for animation, formation and accompaniment of the laity. Few of them are in universities and social units, which are a minority, if compared to the basic education schools. Despite this diversity of spaces, it appears as a common element the engagement with provincial processes of lay animation.

Although draws attention to little emphasis on ecclesial participation, subsequent information shows the presence of lay people in this community space. As the question was about the place from where they develop the mission and two answers could be selected, the group pointed out that the predominant field of activity are the Marist spaces, and ecclesial participation outside of them takes place more as participants than as leaders. The lay who selected the option “other” was referring to specific structures of the AU, with no equivalent area in the other ones, as “provincial sectors” and “canonical structure”.

In addition to the spaces of acting in the Marist mission, lay people were asked about the role they play in the Province/District and responded the following:

Graph 3: Functions in the Administrative Unit



Source: The author

Most of the group integrates the provincial teams of lay animation, in the specific role of laical animator or joining to the work in schools the task of formation, animation and accompaniment of the laity at the provincial level; in this case, they selected two responses. The relationship among jobs performed, involvement with the dimensions of the mission and place where they exercise their ministry demonstrates the complementarity of these information: most of them are local reference to the lay experience of Charisma, so they are also committed to broader instances where they can animate and accompany the lay processes.

It is interesting to note that the lay animation work use to be related directly to evangelization, but this research reveals lay people performing several jobs in schools and other Marist spaces. The identification with the charism and the witness of the Marist experience from the place where they work lead them to contribute with the team responsible for the lay animation. The laical experience is a prerequisite for the functions related to this work, which is coherent: How to animate lay vocational processes without having personally made this life option?

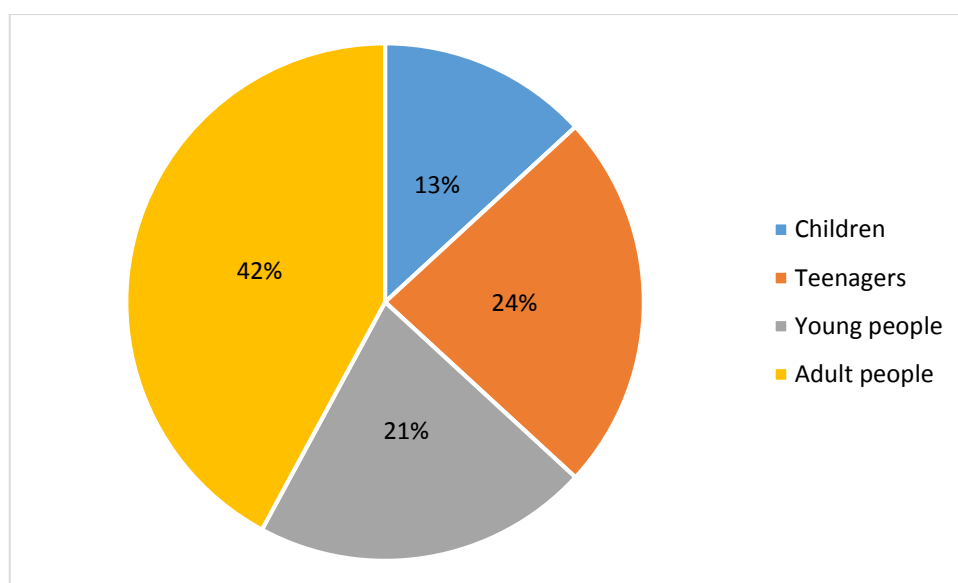
The option “other” refers to specific functions of the province, which don’t match with other Administrative Units, at least according to the expression used to describe it.

4.2 The interlocutors of the Marist mission

Besides the information about their mission places and functions performed, the laity were asked about the people with whom they work in the spaces where they are day-by-day. It’s important to remember that the mission of the Institute is developed with children, adolescents and young people in schools and other formal and informal education structures (Institute of the Marist Brothers, 1998, 126-210). There are specific initiatives with adults and elderly persons but, commonly due to the work they carry out with children and youth.

Asked about the age range with whom they work directly on the day-by-day of the mission, they gave the following answers:

Graph 4: Age range with whom the laity act directly



Source: The author

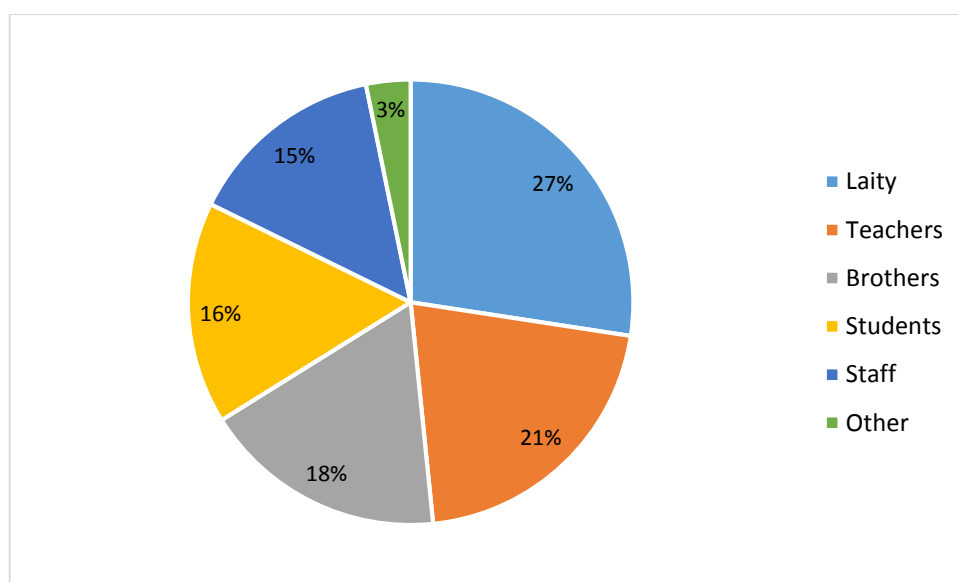
No surprises in this graph. A minority (13%) works with children and 45%, with teenagers and young people. The laity who work directly with children and adolescents are those who are involved with teaching, ministry and management in the schools; some lay women are

teachers of kindergarten and others teach in high school and/or accompany the Marist Youth Ministry (MYM), most of whom are teenage students. In this acting therefore, predominate strictly educational, evangelizing and social activities, according to the school projects and, in the case of young people, following the dynamics of the university and the pastoral projects involving Marist students who have completed basic education.

Nearly half of the group act with adults, which is also not surprising: given the functions performed in the province, they deal directly with the people involved in lay processes. This confirms what has been realized empirically: the gap between the work done with young people, such as MYM, and the specific animation for Marist laity. It also reveals the difficulty to consider young people as laity, on the one hand, and to integrate lay formation processes, on the other. What is the relationship among MYM, Vocational Animation, Champagnat Movement and vocational itineraries to lay people? What elements would favor the integration of these initiatives that, even covering different age groups, are related to the laical experience of the Charism?

In addition to the age group the question arises about who is the public that the group is directly involved with in the day-by-day of the mission. The responses were as follows:

Graph 5: Public the laity act with in everyday life



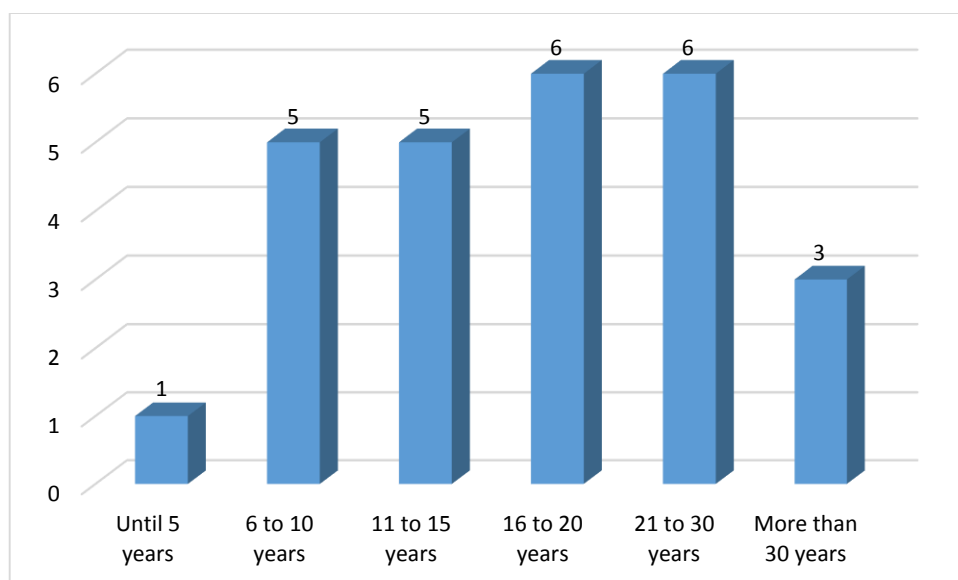
Source: The author

The numbers are consistent with the tasks assumed in the AU's. Nearly a third of the public with whom they work is lay men and women; as participants are directly involved with the lay animation is not surprising that they work more with this group, which includes people that perform several functions in the Marist units and are involved directly into laical formation and animation processes. It is probably that the public “teachers” also includes laity and that among the “students” can be found adolescents and young people involved in ministry and solidarity projects, that is a pathway to awake and cultivate the lay vocation.

It is worth noting that the laity and lay animators are often involved in institutional formation on the Charism, developing activities focused on teachers, collaborators and students. That’s why they pointed out the direct work with the "Brothers": as the lay animation teams are composed of Laity and Brothers, these ones are not the target of the lay job, they only interact in lay animation processes, joint formation and communion. In addition, teachers and school managers also work with other teachers, employees and students, which broadens this public.

Another important information is the time of service in the institution. The group said the following:

Graph 6: Time of service of the laity in the Marist Institute



Source: The author

It can be noted that only one laity works in the institution for less than five years; 10 (38%) are between 6 and 15 years and 12 (46%), between 16 and 29 years. The numbers make sense, considering that the functions of lay animation are generally assigned to those who already have some institutional knowledge, contribution in various mission fields and experience of Charism – an expertise that requires time, theoretical formation and personal and community experiences built on the Marist space and times. Among the group that marked more than 20 years as Marists, there are former students of Marist schools, who consider their time on basic education as a charismatic experience. So they sum the time as a student to the time of professional work to totalize the period they consider themselves as part of the Institute.

Although the work time into the institution does not guarantee by itself some knowledge about the Institute and experience of the charism, it is rare that a person beginning into the Marist life can be responsible for the lay animation. The group demonstrates a considerable understanding about the provincial processes, co responsibility in Marist mission and self-identification as lay Marists, which is evidenced by the following issues.

4.3 The sense of the Marist mission into laity's life

Considering that the involvement of the laity into the Marist mission goes beyond the professional questions, they were asked about how this mission is related to the other dimensions of life: interpersonal relationships, family, church community, work, studies... All the answers affirm the integration between the Marist mission and these dimensions, because of “values and beliefs we seek to live at all times” and because “I understand the Marist charism and spirituality as integral parts of my personal life project. The way I live Christianity is the Marist way. The experience of Marist values goes beyond the workplace and affects interpersonal relationships, family, church community etc.”

The laity demonstrate a vision that integrates the Marist mission and the personal life: “I am one, and as such I work in all areas of my life”. They highlight the influence of the mission over the interpersonal relationships and over their presence at other environments: “My way of being Marist and living some values tints on my acting in the profession, in my Marist Spirituality group, in my family and with colleagues and friends.” The values learned by exercising the mission are reflected into the personal relationships: “The relational way of Marists and the family spirit is what I value and try to promote in my own relationships with family and friends.” This comes from the identification with the Marist values that are lived in

other places: “Being Marist has been helping me to relate with others in the spirit of humility, simplicity, and with genuineness.” There is also a dynamics of relationship established from the mission: “I try to live my being Marist in all the relationships, since I conceive the Marist mission as a way of being in relation to..., more than the tasks that I do”.

Similarly, family relationships are involved directly or indirectly: “The Marist charism touches pretty much all aspect of my life. My girls goes to Marist College. They also go to Marist camp to work and play. Our family is part of the Champagnat Movement. Our best friends are Marist Lays. We have a cottage in a Marist Community where my wife & I offer voluntarily time to the Marist community.” Another lay woman said that the Charisma “influences all my relationships, especially the family ones”, explaining that “I, my husband and my daughter are part of the CMMF”.

The family spirit takes shape also in “relationships within my family network – being brother to all”. It is an experience of infinity, in the sense given by Estaún (2014, p. 116): “the living relationship that mediates between the ‘I’ and the ‘you’ through the human phenomenon of the *encounter*, held in the living bond between people and in their interrelationship on dialogue and love”. The experience of the encounter explains why the Marist mission occupies such an important place in the life of the lays: if it didn’t have a positive influence over their life and surroundings, they – especially those who are married and/or have children – certainly would face difficulties in dedicating it so much of their time and effort.

According to the group, the mission still influences the dynamics of the workspace. Once all respondents maintain a professional bond with the institution, they demonstrate a more fraternal vision about the people present in the workspace: “My Marist mission has helped connected me with other Marists whom I haven’t known in my work. I have come to understand the importance of healthy relationship among the community and family life as Marists. Trying to relieve a need has been my greatest achievements especially relating with students in Marist Schools.” Thus, the work favors the development of a sensitivity to children, adolescents and youth; it encourages fraternal relations with colleagues who are in the same environment; it gives to the profession a sense of personal fulfillment: “[the mission] has inspired me to value and love work”; and shapes a very peculiar dynamic of professional relationship: “I try to live my personal life according to the Marist charism, practicing the values of family spirit, presence, and simplicity. With my school colleagues, I pray and study the teachings of Marcellin.” In these statements can be recognized the practical difference between the laity, “those who are at the heart of a particular work”, and the collaborators, “for whom the work is merely a satisfying job”

(Sammon, 2006, p. 50-51); the collaborator performs his duties with professionalism, while the lays, besides working, contributes to imbue the Marist space with the Marist values, pedagogy and spirituality.

The ecclesial engagement is another result of the mission: “My brothers are also involved in the issue of laical animation and belong to a youth group. My reference group is also made up of leaders of adult groups or teachers.” According to the lays the Marist mission is part of a broader ecclesial reality: “Marist brings a Marial and human face to my Catholic faith – an opportunity to live my values”. It is interesting to note that most do not explicitly pointed ecclesial participation when asked about the places of mission, but the presence in the Church community is perceived in various talking. This theme will be taken up in the discussion about spirituality.

According to the group, the mission requires being near to its interlocutors: “I’m engaged in the animation of young people. The mission has reinforced my spiritual life.” It also causes displacement to other places: “The purpose of preparing ourselves, pray and live as a family is go toward the most needy, i.e. the ones in the periphery”. This echoes the appeal that the Institute has made in recent years to increase the Marist presence at the spaces of insertion and to approach itself to the “Montagnes of today”. Being available to move to different areas of mission is no problem: “I am a single woman and do not present any difficulty for the mission”. To the lay men and women who have constituted family, this displacement depends on how it affects their families life, especially the small children’s.

The main thread of these lines is the conviction that the mission is a way of being, rather than a task or function: “I believe that the Marist mission is something that we live in all dimensions and do not believe they are separate issues, but an integrated life”. It’s an aggregator element, around which are structured the several vital dimensions: “It is related to all aspects of my life because being Marist is who I am”. The recognition that “the Marist mission is part of everyday life, Marist is a lifestyle that you involve in interpersonal relationships with your friends; fraternities and groups of life also allow you to keep new life experiences; and the family, as the first Church, is directly involved in this style of being”. It is positive to realize an integrated relationship between the Marist mission and life of the laity, whereas the invested time and effort could easily break up the experience in the Marist spaces and the other areas – personal, emotional, ecclesial... – equally important.

It contributes to this integrator movement the harmony among interpersonal relationships, the specific tasks of the mission and the good provided by them: “to live from the simplicity of treatment, feel myself and make others feel themselves like part of a family in which one is present closely; to work thinking that someone will make a good with what I can do at this point, are attitudes that certainly nurture myself in my day-by-day, and I've learned to develop it in everything I do and with whom I interact, since I became part of the Marist family”. Thus, relationships, mission and people are intertwined by the same synergy; there is a relational and affective dimension quite characteristic of this way of being in mission, which is expressed as a strong element of lay life and the way how laity are involved in the dynamics of the Institute.

This all helps them to develop awareness of their place in the world, for beyond the Marist walls: “The Marist mission helps me to see and reflect on the realities of the world around me, with all the doubts and fears, opportunities and challenges, in order to discern what is really happening in my life, as in the others’ lives.” The engagement with people in these places and the way of fulfill these activities contribute to develop a broad, critical and supportive worldview, which makes them conscious of occupying a space temporally located in the world around them and coexisting with people and things they are connected to (Estaún, 2014). Many even engage themselves in frontier situations since the Marist space, and this kind of experience usually give new meaning to brotherhood that should govern the entire human community. After all, “Marist Mission is an integral part of my life as Marist. It is part of my everyday life, with my interaction with people both young and adult, family or in the community. I live out the Charism and the mission.” The place of the mission becomes an educational and evangelizing space for the lay people in all dimensions of life.

5. The Marist spirituality into the laical life

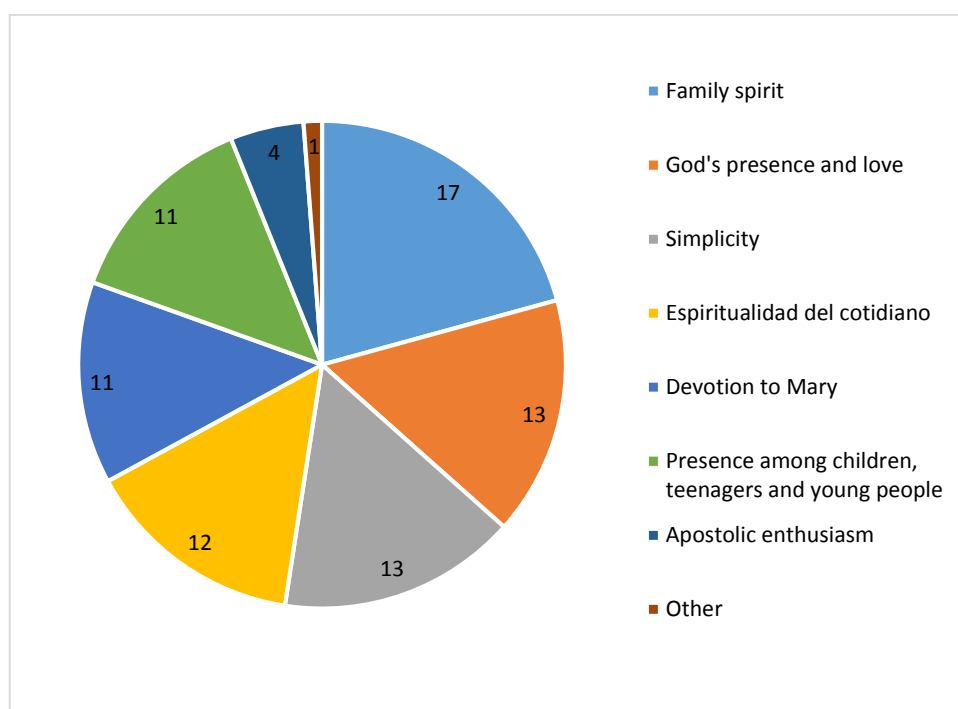
Spirituality is “living in and from God” (GAST, 100), according to His Spirit. Marcellin and the first Brothers “lived in the Spirit” and originate a tradition transmitted from generation to generation, “in a faithful and renewed way”, a mighty river that “renews peoples and cultures from all over the world”, and the Lay Marists “also contribute to it, bringing our own experience of God” (GAST, 102). According to the document *Water from the Rock*, the Marist spirituality, inspired by the vision and life of Marcellin and his first disciples, was enriched along the Marist history and shared with many people; it leads to awareness of a lifestyle from which emerge “the particular characteristics of our manner of being followers of Champagnat” (WfR, 15): Presence

and the love of God, Trust in God, Love for Jesus and his Gospel, The way of Mary, Family spirit and Spirituality of simplicity (WfR, 16-41). Taken together, plus the Apostolic enthusiasm and Presence among children, adolescents and youth, these features identifies the Marist spirituality.

5.1 Laity identifying themselves with the Marist spirituality

Do Marist Laity live the Marist spirituality according to these characteristics? Which of these traits⁵ are more identified with the lay vocation and the life choices that flow from it? Asked about it, lay people gave the following answers:

Graph 7: Traces of Marist spirituality which the laity most identify themselves with



Source: The author

It's quite surprising see the Family spirit as the most highlighted trait of Marist spirituality, because is usually the Marian dimension. On the other hand, it makes sense that the relational dimension has so much importance: it is something recognized in Marcellin, who

⁵ As Jesus and the Gospel are elements common to all Christian spirituality and the various schools of spirituality, this item was not included to enhance specific traits of Marist spirituality.

insisted with the first Brothers to live this fraternal spirit, both among themselves in community life, as in the relationship with students, in fraternal and loving ways (WfR 31). Estaún (2014, p. 162) establishes a direct relation between Mary and the family spirit: “The presence of Mary as Mother and educator model motivates the educator to give the home he lives a family environment”. In this sense, highlighting in the first place the family spirit wouldn’t be a denial of the Marian dimension of Marist spirituality, but an association that reinforces it.

What refers to Marcellin and his spirituality, in which Mary is so significant presence: “The spirit of a Brothers’ school ought to be a family spirit”, in which “sentiments of respect, love and mutual trust predominate” (Furet, p. 552). These are clearly Marian and feminine elements, marking “a spirituality that is strongly relational and affective” (WfR 31), fundamental in the shared life, which is one of the dimensions that identify the Marist laity. “I think that as lay people we have a unique opportunity to be living Gospels in our places of relating to others (with friends, family and work) as we live the reality of faith and life more by who we are than what we do”.

The equal emphasis on Presence and love of God and Simplicity indicates a relation between the both. First, the personal experience of being deeply loved by Jesus and called by Mary was one of the main influences in the formation of Marcellin’s spirituality (WfR 7). He “developed a spirituality that was uncomplicated and down to earth” (WfR, 34), founded in humility and simplicity of attitudes that Marists express “most especially in our way of relating to God and to the others” (WfR, 33). Unlike the image of a distant God and the ascetic practices common in his time, Marcellin spoke of a very close God, and insisted that the Brothers avoid instill in students the fear of Him, especially as a way to punish them for faults, and should help them to make an experience of God’s love. He points out the three places where Jesus, the human face of God, reveals Him in a special way – the crib, the altar and the cross – and where each person can meet Him (WfR 20). Here is the base of a day-by-day Spirituality – the fourth highlighted trace – which leads one to recognize God’s presence in the everyday events.

There is a logical order in this sequence: a close and loving God who relate to the person and “is close to us in our daily human experiences” (WfR 16). This experience of God’s love leads one to share life with others. The Marist spirituality encourages a personal experience of God that is expressed in interpersonal relations and “is in harmony with the lay life because it is practical and absorbs our daily experience” (GAST, 103); favors, therefore, the identification of the lays and responds to the searching for spirituality and significant mystical experiences that characterizes the contemporary time.

The Devotion to Mary and the Presence among children, adolescents and young people are the following indicated traits. Mary isn't such highlighted, although her characteristics are recognized in other traits and Marian reference to discipleship will be discussed later. It is likely that the expression "Devotion to Mary", customarily associated with popular devotional practices, does not reflect the place of Mary into the spirituality cultivated by the group and, therefore, is less significant than other traits. About the Presence among children, adolescents and youth, is seldom mentioned because most of the group has no contact with them in their daily place of mission; so they feed their relationship with God on other areas and groups. And the Apostolic enthusiasm is not a current expression when talking about Marist spirituality, although the passion for the mission has been shown previously.

5.2 Practices to cultivate the spirituality

Water from Rock highlights some practices "essential to nurturing our faith life as Marists": *Lectio Divina* or Meditation of the Word of God, Personal prayer, Review of the day, Community prayer, Faith sharing, Accompaniment, Celebrating Eucharistic and Reconciliation (WfR, 79-87). As the experience of spirituality is very personal, these options have not been presented to the group, that answered freely to the question about their practices of faith.

Personal practices are in harmony with the meaning given by a lay woman to the Marist spirituality: "a way of living. The way I regard life, work, dealing with people, the way I educate my son, etc. It's living in God and with God. It is a desire to live at the root, not only on the surface." About the ways to cultivate spirituality, firstly appears prayer, characterized as "personal and community", "daily", "day-to-day", "in the events", "personal and with my family", with "time to listen to God" and "be more aware of God's presence in my daily life". Several prayer techniques are highlighted, such as reading life from faith, meditation, contemplation, spiritual journal⁶, Ignatian Exercises, centering⁷ and Mindfulness⁸, as "moments of silence that I can have, in order to keep quiet the noises of my heart and my head, and enjoy a silence that fills me with peace". They even mention specifically community activities, such as prayers in groups, Eucharist, participation in retreats and celebrations of the liturgical calendar, besides "Faith in God", "Trust in the Virgin Mary" and "Marian Devotion".

⁶ Taking notes about daily meditation

⁷ Technique of meditation in order to promote self-conscience

⁸ Form of meditation that focuses attention on the direct experience of the present moment, through meditative and psycho-educational exercises.

Several laity recognize community life in its various ways as a source of spirituality. They highlight the participation in the parish community, living “my Christian and Marist commitment in my Church-community” and the “apostolic commitment in the Church”; and the Marist community, that has drawn “as a strong expression of shared faith and support. Sharing our faith, our lives, challenges and joys nourishes and encourages my spiritual life”. One lay woman lives in a mixed community, with Brothers and other Laity, then “prayer is the key element, both in preparation and in animation” of those times; another one says that “labor and proximity to the Brothers also nurture my spirituality”. Living together with the Brothers, even not sharing the same roof, is understood as a form of community life: “Spending every day with them, eating lunch with them, exchanging on all aspect of life, not necessary the work, has brought me closer to the community. I care for them and feel responsible for their wellbeing.” This proximity with the laity certainly nourishes the Brothers, especially the elderly ones, in their need of affection, contact with other people and mutual care – which, incidentally, is proper to the human being.

One laity says that “to be part of the Marist community makes me a better Christian”. Several of them point out that participating of various groups – such as the Champagnat Movement of Marist Family, Marist spirituality groups and groups of prayer and reflection – feeds their spirituality; the same do the places of mission, being “actively involved in the special mission with disadvantage children and young women”, “concerned about the poorest” or “working for my country and for my faith”. Some lay people don’t refer specifically to the community space but say that they cultivate spirituality living “the Gospel according to Marcellin’s style” and “the Gospel values in the Mary’s style”. I.e. they understand the charism in its ecclesial dimension, as a specific way of following Jesus and in order to feed spirituality since the community experience.

Family and friends also feed the spirituality, both “taking moment with family and friends to share our thoughts on life, where we are and where (and how) we are going” as the simple movement of “being with’ people. Seeing God in those with whom I spend my life and through prayer.” According to the laity, it is important that these relationships include “reflection and sharing and then experience of living our values”, so they can “share values, time for each one” and integrate the relationships with “my home, family, friends, fellow workers”, besides “connect myself with people – lived experience – sharing life and mission”. The relational aspect is emphasized here as it was in the missionary dimension.

These relationships don't substitute the dialogue with God, but they aid to perceive His presence: "I keep in conversation with God throughout the day, pausing to realize His message in everything, event, or person with whom I live". Many say they feed their spirituality "reading and praying", once they enjoy "to read a lot about God and have moments of interiority". Regarding the kind of reading, Bible is pointed out firstly, "knowing the Scriptures, and watching those passages in my own reality and everyday life"; this technique is the Meditating on the Word of God pointed by the *Water from rock*. They read yet "books written by mystics", "the literature of this area [spiritual]", "Marist books (*Water from the Rock, Gathered around the same table*, etc.) or other texts" and materials provided by the AU's for this purpose.

It is worth noting the emphasis on interiority. More than outward expressions of spirituality, such as the presence in the community, interactions with people, collective prayers and participation in the sacraments, the laity underline the spirituality cultivated from silence, internalization and personal time in dialogue with God. That's what Turú (2012, p. 66-68) calls "the great return to the interior life", an aspiration that "rises from the depths of their being" and whose path is indicated by "Mary of the silence, of the acceptance, of the attentive listening. She who treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart." The interiority feeds a mystical that run away from rationalization, causes interaction with reality, and promotes integration with other people: "It helps me in finding God in these realities and in discovering where God is calling me and in responding to this call in the way of Mary and St. Marcellin. This way of following and loving Jesus is basically in the way of Mary and St. Marcellin."

Finally, the practices to cultivate spirituality highlighted by the *Water from the Rock* are echoed in the personnel practices of the lays, but not with the same importance. The relational dimension does not appear into the document as a way to nourish the faith, but it is the most emphasized one by lay men and women, probably because they spoke from their experience, and the document was made by a greater number of brothers than of lay people. The laity emphasize the apostolic trace more than the Marian one, and consider very important to reserve personal time to nourish the faith life. As seen, the ways in which Marist spirituality is lived in the lay life follows a different dynamic that one that is proper of the Brothers in the consecrated life.

6. Sharing life with Brothers and Lays

Community life is inherent to the Marist Institute since the beginning, when Jean-Marie Granjon and Jean-Baptiste Audras have begun to live in community in the parish of La Valla.

“In a year and a half, they had constituted a group (...). It was an incipient real association: more than a simple oratory or fraternity, but never similar to a congregation.” (Lanfrey, 2014, p. 201). The formula to the first Brothers make a promise and assume some commitments with Father Champagnat, consecrating themselves as teaching Brothers, ended with this statement: "We share it all in community" (Lanfrey, 2014, p. 254.).

Community life, both sharing the same roof as sharing time, space and projects, also identifies the Marist laity. They live the community experience with each other, with the brothers and with no Marist lays. The shared life emerges from the family spirit, a specific sensibility of the way of life in which the Marists follow Jesus Christ (GAST, 67). Turú (2012, p. 32-33) adds that is the experience of a Marian Church, inspired by “the historical manifestations of the life of the church derived from the attitudes with which Mary responds to her mission as a believer and member of the ecclesial community”. With distinct characteristics of the prevailing ecclesiological model, sharply Petrine, this Marian face reinforces the importance of proximity, affection and sharing of life, building communion from a horizontal view of the Church and its mission – and draws a fraternal way of life quite characteristic of Champagnat Marists.

6.1 The shared life with other lay persons

Asked about the places where they share their lives, the laity first highlighted the work environment, office and schools in most, detailing that this sharing takes place “in the relationship with some colleagues”, not all; personal affinities influence this sharing, as well as the dynamics of relationships in the workspace. Those who are responsible for lay formation and animation understand that the shared life “is the focus of my job. All of my working day as interface between Brothers and Lay.” Several ones extends their working hours to weekends, “working in different Marist projects during the day, evening and weekends” and “developing my duties for five days a week and even on weekends, when there is some scheduled activity”. It is a function that requires persons with disposition to conviviality and sharing, more than fulfillment of tasks: “All my work is designed to share time and activities with the laity. Times are usually weekends and at night, when lay people can participate in activities and experiences.”

They also share life with others laity in activities in schools, “working with teachers and Directors during the day. Mostly on training topics”, reflections with educators and students, liturgies, community prayers, retreats, formation, leaderships conferences, moments of Marist formation and experiences, school councils, ministry and pedagogical journeys, opening and

closing of the school year, pastoral, cultural and social activities, team meetings, provincial meetings, assemblies, workshops with teachers, prayer workshops, living together, Easters, various celebrations and extracurricular activities of apostolate, mission and solidarity. These activities are typical of workplace but are developed in order to promote life-together, affection ties and sharing. The way they are developed, not the activities itself, promotes the sharing of life in the day-to-day work, “living together and celebrating as Marist family”, and the integration of the various spaces, like “my family life, my school and church communities, my interactions with friends and colleagues, my work with other Marists in the province”.

Pope Francis (2013, 67), reading the contemporary world, warns that “the postmodern, globalized individualism promotes a lifestyle that undermines the development and the stability of links between people and distorts the family ties”. Against that, “ministry action should show even better that the relationship with our Father requires and encourages a communion that heals, promotes and strengthens interpersonal bonds”. What laity talks about it follows the direction indicated by the Pope.

They also highlight several groups as places where they share their lives: the Champagnat Movement, the Marist Youth Ministry, spirituality groups, laity groups, reunion of retired Marist School personnel. They live together when they participate of the groups and accompany these groups, through formation, celebrations, community life and mission actions. This is not restricted to work activities: includes community parties, social dinners on weekends or in the evening, leisure and rest times, holidays, praying times and informal occasions, since what they do “it is not only work, but a shared experience of our life, what we value, what we try to promote through what we do. (...) It is so important to find time to share stories over a beer!” The shared life involves creating affection bonds and common time to “talk, laugh and be together” (GAST, 80); here can be recognized the Family spirit once again.

On the other hand, blood and marriage ties appear little in sharing life: only four participants say they live together with Marist lays in the family sphere. It makes sense, since relatives and spouses not always identify themselves with the three dimensions that characterize the laity: some identify themselves with traces of the charism and spirituality, but don't live together with other lay people and Brothers, nor contribute to the Marist mission. Other laity often pray with the family or reserve time for reflection with their relatives; others have children studying in Marist schools and therefore they know and live the values learned there. However, sharing life with the meaning given by the Institute happens intertwined with the mission tasks and, therefore, takes more place among people involved in these spaces.

6.2 The life shared with the Marist Brothers

Life is also shared with the Brothers in many ways. Asked about the spaces, times and activities they use to share life with the Marist Brothers, six persons responded that “the same” where they do this with laity. This reveals the boundaries that used to separate the spaces of the laity from the spaces of the Brothers are becoming less rigid to some groups, even just for few persons, considering the whole Institute. It can be deduced that some Brothers and Lay are in the same space and this sharing is not only among the laity; it signals some progress toward to the new relationship, based on communion and fraternity, defined as an urgency of the XXI GC.

Most of the laity was more specific in their answers: the first place of sharing life with the Brothers is the work environment and the activities developed there: meetings, planning, pastoral activities, especially with MYM, moments of Marist experience, provincial assembly of mission. For those working in provincial instances, living together with Brothers comes from the dynamics of this space, where “come most of the Brothers, sometimes or every day, if they are part of some other provincial instance”. Sammon (2005, p. 34-35) brings the Brothers’ vision on this issue: some of them “are searching for new ways of living together” and make the community experience when “point to colleagues at work, or family members, or a circle of friends as their source of support”. The shared life is a consequence of the relationships established from the places where Brothers and Lay interact.

Community activities stand out as the place where Champagnat Marists live fraternally: extended communities, celebrations, informal occasions (dinners, parties, celebratory moments), Eucharist, Champagnat Movement meetings... A lay woman who lives in mixed community expresses that sharing of life occurs “all the time. At work, in prayer and in daily sharing.” It’s a peculiar dynamic of this kind of experience, which promotes the shared life “with visitors and pilgrims” passing by the community, “conducting small workshops and, above all, sharing experiences”. Whatever kind of community space where Brothers and Lay live together regularly, the shared life permeates both the dynamics between them as the mission that this space makes possible.

On the other hand, a lay woman noted that she coexists with the Brothers “usually in work meetings or planning”, but has “very little experience of sharing life” with them. Many brothers have difficulties to live with lay people, so isn’t so probable they can establish fraternal relations that include affection ties and sharing of life. There are also many laity who can’t establish with the Brothers equal relations that go beyond the professional job. Regarding to the

Brothers, this limitation may be related to issues of personality, to the habit of living only with other religious persons, to an hierarchical view about the AU or to the difficulty in recognizing lay people as Marists; whatever, it confirms that sharing life is not mechanical, it depends on the established ties and indicates that, despite some progress, there is much to walk in building the new relationship between Brothers and Laity.

The perceptions of Brothers and Laity on the importance of sharing life are evidently different. In view of the laity, who consider so important the Family spirit, there is no authentic Marist mission without shared life among the people involved around these places. The Brothers are already living in a collective space, the religious community, which does not necessarily mean shared life. Paredes (2014, p. 40) notes that “it is difficult to live in community!” because “our communities use to join people who did not choose each other, that are very different in their personality, habits, feelings, points of view”, besides the “difference of race, culture, generation”. Sammon (2005) says that every community goes through stages to be configured as such, and the last stage implicates the commitment to the task of living and serving together. This contradiction – living into a community but not necessarily sharing life – illuminates the difference on the emphasis that Brothers and laity put on fraternal life: the laity need to share life with the Marist companions, while Brothers opted for consecrated life but, not always live fraternal relations with other Brothers; so without this learning, they also can’t share life with lay people. The fact is that being together in the same spaces, especially those related to the mission, in which the purpose of being together in the same space is greater than the personal preferences, affinities or limitations, contributes to undermining mutual endurances and to create conditions for a coexistence based on fraternity and reciprocity.

7. The Marist Lays by themselves

González Rey (2005, p. 126) conceptualizes the subjectivity as a complex system whose “different forms of expression in the subject and in the different social spaces always carry the subjective senses of the system that are beyond to the lived event”. Boff (2012) endorses that is proper of being human “to realize values and senses, not just to list facts and actions”, because “what really counts for people are not so much things that happen to them, but what it mean for their lives and what kind of remarkable experiences provided to them”.

So more than make a list with the elements that characterizes and identifies the Marist laity, it is necessary to understand the sense they attribute to being laity. According to Vygotsky

(2009), the sense is a dynamic, complex, fluid formation that bear several zones that vary in their instability, according to the studied subjects and spaces. There is a direct relation between the subjects that build the sense and the spaces where they are, which “engender forms of subjectivity that are materialized in the different activities shared by the subjects and become, with different subjective senses, part of the individual subjectivity of who shares these spaces” (González Rey, 2005, p. 25). From this perspective, the lay subjects are constituted by Marist spaces and times as much as they constitute these same spaces as a place of becoming subjects.

Answering about what means to be a lay, all participants recognized themselves as Marist laity, but have given different emphasis to the elements that constitute them as well.

7.1 The vocational dimension of the laity

Some of them emphasize the laity since the vocational call, pointing that being a laity Marist “means to live my Christian vocation in the light of the charism of Champagnat”, “with a particular style” that is “simple and fraternal, from a profound experience of God that is expressed in everyday life and a commitment to be the sister of the one I meet on the pathway and with whom I share my life”. Lay vocation “gives direction to my thoughts and actions”, gives “sense of life”, “fills the soul and gives meaning to my journey as a teacher” and translates itself into a lifestyle that “gives sense of transcendence and meaning to everything I do”. Several laity repeat the expression “sense” to talk about vocation, and others relate it to “the project of life”: “After meeting and delight me by the Marist Charism, I decided to take on it. Since then, its dimensions (including the mission) are part of my project of life”.

Turú (2012, p. 38) points out that “some feel that God is calling them to live their Christian life with the Marist characteristics and so we speak of the lay Marist vocation”. Several responses detail specific aspects of the lay vocational call: it is personal – “I have found that God is calling me to this way of being Marist”; it requires positive answer – “I got it from God and I have to share with others, especially young people”; it has accentuated community aspect – “Being Marist is all about living out the Gospel values such as praying together and being role model in our relationships”; and it leads to an apostolic commitment: “I am committed to life and protection of marginalized children’s rights”. The Marist lay vocation is discovered from a process that involves different stages of discernment (GAST, 14); being individual, it is developed in different rhythms, times and spaces. Therefore, “the lay life is expressed in a

multitude of contexts and personal journeys” (EMM 125), drawing a movement of calling, answers, community life, apostolate and feedback of this entire pathway.

7.2 Laity as a way of being and living

According to Sammon (2003, p. 30), identity, “on a personal level, it is the awareness that each has of himself and the world he lives in”. The collective identity, in turn, is divided into an emotional axis, which “allows one to *take root* in reality, establish *bonds of communion* with others, to *feel moved* by the needs of the recipients, be *enthused* by the mission, *prove* their own gifts and abilities to serve the mission”; and a narrative axis, which relates to “the perspective in which a person *contemplate* his life, discovers the *plot* that unites the events in which it was involved, the *roots* of the existential situation that lives now and can dare to sketch the way in which is walking into the future” (Botana, 2005, p. 69-70). Also according to the author, “participation in the collective identity of an evangelical Family is the result of a formation process in which the person appropriates such identity”.

Hence is understood that being a lay Marist “is a very particular way of organizing my life, our lives, following the intuitions of Marcellin Champagnat, integrating this with other personal experiences”. It means commitment to “a life of simplicity, humility, apostolic presence and family spirit, and fidelity to the Gospel in the context of my lay vocation”. Lay life is an existential question, “being myself, living and being some very simple values and increasingly radical and exigent”, as well as an exercise of self-awareness and perception of the “focus to my life and a constant reminder of the Marist values of humility, modesty and simplicity”. Almeida (2006, p. 348) confirms that the lay vocation and the consciousness of being a laity are interrelated, because both become “life in all dimensions, in all places and times, in every relationship that constitutes it”.

Take on oneself as Marist laity comes from a personal identification with this way of life: “I was a Marist before I knew what it meant. Finding my spiritual home in the Marist community has given to my life meaning and purpose. It is a great blessing to share my life and work with others who feel as I do.” The time they spend in the Marist environment during working hours, at night or on weekends, as needed, shows their identification with the dynamics of this space.

This experience is also extended to the other areas. Since it is “a way of being and living the values of the Gospel today and now” that “shapes my actions and choices”, being Marist laity motivates one to “live my life in the world according to the Marist spirituality in my capacity as

a laity”. There is a distinction between the Brothers’ and the laity’s ways of living the charism, which implies a life choice and “means that I have consciously chosen to live my life into a Marial way. It influences the interactions and relationships I have and the life choices I make.” Estaún (2014, p. 107) justifies these vocational implications: the laity understand and locate themselves in the world from their lay option because “the human existence is defined by the very being there in the world” and recognizing oneself into its own life “is modulated by an existential intimate level”. Therefore, the conscious choice of living as a Marist laity constitutes a fundamental option from which the other options flow.

Croatto (2004, p. 42) points out that the human living “oscillates constantly between the subjective and the inter-subjective or relational”: the subject becomes himself in relation to other subjects. Hence the relational and community dynamics of lay life, the encounter between subjects, under the particular hue of the Charisma. The feeling of being “welcomed to a universal family” leads the laity to “vibrate with the Marist and valorize each Marist Brother and Laity”, once “being a Marist laity for me is to feel responsible for and part of my Marist family”. Every laity can live “as a Christian through the support of a Marist community and the spirituality that resounds strongly into my spirit”. This form of community life is organized “around the family spirit and living and breathing our Marist characteristics in the way of Mary, our Good Mother”, following her example of “attention to God and to the others, her wisdom and service”.

Although they recognize themselves as ecclesial community, as seen above, laity feel more identified with the Marist way of living together: “The Church community is important, but the Marist community when is gathered and celebrates faith and life speaks strongly on my experience of knowing and understanding God”. Paredes (2014, p. 41) confirms that the “peculiar way of feeling ourselves before God”, that characterizes the Charisma, “puts us in a peculiar ecclesial and social space”, because tinted by the charismatic traits. The ecclesial dimension isn’t so highlighted among the objective questions but is emphasized as a natural consequence of the meaning of being a Marist lay.

7.3 Laity, Brothers and discipleship

Community life brings awareness of “being a brother to all with whom I have contact”, which leads to “be presence for others” and take part “of a community that shares dreams of building a better world”. Since “all Christian vocation is born in and for the Church, and it is for the service of the world” (GASP, 140), it is proper of the laity be “living and sharing life with

others, reaching out to others who need help, responding to the needs of Montagne's of our time and involvement in the Mission"; "to be engaged and committed to the mission of Champagnat (Make Jesus known to children)"; to have "an eye and heart for the vulnerable"; and to be "a person available to work nearby the forsaken children".

The lay mission can't be carried out without the Brothers: as "we hold the certainty that our respective vocations are mutually enhanced" (GAST, 17), being laity implies to recognize themselves as "partners of the Brothers in the mission in ministry, serving children and young people", into a relationship well-marked by "equality, shared responsibility between Brothers and laity". According to the group, there is no reason for resistance by some Brothers – veiled or explicit, but found in several places – about the lay presence into the mission, as well as the fear of losing space or be replaced: "The communion between Lay people and Brothers complements and enriches our specific vocations and different states of life" (GAST, 79). Communion is more than necessary because "there is not only a place for both at the table, but we need each other at our side" (idem).

Vocational call, community life, commitment to the mission and relationships of communion form a pathway for discipleship "as a Christian, accepting God's call to the way of Marcellin Champagnat". The Marist lay is "a person who lives the spirituality of Champagnat", "from its own reality"; sharing the Marist mission and his way of living he enriches the Marist life with "his passion to make Jesus known and loved by the young, especially the least favored".

These ideas echo the pathway of Christian discipleship designed by the Conference of Aparecida: encounter with Christ, conversion, discipleship, communion and mission, fundamental aspects that "appear differently in each step of the pathway" (DA 278). The specific element is that, as the inspiration for this Christian way has a clear Marian profile, the Marist laity must "show the attitudes of Mary in all, through his loving and formative tract like a mother with her child", by "prayerful silence of everyone who observes and listens each day", by the "absolute readiness to serve others and [by] the trust in God". Since "we receive and transmit Mary in our daily lives, immersed and involved in a changing world", showing "love for one each other with Mary as our guide and companion", all the lay way of living "speaks of these models who are Mary and St. Marcellin". Mary is the model of discipleship: "we contemplate the life of our Mother and Model. Our ways of being and acting draw their inspiration and guidance from the attitudes that made her the perfect disciple of Christ" (Constitutions, 4).

7.4 Laity, Marist charism and happiness

Finally, the lay way is also a pathway to happiness: “Being lay is feel myself happy because I felt called to live the charism”. Happiness has been, for a long time, a suspect word into the Church, which explains the surprise caused by Pope Francis (2013) when he has chosen joy as theme of his first apostolic exhortation: “The Gospel, radiant with the glory of Christ’s cross, constantly invites us to rejoice” (n. 5) and the joy “can encourage and guide the whole Church in a new phase of evangelization, one marked by enthusiasm and vitality” (n. 17). He invites all the faithful to “take up, amid our daily efforts, the biblical exhortation: ‘Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say: Rejoice!’ (Phil 4:4)” (n. 18).

Pagola (2012) says that happiness is part of the project of Jesus, who begins “to see everything from the mercy of God” (p. 104.) but in a different perspective of the ascetic preaching of John the Baptist: “the austere life in desert is replaced by a festive way of life”(p. 105). Jesus “wants to put everybody to ‘dance of joy’ because of the mercy of God” (p. 181), and an example of this is the prostitute who is accepted by the Master and washes his feet with her hair because “she does not know how to express their joy and thanksgiving” (idem). According to one lay woman “the daily contact with Marist brothers and laity makes me feel a participant of the community; and share life with them makes me very happy. To open the heart in this community is more important and meaningful to me than open the house doors.”

According to Sammon (2006, p. 90), Brothers and Lay “must strive to be recognized primarily by our obvious joy in serving God, simplicity of life, and visible presence among those most abandoned by society”. In view of the laity, this testimony of happiness results of “following Jesus through the Marist charism, with simplicity and joy”, in order to “live centered on the person of Jesus and his Gospel and with this testify his love for myself and for every human being and creation of nature that exist”. It is not something individualistic nor related exclusively to personal fulfillment but is rooted in life-together, in the joy of fulfilling the mission and its tasks, in the sense of belonging, in the broadly sense of community and in the communion relationship.

Why do relate lay vocation and mission to this feeling of happiness? Because being happy is the most basic human aspiration, even there are many ways to reach it. The laity point out Marist life as one of these ways. The document *Water from the Rock* (n. 46) highlights the joy that comes from sharing: “Our hearts long to find happiness, to believe that we can find love and share in the blessings of life”. Sammon (2005, p. 38-39) relates joy to fraternity: “Genuine

religious community is aimed at self-transcendence rather than self-fulfillment”. This establishes a relation between being Marist and happiness: “Our way of life is meant to make people happy”, clarifying that happiness is not hilarity, but a “deep feeling of contentment experienced by people who have meaning and purpose in their life and marvelous companions with whom to share that life” (Sammon, 2005, p. 71).

This feeling of happiness is also related to the inherently human desire of belonging to a community of reference, to be recognized in their abilities and to nurture their need for affection. The Marist laity affirm to find it all on their vocational journey: “I feel valued and loved by my Marist brothers and laity”. They recognize in this life option “the joy which we experience daily, amid the little things of life, as a response to the loving invitation of God our Father: ‘My child, treat yourself well, according to your means (...). Do not deprive yourself of the day’s enjoyment’” (Sir 14:11,14). (Francisco, 2013, n. 4). Happiness, in this perspective, is an existential question related to the community and sharing life.

8. Characteristics of the Marist laity, according to the lays

The vision of lay men and women confirms how the Institute understands its Marist laity. However, considering the regional and cultural diversity of the group they were asked about which elements identify and characterize the Marist laity, since their own experience. The answers bring several elements common to the institutional conception but with different emphasis, that draw some traces of the Marist laity identity since the lays themselves.

The first characteristic is the “conscience of the Christian vocation, lived from the charism of Champagnat” and “in the way of Mary”, with attitudes of service, simplicity, welcome, and significant presence among children and youth. The laity are “Christians who do not lose the center of their lives, Jesus, and that can manifest themselves before the other by proximity, by the kind and simple treatment, by their confidence placed in God”; they testify the Christianity “since everyday life and our life option”; and express the call of God “through a personal and community journey”, integrating “spirituality, mission and fraternity in the life”. They confirm with no contradiction what the Institute says about its laity (cf. GAST, 12).

With regard to the mission, the Marist laity are characterized by a wish of being “significant presence among children, adolescents and young people”, “with a Marist spirituality and a Marian face of the Church”. Feeling “very united and identified with the mission and the charism”, “they are able to get out of your comfort zone to help others without neglecting their

family or the nearest surroundings”. Why they do this? Because they “are simple people, with a strong spirituality and able to share life in community”; they “exude the warmth of a family” and “recognize their own needs and those of others and, therefore, remain in constant dialogue with God in order to discover His will and to act according to it”.

Turú (2015, p. 4) considers that this dialogue with God necessarily leads to mission, since “God is mission. Not that God has a mission, but that He is mission.” Paredes (2014, p. 40-41) points out that the theological reflection on the mission affirms that “it’s said – and rightly so – that is the ‘Missio Dei’ [Mission of God] that sets the church and the community”, and this setting is given through a “shared *ethos*”, the charism, which “produces enthusiasm, inwardly affects and brings together”, since “there is community where there is an *ethos* that gathers”. The laity confirms and emphasizes the community character of the missionary call: “We are Marist community and from that we want to live and transmit our faith”, in a way “incarnated in the things of this world”. They “are driven by their passion for children and the young” with “a deep wish to fight for children’s rights”; so they “offer their experience, knowledge and work to achieve a common good”.

Moreover the laity highlight the “sense of belonging to the charism” as one characteristic of the lay persons: they live the five characteristics of Marist pedagogy – Presence, Simplicity, Family spirit, Love of work and The way of Mary – “as well as the Brothers”. Being close to the Brothers is fundamental in this belonging, because “those who have chosen to be Marists and who consciously wish to live and continue the charism of St Marcellin Champagnat into the future” will make it “in partnership with the Brothers and other Marists”, cultivating “a proximity in every way with the Brothers” and “a sense of community and belonging as we are moving towards the sense of co-responsibility”.

The reference to co-responsibility echoes the XXI GC, that has recognized it as a necessary element “for the development of Marist life, spirituality and mission” (Marist Institute, 2009, p. 36). However, this issue seems to be more resolved among the laity than among the Brothers. According to the group, “the Marist laity is empowered on job handling”, and this empowerment comes from a formation process. Many Brothers are reluctant to recognize the lay vocation as a sign of the times for the charism, instead of an unavoidable evil against the decrease in the number of religious people. For the lay group the question is simple: “We are co-responsible with Brothers in the mission”. This has very concrete connotations, not only rhetoric: “I feel very responsible for the harmony and vitality of the community as much as the work that we Brothers and laity are doing”. This co-responsibility can be developed according to the

relations, the interactions between Brothers and laity around the times and places of the mission and the acknowledgment of the vocational complementarity; all of this are influenced favorably or not by workspace's dynamics: "My own Marist identity and vocation have been enriched these past two years in my role as Marist animation coordinator. I believe the primary reason is that my office is in a Brother community where three brothers live."

Finally, there are personal characteristics that Marist lay people associate to themselves: "We Marist laity identify ourselves by being happy, fraternal, simple people, who love life, pray, are formed and updated and that are attentive like Mary to the call of God in the signs of the times, to be ready for serving." They are "people very fraternal and very apostolic" that "want to grow spiritually" and offer "their spirit of service and their spirituality"; that bring "the values of humility and simplicity in the way they relate to others and to life"; that cultivate the simplicity and the family spirit, as well as the "sense of community, genuine caring, humor, enthusiasm for life, passion for work". In summary, "we are down-to-earth and uncomplicated. There is a real earthiness to our way of being with people. Unpretentious and real." It's important to note that the characteristics as a whole thing are more related to *be* than to *do*. Even emphasizing aspects of the mission, they confirm that *be* a Marist lay goes beyond the presence in Marist spaces, the functions performed and the developed activities: it's a question of vocation, Christian discipleship and life choice.

9. Contributions of the laity for the vitality of the Marist charism

For almost two hundred years the Brothers were the only inheritors of the Champagnat's legacy, and the way of living actively the charism was only in Marist religious life; the various generations of Brothers were transmitting the Champagnat's heritage and redefining it in the light of the context changes and of the educational, evangelization, social, political and cultural new needs. As for the students, teachers, employees and students' parents, they used to learn the values and pedagogy more by osmosis and living together with the Brothers than by initiatives taken for this purpose. Today the laity are recognized as co-inheritors of this legacy and therefore co-responsible for preserving it and making it grow; however there is not a tradition consolidated in time that allows to visualize clearly the implications of this laity's new place. So it's necessary to ask: What do the laity add to the charism, in order to keep it alive and responding to the demands of contemporary times?

When asked about it, the laity responded that “we add a lot of things, as well as the Brothers”, in many aspects of Marist life; they explicitly highlight the contributions to the relationship between Brothers and laity, to the mission and to the Marist formation processes.

9.1 Relation of complementarity and communion between Brothers and lays

Considering the attitudes with that the religious persons see the lay presence in the shared mission, Botana (2005, p 17-19) identifies three groups: a first one “realize this supposed expansion of the charism toward to the laity as a stratagem of the own institutes and religious provinces that are suffering the shortage of vocations, in order to supply with the seculars the lack of religious in the institution’s apostolic work”; a second group, “with more positive perspective, consider that the participation of the seculars into the religious charism and mission is beneficial for them own and therefore is positive favor it and follow it”, even if no longer be an “external phenomenon that will affect the life and organization of the religious ones”; inside the third group “we see those religious ones who know read the arrival of the laity to the shared mission as a sign of the Holy Spirit that points to a profound changing in the ecclesial internal relations”, leading them to discover in it “a call directed to the religious themselves to be situated into the Church otherwise, to enter into an authentic communion with other Christians in a new ecclesial ecosystem”.

In this perspective, the first contributions of the laity are given over the own relation with the Brothers. The lays believe that are enriching “their life experience, which is very different but complementary from those of the Brothers”. While “a predictable uniformity marks the life of community members and the manner in which they interact” (Sammon, 2005, p. 23) – all of them are men, with similar formation and life experiences tinted by the institutional membership –, the laity can bring diversity of “gender, age and experience”, because of “their varied life experiences and ability to relate to people from all walks of life”. This interaction can generate a “new way of living the fraternity, spirituality and mission, permeated by the lay realities, that have more to do with the sense of everyday reality, to face the vulnerability of life, economic insecurity, more flexible and human structures”.

Therefore, the lay life, for not having the institutional support, can help the Brothers to live “in the uncertainties of the struggle for life, the family experience, the direct contact with world realities” and to seek more “contact with the reality in which we live, the reflection or viewpoint from the lay life”. The proximity can point a “new way of living the charism inserted

into different realities, with different rhythms and expressions”, including the contribution of lay women, who “bring a Marian dimension to the work”. Thus, it is possible to build a “new fraternal relationship that goes beyond sharing tasks and involves sharing life, openness to the others, to undress the garb of superiority and recognize that we are equal in dignity by the baptism”.

Another important contribution is the “commitment to their own personal and spiritual growth”. While some Brothers establish themselves in the same institutional roles and mission places, many lay people strive to develop their potential, in order to be more prepared to the missionary needs, to grow in humanity and to add lightness and generosity to their responsibilities inside the Institute. So the personal commitment to ongoing formation, including joint formation and communion experiences, enables the creation of common spaces for Brothers and lay people grow together and in harmony, being more entirely in their vocational choice and more integrated from their place of mission.

It must be taken care, of course, that the relationship between Brothers and laity do not confuse the roles of each one: that one doesn’t see the laity as a substitute for the Brothers, especially where their number declines increasingly, nor the laity adopt to themselves the lifestyle that is proper of the consecrated life; and that the Brothers, living together with lay people, don’t feel diminished nor take to themselves the lay lifestyle – that would be a big loss for the Institute and the Church. Sammon (2006, p. 49) consider that “we need to welcome not only all that we share in common but the ways in which we differ as well”, since “as we help the laity live more fully their call in life, we will come to understand ever more clearly the grace of our own vocation as Brothers”. Once based on harmony and complementarity this relationship will not lose sight of the specific elements of each life choice and not yield to the temptation to substitute one for another.

9.2 More vitality for the Marist mission

As their vocation and life choices are distinct and complementary to the Brothers, lay people can help to “integrate the dimensions of the mission”, by their demonstrated commitment; to bring “new contributions to the understanding of the charism”, from the way they live this gift of God into the lay life; to “be partners in spirituality, shared life and animation, management and governance processes, in the fulfilling of the mission”; and “to support the work of the Brothers (...) and to assure the continuation of the Marist mission for the future while the

Brothers are getting older”. In many provinces, especially in European countries and in Canada, is a real risk the disappearing of the Marist mission if the laity not take on it, because, while there are few Brothers – and the elderly ones, mostly – the laity “are many; if indeed we live the charism, we will be able to transmit it to other people and other generations as a precious thing that worth be inherited”. In these regions, the continuity of Champagnat’s legacy is literally on the hands of the laity. They demonstrate awareness about it and about their responsibility for Marist life not disappear, so they feel compelled to “share the Marist charism, live it up, spread it”. Green (2014, p. 7-8) confirms that “the future of the Marist education movement will depend on its attracting, sustaining and associating people who can do the same, in ways that suit their time, their culture and their general circumstances”.

There are contributions beyond to the institutional continuity, which is due to the profile of the laity – “some bring technical skills not found among Brothers that is strongly needed for our mission” – and to the lay lifestyle: considering the diversity of spaces in which lay walk around, they not only “contribute to the dissemination and experience of the Marist values in the environment where they are”, but also “bring their wealth of lived experience, which is necessarily different to that of the Brothers”. There is a set of relations into the lay life in which the Charisma can be spread, in order to make them more human, fraternal, reciprocal. Assuming the Marist characteristics, “we become a real source of energy and inspiration in the ordinary moments of life as we connect the elements of faith and life in a very natural way. This can be in our families, with friends or with our work colleagues.” It is from these interactions that “we offer our energy, passion and love of God”, in order to “contribute to the family spirit continues encouraging connected families that can be the core that feeds every human being, feeling loved by his parents and siblings, starting with his own house and then ensuring that every person who is related with can live the experience of feeling part of a family/community that welcomes and accompany him as an extension of what you have inside home”.

The same Family spirit leads to the dialogic proximity with the Brothers: “the laity should be work harder to collaborate, be in constant dialogue, and discernment with the Brothers in the spirit of a family”, as well as “be more concerned about the call of the times scattered throughout the world, to go out from the comfort of their schools or Marist institutions and to reach out to the world where Jesus should be made known and loved”. So they can draw “new forms of living the charism that enrich and make possible new answers to today’s needs”. The laity can bring to the institutional environment “creativity and courage to take on new challenges, simplicity of life and simplicity [as persons], which are necessary to let oneself be filled by God”. They also

can contribute to put the institutional space and structures to serve to the Marist mission as a whole thing, since “we are called to have hearts and minds that are international in outlook” (XXI GC, p. 40).

It’s marked the concern to “live up to the ideals of the ‘New Marists in Mission’”, motto of the II Marist International Mission Assembly (Nairobi, 2014), and help the Brothers to do the same, which means to “overleap the [institutional] walls”, to look “at new ways of sharing our mission with all!”, to “enlarge the reach to young people in need” and to “reach out to others who may not have necessarily come into contact with Marist Brothers via our traditional past in schools”. The laity can “illuminate the Brothers to a new way of living the charism, a new way that invites them to leave their comfort zones and become more Brothers than managers and employees”. To Turú (2014, p. 5), this detachment and availability for mission should be cultivated by all Champagnat Marists: “we do not only imagine the Church as a tent, but also joyfully accept to dwell in it, fully knowing the implications of its provisional, temporary, adaptable, and unprotected character, but also enjoying its welcoming and relational embrace”. It is the same sense that the Pope Francis addresses his words to the consecrated ones, challenging them to see their life choice “as provisional certainties, new situations, provocations in a continuous process, stabilities and passions shouted by contemporary humanity” (Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated life, 2014, p. 5).

In summary, the laity can add to the Marist mission greater reach of public, places and ways of being present among children, adolescents and youth, especially those who are not in the Marist works and/or demand displacement to other realities. However they will not do it alone: they need to be together with the Brothers, in order to grow all of them in “partnership and adding a new relevance to an ageless calling”. Brothers and Lays, with “openness to the spirit” to discern “the local situation and prayerfully setting forth to act”, will “find new creative ways to educate, evangelize, be advocates for, and be in solidarity with poor young children and young people” (XXI GC, p. 40). A necessary care is to do this with the lightness highlighted by Turú (2105, p. 4): the mission is like a dance movement, “it is as though God’s self were a dance of life, of love, of energy, moving throughout the world, inviting each one to join in the dance. And as more people join the dance, even more feel drawn to it.” Brothers and Lays not only can but should join themselves in harmony to the rhythm of this dance.

9.3 Formation processes that support the experience of the Charism

The quality of the contributions brought by the laity raises from their formation process, experience and knowledge about the Institute. Hence the need for investment “through the various formation programs” that allow the laity to deepen “their understanding of the charism and then live it”. Charism is lived, no doubt, but also known, studied, depth... Therefore, “the formation of lay men and women who work in Marist works” is a *sine qua non* condition to them be “empowered to share Champagnat Charism and Spirituality to others, young and adult” and “spread the love of Jesus and Mary, setting an example for their companions and for adolescents”. Knowing and living the charism by osmosis is no more possible in this present time. Thus, the laity who participate in formation processes are able to analyze them critically and enrich the various itineraries to dialogue with their lifestyle (GAST, 157) and favor the charism to be known, depth, and lived.

To prepare the laity is also a condition for the shared mission: “being co-responsible we can provide education/formation, taking time to do fun activities with children, sacraments, encourage children with their own education and growth, hospitality, family spirit and pastoral care”. It is necessary to the laity be prepared for what is expected from them; that the Brothers be in harmony with this demand; and that the processes be developed in community, experiential, integral, integrator, promoting the awareness of one’s place in the world and stimulating the commitment to justice and sustainability (GAST, 159-162).

This can be applied to all formative processes, highlighting what is specific to each one. That the processes of the Brothers favor the development of a broader vision about the Marist world and encourage a relationship of co-responsibility with the laity; that the lay processes support the laity to take on their vocation and play a more assertive role into the Institute’s life; and that the joint formation processes contemplate the peculiarities of the consecrated life, the specifics of lay life and the interrelationship between them, within the spirit of communion necessary to the future of the Marist Institute (EMM, 156-158).

For a lay man, being Marist laity “we stand on the shoulders of giants”⁹: the recognition and the current emphasis on the Marist laity is due to the extraordinary people who has prepared this way. The phrase also refers to the image of the Champagnat canonization, “The giant of love”, which carries a child over his shoulders. As well summarized another one, “the laity add

⁹ Metaphor attributed to Bernard of Chartres, neo-Platonic philosopher of the twelfth century, and popularized by Isaac Newton (1642-1726) to recognize that the scientific developments of his time owes much to the contribution of his predecessors.

vitality to the Marist charism living their specific vocation and relating it to the vocation of the Brothers; living the charism and testifying it in the way of being, in community life, in spirituality and in mission; being available to the Spirit of God and helping others in their vocational processes”.

Conceiving the place of the laity in a so proactive way is a palpable reality in some Administrative Units, distant in others and challenging in more some others. Without going into the discussion about how this will happen specifically, it seems the way drawn by the Marist Institute for its laity is that they can, according to the expression of a lay woman, “take their place as co-nurturers of the Charisma”. This neologism, created with the sense of nurturing together, points out that the Marist lay experience consists on not only feed on the Charism their vocation, mission and life choices, as well as to contribute to its vitality, in order to make it grow and to give to the others the opportunity to find in this gift of God a sense for their lives. The elaborations of lay men and women on their Marist experience, as well as the senses attributed from the mission, shared life and spirituality, can be grouped around this vision. There’s here a new reading key to understand who the Marist lays are, how they live the charism into the lay life option, what is their place inside the Marist world, how they perceive themselves into it, how they can inspire others to do the same, and which perspectives they point today to the present and to the future of the Marist Institute.

Final considerations

After analyzing and discussing the data, a first observation is that the surveyed lay men and women show awareness of their lay condition and the implications arising therefrom; they cultivate their vocation in the tasks they perform, in the relationships they establish with others and in the lifestyle they adopt; they can situate themselves in the Institute from the Administrative Unit and launch a broad, critical, and prospective outlook on Marist life in the world. The three dimensions – mission, shared life and spirituality – are endorsed to really characterize and identify the Marist laity. Although all three are equally important and interrelated, the mission seems to be the most common way to lay vocation be discovered and experienced. Even if the first contact with the charism occurs initially through professional collaboration, it enables the discovery of its components and the identification with the Marist way of doing Education, Evangelization, Solidarity and Advocacy.

The mission is understood more broadly than the work function performed at the UA, and it is significant for several reasons: the presence among children, adolescents and youth, and the educational and evangelizing action developed with them; the sense of personal, professional, Christian fulfillment in the work; the human interaction in the professional space, the other Marist spaces, and the various spheres of relationship; the concreteness of this form of Christian discipleship; the formation and personal growth, knowledge of other realities and expansion of worldview; and the interpersonal relationships and affection bonds. Recognizing themselves personally and professionally into the Marist mission places, they assumed the co-responsibility for its continuity. According to the lays, all these elements identify and characterize their way of contributing to the mission bequeathed by Champagnat.

So important as the development of the mission is the life shared with co-workers, family, friends, other lay people and Brothers. Life sharing happens in the workplace, in the family environment, in the interpersonal relationships, in the mission places, in the Marist community and in the ecclesial community. It is favored by affinities and the time spent together, due to work, formation, apostolate, prayer and living together in Marist and others environments. Shared life is also a growth factor for the lay vocation, the shared mission, the life of faith and the sense of institutional belonging.

Sharing life with the Brothers is not common to all the laity. Some report some detachment or resistance of the Brothers, even with frequent coexistence, while others experience truly fraternal, reciprocal and mutual growth relations, especially from the bonds established in the mission and in the community life. The life together also contributes to minimize possible resistances and to encourage the creation of affection ties, the deepening of specific vocations, the sense of complementarity between them and the relationship of co-responsibility and communion between Brothers and Lays.

Both mission and shared life feed a daily, affective, relational spirituality, simple and based on a significant experience of God's love and the following of Jesus. The Marist mission is recognized as a way of Christian apostolate, being Champagnat and his missionary discipleship a reference for it. Mary is seen more as a disciple than as object of devotion, and inspires a lifestyle simple and connected with the Marist values. Laity refer both to the Founder as the Good Mother in different circumstances, not only about spirituality. They nourish their life of faith in individual and collective moments of prayer, meditation, reading, reflection and sharing, as well as the life together, in the apostolate and in the day-by-day events. It's highlighted the importance of interiority and silence to cultivate the relationship with God, the

life choices, the interpersonal relationships and the sense of being a Marist laity. They confirm therefore that Marist spirituality is simple, practical, day-by-day, uncomplicated.

The group is aware of its importance for the Institute's life and demonstrates it in various situations. Regarding the Administrative Units in which most of the Brothers are elderly and there are no young brothers, they recognize that the presence of the laity in the mission is not only necessary and enriching, but also fundamental to the institutional continuity. Some of them assume functions that, until then, were taken on exclusively by the Brothers, and report no conflicts arising from it; and that their presence fills the need of life together, affection, human contact and care of the Brothers, especially the elderly ones.

In other UA's the laity points out that their presence into Marist life is important for several reasons: the contributions they add from the other environments in which they are in, generally more diverse than the ones where the Brothers are; the possibility to spread the Marist spirit into these spaces where they are present; the lightness with that they live the Marist life option, since they feel less than the Brothers the weight of institutional belonging; the demonstrated availability of missionary displacement to where the Marist presence is most needed; and the relationships of interdependence, co-responsibility and reciprocity built with the Brothers since the sharing of life and mission, and that enriches mutually their respective vocations and life choices.

About the sense of being a Marist laity, they recognize that is based on the vocational call, on the identification with the charism and on the option to live it day-by-day. From this emerge a coherent lifestyle with Marist values in the various spheres of life; the responsibility for the Institute's life, as regards the mission, community life, spirituality, people formation, management, attention to new demands and appeals, presence in different realities and continuity of the Marist legacy for other generations; and the commitment to their own formation and experience, in order to fulfill well what is expected from them and testify their option for living as lay Marist.

This life choice presents common and specific elements in relation to the Brothers' one. Are specific the lifestyle due to the vocational option, developed mainly in the institutional space for the Brothers, and in various areas, including family, for the laity; the dynamics of the formative processes, systematized and with defined stages (Brothers) and more fluid, little systematic and incipient or under construction in many AU's (Lays); the ways of community life, most at the religious community and other Marist spaces (Brothers) and in formal and informal

groups, interpersonal relationships and communities of various kinds (Lays); and the institutional functions: management and governance, as well as institutional decisions are under Brothers' responsibility, in most cases, while the animation tasks, development of various initiatives and presence with the interlocutors of the mission are assumed by the laity.

As for the common elements within the living of the charism, the lays highlight the apostolic, Marian spirituality, founded on the experience of God's love and nurtured by the daily mission, the relationships and the life-together; the life in community, around the spaces where they are present day-by-day; the need of a new relationship between Brothers and Lays, built around the charism and searching for the future of communion; and the feeling of being also inheritors of Champagnat, with different bonds and the same responsibility for knowing, living it up, keeping alive and transmitting this legacy to other generations.

Can these conclusions be applied to all Brothers, lay men and women? Certainly not. Despite the common conception about the Marist laity, there is a great diversity regarding to time and forms of presence in the Institute's life, knowledge about Marist history, religious traditions, life experiences, ways to contribute to the mission, relationship with the brothers, age, gender, ecclesial insertion, stage in the lay vocational itinerary and the own process of taking on the Charisma as part of their lives. The group has an experience, formation and lay self-consciousness that most of the Marist laity, even in vocational and formative process, not reached out yet. But it shows the fruits of a lay process consciously and freely experienced, raised from a personal choice, and it signals something of what will be the new beginning proposed by the Institute, taking as a mark the bicentennial year: the religious and lay vocations, as well as itineraries set for develop them, provide distinct contributions to the continuity of the Marist life. Therefore, although can be noted limitations, oppositions and different dynamics in the development of formation itineraries and in the construction of communion between Brothers and Lay men and women, will come a time when all of they will be identified not by what differentiates them, but by what gathers them around the charism of Champagnat.

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