

Origin Story 1: Le Puy, France - INSPIRATION

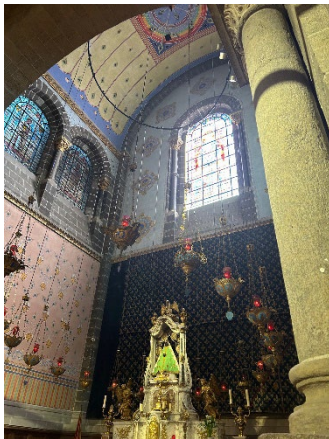


This is the town of Le Puy, France, about an hour and a half outside of Lyons in southeastern France. This town is a source of inspiration for the Marists.

1. The Le Puy Story

Le Puy has long been a place of pilgrimage in France. Pilgrims have come to this town and its cathedral for centuries. The town is set among mountains and dramatic rocky outcrops. There is an aura about it, particularly its cathedral.

Above the main altar a famous and widely venerated black cedar statue of Mary holding Jesus has attracted pilgrims for centuries. At the height of the anti-religious fury of the French Revolution, on June 8, 1794, this statue was burned. In 1801 the faithful restored the shrine and installed a replica of the original "Black Virgin." Many miracles have been attributed to prayers before this statue of Mary above the high altar.



This is the Black Madonna above the high altar at Le Puy. Note the sanctuary lamps circling it

In 1809, a young man named Jean Claude Courville had an ardent desire to make a pilgrimage to this shrine of Mary. As a child he had suffered from smallpox, and his eyesight had deteriorated very badly. Doctors had pronounced his condition incurable.

Following the tradition of the times, this young man placed some of the oil from the sanctuary lamps in front of the Mary statue on his eyes. Immediately he was able to clearly see things inside the cathedral. Afterwards he experienced no more trouble with his sight. He attributed this cure to Mary's intercession, and he resolved to frequently return to Le Puy to pray in thanksgiving to Mary.

Courvielle was again praying on another visit to Le Puy on August 15, 1812 (in the Catholic church, this is the feast day of the Assumption of Mary.) Suddenly, he experienced an inner voice. According to his account, he heard Mary speak to him 'interiorly' with the following thoughts:

Mary was with Jesus at Calvary, and she was now with him in heaven. She was with him in the work He does for the Church. God had raised up the Jesuits (the Society of Jesus) to fight heresy in the world. Now, Mary and her son wanted to raise another society, one that would battle against evil 'in the last age'. The members of this society would be consecrated to her. They would have her name, a Society of Mary. They will call themselves 'Marist.'

The young man was surprised by all this and decided to keep it to himself; but after some time, he talked about it with his spiritual director and was encouraged to take it seriously.

Three years later he would be a seminarian in Lyons with Jean-Claude Colin (the future Founder of the Society of Mary Fathers and Brothers), Marcellin Champagnat (the future Founder of the Marist Teaching Brothers) and others.

He would tell them about the Le Puy inspiration. Fifteen other seminarians and one priest faculty member showed interest in the plan to establish this "Society of Mary." They met regularly during the school year to exchange ideas and dreams about fulfilling Mary's wishes in the future.

So, remember that the name and idea of the Society of Mary originates from this powerful experience.



The steps to the Le Puy Cathedral invite pilgrims who seek healing and consolation in prayer to the Blessed Mother. Pilgrims take 134 steps to the top. Le Puy also marks a beginning point in France for the famous pilgrimage, the way of Saint James. (el Camino de Santiago de Compostela.)

Part II. References

1. The Le Puy story provides instruction for the Marist Spirit.

Jean Claude Colin and his companions believed that, in God's plan, the Society of Mary came into existence because Mary wanted it. Like them, Marists today are convinced that the Lord and Mary, whose work they do, will care for the Society, protect it, and make it grow. *Marist Constitutions (1987), paragraph 217, page 81.*

Let the Marists learn from the first Marists to find in the presence of Mary at Nazareth and Pentecost, in the early Church and at the end of time, the secret of their own presence in the Church and the world today: a presence attentive to God and vibrant with zeal, so that while doing great things for the Lord, they may seem to be unknown and even hidden in the world. This was Mary's way; this is Mary's work. *Marist Constitutions (1987), paragraph 228, page 85.*

2. The Le Puy story inspires our role in support of Marist Education.

For almost two hundred years, vowed Marists and their colleagues have committed their time, their talents, and their sacrifices to contributing to the work of education. The Marist Way has animated the generous work of these people to make their schools like the early Church – a community animated by the Spirit that continues to make Jesus known while being “one in heart and mind.” Today, the Spirit continues this work through those who accept the call to work in Mary's way in Marist Schools. *Standards and Expectations of a Marist Education, paragraph 102, page 3.*

3. The Le Puy story reminds us of a healing from Scripture.

John 9:5-11

Jesus said: “While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva, and smeared the clay on his eyes, and said to the blind man, “Go wash^z in the Pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So, he went and washed and came back able to see. His neighbors and those who had seen him earlier as a beggar said, “Isn't this the one who used to sit and beg?” Some said, “It is,” but others said, “No, he just looks like him.” He said, “I am.” So, they said to him, “[So] how were your eyes opened?” He replied, “The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and told me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So, I went there and washed and was able to see.”



This is the healing slab within the Le Puy Cathedral. This is known as the “stone of fevers” or “stone of apparitions”. Legend has it that a woman in a nearby town was suffering from fever saw the Virgin Mary in a dream and was told to lie down on the stone to heal. It was later moved to the Cathedral and placed here.

Part III. Discussion Questions

1. Inspiration comes from outside of us. The Le Puy story reminds us that we live in a world of grace. Have you had any experiences that have affected or reoriented your life similar to or in the spirit of the Le Puy story?
2. Growth from an inspiration takes time. Consider the Le Puy story: a healing occurred (1809), followed by a profound insight (1812). This was shared in a community of like-minded individuals (1815). In fact, it was not until 1836 that the Pope ultimately approved the Society of Mary. What does the Le Puy story teach us about the movement of a Marist Spirit – or even more broadly, the mission of the Society of Mary today?
3. The Le Puy story highlights the unknowns associated with pilgrimage or adventure. Sometimes in our lives we start out looking for one thing, and then wind up discovering something else. This young seminarian went to Le Puy for healing, but he received something quite different than what he bargained for. Reflect on any encounters you have had in your life where everything changed.
4. Students come to Marist through their own door and leave through ours. Think about the formation of individuals (both students and parents) that happens at Marist over the course of many years here. Parents/families/children come into Marist with their own ambitions/values/aspirations and leave differently. With the lessons of the Le Puy story in mind, consider how individuals are formed – even transformed -- by their experiences here? How were you transformed?
5. Reflect on what the story of Le Puy teaches us about the mission of a Marist education, broadly – and your role within it.



The 8th century statue of the Black Madonna is currently on the main altar. The statue was crowned by the Bishop of Le Puy in the name of Pope Pius IX, on June 1856, the anniversary of the destruction of the previous statue, which was burned by in the French Revolution, June 1794.

Part IV. Prayers for Reflection

Note the following prayers for your consideration and contemplation.

1. Below is a prayer for the “Pilgrims at Le Puy”

Almighty God, you never cease to show your goodness to those who love you, and you allow yourself to be found by those who seek you. Look favorably now upon your servants who are setting out on pilgrimage and direct their way according to your will. Be for them shade in the heat of the day, light in the darkness of night, relief in tiredness, so that they may come safely, under your protection, to the end of their journey, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

2. A Marist Prayer inspired by Le Puy

Lord God, we thank you for the gift of life and faith. At the Annunciation you called Mary to be the mother of Jesus, asking her to accept your request, yet leaving her free to respond. She placed her trust in you, bringing your message of love and reconciliation to our World. You call us, too. We ask for the faith and trust to accept your call, to be courageous in carrying it out, because we believe that you are with us, and that you are guiding us in all the good things we do. We pray for the help of Mary.



This Notre-Dame de France statue sits high above Le Puy. This statue represents the Virgin Mary with a crown of stars. She stands facing the town and crushes a snake with her foot, holding on her right arm the Child Jesus who blesses the town. A stone staircase composed of 33 steps is arranged in the pedestal and provides access to the interior of the statue - which is hollow - and includes a rotating staircase of 58 steps and which provides access to the crown.

Epilogue

Madeleine L'Engle (1916–2007) was a prolific writer of more than sixty books in a variety of forms, including fiction, fantasy, biography, poetry, and prose. She is best known, however, for her children's books. Her book of fantasy, *A Wrinkle in Time*, won the distinguished Newberry Medal for Children's Literature. Madeleine L'Engle was a woman of profound religious faith. She felt strongly that all writers, especially Christian writers, had a vocation from God to bring hope and light into a darkened world. As she said in her book *Walking on Water*, the writer has a duty "to further the coming of the kingdom and to turn our feet toward home."

Reflection: Consider what comparisons can be drawn to the Le Puy story in this short poem below.

"The Bethlehem Explosion"

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the world should be enrolled. And Joseph too went up from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child (Lk 1:1, 4–5).

*The chemistry lab at school
was in an old greenhouse
surrounded by ancient live oaks
garnished with Spanish moss.*

*The experiment I remember best
was pouring a quart of clear fluid
into a glass jar, and dropping into it,
grain by grain, salt-sized crystals,
until they layered
like white sand on the floor of the jar.*

*One more grain—and suddenly—
water and crystal burst
into a living, moving pattern,*

a silent, quietly violent explosion.

*The teacher told us that only when
we supersaturated the solution,
would come the precipitation.*

The little town

was like the glass jar in our lab.

*One by one they came, grain by grain,
all those of the house of David,
like grains of sand to be counted.*

*The inn was full. When Joseph knocked,
his wife was already in labor; there was no room
even for compassion. Until the barn was offered.
That was the precipitating factor. A child was born,
and the pattern changed forever, the cosmos
shaken with that silent explosion.*

Origin Story 2: Fourviere (Lyons, France) - COMMITMENT



High atop Fourviere hill is the cathedral of Fourviere, overlooking Lyons, France. This place symbolizes the commitment by the first Marists to build a Society in honor of Mary and to live a Marist life.

Part I. The Fourviere story at the Marian Shrine of Fourviere in Lyons, France, 1816.

Background of Fourviere

For centuries, the Fourviere hill in Lyons, France was a popular place of pilgrimage, and the walls are lined with plaques placed there for special graces received.

Even prior to the establishment of Lyons as a French city, during the Roman empire, Fourviere Hill was the location of a temple in the capital city of Lugdunum in the western Roman province, Gaul. As early as 1168, a Christian chapel was built on the hill, which by that time had already become an informal Marian shrine. Its popularity as a place of pilgrimage increased significantly, especially when Lyon's preservation from the plague of 1643 was interpreted as an answer to the prayers of city leaders there.

There is a small chapel on Fourviere hill where the early Marist aspirants made a commitment to establish a Catholic congregation in honor of Mary – the Society of Mary that we know today. This chapel is recognizable by a tower crowned by a golden statue of Mary.

When the city of Lyons was spared in the Franco-Prussian War (1870), the community again acknowledged the special blessings of Our Lady and committed to building a much larger church, the present Basilica which now sits alongside the ancient chapel. The massive exterior of the Basilica was built (from 1872-1896) to symbolize the strength of the faith of Our Lady.



The Basilica exterior with the smaller, ancient chapel to its right – which stood alone until construction of the basilica was completed in 1896.

Marist commitment of Fourvière

The Fourvière hill, known as ‘the hill that prays’ (‘la colline qui prie’), was in plain sight of several seminarians, including Jean Claude Colin, as they studied for the priesthood in Lyons in 1816. During that time, Colin and other seminarians at St. Irenaeus, the major seminary of Lyons, had been meeting regularly since the Le Puy inspiration of 1812 about a congregation in honor of Mary.

France was undergoing huge political, social, and religious upheavals following the fall of Napoleon and in the wake of the French Revolution. Against such a background, the idea of a new congregation addressing a variety of needs in the Catholic Church was appealing, especially to idealistic young seminarians.

On July 23, 1816, twelve young “aspiring Marists” walked up to the ancient chapel of Our Lady of Fourvière, which overlooks the city of Lyons. In fact, eight of these seminarians, including Jean Claude Colin and Marcellin Champagnat, were ordained as priests the day before.

In the Fourvière chapel, they celebrated Mass. At the end of Mass, they signed a pledge dedicating themselves to work toward founding a Society of Mary. The pledge was read, and the seminarians placed the pledge, bearing the signatures, on the altar.

These young men resolved to assume ‘the work of Mary.’ They promised to work to build a religious order in the Church: a group called “Mary-ists,” whose work would resemble that of the Jesuits, but whose approach and style would be unlike anything that existed in the Church at that time.

They professed their seriousness about the project and willingness to endure 'all manner of hardships'. Their profession was for a new society, 'under the sacred name of Mary and with her protection and help'. (The Marist school motto, Sub Mariae Nomine, was derived from this early profession.)

We remember July 23, 1816, as the beginning of the Society of Mary, though Papal approval would take place twenty years later. It is clear that Jean Claude Colin was committed to the Marist Spirit to pursue the creation of the Society of Mary all those years!



The statue of Mary atop the old chapel and the basilica of Fourviere.

Part II. The Fourviere pledge

Signed by the Marist aspirants in the summer of 1816, the Fourviere pledge reads as follows:

All for the greater glory of God and the greater honor of Mary, Mother of the Lord Jesus. We, the undersigned, striving to work together for the greater glory of God and the honor of Mary, Mother of the Lord Jesus, assert and declare our sincere intention and firm will of consecrating ourselves at the first opportunity to founding the pious congregation of "Mary-ists."

That is why by the present act and our signatures, in so far as we can, we irrevocably dedicate ourselves and all our goods to the Society of the blessed Virgin. We do this not childishly or lightly or for some human motive or the hope of material benefit, but seriously, maturely, having taken advice, having weighed everything before God, solely for the greater Glory of God and the honor of Mary, Mother of the Lord Jesus.

We pledge ourselves to accept all sufferings, trials, inconveniences, and if needs be, torture, because we can do all things in Christ Jesus who strengthens us and to whom we hereby promise fidelity in the bosom of our holy mother the Roman Catholic Church,

cleaving with all our strength to its supreme head the Roman Pontiff and to our most reverend bishop, the ordinary, that we may be good ministers of Jesus Christ, nourished by the words of faith and by the wholesome teaching which by his grace we have received.

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



Marist School pilgrims sign a renewal of the Fourviere pledge in July 2024.

Part III. References

1. The Fourviere story provides instruction for us based on the **Marist Constitutions**

The foundational Marist experience can be seen as symbolized in the promise made at Fourviere.

*At the shrine of Fourviere twelve companions promised before the image of the Blessed Virgin to express their love for God and their neighbor by founding the Congregation of the Marists. In a similar way a novice comes to see the Society as the place where God wants to meet him to live the Gospel. By the time a novice makes his profession he should appreciate the meaning of the religious vows and the nature, ends, and **Spirit of the Society**. His profession is the first important step in assuming responsibility for the enterprise which was taking shape on the hill of Fourviere.*

Marist Constitutions (1987), paragraph 51, 52, page 20-21.

- *A Note on “the Spirit of the Society”*

- *For the Marists, the Spirit of the Society of Mary has been described as follows – “If therefore they are and desire to be sons of this dear Mother, let them constantly try to breathe her spirit; a spirit of humility, self-denial, intimate union with God, and the most ardent love of neighbor. So they must think as Mary, judge as Mary, feel and*

act as Mary in all things...Marist Constitutions (1872), paragraph 49, page 35; Marist Constitutions, paragraph 228, page 86

*Marists are called, above all, to make their own a **Marian vision of the Church**. To achieve this, nothing will be as effective as a 're-living' of the founding experience of the Society. Like the twelve young men at Fourviere they respond to a special call.*

Marist Constitutions (1987), paragraph 92, page 35.

■ *A note on "Marian Church"*

- *This phrase, a Marian church, is adapted from the work of 20th century Marist historian Fr. Jean Coste. who was the primary modern figure to describe and define the Society of Mary. He emphasized that Fr. Colin saw in certain aspects of the Marist spirit a utopian vision of what the Church could be – that is, a Marian Church. Derived from his meditations on Mary in the early Church, Fr. Colin occasionally told his fellow Marists that there were three fundamental points that should distinguish Marists. Marists should reject or say "No" to the desire for material gain, the need for dominative power, and the seeking for celebrity and prestige. Marists try to realize these ideals through their Mary-inspired approach to ministry. Marist Glossary, definitions on Marian Church and the Three "No's"*
- *A Marian church is a church which makes a choice for compassion over competition; an option for relationship over dogmatism; for humility over power; for service over dominance. It is a church which pushes its boundaries to contain the chosen. And it is a Church which includes the feminine in its attitudes, which can too easily become over-masculine. The Church with a Marian face does not feel the need to create bigger and bigger things to ensure that God is properly honored. It is a Church which understands that small things can be, and often are, the most significant thing. A Certain Way, page 80.*

*Let them always bear in mind that **they belong by a gracious choice** to the family of the blessed Mary, Mother of God, from whose name they are called Marists and whom they have chosen as their model and their first and perpetual superior. Original Marist Constitutions (1872), paragraph 49, page 35; Marist Constitutions (1987), paragraph 228, page 86.*

*Since their vocation is to be in today's world a special presence of Mary, doing God's work in her way, Marists bear in mind this woman who by **a gracious choice** called them and gave them her name. Marist Constitutions (1987), paragraph 144, page 53.*

■ *A Note on "Gracious Choice"*

- *This phrase, found in the Marist Constitutions noted above, refers to the belief by Marists that they have been "graciously chosen" to be Marists. Ultimately it is God, the source of every grace, who does the choosing. But the early Marists believed*

that Mary played a part in choosing who should belong to her Society. Marists see themselves as being chosen by Mary to bear her name and to do her work – a work that involves reaching out to those who are trying to live in a secular world, helping them to persevere. It also involves reaching out to those who have “lost the faith,” those who find their faith has no particular impact on their lives. Marists try to reach out to people in the very same way that Mary herself would. In other words, gently, simply, with a maternal concern for them. Like A Bridge, page 65

2. The Fourviere Story enhances our commitment to **Marist Education**.

When Marists share the gift of their charism with others, particularly in an educational situation, it should be more evident in deeds than in words.

The relationship between the Marist Fathers/Brothers and the school should be intentional and personal in its approach. A Marist school will not be effective in achieving its mission if its relationship to the Society is merely historical or contractual. The relationship must be about persons: a clear and well understood dialogue between the province leadership and those in charge of Marist mission for the school and the various constituencies of the school (governing board, administration, faculty, staff, students, parents, coaches, and alumni.)

Standards and Expectations of a Marist Education, paragraph 103 (1), p. 4

3. The Fourviere story reminds us of our call and our commitment to the Christian life – and Marist life, specifically -- based on **Scripture**.

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High,* and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived* a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

-Lk 1:26-38



Here is the black Madonna at Fourvière, similar to the version at the Le Puy Cathedral. This has been an integral part of French Catholic symbolism since medieval times and was the target of French revolutionaries at all French churches.

Part III. Discussion and Reflection Questions

Opening Prayer

Dear Lord, guide our discussion, open our minds to learning and sharing the way of the Marists. We thank you for the Marist Spirit and the example the Marist priests provide for us. Strengthen us in our commitment to discern what Marist means -- for ourselves and the school we serve. Amen.

Reflection Questions

1. The Marists have a special call referenced in the Marist Constitutions (paragraph 92). This call is to build a “Marian vision of Church.”
 - What is a Marian vision of Church?
 - How would you describe a Marian vision of Church as applied to our work at Marist School?
2. The Marist Constitutions also reveal that Marists believe they were chosen, “graciously chosen.” (paragraph 228 – “they belong by a gracious choice to be a part of the family of Mary...”)
 - Based on your Marist experience, do you feel you have been “graciously chosen” to be part of the family of Mary?

- How does your call differ from that of a Marist priest?
3. The *Standards and Expectations of a Marist Education* (noted in the reference section above) suggest a certain relationship and set of responsibilities between the Marists and lay persons associated with Marist schools. At Marist school, we have been beneficiaries of all who have committed their time, talent, and treasure to the school in numerous ways and advance the Marist Way within it.
- Noting the *Standards and Expectations* passage, how do you intend to make the relationship between the Society and our school “intentional and personal?”
 - In what ways can we develop a “clear and well understood dialogue” between all interested persons associated with the Marist School mission?
 - For others, how might this *Standards and Expectations* passage apply to the pastoral presence of teachers and the relationship they build with their students? How might this *Standards and Expectations* passage be realized in a supportive mutual relationship between parents and school?
4. The Fourviere Pledge deepens our understanding about the origin stories of the Marists. As the first formal commitment to a Marist life, the Fourviere Pledge provides insight as to how deep this Marist Spirit was felt, and believed, at the beginnings of the Society of Mary.
- Re-read and reflect on the Fourviere pledge – its meaning, purpose, and any elements that guide our thinking or our work today at Marist School.



The Annunciation, 1898, by Henry Ossawa Tanner

5. The Gospel story of the Annunciation focuses on the commitment of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary births and cares for Jesus in Nazareth. Mary was dedicated to

Jesus all the moments of her life – raising him, teaching him, protecting him, feeling for him, mourning for him. That is what commitment to God through Mary looks like: a Brave Devotion. Mary’s devotion was persistent. She had different feelings along the way, but she was always a present advocate.

We think of our teachers, and our school, caring for our students in the same way. In a Marist setting, we are meant to be Mary to others who are Jesus. Reflect on the Annunciation story with this in mind.

- *“and the virgin’s name was Mary.” There is power and intimacy in a person's name. Once the name is given and we know about whom we are talking, then we have a certain entrance into that person's life. If we want to come to know someone we will certainly want to discover and remember that person's name. So, God is reaching out to a 'virgin named Mary' - and she in return will give Marists her name. (In fact, the principal feast day for the Marists is September 12, the Holy Name of Mary.)*
 - *What is in a name? Marist School “bears the name of Mary” and has a motto “Sub Mariae Nomine” (under the name of Mary). What does this mean to you?*

- *“Mary, full of grace, the lord is with you ...” Mary has done nothing herself to deserve this announcement. The Angel's message does not depend on Mary's efforts but solely on the Lord's choice. He has favored her and is coming to her. He has called her.*
 - *How is God calling you to help Marist School in line with your vocation?*

- *“Let what you have said be done to me.” At first bewildered, then questioning; but then Mary makes the great surrender of faith. She dared to believe and trust in her God. Obviously, there is room for our own thoughts - but only after we recognize Mary's trust and unqualified assent/faith.*
 - *Reflect on the trust and unqualified faith that is required of your commitment to Marist School.*

Part IV. Prayers for Reflection

A prayer of Fourviere. 1

The call of Jeremiah:

Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you; I appointed you as prophet to the nations ... Then I said, "lord God I listen. I do not know how to speak/or I am only a child."

But the Lord said to me, "Do not say. I am only a child: for to all whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you. says the lord ...Then the Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, Behold, I have put my words in your mouth."

Lord,

You call me to a particular way of life, and give me the strength to answer; but, so often, I am reluctant to answer your call as fully as I know I can. I make excuses, look for distractions and the easy way out. Yet, you still call me, despite my weakness and slowness. You encourage me, you put your words into my mouth, just as you did Jeremiah. Give me the courage to answer wholeheartedly, to trust absolutely, however, and wherever you want. Amen.

A prayer of Fourviere. 2

Trust and Courage:

Lord God, we thank you for the gift of life and faith. At the Annunciation you called Mary to be the mother of Jesus, asking her to accept your request, yet leaving her free to respond. She placed her trust in you, bringing your message of love and reconciliation to our World. You call us, too. We ask for the faith and trust to accept your call, to be courageous in carrying it out, because we believe that you are with us, and that you are guiding us in all the good things we do. We pray for the help of Mary, the mother of Jesus, who modeled persistent devotion to him throughout his life. Amen.

Part V. Epilogue

See below a selection of poems expanding upon the lesson of the Fourviere story, **commitment.**

1.

Annunciation, by Denise Levertov

*We know the scene: the room, variously furnished,
almost always a lectern, a book; always
the tall lily.*

*Arrived on solemn grandeur of great wings,
the angelic ambassador, standing or hovering,
whom she acknowledges, a guest.
But we are told of meek obedience. No one mentions
courage.*

*The engendering Spirit
did not enter her without consent.
God waited.*

*She was free
to accept or to refuse, choice
integral to humanness.*

*Aren't there annunciations
of one sort or another
in most lives?
Some unwillingly
undertake great destinies,
enact them in sullen pride,
uncomprehending.*

*More often
those moments
when roads of light and storm
open from darkness in a man or woman,
are turned away from*

*in dread, in a wave of weakness, in despair
and with relief.
Ordinary lives continue.
God does not smite them.
But the gates close, the pathway vanishes.*

*She had been a child who played, ate, slept
like any other child—but unlike others,
wept only for pity, laughed
in joy not triumph.*

*Compassion and intelligence
fused in her, indivisible.*

*Called to a destiny more momentous
than any in all of Time,
she did not quail,
only asked
a simple, 'How can this be?'
and gravely, courteously,
took to heart the angel's reply,
the astounding ministry she was offered:
to bear in her womb
Infinite weight and lightness; to carry
in hidden, finite inwardness,
nine months of Eternity; to contain
in slender vase of being,
the sum of power—
in narrow flesh,
the sum of light.*

*Then bring to birth,
push out into air, a Man-child
needing, like any other,
milk and love—
but who was God.*

*This was the moment no one speaks of,
when she could still refuse.*

*A breath unbreathed,
 Spirit,
 suspended,
 waiting.*

*She did not cry, 'I cannot. I am not worthy,'
Nor, 'I have not the strength.'
She did not submit with gritted teeth,
 raging, coerced.*

*Bravest of all humans,
 consent illumined her.
The room filled with its light,
the lily glowed in it,
 and the iridescent wings.*

Consent,

*courage unparalleled,
opened her utterly.*

Denise Levertov was born in 1923 in Essex, England, and died in 1997 in Seattle, Washington. Her mother was Welsh, and her father was a Russian Jew, who converted to Christianity and became a minister of the Church of England. As a young woman, Levertov moved to the United States and wrote about spiritual themes all her life, though it was not until she was teaching at Stanford in the 1980s that she began her own journey from agnostic to Christian.

2.

In God's providence, we are confronted by, granted, moments of invitation. Moments that frame a response. Opportunities of Yes! Hear this expressed provocatively in the poem called *Annunciation*, by Bishop Robert Morneau:

*Were others asked?
A lassie from an isle in a distant sea?
A maiden in North Africa
or a slave girl from the Congo?
How many times were angels sent
and returned, unheard, unheeded?
Was Mary tenth on salvation's list?
Or the hundredth?
And you, my soul.
was fiat spoken
when the angel came?*

Strict orthodoxy aside, the poem poses an interesting challenge for us and our faith. "And you, my soul, was fiat spoken when the angel came?" Remember that fiat is a word meaning a faith-filled 'yes,' a deep assent of the will. How do we respond to those soul queries?

3.

A Cathedral Brick by Bishop Robert Morneau

*"Add your brick to the cathedral of life,"
they say. But brick upon brick makes no home.*

*"Add your brick to the cathedral of life..."
event upon event piled high, no life.
A design is needed,
a game plan—a life plan.*



*Our vocation is architecture,
a double calling to envision and execute.*

*Our vocation is to align our mission,
to place our brick
into the hand of the Master builder.*

*It is in this submission
That a cathedral like Chartres becomes a reality.*

Bishop Robert F. Morneau (born September 10, 1939) was an American priest and bishop in the United States. Morneau served as an auxiliary bishop of Green Bay from 1978 to 2013.

Origin Story 3: Cerdon, France – FORMATION



Here is a view of Cerdon, a small village in the Bugey mountain region of France. about an hour and a half drive outside of Lyons. The church in the upper left corner is site of Jean Claude Colin's first assignment as a priest. This is where the Society of Mary begins to take shape.

Part I. The Cerdon story, 1816-1825

After his ordination in 1816, Jean-Claude Colin was appointed to Cerdon, a small rural township. His brother, Pierre, was the pastor there. The priest arrived painfully shy, even fearful of the people, and scrupulous about his own duties. At first the people were bored by his preaching, rarely saw him outside of Church, and found him severe in the Confessional.

However, the parishioners of Cerdon, with their ordinary demands and cares, drew an increasing warm response from the young priest. During a huge crop failure, the Colin brothers rallied round the people, using parish funds and their own time to help the people. The people responded by rebuilding the presbytery for the priests, housing the two of them in their own homes for twenty months, sharing their homes and tables, Colin was able to relate increasingly to the people and their needs, tending to their children's education, and seeing his sermons become the discussed highlight of the week.

This “humanizing” process at Cerdon led to many graces for Colin, allowing him to develop his unique insight on a way of “being church” to others. Out of this grace-filled formation grew the foundations for the Marist Spirit, including the Marist way to think, judge, feel and act as Mary, and a disposition to be hidden and unknown in the world (that is, to accompany and center the other and share spiritual practices of humility and generosity.)

All this time, Colin was struggling with the idea of developing his dream -- a Society of Mary. He would share the idea with two women, Jeanne Marie Chavoin and Marie Jotillon, who would later form the Marist Sisters. He was also endeavoring to seek permission to start the branch of Priests through numerous letters to Rome and visits with leaders of the Catholic Church in France.

Colin faced many trials during this period at Cerdon, often tempted to shelve the whole idea. Yet, he was strengthened in his resolve. He would later describe these experiences as a time of **“Tasting God”** – tangible consolation, trust, assurance and confidence in God.

Cerdon was a time when this timid priest transformed into a courageous, future founder of a Congregation. This is where he grew into a man more spiritually equipped – to allow his spiritual development to be leveraged for the good of others – in order to promote their well-being.

In time, the local Bishop allowed him to form a small community of priests who were keen to belong to a Society of Mary. Historical records show that a group of about 30 men met occasionally in the rectory at Cerdon with the Colin brothers for spiritual guidance and formation in this newly forming entity and Spirit.

In summary, during these years (1816-1825) following the Fourviere pledge and commitment, Jean-Claude Colin navigated life as a parish priest, serving a small congregation of townspeople suffering the long-held divisions of the French Revolution (1790s) as well as the after-effects of Napoleonic reign that ended in 1815.



Working alongside his priest brother Pierre, Colin drafts an initial constitution for the Society of Mary, which portrays an all-encompassing vision of a new Society bearing Mary's name. Colin dreams big here. In the quiet of Cerdon, the congregation he envisions includes four parts -- priests, brothers, sisters and lay persons.

Part II. References

1. **The Marist Constitutions** cite the Cerdon story and provide instruction for our work at Marist.

At Cerdon, Jean Claude Colin became convinced that the idea of the Society of Mary came from God. In prayer and meditation on the mystery of Mary's presence at the birth of the Church, he discovered how the Society of Mary should be present in the Church of his time. In the same way, a Marist novice learns to "taste God" and discover for oneself in prayer, how belonging to the Society, one must live the spirit of Mary.

- *Marist Constitutions (1987), paragraph 53, page 21*

By tasting God as Father Colin did at Cerdon, Marists realize the radical opposition between the spirit of Mary and spirit of ambition, covetousness, and lust for power.

- *Marist Constitutions (1987), paragraph 92, page 35*

2. The Cerdon Story enhances our understanding of **Marist Education** generally and our role within it.

Marist schools are a part of a long tradition of proclaiming the good news of Jesus in Mary's way. Marist schools must base themselves in the mission of the Society of Mary.

All Marist apostolic endeavors are the work of Mary. They invite others to come to know the Lord Jesus. At the heart of a Marist school is the realization that the journey of faith is to find the "Joy of the Gospel." Therefore, the works of the Society aim to bring the good news of Jesus in Mary's way--a way of humility, caring, listening, forgiveness and justice.

By learning from Mary's presence in the early Church, the Marist mission is simply the evangelizing mission of the Church. This mission says no to prestige, power and ambition. The Marist mission calls people to do good without notice in a manner that is hidden and unknown.

- *Standards and Expectations of a Marist Education, Standard 1, paragraphs 201-203, page 8.*

3. The Cerdon story reminds us that – in the Christian life and the Marist life -- we need **to think and pray before we act**. Consider the following passages from Scripture.

Lk 6:12-13

In those days he departed to the mountain to pray, and he spent the night in prayer to God. When day came, he called his disciples to himself, and from them he chose Twelve, whom he also named apostles.

Lk 22:39-42

Then going out he went again, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. When he arrived at the place he said to them, “Pray that you may not undergo the test.” After withdrawing about a stone’s throw from them and kneeling, he prayed, saying, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done.”



A view overlooking the village of Cerdon. Note that the parish is the closest building in sight below and the statue of Mary to the left.

Part III. Prayer, Discussion/Reflection Questions

■ Opening Prayer

Dear Lord, guide our discussion, open our minds to learning and sharing the way of the Marists. We thank you for the Marist Spirit and the example the Marist priests provide for us. Strengthen us in our prayer and contemplation to discern what Marist means, for ourselves and the school we serve. Amen.

■ Reflection Questions based on the Cerdon story and Formation

1. Reflect on your first job or early jobs in your career. Like Jean Claude Colin in Cerdon, what lessons did you take away from those experiences? How did you learn and grow over time and with more experience? What factors or circumstances were most influential in that growth?
2. Professionally, in what ways do you (or did you) take time to contemplate – that is, to think and pray before acting? In a similar way, reflect on your role within your family – as parent, sibling, spouse, child. How did you learn and grow over time and with greater experiences? What factors were most influential in your growth?
3. What does “tasting God” in a Colinian sense mean to you? In what ways do you “taste God?” Reflect on any new actions in your life to help you “taste God.”
4. The Marist Constitutions are written for the Marist priests, yet they can provide instruction to us about what ‘Marist’ looks like. While you are not studying for the priesthood, how would you consider yourself a ‘novice’ in the Spirit of the Society of Mary? In a few words, how would you describe the Spirit of the Society of Mary?
5. Reflect on ways that our school strikes the right balance with that Spirit and is challenged by that Spirit – a school grounded in the Spirit of the Society of Mary, while at the same time committed to excellence in all endeavors.



Our Lady of Cerdon statue in the church at Cerdon, right. Note Mary offering the child Jesus to the world.

Part IV. Prayer/Reflection on Cerdon

There is no way of prayer that we can say is 'distinctively Marist.'

Prayer is personal, and although the experience of others can help us, we always pray in our own unique way. Fr. Jean Claude Colin spoke often of prayer and his time at Cerdon produced several insights.

Colin's primary insight at Cerdon is that we have to '**set ourselves aside**', endeavoring to 'belong completely to the Lord.'" Based on Colin's insight, think about prayer in the following ways as you build a Marist Spirit...

1. To pray well, you must first of all make a firm and generous resolution to set yourself aside for God.
2. Praying involves going aside and really spending time with the Lord. Obviously, this requires resolution and action. We need a time, a place, a manner of prayer.
3. It is also important to find Jesus in the Gospels, to know more and more of him, because in prayer we increasingly conform our own attitudes with those of Jesus,
4. Sometimes we center prayer on our own activities - and quickly time with the Lord becomes 'planning time.'
5. You must turn to the Lord with abandonment and the simplicity of a child. This abandonment is the very heart of prayer, but it is obviously not limited to our prayer time.
6. Prayer is integral to every part of our life. Turning to the Lord with abandonment means seeking constantly and ruthlessly what the Lord wants, not what we want. And trusting him utterly. Perseverance in prayer is essential.
7. We can too easily try to measure the success of our prayer. Spending time in prayer is my gift to the Lord - we allow the Lord to lead us as he will.
 - Reflection offered by Fr. John Walls, New Zealand Marist; former Campus Ministry Director and Spiritual Guide for all in the Marist School community

Part V. Epilogue

The following prayers and poems below invite you to appreciate the wisdom that flows through formation experiences, such as that experienced by Jean Claude Colin at Cerdon. These experiences that prove invaluable as we build strength for promote God's mission.

A PRAYER by Thomas Merton

My Lord God,
I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end_

Nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think that I am following your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you does in
fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this, you will lead me by the
right road though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore, will I trust you always though I may seem
to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will
never leave me to face my perils alone.

The Bridge by Joy Cowley

There are times in life
when we are called to be bridges,
not a great monument spanning a distance
and carrying loads of heavy traffic
but a simple bridge
to help one person from here to there
over some difficulty
such as pain, fear, grief, loneliness,
a bridge which opens the way
for ongoing journey.
When I become a bridge for another,
I bring upon myself a blessing, for I escape
from the small prison of self
and exist for a wider world,
breaking out to be a larger being
who can enter another's pain
and rejoice in another's triumph.
I know of only one greater blessing
in this life, and that is
to allow someone else
to be a bridge for me.

Veni Creator by Czeslaw Milosz

Come, Holy Spirit,
bending or not bending the grasses,
appearing or not above our heads in a tongue of flame,

at hay harvest or when they plough in the orchards or when snow covers crippled firs in the Sierra Nevada.
I am only a man: I need visible signs.
I tire easily, building the stairway of abstraction.
Many a time I asked, you know it well, that the statue in church lifts its hand, only once, just once, for me.
But I understand that signs must be human, therefore, call one man, anywhere on earth, not me—after all I have some decency— and allow me, when I look at him, to marvel at you.

Part VI. Addendum on the MARIST SPIRIT

The following paragraphs, drawn from the Marist Constitutions of 1987, highlight several key elements of the Marist Spirit. All of these elements are grounded in the earliest days of Colin's formation experiences at Cerdon. They can guide us as we discern and discover new ways to share our Marist Spirit.

- Paragraph 12

Their call is to be missionary; they are to go from place to place...

- Paragraph 13

Guided by the Gospel, the doctrine of the Church and the insights of Father Colin on education, they devote themselves to all forms of education, especially among the young.

- Paragraph 15

To choose Mary's name is to enter into a special relationship with her, which teaches Marists to relate to their neighbor in such a way that through them, Mary can be present in the Church of today as she was to the Church at its birth.

- Paragraph 22

Marists seek inspiration in the traditional phrase, "hidden and unknown in the world." For Jean Claude Colin, it best captured, in the light of his spiritual and pastoral experience, Mary's presence in the church.

- Paragraph 23

Marists learn from Jean Claude Colin and like him from Mary, how to approach the work of evangelization so that the Gospel may be received in all its power and clarity.

- Paragraph 24

The Spirit of Hidden and Unknown leads Marists to embrace a life of simplicity, modesty and humility...Like Mary, they are to be gentle with others, respectful of their freedom, and sensitive to their point of view.

- Paragraph 26

The Society of Mary cannot achieve its mission unless its members are equipped, intellectually as well as spiritually.

- Paragraph 27

Through prayer, Marists place their gifts unselfishly at the disposal of the Society. The humility which characterizes their apostolate does not exclude high levels of academic achievement or professional excellence.

- Paragraph 28.

Nothing will contribute more to the Society than the deep mutual love of its members.

- Paragraph 29

They must be careful to avoid all discrimination which might arise from difference of race, nation, region, or culture.

Origin Story 4: The Bugey – Missionary Zeal



Views of the rugged terrain of the Bugey mountain region in southeastern France where the Marists began their first missionary work.

Part 1. The Bugey Mission story

On October 29, 1824, Pierre Colin, the brother of Jean Claude Colin, wrote to his Bishop: “My Lord, today the Society of Mary begins.”

One may ask why he considered that day a foundation day of the Society of Mary. It was, after all, eight years since the small group of aspiring Marists had made a promise to begin a Society bearing Mary’s name at Fourviere.

In fact, by that time, Marcellin Champagnat already had a group of devoted Brothers gathered around him in La Valla and nearby villages requested these energetic Brothers for Christian education for their children.

Yet Pierre Colin wrote with conviction that day because it was the day that a third person, Etienne Declas (one of the signers of the Fourviere pledge), joined Pierre Colin and Jean Claude Colin at Cerdon. A team was soon formed to do mission work in the outlying mountain areas of the Bugey.

Bugey is the general name for all the area in southeastern France between Lyons and Geneva. The area is mountainous and under snow for a good part of the winter. The Marist missionaries did their work in these winter months. Though more difficult and inconvenient for themselves, they sacrificed their comfort for the spiritual growth and benefit of those they sought to serve.

The Bugey was a neglected area: priests didn't want to go there, and many of those who did were not up to the task. Some priests were even described as schismatic. Many of the churches had been abandoned and uncared for since the French Revolution. Buildings and steeples that had been knocked down during the troubles had not been rebuilt. Marriages

entered into unlawfully had not been rectified. Though the land was fruitful and fertile, and the people lived reasonably well materially, their spiritual needs were immense.

Fr. Jean Claude Colin spent five years in this terribly difficult work, but he looked back on those years with great affection and nostalgia.

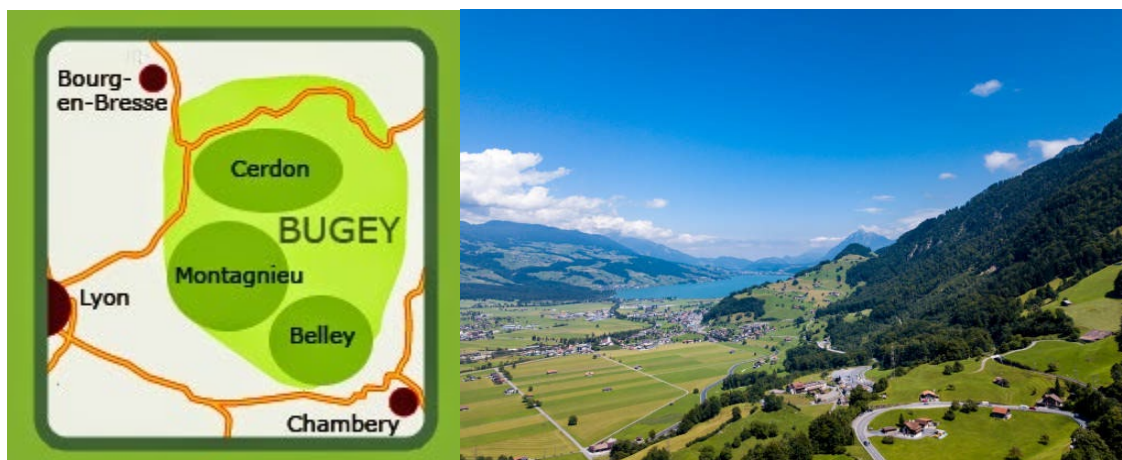
His memory of the Bugey inspired him and provided him with many important lessons in the development of the Society of Mary:

- The Bugey symbolized a zeal for sharing the mercy of God.
- The Bugey reflected the idea of placing the needs of another as a primary focus (that is, hidden and unknown).
- The Bugey required a team approach.
- The Bugey succeeded with limited resources.
- The Bugey revealed the immense power of God at work in those who trusted him.

Not only did he see this period full of these key features of Marist life, Colin also deeply understood that the "place" where Marists should find themselves most at home was among the abandoned, those on the margins, those in danger of being left aside.

In time, Oceania would represent the Marist missionary call to be at the very edges and margins of the world. But the missions of the Bugey represent the initial Marist missionary call to seek out and gather those closer to us who find themselves, for whatever reasons, at the margins. Such marginalized people include those beyond the margins of the Church, those who find themselves alienated from the practice of faith, and those who may be searching for the face of God but cannot see that face in the Church as they perceive it.

(Adapted from *A Certain Way*, p. 128)



The Bugey mountain region is northeast of Lyon. This area includes the Marist formation experiences at Cerdon (beginning in 1817) and the first steps into education by Fr Colin and the Marists at the minor seminary in Belley (1829) Geneva is approximately 55 miles to the northeast of Cerdon.

Part II. References

1. The Bugey origin story inspired parts of the **Society of Mary Constitutions**, demonstrating how the Marists will serve at whatever cost or inconvenience to themselves, like Mary.

The Marists call is to be truly missionary: **they are to go from place to place**, announcing the word of God, reconciling, catechizing, visiting the sick and the imprisoned, and doing the works of mercy. They attend especially to the most neglected, the poor and those who suffer injustice. They are ready to carry out these tasks, anywhere and at any time. *Society of Mary Constitutions (1987), paragraph 12, p. 7.*

In the mountains of Bugey, the first missionaries experienced the joy of proclaiming the joy of proclaiming the Good News to forgotten people. The Marist novice, too, comes to share this yearning to bring the Gospel to all people, especially those who are neglected or abandoned. By the time of his religious profession the novice has demonstrated his suitability for apostolic life. He can forget his own interests in order to respond to the call of those in need. He knows that such **forgetfulness of self in the service of others** always finds its source in God alone. *Society of Mary Constitutions (1987), paragraph 54, p. 22.*

Like the first missionaries in Bugey, Marists proclaim the Good News of God's mercy to those most in need. Thus, in continuity with the experience of the first Marists, the Society of Mary, generation by generation, becomes a reality in the world and its members know the joy that comes from a whole-hearted response to their vocation. *Society of Mary Constitutions (1987), paragraph 92, p. 35-36.*

2. The Bugey origin story provides lessons for educating others and renews our commitment to **Marist Education**.

The Marist way of evangelization **demands openness from all involved to search for faith and justice** so that the whole world may find a way to come to know the Lord Jesus and the One who sent him.

True to the example of Mary, the Marist heritage seeks a **“creative fidelity” to the call of the Spirit who graces co-workers** in the life of the Church. The Marist mission is to renew the Church where it exists and to plant it where it does not yet exist through real awareness of the culture and people in each locale.

Marist schools form students to understand they are given a special dignity by God... A Marist education is meant to form men and women in Mary's way so they in turn will **share what has been given to them as a gift**.

- *Standards and Expectations of a Marist Education -- Standard 2: Sharing the Gospel of Jesus, paragraphs, 204, 205, 206 (in part), p.9*

3. Grounded in **Scripture**, the Bugey origin story reminds us of a Christian commissioning, of “being sent” or “going forth” for the benefit of others.

Acts 1:13, 14 When they entered the city they went to the upper room where they were staying, Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James, son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas, son of James. All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus.

Luke 1: 39-41, 56: “In those days, Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And Mary remained with her about three months.”

Romans 10:13-15: “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call upon him in whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’”

Galatians 6:9: “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”

Joshua 1:9: “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened and do not be dismayed, for the Lord God is with you wherever you go.”

Part III. Discussion and Reflection Questions

- Discussion Opening Prayer

Dear Lord, guide our discussion, open our minds to learning and sharing the way of the Marists. We thank you for the Marist Spirit, and the missionary zeal of the Marist priests, past and present, especially as seen in the origin story of the Bugey. Strengthen our commitment to discern what Marist means, for ourselves and the school we serve. Amen.

- Reflection Questions

On the Marist Constitutions...

1. How does the missionary call found in the Bugey origin story inspire your work at Marist? Broadly speaking, how does it inspire you to generously serve others, especially those near us who find themselves struggling with belief or faith?

2. The following passage from the Marist Constitutions -- written for novices studying for the priesthood – is directed at those who are making a formal profession to the Marists: *“The novice can forget his own interests in order to respond to the call of those in need. He knows that such forgetfulness of self in the service of others always finds its source in God alone.”* Forgetfulness of self is the basis of the Marist value “hidden and unknown.” In such an approach toward others, we seek to remove our own obstacles, or get out of the way, in order to best serve the other. Marist spirituality is about embracing the humility of Mary in order to best show up for the other.
 - Think of how this passage applies to you, a lay person, and how it may help you share your Marist spirit. How has your Marist experience reoriented your heart to serve in such a way?

On a Marist Education...

3. In a larger sense, the Bugey story demonstrates a need or desire, like Marist people, to set out from a routine, comfortable way and be vulnerable to reach others. *The Standards of Expectations* put it this way: **“The Marist mission is to renew the Church where it exists and to plant it where it does not yet exist.”** When the Church is coercive or authoritarian, Marists believe such an approach does not bode well for a receptive audience looking for guidance and support.
 - How does your work at Marist connect to this idea to “renew” Church or “plant” it where it does not exist?
4. An important principle of a Marist education is to share a message about God **“...so that the whole world may find a way to come to know the Lord Jesus and the One who sent him.”** *How* we deliver the Marist message is significant.
 - What are the best measures or evidence that we are sharing this message in our school community? What can we improve upon?
5. A key passage from the *Standards and Expectations of Education* states: **“The Marist heritage seeks a “creative fidelity” to the call of the Spirit...”**
 - What does that mean? Define “creative fidelity” today in the context of a Marist education as you have known it and experienced it.
 - How can we get creative in outreach, hospitality, inclusion, and other means for all students and families?

On Scripture...

6. The commissioning of the Apostles at Pentecost, and Mary's presence there, is a valuable guide to the Marist life. Mary accompanies others in prayer. She is immersed in prayer and fully participating in the birth of the Church. She is filled with the Holy Spirit which draws the Apostles closer to God.
 - What inspiration does the Pentecost scene provide for you?
 - In light of this, do you feel you have "been sent"?

7. Ultimately, the Marists are missionaries sharing Faith in God and God's mercy, especially to those that are abandoned, forgotten, marginalized. This sharing can extend to people closer to home, even to neighbors, friends and family that have lost their faith. The Marists teach us that a ministry of presence is often enough.
 - Reflect on how you may have been called in "haste" to visit others or those in need, as Mary was with her cousin Elizabeth.

Part IV. Prayers and Reflections

1. Prayer to Mary

Mary, mother of missions, inspire us with a similar missionary zeal and confidence of the first Apostles and the first Marists in the Bugey. Each day and in our last hour we entrust ourselves entirely to your loving and singular care. We place in your hands: our entire hope and happiness, our every anxiety and difficulty, our whole lives. May our every endeavor be directed and guided according to the Will of Your Son, which is your will, by the aid of your prayers with God. Amen.

2. Prayer for the Society of Mary

Jesus, Good Shepherd, we ask you to look on this family of Mary, your Mother, with eyes of mercy. Lord, we ask you to enrich the Marist world with the fire of your Holy Spirit and the missionary zeal of the first Marists. May Mary's subtle and delicate presence enable us to breathe her spirit, so that, we will be credible witnesses of your Gospel. And, renewed and strengthened with the fire of your Spirit, may we help bring to life the seed of a Marist calling which you have implanted in the hearts of all who have experienced the way of the Marists. Enable us to accompany others in the fulfillment of their personal vocation. Lord Jesus, give us vocations according to your heart. Amen. *Jean Claude Colin, Pray for us.*



3. A reflection by Marist Father, John Walls (New Zealand)

...Mary set out at that time and went out in haste (as quickly as she could) to a town in the hill country of Judea.

After the Annunciation, Mary is overjoyed. She wanted to visit Elizabeth her cousin to confirm that what the angel told her was true – that Elizabeth, too, was expecting a child. Also, Mary would be of help to her much older cousin. As Mary travels, she carries the Word-made-flesh within her – she is literally walking with God. As Mary sets out, there is a sense of urgency; she goes as quickly as she could. Her overpowering experience of God and knowing that her cousin is in need leads her to move promptly. The journey is a difficult one, over rough ground to a remote area, approximately 90 miles, yet Mary appears to be undaunted by her mission.

There is much to reflect on in this passage. Marists, too, see the needs of those around us. We are able to step out to assist as quickly as possible. Marists carry the Word because we are people who know Jesus Christ and his teaching. We are prayerful people. We are prepared to go wherever there is a need, particularly to help those who no one else seems to care for or be interested in. And always – we Marists endeavor to be people of compassion and mercy in a ‘down to earth’ way.



4. Reflection on the “scroll” for Marist Missionaries

Since the earliest days of the Society of Mary, the name of every Marist priest who has expressed this missionary zeal by serving on foreign missions has been preserved. Their names are found on a scroll that is housed at the General Administration office in Rome.

These priests remain, forever, in the “heart of Mary.”

The scroll, unfolded below by Marist Father John Harhager, is stored within a very large, gold, heart-shaped necklace that is draped over a statue of the Blessed Mother at the General Administration house in Rome.



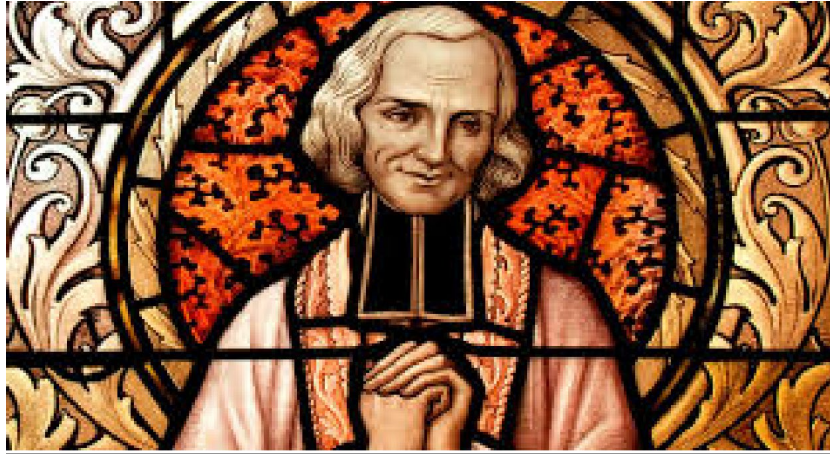
Epilogue

1. St. Jean Marie Vianney and the first Marists.

At the same time as these Bugey missions, about 45 miles to the west of the Bugey, Jean-Baptiste Marie Vianney was himself reviving the faith in the farming town of Ars. It was in the seminary in Lyons that he had become friends with Jean-Claude Colin and Marcellin Champagnat. He would later become a member of the Third Order of Mary in 1846 and,

after his canonization in 1925, its special patron saint. The Cure of Ars knew about the Marist missionary efforts in the Bugey mountains and commented on their work:

"The Marists are a work after God's heart because they have humility, simplicity, and trials."



2. Excerpt from *Brighton Rock* by Graham Greene (From *A Certain Way*, p. 145)

Graham Greene's novel *Brighton Rock* tells the story of the relationship between Pinky, a vicious young gangster, and Rose, a simple girl, in the beach resort at Brighton. Both are Catholics, which is an important element in the suicide pact that they make.

At the close of the novel, Rose is in despair because Pinky has been killed, and she has, as she thinks, let him down by remaining alive. She goes to confession to an old priest, telling him what has happened, and she accuses the priest of not understanding.

Greene writes:

Rose could just see the old head bent towards the grille. The priest had a whistle in his breath. He listened -patiently - whistling, while she painfully brought out her own agony. She could hear the exasperated women creak their chairs outside waiting for confession. She said, "It's that I repent - not going with him."

She was defiant and tearless in the stuffy box; the old priest had a cold and smelt of eucalyptus. The old man began to talk - whistling every now and then and blowing eucalyptus through the grille. He said: "There was a man, a Frenchman, you wouldn't know about him, my child, who had the same idea as you. He was a good man, a holy man, and he lived in sin all his life, because he couldn't bear the idea that any soul could suffer damnation. " She listened with astonishment.

He said: "This man decided that if any soul was going to be damned, he would be damned too. He never took the sacraments; he never married his wife in the Church. I don't know

my child, but some people think he was --well, a saint. I think he died in what we are told is mortal sin - I'm not sure; it was in the war; perhaps..."

*He sighed, and whistled, bending his old head. He said, "You can't conceive, my child, nor can I or anyone, **the appalling strangeness of the mercy of God!**" He shivered and sneezed. "We must hope and pray, " he said, "hope and pray. The Church does not demand that we believe any soul is cut off from mercy. "*

A sudden feeling of immense gratitude broke through the pain. It was as if she had been given the sight a long way off of life going on again.

Origin Story 5: Belley - Foundation for Education



The exterior of the school in Belley France

Part 1: Introduction

Belley marks another stage in the development of the Society of Mary. It was in Belley and from Belley that the Marist project began to take formal shape.

The previous stages of the Society of Mary's development were the following: the Le Puy inspiration of 1812; the Fourviere commitment of 1816; the Cerdon formation years of 1817 through 1825; and, the Bugey missions from 1825 onward.

Belley became home to the Colin brothers at the request of the Diocese of Belley Bishop, Rev. Alexander-Raymond Devie. He summoned the Colin brothers from their parish and missionary work in Cerdon to the small town of Belley, 60 miles to the south of Cerdon.

The Colin brothers lodged at the minor seminary at Belley to continue their missionary efforts in the Bugey. Bishop Devie was so impressed with them and their missionary work that he appointed Jean-Claude Colin as superior of the local school, a seminary for boys, in 1829.

So it was in Belley that Colin soon discovered another aspect of the **emerging** Marist mission – the education for young people. While in Belley, Colin also developed his understanding of Marists' relationship with bishops and the local church.

A Call to Education

In Belley, Colin began to see the value and the importance of education in the life and mission of the Society of Mary. Aside from the profound insights that he and the other

missionaries experienced reaching the unschooled in the Bugey missions, Colin had never dreamed of being a formal educator.

Yet during this time, Colin wrote the educational document called “Advice to the Staff of the Minor Seminary of Belley,” *Les Avis de Jean Claude Colin au personnel du petit seminaire de Belley*. (See section II below.)

Drafted by Jean Claude Collin, these instructions were a comprehensive overview of Colin’s philosophy and objectives of education. He used a variety of resources to form this book, including French writers on education, the teachings of the Catholic Church, and his early vision about the spirit of the Society of Mary.

Colin drafted 111 handwritten instructions that described what a Marist education would look like, feel like, and sound like for a school community. These instructions focused on how teachers would deal with students, colleagues, parents, and the community in general.



In his instructions to the Staff at Belley, Jean Claude Colin called education a “heavenly work.”

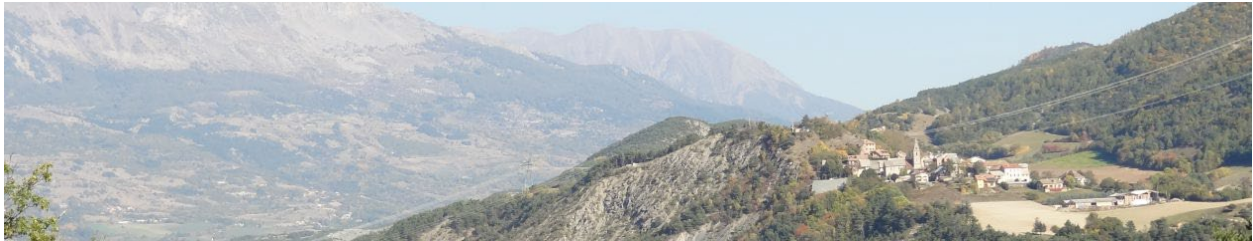
When Bishop Devie appointed Jean-Claude Colin as leader of the minor seminary in 1829, there was an atmosphere of great tension among the staff and pupils. Fr Colin displayed a mixture of great firmness and great understanding, but this cost him a great deal in health. It was during this year that Fr Colin’s hair turned white. (*Origines Maristes*, 2, 476).

In time, Colin would prove himself as a thoughtful educator and change the culture of the school. The school’s tone improved considerably through his efforts and became successful – that is, aligned with the Spirit of the Society of Mary that he envisioned. In fact, Fr Colin chose Mary as model and superior of the school and her statue overlooks the courtyard of the school to this day. (*Origines Maristes* 2,707)

While serving as the head of the school, in 1830, Fr Colin was also elected central superior of several emerging Marist groups of priests and lay persons in Lyons and Belley. (You may recall that the Marists were not yet a formal congregation in the Catholic Church.)

While keeping the title of the superior of the school, Colin left the effective running of the school to his vice-superiors, one among them was Peter Chanel.

The Marists would continue to lead the school after their approval as a congregation in 1836 until the year 1845.



The surrounding landscape in and around Belley, France.

In communion with the local Church

In addition to a call to education, Colin developed one other insight for the Society of Mary in Belley – being in communion, and not hostility, to the local Church. Colin respected and admired the Belley Bishop, Alexander-Raymond Devie. On one occasion, he said: “Monsignor Devie is one of the finest examples of a bishop that I know... When he was appointed, this region was abandoned. He has totally renewed it.”

At the same time, there were tensions between the two men because of their different aims. While in Belley, Colin said: “What made me suffer most was the opposition of the Bishop of Belley, because he was my bishop. I wished I could have the same opinions, and when I realized that I could not think like him without dropping everything, that tore me apart.”

But despite the differences, Colin would not act without the approval of his bishop. He said: “What imperceptibly put me at the head of the Society is that some of my confreres wanted to fight bishops. Then I separated from them. The greatest grace I have received is that I have always kept united to the bishops. My brother and I had the same thought: Let the Society perish rather than go against authority. If the Society is God’s work, God will maintain it.”

Colin said on more than one occasion that Marists must act in such a way that “bishops can look on the Society as their own.”

Marist Statues at Belley

To this day, three prominent statues are worth noting at the school in Belley.

In the chapel, there are statues of two men who were spiritual directors of the school between 1832 and 1844 - Peter Chanel and Julian Eymard. This is extraordinary in that these are two canonized Catholic saints that served in the space of twelve years at one small school in rural France!



The statue of St. Julian Eymard in the chapel at the former minor seminary in Belley. Julian Eymard was a Marist priest and served as a spiritual director at the Belley school until leaving to begin a new congregation, the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament

In the courtyard, the statue of Peter Chanel is prominent. He is standing next to a young student.



The St. Peter Chanel statue in the entrance courtyard of the former minor seminary at Belley. Peter Chanel served as a teacher and spiritual director at the school in the early 1830s until his final, and fatal, missionary journey to the South Pacific in 1836 – after the Society of Mary had been approved as a congregation.

There is also a statue of Mary from that period that overlooks the courtyard, as the model for youth. Mary remained the model and superior of the Marist community at Belley, as she is for all Marist communities in the world to this day.



Fr. Colin placed this statue of Mary in the courtyard of the Belley school in 1833.

In 1832 the population of Belley was 4,286, today its population is about 6000. The present institution is named Lamartine College, after the prominent French politician and romantic poet Alphonse Lamartine (1790-1869), who was a student of the Jesuits at the college from 1803 to 1807.

Part II: Instructions to the Staff at Belley, 1829 -- Excerpts

Written in 1829, the “Instructions to the Staff as the Minor Seminary in Belley” provide goals for a Marist education and guidance for instructors (Please remember: These instructions were written for a seminary of young men.)

Goals of a Marist Education

■ “To educate a man, to form him, what a sublime task! But to educate him in a Christian way, what a heavenly work! Let us, gentlemen; be thoroughly convinced of the importance of the duties that are ours, and the excellence of this good work. Our position is a true apostolate, all the more fruitful for our having taken care to form our pupils according to the principles of the Gospel. It is God’s children that are entrusted to us, and so it is towards God that we have to turn their hearts.”

■ “It is of the utmost importance for us to have a true idea of our duties toward our students, of which the three principal ones are: we must make of them Christians, upright gentlemen, and lastly men of learning.”

■ “We shall therefore work in the first place at giving them a sufficient knowledge of their faith, at stirring their wills to the accomplishment of duty through motives of

conscience and the power of religion.”

- “Next, we shall make it our chief concern to school our students in conduct and gentle, courteous, simple social manners, in good breeding, and a thoroughly Christian polite behavior.”

- “We shall then turn our attention to forming the minds of our students and to advance them in the different fields of learning.”

Guides for Educators

- “It would be a matter worthy of our zeal and charity to take part in the recreation of our pupils, to mix with them, to encourage them to enjoy themselves.”

- “We shall treat our pupils with kindness, gentleness, courtesy and firmness.”

- “We shall try to assert authority over our pupils, both, that is to say, a certain ascendancy that inspires respect and commands obedience. Let us take careful note that it is neither age, nor height, nor tone of voice, nor threats that give this authority, but an even-tempered, firm, impartial stamp of mind, that is always in control of itself, that is guided simply by reason, that never acts on impulse, or through ill-humor or anger.”

- “We shall love each other as brothers and honor each other with affectionate respect united to Christian politeness, so that our boys, having on this score nothing but good examples before them, will behave towards each other in the same way or at least with charity.”

Note: The Belley instructions helped build the modern *Characteristics of Marist Education* for the Society of Mary (2005) and have been adapted by the Society of Mary/US Province into the book, *The Standards and Expectations of a Marist Education* (2020). Both are cited within the references below.

Part III. References

1. *The Belley story affirms that education is a primary work of the Society of Mary and this is reflected in the Society of Mary Constitutions.*

- Guided by the Gospel, the doctrine of the Church, and the insights of Father Colin on education, they devote themselves to all forms of education, especially among the young. Society of Mary Constitutions (1987), paragraph 13.

2. Inspired by his Belley experience, Father Colin developed an additional, educational guide late in his life. This guide became an addendum to the Society of Mary Constitutions of 1872 and is called “(T)he education of boys in colleges.”

- Teachers have a threefold duty towards boys in colleges: first and foremost, to form them into strong and faithful disciples of Christ; to impart to them all solid virtues, so that they may grow up into honest and upright citizens, useful to society; and finally, to teach them letters and the various sciences. Society of Mary Constitutions (1872), paragraph 453

(For those who cherish Latin, the Latin translation in the Constitutions is provided below.)

- Triplex est magistrorum erga pueros in Collegiis officium, scilicet: eos praesertim fideles ac strenuous Christi discipulos instituere; necnon, omni virili virtute instruere, ut in cives probos, honestosque ac rei publicae utiles crescant; litteras denique ac varias scientias edocere.

3. At the international level, in 2005, the General Chapter of the Society of Mary updated the Belley Instructions and shared these **Characteristics of Marist Education** for Marist Schools in the world. (Remember: BKon not a huge fan of these.)

Think Big: Collaborate with God to bring completion to the work of God, revealing to the student who he or she is, and who they are for God.

Nurture Character: Educate students for life, form them in their heart -- with character and virtue.

Deal with Reality: Take children as they are, believe in each one of them, and have confidence in them.

Inspire Respect: Exercise authority with students by being firm but being flexible, too.

Be Yourself: Share a manner and way of meeting and relating with young people that promotes their healthy development.

Watch the Atmosphere: Express confidence in your work, attention to all around you, use your imagination, and share joyful simplicity.

Work with Others: Build just relationships between all members of the school community -- students, parents, teachers, management, governance.

Be Warmhearted: Establish the right distance from young people, accepting their feelings for us, and being clear about our feelings for them.

Educate in Mary's Way: *Allow that all may be done as God wishes it to be done.*

4. At the national level, in 2020, the **Standards and Expectations of Marist Education** were published by the Society of Mary (US Province) to modernize the Belley tradition.

■ **Standard 2: Sharing the Gospel of Jesus in a Marist Education**

[206] Marist schools form students to understand they are given a special dignity by God. They contribute in forming the whole person, aiming to build the church through good Christian people, contributing citizens and thinking learners. A Marist education is meant to form men and women in Mary's way so they in turn will share what has been given to them as a gift.

[206.1] Those who attend Marist schools have the opportunity to experience Jesus Christ in an atmosphere that respects religious and cultural differences and promotes interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

■ **Standard 6: Global Dimension of Marist Education**

[216] Marist education should aim to help the students confront social injustices such as racism, sexism and intolerance. A Marist student should learn to collaborate with other men and women of good will no matter their creed, race or social standing to help build communities where the dignity of the person is manifested.

[216.1] A Marist school prepares students to analyze their own contemporary culture with a Christian insight and response, along with the goal of achieving the freedom to work for justice.

[216.2] In response to the current social teachings of the Catholic Church, a Marist education makes students sensitive to areas of injustice in modern society and encourages solidarity with the disadvantaged and dispossessed in the world. Students should recognize the suffering and pain which poverty, racism, sexism and religious intolerance have caused in the world at large and in their own communities.

■ **Standard 8: Educational Excellence**

[217] Fr. Colin insisted in his time that Marist schools develop curriculums that were well-rounded and educated the whole person. Marist schools should not only succeed in providing spiritual guidance and formation they should also be places of academic excellence. Fr. Colin also recognized the importance of extracurricular programs for the

life of the school and the growth of students.

[217.4] Catholic and Marist values should also permeate extracurricular programs. Care should be taken that coaches and moderators know, live and teach Catholic and Marist values.

[217.5] The school administration maintains standards for teachers so they will be adept and up to date in the material they are presenting, and the methods used for doing so.

[217.6] Educators demonstrate proficiency in their academic area and seek to collaborate with other departments of the school. They are aware that the most important part of their ministry is to form the next generation of Christian men and women **who** will worship, serve and continue the mission of Christ.

4. The Marist call to education draws inspiration and is grounded in Scripture.

- They must grow while I diminish. Jn 3:30

- Train the young in the way they should go; even when old, they will not swerve from it. (Proverbs 22:6)

- At that time the disciples approached Jesus and said, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a child over, placed it in their midst, and said, "Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me." (Matthew 18: 2-6)

- Taking a child, he placed it in their midst, and putting his arms around it he said to them, "Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me." (Mark 9: 36-37)

- And people were bringing children to him so that he might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he became indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it." Then he embraced them and blessed them, placing his hands on them. (Mark 10: 13-16)

5. Marist education is rooted in the Marist understanding of Mary and the love of a mother.

A mother's love does not depend upon any particular quality in the son, or any similarity in thinking, or on any type of behavior, but simply on the fact that this person is her son. Nothing can hide this reality. For a mother, an unbelieving son is not an unbeliever, but a

son. That is what we must be if we have a mother's heart like Mary did. To react as a Marist (teacher) before an unbeliever is to accept him and not to see in him the unbeliever but to see a person whose heart and desires can be understood by God alone. *Jean Coste, A Certain Way, page 76.*



The Belley school in the early 20th century

Part IV. Discussion and Reflection Questions

- Discussion Opening Prayer

Dear Lord, guide our discussion today, as we open our minds to learning and sharing the way of the Marists. We thank you for the generous Marist Spirit as shown in the Belley story and how it represents the foundation for a Marist education. We thank you for the living example of the Marist priests' commitment to education ever since. Strengthen our commitment to a Marist education, and allow us to discern what Marist means, for ourselves and the school we serve. Amen.

- Reflection Questions

1. What lessons does the Belley story provide for us and Marist education?
2. Based on your Marist experience, what instructions listed above (in Part II, Instructions excerpts) resonate with you or seem timeless to you? Which do not?
3. Look closely at the excerpts from the international *Characteristics of Marist Education* (Part III, References, 3). How should educators treat their students and set a tone/culture/climate in a school? How ought they do this for one another? With parents?
4. Look closely at the excerpts from the national *Standards and Expectations of a Marist Education* (Part III, References, 4). Reflect on how these *Standards and Expectations of a Marist Education* complement, enhance or build upon the instructions of Belley. Which do you think are especially important?
5. Based on your readings above, what insights can you share about the signs of hope that remain for a Marist education in the future?

6. What concerns, if any, do you have for a Marist education in the future?

Part V. Prayers and Reflections

- Prayer for Society of Mary teachers

Mary, Mother of the Lord and his first teacher, we acknowledge you as the one who knew Jesus best, and who was truly his first and perfect disciple. Make us one in mind and heart with you, focused on Christ the lord. Help us to be disciple-makers today, teachers of a kingdom that has arrived in Christ, and in Christ, will come to completion in our lives and relationships, in our school and world.

- A Marist priest's Reflection on the Society of Mary in education

The founding vision for Marist education, as far as I can see, is a cooperation with God in getting the person being educated to be at the center of the education process. The primary focus is to form their hearts (soul), characters, virtues, mind, relationships, etc. That is, the whole person. In that way, Jean Claude Colin said, *Yes, we contribute with God to forming a man / woman, in a real way.. That is what education does. Nothing is loftier. You give him/her as if it were a second creation.*

The second creation is the education of the whole person in their four key relationships – to God, to self, to others and to creation. The idea of the "education of the whole person" is found in all Catholic schools so what is therefore special about Marist education? It is special because it is both creative and personal. It is creative in the four key relationships whereby each person is entitled by divine right to be treated with dignity and equality and consequently become committed Christians, Citizens, and Scholars.

It is also personal because of the characteristics or core values that are foundational in Marist education. These values are witnessed in the lives of the educators, the educated, and in the ethos of the educational institution. Simply, they are to think, judge, feel, and act as Mary in all things.

These core values, flowing from Mary's ways, as Marists see it, would be identifiable in the lives of people who have gone through Marist education.

1. They are truly committed but like Mary's presence in the life of Jesus and the early church, are quiet and unassuming.
2. They are fully engaged but in a simple, gentle and humble way.
3. They build relationships which are perceived not in terms of power, control or competition but rather in terms of compassion, simplicity, and above all, mercy, the merciful face of God as in Mary as the Mother of Mercy.

4. They are disciples of Jesus, focusing always away from themselves but on Jesus, as Mary was the first disciple of Jesus.
5. They can find time from activities to be with God.
6. They are willing to trust God as Mary did.
7. They have the strength to say "No" to greed, pride and power and they are essentially open to all people.
8. They have the "Nazareth" and "Pentecost" spirit. A spirit of knowing themselves deeply and approaching life with a lively spirit and witnessing first by the quality of their life.
9. They have also a deep sense of belonging to Mary in desiring to see the Gospel of Jesus taking root in our world.
10. Finally, they reach out to others in need and in times of crisis. They show love to their neighbors.

These core values I have mentioned are snap shots of the new creation that Fr Founder, Jean Claude Colin meant for Marist education.

As we are urged to renew our relationship with God, it would augur well for us in the Marist education ministry to bear in mind and to celebrate what we are engaging in because Marist education is indeed providing the "new rhythms, new hope" as we put our hands together to renew our relationship with our Creator and all creation.

- Marist Father Ben McKenna -- A reflection on education, *Justice and Peace Blog*, September 2020

Epilogue:

St. John Henry Newman meditation (March 7, 1848)

God knows me and calls me by my name....
God has created me to do Him some definite service;
He has committed some work to me
which He has not committed to another.
I have my mission—I never may know it in this life,
but I shall be told it in the next.

Somehow, I am necessary for His purposes...
I have a part in this great work;
I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection
between persons.
He has not created me for naught. I shall do good,
I shall do His work;

I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth
in my own place, while not intending it,
if I do but keep His commandments
and serve Him in my calling.

Therefore I will trust Him.

Whatever, wherever I am,
I can never be thrown away.

If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him;
In perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him;
If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him.
My sickness, or perplexity, or sorrow may be
necessary causes of some great end,
which is quite beyond us.

He does nothing in vain; He may prolong my life,
He may shorten it;

He knows what He is about.

He may take away my friends,

He may throw me among strangers,

He may make me feel desolate,
make my spirits sink, hide the future from me—
still He knows what He is about....

Let me be Thy blind instrument. I ask not to see—

I ask not to know—I ask simply to be used.

Origin Story 6: La Neyliere - Contemplation



The quiet grounds of the Marist retreat house at La Neyliere -- just over an hour outside of Lyons, France

Part I. The La Neyliere Story

The Marist Fathers and Brothers throughout the world regard La Neyliere as the house of Fr Colin, the place of his tomb, and the enshrinement of his spiritual message – of welcome, faith, prayer, and service of others ‘in the manner of Mary.’

It was early as 1842 that he mentioned this place to his confreres. He wanted a place where the Fathers and Brothers could come and pause, refresh themselves and prepare themselves for their ministry. Colin envisioned that all who came to this place would find peace, strength, and encouragement for the future.

Fr Colin came to La Neyliere in 1854 after his resignation as the first Superior General of the Society of Mary. While Fr Colin was a great traveler, La Neyliere became his home base until his death in 1875. He was “based” at La Neyliere and one of his major tasks was to complete the writing of the Society of Mary Constitutions, completed in 1872.



Jean Claude Colin shown as a younger leader of the Society of Mary, and a photograph later in life.

It may be worth noting that the Cure of Ars, Fr. Jean Marie Vianney, was expecting to retire there as well. He made many references during his lifetime to Fr Colin and the Society of Mary.

As a place of contemplation and reflection, La Neyliere allowed Colin to contemplate Mary's life – from Mary's role at Nazareth to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

In fact, there is a fresco above Fr. Colin's tomb that displays all the stages of Mary's life. Mary is represented in this fresco as an icon of the Holy Spirit, and the chapel is called the chapel of Pentecost.



At La Neyliere, Marist Founder Jean Claude Colin's tomb, under the Fresco in the Pentecost chapel.

Part II. **The Fresco in the Chapel of the Pentecost**

Marists believe that through Mary's discipleship, the Spirit of the Lord fills the whole world! This is the message shared in the Fresco (below) found in the chapel of the Pentecost at La Neyliere.





The fresco (in a photo from the summer of 2024, above) depicts the central theme of the mystery of Mary in the Catholic Church. The artist, Chantal Dessirier, wrote of this composition:

“I did not want to do a realistic representation of the life of Mary; everyone knows that, and to do so would have tended to make the viewer become a spectator, seeing it as a picture book. I hoped that the visitor would enter into the scenes of Mary’s life.

The dominant image is the scene of Pentecost, with Mary and the Apostles fired with the gift of the Spirit. (“The Spirit of the Lord fills the whole world.”)

In the background to the Pentecost scene are five major “memories” of Mary: the Annunciation (“I am the handmaid of the Lord.”); the Nativity (“The Word was made flesh.”); the Finding in the Temple (“I must be about my Father’s business.”); the Wedding at Cana (“Do what he tells you.”); and Calvary (“Behold your Mother.”)

Mary, in the Pentecost scene, is the keystone, she is the basis of the composition; everything rests on her. But through the use of color, I was concerned that she should remain discreet and hidden. She blends in with the apostles, who stand out, if not by their height, at least by their coloring.”

In fact, Mary is not in the center of the apostles. There are seven on one side of her, and five on the other. The key of the early Church is Peter, the first Pope. Mary submerges into the community of which she is one of the members among the others.

Without words, without any dramatic actions, she witnesses the Lord simply by her life. The apostles look to her as a visible witness to the presence of the Lord. They draw their

inspiration from her. Mary does not assume the role of leader, but she is truly the Queen of the Apostles by her silent, attentive, loving, prayerful presence.

To the Marists, the fresco underlines the words of Father Colin: "What a model Mary is for us! She bears the title 'Queen of Apostles' and rightly, yet she is more hidden than any of the apostles".

At Marist School, our task is to share this same, loving, prayerful presence of Mary.

(Note: In the summer of 2024, three Marist student artists painted a rendition of the Fresco in the Marist Way reading room in the library here.)

Part III. The Barque of Mary

Fr Colin's room at La Neyliere remains a place for pilgrims to visit.

On the wall of Fr. Colin's modest quarters at La Neyliere, there is a painting of Mary at the helm of a ship. Mary is radiant – her white dress is illuminated and bright, and her golden crown is brilliant.



The barque of Mary

The painting is called *The Barque of Mary* by Alphonse Chigot, and it evokes an early image for the Society of Mary, a small ship with the Virgin at the helm and the Society within, at work, leading all to her Son.

Kevin Mullally shared this representation of Mary with the faculty and staff at the opening retreat for the 2024-2025 school year, emphasizing that this "representation of Mary is a reminder to us what we are about at Marist School – we are ministers of presence, accompanying our students during these years, working to form them more perfectly in Christ's image, helping bring to light the excellence of beauty God has placed in each of them. With educators, it is just what Colin says to the early Marists about the barque of Mary: we give the 'finishing touches' to our students as they

grow and develop by creating the conditions for their physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual growth.”

(Note: This painting is on campus in Kevin Mullally’s office.)

Part IV. References

1. The La Neyliere story influenced the **Society of Mary Constitutions.**

The Society of Mary, like the Catholic Church, finds its model in Mary the woman of faith. Its spirituality is simple and modest in its expression, close to the lives of ordinary people, apostolic in character, and marked by spontaneity and joy. The Society of Mary tries to make the Christian experience lived by Mary its way of life.

The spiritual life is nourished and sustained by contemplation of the word of God. This heightens awareness of the presence of the risen Jesus in the everyday life and work of Marists. His presence inspires them to make of their lives an unceasing prayer.

- *Marist Constitutions 1987, paragraph 117, 118, page 45.*

Every Marist is required to make an annual retreat, normally in common.

- *Marist Constitutions 1987, paragraph 125, p. 47.*

2. The La Neyliere story instructs us to consider Mary’s way while serving **Marist Education.**

Whether at Nazareth or in the early Church (at and after Pentecost), Mary’s relationship with the community of faith was one of listening, obedient attentiveness to her Son. She was among the disciples, a brave and bold witness to the coming of the Holy Spirit. In the same way, a Marist School must learn from her to listen attentively to the voice of the Spirit calling that community to live in God’s reign. They must be responsible for discerning how the Marist mission and vision apply in a particular time and place.

Standards and Expectations of a Marist Education, paragraph 104, page 4.

Fr. Colin recognized that the work placed before the Marists was always God’s mission and belonged in a special way to Mary. From her place in the Kingdom of God, she has sought a family of men and women led by the Holy Spirit who unite themselves to Christ to work for his kingdom. Christ alone is the nourishment of our lives. United in this mission, co-workers grow in their spiritual life through prayer, the sacraments and in particular the Eucharist. This privileged time of prayer with the Lord is essential to the success of their endeavors.

Marist Schools commit themselves to discerning the presence of God in Mary’s way to form companions in the mission of the Society of Mary. Part of the ongoing conversion of life each day is to “think, judge, feel and act at Mary” as these educators listen to the voice of the Spirit in challenges of providing a Marist education to young people.

Colinian spirituality and pedagogy inspire us to work together in fulfilling the Marist heritage and urges us to build a Marian church – a servant church, a church that meets each person where he/she is and welcomes them in the name of Christ.

Standards and Expectations of a Marist Education, paragraphs 105, 106, 107, page 6.

3. La Neyliere draws us toward a deeper understanding of Mary in **Scripture** and opens our hearts toward accompaniment stories - especially the Emmaus story so central to Marist School.

On the third day there was a wedding* in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” [And] Jesus said to her, “Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servers, “Do whatever he tells you.” John 2:1-5

Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him.

He asked them, “What are you discussing as you walk along?” They stopped, looking downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?” And he replied to them, “What sort of things?” They said to him, “The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place. Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning, and did not find his body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see.”

And he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer⁺ these things and enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures.” As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over.”

So, he went in to stay with them and it happened that, while he was with them at the table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning [within us] while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?” So, they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and

those with them who were saying, “The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!” Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread. *Luke 24:13-35*



The rural grounds of La Neyliere.

Part V. Discussion and Reflection Questions

■ Opening Prayer

Dear Lord, guide our discussion, open our minds to learning and sharing the way of the Marists. We thank you for the Marist Spirit and the example of contemplation that the Marist priests provide for us in the La Neyliere story. Their contemplative way and their apostolic way are models for our behavior and spiritual growth. Continue to strengthen in us our commitment to discern what Marist means, for ourselves and the school we serve. Amen.

■ Reflection Questions based on the La Neyliere story and Contemplation

1. Marists see Mary as a “model of faith.” In our service to Marist School, we have been called to be “companions” or “co-workers” to the Marist mission (see *Standards and Expectations* above).
 - Are there ways that you see Mary as a model of faith?
 - Are there specific passages in Scripture on Mary that inspire you?
2. Fr. Colin recognized the retreat house at La Neyliere as a kind of Nazareth, a place for Marists to understand God’s will for them -- much like Jesus did in his time in Nazareth with Mary and Joseph. Consider those ways where you seek to nourish or grow your spiritual life to help you act upon God’s will.
 - What places of retreat or contemplation are especially meaningful to you?
 - At the same time, do you have other ways to grow your spiritual life without setting aside a full day or a weekend of retreat?
3. Jesus’ home in the town of Nazareth also represents a significant way in which the Marists ponder their spirituality to support their way of ministry. In fact, Colin shared that he found “the fullness of the Marist Spirit in the house of Nazareth.” *Founder Speaks, Document 188, paragraph 12, page 543.*

- Can you offer any reflection about what that might mean for us at Marist School? That is, contemplate how or whether the Marist Spirit at Marist school compares to the Spirit of the house at Nazareth.
4. Places of retreat, like La Neyliere, give us an opportunity to discover God's presence in our lives, so that we are then empowered or commissioned to bring God's goodness to others.
 - How do we accompany students, families and others in the school community to help them discover God's presence and the power of God's revelation in and for their lives?
 5. The Emmaus story above also represents a unique way that the individuals – here, the disciples of Jesus -- let God into their lives. As it turns out, Jesus' journey on the road to the Emmaus directs us toward the Marist value of "hidden and unknown." That is, the Marists believe that God is shared in full when we commit ourselves to the welfare of another and centering the other. Fr. Colin often reflected that God speaks to us in many "hidden" ways. In the Emmaus story, Jesus was hidden and unknown to the disciples at first, yet Jesus was revealed to them through their faith and their memory of the breaking of the bread.
 - Reflect on the Marist value of Hidden and Unknown. How can we live out the Marist value of "hidden and unknown" for others in the school community and our lives?



A thoughtful representation of Mary for the Marists -- as a gatherer of all people, in one heart and mind.

Part IV. Prayers/Reflection

A prayer and reflection on Contemplative Marist Living, from Fr Fritz Arnold S.M. after a visit to La Neyliere...

The Lord seemed to be saying something like this to me:

"It is my heartfelt desire to be in union with You, heart to heart. Love me and show me Your love by giving me the gift of Your time. Speak freely to me or just remain in silence. Worship is mostly a silent abiding in my presence, a resting in the radiance of my heart. To adore me is to seek my face, to come closer to my heart. To adore me means to give me the freedom to work in You and through You, so that You are completely united with me. Your sleepiness does not prevent my activity in Your soul in the least. My activity in your soul reaches deeper than your external situation and your attention. It is not necessary to fill the time of worship with thoughts and words, as if it depended on you doing anything. It is enough if you listen to me with the ear of your heart. Come to me with trust and devotion, not with a secret desire to force me to do something. Come with boundless trust."

The time of contemplation is by all means not always filled with experiences of bliss. It often goes through times of dryness.

Part VI. Epilogue

Here is a final thought on the openness to God that emerges through quiet times of retreat and contemplation.

Letters to a Young Poet: Letter Seven, by Rainier Marai Rilke

We must trust in what is difficult is a certainty that will never abandon us; it is good to be solitary, for solitude is difficult; that something is difficult must be one more reason for us to do it. It is also good to love -- because love is difficult.

For one human being to love another human being: that is perhaps the most difficult task that has been entrusted to us, the ultimate task, the final test and proof, the work for which all other work is merely preparation. That is why young people, who are beginners in everything, are not yet capable of love: it is something they must learn. With their whole being, with all their forces, gathered around their solitary, anxious, upward-beating heart, they must learn to love.

But learning-time is always a long, secluded time, and therefore loving, for a long time ahead and far on into life, is: solitude, a heightened and deepened kind of aloneness for the person who loves. Loving does not at first mean merging, surrendering, and uniting with another person (for what would a union be of two people who are unclarified, unfinished, and still incoherent?), it is a high inducement for the individual to ripen, to become something in himself, to become world, to become world in himself for the sake of another person; it is a great, demanding claim on him, something that chooses him and calls him to vast distances.