

installed an ex-grenadier and a farmer's son and trained them as teachers.

He had founded the Marist Brothers and a part of the original dream was now in place as the Brothers began their work of educating poor country children, so much neglected and lacking in both education and faith.

People came to know Fr Marcellin as the man of *'strong mind and gentle heart'* with a special love for the poor and underprivileged. His model and patron was Mary. His motto: *'All to Jesus through Mary'*.

Before his death in 1840 many schools had been opened and the Marist Brothers established as a vital part of the Marist project, soon to spread to most continents of the world.

Marcellin Champagnat was declared a Saint of the Church on April 18, 1999.

### Marist Missionary Sisters

Four years after the 1841 martyrdom of St Peter Chanel on the island of Futuna, a French laywoman travelled to nearby Wallis in the Pacific.

Her name was **Marie Françoise Perroton**.

She was responding to a plea from the women of Oceania that missionary women might come and work with them in the newly-established local church.

Affiliated to the Third Order of Mary, but desiring to be religious, Marie Françoise and her companions ministered especially to women since in the islands it was then unacceptable for the Fathers to do so.

Their communities are now recognised as the founding group of the Missionary Sisters' branch of the Society of Mary, approved in 1931 as a religious congregation.



From these early beginnings in the Pacific the SMSM Sisters (or Marist Missionary Sisters as they are popularly known) spread their apostolic presence to many other countries across the globe. Their commitment was, and still is, to live in communities of both prayer and active involvement in ministry. The SMSM choice, characteristically, has been to work across the boundaries of culture, making the spirit of Mary present in the midst of a world of many peoples.

### Marist Laity

Fr Jean-Claude Colin's vision was for *'the whole world to be Marist'* under the influence of the Blessed Virgin. In early years he established the Third Order of Mary, according to the prevailing patterns of lay associations.

In subsequent times each Marist branch has attracted groups of lay people who share Marist life and spirit, varying from parish or school-based, to national and international groups, yet all bound by a common bond of fidelity to the spirit of Mary presenting her Son to the world.

Their presence completes the Marist Family, a tree with many branches.



Ursula Betka's *'Sedes Sapientiae'* (Seat of Wisdom) depicting the four Marist founders. (Aquinas College, North Adelaide, Australia.)



## The Family of Marists

*A tree with many branches*



*How the Marists began...  
Priests, Sisters, Brothers,  
Missionary Sisters  
and Lay Marists.*

## The dream begins...

It is post-Revolution France. A handful of seminarians share a dream: to form a new religious family under the banner of Mary. They would be known as 'Marists'.

After a day of priestly ordinations in the city of Lyons they cross the River Saone in the early morning of July 23, 1816, and climb to the ancient shrine of Our Lady of Fourvière.

Overlooking the city, this was a place where people went to put their dreams in Mary's hands. True to this long tradition, the Marist aspirants came and pledged to form the Society of Mary.

In the years that followed the project was to take shape with Marists all over the world living the Fourvière dream, like branches of the one tree: the Marist Family.



### The Marist Fathers

One of the aspirants was **Jean-Claude Colin**, ordained priest the day before the Fourvière promise. A shy young man, his first appointment was to assist his brother, Pierre, in the parish of Cerdon, high in the Bugey mountains to the east of France

where he began writing what would one day become the Rule of Life for the Society of Mary. The surrounding hamlets had suffered much during the French Revolution and its attacks on Catholic faith and life. Priests were forced from their parishes or had become disheartened by the turbulence of the years.

Fr Colin sought approval to gather a team of Marist aspirants. In 1824 the bishop finally consented and directed the new missionaries to restore faith to the villages of the Bugey. On Oct 29 another Marist aspirant, Fr Etienne Déclas, joined the Colin

brothers at Cerdon and, as Fr Pierre was to write that afternoon, *'Today the Society of Mary has begun.'* After some years Fr Colin was asked to take over the bishop's secondary college in Belley. The Marists were launched into the world of education. Their work soon became known for excellence in teaching and a characteristic understanding and pastoral care for their students.

In 1836, after undertaking to provide missionaries for the then-unknown south-west Pacific, the branch of *Priests and Brothers of the Society of Mary* was officially approved by Rome. Fr Colin was elected as its first Superior-General.

In subsequent years the Society of Mary grew rapidly in numbers and Fr Colin emerged as a strong and capable leader, responding to calls for Marists to staff schools, seminaries and shrines throughout France and to send more missionaries to the Pacific. Eventually the Marist Fathers were to minister in every continent of the world. Retiring from leadership in 1854, Fr Colin continued to support the Marist project until his death in 1875.

Jean-Claude Colin was the inspiration for a school of saints including Peter Chanel, Julien Eymard, Marcellin Champagnat, John Vianney and others. Soon after his death the Cause for his Beatification was introduced, and revived in recent years.



### The Marist Sisters

Not long after his arrival at Cerdon, Fr Jean-Claude Colin invited two young women to join the Marist project. His brother, Pierre, when pastor of the village of Coutouvre, had been especially impressed by one of them, **Jeanne-Marie Chavoin**.

A person of deep faith and keen interest in religious life, Jeanne-Marie brought with her a close friend, Marie Jotillon.

On Sep 08, 1823, the first community of Marist Sisters was officially established. Jeanne-Marie Chavoin became the foundress of another branch of the Marist Family: the Marist Sisters.

Jean-Claude Colin's early idea was that the Sisters would become a kind of contemplative prayer support for the outgoing ministries of the priests he was then gathering.

This was not to be. Jeanne-Marie was a woman of action with an urgency to reach out to the needy and neglected of these poor parts of France.

In fact, thanks to a deep, personal spirituality, Jeanne-Marie encouraged her Sisters in great fidelity to prayer, a truly contemplative dimension to their spirit.

Before long, the Marist Sisters in Cerdon had become an apostolic and active part of the Marist dream. They were soon to grow beyond the confines of their native France and spread to many parts of the globe.

### The Marist Brothers

Another of the Fourvière twelve was **Marcellin Champagnat**, beginning his priestly ministry in the tiny township of Lavalla, clinging to a steep-sided valley in the Pilat mountains to the south-west of Lyons.

Ministering to a dying boy, Fr Marcellin was deeply moved by the lad's ignorance of God and saw the urgency of establishing a group of brothers to cater for this educational need.

By January 1817, only months after the Fourvière pledge, he had rented a house near the presbytery,

