

## THE MARIST BROTHERS AND MARIST COLLEGE

The history of Marist College begins in 1905 when the Marist Brothers, under the legendary Brother Zepheriny, purchased the McPherson estate, just to the north of the city of Poughkeepsie. Times were rough for French-based religious communities then, and Brother Zepheriny was authorized to use family inheritance funds for the purchase; he and his sister supplied the \$9,000 needed to buy the 44-acre estate. The property was renamed St. Ann's Hermitage. Three years later, in 1908, the Beck estate, contiguous to the southern border of the McPherson property, was also purchased. These 110 acres formed what is now the Marist College campus (minus the 17-acre Gartland Commons added in 1985).

St. Ann's Hermitage served until 1954 as headquarters for the Marist Brothers in the United States. Barns and stables were converted by the Brothers into living quarters, classrooms and recreation areas for students in the original junior high school, then high school, who contemplated becoming Marist Brothers. By 1929 the training center had evolved into a junior college affiliated with Fordham University and Catholic University. Part of the property was occupied by elderly Brothers who retired here and spent their time with farming, carpentry, and landscaping. Forty-seven of these Marist pioneers are buried on campus, near the granite memorial at the northeastern corner of the McCann Center.

Bro. Louis Omer, Provincial of the Marist Brothers in 1943, called upon an energetic and far-seeing Master of Scholastics, Bro. Paul Ambrose Fontaine, to transform the two-year Marist Normal Training School into a four-year institution. Several years of effort were crowned when, in 1946, the New York State Board of Regents chartered Marian College as an independent Catholic college, still for the exclusive training of Marist Brothers. Brother Paul obtained the able services of Dr. John Schroeder, then English teacher at Arlington High School and subsequently the first fulltime lay faculty member of Marist College. Brother Paul also contracted for the services of Dr. John Christie of Vassar College as professor of American Literature. The Brothers embarked on an extensive building program, first under the leadership of Bro. Francis Xavier Benoit (the old gym, now Marian Hall), then under Bro. Nilus Donnelly, physics teacher, engineer, general contractor (Our Lady Seat of Wisdom Chapel, Fontaine, Adrian, Donnelly).

When Bro. Paul Ambrose was elected Assistant General in Rome in 1958, Linus Richard Foy became, at age 28, the youngest college president in the United States. The college's charter had been amended in 1957 and its mission broadened to include the wider community; lay male students were admitted to pursue degree study. Marian College was also now legally designated as non-sectarian, though with ineradicable Judeo-Christian roots. Under the capable direction of Dr. Schroeder an Evening Division was introduced in 1959 to serve the needs of local adults.

In 1960 Marian College changed its name to Marist College. The years that followed were marked by dynamic growth, both in academic programs and in facilities. Between 1947 and 1969 fourteen major buildings were constructed. Much of the manual labor was provided by the Brothers themselves, on weekends and holidays and during the summer, until state-funded residence halls necessitated hiring professional builders. In 1966, for the first time, women were permitted to enter the Evening Division, and, in 1968, the Day Division; in 1969 they were admitted as residents in Sheahan, Leo, and Champagnat.

Ownership of the College was transferred in 1969 to the Marist College Educational Corporation with an independent Board of Trustees. Nonetheless, the legacy of the Marist Brothers, a legacy of community service and educational excellence, continues to inspire and enrich the academic life of the College, especially in programs for the physically and educationally handicapped and in the graduate study of Community Psychology. Six Marist Brothers currently work at Marist College: BB. Joseph Belanger, Nilus Donnelly, Donald Kelly, Richard Rancourt, Cornelius Russell, and Joseph Sacino.

Dr. Dennis J. Murray succeeded Dr. Foy as President of Marist College in 1979. He has raised the undergraduate enrolment to some 2900 students and added several new graduate programs, while continuing to strengthen the College's sense of Marist spirit and heritage.



## MARIST BROTHERS IN THE WORLD AND IN THE UNITED STATES

Since the providential day, January 2, 1817, the Marist Brothers of the Schools (FMS) have spread throughout the world, carrying the charism of Champagnat to the least favored on our earth. At the death of the Founder on Saturday June 6, 1840, there were 280 Brothers working in 47 establishments all over France and even in the South Pacific. Four years later, the total was 610 teaching in over 100 schools; two other fledgling foundations as well had been absorbed by Champagnat's Brothers. The coveted and essential Royal Ordinance of approval had been obtained in 1837, and the Falloux Law passed in 1850 greatly favored the spread of communities of teaching Brothers and Sisters. The Hermitage no longer sufficed as general headquarters, and a larger property was purchased in St-Genis-Laval in the suburbs of Lyons in 1853. This served as the headquarters of the Marist Brothers until the anticlerical laws of France in 1901-05 forced a transfer to Grugliasco, Italy. Since 1958 the world headquarters have been in Rome.

Under Brother Francois, first Superior General, the Institute spread beyond France to Belgium and England. Bro. Louis-Marie succeeded Brother Francois in 1860; at his death in 1879 the Institute counted some 3,700 Brothers and 565 schools caring for over 80,000 children, not only in France but also in South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. The Marist motto, "All to Jesus through Mary, All to Mary for Jesus," and the Marist greeting, "Laudetur Jesus Christus, Et Maria Mater ejus. Amen." (Praised be Jesus Christ. And Mary His Mother. Amen.) were seen and heard the world over. Today the Marist Brothers number some 7000 men, and they work in over 70 countries.

The first foundation in the United States was made in Lewiston, Maine, in 1886. By 1900 there were 60 Brothers teaching in six United States schools. The anticlerical laws of France in 1901-05 led to mass exodus, and many French Brothers joined their confreres in America. In 1904 the Brothers had four schools in New England and four in New York City. The most prestigious of the latter was St. Ann's Academy, 153 East 76th Street, Manhattan; this school had to transfer to more spacious quarters in Jamaica, Queens, in 1957, and was renamed Archbishop Molloy High School. Several pioneer French Brothers returned to their homeland to fight in World War I; some gave their life for their country, several more died of the worldwide influenza a few years later. Nevertheless, the new province of the United States, separated from its Canadian forebears and canonically erected in 1911, continued to grow in personnel and establishments. Mt. St. Michael Academy was founded in 1926 in the Bronx; other schools flourished in Savannah (GA), Haverstraw (NY), Manchester (NH), Lawrence (MA), Wheeling (WV), Lowell (MA), Haverhill (MA). Central Catholic High School was opened in 1935 in Lawrence, Mass. Training houses for candidates were established in Poughkeepsie, New York, and Tyngsboro, Mass.

After World War II there was greater ethnic and geographical distribution among the Brothers and the schools. Candidates of Franco-American and Irish stock were joined by many of Italian origin, as well as a few Afro-Americans and Hispanics, spending their life in selfless devotion to youth in curricular and extra-curricular activity. New schools opened in Florida, Chicago, Texas, and Oregon. Mission fields in the Philippines and in Japan were confided to the United States Marist Brothers, and several volunteered for work in Oceanica and Zimbabwe. In 1986 three Brothers opened a new mission in Liberia. The work commitment also changed. From teaching primarily in elementary schools originally, the Brothers now work primarily in high schools. Furthermore, though teaching has remained the essential commitment, some Brothers engage in other forms of service to the most abandoned and the least favored: drug and alcohol rehabilitation, juvenile delinquency, human rights in Washington (DC) and Pine Ridge (SD), spiritual renewal for adults, CCD; apostolates among the very poorest of the poor were opened in Mississippi and inner-city Oakland (CA). A growing number of elderly Brothers continue their apostolate of prayer and suffering. The United States province was split in two in 1958, with headquarters now in Poughkeepsie (NY) and Bayonne (NJ). The Brothers in the United States now number some 350, and they work in over 25 schools.



## MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT, FOUNDER OF THE MARIST BROTHERS

It has been said that God writes straight on crooked lines. Superficially understood, the statement seems mere verbal paradox, but in the context of a saint's life, it is fact much more than literary image.

A school dropout at the age of eight, a young man of fifteen when he started his formal education, Marcellin Champagnat became through divine irony the founder of a worldwide congregation of teaching religious. His origins were lowly. He came from the fields, the dirt of the soil on his hands, the strength of the plow in his arms, the fire of a simple Christian faith in his heart, and the power of a holy purpose in his will.

Once directed on the road to the priesthood by a providential meeting with a seminary professor, Champagnat never wavered. He studied with the determination and singlemindedness that would later characterize him as seminarian, priest, founder, and educator. He struggled on, working hours on end until he was able to enter the major seminary of Lyons, France, where his industry soon earned him promotion to advanced studies. During those years he made friends with men of similar mold and joined with Jean-Claude Colin to co-found the Society of Mary, commonly called the Marist Fathers. Champagnat's reiterated appeals to include teaching Brothers led the Marist Fathers to delegate this task to him.

Ordained July 22, 1816, (he had been born on May 20, 1789), the future founder became assistant pastor in LaValla, a small village of the Massif Central in the heart of France. On one of his many trips to isolated homes along the narrow mountain paths of his parish, he found a dying young man pathetically ignorant of the most elementary truths of the faith. The memory of this experience haunted him for days; he knew he had to act. Only six months after his ordination, he confided his hopes to two young men who accepted the challenge. On January 2, 1817, they became the first Marist Brothers. Three other men joined them a few weeks later. In time, under the prudent spiritual and educational guidance of Father Champagnat, they qualified to teach catechism to the children and adults of the parish. In November 1819 he assigned his first Brothers to the schools of LaValla and Marlihes, his birthplace. The young religious, trained by the dynamic curate in subject matter and methodology, soon earned an enviable reputation as teachers and pious men.

As other candidates presented themselves, the Founder saw the need to expand the order's limited facilities. He soon began an extensive building program. Poverty was a very tangible condition of their life in these early days, and he himself worked on the building with the Brothers. He was architect, contractor, foreman. Besides meeting the challenge of his new career, he had to face any number of criticisms from fellow priests who repeatedly condemned him as a rash and foolish visionary. Ignoring this vocal opposition, he persisted in his plans, trusting completely in Divine Providence and in Our Lady, whom he called his Ordinary Resource. Belief in a dream, dedication to an ideal, faith and sacrifice were the building stones of the Hermitage, the first motherhouse of the Marist Brothers.

In 1824 the young priest requested permission to quit his parish work and devote full time to the apostolate of his infant congregation, which now numbered thirty members. Until the year before his death he was superior, spiritual director, and school supervisor. Ill health, caused by his frequent travels, his endless hours of manual labor, and his asceticism eventually forced him to stop.

Marcellin Champagnat died June 6, 1840, at the age of 51, leaving his sons a legacy of sanctity, apostolic spirit, and educational zeal of which they are justifiably proud.



## A CENTENARY LEGACY

Brother Paul Ambrose Fontaine  
August 15, 1986

This year the Marist Brothers are celebrating the centenary of the start of their apostolic work in the United States. There will be a Centenary Convocation of all the Marist Brothers in the USA at Marist College, Poughkeepsie, NY, from August 15 to the 22 with the Brother Superior General of the Congregation presiding. It will start with a special Mass offered by Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago, and it will end on June 6, 1987, with a Mass of Thanksgiving celebrated by John Cardinal O'Connor at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. And all this to honor the memory of the man who started it all: BLESSED MARCELLING CHAMPAGNAT, our Founder.

What is his legacy? It is basically his charism which is his legacy, for his example lives on today. His charism can be summed up in a few short phrases: imitation of Mary's service of Jesus, service to youth and especially to the poor, doing good quietly, hard work, confidence in God, close family spirit, care and concern for others. It is true that Champagnat started schools and trained his followers as school men, but this was a means to an end. The school was his means of reaching youth, just as sports are needed to form character and a canvas is needed by an artist who wishes to translate his special idea into a gift on canvas for others. The schools are an open door to let in so very many followers.

We are all familiar here in Lawrence with Lazarus House, the latest of our Marist foundations in this area. Well, Lazarus is also Champagnat's legacy. His the open door to those without shelter, his the welcome to those checked in each night, and to those fed in the morning, as well as to those clothed in the Thrift Shop. His is the welcome at the Good Shepherd Center for counseling, for the alcohol rehab, or for a bit of relaxing from family tension, for a cup of coffee, a game of cards, or else a chit-chat with a new-found friend, and a refreshing moment in an aircon atmosphere. All this continues not only at the Lazarus House, but also in Marist Houses all over the globe.

His legacy is the orphans accepted at Camp Marist, the summer camps for retarded at Esopus, New York, the Club and games for the poor Blacks in Canton, Mississippi. Through his men, Champagnat reaches out to the American Indians in Oglala, South Dakota, to the neglected children of the Bronx. He is the model for the service of his Marists to the 749 lepers of the Andong Diocese in Korea, the new gardens and vegetable farms prepared and functioning for our lepers in Emene, Nigeria, for our sixteen villages of lepers in Yeong-Ju, Korea, where we take all leper children from their homes for a month's vacation at a summer camp each year. I see Champagnat in his men in the "favelas" of Brazil looking after the abandoned and unloved children; I see him going along the Amazon jungle with his men in the river boats as they minister to the sick and cripple at the various stopping places where their medical boat docks. Those landings are flocked with the sick needing dressings, teeth to be pulled, wounds and infections to be treated. I see him as well in the quiet solace of the services of the various Retreat Houses and also in the bustling liveliness of the Youth Hostels in so many countries of the world. He is there reclaiming the wayward youth in Africa, in South America; and he is also with Brother Simeon of Korea, caring for the very young prisoners to take them away from the influence of hardened sinners. I see him in the many Computer

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