



# Companioning Marist Life

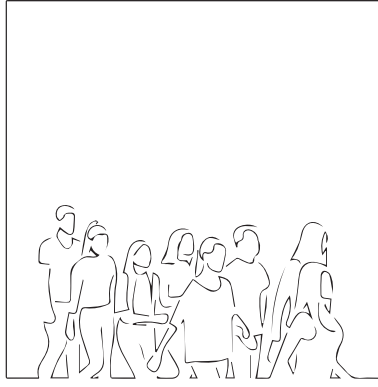
Supporting the Vitality  
of Local Coordinators

*Marist*

ASSOCIATION OF  
ST MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT







# Companioning Marist Life

Supporting the Vitality  
of Local Coordinators

## Introduction

Arising from the consultative process of the National Assembly in 2022, a clear direction to respond to the basic needs of formation emerged. Recognising the pivotal role of Local Groups in the life and mission of the Marist Association, the Marist Mission and Life Formation team launched Companioning Marist Life, a short program to support the vitality of Local Coordinators.

The purpose of Companioning Marist Life is to strengthen vocational leadership in the Marist Association by equipping Local Coordinators to support the life and vitality of Local Association Groups, and to assist Local Coordinators to deepen their understanding of the Local Group as a:

Table of Inclusion  
Family of Companions  
Stream of Spirituality



# Session One

## A Table of Inclusion

“The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel.”

Pope Francis (EG 114)





# A Table of Inclusion

## Pre-reading

Strategic plan of the Marist Association 2023  
(see appendix 1)

## Welcome and catch up (5min)

What has been happening in your Local Group?

## Reflection (10min)

The Marist Association as 'A Table of Inclusion'.

## Woman at the helm

The Religious sister at the centre of the global synodal process tells Joanna Moorhead that synodality is the people of God journeying on the Earth - but the way forward remains unclear

Born into a Catholic family in Fontainebleau in 1969, the eldest of five, Sr Nathalie Becquart is today one of the highest- ranking officials at the Vatican, and certainly the most senior woman at the Synod; the first woman with the right to vote in the Synod of Bishops, and one of the BBC's top 100 women globally in 2022. Since 2021 she's been a Synod Office under-secretary, the first non-prelate in the role. She was, she says, very surprised when she was offered the job; although, actually, everything in her CV pointed to her being eminently suitable. A Religious sister of the Congregation of Xavières, she spent a decade working for the French episcopal conference before becoming a convenor for the 2018 Youth Synod, on which she was also an official observer. She then went to the United States to research synodality. "I'd never imagined [doing this job]," she says, "but I can see that all my work prepared me for it."

What synodality is all about, for her, is the Church opening up to listening to other people's experiences. "What's new with the Synod is that we're talking about the issues, they're all on the table. We're not sweeping things under the carpet." She certainly doesn't underestimate how tough the future will be. "I understand that the problem is we've some people who want fast change, and there are others who are afraid of change."

One overriding call for change has been where women's contribution is concerned: but even there, she points out, there are some – including women – who are happy with the status quo. For her, working together is what matters most,

and she says that in a Vatican culture in which people often seem stuck in separate silos, female leaders tend to be more collaborative. A graduate in business studies, Becquart points out that organisations that have brought in women at the top reap the benefits. "Why? It's because it brings diversity. We take better decisions if we don't take decisions alone." What doesn't work for an organisation, she says, is to have people who are all the same making the big calls – especially in the complex world of today. In the male-heavy world of the Vatican, where most leaders are not only male, but also ordained male, it's pretty clear what she means by "all the same". And it's pretty clear that, though she has to toe the line to a certain extent to fit in here, she's pro-change. All the same, at this point

Becquart says that no one ever imagined being part of the Catholic Church's journey meant having an easy ride (she's back on the high seas, at the helm of her boat again). It's a paschal journey, she says, like Christ's; if you look back over 2,000 years, the Church has been far from perfect – and yet here it still is, continuing to function. And then comes her killer card: the Holy Spirit. That Holy Spirit who opened the way to her sailing again is the same Holy Spirit who can blow the wind of unimaginable change through the Church. She's mentioned the Holy Spirit several times during our conversation: the bottom line is this is where she invests her faith. "Things are changing, and in the long term I believe in the Holy Spirit."

THE TABLET | 8 APRIL 2023

## Personal reflection on questions (3mins)

1. How do we, as a Local Group, more effectively promote and foster respect and dignity for all?
2. How does our Local Group continue to foster a greater sense of connection and belonging for Members?

## Discussion & Prayer (40min)

Reflection over page



## Opening of Heart and Hands

God the Father, good and merciful,  
we Marists of Champagnat recognise that all life is a  
gift and a blessing.

We thank you for your generous love.

Encourage us to be honest and upright people,  
worthy of proclaiming the Gospel, in our awareness  
and fundraising campaign for the benefit of our  
brothers and sisters in need.

Help us to always take advantage of the spaces and  
activities that save lives.

Give us openness to listen to the needs around us.

Give us a joyful spirit, and an eagerness to  
involve others.

Give us hopeful imagination and creative vision,  
recognizing generosity in even the smallest gift.

Give us strong and unwavering hearts in times of  
discouragement.

Give us confident hearts, knowing that the fruits of  
the activities will be realized long after we are gone.

Give us faithful hearts, deeply committed to Your  
kingdom on earth.

Let us feel Your presence so that we know that we  
are never truly alone.

Always remind us that what we do for the least of  
our brothers and sisters, we do for You.

"We bend our shoulders to the task and play our  
part to the best of our ability in serving others".

We ask this through Jesus and in union with the  
Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Mary Our Good Mother, **pray for us.**  
St Marcellin Champagnat, **pray for us.**  
St Mary of the Cross MacKillop, **pray for us.**  
And let us always remember to **pray for one  
another.**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the  
Holy Spirit. Amen.

## A Special Welcome

We extend a special welcome to those  
who are single, married, divorced,  
widowed, LGBTQI+, confused, filthy rich,  
comfortable or poor.

We extend a special welcome to wailing  
babies and excited toddlers, people of  
colour and colourful people.

We welcome you whether you can sing  
like Adele, or just growl quietly to yourself.  
You are welcome here if you are 'just  
browsing', just woken up or just got out  
of prison. We do not care if you are more  
Christian than our Archbishop, or have not  
been to church since Christmas or Easter  
last millennium.

We extend a special welcome to those  
who are over 60 but have not grown up  
yet, and to teenagers who are growing  
up too fast. We welcome keep fit mums  
in 'active wear', football dads in team  
colours, starving artists, tree-huggers,  
latte-sippers, vegans and vegetarians  
or junk food eaters. We welcome those  
who are in recovery or still addicted. We  
welcome you if you are having problems,  
down in the dumps or do not like  
organised religion.

We offer a welcome to those who think  
the world is flat, work too hard, do not  
work, cannot work or cannot spell, or  
are here because granny is visiting and  
wanted to come to our parish now.

We welcome those who are inked,  
pierced, both or neither. We offer a special  
welcome to those who could do with  
a prayer right now, had religion shoved  
down their throats as kids or simply  
got lost because their GPS or Google  
Maps let them down and they ended up  
here by mistake. We welcome pilgrims,  
refugees, asylum seekers, tourists,  
searchers, doubters... and you!



# Session Two

A Stream of Spirituality





## A Stream of Spirituality

### Pre-reading

Growing as Marists (see appendix 2)

### Welcome and catch up (5min)

What has happened since our first conversation?

### Reflection (10min)

The Marist Association as 'A Stream of Spirituality'.



Study for the Annunciation by Henry Ossawa Tanner in 1898

### Erasure Poem and Explanation

Jarred Mercer

The Annunciation must be one of the most commonly depicted scenes in the history of art. From paintings, to music, to poetry and narrative, the story of Gabriel's message to Mary—infused with doubt and belief, joy and sorrow, fear and comfort—has proved to be remarkably generative for both the life of faith and the creative impulse. It is a story sharing space with both devastation and hope, and this means it is a story for all of us, whoever we are and wherever we are in life.

Mary Szybist's remarkable collection of poetry, *Incarnadine*, was inspired by a personal tour of paintings of the Annunciation in Italy. She rewrites the narrative in poetic form over and over again through the different representations of it she finds in the paintings, confronting issues of modern life along the way and bringing in evocative tones of the sacred and profane, erotic, carnal, spiritual, and more. This simple erasure poem, a poem created literally from erasing parts of Luke's narrative, helped me to approach the Annunciation in an entirely new way.

### The Annunciation: Luke 1.26-38:

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel said to her, '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 holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.' Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

#### Annunciation under Erasure

Mary Szybist

*And he came to her and said*

*The Lord is*

*troubled*

*in mind*

*be afraid Mary*

*The Holy*

*will overshadow you*

*therefore*

*be*

*nothing be impossible*

*and Mary said*

*And the angel departed from her*



We cannot imagine Mary—comforted here by the angel and comforted still along the way by Joseph not abandoning her, by her shared experience with her relative Elizabeth—as continuously recalling the event of the Annunciation in comfort, ease, and delight. And nowhere do we hear of her being entirely settled, unworried, and confident after her meeting with Gabriel. We cannot imagine that she didn't have to wrestle through those words of the angel: 'Do not be afraid, Mary', each and every day. Maybe even chanting them like a mantra, like a blessing, like a song you can't get out of your head. Surely, she must have performed her own 'erasure' time and time again: 'be afraid Mary', 'be nothing', 'be impossible', 'and the angel departed'.

Mary's response is a resounding 'yes', her refrain the glorious Magnificat, but how many times must the fragmented memory of that angelic meeting replayed in her head with anxiety or fear or worry or doubt alongside the rejoicing? And how many times after stomach pains, or a fall, or not feeling the baby move for a while must the distressed thought, 'something isn't right', consumed her mind regardless of miracle and promise? And how perfectly appropriate and real and human this is.

## We all perform erasure in our lives.

And that's OK. It's OK to enter into times of fear and doubt or uncertainty, but we also have to remain aware of our selective consciousness—that we are forgetting parts of ourselves; that we are practising erasure. The story of the Annunciation is a story of both uncertainty and belief, sorrow and joy, and everything in between, but it is also a story about radical newness, about openness, about beginnings. Just as Mary must have had her own erasures and fragmentations of memory, so would she have been able to recall and hear, 'The Lord is with you'; so would she have been able to live her calling again and again: 'Here I am ... let it be according to your word'.

The Annunciation is a story ripe for both the rejoicings and the questions and uncertainties that life carries, and it's about opening up and receiving all of it. This is Mary's story in an irreducible particularity and at the same time the story of each of us, of any of us, met with the perfect love of God in the midst of our fear, our struggle, our poverty and weakness, our insecurity and doubt and hearing the words: 'The Lord is with you, do not be afraid'. And it is an opportunity for each of us to respond, to enter into that risk, that freedom, that openness; to say 'yes' to such a love. And this opportunity is gifted to us

because the story is as much or more about God's opening up to us as Mary's opening up to God's plan and salvation. Mary opens up and receives God-among-us, Emmanuel, but God in Christ is also opening up and welcoming human life and experience. At the root of the Annunciation is the new, radical, earthy manifestation of 'The Lord is with you'. The God of the universe opens up entirely to us, entirely to the weakness and beauty of humanity—God in the womb, in the manger, who walks among our streets, holds little children, touches lepers, who dies in human flesh. There is no greater welcome, no wider openness, no fuller embrace, and no invitation more joyful than this.

*After contemplating Mary, let us explore our own hearts. Am I thirsty and longing for God? Deep down, is my heart in tune with the presence of God dwelling in me? Do I really want to be free of all the attachments that are paralysing me, that stop me from getting ahead and that prevent me from being open to newness and change? Do I have a heart that is open to the needs of others and ready to serve without counting the cost? Among all the many choices that are before us every day – sometimes to the point of being snowed under – and leading such fast-paced lives, maybe we are losing our capacity to feel thirsty.*

### Personal reflection on questions (3mins)

1. What is flowing in and through me and where do you experience vitality in Marist life?
2. Association Members feel called to personal growth and transformation. How can my leadership of our Local Group continue to facilitate and assist with their faith journey?
3. The Association is unambiguously part of the Church. What role can our Local Group play in working towards a Church that is evermore faithful to the Gospel?

### Discussion & Prayer (40min)

Reflection over page

## Companions in Action

Lord our God,  
creator of the universe,  
you call each of us into being.

Help us to see you in all things  
and to recognize our own spiritual thirst  
and that of our world.

Each of us has our own gifts to share,  
our own burdens to bear,  
our own stories to tell,  
and our own destiny to fulfil.

In the spirit of St Marcellin Champagnat  
may we be guided by his  
simplicity, modesty and humility.

Send forth your spirit  
on the Marist Association  
and their Companions in Mission  
throughout the world and draw us  
all together in the spirit of your love.

We pray that our Companion Conversations will  
continue to be a wellspring of encouragement  
and hope as we travel together in bringing life and  
vitality to our Local Groups.

## Prayers of Intercession

For what else shall we pray?

... Lord hear us

**All:** Lord hear our prayer

Mary Our Good Mother, **pray for us.**  
St Marcellin Champagnat, **pray for us.**  
St Mary of the Cross MacKillop, **pray for us.**  
And let us always remember to **pray for one another.**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



# Marist

MARIST MISSION AND LIFE FORMATION

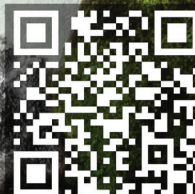
## SPIRITUALITY HUB

### EXPLORE

- ▶ PROGRAMS AND RETREATS
- ▶ LOCAL GROUP FORMATION
- ▶ CONFERENCES AND EVENTS
- ▶ PRAYERS AND REFLECTIONS
- ▶ THEME RESOURCES

COME, YOU WHO  
ARE THIRSTY, AND  
DRINK! WITH JOY,  
DRAW WATER  
FROM THE WELLS  
OF SALVATION.

ISAIAH 12:3



▶ [MARISTFORMATION.ORG](https://maristformation.org)



The background is an abstract, textured composition of various colors including deep blue, vibrant orange, and warm yellow. The textures appear to be layered, with some areas looking like rough paper or fabric, and others like smooth paint or fabric. The overall effect is dynamic and artistic.

# Appendix One

Strategic Plan of the Marist Association





# Marist

ASSOCIATION OF  
ST MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT

*Strategic Directions 2023 - 2025*

# Leader

Dear Members of the Marist Association of St Marcellin Champagnat

St Catherine of Siena is remembered for many notable accomplishments, but one of her comments has particular relevance to us today:

*“Be who God intends you to be and you’ll set the world on fire”.*

This applies to individuals, but arguably also to groups, and the entire Church.

It is remarkably apt for our Association: be what God wants us to be...fulfil our mission...be authentic and genuine...work to be faithful...and there will be results, wonderful ones!

For us Marists, this has already been exemplified by our Founder, St Marcellin. We know his story: a simple country man, who struggled with education, became a Priest and thereafter committed himself wholeheartedly to young people, by establishing a brotherhood to nurture, educate and evangelise them. It’s also been exemplified by those who have followed him, at different times and in various locations around the world.

Last year’s National Assembly, the processes before it and the work of the Council after it, have all been designed to help clarify the question of what God is asking of us and wanting us to be. Careful discernment and dialogue have been required, and I believe have been achieved. I’m most grateful to all those who have contributed to, led or enabled this process of reflection.

The booklet, which I present here, is the result of that process. Since the Association was established in 2015, this is the third such document. If you’re familiar with the preceding versions: *We Marists* (2019) and *As Marists* (2015), then you’ll know that this isn’t a detailed “how to” document. It certainly summarises how the Association sees itself in contemporary Australia. It also offers directions that have been distilled from our recent processes and lists some initiatives that Council will take. However, it’s also a document for Members’ own reflection and prayer, both individually and as local Groups.

If we are going to be as God wants us to be, then it’s the responsibility of every Member to actively work to make these directions a reality. Council, ministries and members need to move forward together. I invite you to join in this undertaking over the next three years.

With every blessing and good wish,

**Brother Peter Carroll FMS**  
Leader, Marist Association of St Marcellin Champagnat







## Our Vision

**We Marists** are a vital faith community, an expression of Church that embraces God's mission with Marian joy, hope, and audacity. Our discipleship of Jesus Christ and the priorities of all of our ministries are inspired by the Gospel passion and compassion which fired Saint Marcellin. We remain attentive to the God of all life and we are committed to nurturing our spirituality through ongoing formation. We draw on both Marist tradition and imagination to be game-changers for young people, particularly those most on the peripheries. We foster connectedness and communion among ourselves as an Association, with the Marist spiritual family around the world, and with the wider Church of which we are part.

**Text:** *'We Marists'*, 2015.



***In 2022 we see ourselves as:***

A spiritual family which advocates for action and change as a Marian expression of hope and joy within the Church. With trust in one another we are still open to further insights and growth in terms of our identity and purpose.







***In pursuit of its vision as a spiritual family committed to evangelisation through education and care of young people, by 2025 the association will be:***

- An expression of welcome, hospitality and synodality, contributing as a respected voice within the Church.
- Led effectively and coresponsibly at the local and national levels.
- Clear about its interdependent relationship with the new Brothers' Star of the Sea Province and the wider international Marist world.
- Locally active, inclusive, and responsive to the imperatives of Marist life and mission at the local level, particularly in the area of formation .
- Sustainable in terms of finance, breadth of membership and leadership succession.

## ***By 2025 the Association will have:***

- Engaged in dialogue with ministries about audacity and visioning as the Australian Church seeks to reimagine itself.
- Implemented strategies and supporting formation programs which clearly respond to its mission and current priorities.
- Clarified the respective roles and responsibilities of the Association Council, the Boards of MSA, AMS, and Marist180, and the Star of the Sea Province.
- Ensured the consolidation of robust governance structures of all its ministries.







## ***Action Headlines***

### *In order to be:*

A model of welcome, hospitality and synodality within the church with strong, local, lay leadership

A respected public voice which influences the thinking, life and care of the Church

### *We will need to:*

- Develop a timeline for the succession of leadership in the Association.
- Consider the nature and function of the evolving roles of Leader and Executive Officer.
- Implement a discrete Association annual calendar of events and an organisation manual.
- Ensure explicit and integrated support for the Association by ministry/school leadership.
  
- Resource a communications strategy with informed and skilled personnel.





## ***Action Headlines (cont.)***

### *In order to be:*

Clear about our interdependent relationship with the Brothers' Province

Sustainable in terms of finance, membership and leadership

Locally active, inclusive, and responsive to membership needs, particularly in the area of formation.

### *We will need to:*

- Develop clear expectations and understanding of collaborative arrangements through a Memorandum of Understanding with the Province.
- Continue dialogue with the Institute in regard to financial sustainability.
- MLF Executive Committee to consistently engage with members in planning, evaluating, and designing formation experiences.







## ***Action Headlines (cont.)***

### *In order to have:*

Ensured the establishment of robust governance structures for all Marist ministries

Clarified the respective roles and relationships of the Association Council, the Boards of MSA, AMS and Marist180, and the Star of the Sea Province

### *We will need to:*

- Review and refine reporting mechanisms and communication between the Association and the various ministries.
- Review the constitutions and governance arrangements for all companies and made necessary changes to reflect the evolving growth of coresponsibility for Marist mission and life through the various ministries.





## ***Action Headlines (cont.)***

### *In order to have:*

Implemented strategies and supporting formation programs which clearly respond to its mission and current priorities

Engaged in dialogue with ministries about audacity and visioning as the Australian Church seeks to reimagine itself

### *We will need to:*

- Continue to resource formation.
- Establish a formation plan for each of the Councils, boards and committees.
  
- Explore opportunities for growth in schools ministries in areas of need consistent with our Marist intuition and tradition.





**Inside Cover**

*The Icon of the Ascension, Michael Galovic 2014*

**Image Sources**

*National Assembly III*, source: Gower Production  
Photo database, champagnat.org



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ASSOCIATION OF  
ST MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT

[www.maristassociation.org.au](http://www.maristassociation.org.au)

The background is an abstract, textured composition of various colors including deep blues, oranges, yellows, and reds. The textures appear to be layered and somewhat chaotic, resembling a collage or a complex painting. The colors are vibrant and saturated, creating a rich, multi-colored field.

# Appendix Two

Growing as Marists



# Christian Discipleship

## GROWING A PROPHETIC CULTURE

### CONSIDER

The story of our spirituality is one of passion and compassion, passion for God and compassion for people (*WFR, n1*).

Our primary Marist Spirituality document, *Water from the Rock (WFR)*, sets the tone from the very beginning of the document. Marist Spirituality is grounded in the practical, the reality of life, the apostolic way.

Marcellin had fallen in love with God, he felt called by Mary. The Fourvière Pledge was a renewed way of being church, in Mary's way, the Marian Church.

Marcellin and the first Marists were unpretentious country lads, living by the work of their hands. Marcellin was deeply aware of the love of Jesus and Mary for others. He dedicated his life in sharing this love. In the encounter of the dying boy (Montagne) we see how disturbed Marcellin was to meet a child facing the end of their life without knowing the love of God. (*WFR, n8*).

Marcellin's apostolic nature sets our example: caring for the poor, practical works, courageous in times of adversity, willing to take action, humble and simple, and trust in God and Mary.

Put simply, our Marist Spirituality is categorised by:

God's presence and love  
Trust in God  
Love of Jesus and His gospel  
In Mary's way  
Family Spirit  
A Spirituality of Simplicity  
(*WFR, n16-41*)

What do these mean to you and how do you see these being lived in your place of ministry?



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### CONTEMPLATE

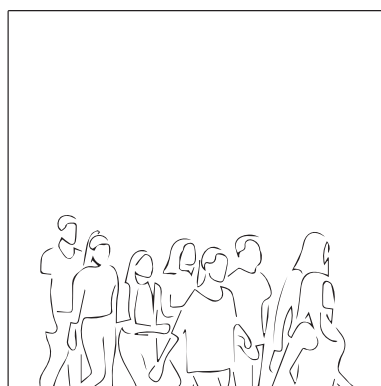
In living our spirituality we find our thirst quenched at the streams of "living water." In turn we become "living water" for others (*WFR, n14*).

Former Superior General, Br Charles Howard, wrote,

**"The ultimate source of our spirituality is God"**

Our spirituality embraces all that we are, all the elements that go to make up our living (joys, sorrows, dreams, struggles, successes, failures). Its formative agents are our parents, family, friends, teachers and a multitude of other influences, including the messiness of life – for example, family responsibilities, conflicting demands on time, the reality of day to day living. (Howard, 2001).

Our spirituality is drawn from those before and those around; we in turn become models for others. Jesus is our ultimate model; which is the essence of discipleship.



# Companioning Marist Life

Supporting the Vitality  
of Local Coordinators