



SUSTAINABILITY OF THE MARIST MISSION

MESSAGE FROM THE MARIST INTERNATIONAL MISSION COMMISSION

The works of the institutes are by nature situated in social and economic systems. A work is therefore sustainable when it maintains a balanced approach to financial matters and makes the most of available resources.

Economy at the Service of the Charism and Mission, Collection Vatican Documents, Librería Editrice Vaticana, 2018, p. 85



Marcellin Champagnat founded the Institute of the Little Brothers of Mary as a practical response to the needs of the people of his time, especially the children and young people. Two hundred years later, this founding intuition continues to find expression today. Whether Brothers or laypeople, we carry the mission forward, knowing ourselves heirs to this charism given by the Spirit to the Church and to society.

The Marist Mission is expressed in various types of educational and/or social structures (formal education structures and social works more ‘non-formal’), with a clear commitment to the lives

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of the children and young people en-

trusted to us. People have always come first, and solidarity is a core element of the Marist charism¹. The emerging needs in our societies urge us, today as before, to manifest God’s mercy in our actions, caring especially for the most vulnerable.

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THE CONCEPT

The idea of sustainability refers to all the different practices that ensure the

¹ The fourth call of the XXII General Chapter – “To journey with children and young people living on the margins of life” – mentions as one of the elements: “be creative in giving resolute responses to their needs”.

vitality and viability of Marist life in the present and in the future². From this perspective, the sustainability of the mission integrates various factors: people in their social and cultural contexts, as well as their relationships, the charismatic dimension, institutional and economic factors, history and traditions, etc.

Practices that form the basis of sustainability promote a better quality of life,³ personal development, satisfaction of needs, improvement of social conditions and care of the environment.⁴



CARING FOR THE PERSON: FORMATION

Formation is central to the sustainability of our mission as educators, strengthening as much Marist as professional skills. This formation con-

² While appreciating that the concept of sustainability can be understood in different manners, we embrace the definition adopted in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development in the Brundtland report, “Our Common Future”. In this document, the expression ‘sustainability’ is associated with society’s capacity to sustain its current needs without compromising the resources and opportunities of future generations. (<https://www.responsabilidadsocial.net/sustentabilidad-que-es-definicion-concepto-principios-y-tipos/>) Another common understanding of sustainability links it closely to human development. Some authors use the terms interchangeably.

³ Cf. Fabián Coelho. <https://www.significados.com/sustentabilidad/>

⁴ Cf. <https://definicion.mx/sustentabilidad/>

tributes greatly to our educational and social works, ensuring they continue to grow and remain relevant to society.

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Following this approach,⁵ the General Administration, the regions and the administrative units develop formation programs for the people who carry out the Marist mission. By so doing, these different levels of governance encourage the implementation of strategies to accompany mission leaders.

Already, at different levels, there are opportunities that contribute to training in skills such as the sharing of experience (best practice), and accompaniment. We find examples of this in the networks being promoted by the General Administration, the Regions, and in many of the interregional projects. Each of these initiatives strengthen the bonds of the global Marist family and lay the foundations for the sustainability of the Marist Mission.

CULTURAL CHANGE: INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP ...

In recent times we have been faced with the difficult and unexpected challenge of the pandemic. This has highlighted a certain fragility in sustaining the mission, as shown in the scarcity of economic resources in some areas of the Institute. We need to act creatively and with flexibility to adapt to increasingly complex social environments.

⁵ In section d) of the principles and suggestions of the XXII General Chapter – “... in our style of governance” – it is stated: “identifying and forming leaders, lay and brothers, at all levels, in order to build up co-responsibility for Marist life and mission”.



In order to address the multiple challenges of the Marist mission, those in leadership and management need to be capable of promoting attitudes of responsibility, transparency and trust.⁶ Cultural change means that the

exercise of leadership is more inclusive, less hierarchical and more communicative. We connect through work networks and integrate technical and professional advice. Each person contributes to the mission, feeling empowered as someone who bears the Marist charism, as a gift of the Spirit to the Church and to the world.

The XXII General Chapter calls us to develop a sense of ourselves as a global family. This has remarkable implications and offers opportunities to work together for the sustainability of Marist life and mission. The strengthening of networks and the consolidation of the regions are key elements in this process.

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⁶The Vatican document “Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission” refers to these three elements. In number 41 it affirms: “Responsibility, transparency and the maintenance of trust are interconnected principles: no responsibility is given without transparency, transparency generates trust, trust verifies both.”



... AND PROFESSIONAL MANAGEMENT

The sustainability of the mission requires efficient management of human and financial resources, based on common policies with clear and coordinated processes and procedures at all levels of the Institute. This is made concrete through planning, effective implementation by management and accountability for results.

Offering pertinent answers to the different social realities requires an evaluation of current works and insertions⁷ taking into account the objectives of the mission and the basic principles⁸ of transparency, communication, teamwork and respect for roles.

ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY OF THE MISSION

The diversity of our mission is expressed in a multitude of ways in most of the administrative units. Our presence, mainly in schools, universities and

⁷ The Strategic Plan of the General Administration for animation, leadership and government outlines an initiative to evaluate our presence and projects in light of the calls of the XXII General Chapter.

⁸ In this respect the Message of the XXII General Chapter suggests: “developing administrative policies on human and financial resources, in keeping with ethical principles, at all levels of the institute in the form of a Vade Mecum or Guide.”

social works, is significant due to the educational quality that we offer. This diversity favours the sustainability of present and future life and mission, to the extent that we act in a coordinated way, as a global family.

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We have received a heritage⁹, fruit of the work of many generations of brothers and lay people, built with hard work and dedication. Any vision for the future of Marist life and mission implies that we manage this inheritance responsibly. This is a priority.

In his circular *Concerning Our Material Goods*, Br Benito Arbués, invited us to feel and be humble administrators, aware that we are not owners but simply administrators of the goods of the Church. As such, we are called to pay attention not only to “safeguard and increase”, rationally and prudently, the patrimony of the Institute but also to “allocate resources” in accordance with the aims of the different projects.¹⁰

The search for other sources of income, strategic alliances with governments, companies or organizations with similar purposes, offers other opportunities to strengthen sustainability. Diversification in financial terms is a concrete way of mitigating risk and following ethical and socially responsible criteria, in accordance with the guidelines of the social doctrine of the Church.¹¹

⁹ The Vatican document “Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission” explains in number 39 that: “the stable patrimony made up of assets, property and furnishings, guarantees the existence of the institute, of the legitimately established provinces, of houses and of its members. Further, it ensures the realisation of the institute’s mission”.

¹⁰ Cf. Benito Arbués (2000), *Concerning Our Material Goods*, Marist Brothers, circulars from superiors general. Volume 30, p. 17

¹¹ By the expression “social doctrine of the Church”, we refer to the thinking that the Church has developed on social, economic or political issues and that become ethical criteria in our everyday personal or institutional practices.

CONCLUSION

The sustainability of our life and mission is a challenge for all Marists of Champagnat. Caring for the person, combined with the efficient management of resources will allow us to continue giving life to Champagnat's dream. Like him, we trust in

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God and in the protection of Mary. While striving to respond to current needs, we hold fast to our vision of the future, aware that if the Lord does not build the house, the builders toil in vain (Psalm 126).

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On behalf of the *International Marist Mission Commission*

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