

What draws you to be part of the Association with other Marists?

Responses to this question offered frequent references to the story of St Marcellin Champagnat, beginning in La Valla, and the charism that emerged from our early communities.

Many respondents referred to family spirit and a sense of coming home – whether in terms of reconnecting with a school experience as student and/or teacher or simply the sense of ‘coming home’. One respondent referred to “a home base”; another wrote, “it’s like connecting with family. Love to be with, gather with, pray with, work alongside...” Another wrote simply, “I know these people.”

Another aspect of the Association that appeals is the practicality and authenticity of the charism encountered. One respondent referred to “a participatory spirituality”; another stated, “It has a daily-ness about it”. There were references to grasping “the story of Marcellin Champagnat and incorporating it *authentically* into our lives” and to the inclusiveness of the charism.

Many saw the Association as a bridge to the church, another layer of church or indeed a parallel dimension. One wrote, “A great opportunity for people in our schools who don’t connect with church through parishes, but can do so through the spirituality of our schools.” Another wrote, “Marists meet you where you are at and are okay with that, without judgement.” One respondent felt that the Association “provides an opportunity to be part of the church through a Marist lens”.

The experience of community was affirmed as being highly valued. From a “common story and mission” arises a natural affinity and desire to move forward together. One referred to “meaningful conversations, meaningful work”; another wrote, “It’s about ‘fellowshipping’ with like-minded people” and another, “The charism provides a connection with others of like mind, spirit and faith.”

A further drawcard of the Association is the opportunity it offers for deeper “spiritual formation that nurtures faith”, for “enrichment”, for “extending the tent”.

Finally, as one respondent observed: “It was the relationships that developed the charism – our relationships are giving new expression to the Marian Church – this draws me in.”

What are you hoping this Assembly process will achieve and what are you bringing to it? Is there something in particular you would like to bring to the dialogue?

Responses to these questions reflect a balance between offering practical, grounded and informed questions and suggestions and invoking the vision, breadth and depth of the Marist way. There are real echoes of both Marcellin the builder and Marcellin the dreamer. Underlining all this is the evocative term “our disruptive edge” which has promises of a tantalising way forward. Respondents used terms such as “crazy ideas and left field notions”, “rebellion” and “comfortable with the uncomfortable”.

There is a clear emphasis on listening in order to foster diversity, share story and gain wisdom.

There is repeated acknowledgement of the increasing demands of society in general, of the changing Marist landscape in terms of the new Star of the Sea Province and of the contemporary church under the leadership of Pope Francis and closer to home, in the time of the Plenary Council.

A particular concern is keeping in mind the needs of those in schools with a Marist charism and those whose Marist connection is independent of engagement in a school. Other issues named include pathways for formation, communication between the two groups, effective leadership and mentoring.

In the wider community there is a desire to support the Marist mission (financially and in other ways), to strengthen the Marist commitment to our Indigenous brothers and sisters, to stewardship and to Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si’*. There is deep cognisance of the needs of the materially and spiritually poor and of those of young people – for whom St Marcellin founded the Institute.

Participants seek to bring to the Assembly their commitment to the ongoing Marist story, their passion, prayer, energy, collective faith, creativity, awareness of the power of community and willingness to embrace new ways.

Shine among them like stars in the sky

Philippians 2:15