

WATER FROM THE ROCK AND THE YEAR OF SPIRITUALITY

On October 15, Sean Sammon sent a letter to all Marist Brothers and our lay partners encouraging us all to participate in the Institute's Year of Spirituality centered around the newly published document on Marist spirituality, *Water from the Rock*. Here are some excerpts from that letter:

Dear Brothers and Marist lay partners,

On Sunday, October 7th, 2007, our Institute set out on a year-long pilgrimage of spirituality. Meant to help each of us deepen our appreciation of Marist Apostolic Spirituality, the next twelve months will be an important time of renewal for all those touched by the charism that came into our Church through Marcellin Champagnat and for our Institute at large.

So many of us long for time enough to cultivate and deepen those aspects of life that are most important, and surely spirituality numbers among them. As a consequence, we promise ourselves that we will pray with some regularity, avail ourselves of a few days retreat each year, and make resolutions about being more available to those persons in need of our respect, talents, and service. Try as we might, however, many of us often miss the mark and fall short of our goal. While not a ready-made solution to our dilemma, the twelve-month pilgrimage we have just begun will hopefully provide us with the means to take yet another step forward.

We begin this Marist Year of Spirituality with several objectives in mind. First and foremost, we are committed to implementing further the first call of our 20th General Chapter: to make Jesus the center and passion of our lives. These challenging words seized the hearts and captured the imagination of those who participated in the Chapter itself and have done the same for so many others since. The year ahead will give you and me a chance to find the most effective ways in which to make the first call of our last Chapter a living reality in the lives of each of us.

Second, the Marist Year of Spirituality is meant to help us understand more fully just what we mean when we say that our spirituality is both Marial and apostolic. With this knowledge in hand we can help others come to appreciate the treasure that is ours. Mary lived and suffered simply like all of us in the dark night of faith. As a daughter of this earth, she had human passions and joys and all the concerns that are ours today. Who, though, is this remarkable woman of faith – the one whom Marcellin called our Good Mother and named our First Superior – for those of us living at the dawn of the third millennium and, more importantly, how is she evident in our spirituality?

So, too, we must deepen our understanding and appreciation of the apostolic nature of that spirituality. Much of the religious practice that marks Church and religious life today finds its source in the monastery. What might a genuine apostolic spirituality look like, had we the courage to live it?

Third, the next twelve months will provide us with time enough to make our own the spirituality that is at the heart of *Water from the Rock*. If that spirituality is to be a living reality in your life and mine, we must study the text carefully, share with others our insights and experiences, and eventually become living examples of what appears in print.

Finally, this time of grace for our Institute should also provide us with an opportunity to set up and put into motion formative processes in the area of spirituality that will continue well beyond the year itself. Systematic study of the newly published *Water from the Rock* is, of course, one step in that direction. But what else do we need to include in our efforts if the year ahead is to be more than a passing moment in

time. Let's take the steps we need to make the Marist Year of Spirituality all that it can be and a time of lasting value to each of us and to our Church at large.

Marist Brothers and lay Marists as well as those who would like to learn more about the underpinnings of our Marist tradition, all are invited to be part of the Year of Spirituality that got underway on October 7th. So, the invitation is broad and heartfelt.



The theme of the next twelve months has taken its cue as well as its title from the recent publication: *Water from the Rock, Springs of Life*. Our spirituality has Jesus as its rock and cornerstone; Marcellin literally hewed out of rock some of the first elements that made up the fabric of our Institute and its mission. In but one example, he transformed the stones he cut in the rock by the Gier into the Hermitage. That much loved structure stands even until today as a reminder of his faith and hard work.

In undertaking this important year we must also revisit those elements from the past that continue to have lasting value today.

We have almost two hundred years of tradition as Marcellin's Little Brothers of Mary and as Champagnat Marist laity. We plan to add to the treasure that is ours and put into place the means that will ensure that it continues to thrive long after we are gone.

The recent Mission Assembly in Mendes, Brazil taught us many lessons, among them this one: the importance of focusing attention for a sustained period of time on just one theme. In the months leading up to that Assembly there were regional gatherings throughout the Institute; in the years to come there will be steps taken to follow up on the experience of Mendes so that the hope it engendered can become a living reality.

Likewise, using the year ahead to our focus our attention on the topic of Marist Apostolic Spirituality reminds us that our ministry is more than work, significantly more than simply having a job. Having such a focus also helps us to understand that it is God who has called us together in community, or to a particular family, or into a relationship with a particular person. The transcendent elements of our life become more apparent to us.