

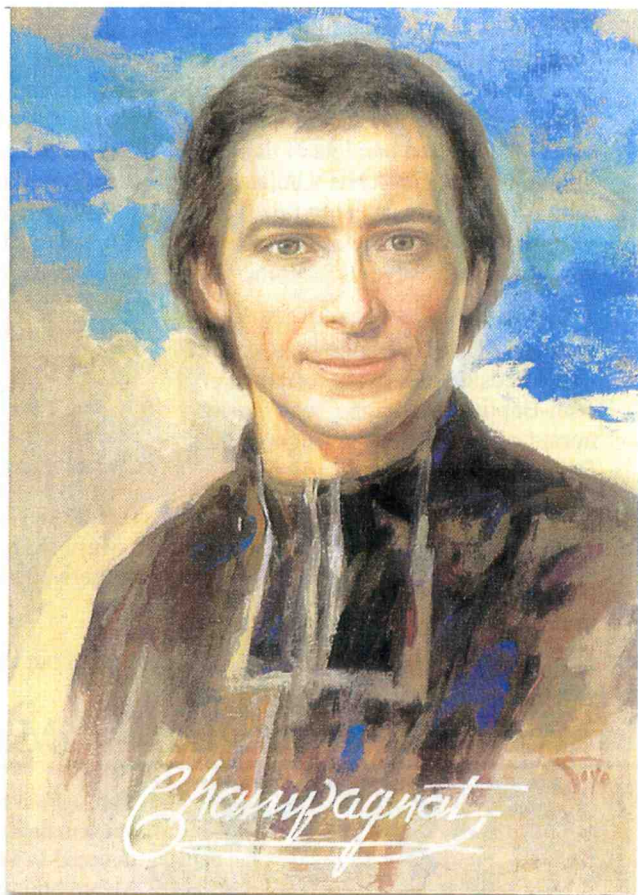
THE LIFE OF FR. CHAMPAGNAT

Marcellin Champagnat was born near Lyons, France on May 20, 1789. He was the second youngest of ten children. During the French Revolution his father held public office in the Canton of Marlihes. Marcellin was born into a family where Christian values were put into daily practice. His aunt, a nun, contributed to his spiritual formation and may have had a profound influence on his vocation to the priesthood and later education.

As a young boy, Marcellin preferred manual work to things academic and so grew up as a peasant, learning to farm and build. Marcellin's life was quite normal. Among his peers he did not stand out as an exceptionally religious person.

It came as a great surprise to his father and brothers when, at the age of fifteen, and hardly able to read, he decided to enter the priesthood. Marcellin had his troubles with school. Not having had any formal education, he was required to finish his primary schooling at home.

The initial years in the seminary were difficult ones for Marcellin, and after the first year he was asked to leave. However, his mother encouraged him to continue and with the help of the parish priest he was readmitted. He was a vigorous, physical person and, as a country boy, he was naturally curious about city life.



Several times he and a few classmates slipped out to a local bar. They were caught once upon their return, and Marcellin was told that such behavior, coupled with his scholastic problems, would lead to prompt dismissal. That one warning sufficed.

By late 1813 Marcellin transferred to the Major Seminary in Lyons. There he joined a group of twelve seminarians who, inspired by Jean-Claude Courveille, promised to found a society to the Blessed Mother and devote themselves to parish mission work. On July 23, 1816 the twelve newly ordained "Marists" went to Fourviere, a fa-

mous local shrine to Our Lady, and formally pledged to found the Society of Mary. They intended it to include the whole world and have priests, Brothers, Sisters and a Third Order of lay people.

Marcellin's dream was to organize a special group of Brothers, whose main work would be the Christian education of youth. He declared several times that it was the difficulties he had in school that caused him to conceive the project of preparing religious teachers for country children.

Choose Life!

FOUNDER OF THE MARIST BROTHERS

St. Marcellin Champagnat



Marcellin Champagnat—A Man of Vision, A Man for All Times

His studies now behind him, Marcellin Champagnat, at the age of 27, arrived as a parish priest to serve the people of LaValla, a small parish consisting of a series of scattered hamlets in the foot hills of Mount Pilat. His whole apostolic life was to be spent in this region of mountains and valleys, but his vision would reach far beyond LaValla.

A few months into his ministry, on October 28, 1816, Marcellin was called to the bedside of a dying teenager, Jean-Baptiste Montagne, who was ignorant of the most basic truths of the faith. He instructed him as best he could, and the youth died a few hours later. Now he was more determined than ever to found a group of teaching brothers committed to religious instruction.

Returning from the Montagne home,

Champagnat immediately approached a young man of LaValla, Jean-Marie Granjon, and asked him if wanted to become a teacher. Granjon, who was 22 years old, said yes and Marcellin borrowed money to buy a house in LaValla. He repaired it, cleaned it, built beds and a dining table. A second young man, Jean-Baptiste Audras, who was 14 years old, joined Granjon and the three of them moved into the house on January 2, 1817. This date is regarded to be the foundation day of the Marist Brothers. They worked together, prayed together, visited the sick and the elderly, made nails to earn some money and trained to be teachers. In May, 1818, in LaValla, the first six Brothers opened their first school.

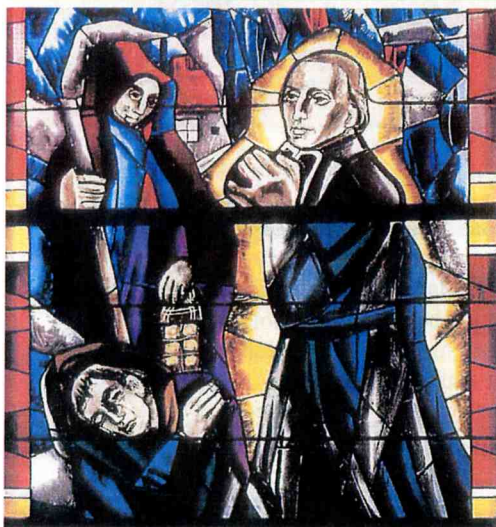
Throughout the next few years, many

others joined Marcellin's band of Brothers. At the time of his death, at age 51, there were 280 Marist Brothers working in 48 schools.

Marcellin Champagnat's dream lives on today in the lives of his Brothers. Almost 5000 Marist Brothers in 76 countries strive to continue Marcellin Champagnat's legacy of strong family spirit in community and ministry, hard manual work, active concern for the marginalized and most neglected, deep faith in God, and a filial devotion to Mary. Along with tens of thousands of others who share in the Marist spirit, the Marist Brothers work to make Jesus Christ known and loved as they minister in schools, parishes, and other educational and youth facilities.

Light the Fire Within!

Marcellin Champagnat—A Man of Faith, A Man Devoted to Mary



Throughout his life, Marcellin Champagnat remained faithful to God and a man devoted to Mary. In times of trouble, Marcellin turned to his "Ordinary Resource" for strength and consolation.

One day in February, 1823 Marcellin set out on foot with Bro. Stanislaus to see a sick Brother 20 kms away. On the return journey they were caught in a terrible snowstorm and lost their way. After several hours of wandering, Marcellin turned to his "Good Mother;" he and Stanislaus knelt in the snow and recited the *Memorare*, a traditional prayer to Mary. Upon concluding, they saw a farmer's lantern and were able to

reach the farm of Mr. Donnet. Donnet could not explain why he had gone from his house to the stable by the outside instead of by an inner door, which he normally used.

Shortly after Christmas in 1825, Marcellin's health began to fail and, as usual, he turned to Mary and he regained sufficient health to continue directing the Brothers.

When the Revolution of 1830 broke out, and soldiers invaded the Brothers' home, the Hermitage, Champagnat again turned to the Virgin Mary and the community decided to start each day with the *Salve Regina* ("Hail Holy Queen"), a practice retained by the Brothers to this day.

Marcellin Champagnat—Saint and Role Model for All Today

Marcellin was a warm, sympathetic person who was well-skilled in human relations and was a wise counselor.

Although he was not a theologian, spiritual writer, or educational innovator he was an originator. When he was faced with adversity, his responses were often contrary to accepted procedures; he had the independence to be different!

Marcellin was a leader in every sense of the

word. There was no task too small nor too great for him to tackle, especially when the task was to serve his Brothers and the people to whom he ministered.

Marcellin Champagnat was an ordinary man who did extraordinary things because he did the ordinary things with an extraordinary amount of love.

This "ordinary man" was proclaimed a saint of the church on April 18, 1999.



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ST. MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT