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The Holy Father Francis' Message to the Superior General of the Marist Brothers on the occasion of the bicentenary of the foundation of the Congregation

The following is the Message sent by the Holy Father Francis to the Superior General of the Marist Brothers, Emili Turú Rofes, on the occasion of the bicentenary of the foundation of the Congregation:

Holy Father's Message

To Brother Emili Turú Rofes

Superior General of the Marist Brothers

Dear brother,

I am pleased to greet you, and through you, the whole Marist family, on the occasion of the bicentenary of the foundation of your Congregation, during which you will hold the 22nd General Chapter, to take place in Colombia. This event has been prepared with the motto “a new beginning”, which summarizes a whole program of renewal, intending to look with gratitude to the past, to discern the present, and to open with hope to the future.

Gratitude is the first feeling that comes from the heart. This attitude of recognition is needed to value the great works that God has done through you. Likewise, giving thanks makes us good; it helps us to recognize that we are small in the eyes of the Lord, and heirs to a tradition that has been given to us without us having done anything on our part. You belong to a large rich family of witnesses who have known how to donate their lives for the love of God and neighbour in that spirit of brotherhood that characterizes the Congregation and which makes the other “brother dear to me” (Phil. 16). These two centuries of existence have been transformed into a great history of efforts in favour of children and young people, who have been welcomed the length and breadth of the five continents and trained to be good citizens and, above all, Good Christians. These works of good are an

expression of the goodness and mercy of God who, despite our limitations and torpor, never forgets His children.

However it is not enough to contemplate the past; it is also necessary to carry out a discernment of the present moment. It is right for you to examine yourselves and it is good to do so in the light of the Spirit. To discern is to recognize with objectivity and charity the present state, comparing it with the foundational spirit. St. Marcellin Champagnat was an innovator for his time in the field of education and training. He himself experienced the need for love in order to bring out the potentialities that each child has hidden within him. His holy Founder said: "Education is for the child what the crop is for the countryside. No matter how good it may be, if one does not till the land, it produces nothing but brambles and weeds". The task of the educator is one of constant commitment and has a sacrificial burden; however, education is a thing of the heart, and this makes it different and sublime. Being called to cultivate requires you first of all to cultivate yourselves. The religious-educator has to take care of his inner field, his human and spiritual reserves, in order to be able to go out to plant and care for the land entrusted to him. You must be aware that the ground you work and shape is "sacred", seeing in it the love and imprint of God. With this dedication and effort, faithful to the mission received, you will contribute to the work of God, who calls you to be simple instruments in his hands.

Finally, I encourage you to open yourself with hope to the future, walking with renewed spirit; it is not a different route, but is quickened in the Spirit. Today's society needs people who are steadfast in their principles, who can build a better world for all and give testimony of what they believe. The motto of your religious institute is already a project of life: "All to Jesus for Mary, all to Mary for Jesus". It means trusting Mary and being guided by her in her humility and service, in her promptness and silent surrender; these are attitudes that the good religious and educator must convey by example. Young people will recognize in their way of being and acting that they have something extraordinary, and will understand that it is worthwhile not only to learn these values, but above all to internalize and imitate them. Mary will accompany you in this purpose and, along with it, will confirm your vocation, contributing to the creation of a new humanity, where the vulnerable and discarded are valued and loved. This future that you desire and dream of is not an illusion, but is constructed starting from today, by saying "yes" to the will of God in the certainty that He, as a good Father, will not delude our hope.

I thank the Lord and Mary, our Good Mother - as Saint Marcellin liked to call her – for the presence of your vocation and service in the Church, and I ask for you the gift of the Holy Spirit so that, moved by Him, you bring God's closeness and tenderness to children and young people, and to all those in need.
