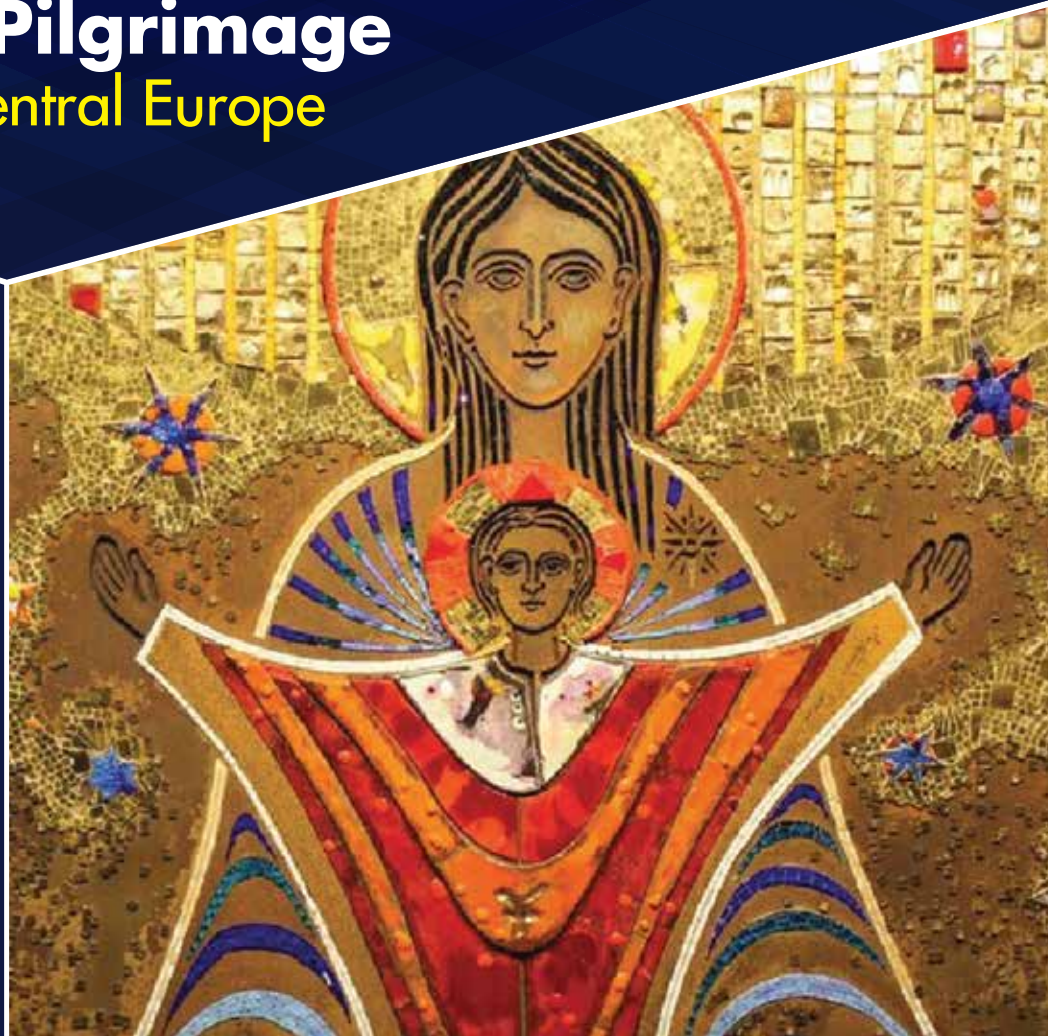


Marist Pilgrimage

West Central Europe

Day 1
Notre Dame de
L'Hermitage



Four sites in particular, referred to as "**Marist Places**" are important to those of us who call ourselves Marist.

- 1) Le Rosey
- 2) La Valla-en-Gier
- 3) Les Maisonnettes
- 4) L'Hermitage





Notre Dame de L'Hermitage

Of all four Marist places, however, the Hermitage is at the heart of our story. Marcellin spent the greater part of his life here. Within the walls of the house and the surrounding property, the first generations of brothers gave shape and character of the Marist life and mission. The impressive building left to us as a legacy by the founder and his early recruits continues to inspire us today because of the project's audacity and the circumstances surrounding its realization. At the Hermitage we find the founder's tomb and reliquary as well as the graves of brothers whose names have become a familiar reference for every generation of Marist brothers and lay partners that have followed.



1824 SPACE CHAMPAGNAT The Exposition Hall



The place to meet Marcellin Champagnat and Brother Francois

This museum setting brings together Marcellin Champagnat (1789-1840), founder of the Marist Brothers, and Brother Francois, Gabriel Rivat (1808-1881), his first successor, who was determined to become “the living image of Marcellin”.

The two portraits, “superimposed” in a transparent way, suggest Marcellin’s handing on his charism to Brother Francois. As a sign of their veneration the generations of Brothers who followed them at the Hermitage have preserved each one with the greatest of care. Over and above their sentimental value, those objects bear witness in a flesh-and-blood way to these men of God in their given time and place.

The photocopies of documents presented here offer interesting insights into their personalities and that of de Jean-Baptiste Champagnat, Marcellin’s father.

Showcase 1, 2 and 4 refer to Marcellin Champagnat.

Showcase 3, to Brother Francois.

Showcase 5, to Father Champagnat and Brother Francois.



Showcase 1

Marcellin Champagant and his everyday life

- Ring for a table napkin, a gift to Father Champagant from one of his little nieces. Embroidered with pearls, the words "Present for M. Champagant".
- Warming pan, a basin for holding hot coals to warm up the bed before going to sleep.

Showcase 2

Marcellin Champagnat: the work he did and his relationship with his brothers.

- **Letter of Obdience** in use among the Brothers in 1839
This was the kind of letter used when specifying a Brother's assignment to a new community. Note the inscription at the top of the page, "Mary was conceived without sin", calling to mind her relationship to the infant Jesus and linking the images of her Assumption and Divine Maternity to that of her "Immaculate Conception". This was well before that dogma was proclaimed in 1854 and Mary's apparitions at Lourdes in 1858.





Brother Francois (Gabriel Rivat):

Articles from his everyday life, flasks and various instruments he used when caring for the brothers.

- **Mould used for making large hosts**

One reads that out of respect for Our Lord, Brother Stanislaus, the sacristan, wore a surplice whenever he made a new supply of hosts.

- **An iron base with forged nails**

A reminder of one of the ways the first Brothers used to earn a living, especially during the time they were at La Valla en Gier. After moving to the Hermitage, they concentrated on weaving fabrics and bed linen.

- **Brother Hippolyte's Jug**

This has a story all of its own. Brother Hippolyte, was for 43 years a tailor at the Hermitage. He had a room on the top floor of the house. What's more he was a cripple.

- **Wills written by Marcellin Champagnat**

The same sheet includes two testaments (on several occasions Marcellin made out wills to bequeath the possessions of the Congregation). The first one, from 1826, on official stationery, was voided; a second one, dated June 30, 1833, named Gabriel Rivat and Jean Deville, both of them Marist Brothers, as overall heirs.

- **His journal entry from January 22, 1881, the day he died.**

- *A small holy card with the inscription: "Gabriel Rivat made his First Communion at the parish church in La Valla, April 19, 1818."*

Showcase 4

Marcellin Champagnat, priest.

- **A celebret** was an official document from the Bishop authorizing a priest to exercise his ministry within his Dioceses in a customary and ongoing way or temporarily if he were only staying for a while.

This celebret, dated August 16, 1816, was issued in the name of Cardinal Fesch, the uncle of Napoleon Bonaparte, but signed by the Vicar General of the Diocese, Courbon, as Cardinal Fesch had been exiled to Rome.

- A celebret signed by the Bishop of Autun in 1840, on the occasion of Father Champagnat's trip to Vauban, at Saône and Loire, to establish a novitiate in that small town.

Showcase 5

Photocopy of documents relating to Marcellin Champagnat and Brother Francois.

Handwriting of Marcellin's father, Jean Baptiste Champagnat

Excerpt from the minutes of the town council in Marles, where Mr. Champagnat was in charge of the administration during the Revolution. Few people in his day had such good penmanship. The flourishes accompanying his signature indicate he was specially trained in this art, perhaps by a master calligrapher.

Excerpt from the Registry for Baptisms in Marlhes.

A record of the Baptism of Marcellin-Joseph-Benoît Champagnat.

Domestic Passport

Provides a number of interesting details about Marcellin's physical appearance.

Father Champagnat's Spiritual Testament

The Office and Room of Marcellin Champagnat

This is the room where Marcellin Champagnat lived for 15 years (1825 – 1840) and where, surrounded by his Brothers, he died on June 6th, 1840.

This is where he prayed, rested, held personal interviews with his brothers and corresponded with them.

Here is the place to have a personal encounter with Marcellin. Here everything speaks of his presence.

In his office: the armchair Marcellin used to hear his Brothers' Confessions; a table and a small shelf for his books.



In his room: the bed Marcellin used during his illness and in which he died; his prie-Dieu below a crucifix; his armchair.

The plainness evident in these two rooms (their walls, ceiling, and especially the flooring that existed in 1825, restored to its original condition) brings to mind the simplicity of Marcellin's life. Outside, the earthen colours of the land and rocks sing out how deep were the roots of Marcellin's attachment to this secluded valley of the Hermitage.

This is a space that invites us to be at peace and contemplate encountering Marcellin Champagnat in all his humanness and nearness to us;

A space where he conversed face to face with his Brothers...

And today converses with those who come to visit him.



Portrait of Marcellin Champagnat

Most likely this is the original sketch that the artist Ravery made on Saturday, June 6, 1840 in order to create a portrait. He kept it in his art studio and worked from it to paint the official portrait of Father Champagnat that is now in Rome, and also the one at St Genis-Lavak commissioned by Brother Benoît Deville. The painter's family probably gave it to the Brothers at the Hermitage when the artist's studio was closed.

It's the portrait of a man who, out of love, surrendered his life to the point of exhaustion at the age of 51. In a November 20, 1840 letter to the Brothers in Oceania, Brother Francois would write, "His final illness wore him down and took so much out of him that he became nothing more than skin and bones".

Here are a few of Marcellin's sayings that his Marists treasure in their hearts:

"If you want to teach young people, first you have to love them all – love them all equally"

"When you live in the favour of God and rely on him alone, the sky's the limit."

"Without Mary we are of no account; with Mary, we have everything, because she is always holding her adorable son in her arms and her heart."

"I cannot meet a child without longing to tell him how much God loves him."

"You can only help others when you offer up your life for them."

Flow Gentle River (Fr. Chris Skinner MS)

Flow Gentle River

Flow gentle river
Flow from the rock
Down from La Valla
Gently flow

God of creation
Source of new life
With our Good Mother
We give thanks

Speak loving Father
We long to hear your voice
Speak in the silence of our hearts



God of creation
Source of new life
With our Good Mother
We give thanks

Instrumental (verse and chorus)

Flow gentle Gier
Flow from the rock
Down from La Valla
Gently flow
God of creation
Source of new life
With our Good Mother
We give thanks

Excerpt from Fr. Chris Skinner M.S

The river Gier and the rock face from which the main building was hewn are dominant features of the geography at the Hermitage, near St Chamond and have huge symbolic significance for the Marist Brothers.

As a Marist Family on Renewal in 2010, we had the privilege of staying at the Hermitage for 12 days and visiting the significant sites connected with St Marcellin Champagnat, the Marist project and the early brothers. I was particularly moved by the simplicity of the first school at La Valla. This song gives thanks for all that has been and is still to come.



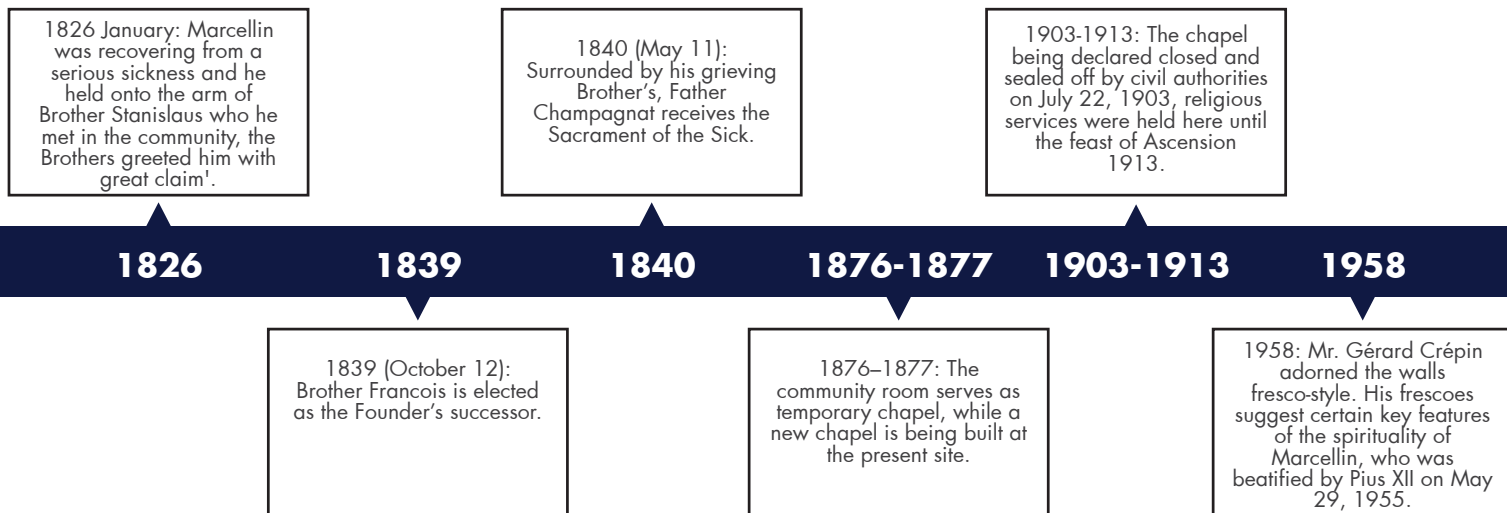
Community Room, also called 'Frescoes Room'



The Community room has been in the same place since construction (1824-1825). Here Fr. Champagnat met his Brothers each day to pray with them and to form them in Marist ways.

Among the events that occurred in the room, one may be singled out:

Put in timeline format



The Frescos Room

This was the prayer room at the time of the brothers since 1824. It was also used by Fr. Champagnat to give his talks and directives to the brothers, especially on Sundays and feast days. Here he received, the 11th of May 1840 his last sacraments. When Fr. Champagnat was canonized in 1955 the brothers wanted to keep, in pictures, the main characteristics of his thought.

Lets have a look at the frescoes, one by one.



1. The one in the middle: The Calvary. “St John is the first Marist”, Fr. Champagnat used to say thinking of the scene at the Calvary: “Here is your son, here is your mother. And the disciple took her to his home”. It is possible to distinguish Mary and Jesus on the cross. John is on the other side represented by an eagle. The crossing lines form the letter “M”, Mary, is on the body of Jesus. We cannot detach Jesus from Mary.



▶ **2. The Wedding at Cana.** Mary says to the servants: “Do whatever he tells you”. The jar, which is “standing”, contains water. The one lying down is pouring wine.



▶ **3. The open hands.** Champagnat and his brothers consecrate themselves to God: “Here I am, O Lord, to do your will”. We can see that from the offering hands an ear of wheat comes up and a wide leaf spreads out, meaning the development of our spiritual life.



- **4. The lamb carrying the cross.** This is the lamb that enters into our darkness to bring light to our life. When Fr. Champagnat raised the host before the communion: "This is the lamb of God", they seemed to see the very same Jesus.

5. The Annunciation. We can see the head of the Angel Gabriel, bottom left, who comes to Mary. There are two lines to follow: the words of Mary, "I am the servant of the Lord" and the arms that open to heaven: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord". ►



6. The three places. The first one is Bethlehem: at the bottom the child in the crib; then the cross, the Calvary is clearly seen; and finally the altar: a priest seen from the back raising the chalice. These three "first places" are surrounded by a red circle, the symbol of perfect love. ►



7. The mystery of Mary: "We have everything in Mary and we have nothing without her. She is the resource of the house. She always has her loving child either in her hands or in her heart". (From a letter by Champagnat). The artist has placed Mary on top of a church: Mary, Mother of the Church, mystery for those coming from the right: shepherds?, women?, humble people?; and from the left: magi?, men?, intellectuals?. Yes, feminine mystery that speaks of God as Father and Mother. ▼



8.The Church. At the top, the mystery of the Trinity in three triangles. At the bottom, to the left, the whirlwind is the human thinking; the prayer of man that tries to reach the mystery by his own effort. The solution is to accept the mediation of the Church; we can see the symbol of a church, to the right. This fresco represents the teachings of Fr. Champagnat: fidelity to the Pope, the bishops and good understanding with the priests. ►



► **9. The grain sown in the field:** "If the seed does not die, it remains useless, but if it dies, it will bear fruit". In the middle we have the seed that has become a big host, on top of which we have the chalice. And the host is also on the cross. Fr. Champagnat, said, before his death: "This will improve". When he died there were 280 brothers and 20 years later more than 2000.



► **10. The Marist tree whose roots are underground:** The beginnings were not easy at all. Champagnat, a builder, is considered a fool, but soon afterwards the tree grows to the light. We do not know where it will reach and for how long.

11. Fishes. It is the symbol that identified the Christian community during the persecutions. The word fish, in Greek "ichtus" refers to the name of Christ: Iesu-Christu-Theou-los-Soter, that is, Jesus, Christ, from God, Son, Saviour. Tertulian said: "Jesus is the big fish and we are the small fish born out of the water of Baptism". We are together in the same net with Jesus and Marcellin Champagnat. ►





- ▶ **12. Pentecost.** A big flame divides itself into another 7 smaller ones. Now the universe is in light. The Spirit blows over the apostles and their successors and the flames reach everywhere.

The chapel – Notre Dame De L’Hermitage

This chapel has known an important renovation in 1989, and it was not the first one. Its construction started in 1836. It probably kept the remains of Fr. Chanel, the Marist Father who was in the first group of missionaries to Oceania. The building was finished by 1837 and it was quite different

than it is now. The original construction had its presbytery farther behind. On the opposite side the chapel ended where the side door is now.



In 1875, the roof was threatening to collapse so the first repairs took place. The walls were not demolished but the height was increased. At the same time, another rock was removed to allow another 15 meters along the side door. The blessing of the bigger and longer chapel took place on the 15th of August 1877.





In the ground around the house and to the cemetery

Depending on the seasons, the river Gier can bring a lot of water or remain almost dry for some time. In any case the river has been both a dangerous and useful neighbor. Four important floods are recorded in 1840, 1847, 1872 and 1900. One of the first things the brothers did, was to build a wall to control the water and direct the river. They had then, some ground for a small garden.

Following the path, to the left of the garden, we go towards the cemetery. After the first 100 meters or so we find a plaque that shows the place where the "chapel of the forest" was. Here Fr. Champagnat celebrated the mass for the brothers when the building of L'Hermitage was in progress.

At night, the Brothers had to go to sleep at Mr Patouillards proportion on the other side of the river. Fr. Champagnat had his bed in a poor shelter to protect himself from the cold and the rain.

By the cemetery door there is another plaque, marble and bronze, which mention the different changes that have affected the graveyard. Although the remains of Fr. Champagnat and Fr. Francois were taken to the chapel, we can still see the tombs of three of the first and most significant brothers: Fr. Louis, Fr. Lorenz and Stanislas, to the right of the big cross as you look at it.

There is also a small canal that was built to take the water to a turbine that provided electricity to the houses since 1891, that is, 30 or 40 years earlier than the rest of the house in the region. Now it is used to water the region.

To the poplars – The forest that is next to the cemetery has a good amount of old oak trees. The altar was placed recently, in 1989. However the big metal cross along the poplar promenade was moved. At the time of Fr. Champagnat, 1838, it was further down and a bronze mark shows the exact place.

Originally Fr. Champagnat designed this area as a playground. It is not a big place because we have the big rock by the house at one end of it. In 1869 Fr. Apolainair decided to open a path to reach the other side of the property. Many postulants, novices and brothers had to work hard there. From that side it is possible to have a good view of the two dams up the river, Soulages and La Valla.



Fr. Francois's Garden – Fr. Francois prepared a small garden where he liked to grow the plants and flowers he would use for his medicines. Big cedar trees grow now to provide shade. This is also a good place to scan the whole property:

- At the bottom we can see the terrace of the main house and from there we have a good view of the river Gier, the statue of the Virgin, and the football field.
- To the right hand side of the building there is also another terrace and a big, tall wall. The poultry are there now, but before it was another playground.
- There is still a third terrace called after Br. Luis Gonzaga. All these terraces indicate that there was a great need of space for sports, so it has to be taken from the mountain, leveling and flattening it.

