

# Being Marist

WEST CENTRAL EUROPE



## Dear Marist Friends,

**They say that in autumn the leaves teach us about letting go, about growth and change. I have always loved this notion and it resonates with me particularly in this year.**

Looking back on the last few months within the province we can see so much life, energy, colour and growth in our activities. Just as nature allows for growth in spring and summer, in autumn it moves into change and rebirth. This is autumn is our season as a province to be reborn.

Soon we will cease to be known as a province of West Central Europe and instead will become a district of the province of Hermitage. Just like the leaves, we will soon become something new by ceasing to be something old. This edition gives us an opportunity to appreciate and give thanks for the Marist

mission we have in the province. A new time of growth begins for us and although our roots as five countries remain the same, something new will grow and blossom for us as we move into the next season as a district.

I hope you enjoy our snippet this month of Marist mission in the province, from our exciting Province Gathering which was able to take place in Guardamar once again, to Marist Week in Ireland, cmi theme week in Germany, and our recent Marist leadership Gathering in Hermitage, with lots more in-between.

There is a beautiful vivacious energy evident in the Marist mission in our province and I for one look forward to seeing that grow in new ways as we take a new road in our journey.



**Aisling Demaison**  
Director of Marist  
Education

## The Road Not Taken

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

*Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,*

*And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.*

ROBERT FROST



## Province Gathering 2022 in Guardamar

**The June 2022 trip to Guardamar in Spain was a gathering of Marist teachers and Brothers with a spiritual and retreat dimension, and with its beautiful surroundings Guardamar certainly provided welcome ground for this connection. The theme of our gathering was Accompaniment, guided by the very inspiring Brother Darren Burge and Paul Cummings from the Kinharvie Institute.**

As teachers, we are trained to offer guided learning intentions, constructive and focused feedback and critical comment. So, to suspend that was a challenge and a shift in our thinking. On the programme we focused on taking the listening role, active and privileged listening explored through analysis of body language, facial expression and guided responses.

When looking at the metaphors for Accompaniment, Brother Darren outlined the idea of the Piano player and the singer, a metaphor that particularly struck me. The piano player accompanies the singer, gives them the note and lets them take over. Brother Roberto furthered this metaphor by highlighting to us that in order to see the place of God in all of this we must acknowledge the presence of the composer. The composer writes the lyrics and the music. In such an eloquent way, he opened my eyes to the place of God in our role as accompaniers. Accompaniment is sitting with the person in the dark, not turning on the light. For me, I am aware that we accompany others regularly in our lives but the programme offered me many tools on how to do this in a more meaningful way. Much of this I can use in my role as a

teacher in Marist College; to listen more attentively, to suspend judgement and to not interrupt. Of course, we try to do this but now I am more conscious of it. Brother Darren brought my focus to the fact that we should not interrupt, as often what someone is about to say could be the most important thing you have heard all day.

Meeting others and getting the opportunity to join with fellow Marists really brings to life that we are part of a big picture and we are connected to so many throughout the world by the Marist values, giving meaning to all that we do in day to day school life. Witnessing the passion for the future of Marist schools is inspiring and I am very grateful to have been part of this.

**Ciara McManus – Marist College  
Athlone Ireland**

# Tastes like more

The intensive 3-day program about accompaniment in Guardamar was for me personally both a celebration of recognition and a great way to meet new people, traditions and methods.

## Accompaniment

It was lovely to see people from different countries, projects and occupations experiment with accompaniment for the first time in their life. For me the concept wasn't new because more than a decade ago I was a participant of Leerhuis Westerhelling in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. It was the silence, coaching and professional accompaniment offered by that Marist project that made me recognize and tear down the walls around my heart and get the help I so desperately needed. Since I benefited so much from accompaniment, it felt like a blessing to finally learn more about it in Guardamar. How it works, why it is such a powerful form of communication and what you need to do – and even more important: shouldn't do - to create the space, the atmosphere for this special kind of deep contact to ignite.

## Community

I had always known that Leerhuis Westerhelling was a Marist project. But sporadically meeting some international Marist guests in Nijmegen pales in comparison to what I felt in Guardamar for the first time: really being part of the Marist community. Sharing a way of life, all of us working together to better the life of young people while also enjoying each others company with great food and laughter. For me, the Marist Gathering 2022 in Guardamar tasted like more, both literally and figuratively. Hopefully I'll be invited again, so I can bring the cheese to accompany the slicer.



## Invitation

As I witnessed the divine spark of accompaniment ignited in Guardamar in so many of us, I hope we will all be able to take it home to our projects and private life. But to be honest: I needed quite a few visits to Leerhuis Westerhelling before I fully recognized and could embrace the power of silence and accompaniment. Guardamar 2022 was a unique experience that I believe none of us will ever forget. But for us to be truly be empowered to accompany, I think we all need a quiet place to recharge from time to time. Since I've evolved from a participant to a board member, I would like to officially invite all of you to Nijmegen to enjoy our house of silence at Leerhuis Westerhelling. We can offer you a personal silent retreat and a venue for an awayday with a small group. Perhaps for a brainstorm about how to incorporate accompaniment in your project as well?



## Marist Gathering June 2022

I can clearly remember the moment when my principal of the Marist school in Recklinghausen, Germany, Mr Schulze Beiering, asked me to take part at the Marist Gathering in Guardamar 2022. I felt surprised and nervous because I did not really know what to expect. I have never been to a Marist Gathering before and talking English all the time... PUH!! How am I supposed to do that?

But right at the beginning I felt the spirit of the «Marist Team». Although we all were from different schools / institutions, we tried to communicate, listened to each other and were not afraid to share private stuff.

Especially working in our home group (remember «The Ugly House» ;) ) It was an amazing experience, I felt acknowledged, appreciated, understood and respected for who I was - due to that I felt no judgement from the people listening and that was an impressive experience.

There were also inputs from Darren Burge who travelled all the way from Australia to lead our event - although we listened for plenty of time it never felt boring, time flew because of the way he talked and shared his knowledge! He helped me have inner dialogues and feel the sensations within my body.

All in all this Marist Gathering helped me to recreate my being of a teacher and now I know what it really feels to say «I am a member of the Marist Family».

**Kirsten Haelissch - Maristen  
Recklinghausen Germany**

# Marist Gathering Guardamar 2022

**For the past two years worldwide, we have lived in a period of isolation and disconnect due to the restrictions placed on communities to limit the spread of Covid-19, and the devastating effect it was having globally. This year's Marist Province Gathering in Guardamar was the first gathering of teachers and representatives of our Marist community since the start of the pandemic. For myself, the significance of this was heightened by the fact that this would be my first time attending a Marist gathering despite having been a teacher in a Marist school for the past 12 years.**

Teaching in a Marist school is an experience which I have found both fulfilling and purposeful, as I strive to develop Marist values within young people. The values of family spirit and presence are two in particular that I have tried to exemplify through my words and actions, so that my pupils have a clear understanding of their responsibilities as members of our Marist school community.

The weekend of the 17 June 2022 gave me insight into how impactful I as an individual, and educator, could truly be through the act of accompaniment.

«Accompaniment», the focus of the Gathering, was new concept to me. However, I soon began to understand the rare opportunity that I had to develop my ability to be present for others in a meaningful way. Not with the intention of solving problems, but as a supportive presence, truly listening, being intuitive to the needs of another. The exercises the group participated in gave me the chance to work on the skills of accompaniment and develop an understanding that when we are more observant of others, we are better able to be present for them because we are more aware of when our presence is required, and the way in which it is required. I also found there to be an added secondary benefit in that these exercises also served as a platform which allowed us to connect with each other on a deeper level despite only having just met. I was humbled by the vulnerability that was exposed to me by





my fellow participants and encouraged to reflect and share the heart of who I am and the things I value most. I am most grateful to Darren Burge for facilitating this experience where despite language, cultural, and experiential differences, there was an innate sense of unity and purpose over the course of the weekend. While it was an intensive experience developing the skills of accompaniment, in the truest sense of family spirit, each day also provided an amazing opportunity to meet and grow with others involved in education in Marist schools, reinforcing my connection to a wider Marist community. I look forward to and am eager to find ways to work with those individuals I was blessed to meet.

The Marist Province Gathering in Guardamar gave me the opportunity to reflect on the link between my responsibility as educators, the way in which I live the Marist values, and how I exemplify my faith and spirituality. I

am thankful to all those involved in the organisation, delivery, and participation of the event, it was truly spiritual. I have come away with renewed vigour to aid in the spiritual growth of young people and find innovative ways to nurture capacity in them.

**Astra Belille-Sharp – St Josephs College Dumfries Scotland**



# Pilgrimage 2022 from Le Puy to Hermitage

This year again, a small group of Marist Youth from Mindelheim travelled to Notre Dame de l'Hermitage. This time, however, it was not quite so comfortable and easy. Following in the footsteps of the «Little Brothers of Mary», we packed our rucksacks, put on walking shoes and set off on foot. Five days of pilgrimage were planned: from Le Puy to St Julien Chapeuil, the next stage from St Julien Chapeuil to St Jeures, the following day from St Jeures to Montfaucon, then from Montfaucon to Marlihes and finally the last stage on the Sentier Champagnat from Marlihes to Notre Dame de l'Hermitage.

In a short interview, three of the young participants tell us how they fared on the journey.

**Pilgrimage, what is that anyway? To set out on such a long journey on foot, even though it would be much quicker by car.**

The first thing that came to mind when I heard the term «pilgrimage» was Hape Kerkeleing's book «Bin dann mal weg». But what does pilgrimage mean to me? I hoped to be able to take time to reflect while on pilgrimage. To be able to concentrate on a specific thought in peace and quiet. Through the distance and the walking, I might be able to do that better than in everyday life. But I also counted spirituality and coming closer to faith among my expectations.

**How did you fare on the way? What was your highlight?**

I found the walking itself less strenuous. Because you were always talking to others, the time sometimes went by much too quickly. But the moments of silence were also very nice. When you could walk at your own rhythm and pace, but at the same time knew that you would meet the others again after a few kilometres. The most beautiful experience for me was the hospitality of the hostel owners. They were all so interested in what we were doing and gave us a very warm welcome.

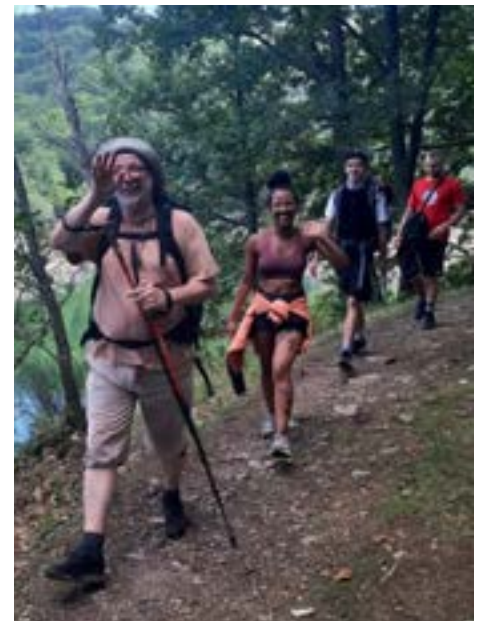


**In what ways was the pilgrimage a new spiritual experience for you?**

On each day of the pilgrimage there was a new Bible passage that accompanied us throughout the day. I have never before dealt so specifically with a passage from the Bible. I learnt that everyone interprets the passage differently and was able to understand what was meant much better. By reading several times, I was able to understand each passage in such a way that I could also believe it, and this brought me much closer to my faith.

**Mary was at the centre of the various impulses. How did you feel about that?**

Mary is a figure that I often read over in the Bible as a matter of course. It was all the more impressive to be able to consciously read and reflect on the small as well as the very big deeds and words of this woman and thus take them as a model for my own life as a Christian. Her strength and humility were a



great inspiration for my own life.

**What were your feelings on arrival?**

This pilgrimage was not the first time I had heard about Marcellin, his life and his work. It was all the more exciting to visit all the places along the way that had played a big part in his own journey. When we arrived in l'Hermitage, I was able to consciously round off and reflect on these experiences. It was interesting to get closer to Mary and the question of what it means to be a Christian in her way.

**What do you take away from the journey?**

That the faith of each individual can be very different and if you are in the right community and can talk about it, everyone learns something. No matter if you share the views or not, it is nice to discuss and deal with such a personal topic as faith. In the end, it always makes us look at our own actions and sometimes that's not a bad thing.



Since last year, a group of volunteers have come together and founded a group - the Marist Youth - which has set itself the goal of offering regular activities, especially for children from socially disadvantaged families, in order to bring them joy.

The «organiser» is the Marist Youth House. In the course of this, there has already been a pre-Christmas afternoon for pupils from the special school in Mindelheim, a scavenger hunt and bi-weekly games and

handicrafts programme for children from the refugee hostel in Mindelheim.

About a fortnight ago, the children were guests at the youth centre for the first time as part of this programme. Here we spent a sports afternoon with ball and rope games on the adjacent sports field. Further activities are being planned.

As a rule, about 20 children take part in each activity, which makes us very happy!

**Stefanie Eschenbach –  
Youth House Mindelheim  
Germany**

## Theme week on the topic of «Poverty»



This year's theme week on the topic of «Poverty» took place

**from 7th-22nd May 2022.**

**Everyone was invited to participate via Zoom!**

The theme week was opened with a church service in which, among other things, our new volunteer from South Africa recited a poem she had written herself on the theme of «poverty». The different themes were:

### 09.05. - 11.05.2022:

Child poverty, old-age poverty, wages of people with handicaps, educational and gender justice, causes and solutions of poverty, effects of poverty.

### 12.05. - 14.05.2022:

Poverty from a political point of view, contrast between wealth and poverty, interrelationship between Hartz IV and citizen's income.

### 15.05. - 17.05.2022:

Development Cooperation - Aid Organisations, Flight as a Cause of Poverty, Poverty and Climate Justice, «Poverty Porn».

### 18.05. - 19.05.2022:

Poverty as an ideal - seen religiously: Asceticism, message of the Gospel, philosophical/theological: meaning of poverty, ways of depicting poverty.

### 20.05. - 22.05.2022:

Homelessness - poverty in Mindelheim, homelessness, «hostile design», interactive city tour on the topic in Munich in cooperation with the homeless magazine «BISS».

Each topic was presented through various info posts on Instagram and through lectures on the topic.

On average, about 10 people took part in each event.

We are currently thinking about offering another theme week in November this year. However, we are still in the planning phase.

## Touched by Fire

*The only thing that separates a people from Poverty, is privilege. It is perverse in its thirst and is never fully fed, It is ever hungry - a glutton, with a taste for daily bread. Poverty is as senseless as a fire ablaze, eating at everything flammable enough to be touched by the flame. Poverty is lustful and never stops yearning, and once we've been touched, we never stop burning...*

*I once held gently the mutilated hand of a child whose father had held her first in fire; while tucking her safely into bed one night, she pulled me closer - with molten fingers - and told me, «It's burning».*

*How do you look into a babe's eyes and tell her that it's unlikely to end? Poverty of the pocket is one thing, but with poverty of the heart, it's hard to pretend. There is a higher danger with being undernourished in matters of the heart - a lack of food is fatal, but a lack of love is from where the fire starts.*

*If we are all under threat of our homes burning down. If each of us are flammable and vulnerable, then how -*

*How can we continue to shield our eyes from the flame? Instead of jumping in - heart first - for those at the stake?*

- Raquelle -  
cmi volunteer.





## Marist Coordinators Training Glasgow

On Saturday 3rd of September, our Marist Student Leadership Coordinators gathered in Kinharvie to define and evaluate our roles as Marist Student Leadership Coordinators, build relationships and share best practice together.

It was wonderful to be able to meet in person again after such a long time. There was valuable sharing of best practice and lessons learned from our collective experience in the Marist Student Leadership coordinator role. We also had an opportunity to develop an Increased awareness of Global Marist Schools and an exploration of the potential benefits of engaging with this opportunity.



**We are looking forward to the year ahead!**



# European Marist Animators Gathering 2022

The annual European Marist Animators gathering took place in Guardamar this year at the beginning of August, bringing together Marist youth from all across the continent. This year, the gathering was different. A much larger gathering of about 80 people took place, allowing more Marist stories and experiences from more places across Europe to be shared. The participants were mostly made up of co-ordinators of various Marist Youth groups from each province, coming from countries such as Spain, Italy and Greece.

This year I was part of the organising team, and was the sole representative of West Central Europe. The theme of the gathering was «Way», and each day a unique spin on the word gave meaning to the day, and laid out the foundation for some of the activities that were to come.

The first day was centred around «My Way» which focused on the individual, and how they fit into the world, both in society and in the Marist. The second day was focused on «Our Way», which built upon the learnings of the first day, and expanded into how people may rely on each other to navigate the world. «Wayfarer» was the theme of the third day, which focused on the path that we lay out before us on our journey through life. The fourth day was «Share the Way» which was all about community, and sharing life with others. Finally, the theme for the final day was «The Way». This day focused on navigating the areas of life that can't be changed. Each day began with a piece of drama by myself and one other coordinator from each



province. The piece of drama usually involved a group of hikers who were lost, asking each other questions in an effort to find which «Way» to go. Maps were discovered along the way, and a new clue was discovered each day. This nicely set up the theme for each day, putting the participants in the right frame of mind for the activities that were to come. At the end of each day, another piece of drama followed, concluding with the learnings of the day.

The week involved many times of reflection, both personal, and on the world. It was a week of peace, joy, and emotion. Strong bonds of friendship were formed between participants and co-ordinators alike, and memories were

created that will stay with each person forever. The Marist ethos shone bright throughout the week. The Marist was not taught, but was experienced. To say the gathering was an amazing experience would be an understatement.

Ciaran McDermott – Athlone Ireland



## Champagnat Festival at Habay-la-Vieille

This year, it was on Friday 12 June that our Marist Community organised the Champagne Festival. The village church was well filled for the Eucharistic celebration, animated by a friendly couple: Philippe on the guitar and Sabine to lead the songs. Many priests wished to concelebrate this joyful and participative celebration.

Afterwards, all the faithful present were invited to have a glass of friendship in the inner courtyard of our Welcome Centre, which continued with the festive meal during which about a hundred people were present.

We were able to count on many lay Marists in the preparation of this celebration but also during this meal appreciated by all the participants. And it was quite late in the night that the last of the participants took the road back home.

The next day, many people from the «Teams of Our Lady» of the region were present to tidy up and wash the dishes.

Brother Albert ANDRE



# Marist Week Ireland

**Moyle Park College Dublin, Marist College Athlone, Marian College Dublin**

**It was great to celebrate Marist Week from 3rd to the 7th of October. The theme this year shared across Marist Europe was «Smile from the Heart».**

Each of the three Marist Schools had a number of events to help school communities deepen their knowledge of Marist history and spirituality.

Brother PJ and Br Nick visited different class groups in our school to introduce them to the Life of Marcellin Champagnat. Students visited some of the Brothers communities where they had a opportunity to become aware of our

special Marist history and tradition.

Many other events including an Art display helped us celebrate our Marist heritage.

Our Marist Leaders with their teacher coordinators from the three schools joined with our three Scottish schools on a pilgrimage to L'Hermitage.

Our annual Marist Schools History Quiz took place in Moyle Park College and each school had a celebration of the Eucharist for the beginning of the school year.





# MARIST WEEK 2022

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<i>Morning Reflection- Our Values</i> (Gearoid MC)	<i>Morning Reflection- Our Values</i> (Conor Rowe)	<i>Morning Reflection- Our Values</i> (Dylan Farrell)	<i>Morning Reflection- Our Values</i> (Oisín Byrne)	<i>Morning Reflection- Our Values</i> (Mark Rockett)
<i>Mural Begins-</i> inspired from the core Values  **Launch Social Media Competition to name the Leaders Podcast/ Design Logo**	<i>Get to know our Marist Family worldwide-</i> QR CODE activity- scan codes and complete the task!	<i>Connecting with our present-</i> Br. PJ Talk to 1 <sup>st</sup> yr. students  <i>Marist Heart Activity-</i> our tradition for new students -Leaders	<i>Smile from the Heart-</i> Guess the Marist Smile Competition- Whole school  <i>The Marist Story-</i> showcase from various classes	Staff Bake  <i>In the Way of Mary-</i> 5 <sup>th</sup> RE clean up and flower planting -
<i>Connecting with our History-</i> 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> Visit to Marist House and Statue	<i>Celebrating Together-</i> Annual Champagnat Mass@ 2.30 St Mary's Church Fr Shea Casey	Record Special edition of <i>Marist Podcast</i>  TY Film- Smile from the Heart- Comedy	<i>Cake Sale</i> Organised by LCVP  New Staff induction	<i>We are Marist-</i> 2 <sup>nd</sup> yr. Semi Final Year Group to attend-  Marist Week Podcast release- Winner announced for competitions.
<i>Minding Our Minds-</i> 6 <sup>th</sup> Year Mental Health Talk				





**Conor Devaney**

**H**i my name is Conor Devaney a 1st year Marist leader who attended the 2022 Marist leadership gathering at L'hermitage.

We left the school at 6am and arrived at L'hermitage at 6pm naturally I was very tired but as soon as we got there I felt very welcome getting an introduction and meeting our new roommates. Although almost everyone was a complete stranger it didn't take us long to start mixing and that night we were in the social room playing cards and listening to music which was really fun.

The next morning we went down to Marcellin Champagnat's birthplace and where he grew up. I found it quite interesting and it helped me to understand more about the Marist community. Later that night all the other Marist leaders shared presentations on their schools and their ambitions for the coming year some of which we can implement into our own school.

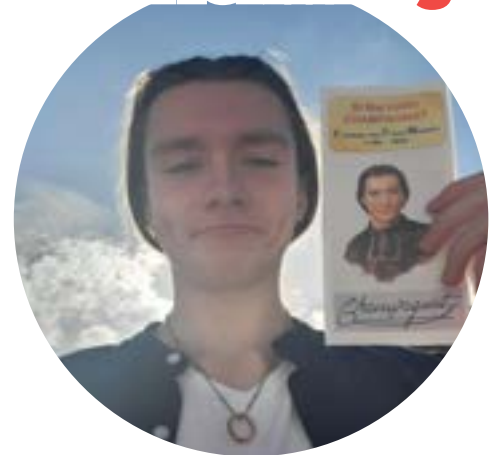
The third day was probably my favourite day in which we split up into our leadership groups and completed certain tasks such as lifting our teammates through a spider-web without touching the rope. This really showed the Marist values of love of work and family spirit as we had to all work together and if one person lost we all lost. Lastly I'd like to say I learned a lot of new things from this trip. I would like to thank the coordinators and all involved for making it possible to have this experience with my friends.

# Marist Student Leadership Gathering 2022 in Hermitage

## Calum Gore

**M**y trip to L'Hermitage was one of the greatest experiences I've ever had. I learned new things, made a ton of new friends and gained a lot of confidence in my ability to lead others.

The bonds I made in France will definitely last, each person from every school were all such great people. At first it was weird meeting so many new people at once who were all from different places but even just the first night in the social room singing and laughing we all got on so well that it felt like we were friends for years or even family. It was quite a shock when we arrived and were told we had to share our rooms with someone from one of the other schools. Some people even had to share with two others but I feel that it wouldn't have mattered who I had to share a room with because I got on well with everyone there. I even formed new bonds with people from my own school, some of the people who I maybe didn't have the confidence to try talk to or just hadn't gotten the chance to but during and even now after the trip we all feel so much closer. We did a lot more than just sing and laugh together we visited the house of Marcellin Champagnat the founder of the Marist Brothers and learned about his life on a tour from the Coordinators of the trip and some of the brothers who live in L'Hermitage specifically Brother Paul who taught us all about Marcellin in the chapel that was gifted to the Marist Brothers by some of its followers. I also learned that I look a lot like Marcellin Champagnat. The group activities we did over the week were also really fun and engaging. The tasks were random things that you had to work together with your group to complete,



each task your group had to nominate a new person to lead the group through the task and i was made lead for a task called plank where you all had to stand on two planks that had ropes on them and walk in sync to a certain point and although our group had one of the slower times we were told that we were a really good group and everyone said i did well as a leader although I didn't think I did that great. The other people who were nominated to be leaders all did really good jobs as well. Our group felt like a sort of family and each of us were really close, we were called the Carrots which originated from one of my own «traumatic» experiences which I told to my teacher in the airport and when they mentioned team names she brought it up again and everybody in the group agree we had to name the group the Carrots. It was quite sad when we had to say goodbye to the Scottish schools as they had to leave earlier than the Irish Schools so as they were leaving on the bus a bunch of us gave them a mexican wave to say goodbye but gladly most of us still stay in touch which shows that our bonds were not just a quick laugh and goodbye but we actually connected and bonded over the course of the trip and we made lasting connections.

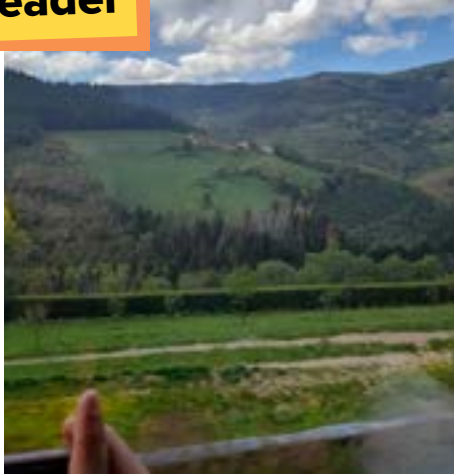
**Calum Gore – Marist Leader**

 **Click here to watch the video**  
from our Marist Leadership Gathering 2022 

## Jack Collins – Marist Leader

**O**n the day we arrived, we unfortunately arrived later than expected which effected the timetable, delaying some of the planned activities. It was clear we were all tired or at least I was. We were all put into the lobby and told that we'd be sharing rooms a concept that I absolutely hated, but alas it could go worse, we were sharing rooms with the people in the other schools.

There were double rooms in which contained two people and triple rooms in which contained three people, I could only pray to get a double... I suppose my use of an ellipsis is pretty telling, I was put into a triple room. After that we were quickly whisked off upstairs to a large conference room in which a timetable was passed out and the agenda was explained to us, we also did a small activity consisting of talking to three random people, it was quite difficult then we were split into groups containing a mixture of students from all the schools, again an idea I HATED (this changes). We were told that in our groups we'd be given a range of teambuilding activities to complete. In the evenings, most people went back to their rooms or to the allocated community rooms. I was there for a short while but soon left when I heard a piano echoing through the halls, following it I found Mark from one of the Dublin schools playing on an out of tune piano, he was quite good, alongside him was Alice, Tom and Tommy and later we were joined by Lucrezia (who was in my teambuilding group), I became friends with this group. We were once again brought up to the conference room, I kept up conversation with Lucrezia and she introduced me to Jason in our teambuilding group. We were told that we needed to build a bridge out of various flimsy papers that could hold a bottle of water and that a football could roll under, we utterly failed but had lots of fun failing then gave ourselves group names. Finally, we were given some free time, dinner was first served, I regret to say that the food made a poor first impression, disregarding that the staff were quite hospitable and lovely. The first night was also quite difficult, I find schedule

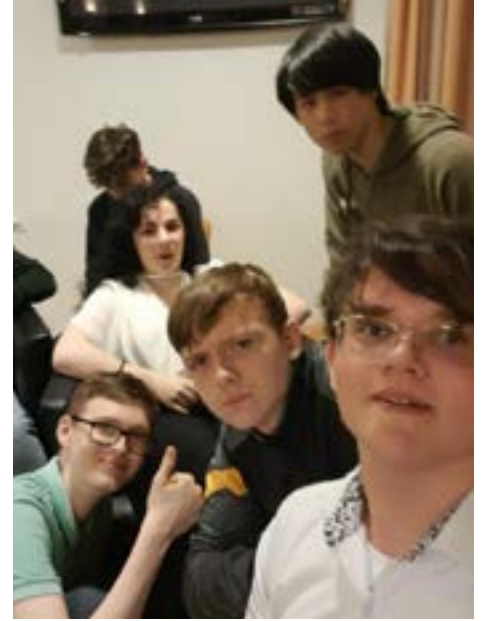


*The view on the way up to La Valla.*

changes extremely hard to deal with so it's understandable and of no fault to anyone, I did sleep quite well considering all that.

On the second day, the breakfast was a great improvement from the previous night. We were once again brought up to the conference room where we were split into an Irish and Scottish bus and taken to Le Rosey and La Valla where we learned of the origins of the Marist, it was quite informative we were given two breaks with packed lunches that were alright. Then we were to hike back to l'Hermitage, it was gruelling, Lucrezia and Tom didn't have to hike I was debating on going with them to be perfectly honest. We finally got back and then dinner was served, it was... ok. The time I had dreaded most arrived, the school presentations. Luckily, I was completely passed over by some divine intervention and I avoided the nightmare that is public speaking. Evening free time was granted and I spent the evening with my new friend group bonding over shared interests and experiences. The second night wasn't as bad as the first and yet again I slept quite well.

On the third day I woke up earlier at 7 O'clock along with Kolm, we rested in the community room and waited for our friends to come down. Soon they did and we enjoyed a nice morning until breakfast, which was good, again. Then we followed the routine, going up to the conference room and doing a myriad of teambuilding activities on rotation, they fulfilled their purpose, we definitely grew as friends. Between activities we were given a lovely lunch, or it would have been lovely if



*Me taking a picture of Jason (behind me), Lucrezia (behind Jason on the chair) and Tommy (right)*

not for the fact that I confused sugar for salt, and if the hotdogs weren't so abnormally red. That evening we were taken to St Etienne for a dinner, I sat with my newfound friends and we had a lovely time, Jason didn't eat his burger because it was «raw» it wasn't for the record. Then we spent our last evening playing an intense game of uno and throwing Clive across the room. I slept well that night.

On the final day I had breakfast with my friends as usual and sadly said goodbye to all my Scottish friends, as a memento Lucrezia gave me her boarding pass (the one for the trip to France not the one she needed to get home) and Tom gave me his school timetable. Throughout the trip Lucrezia kept taking one of Jason's rings, so he just gave it to her to keep. The Irish schools then went to mass, which I didn't enjoy much, and began preparing to leave. I savoured my last few hours with some of my new friends, Mark played the piano at the airport and we all got burger king ice cream. But we eventually had to say goodbye at Dublin airport, where Tommy gave me his boarding pass too.

Over all it was a lovely experience that I would definitely attend again given the opportunity as long as i don't need to share a room. I'm still in contact with my friend group in fact Tom and I recently began watching the final season of a show we both enjoy.


**Michael White**

**'ve always heard about leadership, but seldom knew how to do it. I thought it was this esoteric feature that some people just...had. That was all going to change for us on the 6th of October, 2022. I remember that Thursday morning so well. It was dark. It was dreary. It was cold. We all groggily got on the bus at our school and departed on a journey that would shape us for the rest of our lives.**

We arrived at Dublin airport some point around 8:30AM. We met two other Marist schools there: Moyle Park College and Marian College. It's funny looking back now, because we were all strangers at first, but at the end of it all, we would leave as close friends. We boarded our flight in the afternoon and arrived at Lyon-Saint Exupéry Airport at 5PM.

It was around 6PM that we arrived at Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage, and it was breathtaking. The area was so nice and rich with history. We were let know that we would be sharing a room with people from different schools, some of whom were from Scotland. To be entirely honest that news sent a pang of anxiety through me, but it turned out to be a wonderful thing as I became great friends with my roommate, as did everyone

with theirs. We had our first meal and met the Brothers, who were so welcoming and kind. The food was nice, and afterwards, we began our introduction session. It was here that we were split up into our Leadership Groups. This was a great concept as it compelled you to socialise outside of your school group, and get to know others. I was lucky to be part of the legendary «Carrots», as we called ourselves. We all nervously got to know each other, and over the next 3 days, we would learn what it meant to work as a team and support each other. Before we all scurried off to sleep, we got to spend a while in the social room and relax. It was here that friendships were really made.

The next day, a beautiful Friday it was, we embarked on a journey to learn about the life of Marcellin Champagnat. What an eye-opening and beautiful experience it was. I developed a deeper appreciation for the work and mission statement of Marcellin. His humble beginnings and difficulty in school informed his values deeply. Later that evening we got into our Leadership Groups again, and began the Leadership activities, which would continue into the next day also. These activities were what left the biggest impact on me. I never really knew how to lead,



and seeing how others did and giving them feedback gave me a deeper understanding of what made someone a good «leader». I had to lead the «Carrots» on one particular activity called the «gutter», and it was a transformative experience. I learned in those 15 minutes the value of morale, inclusivity, and teamwork. A team cannot work if all members aren't included. These activities brought us closer together, and brought out the potential, that perhaps we mightn't have even known was there, in each of us.

Sadly, on the 9th of October, the time had come for goodbyes, and it was hard. My roommate and I took one last look at what became our home for the last 3 days, and locked the door for the final time. We said our goodbyes to the Scots, who left first, and attended a mass with the local community. It was a beautiful ceremony and it served as a nice moment of reflection before going home. I learned a lot from my time there, and as someone who is on the cusp of college, I could not be more grateful for the experience and opportunity to be a Marist Leader one last time.

**By Michael White**  
 (6th Year, Marist Leader,  
 Marist College Athlone)

## Ben Doonan

**O**n the 6th of October we began our journey to L'Hermitage. We set off to Dublin airport at half 7 in the morning and we arrived in L'Hermitage at around 6pm. When we arrived, we were welcomed in with generosity. We were immediately torn from our tightly knit school groups as we were separated from our schools and each given a roommate from a different school. I was pretty anxious as the names were called out, I mean I was going to share a living space with a complete stranger for the next few days. I ended up sharing a room with a boy called Martin from Athlone and within minutes we were chatting away and I just didn't see what the fuss was about.

We had dinner afterwards and it was great, I enjoyed both the food and the company. As the week progressed and we became closer as a group we began mixing around the tables and starting new interactions with different people. The caterers were so kind, they went out of their way to help us. I really appreciated the food and the hospitality.

In terms of the leadership activities I found them a load of fun. They required us to actually communicate and work together as a unit. I agreed to be leader of the first activity and to be honest I was completely dumbfounded. The activity was building a bridge and I didn't have a clue so I let other people do the work instead. I think the following activities showed me more about what it is to be a leader and I think I've improved my leadership skills as a whole.

Of the moments I appreciated most were those that were spontaneous. I loved the leadership activities, but there was something special about singing

in the social room and interacting with all the people from the other schools having a laugh. I had some great craic playing football as well, I mean I'm not sure how we even managed it. In an area about the size of a back garden we managed to play a game of football with about twenty players, if that doesn't show family spirit what does. It actually reminded me of the Lavalla table, of anyone wanted to join in the just joined the team short of players. The meal at the restaurant was also very fun. The food was great, but the best part was when the majority of the restaurant in unity decided that they were going to cheer for Dortmund in a Bundesliga match. It was a very tense affair and Dortmund were down 2-0 at one point. They managed to score in the very last minute of the game and the entire restaurant erupted in cheers. It was genuinely a lovely moment.

I had a brilliant time in L'Hermitage. It's mad that just 3 weeks ago I was walking along the river Gier. I'd love to thank all the coordinators who helped out. I think the brother, especially brothers Paul deserves a lot of praise. I can't thank them enough for welcoming us in, making us feel at home and showing us Marcellin's home.

I'm currently still in contact with almost everyone I met on the trip and I hope we can all stay friends. One day, I hope to meet them all again.

On the trip I developed a lot, I learned what it means to be a Marist, where it all started. I developed my understanding of the ethos and so much more. I think these values are essential to living a good life and they are key to everyone, not only Marists. I hope to be able to use what I've gained in L'Hermitage to help better my school.

No matter what, L'Hermitage will always hold a special place in my heart.

## Matthew McKenna

**T**his year myself and other Marist leaders went on a trip to L'Hermitage in Lyon. When we first arrived in L'Hermitage I was immediately sceptical.

The first thing to happen was room sorting, I assumed we were in rooms with our school groups but I was wrong, I was put in a room with another Marist leader from Athlone, strangely enough his name was also Matthew. After a lovely dinner we were split into our leadership groups. My group was called the Marcellin Champions. We were, without a doubt, the best group. The second day was spent doing a tour around the area where Marcellin grew up. We also went to the first Marist brothers house and ended the day trip with a long walk back to L'Hermitage. The third day we did lots of different activities. Some included working as a team in order to stack wooden blocks on top of each other, or making 10 squares but you're not allowed to speak. We ended this day with a nice dinner out and a longer time in the social room. On the day we all left we attended a mass, it was a great experience and the church was beautiful.

My favourite thing about this trip was the new people I met. I didn't realise how many people would be here and I didn't think that in such a short time I would be able to make new friends. Some of these new friends live in different parts of the country and some even live in different countries. It's great that I can still talk to these people even after we all left.

I have also learned a lot about myself and about what it means to be a Marist leader. I have found new ways to use the Marist values in everyday life and I have also learned how to identify the Marist values that I wouldn't think twice about before. This experience has helped me with my school life as well. I feel more confident with doing my school work as well as identifying where I need to improve.

**Thank you Aisling for bringing me on this trip.**

## Gearoid McCarthy

**M**y name is Gearoid McCarthy, a first year Marist leader who attended the 2022 Marist leadership gathering at L'hermitage in Lyon, France.

We left the school at 6am and arrived at L'hermitage at 6pm after a 2 hour flight and over 3 hours spent in buses! I was tired but as soon as we all got there I felt very welcome by getting introduced to every one and meeting our new roommates. Although almost everyone was a complete stranger it didn't take us long to start mixing and that night we were in the social room playing cards and listening to music in the evening social room.

The next morning we went down to Marcellin Champagnat's birthplace and where he grew up in la rosey. I found it quite interesting and it helped me to understand more about where the Marist values originated and why they were created. Later that night all the other Marist leaders shared presentations on their schools and their ambitions for the coming year.

The third day was the most enjoyable day in which we split up into our leadership groups and completed certain tasks such as working as a team to lift a golf ball through the air using gutters. This really showed the Marist values of love of work and family spirit as we had to all work together and if one person dropped the golf ball we all lost.

Lastly I'd like to say I learned a lot of new things from this trip. I would like to thank the coordinators and all involved for making it possible to have this experience with my friends.



## Dawid Syper

**T**here is so much to say about this trip, that I can't believe it was only 4 days. We all started off as strangers, yet by the end of those short 4 days it felt as if we had known each other forever. Looking back...

**October 6th 2022**, my alarm woke me up in the dark early hours of the morning. Half asleep I was greeted with a cheerful bonjour from my mum and a nice breakfast. I honestly wasn't comprehending properly because I was tired. My parents went off to work, after the kiss and goodbye of course and I was left by myself but no time for a session, it was pack up and go, with a side of hairstyling of course.

I grabbed my bags and left, out into the dark morning and to the bus stop. As usual, the bus came 3 minutes late. I got off right outside the school and made my way in to meet the others in the art room. We hopped on to a minivan after we made sure we had everyone and made our way to the airport, my favourite place ever.

This came in handy, as there was only 1 teacher supervising the group of 12 so because I travel a lot and know my way

around I was given the task of helping out through the airport, which proved to be challenging as some people's tickets didn't want to scan at check in and we had to find a solution, others had never done self check in and needed a hand and I feel my leadership skills came out here as I successfully helped Ms Ellis get everyone through the airport, yay us.

At the airport we saw the other Irish schools that would join us and we completely ignored each other, not knowing how close we'd get.

After a short wait we got on our plane, everyone was asking me questions about it because I'm a plane geek but I was more than happy to answer. We settled into our seats, the lovely French lady beside me swapped seats with me so I could have the window which was really nice, and we were off, not before a computer malfunction delayed us almost 2 hours though. The flight was great, while admiring the views I caught up on the new Madonna remix album and found it to be quite good and before we knew it we were in Lyon where we were greeted by Aisling and a Scottish teacher who got stranded waiting for a piece of lost luggage, the joys of travel in 2022. As we waited for our bus we all invaded the



shop and bought loads of tasty French pastries. We got onto our bus and this is the only part I don't remember because I fell asleep and when I woke up, we were in L'hermitage. We flooded into the lobby where we were broken the news we would be sharing rooms with people from other schools, when we heard this our faces dropped and we all started looking around the room frantically wondering who was it going to be, thankfully I got stuck with a lovely lad Michael from Athlone and we got along from the moment we were forced to meet. This experience initially gave me a mini panic attack but looking back it was the best thing that could've happened. We went up to our rooms and shortly after went down to dinner where we got introduced to the brothers, and Brother Paul became a somewhat celebrity being idolised by us all, Brother Paul if you see this you are iconic. We had a meeting where we were put into our leadership groups and we kinda got to break the ice and meet each other. It was then time for the first visit in the social room, and the first night was definitely the most tame.

We all went to bed, however my roommate and I talked for about 2 hours straight and got to know each other really well just during that first night. Lights out, bedtime

**October 7th, 2022**, you know it was a good night when you both oversleep for breakfast, not that we did anything excessive, we just got a bit carried away with the late night chats. After our very spartan breakfast because everything was gone and we didn't want to sit alone in the dining room, we went up to the morning meeting where we went through the plan of the day, there I nominated several people to be my photographers in aesthetic places, because while we are on a leadership skill building and bonding trip it's important to remember about the Instagram page :)

We got on a bus and made our way to La Rosey, a stunning little village where



we explored a stunning little chapel and Marcelin's house. It felt a bit strange, because for the last 4 years I had heard of this man called Marcelin and that he did this and that but now I was in his family home, it felt a bit like a full circle moment. We then hopped onto a bus to La Valla where we introduced our new Scottish friends to the best of Irish culture by making them watch Cáca Mílís.

When we got to La Valla we wandered up through the stunning streets to the school Marcelin and the original Marist brothers had set up. We looked around the different rooms, most interesting of which was the art gallery which visualised some of Marist values which I thought was very cool. We then had lunch in a lovely little Rose garden. After lunch we started our journey to L'hermitage on foot, 2 girls from a Scottish school, Denny Roxi and myself spent the whole way singing Kate Bush songs which was certainly a vibe among the different bits of landscape we saw, like a lake and a huge dam. After a fairly tiring 40 minutes we made it back to L'hermitage.

After the walk we had a minute to rest, and afterwards we went on a tour around the place we were staying in. The most interesting part for me was definitely the chapel as I had no idea that something so enormous and stunning was housed

within the same place we were staying in. Marcelin's bedroom was also a nice experience, as well the art gallery with interesting paintings open for interpretation.

After dinner we all did our presentation, which I found extremely easy at this point I was really close or familiar with everyone so there was no reason for stage fright. Everyone did well and afterwards we all rushed down to the social room, where we drank fizzy drinks and belted out tunes such as Dancing Queen, Bohemian Rhapsody and You Spin Me Round which was fun, all of that in between chatter where we further got to know each other, I ran into 2 other Madonna fans and we do listening parties together now listening to her music. After a really fun night we all went back to our rooms, in my case that meant more chatting which of course was fine by me.

**October 8th 2022**, this time we woke up on time for breakfast. Sleepily we made our way down to the dining room where we ate our breakfast, every day we sat at a different table with different people which was nice because I feel everyone in the group got to talk to everyone at some point.

We had another meeting outlining what we were going to do, which was leadership activities which were some of the funniest moments of the trip. The 2 activities that stood out most for me were the gutters because we did really good in that, and also the spider web as when I was being carried through I felt like Regina George in that scene from Mean Girls when she's carried out onto the field. Another activity that we had done the evening before was building bridges from paper and kitchen roll, which seemed impossible but with a little bit of thought put into it by us all we managed to make it tall enough to have a football roll under it and have a 2 litre bottle rest comfortably on top.

All in all my group actually did the worst but it didn't matter as our bond had

become deeper while doing the activities and we all had a laugh and that was all that mattered.

Afterwards we had loads of free time, so my friend took on a part time job as a photographer and took pictures of me around the beautiful complex which definitely proved worth it in the end.

For the last night we went out to lunch in St Etienne in a nice restaurant, where we served burgers chips with a French twist as the meat was rare, though quite nice and I appreciated something different. We got dessert as well, everyone got a cake however myself and my new friend Roxi got a fruit bowl because we're both lactose intolerant besties.

We headed back to L'hermitage, for the last night in the social room. No one was thinking about the impending return home, and we all just partied out all the emotion. My inner Martha Graham came out that night and myself and a guy from my school Maurillo danced to the songs but not awkwardly moving side to side I mean whole intentional choreography which was definitely funny, but when I dance in front of you that means I'm comfortable with you, and the fact I was comfortable with everyone there really made the family spirit pop out for me. Our curfew was nicely extended until 11pm, which meant we would be exhausted in the morning, but that didn't matter because it was the last night and we all gave it socks with singing. It was also the night of selfies and frantic snapchat exchanges, which I'm so grateful that we can have as it keeps the memories fresh.

**October 9th 2022**, my roommate and I got up very early to say goodbye to the first group leaving at 7:30, it was hard, but we did it. We waved them goodbye and went back off waiting for breakfast. Breakfast was had and we had free time to spend with each other before leaving.



Here we personally reflected on the trip, and came to a conclusion that the funniest moment was when myself and a mix of people decided to take the lift 1 floor up to the conference room, and we got in but someone didn't press the floor button and we just stood there. Eventually I asked why we weren't moving and the girl Shannon opened the door to see we were still on the ground floor and we burst out laughing while getting judged by teachers. This moment still sends me into the atmosphere everytime I think about it.

The time came to say goodbye to the next group was incredibly difficult as most of the people I got really close with were in this group. How I didn't cry I don't know but I was extremely close to it. We all hugged and said goodbye to each other but I truly believe it was just a see you later.

The bus left and we all waved goodbye, then soberly flooded back inside, it was just the Irish groups now. We hung around and waited for the local mass to start. Despite not being religious I found this a good experience as again I saw the family spirit in the local community, which was incredible to see. After mass it was time to pack up and leave, not after some last photos though.

We said goodbye to Aishling, and said thank you for all the incredible work she

did to make such a great trip possible and

to make it as great as it was. I slept on the bus ride back to the airport, and there it was the usual of check in and crowds. One of the lads from Marian swapped with me for his window seat which I really appreciated. We did some last minute souvenir shopping before getting on the flight home.

When we landed we collected our bags and it was time to say goodbye to each other, which was really hard but not as hard as the Scottish schools because we all live on the same island making it fairly easy to meet up again. We hopped onto the mini van back to school where our parents greeted us, and it was time to go home.

When I say L'hermitage was one of the best trips I have ever been on, it's really true. I've trotted all over the globe in my life from London to Miami, Rome Paris and Milan, Barcelona and Venice and even Edinburgh to Crete but this trip had something so special to it, it was not only a physical journey of being away but an emotional one where I learned a lot about myself, that I can lead, I can get up and talk in front of a crowd, I can talk and make best friends out of strangers, and this communication skill will definitely help around the school, to make it a better place.

So while I already prepare for my next flight in 8 days, the memories of L'hermitage will stay with me forever and it's an experience that I will never forget, and people I will never forget, even while writing this I'm getting emotional, and I'm forever grateful to Marcelin for what he did all those years ago, so that in the far future he envisioned a group of kids all from different walks of life would have the opportunity to make strong lasting bonds and develop lasting skills, to Marcelin, Aisling, and all the brothers current or passed, un énorme merci

**David Syper – Marist Leader**

## Michael Agbomere

**H**i my name is Michael and this is my experience on the trip to the L'hermitage.

**When I first found out that I was going to France with the marist leaders. I was ecstatic. But then I started to question what we were going to do there? Who am I going to meet? Where exactly will I be? What will the food be like over in France? But that is what made the trip even more exciting, just not knowing what is going to happen, I was so eager to find out.**

The trip to France was great, it was the first time I have been to the airport in a long time so I was a bit rusty in what I had to do. But luckily I had my fellow marist leaders as well as my helpful teachers to guide me. When we

were in the airport we saw the other Marist school from Ireland but all we did was wave, even when we were on the same bus as one another we didn't talk. Things definitely changed when we got to L'hermitage, as we were put into rooms by a person from the other schools, so I had to sleep next to someone I have never met before. I think this built-up our friendship between my roommate and I. In a normal setting I don't think I would have been around him much as we do not have a lot in common, but since we had to stay together in a room we made it work, and I'm happy we did.

The activities we did were very fun, they all helped us communicate with one another and work together. My favourite activities was the gutters, since we all had to work together and form a plan of action. And the

other one would be the spider, it was so different from the rest and required a lot of trust and also it was fun to lift people.

I learned a lot about Marcellin Champagnat and the marist values, especially when we visited Champagnat's house where we were told how his younger life was. And when we visited the church and Brother Paul taught us more about Champagnat. I feel like the whole experience has made me a better person and strengthened my beliefs in the Marist way.

I also made many friends over there and I still talk to them on social media. It is great meeting new people from different backgrounds and different countries.

I am so thankful for the experience so thank you all.

**Michael Agbomere**

## Brooke

**M**y name is Brooke, from St. John's RC High School and I wanted to talk about my experience in France - from meeting new people to seeing the breath-taking views - the trip truly gave me a new point of view on St. Marcellin, his life, his brothers and how often we use the Marist Values in our school without recognising them.

From my perspective, being in France took me out of my comfort zone and let me experience something completely new and different. I thoroughly enjoyed meeting new people and getting to know the wider community I was a part of. To just be a part of the Marist Leadership Group is something I am extremely grateful for and after my experience in France I have a lot more to be thankful for - including the new friends I have made and increased knowledge about who St. Marcellin was.

The four days we spent in France taught me a lot about my leadership skills and being able to use my voice within a group of people. Being part of a leadership group meant the same people I was working with became my friends very quickly;



we all just bonded as one. We had a lot in common and straight away it seemed we just knew how to make the weekend enjoyable - we all worked together. I really liked doing the different activities which determined people's strengths and weaknesses because we would join heads and figure out who was best for each position. From not being familiar with these new people, I was really fond of how well we got on, as if we'd already known each other. I believe the weekend went far too quickly and maybe having a few extra days would have been nice because when we went for a lovely meal, everyone sat in random places on the bus so that helped us bond too. However, it was our last night together.

One of my favourite places we visited was La Valla. It was the most beautiful place I'd ever seen and on the bus ride leading up to it, the views were immaculate. Then, when we walked back to L'Hermitage, even with the rocky roads, I just appreciated it a lot more being where I was in that moment. The weekend we spent in France gave us all an opportunity to gain our independence. Being away from home, away from our families, was nerve-wracking but the people there, and the place itself, made me feel, personally, more secure. As I had gone into the experience more blind than I thought, it was nice to be surprised at how much I learned, and to meet all these people that I didn't think I was going to.

I thoroughly enjoyed learning about St Marcellin and going into greater depth about his life and his history. Actually spending time in his own personal space, seeing his death bed, even going into the chapel with the box of his remains, made me feel somewhat connected to him and his story. It was nice to know and experience the Marist values as well. Although we portray these daily in our school, using them within his space just made it so much more special.

## James Casey

**T**he Marist Leadership excursion to L'Hermitage and the sights of Marcellin Champangat's development is one I'll never forget. Reliving the experiences of Marcellin resonated with me and I feel like I have developed a deeper understanding and appreciation of the Marist values. Over the four days I developed a connection and network with the people from the other schools but also from my own school. I feel that the leadership activities demonstrated the key characteristics of a leader and a teammate. This experience began a journey within and reflection of myself and personal mission.

Over the course of the weekend I believe that I developed deeply my connections with the Marist values. Visiting La Valla and La Rosey really enthralled me and deepened my understanding of Marcellin's journey and his strife. Seeing the home where Marcellin grew to be the person he was put the importance of these values into perspective. The trail we travelled was but a mirror of Marcellin's treacherous journey but the weekend helped me understand his path. I feel more connected to the Marists.

The connections and friendships I made over the period through the trip we took, the leadership activities and the social room seemed to grow and flourish quite quickly. It was pleasant to see how each and every person there highlighted the Marist values. Upon entering the room it was clear that we had formed a bond with each other. Spending time playing cards and talking and singing songs with one another created links that lasted the whole weekend.

Additionally I feel like I made a deeper connection with the Marist leaders from within my own school. Travelling together, presenting together and eating together over the weekend formed in some ways



a more meaningful relationship with one another. Those were times we worked together and were present with each other.

I believe that the time we spent together really sharpened our minds to work together. I feel like I developed new ideas and skills from just listening to the others. Seeing the presentations the others had made struck me. They were each presented elegantly and some of the ideas stuck with me.

The course of the weekend aided my leadership skills immensely. Throughout the leadership activities I learnt the key skills associated with leadership from leading a task and analysing and understanding the feedback I received but also from watching my teammates take charge on other occasions. I saw the qualities that made each one of them a good leader. I really came to understand and identify issues with the tasks but also with my team. I learnt that sometimes to understand you have to step back and watch and that idea really came to fruition over the course of the retreat.

Not only do I feel that I developed as a leader but a person too. Throughout the days of tasks we were challenged

to reflect on ourselves and I think that reflecting began an important process for me. Throughout the weekend I found solace in the peace of the place and I found that through the calm from the calamity I was able to grow as a person. I feel that I discovered a greater amount of my personal mission. Insightful thoughts really began that weekend and they will stick with me for a long time.

The most difficult part of the trip was the departure. It was tough to part with the great connections we made not only with the people but also L'Hermitage. I hope that the place means something to everyone that went. I know it did to me. There was calm and peace in each aspect of the grounds.

This trip gave me the tools to become a better leader, teammate and a better person. I gained confidence in my choices and actions and the people around me. I developed my link with the Marist values and its deeper than ever. I understand the difficulties some may face. I feel more confident dealing with intense situations and I feel calmer in the making of my decisions. I really appreciated the people that made my experience what it was and I enjoyed the entire experience.

## Lennon



**H**i, I'm Lennon and I'm from St John's RC High School in Dundee, Scotland. I will be sharing a little about my opportunity to enjoy the experience in France with other Marist leaders from across Scotland and Ireland while building bridges and learning about what they do to spread Marist values.

France, for me, was a big deal. Leaving the country without a family member for the first time was nerve-wracking to say the least, but the Marist family in France made it so much easier, and a far better experience than what was first described. Our adventure to France was highly anticipated, just like any other ordinary 'holiday' and the group that was there made that adventure so much more enjoyable. Although in France, with the Marist community, we built upon already developed skills, such as our



communication and social skills, the trip made people break out of their bubble and step beyond their comfort zones to learn that not everyone is perfect, and things can go wrong. Going to France taught a lot of us that those communication skills are important to a leader. It also taught us how to use those skills in the correct manner and how to balance the talking and listening aspects of communication skills.

Having the opportunity of walking in the footsteps of St. Marcellin and developing a greater understanding of the Marist history is another thing we had the opportunity to experience. For example, connecting with Marcellin through lighting a candle in the chapel and through hearing the things (like the river) that he heard from his own bedroom is something that stood out to me. We learned about his Marist Values and the experiences that he lived through, throughout his life. Although Marcellin had a tough childhood and found education a real struggle, it made us appreciate the education that is free to us today.

No one can be a leader without people to lead. Whether that was in the activities in France or if that's in other school leadership jobs. Since France, we've had the opportunity to reflect with each other on what we learned and the experiences we had in France. I plan to continue



communicating with other Marist Leaders that I met over the course of the weekend and cannot wait to meet up with them again some time. These bonds sparked even on day one. Although sleep deprived there were still some sparks appearing in places. I think it's safe to say that at least every Marist Leader came away with at least one experience they enjoyed, or one person that they are grateful to have met. Without the social time in the evenings, I don't think we'd come away with as many people we still speak to or had as many enjoyable moments as we did.



## Marist Europe

The Provincial Councils of the Hermitage and West Central Europe met for the first time in Dublin.

In this common journey that Brothers Gabriel Villa-Real and Robert Thunus began, «to see this new step as an opportunity to look at the past with gratitude, live the present with passion and embrace the future with hope»; and they recalled that «the reflection of the Region of Marist Europe will be key to envision together a better future».

In September the Communication, Education and Solidarity teams meeting in Germany, France and Spain. During this time the team also visited Maristenkolleg Mindelheim where they discussed issues related to training, content plans, exchange of strategic plans of the provinces and monitoring of the projects proposed by the Institute among other things.

## THE PROVINCE OF WEST CENTRAL EUROPE WILL BECOME A DISTRICT



**On 15th August, the patronal feast of the Institute, Br Ernesto Sanchez, Superior General communicated to the Provinces of West Central Europe and L'Hermitage that the present Province of West Central Europe will become a District, canonically dependent on the Province of L'Hermitage, as from 23 October 2023. Br. Robert Thunus will continue as Provincial until the creation of the new District.**

In the letter sent to the Provinces of West Central Europe and L'Hermitage, Br Ernesto stressed that a process of discernment has been carried out in recent years, in view of the care and future of Marist life and mission in this part of the Institute.

The General Council has been in dialogue over the last two years with the Provincial and Council, and with other Brothers and lay people of the West Central Europe Province. The dialogue was then extended to the Provincials of Europe and the Provincial and Council of the Province of the L'Hermitage in particular were consulted. In the letter, Br. Ernesto offered some indications regarding animation,

management and government, which will be included in the Statutes of the new District.

Brothers Gabriel Villa Real and Robert Thunus, Provincials of L'Hermitage and West Central Europe respectively, invited the brothers of the two Provinces: «to see this new step as an opportunity to look back at the past with gratitude, to live the present with passion, and to embrace the future with hope». They also stated, «During the coming weeks, we will embark on a common journey with the aim of enhancing the vitality and viability of Marist life and mission in the countries in which we are present».

In the conclusion of his letter, Br. Ernesto underlined the concern of the Council «to maintain the hope and viability of the pastoral and educational ministry of the future District». He also reminded everyone that «the reflection of the Region of Marist Europe will be key in envisaging together the best future for the Marist charism on this continent, the origin of the Institute».

Extract from





## The Marist Province of L'Hermitage

**The Marist Province of L'Hermitage was created in the summer of 2003. It brings together 5 countries: France, Greece, Catalonia, Hungary and Algeria. During these almost 20 years, the different realities of each country that make up the Province have been an enriching way of getting to know each other and working together. Little by little we have overcome the initial differences (language, culture, traditions, legislations, etc...) and we have reached a real and deep feeling of province. Today we consider the diversity that exists in the Province as a richness and a characteristic that helps us in the realisation of the Marist mission both at provincial and local level.**

Currently in the Province there are 26 schools and 17 social works under direct Marist ownership, as well as many other pastoral and social projects such as scouts, solidarity groups, etc. There are also various fraternities and groups of Marist life in the Province. It is fortunate that also the Marist places, L'Hermitage, La Valla, Rosey... are in the interior of our Province and we can manage and use them in co-ordination with the General House.

In each of the four European countries of the Province there is a network of Marist

works co-ordinated by a local organism (Fundació Champagnat in Catalonia, Association Marcellin Champagnat in France, SMAEL in Greece and MIF in Hungary) which energises and manages the life of these works. The Mission Council of L'Hermitage coordinates these four networks, thus being a network of networks. The Council supports the development and consolidation of each of the networks and at the same time accompanies, unites and gives tools to each of them so that they can carry out the Marist mission in an effective and autonomous way.

At the same time, there are various teams that co-ordinate different themes, such as youth ministry, communication, safeguarding, etc. This provincial structure tries at the same time to co-ordinate the themes common to all the countries and to guarantee the autonomy required by the different realities of the Marist mission in each country. **There are some common projects for all the countries in the field of mission that unite us as a province:**

- Strategic plan: we have a strategic plan of the mission at provincial level which is concretised in specific action plans in each country and in each work.
- Díktyo Bulletin: this is a bulletin that appears 3-4 times a year and contains the

latest news in the field of the province's mission. You can consult the latest issues of the bulletin at this link.

- Jean-Baptiste Montagne Prize for educational innovation and good practices: For several years now, we have been organising an educational innovation prize in which any educator of the province can present his or her innovative practices. You can consult the latest prizes awarded on this link.

- ROE (Rencontre d'œuvres éducatives): All the directors and ministry agents of the educational works of the province, both schools and social works, come together for a few days at the Hermitage to get to know each other better, to share and to discuss some common themes.

- Provincial formation on the Marist evangelising mission: a provincial formation in Catalan, French and Greek for those educators who have a special sensitivity towards the Marist mission.

- Protocol of voluntary service: this is a very recent protocol with which we want to promote and co-ordinate international voluntary service within the Province.

With all this structure and activities we only want to make Marcellin Champagnat's dream come true: to make Jesus Christ known and loved.

**Brother Pau Tristany, coordinator of the L'Hermitage Mission Council**

# CHAMPAGNAT GLOBAL

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# Marist Interview

**Gabriel Villa-Real**

**- Tell us a little bit about yourself**

- My name is Gabriel Villa-Real, I am 55 years old. I was born in Barcelona in 1967. I try to face each stage of life with an open mind, in the sense of trying to get the best out of every experience by living it intensely. I have the feeling of having enjoyed everything I have lived through. I value simplicity in relationships and dealing directly with people.

**- How did you get involved with the Marist world?**

- I have been a Marist Brother since 1986. At the age of 13, I discovered a path in which I feel very much at home. And it is a discovery, because you see yourself before the challenges that life presents to you. It has been an intense path, very vital, I consider myself a fortunate person. I have been lucky that in the different stages of my life I have been able to live experiences and I have met people who have allowed me to discover different dimensions to try to give the best of myself at every moment.

**- For those that don't know your Province of Marist Hermitage can you**

**tell us a little bit about it and your role?**

- I would highlight the great richness of the diversity of the Province of L'Hermitage. A great variety of presences and projects, schools, social works, youth movements in five countries (Algeria, Catalonia, France, Greece and Hungary). Since July 2022, I'm at the service of the Province and the people who make it up as Provincial.

**- What is an interesting fact that most people may not know about you?**

- Since I was a child, I have been very interested in learning about other peoples and cultures, their customs, mentality and way of thinking. It is something I try to cultivate both through reading and audio-visual elements and, above all, through knowledge and direct exchange with people when I have the chance.

**- Who is a person you admire and why?**

- I have always admired people who live in simplicity and discretion for others. People who are often anonymous. Life is a combination of relationships and experiences. Life is built with the relationships we have and the

experiences we live. In my case, I have met people who have marked me, and I have had the good fortune to live very significant experiences.

**- What accomplishments are you most proud of in your life?**

- Looking back, I am left not so much with the actions or projects carried out but with the way of living them. I realise that it has been a privilege to be able to grow as a person, as a Christian and as a Marist in the heart of a fraternity. To develop a family life, of simplicity in relationships, and with that practical sense, of not making things complicated, of being very close. And that is something that I perceived very directly from a very young age in the brothers.

**- What is the best part about being a Marist for you?**

- Being a Marist Brother was an early decision in my life. It was a first step that caught me at the time and still catches me today. At that time it was my turn in a significant way to live in fraternity. To be a brother.

To understand the life of service as



Marcellin Champagnat understood it, at a given moment you discover that life takes on a profound meaning in serving others, in serving children and young people. that life takes on a profound meaning in serving others, in serving children and young people. And this dedication is an aspect that has always touched me. A simple style, close, concerned for others, proximity... these are aspects that have always been significant for me.

**- How would your family and friends describe you?**

- The question should probably be put to them. I suppose I'm seen as someone with a capacity for work and no apparent nerves. But perhaps there is a phrase found in the Bible in the book of Ecclesiastes that I think identifies me quite well: «There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under heaven» (Eccl 3:1).

**- What is a significant event in your life and how did it influence the person you are today?**

- People and experiences have marked me from a very young age: «When I finished the third year of BUP (the current first year of Bachillerato), I experienced a very important moment: entering the

novitiate, two very rich years to deepen the call of God that have marked me for the rest of my life. A strong experience of faith, of life in common, of fraternity...

Life is built by daily decisions, and the time of the novitiate was a significant experience that moved me to take an important first step. We are talking about 1986. Now we are in 2022 and it is a journey that I am still making».

**- When you're having free time what do you like to do?**

- I like to enjoy reading. But I especially like going to the mountains, walking in the woods, being in contact with nature. Contemplate.

**- What has been your highlight in your work in Marist Mission to date?**

- I worked for some years as a formator and teacher at the juniorate in Llinars del Vallès, then as a teacher, catechist, animator in youth ministry and scout groups, community superior and school director in Rubí (Barcelona) (1998-2004). In recent years, my activity has been concentrated in the service of the Province of L'Hermitage first as Director of the Educational Works Service of Catalonia (2005-2010), then as Coordinator of the Secretariat of Mission of the Province of

L'Hermitage (2010-2016) and member of the Provincial Council since 2006. I was Vicar Provincial (2016-2022), delegate for the protection of children in the Province for ten years (2012-2022) and coordinator of the Marist European Protection Team (2016-2022).

**- What is your vision for the Marist Europe?**

- I think that the image of the «Global Family» offered to us by the 22nd General Chapter could define quite well my vision of the Marist Europe.

I note that the Marist Europe is enormously rich in its diversity. From this perspective, the contribution of each one, from his own sensitivity, from his own context, is necessary to build a vision of the future. I think that a good way to guarantee the development of the Marist Mission in each country of the Marist Europe and with respect for cultural, human and social accents is from the perspective of a network of networks. A network of networks that can propose and offer elements, mechanisms and processes that help to ensure and develop the network in each country, with particular attention to the most fragile situations.

# Autumn Prayer

**God of autumn, the trees are saying goodbye to their green, letting go of what has been. We, too, have our moments of surrender, with all their insecurity and risk. Help us to let go when we need to do so.**

**God of fallen leaves laying in colored patterns on the ground, our lives have their own patterns. As we see the patterns of our own growth, may we learn from them.**

**God of misty days and harvest moon nights, there is always the dimension of mystery and wonder in our lives.**

**We always need to recognize your power-filled presence. May we gain strength from this.**

**God of harvest wagons and field of ripened grain, many gifts of growth lie within the season of our surrender.**

**We must wait for harvest in faith and hope.**

**Grant us patience when we do not see the blessings.**

**God of geese going south for another season, your wisdom enables us to know what needs to be left behind and what needs to be carried out into the future.**

**We yearn for insight and vision.**

**God of flowers touched with frost and windows wearing white designs, may your love keep our hearts from growing cold in the empty seasons.**

**God of life, you believe in us, you enrich us, you entrust us with the freedom to choose life.**

**For all this, we are grateful.**

**Amen**

*Image by Oleksandr Ryzhkov*