

5. One tree, several branches

The work of Mary was to be shared by Jean-Claude Colin and the Marist Fathers and Brothers, by Jeanne Chavoïn and the Marist Sisters, by Marcellin Champagnat and the Marist Teaching Brothers, and later by the first pioneers and the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary, as well as by the Third Order of Mary. Fathers, brothers, sisters, missionary sisters and laity have been regarded from their beginning as being part of the one Marist Family tree. The following text is part of the Summarium ("Summary of the Rules") which Colin presented in December 1833 to Pope Gregory XVI and which is still kept in the archives of the Congregation of Religious. The competent cardinal of the Curia at the time found it difficult to take seriously the idea of a Society with four branches.

DECEMBER 1833
SUMMARIUM

Finally, after overcoming many difficulties by patience, and with the consent of the local ordinaries, they began, with God's help, to set up, 1st, a society of priests who work in the dioceses of Belley and Lyons as home missionaries, especially among the country people, and who have also taken on the administration of the minor seminary in Belley; 2nd, a society of lay brothers who already have two novitiates and conduct in the parishes several schools for children; 3rd, a community of religious sisters, whose principal house is located in the city of Belley; and 4th, a confraternity of lay people, who are living in the world and who, by their attachment to the Society, are equal sharers in the spiritual goods of the whole Society; this confraternity has already come into existence in the city of Belley.

[OM 294]

Ch. Girard, Lay Marists, Anthology of Historical Sources,
Rome: 1992, p. 18

These words remind us of the original dream of a Society of various branches, embracing the whole people of God and called to carry out the work of Mary. Father Colin saw the Society as a communion of communities, expressing diversity of women and men, of religious, priests, and lay people, generations, social roles, ministries and cultures. His text contains the challenge for all Marists to strive toward communion, while respecting diversity. In that sense the communion within the Society should be a pilot project for building community within the Church.

