

## BR. CHARLES HOWARD (1924 - 2012)

### Let's be Champagnat Today

**D**ear Marist Brothers and Lay Marists: Brother Charles Howard, who was our Superior general from 1985 to 1993, passed away on Saturday 14 January 2012 in Campbelltown (Australia). He was 87 years old.

The lamp of his earthly life had been dimming little by little in the community of elder Brothers where he spent his last days. Presently, Charles' lamp is eternally shining with the whole Marist community in heaven.

Bro Charles was born near Melbourne (Australia) on October 29, 1924. As a teenager, his family moved to Sydney. Charles studied at the Marist School, Randwick, and through his contact with the Brothers there he discovered his vocation. At 18, Charles received the religious Habit.

After some years of studies and formation, Br Charles ministered in various schools and in the juniorate at Mittagong. He excelled in his ministry through his intelligence and peda-



## GENERAL HOUSE

This week, the activities of Br Superior General and his Council have been centred on two aspects:

- The plenary, with the participation of different parts of the General Administration, Secretariats, Brothers in charge of formation...
- The decease of Br Charles Howard. To regret at this great loss is added gratitude to God for the great gift He gave the Institute through his person. A little altar near the office where he spent 8 years of his life invites the personnel of the General House to prayer and at noon on the 18th of January, there was a Mass for the repose of his soul.

gological know how. In 1961 he was sent to France to complete his religious formation. Returning to his country, he was appointed headmaster of St Joseph's College, Sydney, a big centre with 1000 boarding-students. Charles proved to be a good leader with serenity, consultation, humor and compassion. In 1968 he pursued studies in catechetics at Louvain, Belgium. Subsequently, he went to Dublin, Ireland, for further studies in psychology.

In 1972, at 48 years of age, Br Charles was appointed Provincial. During this challenging post-Vatican II period he gave priority to pastoral work.

In 1968 he participated at the General Chapter as delegate; in 1976 he did so as Provincial. It was during this Chapter that Br Basilio Rueda was re-elected as Superior General. Br Charles was elected General Councillor. During the next 9 years, Br Charles had the chance to visit the Marist world. He was touched particularly by issues and implications arising from the call to social justice



At the General Chapter of 1985, Br Charles was elected Superior General. Together with Br Benito Arbués, Vicar general, and the other Councillors, they determined the main priorities for their ministry leading the Institute. These priorities are beautifully reflected in the Circulars Br Charles wrote:

1. The new Constitutions, adapted to the Council requirements, were approved. Br. Charles encouraged the Brothers to pray them, love them, and live them. (Circular Our new Constitutions, 1986)
2. Vocations- Based on a serious theological foundation, Bro Charles encouraged Brothers and communities to commit themselves to vocation promotion, a field in which we are all responsible. (Circular Vocations, 1987).
3. Discernment was, for Bro Charles, a key attitude in the process of decision-

taking, in our personal relationship with the Lord and in our personal growing. He invited all to personal and community discernment and promoted the Review of the Day. (Circular Discernment, 1988).

4. Meeting Champagnat. Since his youth Bro Charles felt attracted by the personality of the Founder and that experience consistently evolved in him. He began to see him as leader, friend, companion, and father. Based on his own experience, Br Charles challenged his Brothers to get closer to Marcellin especially during the 200th anniversary of his birth. He invited all of us to be Champagnat today. (Circular The Founder challenges his Brothers, 1989).

5. Hope. At the end of the Champagnat Year, celebrated throughout the Institute, Br Charles launched a message of hope to all the Brothers. Addressing the big changes affecting our society, Br Charles unmasked false interpretations of hope and encouraged the Institute to live a genuine hope with serenity, audacity, patience and creativity. (Circular Sowers of hope, 1990).

6. Love for the poor. The issues of social justice were very much at the heart of Br Charles. He struggled to share his passion with the whole Institute out of fidelity to Champagnat and to our charism. During his mandate he established an international commission to deal with these topics. (Circular An urgent appeal: Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, 1990).

7. Laity. Br. Charles referred to our time as the era of Laity. Therefore he fostered the openness of the Marist

charism and mission to the world of lay people. He launched and promoted the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family. (Circular The Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family, 1991).

8. Marist Apostolic Spirituality. In Br Charles there had always been an inner desire to unify and harmonize his own life and the life of his brothers. His response to this desire emerged through a deepening of Marist Apostolic Spirituality, a deepening that encompassed consecration and mission, prayer life and community life. (Circular Marist Apostolic Spirituality, 1992 y 1993).

Major undertakings for Br Charles during his mandate included the creation of the International Finance Commission, the new Marist presence in Eastern Europe and the establishment of international scholasticates for Africa (MIC) and for Asia (MAPAC). Charles paid a visit to our Brothers in China and also participated in the Synod Pastores dabo vobis.

After his Generalate was over, Br Charles, then 69, was still strong and dynamic. He spent years in two novitiates: Kutama (Africa) and Lomeri (Pacific). He was the delegate Visitor for the Sector of India. When his memory started to fail, he came back to his Province living in different communities. Finally, he went to Campbelltown, where he had been receiving medical care until his death.

I invite all the Marists of Champagnat to join me in a thanksgiving to God for the marvelous gift of Br Charles' life and vocation. He coined the expression "To be Champagnat today". And this is what he really was for all of us; a heartfelt Marist, a truly genuine son of Champagnat.

May this faithful Little Brother of Mary rest in the peace of the Lord!

Br. Emili Turú - Superior general



# LET'S BE CHAMPAGNAT TODAY

"Our Institute, a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church, is a grace forever relevant to the world."

The following text was written by Br Charles Howard in 1989 as an introduction to the FMS Message. It was on the occasion of a double and exceptional anniversary of Champagnat, the bicentenary of his birth and the 150th anniversary of his death. We are reproducing the text here as a concrete representation of the thinking which characterized the mission of Br Charles as Superior General of the Institute.

All of this is very encouraging. However, we all know that there is a sense in which the most significant celebration will take place within the heart of each one of us, his Brothers.

For that reason, personal and community reflection and prayer will be of utmost importance for us all. As a starting point for our reflection we could take this sentence from Article 164 of the Constitutions:

"Our Institute, a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church, is a grace forever rel-

evant to the world."

We know that, led by the Spirit, Marcellin was seized by the love that Jesus and Mary had for him and for others. This was the wellspring of his spirituality and his apostolic energy, and out of these has flowed the distinctive character of our Institute. What we have inherited from him is not something just for ourselves. It is a gift of the Spirit to the Church, for the building up of the whole People of God. And this gift of the Spirit is a pre-sent day reality entrusted to us Marist Brothers of today. I am not referring here to a par-

ticular talent or expertise for running schools which is very obvious with us after the many years of accumulated experience that we have. No, I am talking about something much deeper and richer than that. What I am discussing is a grace, a gift of the Spirit to Marcellin, and then to his Brothers right down to our own time, a gift which embraces a particular spirituality, a distinctive spirit and an apostolic orientation to the Christian education of the young, especially those most in need. This gift is just as real for each one of us as it was for Champagnat and our response is to live it, to develop it and to share it.

## REQUIEM MASS FOR BROTHER CHARLES

Australia, 24 January 2012

The Requiem Mass for Brother Charles will be celebrated at St Joseph's College, Hunters Hill on Tuesday 24 January. The chief celebrant will be the President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, the Most Reverend Philip Wilson. Archbishop Wilson is also an ex-student of Brother Charles. The eulogist will be former Superior General, Brother Seán Sammon, from New York. The current Superior General, Brother Emili Turú, will also travel from Rome to take part.

The Requiem Mass for Br Charles Howard will be webcast live from 10:45 AM on 24th January, 2012. The webcast will be available on demand for 3 months following the requiem. Please follow this link to view the webcast: <http://player.streamcast.com.au/node/422/view>.

One of my favourite hymns is "La Familia Marista" composed by a group of Spanish Brothers and recently translated into French. There are people who know that I enjoy it and who sometimes sing it to give me pleasure. At the Centenary Celebrations in Madrid in 1986 there was a dinner for Brothers, parents, ex-students, friends and teachers and I think there were 1400 people pre-sent. Towards the end of the dinner I was asked to say a few words and at the end of my short speech I told the group that I had a special favour to ask of them. There was a hush, and then I told them that I would like to take away with me a special memory, the memory of the whole 1400 singing "La Familia Marista". And they did, and it remains a special memory for me:

"Tis not for us to turn away from work entrusted for this day. Marcellin must live in other parts, in our strong arms

and loving hearts. And on the course traced out by others we shall continue with our Brothers."

It is true. We are the Champagnats for today.

- We are the Champagnats for the young people in need, for those in search of values, for those in search of credible witnesses to Christianity.
- We are the Champagnats for young people in need of Brothers, someone to listen to them, to encourage them, to love them.
- We are the Champagnats for the poor, the dispossessed, the marginalised: we are Brothers for those most in need.
- We are the Champagnats for our own Brothers, with our concern, our encouragement, our support, our prayers, our love.

- We are the Champagnats for a Church which is struggling to serve mankind. We follow Champagnat with his great love of the Church - the pilgrim people, the body of Christ.
- We are the Champagnats for those who do not know Mary, who do not understand her love for them, her presence to them.

And we are the Champagnats to renew, to "refund" the Institute today. There is no genius who is going to come to tell us exactly what to do to renew the Institute. The most important instrument of the Holy Spirit in the renewal of the Institute is the conversion in the heart of each Marist Brother as we set out to give our measure of love to the world, as we set out to "refund" our community, our district, our province, our Institute in response to the call of the Holy Spirit. I believe that each of

us is called during this time to see how we can be more faithful to the charism of Champagnat.

I recall reading an article a few years back where the writer said that there had been Generals who had written important articles, visited the monasteries and had been very active to bring about the renewal of the Carmelites. But it was only when there were saints —John of the Cross and Teresa— as Generals that there was real renewal. I do not subscribe to the theory and part of the reason, no doubt, is my awareness of my own weaknesses. I think Marist Brothers need a saint then the last Chapter drew the wrong straw!



# 18 JANUARY 2012

## General House - Mass for Br Charles Howard

Fr Craig Larkin, a Marist Father, celebrated Mass here for the repose of the soul of Br Charles Howard. Among those present were the Superior General and his Council, the Brothers of the community and the laity of the General House, as well as Brothers from other communities.

Fr Craig Larkin, who knew our Br Charles well, testified to his attentive and affectionate attitude towards the Brothers – « this good Brother, these good Brothers » he would always say in their regard... Fr Craig also referred to Br Charles' simplicity, and his refusal of the honours due to his position.

Br Emili, for his part, mentioned that when he met him in 2010, Br Charles was still very much himself, that is, giving evidence

of his strong personality and gifts for leadership. He too testified to his affection for his confreres, shown in little details. Br Emili himself had been a beneficiary of the exquisite sensitivity of Br Charles when he was a young Brother in Barcelona, when Br Charles was visiting his Province. He also made allusion to Br Charles' special sensitivity to social concerns, to his efforts towards a more just and fraternal world, signifying thus new frontiers to our mission. The Superior General emphasized the invitation he had made to a significant group of lay



people to take part in the XIX General Chapter, thus opening the doors of the Institute to the lay reality of our charism and mission. Br Emili referred to the way in which Br Charles lived the expression « to be Champagnat today ». Yes, Br Charles was a Marist with all his heart, an authentic son of Champagnat.



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