

Good Morning Dear Brothers and all my fellow USA Marists,

A special welcome to all who join us virtually today. I look forward to many opportunities, hopefully in the near future, when we can once again fully and safely join together in person for gatherings and times to be united as a Marist Family.

I am truly humbled to be speaking to you this morning and would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Brothers of our Province who deemed me worthy to serve as your Provincial. I walk on the shoulders of giants, some of whom are present in this gathering. I pray that I might serve you with the grace and wisdom that so many of our previous leaders have blessed our Province. I believe each of them is a true example of servant leadership. I am most especially grateful for having had an incredible mentor, in Patrick, these past six years who has allowed me to grow in knowledge and understanding of the many graces and challenges that this new role will bring. He has taught me, by example, the two most essential lessons for my having any success. First, to entrust this work to the sacred hearts of Jesus and Mary and, secondly, to always act out of a deep love for all our Brothers, all in our Province, and all in our Marist World.

I pledge to you this morning my deepest desire to faithfully serve you well in the years ahead. I ask, as we move forward together, that you hold the needs of our Province and all our USA Marists in your daily prayers. Let us, as Champagnat did many years ago, entrust the work before us, to our Good Mother and know that she will not allow us or her project to fail.

As I began to prepare for today and the days that lie ahead, I quickly knew that I needed to select a Vice Provincial who would walk this journey with me as my Brother and who would enable our Province to grow through his vision, hard work and deep love for our Marist way of life. I am blessed that Br. Owen Ormsby is willing to fulfil this role and I ask that our Chapter delegates affirm him as my choice for Vice Provincial and first Provincial Councilor.

Twenty years ago, the former United States Provinces of Esopus and Poughkeepsie joined together to, once again, form one USA Province. In an effort to honor our past, our Province adopted the name of the Holy Family as a way of combining the patrons of the former provinces of St. Anne and St. Joseph. We live now as one. As I begin my time as your provincial, I ask you to prayerfully join with me in celebrating the rich history of our Marist journey. Recalling the many blessings God has already bestowed upon us, let us, together, reflect on the Holy Family during these next three years.

This first year, we will join the Universal Church's celebration of the Year of St. Joseph. Next year, we will focus on Mary, Our Good Mother and in the concluding year of my term, we will place Jesus at the center of our theme as we strive to live our common Marist Mission of Making Him known and Loved.

In the weeks, months and years ahead, numerous prayer resources and opportunities to engage in reflections around our Holy Family will be forthcoming to all members of our Province.

As I begin my time as your provincial and look to the future, I am filled with great hope and much gratitude.

We are blessed as a Province to have countless wisdom figures in our midst who have helped build the way of Marist Life in our Province. Many of our Senior Brothers and long-time Lay Marists have paved the very roads we walk. Their labors have built the buildings and programs that are at the very core of our mission. To you our Marist Elders, I ask that you continue to guide us by your witness, and especially your fidelity to praying for our future, so that we too might have the courage and foresight to create Marist life and continue your work in deepening our Marist Mission.

To those in our Province fully engaged in our Ministries and mission today, I am grateful for all you do to live out our Marist charism here in the USA. While I am thankful for the incredible sacrifices so many of you make to strengthen our Mission, our journey to becoming all that Champagnat dreamed is still far from over.

I believe we are at a very critical juncture in our USA History. If the next generation of Marists in our country are going to have a future, I believe we will need to take “risks, informed by wisdom.” The old days of “this is the way we always have done it” will not produce future Marist life. A failure on our part to respond to the urgent needs and signs of our times will not move us forward. We must be sowers of Hope and willing to constantly ask ourselves who is Champagnat calling us to be today. And there will be a need for some new structures to meet future needs.

All of us are keenly aware that we currently have only one Brother in the administration of our 6 owned schools and none in the administration of the MBCE or Camp Marist. In addition, many of our more seasoned lay administrators will shortly be approaching retirement age. Who will be the future keepers of our charism in our Ministries? Are our Ministries fully the vehicles of evangelization they need to be? These are the realities that face us. In an effort to respond to these and many other growing needs in our Ministries, I am creating today a USA Office of Marist Ministries. The new Office will support each of our Ministries placing a special emphasis on the Formation of future Marist Ministry Leaders, the Formation of Board members, as well as ensuring that each of our institutions is solidly focused on being a true place of Evangelization, that lives our Marist Charism and Mission. I am grateful to Br. Hank Hammer, who has agreed to join with Br. Tom Schady to begin this new initiative. As this office will be vital to our common future and the mission of our Province, I ask our Chapter Delegates to also affirm Hank Hammer as a Provincial Councilor for the next three years.

In regard to the size and the remaining composition of our next Provincial Council, I would respectfully ask our Chapter Delegates to consider the following criteria in your discernment process. I would find it helpful to have a Council that consisted of either 5 or 6 total members in addition to myself. I leave the final number to your disposition.

I would, however, ask this of those who choose to consider leaving their names in after nomination.

- *Each councilor would need to be willing to frequently travel as our Council meetings will continue to take place in each of the regions of our Province, as well as joint council meetings held throughout the Arco Norte Region.* It is vital to the future of our ministries that we as a Provincial Council take time to deepen our ongoing relationship, as trustees, with the administrations of all our Ministries and with each of their Boards.
- *We need councilors who are willing to think outside the box.* I have already indicated that new structures will be needed in facing future needs. I would hope that the council would work with me to provide *a sense of vision* as we begin this third century of Marist life and mission.
- *We need councilors who are willing to make the work of the province a priority.* While all of us do important work this is a critical time for the province and leadership is demanded.
- *We need councilors who are willing to embrace Marcellin's dream of a global family and a Marist family that includes five branches, including the Marist Laity.*
- *And finally, we need councilors who are willing to embrace the province's responsibility to the district of Canada, the Arco Norte Region and the Institute*

Apart from the invaluable insights and wisdom that Owen and Hank would provide, some of the other needed perspectives and voices which I would find most helpful to have at the table as Councilors include:

- A Brother who has a wide vision of our Marist World as our involvement as a member of the Arco Norte Region and our commitment to growing as one Global Marist Family continues to deepen and expand. I have found that in my time serving on the Provincial Council, experience in global leadership and perspective has been an invaluable voice.
- A Brother who will help guide the continued evolution of our Marist Brother Formation Programs. In the coming months we will need to implement the findings of a recent evaluation of our USA Initial Formation program so that the recommendations of that study might be reflected as we move to the future.
- For many years now, we have been blessed to adequately meet the needs, both physical and pastoral, of our Senior Brothers. I consider them our greatest treasure and source of wisdom. We must ensure that we always have their needs, concerns and represented voice in our decision-making. I would be most grateful to have a Brother that could always speak for that needed voice in our province.
- Lastly, a Brother who has a passion for Solidarity with our least favored would be a critical presence and voice on the next council, as this is an area I intend to grow within our Province.
- Apart from these Councilors, there are a number of other needed voices that will often be invited to be part of our decision making as we move forward. They include the voices of our Evangelization efforts, the voices of our young people, our Lay Marists, our

Province Medical staff, and none of this will be possible without the careful stewardship and input from our Province Finance and Development Offices as well as our Finance and Investment teams.

So please, brothers, discern with the Lord, who can best help us as we face future challenges? For there are many challenges.

During the recent season of Lent, we may have often heard the words to the song, “The Lord hears the cry of the poor.” As a Province can we do a better job at truly embracing the words of that song and respond to the cry of the poor in even more profound ways? As Marists, We bear the name of Mary. As a USA Province how might we continue to grow in being the Marial face of the church at a time when so many are in need of such a resource and inspiration? Our recent 22<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter calls us to be Bridge builders, to journey with Children and young people living on the margins of life and to respond boldly to emerging needs.

What bridges do we, as a province, need to build? What new structures do we need to build such bridges:

- With young people
- With the marginalized
- With the brothers and fellow Lay Marists of our Arco Norte region
- With our global Marist family
- With our Marists of Champagnat USA

As we set out to build these bridges let us remember and pray as Champagnat so often did, “If the Lord does not build the house....”

I believe that during this past year, one of the most hopeful signs of life for our Province has been the continued development of our Marists of Champagnat program. For more than a generation, our USA Lay Marist efforts have continued to deepen and grow through the hard work of many Marists. Well the plane has finally landed. We now have a vehicle for our Brothers and Lay Marists to move forward in communion together: supporting each other in our unique vocations and in developing a path that allows us to work together in fostering our common Marist mission here in the United States. A special word of thanks to our USA Council of Lay Marists for all their efforts in the creation and implementation of the new Marists of Champagnat Formation program and to the 57 USA Marists in the first cohort of this program. You have been bold and daring. And like our founder, you have shown persistence in making this dream a reality.

Our Institute calls us as Brothers to walk in communion with our Lay Marists so that together, we can grow our Mission as Marists of Champagnat. Are we willing to work together, pray together, live together for mission? Are we as Brothers willing to empower with them? If not now, when? We, as Brothers, must do all we can to help foster and deepen their call to live their

unique vocation as Lay Marists and encourage others to join them. Likewise, we ask them to promote our way of life among the young men they may know. So that together we build a common future that will continue to have Brothers and Lay Marist working in communion in the generations that will follow us. 204 years ago, Marcellin was convinced we need Brothers to build his dream. Today, as his dream continues to expand, we need all Marists of Champagnat, Brothers and Lay Marists, to respond to the many Montagnes in our world. Together, we are called to be a true Marian face of the church.

We have been blessed as a USA Province in recent years by a number of young men who are answering the call to Marist Brotherhood. We are joined here today by Sam Amos, who professed his final Vows only a few months ago, by Luis Ramos who continues his initial formation as a temporary professed Brother as well as by Rob Dittus and Ryan Ritcher, who are currently in our postulancy program. When I look at great young men like these who want to embrace our dream and way of life, I am reminded of the words of Sr. Joan Chittister, who when speaking about the future of Religious Life in our country said, "Who is to say the best of your years are not yet to come?"

May Mary our Good Mother continue to Bless our Province with many more vocations to both our Marist Brotherhood and to our Lay Marist movement. Let us pray for all Marist Vocations as if it all depends on God, but yet work for vocations as if it all depended on us. To every single Brother and Lay Marist in our Province, if you truly believe and desire a future than this important work of supporting all Marist Vocations is also in your hands.

To our Marist Young Adult community, our Marist Youth of today, and all young people who may have a vocation to be a Marist Brother or a Marists of Champagnat, you are the yet to be realized Dream of Champagnat. You are needed in the years ahead. I pray that you will continue to walk with us, grow with us, deepen your love of Jesus and Mary with us, so that one day we may pass the torch of our Marist Charism to you as the Marist Leaders of Tomorrow.

While we have much to be excited about and look forward to as a USA province, our road ahead will also be filled with many challenges for us as Brothers, for our communities, for our Lay Marists, for all our ministries and for all of us who are proud to be USA Marists of Champagnat.

If we are to truly embrace the Gospel that we are each called to live, then we cannot do so without also embracing the crosses that will come in living that Gospel. Today as a Church, we continue to celebrate the Easter season and Christ's resurrection, but we must remember that we cannot enjoy and celebrate the hope that Easter brings unless we first endure and follow Christ on the journey of Good Friday.

While we have much to be proud of and grateful for in our rich history of Marist Life here in the United States, we also must continue to reconcile the collective sins of some of our Province Members in earlier times. There shamefully have been claims of sexual abuse committed against young people who were entrusted to our care. We must own that sad fact. We must

pray for those victims, do our best to make amends, and as we have actively done for many years now, do everything we can to ensure that such acts will never be allowed to happen again.

For the past 16 years, our Province and each of our Ministries have been fully accredited by Praesidium in regard to ensuring the protection and safeguarding of all young people and vulnerable adults entrusted to our care. We, as a Province, are fully committed to being proactive, in every possible way, to safeguard the dignity and rights of all children. I ask each of you, my brothers and Lay Marists, to rededicate yourselves to this sacred commitment as we journey forth together.

Likewise, we also live in a period of history in our country and world, where many injustices continue to run rampant such as racial, gender, sexual orientation and economic disparities and discrimination among too many people. We as a USA Province will continue to challenge all our members and ministries to find ways to be a "*Beacon of Hope*" in these turbulent times. We must continue to model how a Marist community embraces diversity and is built on acceptance, love and how together and united we foster our common Marist Mission. By the lives we live, we must give witness to the truth: that everyone is our brother and sister.

We are living in unparalleled times. We may never again return to what we experienced as "normal"! If COVID has taught us anything, it has taught us that we need each other. That we must work at being connected to each other. That in times of crisis, opportunities exist. Over the next three years, we will continue to face new challenges. A few of these will be in the areas of community, finances and staffing.

If we want to attract new Members, we will need to grow a number of communities that will be attractive to younger people and formative for our younger members. We may need to create more mixed communities of Brothers and Lay Marists if our Mission is to grow, thrive and meet the current signs of our times. We will also probably have to make tough decisions about the viability of residences when we no longer can find folks willing to move to a community in need of more members.

As a Province, we have been incredibly blessed by all those who have worked tirelessly, for many years, in the areas of Finance, Investments and Fundraising. As a result of their heroic efforts, our senior Brothers are able to receive the loving care and comfort they so richly deserve. As we look to the future, we are grateful that we have the security in knowing that our retirement income and funds will continue to meet the needs of our senior Brothers.

As we look at the future of our Marist mission, however, we must strategically focus on sustainability. We have limited resources for the future, both in personnel and finances. We must, in the coming years, increase significant funds for province operations. We will also need to add personnel in a number of key areas if we wish to not only sustain but also grow our province. We need to empower some younger folks to begin to take on leadership roles; and we will need to mentor them so that they can grow into competent leaders who deeply love and

embrace our Marist Mission. We must do all we can to ensure that they will be true keepers of the Charism.

In closing, I simply wish to again express my deepest gratitude to you, our Chapter Delegates, for the wisdom and direction that you will provide me and our new council through your discernment and deliberations. I thank all our in-person and virtual guests who will add insights and important voices to the discussions during these days, especially our Lay Marists and Marist Young Adults. Lastly, I again ask that you join me daily in entrusting all the needs of all those in our Province and all our Ministries to our Good Mother. With and through her all things are possible.

Praise be Jesus Christ...and Mary His Mother