

They brought with them an act of commitment which they had all signed. During the Mass it was placed on the altar under the corporal thus uniting their commitment with the sacrifice of Christ.

By the declaration they promised to devote themselves to the foundation of the Society of Mary.

Jean-Claude Colin and Fourvière

Fr Craig Larkin writes:

The Fourvière pledge became a powerful symbol for Jean-Claude Colin because it represented for him two realities: first, that the Marist project was where his deepest desires lay; second, that it would become real only if he made it real.

The Marist project was not something outside of him, which he joined. It was an interior driving force which inspired him.

For Marists today, the same is true. Fourvière represents not only that Mary wants the Society, but that she wants Marists in order to make it exist.

Source texts:

'Marist Pilgrimage', Craig Larkin SM (Rome, 1991)
'Ascent to Fourvière', Justin Taylor SM (Rome, 2015)

Later Marists and the shrine

Since the event of July 1816 many Marists have come to Fourvière, some at moments of special significance.

On Aug 29, 1833, a Mass was celebrated here before the departure of Fr Jean-Claude Colin for his first visit to Rome, accompanied by Frs Peter Chanel and Antoine Bourdin for Rome.

In Oct 1836, before the departure of the first missionaries for Oceania, Bishop Pompallier had a novena of Masses said here, and on the first day, Fr. Chanel hung a heart containing the names of the missionaries round the neck of the infant Jesus, giving birth to the legend that Mary had given her mantle to the future martyr.

Since then, many Marist celebrations have taken place either in this chapel or in the basilica.

On Jul 24, 1966, the first time that the four branches of the Marist Family celebrated together here, the 150th anniversary of the Fourvière pledge was remembered.

Meanwhile countless Marists, some climbing the steps in their own 'ascent of Fourvière', have knelt at the ancient shrine, renewing their commitment in the spirit of the 1816 pledge.

They will do so again on Jul 23, 2016, bicentenary of the historic promise.



Fourvière

1816-2016

'On Jul 23, 1816 twelve Marist aspirants climbed the hill of Fourvière overlooking the city of Lyons to the ancient chapel of the Blessed Virgin.

Here, for centuries, Catholics had sought the intercession of Mary for their future dreams.

The youthful group solemnly pledged to establish the Society of Mary as soon as they could.'

'Vision & promise - the Fourvière pledge'

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The hill of Fourvière

Overlooking the city of Lyons from its west is the hill of Fourvière.

In ancient times this was the site of the Roman forum (whence its name *'forum vetus'*, the ancient forum) and pre-Roman Celtic town of Lugdunum.

Since 1170 there has been a shrine here dedicated to the Blessed Virgin.

Over the centuries pilgrims came - and still come, from all parts of France and beyond - to seek the intercession of Mary for their hopes and dreams.

The chapel, restored in 1751, has not greatly altered over the years. But today it stands dwarfed by the giant basilica overshadowing it, consecrated in 1896, in fulfillment of a vow by the city of Lyons

and in thanks for Mary's for protection from the ravages of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870.

Fourvière's popularity as a place of pilgrimage is evidenced by the many plaques covering the chapel's walls.

Two plaques in the sanctuary are of special significance to Marists. On the left of the chancel is one commemorating the event of Jul 23, 1816 when the pioneer Marist aspirants pledged to form the Society of Mary. Another, opposite, commemorates the founding of the Marist Brothers.

The Marist aspirants

The Marist project began in the early part of 19th century, post-Revolution France.

In Lyons' diocesan seminary of St Irenaeus an idea was shared to form a Society of Mary as a counterpart of the Society of Jesus.

Inspiration came from one of the seminarians, **Jean-Claude Courveille**, whose earlier experience of healing and of hearing a call of the Blessed Virgin convinced him that Mary wished to have her own Society.

Another seminarian, **Jean-Claude Colin**, already had his own 'idea' of a society, which so far remained with him alone. Recognising a similarity between it and the Society of Mary to which Jean-Claude Courveille was recruiting, Colin joined the little group which had formed around this idea. Before long he would come to be acknowledged as the Founder of the Society of Mary.

Now the day for ordination had come for several



of the group. They were about to separate. It was the time for them to make a commitment. They would seal this before the venerated statue of Our Lady of Fourvière.

July 23, 1816

The morning after the ordination of five of their number, twelve young men, the Marist aspirants, climbed the 800 steps leading to the shrine.

One of the twelve was **Marcellin Champagnat** who would soon establish the Marist Brothers.

The common project would be a tree with several branches: the Marist Family.

One alone, Jean-Claude Courveille, celebrated Mass - the other newly ordained were intending to celebrate their first Mass in their parishes. All received Holy Communion from Fr Courveille.