

## 48. A family matter

*The following are extracts from a letter written by Marist lay women ("Tertiary Sisters" to use their term) in Lyons, France, to Bishop Jean-Baptiste Pompallier, Bishop of Maronea and Vicar Apostolic of Western Oceania. Bishop Pompallier had begun the fraternity of Christian Maidens in Lyons.*

LETTER OF AUGUST 17, 1838

Many of us, your Excellency, have had the good fortune of contributing to the preparations for the departure of the Fathers who are taking these letters to Oceania, and we assure your Excellency that all the work we did has been the cause of great happiness for us; for we consider this mission to be a family matter since it is concerned with making Jesus and Mary known and loved, and since we cannot help you with our own hands and arms in Polynesia, we have tried and are still trying to do something for this undertaking – first, by sincere prayers which we offer to the Blessed Virgin and then, whenever the occasion presents itself, we will work with all our might in the preparations for the departure of missionaries....

There are only ten of us, but already six of us have had the happiness of making the commitment and being enrolled under the banner of Mary by a solemn oath. This wonderful ceremony took place on August 17, 1837 and we hope that it will happen again soon. Since the Marist Sisters moved into Lyons, it has been much easier to hold our meetings, which take place regularly, for these Ladies are kind enough to look upon us as their sisters. We hope, your Excellency, that the Blessed Virgin will increase her little flock and that your Excellency's prayers, as well as those of your beloved converts, will obtain for us all the abundant blessings we need to become the solid foundation of the Third Order of Mary.

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From their very beginnings, lay Marists saw themselves as being connected to the vowed Marists. The Fathers had begun their missionary work in Oceania, and in this they were supported spiritually and practically by the confraternities of lay people. The Marist Sisters, from very early on, also took a warm and supportive interest in them. As early as 1833, Mother Saint Joseph (Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn) sent the Tertiary Brothers of Mary a gift to adorn the altar in their chapel, and in that same year, Fr Colin encouraged her to take an active part in developing the Third Order in Belley. This cooperation and interdependence of the members of the Marist Family has, happily, become a much stronger feature in recent years, and we are all eager to promote it.

