



**First Marist
Community in Brazil
17-01-1978**



First Community in Brazil (1978)



Preparation for the first community in Brazil.

According to documents and letters from the Superior General of the time: Sister Margaret Purcell: the first time there was talk of opening a house and beginning a community in Latin America occurred at the General Chapter in 1966. This discussion was in response to a call from the Church of Rome, it was a request "from the Holy Father, Pope Paul VI, to Religious Congregations to assist in the work of evangelization in the countries of Central and South America. Although they discussed Pope Paul VI's proposal, they put it aside, judging it to be a not very feasible dream to realise. The objections raised meant that the proposal stopped there.

The resumption of the matter in 1976 seemed, to them, the right moment, a decade had been enough time for it to mature resumed the proposal, making them ready to undertake it (LACERDA, 1993).

The Church's new way of conceiving the world included the need for a commitment to this reality of Latin America, which is the reality of poverty, misery, violence and blatant social exclusion. Thus, the call of Pope Paul VI had reached the Marist Sisters.

To bring this project of bringing the Congregation of the Marist Sisters in Brazil to reality, Sister Margaret Purcell, Superior General of the Marist Sisters, had the help of Brothers Avelino Spada and Aloísio Khun, both Brazilians who were in the administration of the Province of Santa Catarina when the negotiations for the mission of the Marist Sisters in Brazil were taking place in 1977.

The following reasons about the mission of the Marist Sisters for Brazil:

- From the desire to "leave" and to "go" to meet the people. That awakened in the sisters after Vatican Council II, the concern to refound the congregation;
- From the insistent invitation of Pope Paul VI for religious congregations to help in the work of evangelization in the countries of Africa, Central and South America;
- From the insistent invitation of the Marist Brothers, especially Brother Avelino Spada, to come to Brazil bringing the feminine branch of the Society of Mary.

Foundation of the Community at Guaramirim Santa Catarina

This first community of sisters was located inside the Santo Antonio Hospital, a municipal hospital, which underwent a major transformation during the four years that the Marist Sisters were there. When the Sisters had finished preparing the team of nurses for standard work and had set up the X-ray centre, they left the hospital, closing the religious community there for good, because new communities had already been opened and some of the sisters who had started together in Guaramirim were already on other mission frontiers.



The beginning of the community in Guaramirim occurred with the arrival of the first five sisters: Bernadette Healy, Irish, a nurse specialising in natural childbirth. Grace Ellul, born in Australia, teacher and psychologist, Imelda Layden, born in Ireland, physiotherapist, Mary Duffy also Irish and a nurse, and Violette Marie Donatta Cyr, born in Canada, a teacher by profession, on 13 May 1978. The promise of the General Administration of the Marist Sisters was, according to Grace Ellul, to send eight sisters to Brazil (LACERDA, 1997 p.19).

During the first months of 1980 the other sisters arrived. Kathleen Gilligan, originally from Ireland and a nurse, Gemma F. Wilson, a New Zealander, teacher and musician, and Antonia Onali, an Italian, also a teacher.

The arrival of this new group made possible the closure of the first community, the opening of a new community in Florianópolis and, above all, the mission in Rondônia.



Violeta, Mary Duffy, Grace, Imelda, Bernadette

Foundation of the Community in Florianópolis Santa Catarina

Guaramirim was just a beginning. The Marist Sisters in their mission, like so many other religious institutions, hoped for the commitment of young Brazilian women.

When the sisters arrived in Brazil, Nair Hammes was already waiting for them at the hospital. Nair came from a large family, one of her brothers (Antônio Hammes) was a Marist Brother, and she had already tried to live religious life in other congregations, But on hearing Brother Avelino Spada, then Provincial of the Marist Brothers, tell of the coming of the Marist Sisters to Brazil, she decided to stay with them.

Nair reached her Silver Jubilee as a Marist Sister, was a Regional Councillor for Brazil, directress of novices, did very beautiful work in vocations ministry, started two mission communities, the community of Bairro Tupi in Belo Horizonte/MG and the community of Morro da Penitenciária in Florianópolis, and then left the congregation.

Tereza Periolo, the dearly missed Terezinha, was an older woman of Getúlio Vargas/RS, 64 years of age, still single and without a religious congregation. She had worked as a cook for the Marist Brothers for many years. Terezinha lived 20 years in the Congregation, three years of initial formation and 17 years of consecrated religious life. She died on 24 July 1998.



Bernardette, Terezhina, Imelda, Katleen

Nair, Grace, Clarice