St. Marcellin Joseph Benoit Champagnat, patron of education and teachers

Marcellin Joseph Benoit Champagnat (1789- 1840) was a French priest and founder of the Society of Mary. Born to a humble family, he received no formal education until the age of fifteen, although he was possessed of a deep faith and a determination to advance the Gospel. After meeting a seminary professor, he embarked upon the road to the priesthood, studying with fervor as part of a class that included Jean-Marie Vianney, the future Curé of Ars. After ordination in 1816, he became friends with other priests who shared his zeal, including Jean-Claude Colin, who co-founded with him the Society of Mary. Marcellin, meanwhile, urged the society to permit teaching brothers, eventually receiving the task of founding this branch of religious.

In 1817, Marcellin discovered his first two vocations to the Marist Brothers. From this humble start came the congregation of the Little Brothers of Mary, or Marist Brothers, founded in poverty, humility, and total trust in God under Mary's protection and with the purpose of having its members serve as teachers, catechists, and educators of young people. In 1836, the Holy See gave official recognition to the Society of Mary and entrusted it with the missions of Oceania. Marcellin continued laboring for his congregation until his death. He was canonized on April 18, 1999, by Pope John Paul II (r. 1978-2005). His feast day is June 6.

Learn more about his order and his life here.