



# The Marist Option for Education in the African District of the Society

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The congregation of the Marist Fathers and Brothers is open to any type of ministry. But one of the most important on which our founder, Jean-Claude Colin, focused is that of education. In the original Constitutions which he himself wrote, he even suggested that Marists should take it as a fourth vow in the Society.

This ministry education has been central for many of the young Africans who have joined the congregation. Following what our French pioneers did by opening a school, a school which has now been given back to the Archdiocese of Dakar, the African Marists decided to open a new school in a suburb of Dakar, in a village called Ndiakhirate.

## Why the choice of a village in the suburbs of Dakar?

The rate of literacy in Senegal is low (58%) compared to Cameroon (which is 84%). Besides, Senegal has the highest rate of immigration to Europe compared to other African countries. Those who have visited Dakar have seen the widespread phenomenon of street children which is not as pronounced in many other countries in Africa. Muslim parents send their children to religious schools to learn the Koran, but these children are often exploited by their Koranic teachers to beg in the streets. If they do not bring in the expected amount of money, they are punished. Children who cannot comply with

their teachers' quotas and otherwise have nowhere else to go are put out and remain on the streets. You can understand from this why some Senegalese youth choose to join the Jihad. Many others who do not go to school at all would much rather leave Africa.

Today, there is a great need to teach our children in Africa how to live together despite our differences of color, religion and culture. Thus, we Marists have decided to establish a secondary school for 2,000 students, for both boys and girls, and for Christians and Muslims together, in a country where Christianity is not the majority. This is a way for us, we hope, to promote a living together in harmony and peace on our Continent.

We also hope to respond to a call from Pope Francis who invites all religious to leave their comfort zone and to go to difficult places in order to bring the good news to the people who feel neglected or abandoned. Ndiakhirate is actually located 40 km. from Dakar. Since life is becoming more and more expensive in the capital city, many people choose to settle in this suburb of Dakar where rent and other amenities are more affordable. Unfortunately, for Christians who come to this area, there is neither a Catholic school nor a Catholic parish.





We Marists bought three hectares of land near the primary school which resumes in October. We are hoping in time to build a small chapel, to establish a community, and to establish a strong Christian presence there.

We also maintain a school in the remote village of Cameroon called Voundou in the diocese of Bafia which we opened as a primary school five years ago. With the help of our General Administration, we just recently built three classrooms because the number of students increases every year.

Our Marist District of Africa has made education the central mission of our presence. We and many others see it as the central need for Africa in the future. Our choice is confirmed by numerous meetings of the Catholic Bishops of Africa. We are happy as Marists to respond not only a central call of our Founder, Fr. Colin, but also the Bishops of Africa.

Various photos from the opening of the new school *Cours Sainte Maria de Ndiakhirate* in the suburbs of Dakar. Students belong to all religions, notably Catholics and Muslims.