



Marianist Lay Community of North America (MLC-NA)

The Marianist Center

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Being Church in the Modern World

Circular No. 1

Marianist Origins and Implications for Us Today

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Dear Friends,

Building on the theme of the 2017 Assembly of the Marianist Lay Community of North America, “Yes, God: Committing to the Marianist Movement,” I offer you the following reflection and suggestions for action. If we are truly going to be a movement, we mustn’t be stagnant. We must attract new members to the Marianist Family.

The first Sodality started on 8 December, 1800 as the missionary project of Blessed Chaminade to re-Christianize France following the French Revolution. There was little Christianity and parishes were practically empty.ⁱ There was a need for first Christians, just like in Jesus’ time.

With Mary’s role in salvation history as a focal point and guide, the Sodality committed to Mary’s mission communicating the faith and joining her in bearing Christ to the world. On February 2, 1801, members of the Sodality made their first act of consecration to Mary.

The following year the Sodality grew to 66 Sodalists and by 1802 there were over 100. They were from all walks of life. There was a place for everyone.

“Sometimes we say the purpose was to multiply Christians, but we have to understand well the method. In the Sodality of Father Chaminade, Christians were multiplied by multiplying Sodalists... More than a group of select persons, it was an organization for everyone.”ⁱⁱ “It was a whole new strategy of finding, drawing, and integrating others into the Sodality to multiply Christians. It was the basic mission of the Sodality.”ⁱⁱⁱ

It would have been interesting to have been invited by Fr. Chaminade to join the Sodality. He knew he wanted to build community like the early disciples. Did he invite people to a prayer meeting? Perhaps a bible study? Was he up front, saying “Join me so we can re-Christianize France”? Did he say, “Would you be interested in getting together with a few people where we can be community for one another, pray, and discuss our faith?” He reached out to people he knew. But where did everyone else come from? What was their expectation? What was his? Did people come and then tell their friends, who then told their friends, who then told their friends, and so on? Perhaps.

What are the implications for us today? While wars exist around the world, we (in the United States) also experience a different kind of war. The Christian way of life is counter-cultural to society. Society tells us to be individualistic and materialistic. Yet there is a deep yearning by many for a kinder, gentler, simpler world, and a place to call a spiritual home where all are welcome as brothers and sisters. Parishes are shrinking, not growing. Christianity, Catholicism in particular, is shrinking,^{iv} This is especially true as many people have become disenchanted with the Church due to scandal and rigid teachings.^v

The mission of the Marianist Lay Community is to be *church in the modern world*. Through our “contagion of good” and as a “spectacle of saints” our lives should be attractive to others. But what are the intentional ways we find, draw, and integrate others into our community? It is our mission, after all.

Could you invite people to a prayer meeting? Perhaps a bible study? Could you say “Join me so we can re-Christianize the world and be church for one another?” Could you say, “Would you be interested in getting together with a few people where we can share, pray, and discuss our faith?” Or, “You know, every other Thursday I get together with people to pray and discuss our faith. It’s a little faith community. Would you like to come sometime?” Could you do that with people you know (significant others, friends, co-workers, people from church)?

If you’re not a member of a community, such questions could lead to the creation of one. Remember, where two or three are gathered... (Mt 18:20). But if you’re already a member of a community, the questions, or similar ones, could be a way to invite new members and grow your community. Depending on your circumstances you can either be spontaneous or plan ahead. You’ll want to consider the timing of the invite, the plan/topic for the meeting or activity, and you’ll want to follow up. Does your community have a policy on welcoming guests or new members?

When should you invite others?

- ❖ **Anytime**
- ❖ **Special prayer/social celebrating Marianist founders**
- ❖ **Prayer/social on Shrove Tuesday (night before Ash Wednesday)**
- ❖ **Advent prayer service**
- ❖ **Lenten prayer service**
- ❖ **A summer picnic, cookout, meet-and-greet (no pressure, just fun)**
- ❖ **Game night (no pressure, just fun)**
- ❖ **A night where a special topic will be discussed that might be of interest to others**

How will the inviting happen?

- ❖ **Are you on God’s time or yours? Is there an open invitation where anyone can invite anyone at any time?**
- ❖ **Will certain people do the inviting?**
- ❖ **Will everyone do inviting? Could everyone invite at least one person?**
- ❖ **Will there be a specially planned time to invite others?**
- ❖ **Are kids and families welcome (applies to special gatherings as well as on-going meetings)?**

Logistics

- ❖ **Where will it be (someone's house, parish hall or meeting room, park pavilion, etc.)**
- ❖ **Is there plenty of space?**
- ❖ **Will there be enough food (without having to make guests bring something)? Who's bringing what?**
- ❖ **Do you want RSVPs? Do guests have to RSVP? Who's receiving them?**
- ❖ **Consider having nametags**
- ❖ **Take time to do introductions. Or if a picnic/social setting, individuals could shepherd their guests and make introductions along the way.**
- ❖ **Follow up – organizers/members should reach out to guests to see what they thought and if they'd like to come back. Extend further invitations as appropriate.**

Topical Meeting or Prayer

- ❖ **Discussion/meeting? What is the topic? Who will plan it? What kind of sharing will be expected (none, individual, large group, pairs, small group)? Could certain sharing be too intimidating for guests?**
- ❖ **Prayer service or scripture reflection? You could easily do a *Lectio Divina* or reading and discussion of Sunday readings. Or someone could plan a prayer service. Who will take the lead?**

On this Feast of the Immaculate Conception, the anniversary of the first gathering of the Sodality convened by Fr. Chaminade, I encourage all Marianist communities to prayerfully ponder the possibilities and take action to welcome others into your communities. If you don't actively participate in a community in your geographic location, start one! Or at least gather people for a meaningful encounter.

As if putting our faith into action wasn't enough, perhaps, with the holidays approaching, you might make it a New Year's resolution to be church not only for yourselves but for others. Give them what they seek, as we share our gift of community with the church and the world.

In Jesus and Mary,

Matt Dunn

Chair, MLC-NA

ⁱ *Origins of the Marianist Family, Notes on Marianist History*, Eduardo Benlloch, SM, North American Center for Marianist Studies, Dayton, Ohio, 2010, pg 90.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, pg. 95

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, pg. 97

^{iv} "America's Changing Religious Landscape," Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015.

^v "An Attempt to Answer the Question: Where are the Young Adults," Fr. Peter Daley, National Catholic Reporter, January 12, 2015.