



INTERNATIONAL TEAM / MARIANIST LAY COMMUNITIES  
EQUIPO INTERNACIONAL / COMUNIDADES LAICAS MARIANISTAS  
EQUIPE INTERNATIONALE / COMMUNAUTÉS LAÏQUES MARIANISTES

## Transformed and transformers -Formation in the Marianist Lay Communities-

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### Circular #1

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Feast of the Immaculate Conception

Dear sisters and brothers,

The International Team chosen in Seoul (Korea) in July 2018 is in the second half of its mandate, and preparations have begun for the 8th International Meeting. Today, in this very particular and historical context of a global health crisis, I am pleased to present you with a first circular letter which aims to shed light on the reflection on the theme of formation. It is a theme that is particularly close to my heart and which was also a challenge voted during our last international assembly. Formation is a constant and legitimate preoccupation, since on it depends our human and spiritual growth of each of us and of the Marianist Family.

"We enhance the development of people by encouraging ongoing formation and concern for the growth of the unique gifts received from God. Each member, as well as the community as a whole, through resolutions to continue to grow, seeks to progress in personal fulfillment, maturity and true interior freedom".<sup>1</sup>

How can we be Lay Marianists who transform the world and the society we live in?

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<sup>1</sup> *The role of MLCs in the Church and in the world* § 4 and 5

«We cannot think of ourselves as lay transformers of the realities in which we live and work if we are not first of all transformed.» <sup>2</sup>

Our baptism places the beginning and the foundation of our vocation as Lay Marianists. It represents the starting point of a dynamic openness to new perspectives. This gift invigorates and transforms us as we become part of daily life and the "Sequela Christi". We all aspire to transformation, not into a better, ideal version of who we are, but into our authentic, revealed version, that glorious image of our being fully realized by the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ in our lives.

To be a transformed Lay Marianist is first of all a being formed by grace which is declined in many ways. This first circular has no other ambition than to introduce us into our dynamic of transformation, better said, of revelation of what we are. Like any path, it passes through certain stages of unsuspected richness. There is no end in sight, except that of being able to fully accomplish our mission: "to be transformed" in order to become a "transformer" in our family, professional and ecclesial reality.

## **The thirst for formation of the Lay Marianist**

### **Towards a definition or "definitions" of formation?**

Why this thirst, this search? A question related to what everyone understands by the term "training". If this aspect of our Christian life concerns us Lay Marianists so much, it is because we feel that it represents a vital aspect: what we are and what we are called to become, through our daily lives. It is frequent to note that formation, education in the faith, is often perceived as a juxtaposed aspect, external to ourselves, which would make us become someone else whom we understand better, especially through the exclusive assimilation of intellectual knowledge. It is sometimes this Christian Gnosticism that resurfaces, when we think that our salvation depends on a superior and enlightened form of knowledge (gnosis), the fruit of personal experience in the search for truth, whereas the Christian faith recognizes that salvation and happiness are a free gift from God.

Formation, whatever the concrete plan proposed, is first of all the awakening of a thirst for truth, a taste for broad ideas, analysis and critical sense. All this qualifies well the Lay Marianist that we are becoming little by little. It is to return to the seeds of holiness deposited in each one of us on the day of our Baptism and to allow them to grow and reveal the fullness of a person. Formation is a way of shaping our human and spiritual identity, it is a way of glimpsing the ability to read our life in the light of the meaning we wish to give it. Formation is a specific way of looking at people and at the world that looks beyond appearances and learns to read the signs of the times. Formation is the possibility of distinguishing in human experiences the

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<sup>2</sup> Subsecretary Ghisoni at the meeting with Acción Católica in Spain, August 2019.

lasting, the authentic, the eternal, already present in the world. For we know thanks to Saint Paul that "even though in us the outer man is going to his ruin, the inner man is renewed day by day, that the goal is not what is seen, but what is not seen, what is seen is temporary, but what is not seen is eternal. »<sup>3</sup>

## **The Word of God, the privileged place for the formation of the Lay Marianist**

The Lay Marianist knows that there is no other place than the Bible, the Word of God, to seek and find « the wisdom of God ». The Second Vatican Council places Sacred Scripture at the center of our Christian life, so much so that the Constitution *Dei Verbum* opens the writings of this Council.

« For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the force and power in the word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life.»<sup>4</sup>

Everything is said: the Word of God is the best place where God reveals Himself to each one of us. Pope Francis reminded us of this when he decreed in 2019 "the Sunday of the Word of God", the third Sunday of Ordinary Time. Everything lies in sitting down - the typical position of the disciple who is listening - and opening the book of Scripture in order to listen to the Word of God, to draw from it the necessary resource and to advance progressively in the direction of one's life and an understanding of the world. The most important thing here is not so much the knowledge we have about the Bible, but the journey we make inwardly with it as we read it. The Lord reveals Himself through His Word and the way it resounds in our hearts. It is His way of "conversing" with us. The path that each Lay Marianist takes with the Word of God is the path of our spiritual life, of the life of the Spirit within us. To form oneself to read it, to meditate on it, to "ruminate on it" as St. Augustine said, is to form oneself progressively to the spiritual life that has been planted in seed and to allow it to grow and be fulfilled. Our life then can have the taste of the "eternal" and the "authentic". Thus, the Word of God shapes and transforms us. It leads us to our plenitude and our full accomplishment because it is creative and operates mysteriously in the heart of each one of us. Thanks to the Word of God, we know what God wants to do of us, with Him.

God knows us well for having created us, "formed" us.<sup>5</sup> This verb used in Genesis chapter 2, verse 7 is used to indicate the work of the craftsman who builds the earthenware vessels. It is the action of the artist who takes the clay and gives it a shape. This is how God works with us. There is everything of Him in this work of art. But He uses the dust of the ground, of the earth and not the clay to create his work. The main action of God at the heart of his creation is

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<sup>3</sup> 2 Cor 4, 14-18

<sup>4</sup> *Dei Verbum* Chp VI n° 21

<sup>5</sup> In Hebrew יָצַק which literally means "to form", "to shape".

therefore to have created man (and woman) and to have given them a form. In the Old Testament man is נֶפֶשׁ-soul-בֶּשֶׂר-chair- and רוּחַ-breath-. Man is capable of God. In the Yahwist narrative, only man (and woman) are created with the hands of God, God's life-giving breath. The priestly narrative insists on the ultimate fullness of what God has created: man and woman in his image and likeness. And we know that God is faithful. His creation is not finished in absolute terms. God continues his creative work. So we know that we are each created continually, accompanied by God to give us progressively our form. He has done the work of creation, of formation, and He continues to do so.

With Moses and the people of Israel, God is doing this work to accompany the people to their own «rebirth ». This is the whole history of God's people, it is also our history. At its center: the liberation of his people from the land of Egypt, as a sign of faithfulness to his covenant.

« In rabbinic thought, the liberation celebrated on the feast of Passover is the founding event of Israel, even more important than the creation of the world. (...) If the First Testament begins with creation, it is only by logic, the true beginning is liberation. In Hebrew, the word Egypt מִצְרַיִם, also means anguish, distress, which means that it is not enough to have come out of Egypt, it is also necessary to learn how to drive out the Egypt that is in each of us.»<sup>6</sup>

The key to our history is the experience of the miracle of the sea, the founding experience of our identity. It is the path traveled in the desert, where God accompanied his people through Moses, offering the tables of the Law as a sign of his covenant. The desert will be the place of his greatest presence, of his most overwhelming tenderness: "I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart."<sup>7</sup> The prophets will remind the people of that blessed time when the glory of Yahweh was visible and/or his word was perceptible. "I, the Lord your God, brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods but me...". We know that this charter is the foundation of the whole life of Israel. The people know that it takes all the power of God's love to change their hearts.

God calls upon Moses to accompany his people to form and transform them. How many Moses have we met in our lives? Who has been able, in the course of our personal history, to reveal to us God's love, His faithful covenant, His mercy? The Lay Marianist remembers the Lord's blessings, what he did through our "Moses" to form and transform us little by little, not at His pace, but at ours. In the loss of our bearings, let us remember that God accompanies us on our journey, as He did with the people of Israel, with benevolence and pedagogy. Our rhythm will always be His. What is important is our desire to learn: "I never lose, I either win or learn."<sup>8</sup> What appears to us as the place of our defeat is in reality the place of formative learning.

For William Joseph Chaminade, the Gospel held a privileged place in faith education. His spirituality is based on a well asserted Christocentrism. Christ is the path that leads to man and woman and man and woman are the path that leads to Christ.

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<sup>6</sup> *Moïse-Les combats de la liberté*, Antoine Nouis, Ed Empreintes, 2017

<sup>7</sup> Hoseas 2, 16

<sup>8</sup> Nelson Mandela

« For man will always yearn to know, at least in an obscure way, what is the meaning of his life, of his activity, of his death. [...] But only God, Who created man to His own image and ransomed him from sin, provides the most adequate answer to the questions, and this He does through what He has revealed in Christ His Son, Who became man. Whoever follows after Christ, the perfect man, becomes himself more of a man. »<sup>9</sup>

The Lay Marianist is not a separate or new category in today's Church. It is about every man, every woman, each of us, like Peter, called one day, at the heart of our daily life, however little exceptional it may be. Jesus has joined us to open us to a new relationship, to a new dimension. One day He suggested that we climb into the frail boat of our lives to make His word heard: « put out into deep water... »<sup>10</sup> Like Peter, we have accepted to go further, beyond our limits, beyond the apparent order of our lives, to offer ourselves to the unexpected, to a trust that goes beyond human common sense. This stroke of madness is certainly similar to ours when we too heard Jesus tell us: "go out into the deep », far from your certainties and the shore of your own safety. Are we still ready for this audacity of the beginnings? For us, today it is a great adventure that involves all our freedom. Our life is gradually taking the form of a response to His call, at the heart of our daily lives. To be a disciple of Jesus is to be the person who accepts to lose something of themselves. Our life is a path of availability to allow ourselves to be formed and transformed.

Since the beginning of our journey, we have come across Marianist Lay Communities and have chosen to live and deepen our faith within a Family rich in Church tradition and spirituality. This belonging is not simply offered to us to receive help. Rather, it is a way of declining our daily life with Christ in the Church. It places Mary at the center as the model of a given life, centered on the essential. With her, through her, we live our faith, sure that she brings us ever closer to her son. It also includes the sharing of faith in fraternity. The community was at the heart of Father Chaminade's intuition, it is at the heart of our life.

We are aware that Christ is journeying with us if we contemplate Him in the Gospel. It is there that He makes himself known to us. Meditating on the Gospel will help us to situate ourselves "in our place", the place that Jesus Christ wants for us in the Marianist Family, with our hearts calmed and rested, with the deep desire to be joined by Him on our journey and to walk with Him. His closeness, welcomed at every moment, will form our desires, our intentions, to better respond to His call. This is what it means to "follow Christ". If we think we should be behind Him, we are wrong. This is the temptation of pelagianism: to exercise our own strength of will to go towards the good, Christ being "the good example", a master of life whom we must follow to cultivate moral virtue, disregarding the gift of grace.

Jesus asks us to walk beside Him, not to imitate but to resemble Him. To be at the school of Jesus and to let be formed by Him is also to let be transformed. William Joseph Chaminade knew this. In inciting fidelity to the Gospel, he pointed out something fundamental: Jesus is the formator par excellence, the one who does not want us behind Him, but beside Him on the path of our life, not only to imitate Him by reproducing his deeds, gestures and words, but to

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<sup>9</sup> Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of the Second Vatican Council, 41

<sup>10</sup> Luc 5, 1-11

share his life, to assimilate his deepest intentions. So, like Peter, James and John on the day of the transfiguration, let us raise our eyes to see only Him, Jesus, alone... on the shore of our life, and watch Him "stand there".

Let us search in what is happening what is not happening: God's love revealed in Jesus, Christ is risen, living since Pentecost in the heart of the world and in the Church. He will never show us a comfortable path, for it will always be made to disturb us if by mistake we were to be well ordered in our certainties and worldly achievements. In the events of life that challenge us, such as the pandemic today, let us invent, through our choices, solutions to the humanization of our world that will go in the direction of sharing, generosity, solidarity and attention to life, which is a gift from God.

## **The origin of the Marianist Charism: formation with Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon and William Joseph Chaminade**

Since I am naturally a Lay Marianist I turned to a few competent people to enlighten me on this point. For who can speak better of the formation envisaged by the founders than the religious of the Marianist Family? I thank Sister Clotilde (FMI- General Assistant), the late Father David Flemming (SM- USA), Father Arnaiz (SM- Chile), and Giuseppina Belnudo (MLC- Italy- Campobasso) for their precious help without which I would not have been able to share some insights with you.

Mother Adele and Father Chaminade both expressed themselves on the theme of formation, each in their own way. The legacy of their own vision on the subject was concretized in plans for formation in religious life and an educational project. Father Chaminade would not disagree if I start with Mother Adele!

### **Mother Adèle: training to be a trainer**

It appears that it is not easy to find out what Mother Adèle says about formation. In fact, if we look for the word formation in her letters, it does not appear very often. But it is in her life and throughout her correspondence that we discover the importance it has for her. What Mother Adèle has become is rooted in a solid education and Christian formation received from her parents, aunts and uncles. Her life at their side was imbued with kindness and generosity, especially towards the most destitute on the land of Trenquelléon. They were convinced of the need for a good intellectual and spiritual education and believed in the necessity of a spiritual guide. It was from her own education that Mother Adèle drew the fundamental principles of formation: a simple education, daily prayer, a life of faith and the need to follow a rule of life, that of Monsieur Ducourneau. She discovered that reading forms the intelligence and the spirit. In the first place the Gospel, then the "Imitation of Christ" and the holy books, and finally the "Manual of the Servant of Mary" thanks to Father Chaminade who will bring her to the

knowledge of Mary in order to love and serve her. Mother Adèle wants to let herself be transformed by God through prayer and the sacraments.

« Ah! How exquisite is the taste of this celestial manna! It should fill us with disgust for the poisoned crumbs which the world offers. We should always be discovering new flavors in this Bread of Angels; yet, how cold we are when we approach it! We should be seized with holy trembling at the sight of this divine food; yet we receive it almost distractedly. That is why we see so little result from its reception. We receive the Bread of the strong, and we are forever bowed down under the same frailties. 4 The reason is that we lack the dispositions demanded by the Lord for sharing in the abundant graces accompanying the reception of his adorable Body. My dear friend, henceforth let us pay more attention to our preparation for so saintly an act; by our fervor, let us merit not to lose the graces welling from this divine spring.»<sup>11</sup>

« This morning, dear friend, I was meditating on Holy Communion in order to prepare for Sunday, should I be given permission to receive. (...) Holy things are for holy people. Let us not forget that. Our purpose is to acquire that sanctity, so that we might be more worthy to approach the divine mysteries more often. No, I shall not give in to discouragement; my powerlessness will be the throne of the power of my God, and my wretchedness the seat of his mercy. If it pleases him, he can make his strength shine forth through my weakness. »<sup>12</sup>

The Holy Spirit of her confirmation shaped her throughout her life and gave her the dynamism to associate with some friends to begin a project of religious life. Life must be lived as a path of holiness, in fidelity to ordinary actions.

« God does not demand extraordinary things of us; God wants us to sanctify ourselves by means of our daily actions.»<sup>13</sup>

«Let us strive to acquire that understanding which recognizes the path that leads to life, and that knowledge of the saints which is so different from that of the world and so opposed to it. Worldly knowledge seeks the glory of vain display. That of Jesus Christ consists in being hidden from the eyes of a world blind to the things that concern salvation.»<sup>14</sup>

Formation in reading the Gospel, in prayer, in the sacraments of Christian life, in works of charity, naturally leads to several missions for Mother Adele.

- Formation for congregations, those groups of lay people made up of mothers, widows, young people, servants, who meet on Sunday afternoons.

« Ask the good Lord to be your Teacher so that you might instruct others for his greater glory; He himself will put his words into your mouth»<sup>15</sup>

- Training for the underprivileged

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<sup>11</sup> *Correspondances*, January 21, 1807, Volume I

<sup>12</sup> *Correspondances*, July 21, 1813, Volume I

<sup>13</sup> *Correspondances*, August 3, 1814, Volume I

<sup>14</sup> *Correspondances*, June 7, 1810, Volume I

<sup>15</sup> *Correspondances*, November 6, 1820, Volume II



« In what concerns our education, we must study diligently all that obedience calls us to learn, for one day this knowledge will be the secondary means of drawing our neighbor toward salvation. One of our principal means is having free classes for poor children. To attract them we must teach them reading, writing, and arithmetic. In the novitiate, therefore, the novice must do all she can to master these skills to the best of her ability. Otherwise she would be responsible for a talent which God has given her to win souls for him, and these souls would hold her responsible for all eternity for their salvation. Which means also that she must be trained in solid Christian doctrine, pay attention to the readings, the catechism classes, etc.»<sup>16</sup>

Mother Adèle's legacy has given us today a formation guide for the Daughters of Mary Immaculate that develops a dynamic spirituality, a pedagogy of faith and a methodology for formation whose pillars are the faith of the heart, Mary and the mission.

### **William Joseph Chaminade: to form oneself and form to the faith of the heart**

The formation of new members was at the center of Father Chaminade's apostolate from the beginning of his mission after the revolution. It places the human, Christian and Marianist person at the center. His key texts are those of the three volumes of his writings of direction, concerning always on themes of the spiritual life. At the end of the revolutionary period, people did not receive much religious instruction. It was, therefore, necessary to give the basic knowledge of the Christian faith if they were to enter into an authentic spiritual life. Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, with his wisdom as a spiritual father, transmitted to us the doctrine of the Fathers of the Church and the spiritual masters of the French school through an itinerary that leads to full conformity with Christ and to giving ourselves entirely to God and to our brothers and sisters. This itinerary passes through two aspects: the faith of the heart and the disposition of the heart.

- Faith from the heart

« We must love what we see... faith, and this faith, especially of the heart, is a great gift from God; that is why we need to say: "Lord, let us increase our faith...". Faith that would only enlighten our spirit would not give us the life of righteousness, which is a divine life.»<sup>17</sup>

To bring faith down from head to heart, to live with Jesus Christ and to resemble Him little by little, this is what all the methods of spiritual life given by Father Chaminade are aimed at. The faith of the heart is exercised and renewed by the lectio divina, the creed and the prayer of faith and presence of God.

« While faith of the mind is important, it is not sufficient. Father Chaminade insisted that what we believe with our mind must pass to the heart. By faith of the heart we give assent not only of our mind, but we adhere with our whole heart to what we believe. We love what we believe, and we commit ourselves to embrace it with our whole being. Faith of the mind brings us

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<sup>16</sup> Address to the Novices of Bordeaux, March 4, 1826, Volume II

<sup>17</sup> EF 164



knowledge; faith of the heart attaches our person to what we believe...Faith of the mind gives us ideas about Jesus; faith of the heart gives us a personal relationship with him.»<sup>18</sup>

- The heart disposition

« But our faith must be firm. Without doubt, it must be animated by charity. Faith must not only be like a light in the mind, but it must be in the heart. There must be a disposition of the heart that is itself faith, love of truth. »<sup>19</sup>

The daily consecration renewed through the covenant with Mary and the Three Hour Prayer recreate the dynamic of "letting oneself be formed by her". The method of the virtues and the five silences as well as the exercise of the examination of the prayer lead us to identification with Christ, to a mature faith, lived in the spirit of Mary, in fraternal communion and in permanent mission.

## A priceless legacy to pass on

We can see Father Chaminade and Mother Adèle are extremely complementary in the inheritance left to us. Both of them do not seek to bequeath an unfailing plan of formation that would adapt to all circumstances and all times. What clearly emerges, on the other hand, are the broad outlines of the treasure of our spirituality as our path of Marianist holiness in the Church. This Marianist charism is transformed into a life process, a spirituality and a mission in these words: to follow Jesus, made son of Mary, for the salvation of all men and women. This process unites life of faith, fraternity, mission, community, Mary and Jesus. The treasure of this charism we have each received. How did we receive it? When did we receive it? Thanks to whom? It is by answering these questions that we have advanced or will advance each one of us in the discovery and formation of our charism. Remembering it is probably awakening in us a taste for sharing, for transmitting what makes sense in our lives. We have sometimes moved quickly to advance a formation plan to make our charism better known, but how do we commit ourselves to this transmission? What joy do we dare to report? With what strength of conviction, attraction, contagion as Father Chaminade liked to say?

« Spreading the faith by contagion: We embrace Blessed Chaminade's image of spreading the faith by contagion. Formed by Mary in the virtues of her Son, we live our faith in our homes, schools, work, and diverse Marianist ministries and projects around the world. The love grounded in faith of the heart overflows into love lived in the work of our hands. We bring the heart of Jesus into the heart of the world. This is our mission.»<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Quentin Hakenewerth, SM, *The Great Design of God's Love, A Companion to Growing in the virtues of Jesus*, San Antonio, Texas : Burke Publishing Compagny, 1997, p.43.

<sup>19</sup> Retreat of 1827 in Saint Rémy, second conference. Quality of faith.

<sup>20</sup> *Faith from the heart to the heart of the world, Circular n°4, p.3 and 4, Isabella R Moyer, May 19, 2013*

## **The Marianist charism: a renewed proposal as a life option for today and tomorrow**

The Lay Marianist know that we are not a Marianist but the becoming one. In the Lay Marianist that we are, it is thus necessary to see something more than a completed realization. The Marianist is on a path of humanity and spirituality. We walk in the understanding of the Marianist charism. We let it unfold in our life to give it all fullness. Thus, we allow ourselves to be formed in various circumstances.

### **The discovery of knowledge: initial training**

Every Lay Marianist one day takes its first steps in the Marianist Family. This beginning is its founding event, the beginning of a journey filled with enthusiasm for starting something new. A so-called "initial" formation marked our beginnings and this formation, even if it is less long and less extensive than for the religious during the novitiate, is very important. It gave us all a sense of an inexhaustible richness that a whole life cannot completely circumvent. This co-birth has brought us back into being with other branches of the Family to gradually make us new beings. This option for life is a free response to a vocation in the Marianist Family and in the Church. The Marianist discovers the need to know in order to love and serve. This so-called initial formation gives a taste for experience. It strengthens and gives confidence to move forward, not full of certainties, but happy to have found its place for a discerned and consented response to one's own vocation in the Church and in today's world.

### **A constantly renewed experience: ongoing formation**

During our first meeting as International Team in Via Latina (Rome) in October 2018, we received Father David Flemming, former General Superior of the SM (who recently left us) for a time of exchange on Marianist formation. I remember what was most dear to his heart: formation, he said, is not a list of concepts or knowledge to be acquired. It is "an experience". It passes, again according to Father Flemming, through six aspects: the spirit of faith in daily life, which presupposes a new look at oneself, at the world, at God, and which contains a promise of life ; prayer as the desire to open one's heart to God, to his Son Jesus Christ ; fervor and daring for mission because we are all "passionate missionaries ; Mary who gave us her Son to the world ; and Community and discipleship in the Marianist family in equal parts.

The purpose here is not to explain all these aspects. Many of our official documents from our international meetings have addressed them. These documents are accessible to us on the official website of the International Organization <https://www.clm-mlc.org>. Reading and working on them can be extremely formative. In reading them we understand well what we are trying to live as Lay Marianists. Above all, let us remember that the goal of formation is to live fully all its aspects and to assume them in our lives.

« We value development of persons and encourage life-long learning and growth of unique God-given gifts. Individual members and the community as a whole, each with resolutions for future growth, seek to advance in wholeness, maturity, and liberation.»<sup>21</sup>

« As Marianist Lay Communities, we understand the importance of formation that addresses the whole person. This is the catechetical model that is required for the new evangelization. Doctrine, alone, will not answer the needs of the modern woman and man. The teachings of our faith must be woven into a life of prayer and just action. To be an effective agent for change in our world, our faith must engage our mind, heart and hands. We must be open to the creative action of the Holy Spirit, like Mary was, for new times require new methods.»<sup>22</sup>

## The Community: place of formation

Our declaration of identity ratified at the First International Meeting of Marianist Lay Communities in Santiago de Chile in 1993 evokes the community life of the MLCs. This dimension at the heart of our identity was taken up and made explicit in another document emanating from the 3rd International Meeting held in Philadelphia:

« Being in community is an essential aspect of the Marianist charism and therefore defines our spirituality. (...) In a time characterized by globalization, competitiveness, and obsession with success, we need a community, a concrete, visible place which responds to the needs of ordinary men and women to belong, to transform the world, and to reflect in depth on the communal dimension of our faith. (...) For us, community is experienced as gift and task. Community is called forth by the Spirit, and is not only our own work. We understand it as a call by the Spirit, as a vocation, and as a life choice. (...) Being in community is a source of joy as we experience the presence of God and the signs of the inbreaking of God's love.»<sup>23</sup>

The community is therefore a unique and specific experience of our charism. It defines the identity of the Lay Marianist. It is the place where we share our gifts, which enrich and complement us. It is the place where we learn the fraternity that can prefigure the universal fraternity towards which our world is tending. We, lay people and Lay Marianists, know from experience that a Marianist Lay Community is much more than a monthly meeting and a spirituality group as there are many in the Church. The community is the place where we belong to a group, to a Family we are proud of. It is the place for our exchanges, our listening, our sharing, our re-reading of life. It is the place of our formation par excellence.

The community contributes to accompany us, to make us walk and grow in faith. Yes, the community forms and transforms us. We are not better Marianists in community. But we are Marianists who constantly awaken their desire to become one. Community life is a real gift. The religious men and women of the Marianist Family would have so much to share about this fundamental aspect of their daily life. They also know how much fraternal life is a source of union and tension, that it is a school of the Gospel...

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<sup>21</sup> *Being in community*, 3rd International Meeting of MLCs, Philadelphia, 2001, § 2. 6.2.

<sup>22</sup> *Marianist lay communities and the new evangelization* - Isabella R Moyer- Circular n°2, July 2, 2011

<sup>23</sup> *Being in community*, 3rd International Meeting of MLCs, Philadelphia, 2001

## Mary, our educator

Who is she really for us? What path do we take with her? With her, like her, are we not constantly called to walk again the Paschal journey that goes from joy to glory through the mystery of the Cross?

Mary had to listen to her Son especially in those moments when the meaning of events escaped her, in absolute trust and inner certainty that this was her way of contributing to the salvation of the world. After the death of Jesus, with the disciples in the cenacle in full inner confusion, she knew how to refocus their hearts. Mary was a model in the way she listened to the Word of God. "But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."<sup>24</sup> To teach us to pray, Jesus gave us His mother. She meditates each event in her heart to find God.

«On one hand, Mary appears as an example of welcoming the Word of God, of opening a human heart to the Word of God. On the other hand, she is herself, through her deep and total union with Jesus, the incarnate Word.»<sup>25</sup>

Mary is the path of unification of our life in all its aspects. Her availability to the Spirit can be ours because we live in covenant with her.

«By consecrating themselves to Mary, the members of the communities sought to be more perfectly formed by her in the image and likeness of her Son.»<sup>26</sup>

Mary is not a passage, a footbridge or a bridge to Jesus. She is with us and we are called to experience her. These attitudes that we admire so much in her of listening, humility, joy, attention, in all circumstances of her life with Jesus, are a daily learning experience for us, not as a model to be imitated but as profound attitudes to be lived. Mary is a magnificent formator because she does not "say" ... she accompanies patiently and firmly. Her presence with Jesus throughout the Gospel speaks volumes. For us Lay Marianists, it is a call to open our hearts to her presence, to her way of accompanying us, to her own pedagogy for each one because she accompanies us in our own "holy" history.

Mary is indeed a maternal presence everywhere and always. Let us never doubt it in our own moments of doubt. They join hers and her presence helps us to overcome them. It is she who teaches us to do so. With her, like her and in alliance with her, we are all joyful missionaries.

## The Marianist Family: the privileged place of formation

Our family seems so complete, so complementary, doesn't it? Four branches, four distinct vocations recognized in the Church with a specific mission, four ways of living the richness of the same charism and spirituality. A heritage bequeathed by our founders, Blessed William Joseph Chaminade and Adèle de Batz de Trenquélléon.

« One of our greatest gifts is the deepening understanding that to be Marianist is to be family. In our MLC Statutes and in each of our international documents we proclaim with pride that we

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<sup>24</sup> Luc 2, 19

<sup>25</sup> Synod of 2018 in Rome

<sup>26</sup> *Being Marianist, being Family* -Isabella R Moyer - circular n°1, June 12, 2010, p.2

are united in one spiritual family with our brothers and sisters of the Society of Mary, the Daughters of Mary Immaculate, and the Alliance Mariale. There is a growing desire in all four branches to explore this family spirit together, to go beyond nice words and warm sentiments to practical collaboration in mission and life. We are realizing that this family model, given to us by our founders, is both prophetic and timely for today. »<sup>27</sup>

The same spirit is, therefore, what animates us. This is what makes us live today as a Charismatic Family.

« The current emergence of many charismatic families is undoubtedly a sign of the Spirit: under its impulse, something new and unexpected is developing in the Church. Some impetus is manifesting itself and new paths are opening up, with rich consequences for Christian life and mission. New forms of ecclesial life are gaining strength and bringing a renewal to our perception of what the Church and its mission in the world is called to be. The progressive development, since the middle of the last century, of the Marianist Family belongs to this trend and has its own value. By deepening this reality, the members of the Marianist Family can better respond to their vocation. »<sup>28</sup>

We must admit that Father Chaminade had a magnificent intuition in his time. It is still relevant today: to live the complementarity of vocations in interdependence in the same family.

« We are still learning how to be a family that effectively lives "union without confusion". We are still learning how to be interdependent, to discern creative and effective means of collaboration while respecting the uniqueness of each branch. Interdependence requires a careful balance, and it can be difficult work. Yet, with all its struggles and challenges, it is a valuable lesson to learn and to share. »<sup>29</sup>

« We have to start to consider how we want the existing reality to become more and more "family-friendly". We always talk about working "in union without confusion".<sup>21</sup> I would say a little more and more daring, if you will allow me, in union, even sometimes, despite the confusion. It's okay if we are wrong. Let us together seek ways to help us clarify the role of each branch within the Family. »<sup>30</sup>

So much diversity of vocations in our Family to religious life, to consecrated life, and to the laity, places each in its proper place, according to the other vocations in the Church. Each of them expresses and declines the founding charism in its own way in today's world. But today more than ever, each branch feels that it cannot live without the others. This is already a testimony in today's world, so divided and fractured at the social level.

For us, Marianist Lay Communities, the Marianist Family is the place par excellence for learning to "live" together, which goes hand in hand with the desire to "do" together. In many projects throughout the world we really express this aspect and bear witness to it. Our Family Councils

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<sup>27</sup> *Being Marianist, being Family* - Isabella R Moyer - circular n°1, June 12, 2010, p. 2

<sup>28</sup> *A charismatic family, the Marianist Family*, World Council of the Marianist Family, September 12, 2019

<sup>29</sup> *Being Marianist, being Family* - Isabella R Moyer - circular n°1

<sup>30</sup> *Walking hand in hand: the gift of laity to the Marianist Family*, Félix Arqueros Pérez, Circular, July 16, 2018.

are also places of mutual training. They help each one of us, they form and transform us through our exchanges, our listening, our concessions at times, and our celebrations together. The richness of this experience is unsuspected and the concrete fruits cannot be quantified.

To be an equal disciple in the Marianist Family is a new paradigm, a path and a challenge. It is also an opportunity! The World Council of the Marianist Family calls and challenges on this aspect that unfolds over time and through the experiences lived in the Family. The past model of the Marianist Family put the Society of Mary at the center, also due to the disappearance of the Marianist Lay Communities from 1850. Today, in a post-Vatican II era, which presupposes the revaluation of the role of the laity in the Church, and returning to the original intuition of our founders, the Marianist Family is moving towards a process of development of Marianist Lay Communities and their contributions to the Family. This sharing of responsibility in our Family is in line with our common human vocation: the vocation to life. For us lay people, it means taking part in this new challenge: no longer situating ourselves (or sometimes accepting to be situated) as collaborators, but as co-responsible, on the occasion of common projects: a common mission in the same spirit and shared in its realization.

For this reason, training today must be considered as a Family. Each branch has worked extensively on this issue, as evidenced by all the training plans that have blossomed and continue to blossom throughout the world. But no doubt we need to affirm a common direction, as a Family, on this aspect of training. On this common vision, everything has to be invented. It is an opportunity not to be missed, as we know, especially at the level of our World Council of the Marianist Family.

## **Some perspectives in the field of formation**

What a joy to see that the aspect of formation animates and enthuses us Lay Marianists! Many countries have worked and proposed formation plans accessible everywhere and by all means of communication: books, bulletins, the Web (especially in Spain and in many countries of North and Latin America), conferences, assemblies, formation centers (especially in Canada and France)... so the Lay Marianist can travel at his own pace in the knowledge and assimilation of the charism. It is not the sum of knowledge that will make us a better Marianist, but what we will want to make our own from all these formation plans in our daily life, because that is where it all comes down to.

The mission that the Lord entrusts to me today as International President of the MLC allows me to humbly share with you two profound insights that I carry. They even have the appearance of two convictions.

- Training in spiritual accompaniment: a listening mission

Today's world needs to listen. The current pandemic has stopped the frenzy of consumerism for a while and makes us aware that people, their dignity, must return to the center of our political, social and economic concerns. In this context, how can the Lay Marianist contribute with something new? We can choose to walk with others by listening, by consoling, by sharing

a word of hope. Being a brother in humanity cannot be improvised, especially on the level of spiritual accompaniment. Our family is not a specialist in this aspect, but it can rely on other great traditions (notably Ignatian and Augustinian) to form itself in spiritual accompaniment. Accompanying others on the path of faith and life has long been the privilege of clerics and religious. Today the Lay Marianist can put at the service of the Church and the Family their skills of listening and accompaniment if we are called to this mission. But we are called to form ourselves to be in possession of certain tools and strategies that will be helpful and effective. Let us have the audacity to explore this field of mission. It will make us take part in this new world, transformed by the Gospel by listening to people, to the world. This field of mission will also make us reach out to the youngest because they are too in need of listening and accompaniment on their life journey which at some point is moving towards a life option. The spiritual accompaniment of young people takes its full place in youth ministry. We will stop imagining what we can do for young people and will begin to be with them, to accompany them enthusiastically in their own project. Who knows, the mutual and joyful sharing of life can animate young people to join one of the options of life in the Marianist Family.

- The Spiritual Retreat: Healing the Inner Life

"The essential is the interior" said Father Chaminade. In the spirit of many Lay Marianists, the spiritual retreat is reserved only for religious and consecrated persons, for those who "know" how to pray. All over the world, there are many places that are spiritual stops with proposals for spiritual retreats, especially Jesuits, but not only.

What is a spiritual retreat? A time for oneself and a time for God. A time when the light of God's Word can pass through our lives. It is a time when the Lay Marianist can return to the sources of our Baptism, go through our history and remember the fidelity of the Lord in our lives, the significant points of passage that have filled us. It is a time of re-reading and discernment that allows one to set new objectives and to move towards new perspectives. This process is accompanied. It arouses and maintains the life of the spirit in each of us. The Lay Marianist need to descend into ourselves to regularly renew our deep convictions and desires. This is how we are strengthened and grow in our faith. We are formed and conformed to Christ through prayer and silence. Our vocation as Lay Marianists is all the more enlightened and affirmed.

« We are called to evangelize with our lives, to show the beauty of the Gospel lived with honesty, sincerity, and integrity. We are called to be women and men grounded in prayer and mission with Mary at our side. And we are called to be well formed in our faith so we may speak the truth of the Gospel with enthusiasm and with ease. »<sup>31</sup>

In this way, the Lay Marianist will be "the man who does not die" according to the expression of Father Chaminade. Our life will be lived with the seeds of eternity in our heart. It will be a pledge of authenticity. Let us never forget that the best formator for us is Jesus himself because

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<sup>31</sup> *Marianist Lay Communities and the new evangelization* - Isabella R Moyer - circular n°2, July 2011



He knows us better than anyone else. His gaze on us and on our life lifts us up and leads us. He strengthens us.

## Conclusion

The formation of who we are really coincides with our life project. What if forming us means looking for a treasure?

« In our times, as we are all aware, the lives of some people can end up mediocre and dull because they probably do not go in search of a true treasure: they are content with attractive but fleeting things, glittering flashes that prove illusory as they give way to darkness. Instead the light of the Kingdom is not like fireworks, it is light: fireworks last only an instant, whereas the light of the Kingdom accompanies us all our life. The Kingdom of Heaven is the opposite of the superfluous things that the world offers; it is the opposite of a dull life: it is a treasure that renews life every day and leads it to expand towards wider horizons. Indeed, those who have found this treasure have a creative and inquisitive heart, which does not repeat but rather invents, tracing and setting out on new paths which lead us to love God, to love others, and to truly love ourselves. The sign of those who walk this path of the Kingdom is creativity, always seeking more. And creativity is what takes life and gives life, and gives, and gives, and gives... It always looks for many different ways to give life.»<sup>32</sup>

I began this circular with this question: why this research? Probably because it makes us "living" ... Let us continue to seek, to let ourselves be formed to be transformed by the light of the Risen Christ.

I assure you of my affection and prayer wherever you are in the world, all of you, members of the Marianist Lay Communities, friends, and all of you, dear sisters and brothers of the Family.

May the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit  
be glorified in every place by the Immaculate Virgin Mary.  
Amen

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<sup>32</sup> Pope Francis, Angelus, July 26, 2020

## APPENDIX

### What witnesses had to say about their own vision of formation

#### Gilles Legrand, Head of a Marianist school (FMI) -France-.

"In order to make a distinguished professional: capable of putting his or her own personal experience into perspective, and thus to anchor his or her practice in a scientific or technical register that conforms to professional rules, professional postures and ethics.

To remain professionally integrated throughout one's career: requiring periodic training to adapt to changing global contexts: sociological, technological, environmental, human, etc...

So that everyone can fulfil themselves as a learner, a person in project or in movement, a person who is enriched, who finds pleasure and satisfaction in the acquisition of new knowledge, know-how, interpersonal skills, in new human encounters, in new opportunities.

So that each person can develop humanly, spiritually, progress, grow, realize and radiate themselves and especially for others.»

#### Susan Vogt - former responsible of North America, Asia, Ireland, Australia Region within the International Organization 2014-2018- CLM -

« What is formation for me?

- The word "formation" in English implies how something evolves from a raw substance to take a shape that is useful and meaningful.
- In the language of religion, formation usually refers to training in one's spiritual life.
- For Marianists we add the dimension of how Mary's "Yes" was the beginning of Jesus' life as a human - like us. Also, our intuition leads us to assume that Mary's influence must have helped Jesus become the person who inspires us to be loving and sacrificial towards others.
- For me, formation implies all of the above with an emphasis on learning, growing, and evolving. Formation does not end with completion of a class, a commitment, or a vow. It is a never-ending process of moving me closer to the meaning of life. For me the meaning is self-love evolving toward the sacrificial love that Jesus showed us and that Mary participated in. We will all die some day. May my life be a vehicle to spread love beyond myself even the kind that is often tough. »

#### Marisa Iranzo, Casa de María, Valencia, CLM -Spain-

Old and New Testament Bible Workshops: a training format that goes beyond.

« In recent years, in Valencia, we have had the opportunity to participate and share in workshops on reading the Bible of the Old and New Testaments, an initiative promoted and coordinated by Marianist lay people, offered to the whole family, our environment and Valencian society. I have had the good fortune to participate in the first workshop "Drama and Hope" (TA) for three years, since there have been several editions, and in "Tabor" (NT) for several years now. It has been an experience of formation, yes, of course, but above all an existential experience, which has touched us and reached much further. A reading and a deepening in the Word, linked to life, updated to our today and shared in group. The value of this workshop format is that it is shared, it is done among everyone. Each and every one of the

contributions, testimonies and experiences of faith and life that arise from the readings are the key to the success of the sessions, which are held monthly. Often, we lay people, immersed in the world, in work and in the family, suffer from time and find it difficult to form ourselves. However, this experience has opened our eyes, given us new vision, provided us with new glasses to see, so that, by using them, we have gained time and life. It has helped us to get closer to the heart of God through the faith experience of so many believers throughout history, to know his "Word", origin and foundation of our faith, and above all to pass it through the filter of our heart, of life, to be more coherent, to order our interior, and to know how to transmit our faith with greater foundation, confidence and security. In short, a bet that results in gaining "life and time" for our day. We have to be aware of the importance of living our faith and knowing how to transmit it. It is more and more necessary that we lay people get involved in the extension of the Kingdom in this world, and for that it is necessary to be formed as Christians. I encourage the use of this "workshop" format, compatible with a busy life, applicable also to other areas of formation, and that allows us to share in diversity, of condition and age, enriching our vision and love for our sister or brother. »

+ Testimonios de :

- Domingo Fuentes (Brasil)
- Josee J (Canada)
- Javier Palop (España)