



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

Marianist Lay Communities: An International Community of Communities

Circular #3

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International Organization of Marianist Lay Communities

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Immaculate Heart of Mary

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Greetings, on behalf of our International Team of Isabel Duarte Quapper (Latin America), Félix Arqueros Pérez (Europe), Susan Vogt (North America, Asia, Australia and Ireland), Ernest Kasongo (Africa) and Brother Domingo Fuentes, SM (Assessor). Our team is in the second half of our mandate, and preparations have begun for our 6th International Meeting.

Marianist Lay Communities have a long history, beginning with the Bordeaux Sodality in 1801. The history of our International Organization is much shorter. The first International Meeting of Marianist Lay Communities took place in February, 1993 in Santiago, Chile. At this meeting, delegates from around the world formed an international organizational structure to connect and support our Marianist Lay Communities around the globe. The first International Team was elected, with Mr. Enrique Llano Martínez as President.

We are approaching the 20th anniversary of our existence as an International Organization. Our greatest success is our growth and maturity as an independent lay branch within our Marianist Family and our church. We have strong, committed communities around the world that form women and men of faith and action. Each year our Regional Responsibles report of new social justice works and foundations.

We are empowered by our independence as a Private Association of the Faithful. And, we are supported and strengthened by our interdependence with the Alliance Mariale, the Daughters of Mary Immaculate and the Society of Mary in a true spirit of family.

One of our greatest challenges is to encourage each MLC, each Marianist lay woman and man to experience both the joys and the responsibilities of being part of a global family. We acknowledge this challenge every time we hear the question, “Why do we need an International Organization of Marianist Lay Communities?” or, “Why must we support the International Organization?”

The topic for this present circular was proposed by our team. We hope it will be a source of reflection on our current situation, and promote dialogue on how we can improve our connectedness in the future. May we open our minds, hearts, and arms to embrace our reality as a truly international community of communities.

Why do we need the International Organization of Marianist Lay Communities?

When we ask “why do we need?” we are often asking “what will it do for me?” We value independence and self-reliance. And, this is good.

The concept of subsidiarity respects the right to make our own decisions, to choose the ways and means best suited to our individual circumstances. We affirm this in our international documents and statutes. We describe who we are and what we do in general terms that unite us. We do not demand specificity of action as proof of our identity. We respect the diversity of our cultures and acknowledge the freedom, dignity and responsibility given to each one of us.

But, we are also called to work together for a greater whole.

The complementary partner to subsidiarity is collegiality. We believe that we were created not only for ourselves, but for the other. For Marianists, this belief is reflected in our love of community. We know that we cannot attain our full potential when our focus is on ourselves alone. We are called to a greater communion, so we build community. We are formed and nurtured within community. And we are sent out in mission with the support of our community.

But, we are also called to look beyond our own community. We can do more as part of a ONE that is made up of many. So, we organize our Marianist Lay Communities around the world in local, national, and regional structures depending on geography and numbers

And, we have a structure to organize us on the international level. The International Organization allows us to:

- Network and share the good news of Marianist Lay Communities around the world, and to offer support in times of need.
- Have an official voice within the universal Church.

- Gather delegates from around the world to meet, discern, pray and celebrate as an Assembly.
- Support new MLC foundations around the world
- Represent Marianist lay women and men to the World Marianist Family Council.

Networking and Communications

The main work of Marianist Lay Communities is done at the grass-roots level. Networking and communicating this work is the major task of our International Organization. We share news to help connect our Marianist Lay Communities across the miles. This has a two-fold purpose; to inspire others and to support each other.

Methods of communication have improved immensely in the past twenty years. We use Skype, Facebook, Twitter and emails to communicate with each other. National web-sites reflect the Marianist experience in other countries. Online resources allow us to share and distribute formation materials in a quick and cost effective manner. Language barriers are overcome with the help of translation software. Newsletters no longer need to be printed and mailed. They can be sent with a click of a computer button.

The role of the International Organization is best understood as a portal for communications from the regions. We have a very simple web-site¹. The purpose of it is to provide links to all our national and regional web-sites. We also have a blog², a Twitter account³ and a Facebook page⁴ to share current news and promote discussions.

We still face many challenges in our communications. It takes time and energy to provide updates on a regular basis. Ideally, we would have a communications team that would be responsible for collecting and distributing information for us. If you have any suggestions on how we can improve our communications, or if you are able to help us, we encourage you to contact any of our Team members.

¹ <http://clm-mlc.org/>

² <http://clm-mlc.org/blog/>

³ CLM_MLC

⁴ Available at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/International-Organization-of-Marianist-Lay-Communities/265366880170410>

Private Association of the Faithful

Marianist Lay Communities were granted *ad experimentum* status as a Private Association of the Faithful on March 25th, 2000. The definitive approval of our Statutes and formal confirmation of our status as a Private Association of the Faithful was granted on February 22, 2006.⁵

It was an immense task to petition the Vatican for official canonical status. During the preparatory work, Mr. Enrique Llano Martínez and his team sent a question to all Marianist Lay Communities. Is it important to you to be recognized as a Private Association of the Faithful within the Church?

I was the MLC responsible for Winnipeg, Canada at the time, and we were struggling with an authoritarian bishop. I knew that having official recognition in the church would be valuable to us on the local level. It would mean that our existence in the diocese would not depend on the benevolence of the local ordinary or priest.

Having official canonical status is important. It is our community 'passport' into the Church when we introduce ourselves to local bishops and priests. This is especially helpful in geographical areas that lack a strong Marianist presence, or when a new foundation is begun. Our International Statutes⁶ and Decree of Ecclesial Recognition⁷ are both available on our web-site.

The International Team maintains regular contact with our friends at the Pontifical Council for the Laity (PCL)⁸. At our last meeting in Rome on October 31, 2011, we discussed the joys of celebrating the Chaminade Year with our Marianist Family. We also discussed the Circular, *Marianist Lay Communities and the New Evangelization*⁹. It was a timely conversation with the upcoming October 2012 Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization and the Year of Faith, commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the start of Vatican II. We discussed the role that our charism has in the New Evangelization. We also spoke of Chaminade's teaching of Faith of the Heart, and the importance of having a personal faith and love of God that moves us beyond doctrine to action. We received much affirmation for who we are and what we do.

⁵ Marianist Lay Communities are listed in the Associations of the Faithful Directory available at <http://www.laici.va/content/laici/en/sezioni/associazioni/repertorio-delle-associazioni.html>.

⁶ Available at http://clm-mlc.org/old_website/eng/MLC-DocEN-00-InternationalStatutes.pdf

⁷ Available at http://clm-mlc.org/MLC_Documents_Eng/MLC_Doc_EN_01b_Decree_of_recognition.pdf

⁸ See the Pontifical Council for the Laity web-site at <http://www.laici.va/content/laici/en.html>.

⁹ Available at http://clm-mlc.org/Circulars/Marianist_Lay_Communities_and_the_New_Evangelization_english.pdf

Privileges of Official Status in the Church

Our official status allows us representation in ecclesial gatherings on national, continental, and international levels. This representation is a valuable opportunity to dialogue as lay women and men in the Church. We have sent delegates to

- the 2nd International Congress of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities (Rome, 2006)
- the 5th General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops (Aparecida, 2007),
- the 2nd and 3rd Congresses of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities of Latin America (Bogota, 2008 and Paraguay, 2010), and
- the International Women's Congress, Woman and Man: the *Humanum* in its Entirety (Rome, 2008).

We will also have a Marianist delegate attending the Pan-African Congress of Catholic Laity (Yaoundé, Cameroon, September 2012)¹⁰. Mr. Ernest Kasongo, our Regional Responsible for Africa, will be representing us.

Our friends at the PCL also assisted us in acquiring scholarship funds for our International Meeting in Nairobi.

Responsibilities of Official Status in the Church

Canonical status also comes with responsibilities. Because the Pontifical Council for the Laity is responsible for our official recognition as a Private Association of the Faithful, any changes that we make to our Statutes must be approved by them. We also send copies of our formal documents to the Council.

Some of us come from cultures where independence is highly prized. Some of us have had difficult experiences with Church authority. Wouldn't it be better to be independent?

It is important to remember that Blessed Chaminade, Mother Adèle, and Marie Thérèse de Lamourous were faithful sons and daughters of the Church. And, so are we. Having official recognition means that we must be careful of what we say and do when we speak and act in the name of our Marianist Family.

¹⁰ Information on the Pan-African Congress is available at <http://www.laici.va/content/laici/en/eventi/essere-testimoni-di-gesu-cristo-in-africa-oggi.html>

Yes, we desire a church that is more inclusive, egalitarian, concerned with justice and peace. We desire a church that is more open to the gifts of women in her leadership. But, we are not a group that acts loudly or protests strongly. It is a good thing to have to weigh our words carefully. As Marianists, we are called to embrace and model dialogue and not debate, for there is already too much angry and loud debate in our world and in our church. Dialogue calls us to listen with an open mind and an open heart and to speak with a voice that is respectful even when it is challenging.

International Meetings

Every four years we gather as an Assembly in an International Meeting of Marianist Lay Communities. It is the responsibility of the International Organization to plan and convene the Assembly, the official decision-making body of all Marianist Lay Communities around the world.¹¹The Assembly discerns the direction of the International Organization, votes on procedures, ratifies official documents, elects the International Team and proposes the Challenges for the next four years.

Participants at our International Meetings never ask “Why do we need to belong to an international organization?” When we gather in one place, a glorious spectacle of women and men from all corners of the world, we know instinctively the beauty of an international community. We are surrounded by the colors of multi-cultural fabrics and flags. We hear the wondrous sounds of many languages. Our hearts dance to a diversity of rhythms and beats. And we celebrate the liturgy in a multitude of traditions while praying as one.

For some, interest in our International Organization is present only when an International Meeting is announced. It is important, therefore, to ask ourselves these questions.

What support have we given to the International Organization since the last meeting? If we sent a delegate, did our delegate(s) share the news of our international reality with our local communities? If our country asked for a scholarship for the costs of sending a delegate, what have we done in return?

Has our country, through our National Responsible, kept in contact with our Regional Responsible? Have we sent reports when requested? Have we shared the news and documents that have been sent from the International Team? Have we tried to communicate with other communities in our country, our

¹¹ See International Statutes, available at http://clm-mlc.org/old_website/eng/MLC-DocEN-00-InternationalStatutes.pdf

region, in other parts of the world? Have we given financial support for the work of the International Organization through the paying of regular dues?¹²

Our International Organization does not exist only once every four years. The gifts and tasks received at our International Meetings are meant to be shared by all, to help build the bonds across the miles; to help build an international community of communities.

New MLC Foundations

A recent reality is the founding of new foundations by Marianist lay women and men. Haiti is a wonderful example. The Marianist presence in Haiti began with lay communities founded by Agnes Dumas, a Haitian woman who fell in love with the Marianist charism while studying in Fribourg, Switzerland. Soon after, the Society of Mary generously formed a new foundation of brothers to support the Marianist presence in Haiti.

Marianist Lay Communities in Spain provided formational and communal support to our new Marianist Lay Communities in Poland.

The seeds of our Marianist charism are presently being sown in Indonesia and Cameroon with the efforts of two Marianist lay men.

The benefits of having an international organization are apparent. A new foundation needs prayerful, formational, emotional and sometimes financial support from older, more established communities. By sharing the news of emerging foundations, this networking and support can happen.

To see our charism through the eyes of another culture weaves richness into our spirituality and celebrates the diversity with our Marianist family. As an international community of communities, we are challenged and inspired by the zeal of new foundations.

Members of the World Marianist Family Council

Over these past 20 years, we have grown in our understanding that our local communities are part of a greater entity. We are part of a world-wide spiritual family consisting of four branches, reflecting different life-styles but with a common historical and spiritual foundation. Recent decades have seen

¹² The formula for paying dues to the International Organization of MLC equals one hour's salary per year per member. While respecting the diversity of our economic reality, the act of paying dues is a sign of support for the work of the IO-MLC.

the MLC branch grow in self-realization and autonomy while acknowledging the interdependence rooted in our family spirit.

Marianist Family Councils are a concrete sign of this interdependence, a model of collaborative leadership as a discipleship of equals. The International Organization is the official representative of the Marianist Lay Communities to the World Marianist Family Council¹³.

At our Family Council meetings, we share our own international reality with the global reality of our sisters of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate and the Alliance Mariale, and our brothers of the Society of Mary. We report on our successes and our challenges. We seek ways to support each other in our mission, and vision together as a Marianist Family. We also work to promote the Family Council model on the local, national, and regional levels.

Conclusion

The work of the International Organization, and the work of all our local, national and regional organizations, depends on the support of each and every Marianist Lay Community. We need to communicate regularly, to know the successes and the challenges on the grass-roots level.

We need to know what we are doing well, for we all need mutual encouragement. And, we need to know how we can improve our efforts in sharing and supporting your successes, and responding effectively to your challenges.

Strong organizational structures also need good leaders, and this is the responsibility of us all. If there is no interest in the leadership of a group, there is no interest in the group. Discernment for leadership must be ongoing, and not a hasty decision when an election is announced. Potential leaders must be constantly identified, mentored, empowered and supported.

We have reached a moment in our history where ever greater tasks can be undertaken if we seize the opportunity and move forward, together, in daring faith. Our international Marianist family is part of a church and world that challenge us to think globally. We are well positioned to do so. As Marianists we will always gather in community, for this is the basis of who we are. This is where we are nurtured, formed and sent. But we are also called to look outward with ever-expanding horizons, to build a truly international community of communities.

We know that our prayers join those of Blessed Chaminade, Mother Adèle, Marie Thérèse de Lamourous, and all holy Marianist women and men who have gone before us. We go forward in faith

¹³ The official web-site of the World Marianist Family and the World Marianist Family Council is found at www.marianist.org.

and confidence knowing that Mary is always at our side, for it is her mission that we embrace; to bring Jesus into a world so in need of God's love, justice and peace.

May the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit

Be glorified in all places through the Immaculate Virgin Mary.

Amen!