



Marianist Lay Communities

*Presentation to Society of Mary General Chapter – Rome, July 7, 2012
(Isabella R. Moyer, MLC President)*

Slide 1.

Dear brothers and sisters

I bring greetings from our International Team of Félix Arqueros Perez, Isabel Duarte Quapper, Ernest Kasongo, Susan Vogt and Brother Domingo Fuentes. Our Marianist Lay Communities around the world are united with you in love and prayers as you gather for this, your 34th General Chapter.

I will attempt to address the three questions asked of us by the Preparatory Commission. The answers are not mine alone. They are a compilation of responses from all of our team members.

Slide 2

The three questions are:

1. What is the current presence and situation of the MLC in the world
2. What are, for the MLC, directions of renewal and what are your missionary priorities?
3. What do you expect of us as religious? How do you think we might better collaborate?

Our International Organization of Marianist Lay Communities is divided into four regions. I will begin with a brief report from each of those regions.

What is the current presence and situation of the MLC in the world

Slide 3

AFRICA

Our Marianist Lay Communities in Africa became an independent region at our 4th International Meeting in Bordeaux, in 2005. An agreement was made among the National Responsibles that the position of Regional Responsible will alternate each four years between Eastern and Western Africa. The first Regional Responsible was Lorna Mueni from Kenya. The present Regional Responsible is Ernest Kasongo from Congo Kinshasa. Ernest has a strong interest in lay formation. MLC national reports from Africa always identify formation as a priority.

Kenya hosted the 5th International Meeting of MLC. We experienced warm hospitality and vibrant celebrations. We also learned of the many good works done by our MLC in all of Africa. Our communities are involved in parish work, catechesis, education of children, advocating for persons with mental health challenges, empowering women, and more. With few resources, much work is being done.

We have one emerging community in Cameroon led by the efforts of Cyrille Ebabe, a lay Marianist from Congo-Kinshasa.

Slide 4

This September, the Pontifical Council for the Laity is sponsoring the 2nd Pan African Congress for the Laity in Yaoundé, Cameroon. Lay formation and the role of ecclesial movements in the new evangelization is a major topic on the agenda. We are happy to have an invitation to this congress and Ernest Kasongo will be our delegate. He has been invited to give a 15 minute presentation on our Marianist Lay Communities in Africa. This is a wonderful opportunity to share our Marianist charism more fully with the Church, and to learn more about the African reality of our lay brothers and sisters.

Slide 5

LATIN AMERICA

Isabel Duarte Quapper is our Regional Responsible for Latin America. She and her husband, Fredy, were National Responsibles for Chile for many years. Isabel is a professional business consultant, with wonderful organizational skills. She is passionate about collaborating as a Marianist Family and works diligently in promoting National and Continental Family Councils and meetings of all the branches.

Isabel and our previous Regional Responsible, Ezequiel Reggiani, have worked hard to strengthen our connection to the Church in Latin America. They have both attended several important ecclesial gatherings including the 2nd and 3rd Congresses of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities of Latin America (Bogota, 2008 and Paraguay, 2010) and the 5th General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops (Aparecida, 2007).

As you can see, our greatest numbers are in Chile. The more established CLM are in a stage of maturity, showing much responsibility and influence both in the local Church and in their professional world. They are presently reflecting on "Mature faith and the laity" and "living the faith as a lay Marianist." Presently, only 10% of communities in Chile are youth groups.

Works of social justice are important in all our CLM in Latin America. Initiatives of the World Council of the Marianist Family such as World Day of Prayer, Vocation Day and the Chaminade Year are embraced and celebrated with faithfulness and zeal.

We have not finalized the location for our 6th International Meeting of MLC, but are hoping that it will be in Péru, in February, 2014. The theme of the meeting will be 'Faith of the heart in the heart of the world'. The focus will be on our life of prayer as Marianist lay women and men.

Slide 6

Félix Arqueros Perez is our faithful National Responsible for Europe. Félix has a warm personality and wonderful sense of humour. He has formed a special council in Europe to help him with the international work. He has been an avid supporter and promoter of the collaborative work of the Fundación Acción Marianista in Spain.

Strong collaboration among the branches is also apparent in the Marianist Family gatherings in France, such as the Assize last autumn.

Travel among our countries is relatively easy in Europe compared to other regions, but the diversity of languages is a challenge. Félix is not scared! His CLM in Zaragoza assisted with the foundation of our first Marianist Lay Community in Poland. He traveled to Poland for their first consecration ceremony to formally welcome them to our International Organization.

Slide 7

Susan Vogt is our fearless and intrepid Regional Responsible for North America, Asia, Australia and Ireland. Anyone who has worked with Susan knows that she is a task-master. Ask Susan to get something done, and it will be done!

She and her husband, Jim, travel frequently to visit their family all over the world. Recently, they combined their travels with visits to our Marianist Lay Communities in India, Japan and Korea. They paid the costs of these trips.

This region is large in geography, and diverse in language and culture. The challenges are diverse, also. Some communities are aging, such as Australia and Japan. Ireland has committed Marianist lay, but no present community. The Philippines is one of our newest foundations, with an MLC in Manila and one in Davao City. North America is challenged with strengthening their organizational and leadership structure – the Marianist Lay Network of North America. Korea is a strong model of Marianist commitment and strong family spirit among the branches. India is in need of strong formation and empowerment of lay leaders.

We also have an emerging community in Indonesia. Heribertus Denny was discerning religious life with the Society of Mary in the US. Family responsibilities required him to return home to Indonesia. He has now formed a community in Indonesia, and they are presently discerning formal recognition as an MLC.

Susan publishes a monthly email newsletter, *gifts and tasks* with regional news. If you do not subscribe to it, please send her a request by email.

Slide 8

Brother Domingo Fuentes, from Brasil, is the much loved and respected assessor to the International Team. One of our Challenges from Nairobi is to promote the formation of both lay and religious assessors for our communities. Brother Domingo models the gift of a perfect assessor. He is our spiritual guide and friend. He calls us to prayer at the start of meetings. He gently nudges us to stop and pray when meetings become difficult! In English we say that he is a 'guide on the side' and not a 'sage on the stage'. He listens, and shares his wisdom without imposing.

NOW, I WOULD LIKE TO INTRODUCE YOU TO SOME OF THE FACES OF OUR MARIANIST LAY COMMUNITIES AROUND THE WORLD....

Play Slide show starting at Slide 9 (Custom Show)

Slide 75

What are, for the MLC, directions of renewal and what are your missionary priorities?

Slide 76

Directions of Renewal

NEW FOUNDATIONS

Historically, our Marianist family began with the Sodalities followed by the Religious congregations. In modern times, the order reversed. Marianist Lay Communities followed the foundations of Religious communities. Our existence depended greatly on the initiative of the Society of Mary and Daughters of Mary. And for this, we are grateful.

A new phenomenon is now taking place. Marianist lay men and women are taking the initiative and responsibility for implanting the Marianist charism in new places. Over ten years ago, the Marianist presence was brought to Haiti by a lay woman, Agn es Dumas. Today, we have emerging Marianist Lay Communities in Cameroon and Indonesia.

This phenomenon is also present within countries that already have a strong Marianist Family presence. For example, in the United States, women and men are often introduced to Marianist life in major Marianist 'centers' such as universities or retreat centers. When they move to new geographical areas, they want to start new Marianist Lay Communities. Our lay Marianists in Malawi have done this. Traveling as teachers, they try to form communities wherever they go. In this way, the Marianist presence is growing....through the lay branch.

ECCLESIAL RELATIONS

We continue to grow in our awareness and appreciation of our canonical status as an Association of the Faithful. We maintain contact with our friends at the Pontifical Council of the Laity, via email and regular visits. This contact helped us to acquire the invitation to the Pan-African Congress.

We are encouraging all of our communities to be connected to their local, national, and regional ecclesial structures. Our statutes and Document of Recognition as a Private Association of the Faithful is our 'passport' into the Church.

MATURITY IN LAY IDENTITY

The International Organization of Marianist Lay Communities was born at the first International Meeting in Santiago, Chile in 1993. We will be celebrating our 20th anniversary next year. In many ways, we are still very young. But, we have also matured in those years.

The level of maturity in our communities varies. Some communities date back to the 1960's and 1970's. These communities are well rooted in our charism, and often take a leadership role in national organizations.

Some countries, such as Spain, France, Chile and Korea, have a strong organizational structure and leadership. Some countries such as the United States, have many mature communities but have some organizational challenges. And, of course, we have countries with very young communities. These younger communities benefit from mentoring and support from more established communities.

Slide 77

Mission Priorities

Mission of first sodalities equals the mission of the new evangelization.

The New Evangelization, introduced by Pope John Paul II and promoted by our present Pope, is a call to the people of God to be missionaries in our modern world, in our own place and time. It is a call to revitalize our own faith, that we may help draw others to God. The new evangelization is addressed primarily to those who no longer believe in God or the Church.

This was the same situation facing Blessed Chaminade, Mother Adèle, and Marie Thérèse de Lamourous. They answered this need by building communities that were to be a joyful spectacle of saints. These communities would form its members into mature women and men of faith. They would draw others by

contagion. They would go out into the world, living their faith in family life, in their work, and by answering the call to social justice.

Our ministries and projects are diverse, and always will be. But our mission priorities have not changed; to form women and men of faith. The call for a New Evangelization affirms our historical mission for the world and church of our own place and time.

FORMATION

Formation is more important than ever. It is a need acknowledged in all our countries. We need formation in the Christian faith, the Marianist charism, and in leadership. We need to form the formators. We need to form women and men to be assessors, spiritual guides for communities especially in areas where religious brothers and sisters are unavailable.

We also have to be intentional in forming Marianist Lay Communities of youth, and networking existing youth communities such as our Faustino Groups.

PRAYER

We, as Marianists, know that merely teaching doctrine does not convert hearts. At the core of evangelization is the person of Jesus. True conversion requires a faith of the heart....a heart that knows God's love, embraces that love, and seeks to live out that love each and every day. We take seriously Blessed Chaminade's words: the essential is the interior.

FAITH IN ACTION

As lay women and men, we are called to live our faith in the ordinariness of family life and work. And, we are called to discern the needs before us and respond with generous and effective works of social justice both as individuals and communities.

Marianists know the importance of balancing formation, prayer, and works....a balance that is reflected in the three offices.

Slide 78

What do you expect of us as religious? How do you think we might better collaborate?

Slide 79

We, as a Marianist Family, have a prophetic and timely charism that answers the need for a new evangelization.

We also have a prophetic and timely model of being Church. We are told that we need a new evangelization because some women and men have 'drifted' from their faith, because of indifference or growing secularism.

But, many are leaving the Church in anger. They are angry at the unfolding sexual abuse crisis that is growing like a disease across the world. They are angry at a clericalism that focuses on privilege and authority. They are angry at a church that puts more emphasis on doctrine, the letter of the law rather than on the gospel call to feed the poor and hungry in our midst. They are angry at a church that does not embrace fully the gifts of women.

Slide 79

We, as a Marianist Family, offer another model of Church, a **Marian model of Church**. We are an ecclesial family that seeks to be participatory, inclusive and egalitarian, where vocations to lay life, consecrated life, vowed religious or ordained are respected and empowered but not placed within a hierarchical structure.

We are an ecclesial family that prays and ponders like Mary, and then gets up and goes to where the need is greatest. We reflect the compassionate heart of Mary, the heart that shouts out against injustice, that seeks to raise the lowly and topple the mighty.

For many women and men, our Marianist Lay Communities are their primary connection to the Church. For some, it is their only connection. For others, it offers a welcoming door to return to an active life within the church once more.

You, our brothers, as vowed religious and ordained men, play a vital role in reflecting this much needed model of Church. You show to us and to the world that a religious vocation or ordination is a gift of service to the church, not a personal ticket to special privileges or power. This is very important.

All of our team members are united in this statement... We, together, must truly **BE FAMILY**. How do we do this?

We must let go of any remnants of past patriarchal roles. We as lay women and men must embrace the responsibility of a mature faith. Our church does not need lay who act like dependent children.

We ask you, our brothers, to respect our independence as a canonically recognized private association of the faithful. Sometimes, our Marianist Lay Communities are seen as mere appendages, collaborators or associates of the religious congregations. But, unlike other third orders or oblates, we have the right to exist independently.

We are independent, yes. But, on our own we are not whole. We desire deeply to collaborate **interdependently** with the Society of Mary, the Daughters of Mary, and the Alliance Mariale, in a true spirit of family....as a Marianist Family.

We must collaborate on formation efforts. Our initial formation is to the Marianist family. When a young man or woman is formed within a Marianist Lay Community, and then discerns a religious vocation, he or she will come to the congregation with a solid foundation. If they discover that religious life is not their calling, their vocation to the Marianist family remains.

We need your help in formation, for you are the ‘director that never dies’. We can also help you with forming, supporting, and nurturing religious vocations. We can help with the initial formation of contacts and aspirants. We can show novices the beauty of community, supporting and encouraging their vocations; especially in areas where few are in formation. Our Marianist Lay Communities have provided the seeds for many vocations. Together, we can **nurture and support both religious vocations and vocations to Marianist lay life.**

Our **Family Councils** are our most concrete model of a collaborative church that gathers all gifts around a table, rather than placing them on a ladder of hierarchy. Unlike pastoral and diocesan councils, decision making powers in our family councils are not exclusive to ordination. All branches have a voice. All have a vote. We need to collaborate on forming councils in all geographical areas where two or more branches of the Marianist family exist. With the help of these councils, we can promote Marianist family gatherings on local, national, and regional levels.

CONCLUSION

I firmly believe that we are in a graced moment of our history. The charism gifted to us, is not ours alone. It is needed in our church and our world today and we must intentionally share it. Together.

I pray that our loving God will continue to bless this great Marianist Family of ours. With Mary as our model and guide, may we rise to bring Jesus into a world so in need of His love, peace and justice. Amen.