Community in the Marianist Tradition:
Roots and Realities

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Abstract

In the paper, Carol Ramey will outline the reasons Father Chaminade chose to form lay communities to restore faith and zeal among Catholics in France after the French Revolution. The spirituality and organizational wisdom of the Marianist Founders, which contributed to the vitality within the communities as well as multiple good works within France, will be discussed. Distinctive features of community as lived by members of the religious institutes—the Society of Mary and the Daughters of Mary Immaculate—will be described.

After 30 years of growth and expansion, the French government suppressed lay communities. Ms. Ramey will investigate the re-emergence of this branch of the Marianist Family. Today’s expressions of Marianist community, both within the vowed religious communities and among lay people, will be examined for their fidelity to the foundational vision and for what they give witness to in today’s world.

Introduction

Bro. Raymond Fitz, SM, to clarify the basis for the papers to be discussed at MUM, asked we three contributors, “What can we learn about our efforts to build communities and transform culture from our Marianist spiritual, apostolic, and educational tradition and the praxis of the Marianist Family?” Our understanding and interpretations of Marianist past, present, and future will all come to bear on this conversation-framing question.

If this discussion on community were likened to a mountain to be climbed, intellectual curiosity and fascination with a challenge would guide many decisions about the pursuit to the top, but on the journey the climber will encounter deep crevices where human longing for belonging and questions of faith need negotiating. There will be caves where the human flaws of ennui and self-absorption dwell, waiting to waylay the adventurers into thinking that coziness by a fire and safety from the elements are better than the risks of the ascent. But, enough of what is probably an overreaching metaphor. Presented here, then, is a bit of history, various observations on the contemporary
incarnation of the founding vision, and pure speculation about the future. It is one voice in a conversation just getting started.

In his homily for the liturgy celebrating Father Chaminade’s beatification, Father David Fleming, SM, Superior General of the Society of Mary, expressed the core of what community in the Marianist tradition was during the early 1800s and what, today, we hold up as the ideal for ourselves. He said, “Chaminade invited all sorts of people to the Bordeaux Sodality, from every class of society, every state of life, every background and education. He thought that all could live in a style of Christian community modeled on the first community of Jerusalem, with ‘one heart and one soul’” (Fleming, September 3, 2000).

The power of the gift of Marianist community lies in this description—everyone is included; the basis for the design and methodology is a retrieval of the passion, mystery, and apostolic thrust of the first disciples of Jesus; and it embodies a unity of purpose so profound that the core of our body and spirit is engaged. Community, like colorful packages at Christmas or birthdays, is a wonderful gift—that’s the good news. The bad news is “batteries are not included.” A source of energy is needed all the time to keep it functioning.

**Community: one element of Marianist charism**

I would bet that if today we entered into any gathering of large numbers of people associated with Marianist life through institutions or ministries, and asked, “What is unique about Marianists? What distinguishes their charism from others within the church?” the majority of people would respond, “Community.” There is no argument that community is a visible and well-documented aspect of Marianist life. However, community is but one element of the Marianist charism.

Brother Thomas Giardino, SM, in his article “Marianist Charism and Its Manifestations,” reports that even among those who call themselves Marianists he has heard someone say, “our charism of community.” Brother Giardino cautions that while “this reductive phenomenon is not uncommon, we do a disservice to the mission” if we do not differentiate the charism from its manifestations” (Giardino, 2004). Community is
a manifestation I will focus on here, but I do not want to reinforce any misunderstandings about treating this part of Marianist life as the whole of Marianist life.

**Chaminade’s life experiences and his vision for a new kind of church**

Most readers of this paper know the general outline of Father William Joseph Chaminade’s life and times as well as those of his collaborators, Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon and Marie Thérèse de Lamourous, in the founding of what we now call the Marianist Family. By reviewing a brief narrative of his life up to his foundations, we can see experiences that prepared him to act on and sustain his response to the fundamental inspiration of the charism and its incarnation into history.

We see that in forming the Bordeaux Sodality he drew upon the best elements of healthy families, as his family had been a positive influence—they nurtured his intellectual and spiritual life. We identify ways in which he utilized the dynamics of small groupings of the faithful. It was at the school in Mussidan where he spent many years that he experienced the practical support and spiritual growth that resulted from the twenty years of common ministry, common prayer, and common living circumstances. We come to understand how he could trust the laity as he had witnessed ordinary faithful men and women doing extraordinary things to continue some form of church life—underground, frequently without clergy or religious, and constantly at risk. He must have had a profound sense of the unpredictability of life and the necessity of skills for adaptation to change. Little surprise that he had become a pragmatist.

Just a few details. Chaminade was born in France into a typical family of the lower middle class at the end of the *ancien régime*. His father was a master glazier who later took over his father-in-law’s drygoods shop. His maternal great-grandfather was a Huguenot who was forced to leave France after the Edict of Nantes ended religious tolerance. Chaminade’s grandfather, baptized a Protestant, returned to France and converted to Catholicism.

Supported by his family in both his education and his vocation, Chaminade, the youngest of his siblings who grew to adulthood, became a teacher, a priest, and a business manager. At a young age, he moved to the quiet city of Mussidan, just down the River Isle from his birthplace. There he joined his brothers at St. Charles Borromeo, a
school and minor seminary. After his ordination, he joined the Congregation of St. Charles with other priests on the faculty. The Congregation’s members were linked to “offshoots of the foundations of St. Vincent de Paul, communities of diocesan priests who were ordained to preach in country parishes and undertake the training of seminarians” (Délas, SM, and Gadiou, SM, p. 17). The members seemed to have a strong devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Had not the Revolution intervened, Chaminade probably would have lived out his days at this school.

Accounts of Chaminade’s activities during the Revolution reveal his courage under extremely dangerous circumstances, his fidelity to the Church, and his commitment to serving the faithful in whatever way possible. From the time he refused to sign the oath required by the Constitution on the Clergy—an act which would have placed him under the government’s authority rather than the Church’s—he must have sensed that little of what lay ahead would be familiar or ordinary. He moved to the port city of Bordeaux where, with financial help from a priest friend, he purchased a small country estate for his aging parents. When the reigning powers further suppressed the Church and deported clergy and religious, he hid and secretly administered sacraments and spiritual counsel. When periods of relative calm and freedom of worship briefly returned, he openly conducted services and assisted with a process to bring priests who did sign the oath back to priestly ministry. In 1797, seven years into the Revolution, those in power required that all émigrés who returned to France after the Reign of Terror without authorization had to leave the country immediately. Chaminade’s name mistakenly appeared on the list as, ironically, he had hidden so well, officials thought he had left France. He and his brother, Louis, fled to Saragossa, Spain. He remained there in exile for three years.

What happened in Saragossa is an historical intrigue—one which we could spend a good deal of time discussing. Suffice it to say that Marianist historians recount similar events, but exhibit differences in the interpretation of these events. Many feel that the time in Spain allowed for deep prayer and reflection, as well as long sustained conversations with other exiles about what might be possible in the effort to rebuild the church, when and if they returned to France. These historians posit that Saragossa was a time for what we would call “brainstorming” and possibly synthesis of ideas first germinated as far back as his time in Mussidan. Others sense from some of Chaminade’s
correspondence, and his behavioral departure from the paths he followed before the Revolution, that he had an inspiration that directed his life from there on out. Mere instinct or good strategic planning would not explain the course Chaminade pursued after Saragossa. We do know for sure that while at Saragossa he spent hours praying at Our Lady of the Pillar, and throughout his life he described his efforts as a mission given him by Mary.

In his book, *Chaminade’s Message Today*, Father Eduardo Benlloch says, “From the time he returned to France in 1800 at the age of 39, we see William Joseph Chaminade changed. He is not the same person who went into exile. He is decisive and knows where he is going. He has a personal missionary project and becomes extraordinarily creative. His life is not the same as it was before going into exile; something had happened in Saragossa. Only one month after arriving in France from Saragossa, he gave birth and life to a Marian Sodality for lay people” (Benlloch, p.18).

Benlloch, as well as other biographers, enumerates steps Chaminade took in relative short order to develop a unique and dynamic network of communities, always with the knowledge and approval of the bishop and without succumbing to pressures to become a diocesan pastor or administrator. So, then, as Father Fleming reminds us, Chaminade returns to France and gathers a few young men to begin a Sodality that would include *all sorts of people, from every class of society, every state of life, every background and education.*

“All sorts of people”

Let’s look for a moment at the phrase “all sorts of people.” In 1800, to gather people outside of their class and age cohort was radical. Did his idea for this equality come from the underlying values of the Revolution—*liberté, fraternité, and égalité*? Perhaps. As young people might say today, he knew the *ancien régime* was “so yesterday” and that there was no going back. Chaminade often said, “The fulcrum that moves the world had changed—new times require new wars.” Father Benlloch states the following:

The people who constituted the founding group are proof that something new was being born. It is true that some of the first members of the Sodality had previously belonged to other sodalities, all of which had been suppressed for several years
because of the Revolution. Chaminade did not decide to reestablish any of these. The sodalities of the Jesuits were structured into different groups according to the category of persons and the social groups to which they belonged; each of them functioned with a rule adapted to its own characteristics, had its own resources, and organized its own recruitment. If we identify the first members of Chaminade’s Sodality, we see that it brought together people of the most diverse categories into a single group: merchants, teachers, priests, clerics, former soldiers, and even a shoemaker. This was new and revived the spirit of early Christianity, which made no distinctions and opened its communities to every class of persons (Benlloch, p. 49-50).

His closest collaborator in developing these communities was Marie Thérèse de Lamourous, a laywoman! While in Saragossa, he had written to her, mentioning how they might cooperate on “starting for good and doing something for the glory of Jesus our good Master” (The Letters of William Joseph Chaminade, August 26, 1800). Once Chaminade returned, she organized the Young Women’s section of the Bordeaux Sodality…hers being the first name to appear on the register of the group. Later, she assisted in the development of the Ladies of the Retreat, formed to “take an interest in the younger women of the group and provide them with counsel and good example” (Stefanelli, p. 11).

As late as 1824, some pastors in Bordeaux wrote a letter to the Archbishop complaining of Chaminade’s bold approach to equality. They wrote:

How is it possible to gather, into one society, persons of different rank and age? This might be suitable for a confraternity. But how can social relations be established without constraint and incongruity, when there is such an inequality

1A short digression, if you will, as this woman was so very interesting. Marie Thérèse de Lamourous organized this work around the philosophy, “Enter Freely, Stay Freely.” No court-assigned women nor those under pressure from family were taken in. “Residents at her new home were from all segments of society—a mixed group of older, streetwise women and fairly innocent children (Stefanelli, p. 9). The most uncommon policy, however, was to have both residents and the staff live in community in the home—meals, prayer, and living quarters were all shared. Father Chaminade was a spiritual counselor, a fund-raiser, and the ecclesial superior for the home. The inclusion of all working for the good of all was characteristic of the Sodality and the Miséricorde.
between the individuals? Such a union would result in shocking confusion” (*Spirit of Our Foundation*, Vol 3, § 212).

The pastors didn’t even mention combining the genders into one community! Chaminade replied that the Sodality was “no more a confused group than an organized society is a mob” (*Spirit of Our Foundation*, Vol 3, § 212). He acknowledged that the combination takes coordinating, but this is the role of the director. Members were grouped like-on-like for some activities, but were not, according to Chaminade, “separated from the whole” (*Spirit of Our Foundation*, Vol 3, § 212).

As a pragmatist, Chaminade knew that an enterprise with the goal to re-Christianize all of France would need every person possible to engage in the project.

A providential encounter in a hospital’s waiting room between a member of the Bordeaux Sodality and the mother of Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon, offered Chaminade the chance to expand the communities into the rural regions of France. Upon her return from exile, Adèle, a young aristocrat with a deep compassion for the poor near and around the family’s chateau in Agen, began an Association, a network of women and priests throughout France who prayed together and engaged in good works. Although widely dispersed geographically, Adèle kept the network together through letter writing. The chance meeting brought Adèle and Chaminade into communication. Seeing the similarities of their enterprises, Adèle affiliated her Association with the Bordeaux Sodality.

Adèle wanted to form a religious order of women who would serve the poor. Drawing on Father Chaminade’s knowledge of canon law and his spiritual guidance, she founded the Daughters of Mary. The chief work of the new order was to “make true sodalists” of the young women they instructed in religion and counseled to lead virtuous lives.” In fact, Father Chaminade told Adèle, “Your community will be composed entirely of religious missionaries” (*The Letters of William Joseph Chaminade*, October 3, 1815).

The religious institutes and their relationship with the lay communities

After many years of experience with the lay communities, and after helping Adèle found the Daughters, the opportunity arose to form a religious order for men under
Mary’s name and protection. Chaminade’s conviction about equality within community continued within the institute. All those who entered the Society first became Brothers of Mary. After some time in religious life, the community would discern a brother’s call to the priesthood, not to set up a special category for an elite group within the Society, but to serve the community. Brothers and priests lived together, shared ministry, and exercised authority one over the other, despite state of life. This feature, called mixed composition, did not fit easily with those in Rome overseeing religious life, and the conflict held up the process toward official approbation of the Society. Misunderstandings about how the issue was being pursued by leadership of the SM caused internal turmoil among the brothers, some thinking a push was underway to change the mixed character of the institute to a clerical order. After an official Apostolic Visitation (luckily conducted by a friend to the Society), a period of negotiation between Rome and the SM resulted in a compromise. A priest had to be designated director in communities numbering 12 or more members. As few met that criterion, the tradition of mixed composition prevailed. (Today, by special indult, brothers may hold any position except Superior General).

So, a main characteristic of community in the Marianist tradition is the radical opportunity to belong and participate fully in the community’s life. This does not imply a lack of necessity for leadership or an indifference to knowledge, skills, wisdom, and desire that often elevate some people to positions of authority. But leadership and authority flow primarily from a person’s gifts and talents, not status.

**Union without confusion**

When one opens the door to everyone, the range of need, experience, talent, and maturity is great. One of Chaminade’s favorite expressions was “union without confusion.”

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2 Benlloch puts the formation of the religious institutes into an historical context.

When Chaminade was overwhelmed with the ever-increasing task of animating the Marian lay Sodalities, the need arose for a group of people who could do what he was doing: activate and propagate these lay Sodalities for the re-Christianization of France. This group of directors would be Father Chaminade, multiplied and perpetuated. This is the meaning of the famous expression “the one who never dies (Benlloch, p. ix).
confusion.” He organized the Sodality with a complex of small units based on common backgrounds or ages, but would bring everyone together on Sunday evening for lectures, singing, debates, and celebrations of feast days. Early on, the Sodality focused on formation in faith of youth with special instruction and spiritual exercises, as well as wholesome recreations for them. Soon, the Fathers of Families conducted classes in practical studies such as accounting, inventory management, and geography. A branch of the Good Books Society was instituted. Professional persons offered their expertise to community members at no cost. Those who were unemployed, sick, or imprisoned were visited and helped in practical ways. Funerals and burials were an important way to support families.

In addition to an array of support inside the community, the city of Bordeaux profited from the sodalists’ zeal to do good. Just as the first disciples of Jesus had to leave the Upper Room to go into the streets to give witness to Christ by healing, preaching, teaching, consoling, and serving, so too did the sodalists. A baker’s union was formed when Napoleon’s war with England put great pressure on wheat production and prices. Sodalists visited the prisons and provided housing, food, and instruction to young chimney sweeps (the migrant workers of those times). Women volunteered at the Miséricorde. Other religious orders were formed or revitalized by Father Chaminade and sodalists.

Chaminade’s organizational wisdom

Chaminade employed a systematic application of organizational principles (which would much later be recognized in the wider Catholic community as Catholic Action). Services were rendered from “cradle to grave.” Frequent reunions helped bond the members into a commitment to one another and provided the companionship so necessary to each individual to stand up against the vestiges of indifference or hostility to religious expression—not to mention the more mundane temptations of the streets of a port city. An openness to newcomers was pervasive. People were invited to gatherings, were soon involved and invested in a work of the Sodality through responsibility and leadership, given opportunities to intensify and integrate their growing participation in the life of Christ through spiritual accompaniment, and encouraged to make the supports
needed for their commitments more intentional by pledging themselves to Christ, through Mary.

It was in the Bordeaux Sodality that Chaminade first applied his ideas about what he called the Offices—institutionalizing the roles Jesus embraced of priest, prophet, and king into offices of zeal, instruction, and temporalities (think heart, head, and hands). These entailed practical tasks for the ongoing operation of the Sodality; more importantly, the offices were intended to bring various spiritual dimensions to the work of administration. The relationship between Jesus and Mary described in the Gospel was modeled through progress in virtues of preparation, purification, and consummation.

“A style of Christian community modeled on the first community of Jerusalem, with ‘one heart and one soul.’”

Chaminade’s genius about community was the ability to incarnate the model of community from the primitive church into his contemporary situation. The depth of faith, the quality of friendship, the sharing of resources, the mutual exercise of love, and the steadiness of this love in the community helped members to persevere in the face of disbelief in the culture, as well as within any adversities that arose (Phillips, p. 30). The Bordeaux Sodality and its sister communities did, indeed, as Father Fleming described, exhibit “one heart and one soul.” When deciding which of the great rules of the Church he would model his Institute on, he chose the Benedictine Rule as the one in which community life is most emphasized, most demanding, most developed, and most cultivated (Brivio, p. 261). A premise, then, of community in the Marianist tradition is that persons can belong to the community throughout their whole life, engaging fully with their intellect, emotions, spiritual nature, and social skills.

**Community as means to an end**

All this activity, organization, and spiritual direction resulted, obviously, in meeting the needs of the members and of the larger ecclesial and civic arena. Chaminade, however, always had a larger mission in mind.

One commentator, Father Juan María Artadi, SM, says this well.
We believe that Father Chaminade’s primary concern never was to promote a particular way of living the Christian life, nor even to outline a path to sanctity, nor to create communities, but rather to evangelize and re-establish Christianity by developing a dynamic and apostolic movement, above all among Christian peoples, neither institutionalized nor clerical (Artadi, “Charism” p. 148).

Chaminade said that to address the dark issues of the age, one needed a “spectacle of saints” from which would emanate a “contagion of good.” Christians would be multiplied by such contagion. Therefore, the community had to be attractive and dynamic if it would be the source of this contagion. In fact, he said, “They will shine forth as a sort of light which will make them the object of general attention. The individual will not necessarily be anything in these assemblies; it is the assemblies themselves which excite admiration” (Verrier, The Sodality of Father Chaminade, p. 291).

Chaminade did not want the admiration for admiration’s sake. It was the potential for evangelization that the admiration provided. He had set out to revivify faith throughout France. He believed that faith would be rekindled by such communities more effectively and in greater lasting measure than the best of sermons.

According to Phillipe Pierrel, SM, who quotes from Jalons d’histoire sur la route de Guillaume – Joseph Chaminade of Father Verrier, SM, one can compare Chaminade’s methods to those of Catholic Action. He says,

The method was no longer one of training a few individuals to become professionals in apostolic work, and who were then expected to teach others. On the contrary, each one was called to become part of a living organism, in this case of the Sodality, within which progress in faith was made easier by the support of others (Pierrel, p. 51).

In another text, Father Verrier, SM, says:

The method of absorption and assimilation had replaced the method of radiation and protection; the tactic of “movement” has replaced the tactic of the elite and of personal influence . . . . Formerly, one Christianized before incorporating; today we incorporate first, and Christianization takes place almost automatically through the influence of the community (Verrier, The Verrier Collection, p. 77).
Permanent mission

At the time of Marianist foundations, parish missions, organized by dioceses, were popular. (We still have places where these are conducted.) The best preachers visited an area for about a week’s time. Well-prepared and vibrant homilies and retreat presentations were offered and often resulted in renewed resolve by those in attendance to practice one’s faith more regularly and with great fervor. But, the preacher moved on to the next site and the fires ignited, so to speak, sometimes burnt out from lack of fuel or oxygen. Philippe Pierrel, SM, tells us that Chaminade did not neglect them (the missions)—he collaborated with one in Bordeaux—but he “feared that people would go to the mission as spectators, and that any in-depth impression would be impossible” (Perriel, p. 47). Chaminade positioned his communities as groups in “permanent mission.”

As noted by Pierrel, “It is to Father Chaminade’s credit that he made the Sodalities adopt the fundamental strategies of a mission, that is, to convert, to arouse dormant faith, to give a sense of community, and to provide for the continuance of the development of faith in every aspect of life. That is why his Sodalities were “ongoing missions” (Pierrel, p. 47).

Several authors have tried to capture the “both/and” aspect of Marianist community, then and now—the attention to the vitality and integrity of the internal life of the community in balance with its external mission. Some examples of current expressions are the following:

The community was not just gathered; it was sent. (Lee)
The community was not just destination; it was vehicle. (Ramey)
The community was not just a noun; it was a verb. (Giardino)

It is necessary at this juncture to say that the interpretations and ways of activating permanent mission have been adapted as we, as a global Marianist Family, have come to understand the call for justice and our responsibility to address in concrete, clever, and courageous ways the unmet needs of our times.
The term “social justice” and its implications for Christian life did not exist at Chaminade’s time.³

Today, we think of permanent mission as the collective of knowledge, skill, and determination needed for apostolic boldness in our world. In Chaminade’s day, this was about evangelization as much as it was about good works.

**Transition from lay communities to schools as primary instrument of evangelization**

Chaminade could only watch as the government suppressed lay communities in 1830. By his death in 1850, they had not been reconstituted; in fact, over time, many of the religious forgot about them and newer members never experienced the primary instrument of evangelization from the foundation period. The works of the religious focused primarily on teaching in schools. In the 1839 Constitutions of the Society of Mary we find the statement:

> What conquests modern philosophy has made in the kingdom of Christ! Faith is enfeebled, its torch has gone out in a great number of individuals, and even in entire corporate bodies….What remedies can be offered to oppose so many evils? Among the means which the spirit of the Lord has given in order to stop the progress of impiety and of a dissolute life, He has deigned to inspire an association, composed of all talents and of all states, priests and laymen, whose principal object is to form the children and the young of every class; this association is the Society of Mary (Constitutions of the Society of Mary 1839, §339 and §340).

Any documents referring to *community* were speaking of communities of Marianist religious, usually the faculty of a school. The commitment to faith formation among Christians never wavered, but quality education, rather than fostering lay communities, became the most prevalent locus of Marianist activity.

Education, then, became the privileged way to incarnate Christ into the world.

Bro. Joseph Panzer, SM, Ph.D., in *Educational Traditions of the Society of Mary*, says:

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³ Certainly, our founders demonstrated their commitment to address the consequences of social injustice on individuals, but the concept of “a situation in which the very organization of some level of society systematically functions to the detriment of groups or individuals in the society” had not been articulated. (Definition of social sin by Father Bryan Hehir in *Chicago Studies*).
“Once convinced that the services of his society were urgently needed to counteract the effects of *philosophism* in the schools, and that education, joined to the work of the Sodality, offered almost unlimited opportunities for effecting the Christian regeneration of France and of the whole world, Father Chaminade prepared to enter the educational field….Lalanne, who might well have claimed some of the credit for himself, admitted, in his declining years, in a letter to a fellow-Marianist, ‘Who was it that launched us in the career of education if not Father Chaminade himself, urged on by Brother David? And I do not say that they were wrong. Considering the present condition of the world, there is not, to reform it, a more universal means than education’” (Panzer, SM. p. 43).

As vocations from among students were increasing and the pedagogy of the brothers was well respected, institutions became fairly stable. Formation into community life was often typical of the “golden years” of organizations—conformity to well-established rhythms and methodology was expected. Marianist community would have been characterized by its alliance with Mary and its dedication to Christian instruction of youth.

**Impact of Simler, the second founder**

Since the problematic days of Chaminade’s last years, his life story and vision fell into the shadows, only to be brought to light in 1901 through a biography written by Joseph Simler, SM. After reading the biography and learning the history of the Bordeaux Sodality, vowed religious began to reinstitute sodalities within the school settings. They typically followed the Jesuit model where cells of dedicated individuals met as an extracurricular activity. As natural leaders were often recruited, and because these students developed a strong commitment to spiritual growth and to spreading the good news of the Gospel, these people, along with the faculty composed primarily of religious, often became “carriers,” if you will, of the Marianist spirit.

**William Ferree**

In terms of any long-term association with Marianist life beyond high school, the invitation to students was related to vocations within the religious order, not to adult life in lay communities. Gradually, here in the United States, the reemergence of lay groups began with Mass Leagues in the 1920s. In 1938, William Ferree, SM, began a series of articles in the *Apostle of Mary* on the schools as the historical equivalent of the Bordeaux
Sodality. He followed up with a synthesis of Father Chaminade’s thought that quickly brought Chaminade’s views on community to the forefront of Marianist thought and caught the imagination of many about how the Family of Mary could be expanded.4

References to lay communities and the vowed religious as a “comprehensive Marianist Family” began. By the 1940s, parents of the brothers, affiliate groups among teachers and coworkers, Marian Guilds, Marianist Leagues, and high school sodalities were in full swing. In 1950, the National Association of Marianist Organizations held its first national meeting. Father Paul Hoffer, SM, in 1960 when he was Superior General, wrote the circular “Extension of the Family of Mary.”

Ferree’s impact on the resurgence was significant. Training for sodality moderators, creation of study groups among the scholastics, doctoral level study into Chaminade’s thought, and discussion at provincial and general chapters all advanced a retrieval of Chaminade’s understanding of communities in permanent mission. Names such as John Totten, SM, Adolf Windisch, SM, Lawrence Cada, SM, Joseph Stefanelli, SM, John Dickson, SM, Hugh Bihl, SM, and Bernard Lee, SM, were all associated with the revival of adult sodalities. An effort was undertaken to translate all the primary foundational documents into English, not only in response to the Vatican II call for religious orders to investigate their founding charism, but also to ensure that no aspect of Chaminade’s way of incorporating the manifestations of the charism into the Marianist Family would be lost. Lay people started reading the letters, documents, and major interpreters of Chaminade’s life and thoughts. The Bordeaux Sodality achieved the status of an icon.

Crisis in religious life

By 1966, the Society of Mary reached the highest level of membership in its history. Soon after that, the departure of men and women throughout the world from religious life reached record numbers. Some described it as a hemorrhage and attributed

4 Raymond Fitz, SM, has been studying Ferree’s thought and has given several lectures on the topic of the mission of the Marianists to form apostolic faith communities that work at social transformation. Fitz follows Ferree’s study of Chaminade and his assertion that Chaminade’s strategies prefigured ideas of Catholic social tradition. We anticipate that Brother Fitz will soon publish his research. (The Ferree Lecture, March 2004)
the defections to the stagnation of community life and the repression of individuals within community. Others, of course, blamed the new activism of the religious as the culprit as the participation with students and parents outside of the classroom brought them into too close proximity with the secular world. In response to the crisis, efforts at revitalization started.

**Revitalization of community life**

In an article for *Review for Religious Life*, Brothers Raymond Fitz, SM, and Lawrence Cada, SM, wrote “The Recovery of Religious Life” (Fitz and Cada). Concerning revitalization, they suggested that communities that survive the demoralization and disintegration of a breakdown period are distinguished by “three characteristics: a transforming response to the signs of the times; a re-appropriation of the founding charism; and a profound renewal of the life of prayer, faith, and centeredness in Christ.”

The community experiences the revitalization as a second foundation. Personal transformation or conversion is central to revitalization. With personal transformation comes innovative insight and a new centering in the person of Christ. The innovative insight allows the transformed individuals within the community to develop critical awareness of the assumptions underlying the traditional meaning of the community and functioning of that community within the Church and the world. This innovative insight brings with it a focusing of energies through a new positive vision of what the community should be in the future. The vision allows the emergence of a new theory which gives meaning to the experiences of the individuals and the shared events lived within the community and spurs the community to building and creating its future. Such a new theory guides the community in the search for and the invention of new models of living together as a community bound by the evangelical conditions of discipleship in the service of the Church (Fitz and Cada, p. 706).

The ideas in the article were first suggested by David Fleming, SM, in a lecture at the University of Dayton in 1971. In the summer of 1996, Father Fleming became the Superior General of the Society of Mary. During his term, the content of his circulars have themes that mirror the three characteristics for revitalization. Community life within both the SM and the FMI have been bolstered through several approaches—from better community prayer life to intensified commitment to issues of peace and justice.
SM province unification and community life

Today, within the United States, another new challenge has been the unification of four provinces of the Society of Mary into one. The culture of communities differed among the four provinces—some in significant ways, others just in terms of certain policies and procedures. Several brothers are transferring into “new territory” as they are assigned to new ministries and communities in geographic areas formerly part of a province different from the one in which they were formed and in which they had a long history with those they served in ministry. The adaptive skills of the founders are critical to those struggling with the new times.

Current expressions of Marianist lay community

About lay communities, another paper could be written. These groups have usually been characterized as autonomous but loosely networked, lay lead, and structured around the classic elements of church—breaking open the Word, breaking bread, serving others, and community building. Some are explicitly Marianist; others qualify their identity by saying they are in the Marianist tradition—usually because a number of community members have not embraced (perhaps will not embrace) Marianist spirituality as their chosen way to live out their faith life.

Many of the groups formed in the late 1960s and early 1970s are entering mid-life and its attendant challenges. New groups of young adults have been established whose members’ first exposure to Marianist community is typically through LIFE Programs or programs and groups at the Marianist universities. A new effort, the Marianist Lay Formation Initiative, launched in late 2004, is training lay people in how to start and sustain Marianist communities. Communities at Marianist institutions are emerging, usually comprised of faculty and staff. Affiliate groups continue to meet locally and hold national retreats. Some parishes have small Marianist Lay Communities associated with them. There is again a Marianist Volunteer Program that fosters community living while participants work among the poor. Both at the high school and college level, Characteristics of Marianist Education are being inculcated through curricula, special and ongoing programs, and the promotion of small faith-sharing communities.
**Marianist communities now among a movement within the larger church**

Within many churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, persons are seeking more supportive and challenging experiences related to their faith life. Small groups are gathering in record numbers. These small faith-sharing communities mirror the motivation and format long known within the Marianist tradition. Bernard Lee, SM, sponsored by the Lilly Foundation, has researched this phenomenon. He encourages Marianist Lay Communities to network with the Small Christian Community movement through organizations like Buena Vista, National Association of Parishes Restructuring into Communities, and North American Forum for Small Christian Communities. In particular, Father Lee is interested in the public life of these communities. In one of his publications for Buena Vista, he quotes Jeremiah 29:7, a Scripture passage Lee finds elemental to advancing the civic engagement of communities and to grounding the importance of being a community sent, as well as gathered. “Seek the well being of the city where I have sent you into exile. And pray to God on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Lee, *Seeking Justice*, p. 3).

**The networking phenomenon among Marianist communities**

Lay groups are networking and gathering regionally, continentally, and internationally. Since 1988 in North America, Continental Assemblies have been scheduled every three years to bring together the wide variety of people engaged in lay community. In 1991, the Marianist Lay Network of North America (MLNNA) was formed to provide collaboration and communication services to more than 100 communities and to join with the SM and FMI in cooperative ventures. This summer, July 2005, the fourth International Convocation of Marianist Lay Communities was held in Bordeaux, France. After each convocation, a document has been issued. To date, the topics covered have been an identity statement; mission of the lay communities; and “being” Marianist community, a description of the common features of the various expressions of lay life around the world. This year’s document will address Mary in the life of lay communities. As the complexity of the types and networks of Marianist lay
communities grows, a key phrase of Chaminade has been jokingly altered to describe the current situation—union with some confusion!

**What have we learned? What is useful to today?**

Many names, dates, and developments have been cataloged here. Now, to the most important task—what does all this teach us about our efforts to build community and transform culture? What might we do now to shape a healthy future for Marianist community? What does our spirituality, our method of apostolic approach, and our educational expertise equip us to do in this world? Before we move further into these questions, it will be important to keep before us an understanding of community that has a good deal of integrity and a bit of humility. Again, Father Fleming helps us with this.

In his circular of September 12, 2004, he wrote to his brothers about the experience and meaning of community within the Society of Mary. However, I think we can read his words and then, from the optic of a Marianist institution of higher education, decide what in that setting are the markers of genuine community, as opposed to facades of community.

The word community is used in so many contexts today that it might not evoke the powerful sense of solidarity and human care that we need. The words “brotherhood and sisterhood” suggest that the kind of community in question is much more than some kind of organizational belonging, much more than a vague heartiness or a cheery camaraderie. Today’s lonely people, especially youth, long for a real set of family relationships, which some of them have hardly ever experienced. They long for the sense of a common commitment that emboldens people to try to achieve difficult goals together. But, in our Marianist communities it is easy to settle for a kind of congenial individualism, a convenient and benevolent agreement to keep in touch and not to interfere much in one another’s private lives. No strong apostolic team will emerge in such a community. . . . On the other hand, whenever people manage to establish a warm and welcoming and challenging sense of real brotherhood and sisterhood, engaged together in a mission that is worth doing, there is a powerful response (Fleming, Circular no. 2, page 18).
Father Fleming hits the proverbial nail on the head. How in today’s world do we create for ourselves at our institutions, and for the world we aim to transform, a genuine sense of healthy family relationships that provide solidarity and human care and, at the same time, engage one another in a mission that is worth doing? I return, briefly, to the metaphor of the mountain from the introduction of this paper.

**Caves and crevices**

Unfortunately, many Marianists—lay and religious—could tell stories of community life that resonate with Father Fleming’s caveats—situations in which “a vague heartiness or a cheery camaraderie” characterize the cave into which we crawl, while climbing the mountain, weary or lacking imagination for “trying to achieve difficult goals together.” We have all too often let a major crevice permanently obstruct our ascent on the face of the mountain—we have in some cases, “settled for a kind of congenial individualism, a convenient and benevolent agreement to keep in touch and not to interfere much in one another’s private lives.” At its worst, community can be like a family that has lost any sense of being together other than for basic economic realities or external expectations.

However, Father Fleming posits ways to entice people out of the cave or over the crevice. It’s really very simple; it means looking up from our own boots toward the vision of the mountaintop. At the summit, if you will, we find “a strong apostolic team,” grounded in what is “real,” excited about having undertaken “a mission worth doing,” and watching “the powerful response” from the team members and others invited into the transforming work toward the vision. From the mountaintop we hear an echo from a voice first heard nearly 200 years ago. The source and words of the echo? Chaminade calling Marianists to be “a community in permanent mission.”

**What we are already about/doing**

I’m assuming that participants in the MUM gathering would say that higher education is a mission that is worth doing. The mottos or headers on websites, UD’s “Learn, Lead, and Serve,” St. Mary’s “Personal Attention, Powerful Programs,” and Chaminade University’s “Inspiring Success” seem to be about equipping students to
provide a powerful response—a transformative agenda and approach—for the world into which they will soon be ushered.

The university communities already know a great deal about how to go about building community within the university student culture and make their mottos or headers evident, relevant, and sustainable. Witness the myriad of activities sponsored by the Chancellor and Rector’s offices, service learning programs, and campus ministry offerings in which students experience the warmth of welcome and are the given the skills critical to organizing and implementing programs for change. Community is experienced as gathered and sent, destination and vehicle, noun and verb. Is the same true for faculty, staff, and administrators?

Several scholars among you are wrestling with the challenge to offer the best aspects of Marianist community, not only to the university culture, but also the larger culture(s) in which we operate. In his recent article, “The Impact of Faith and Culture on Marianist Ministry: Position Paper of the Task Force on Faith and Culture,” Brother Victor Forlani, SM, summarizes much of Marianist spirituality and apostolic approach that can be brought to a transformative agenda. He highlights what he calls the “healthy, hopeful, and realistic responses” which Marianist spirit can bring to the culture (Forlani, Soundings 9.1, p. 45). He quotes Brother Steve Glodek, SM, who has written several texts on an orientation toward new virtues that are required to sustain this work. Brother Glodek calls for several reversals in our customary Marianist habits. No longer will it be sufficient to say, “build it and they will come.” Brother Glodek encourages us to move from our “comfort zone,” switching from “welcoming” to “being welcomed,” changing places so as to be the “uncomfortable guest” instead of the “hospitable ones.” Only then will true inclusion be possible (Forlani, Soundings 9.1, p. 49-52).

Mary Lynne Hill, Ph.D. has written Stories from the Wake. In this text (soon to be published by NACMS), she recognizes a semantic shift with the word “revolution” to explore what she sees as a “circular response in the wake of linear events.” Among the many examples she gives of how we return or revisit deep symbols and reshape them to fit the new reality, Hill sees how we as Marianists will profit from looking at the times of the French Revolution where God/king/subject were revolutionized to God/reason/citizen and how we revolve back to liberté, fraternité, and égalité, deep symbols of those times,
to become deep symbols of our time as Marianists. The power of a community in permanent mission based on these deep symbols is seen as a transformative medium for both Chaminade’s time and our own.

Brother Raymond Fitz, SM, and Dick Ferguson are developing organizational principles, strategies, and curricula for how the Marianist apostolic method with its process of community building can create initiatives and sustainable partnerships for justice with cities and regions. Based on the heritage of William Ferree, SM, their work builds links between Catholic Social Teaching and Catholic intellectual tradition with public dialogue, deliberation, and civic engagement.

I am sure there are other studies, writings, and projects by which the university “community” strives to be faithful to traditional Marianist constructs while seeking ways to be adaptive to the challenges any major university faces today. Are these studies promoted within the universities? Are they readily available? Is there dialogue around the ideas and efficacy of the various contributions?

Is there more to do?

I am not “inside” this university community, so any attempt on my part to describe its reality is very risky business. But, people talk. I hear stories. I understand that within any academic environment scholarship in research, excellence in instruction, meaningful and inspiring interactions with students, frequency of publication, and, oh yes, being wise and politically astute in committee work are more than enough for any one person on any given day. Being “community in permanent mission” in any institutional setting seems to be a challenge.

A summary of important understandings

At this juncture, from our traditions and praxis, it seems appropriate to capture the elements that need to be “unpacked” so as to understand their importance or applicability to our situations today. I will simply list some I see. Of course, discussion and debate on

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5 I have not attempted to summarize the many books, articles, and presentations of Bernard Lee, SM. As he is submitting a paper to the Marianist Universities Meeting, his thought will be included in the proceedings and the themes from his body of work will be well represented, I am sure.
Marianist educational experience fosters the development of a community characterized by a sense of family spirit that accepts each person with loving respect, and draws everyone in the university into the challenge of building community. Community support for scholarship, friendship among faculty, staff and students, and participation in university governance characterize the Marianist University. (See www.udayton.edu/~amu-usa/)

For consideration:

- Community does not happen through good intention. It takes initiation, steadiness through awkward stages or periods of conflict, direction, and creativity.
- Community, in the Marianist tradition, is not the end point. People sometimes need the cave to crawl into to rest and seek succor from the elements. Communities can provide that, but, to be true to Chaminade’s vision, they serve a greater purpose. Marianist communities are part of an apostolic movement calling for bold action. That doesn’t mean the entire community has the same engagement in an external project. The work of the institution, family life, civic engagement…all can be apostolic work. The point is that in community we strive never to lose the vitality of an apostolic consciousness and to share that with one another in some way.
- Chaminade chose unusual partners to help reconstitute faith in his culture. Key players do not always possess the typical profile of leaders.
- Marianist community is to be widely inclusive—not everyone needs to be represented in every group, but within the Family, our communities should reflect the diversity of our culture.
- Within community, everyone has an equal voice, but at some point in time, trust can be given to a leadership structure.
- Within community, everyone has an equal voice, but to build community within institutions where stratification and role leadership is the *modus operandi*, it will be a challenge to step outside of the institutional culture.
- No one community will look like another. Core elements are needed for the term “Marianist community” to have any authenticity, but the reality of various “incarnations” will require a comfort with complexity.
- Marianist communities are “whole-life” communities. We travel with each other over time through many life changes. Again, with institutions were employment at the institution may change for various reasons, this is a challenge.
- Frequent reunions are necessary. A “test” of whether it is a community or an organization is whether or not it meets in the summer!
• Individuals within the community often need spiritual accompaniment, but so does the community itself. Loving counsel, by one with a bit of detachment from the life of the community, is frequently helpful.
• Some expression of intent or commitment to “stay at the table” is important. Communities where members come and go or never accept any responsibility for the life of the community will fold.
• The Offices and Virtues offered by Father Chaminade often put people off as structure imposed from without. This is a mistake made by thinking of them primarily as organizational tools rather than spiritual supports. If these concepts are introduced before persons have significant experiences in community, the richness of their purpose and impact may be diminished.
• Vowed religious are often members of lay communities. They are usually not the leaders (although some lay want them to be!). Many religious have background and training that can be very helpful to deepening the Marianist character of a community, but it should not be assumed that they will be the source of this expertise. Lay need to step up to the plate, as well.
• Marianist communities are not intended to replace parish life, anymore than it did in Chaminade’s time. For some people, though, who may be alienated or unfamiliar with formal church, Marianist community can serve as a primary church experience.
• Marianist communities are now networked. It is probably wise to discuss alignment with the larger Marianist Family from the start. Single communities, one in isolation from others, often is a problem that leads to loss of integrity around identity and purpose of these communities.

For discussion

Perhaps, posing the following questions will encourage dialogue. To begin some reflection and conversation, let’s ask…

• Do we have a sense of “organizational belonging” or a “growing sense of solidarity and real evidence of human care?”
• Can we struggle to relate to each other as family at the same time we set standards to achieve and then hold each other accountable to those standards?
• Is our institution a place where any person on the campus can articulate why being Catholic and Marianist makes a difference?
• Is “Marianist” community seen as the context in which we accomplish the work of our university or is it seen as a series of tasks?
• Do Marianist values and methods for building community play any explicit, integral role in our classrooms and extracurricular activities? In faculty meetings, staff orientations, alumni relations?
• Are we clear and honest about our intent to transmit these values and methods as part of both the academic life and the informal education that occurs at the institution?
• Are our students likely to carry these values and methods with them after they leave?
• Where does the commitment to build community reside on a hierarchy of critical elements such as academic rigor, financial stability, and accomplished graduates?
• Is it a place where people can easily find a small faith-sharing community if they’d like to be in one?
• Do we incarnate Marianist characteristics into the common parts of our daily life, let alone in Dayton, Ohio, or even human history?
• And, perhaps, the most important question is whether or not there is the will and the passion to continue the Marianist context beyond the life of the last Marianist brother or sister on campus? Among whom?

The questions themselves may give the false impression that community building rises and falls on our human effort. As people of faith, we know this not to be the case. Paul Tillich, quoted by Bernard Lee in his book Habits for the Journey, rightly observes that “in human history, community is the shape of grace.” Lee continues, “It is patently clear to Marianists, lay and religious, that community is at the heart of whatever else we do” Lee, p. 30). “We need to be there for the world with all we have at our disposal from Marianist life, and God will do with us as God wills. ‘Being there’ is within our power. The rest belongs to God” (Lee, p. 4).
Epilogue based on MUM Interactive Sessions

Areas of discussion that seemed to generate the most interest for further development included:

The tension of values, images and language—sometimes healthy; sometimes not—between institutional and family cultures. For example, in an institution, acceptance by and long-term relationship with the institution are often based on performance. While families have norms and systems for accountability, performance is not as frequently the bottom line for acceptance and long-term relationship. How can the two—institutional policy/practice and family metaphor—be better integrated? Many thought that leadership style and modeling is key to fostering compatibility between the two.

Fostering community—either evidenced as a common will to provide for the common good or as small gatherings of people within the university to share faith-based values and efforts for apostolic engagement—is best achieved by a consistent, organic, campus-wide influence grounded in Marianist ethic that shapes the choices made in a range of decision making situations—from Board of Trustees to curriculum development to faculty/staff interactions. The formation of Marianist Educational Associates is a start, but will this do enough fast enough?

The notion of education as instrument of transformation is deeply imbedded. Can the notion of community as instrument of transformation be better articulated and instilled—in curriculum? in faculty and student bodies? in administrative councils?

Gifts from the Marianist tradition that impact how the business of an educational institution is conducted were identified in the conversation.

Stability

The conversation started with comments about how Dr. Christopher Duncan’s paper for MUM, Community and Culture: Reflections from Contemporary Resources, describes the difficulty of community in a culture in which most commitments are provisional as the rate of change and belief in individual autonomy mean that anyone “can quit or exit a community when it no longer suits their needs or beliefs.”
An engineer, a biologist, and a community planner within the audience all commented on how, within their disciplines, stability is related to the ability to adapt to change. Both the words “stability” and “adaptation to change” are familiar to students of Marianist culture. It was recommended that a “strategic intent” be developed to better understand the interaction of change and stability in the context of Marianist spirituality. The goal would be to assist in addressing the problem of sustaining a core ideology while making necessary shifts within the institution when conditions change; for example, the change in demographics and increasing diversity within the university community. Skills for riding the waves of change need to be developed.

**Non-clerical context**

Many comments referred back to the dynamic of a family spirit within a university striving for excellence on all fronts. The ideals and the witness of models of leadership within community life given to the university by the members of the Marianist religious are a positive incentive to see how standards, accountability, shared responsibility, cohesion, and inclusion can work within a typically stratified structure under role leadership. In the ideal, the Brothers have held that any divisions of authority within the community must serve the community itself and the mission, rather than the purpose of sustaining status and privilege for their own sake. Could this, too, be more carefully reviewed as an untapped resource?
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