

“In Alliance with Mary”

A Four Part Study Guide for Marianist Lay Communities



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2006

In Alliance with Mary

Document approved by the delegates from the IV International Meeting
of Marianist Lay Communities in Bordeaux, France, July, 2005

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Introduction

(Section One)

1. From the beginning of the Marianist Lay Communities (MLC) we have been reflecting on the Marianist charism. In previous International Convocations we have defined our identity; we have discerned our mission and our way of being in community. In this Fourth Convocation we have reflected on the presence of Mary in our lives and in our communities, in order to deepen our understanding of our relationship with Mary and to present her to others.
2. Blessed William Joseph Chaminade throughout his life, and especially at the Shrine of Our Lady of the Pillar in Saragossa, received a powerful Marian inspiration. With Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon and Marie Thérèse de Lamourous, he shaped this inspiration into a new missionary vision for the revitalization of the Church in France by means of establishing lay communities in alliance with Mary.
3. In every culture throughout the Christian world we see diverse forms of Marian devotion. Marianist spirituality invites us to collaborate with Mary in her mission to make Christ present in our world. This way of understanding our relationship with her has been called Alliance with Mary; it is what invites us with all members of the Marianist Family and leads us to form and build Christian communities.
4. In living our Marianist spirituality, we face the challenges of our times in different places with very diverse cultural and social experiences. Our personal and communal lives are threatened by fragmentation and isolation. We Marianists find in Mary a source of strength in these challenging times.
5. Today, attentive to the signs of our times and eager to integrate faith and life, we find in the teaching of our Founders and in our alliance with Mary the path that inspires us to deepen community.

We present this document following the Marianist tradition to know, love and serve.

Commentary

“Mary allowed herself to be drawn into incarnation; she allowed her life to change at God’s invitation to her. She allowed her flesh and blood to make flesh and blood for God. Because of this, she experienced both great sorrow and great joy. Faced with someone who understood her risk and trust in God, she exalted (Lk 1:39-56). Faced with opportunity, she helped others see Jesus for who he is (Jn 2:1-11). Faced with family strife, she stood in the midst of confrontation (Mk 3:31-35). Faced with her son’s crucifixion, she stood in the midst of that pain and allowed it and God’s Word to unite her with others (Jn 19:25-27). Faced with a gathering called to be a community willing to live fully the joys and sorrows of letting God continue to incarnate love through themselves, she stayed with them and prayed and plunged with them into an unknown future (Acts 1: 13-14). This woman, with her openness to God incarnating and continuing to work through her, is the person Chaminade chose . . . as model and inspiration, as leader. Her mission of responsiveness to allowing God to become incarnate through her, Chaminade claims as the mission of the entire Family of Mary.”¹

Anna Huth

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How would you describe the presence of Mary in your own life? In the life of your community?
2. What is your understanding that as Marianists we are called to “collaborate with Mary in her mission to make Christ present in our world”?
3. In what ways do you see yourself and others in your culture experiencing fragmentation and isolation?
4. How does your relationship with Mary make a difference in your life?

Further Reading: Section One “Introduction”

Things Marianist, “Who started all this, anyhow?” by Joseph Stefanelli, SM. This is an easy-to-read history of the three people the Marianist Family calls “the Founders.” The lives and contributions of William Joseph Chaminade, Marie Thérèse de Lamourous, and Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon are highlighted. Readers can grasp the story of each and find reference material for more historical detail and context.

Chaminade, Pragmatist with a Vision by Joseph Stefanelli, SM. In this short biography, Father Stefanelli highlights key moments in the life of William Joseph Chaminade. The reader enjoys glimpses along his faith-filled (and at times rocky) path as the Marianist Founder traveled from his life as a young child in Mussidan, France to his exile in Saragossa, Spain, and to his beatification 150 years after his death. Chaminade’s inspired mission to rechristianize France is as viable today as it was at his first Sodality meeting on December 8, 1800.

Adèle, Aristocrat for the Poor by Joseph Stefanelli, SM, 28 pp. Father Joseph Stefanelli, SM, writes a brief-yet-encompassing story of the intriguing life of Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon. Adèle’s biography takes the reader from her early years as the child of wealthy aristocrats to the formation of the Daughters of Mary and her untimely death at age 38. It concludes with a brief statement of the mission of today’s Daughters of Mary as they continue Adele’s work in the modern world.

Marie Thérèse de Lamourous: Firm of Hand, Loving of Heart by Joseph Stefanelli, SM. The title of this short biography succinctly captures the life of Marie Thérèse de Lamourous. The reader will get swept away in the trials and adventures of life during the French Revolution and learn of Marie Thérèse’s unflinching faith and courage in this tumultuous time of history. Father Stefanelli paints a portrait of a rather unwilling heroine, who eventually embraces her God-graced mission in life and adopts the prostitutes of Revolutionary France, creating a place of refuge, safety, and prayer at the Miséricorde. Marie Thérèse’s devotion to her faith and to the women she served is a positive lesson for women and for all ages.

To Know

(Section Two)

6. Mary is for us an inexhaustible spring of knowledge. Therefore, we strive to discover her attitudes in the Scriptures as in the following passages.
7. In the Annunciation (Lk 1:26-38) we discover Mary's trust in God and her joyful acceptance of God's will. With her, we say "Let it be done to me according to your Word."
8. In the Visitation (Lk 1:39-45) we learn from Mary to be close to and serve others. Despite our own difficulties we wish, like her, to be always disposed to offer the best of ourselves to others.
9. In the Magnificat (Lk 1:46-55) Mary sings of God's solidarity with the poor, the afflicted, and the marginalized. She is a witness to the transforming power of God that raises the lowly and destroys evil in the world. Following the example of Mary, we desire to be valiant witnesses and prophets of the greatness, power, and mercy of God.
10. In Bethlehem (Mt 2:1-12) Mary gives birth to Jesus and presents him to everyone, the lowly and the powerful. Moreover, she is attentive to all that happens and treasures it in her heart. Following her example we also wish to be a gateway for the entrance of Christ into the life of men and women of our world, enabling Him to be born and to grow in everyone, and to meditate deeply on these events as Mary did.
11. Mary had to flee Egypt (Mt 2:13-23), forced by the violent circumstances of the times, to protect the life of her son. She educates us into a gospel attitude when facing violence. We wish to be in solidarity with all those who suffer a similar situation today.
12. When she finds the child Jesus in the temple (Lk 2:50-51) Mary does not understand the plan of God but keeps it in her heart. By her attitude, Mary invites us to live the faith of the heart and to accept and carry out the will of God even though we may not understand it.
13. At the wedding at Cana (Jn 2:1-11) Mary reveals herself as a woman attentive to the needs of others in each moment and confident in her Son. Her attitude

calls us to listen to the needs of humanity and to be open to “do whatever He tells us.”

14. Mary stands at the foot of the cross of her son with the beloved disciple (Jn 19:25-27). We want, like them, to accept our own suffering and to be present to the pain of others. Jesus continues to offer us Mary as our mother, and she receives us as her children.
15. At Pentecost (Acts 1:14) Mary is with the disciples of Jesus, praying, supporting their faith, and trusting in the coming of the Holy Spirit. She animates us to form united and prayerful communities and to reach out in mission, open to the action and gifts of the Holy Spirit.
16. To deepen our knowledge of Mary we need to get in touch with her through prayer, formation, and our personal living, by which we make her present in our lives. Apart from Scripture we seek to form ourselves from other sources, particularly in the documents of the Church, the writings of Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, the writings in the Marianist tradition, and the documents of the Marianist Family.

Commentaries

“Marianists in North America often use the gentle, feminine qualities of Mary to explain our instincts around hospitality and nurturing, or her faithfulness through terrible injustices to her son to model steadiness and comforting presence to those who suffer. Those are not bad things to be inspired to. But, should they eclipse the anger and passion we hear in the Magnificat, or the initiative at Cana, or the courage to come to and go out from the Upper Room? If the charism is to speak to the Church, we must present *all* we know of Mary, not just the most familiar or the most comfortable.”²

Carol Ramey

“It is to the chanting of a new Magnificat that we are called: the celebration of God’s action in our world and our response in faith. This response in faith must be a careful, critical discernment of both “yes” and “no.” It needs to be a response of “yes” to the uplifting of God’s people to God and a response of “no” to all that impedes or works against that uplifting.”³

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Take several minutes and reflect on the scriptural references in this section, try to imagine yourself in one of the scenes standing next to Mary. Which one did you choose? Why?
2. When you imagined yourself in the biblical scene standing next to Mary, what were you thinking or feeling? Describe the scene as you imagined it.
3. St. Theresa of Lisieux, when speaking about Mary, said: “For a sermon on the Blessed Virgin to please me . . . I must see her *real* life. . . . They show her to us as unapproachable, but they should present her as imitable, bringing out her virtues, saying that she lived by faith just like ourselves giving proofs of this from the Gospel.”

What do you think that Mary as a first century Jewish woman would have looked like? What were her values? What situations might have been difficult? What situations might have brought her joy?

Further Reading: Section Two “To Know”

Devotion to Mary in Chaminade’s Life and Thought by Jean-Baptiste Armbruster, SM. Translated by Joseph Roy, SM, and Joseph Stefanelli, SM, pp. 45.

“Marianist Spirituality Today” by Paul Landolphi, SM, pp. 393-420 in *The Promised Woman*, ed. Lawrence J. Cada, SM, NACMS Monograph Series, Doc. 37, 1995. This volume contains 24 papers presented at the 1992 International Symposium on Marianist Spirituality. Father Landolphi’s paper reflects on the Marianist Family’s need to be clear on its Marianist identity, ongoing formation, and connectedness to the Church among its various communities. The paper offers suggestions on the ways to implement Marianist spirituality today.

Things Marianist, “What Do You Mean, ‘Community is a Gift and Task?’” by Isabella Moyer. Using the international lay document on community as a basic template, Moyer examines the origins of Marianist community and its interwoven nature to the life of Jesus and Mary. She reminds us that community is both a safe place for maturation and fellowship and a gospel challenge to be shared with the world. Here is an excerpt of her work: “The life-giving enthusiasm of a community can, indeed, draw new members who want what they are having! But, if the zeal remains within the community then it merely becomes a service station where we come to get filled up on good feelings, warmth, and camaraderie. Not that this is all bad. After all, we do come together to receive nourishment, to refocus, and to get a much-needed shot in the arm before we once more face reality. . . . The gifts we receive in community are meant for the world.”

To Love

(Section Three)

17. Like Mary, lay woman of her times, we are lay Marianist men and women who live in a specific time in history, and we commit ourselves, as we are, to follow Mary's example and to love as she loves.
18. One of the characteristics of our time is the proliferation of and desensitization to violence. As Marianists we choose to reject violence and to educate youth and adults in justice, peace, and reconciliation.
19. As members of the People of God who are on pilgrimage, living as a specific people in a local church, we live the story with our brothers and sisters. We publicly express our commitment to and love for Mary through expressions of Marian devotion proper to our cultures.
20. Mary, praying woman, calls us to pray in all the moments of our lives and to be united in solidarity with the suffering of others. Mary is our intercessor. She prays with us and for us, and we pray to her as Mother of Jesus and our Mother.
21. Mary remained attentive to the Word and lived the "faith of the heart," confidently accepting the will of God in her life. Following her example we make faith the criterion for our discernment and the center of our lives.
22. We live a family spirit that is based on hospitality, acceptance, and care for one's neighbor, discovering the presence of Jesus in others. As at Pentecost, Mary accompanies our communities and makes them open to all, fully accepting of each person.
23. In the same way that Mary is Mother of all, we open our hearts and communities to everyone. Given our multicultural character we are enriched by our differences and focus on community life and mission, promoting an authentic family spirit and open dialogue.
24. Like Mary, we seek to be humble in our individual and family lives so that our communities exhibit simplicity and enable us to place our gifts at the service

of the common good.

25. Just as Mary was more concerned about the needs of her kinswoman Elizabeth than her own and went to be with her, we are attentive to the needs of our brothers and sisters. We commit ourselves to solidarity with the poor in the cause of justice.

Commentaries

“The slow, patient, tolerant but persistent work of a mother is connatural to the Marianist charism. Our way is that of entering into the heart of any human community and seeking to transform it, with full participation, with acceptance, affirmation, and love, from within . . . this patient, formative, nurturing thrust is prophetic. It challenges our culture and meets a deep-felt need.”⁴

David Fleming, SM

“When I ask the question ‘How is Jesus like Mary?’ I think of the little passage in St. Mark where Jesus, on his journey to Jerusalem, sets his face like flint. I could imagine that look: his strong jaw pushes out in the direction of his destination, while all the other facial muscles concentrate energy in his determined eyes. This look of defiance, this face like flint, is a family trait that I believe Mary and Jesus *shared*. The look reflects an interior characteristic I call *mother courage*. Like the mother hen who gathers her young under protective wings displaying a startling ferocity when her young are threatened . . . this feminine strength, this parental perseverance, I call . . . *mother courage*. Jesus is truly Son of God, Son of Mary.”⁵

Peter Daino, SM

“Let us constantly beg our good mother to strengthen us in our weakness, to increase our courage and our faithfulness, and, by the love she bears us, to preserve us from the misfortune of ever losing sight of what faith has a right to demand of us with greater reason than of others.”⁶

Marie Thérèse de Lamourous

“Let us imitate the love of our heavenly Mother and, like her, let us cheerfully render to all our brothers and sisters all the services we can, both for the body and for the soul.”⁷

Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. One of the most notable characteristics of the Marianist charism is hospitality—welcoming others in. What has been your personal experience of being welcomed by others in the Marianist Family?
2. “As at Pentecost Mary accompanies our communities and makes them open to all.” What are the challenges inherent in the phrase “open to all” in regard to race, gender, culture, religious expression, or social status?
3. What has been your experience of reaching out in ways that were new to you and your community? What hesitation and fears did you have?
4. In what ways are you and your Marianist Lay Community presently being called or challenged to reach out to others from different situations or backgrounds?

Further Reading: Section Three “To Love”

Things Marianist, “Why Mary?” by Carol Ramey. Named after Mary, Marianists have a unique way of describing and embracing her relevance for Christians. Through the ages, the Church has honored Mary and encouraged devotion to her; however, Marianists see that Mary’s role in our journey goes beyond the one-time event of bearing and mothering the Son of God. She is a model, not only of holiness and virtue, but also of how to bear Christ into the world in all times. This pamphlet details the thinking of the Founders and includes comments from

contemporary Marianists on Mary's meaning today. This issue is also available in Spanish.

“Emphases and Dynamics of Marianist Spirituality Alive in Today’s Reality” by Anna Huth, pp. 373-82, *The Promised Woman*, ed. Lawrence Cada, SM, NACMS Monograph Series, Doc. 37, 1995. This volume contains 24 papers presented at the 1992 International Symposium on Marianist Spirituality. In Anna Huth’s paper ongoing incarnation is proposed as key to Marianist spirituality. Several emphases in Marianist spirituality draw out this focus on incarnation: Mary’s mission, community, consecration, and living mystery. Chaminade gave Marianists specific spiritual dynamics to support growth in incarnation, especially through a three-step process that underlies the System of Virtues, the Prayer of Faith, and the Three Offices. Through use of this process and focus on ongoing incarnation, Marianists can be a special gift to today’s church and world.

To Serve **(Section Four)**

26. We seek, as members of the MLC, to imitate the virtues of Mary in our personal and communal lives and to place ourselves at the service of the specific society in which we live. Our Marianist identity leads us to witness by our presence and hard work that our Marian devotion, according to Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, is a dynamic devotion that goes beyond ritual and affection; it propels us to mission.
27. Mary invites us to make an alliance with her and give Jesus to the world.
28. Our alliance with Mary renews our baptismal commitments. Through it, we choose to live in permanent mission with Mary by walking with her in humility and freedom. By this alliance we place our trust in the Holy Spirit so that Christ may grow in our hearts and that we may make Mary's mission a reality.
29. Because of this alliance with Mary, the members of the Marianist Lay Communities share a common identity and mission, a way of being in community, and a method of building communities.
30. We express our alliance with Mary in a community celebration with varied expressions depending on location, respecting our rich cultural diversity.
31. This alliance is an evangelizing instrument through which we commit ourselves to:
 - ... construct from our witness a model of family life that respects the gifts and vocations of each member and where responsible freedom will be the fruit of our love;
 - ... develop egalitarian communities, in which all are accepted without exclusion or discrimination;
 - ... reaffirm our preferential option for youth;
 - ... take part in the social, cultural, political, and economic life in our areas, helping to build the Reign of God in our daily tasks, calling for peace and justice, and denouncing all situations that oppose them;

... assume our work as an important part of life's experience where the opportunity is given to us to witness to our understanding of life;

... care for life and work for the integrity of Creation;

... share with simplicity and humility expressions of faith and community devotion.

32. As members of the Marianist Family composed of Marianist Lay Communities, Alliance Mariale, the Daughters of Mary Immaculate, and the Society of Mary, we promote the Marian aspects of the Church. We believe that this Marian model is our gift in the Church and that the Holy Spirit will guide us to contribute to building a new humanity. We hope to be a prophetic sign of our society and of a Church with the following characteristics:

Inclusivity. Her doors are open to all who seek God.

Equality. All are heard and encouraged to express themselves as equals, and all have the same rights without consideration of sex, race, education, civil position, or social status.

Participation. Authority is understood as service without privileges, channels of consultation are opened for decisions and assignments, and no one feels excluded for thinking differently.

Dialogue. There is an attitude of listening and of interaction among persons and groups before any judgment or condemnation; this permits exploring the limits of human knowledge with the firm trust in the Holy Spirit.

Solidarity. There is increased nearness to the poor and the impoverished in order to bring them the Good News of their dignity as children of God and to assume together reciprocal obligations that enable us to build a civilization of love.

Sensitivity and affection. All draw closer to people, sharing their joys and their sorrows.

Patience. Respecting and understanding the stages of growth in others.

Courage. To stand for justice and truth in order to build the Reign of God.

Finally, we build a Church in which all are responsible for the Reign of God.

**Knowing Mary better,
loving as she loves,
accompanying her faithfully in her service of others,
let us build a better world.**

Commentaries

“Is there anything unique in the way a Marianist community images the Church to others?

Recent reflections by Marianists, both lay and religious, have presented a Marian model of the Church as a ‘family of disciples, gathered together, with respect for each one’s gifts and each one’s needs, around the Mother of God. . . . Like Mary, we emphasize the roles of nurturing life, forming, affirming, and creating unity, much more than judging and condemning.’

Mary is much more than a namesake and patron. She shows us a new way of being Church to others, to be ‘the listening, the welcoming, the expecting, the educating, the dialoguing, the tending, the devoting Church.’ It is a ‘less powerful and intellectual Church, closer to the troubles of the people and more inclined to compassion.’ When a community provides this kind of rich spiritual soil, its members benefit from the freedom, formation, and support that encourage a true maturity of faith.

Community can also link us to the presence of God in the larger Church.”⁸

Isabella Moyer

“As Mary formed Christ in the womb, so is it the Marianist vocation to form Christians in the womb of our community.”⁹

Bernard Lee, SM

“This powerful woman who crushed the serpent’s head was Chaminade’s inspiration for mission. She symbolizes the reconciliation of everything with God and the arrival of a new heaven and a new earth.”¹⁰

Margaret Cavanaugh

“We devote ourselves to her, in all that we are and have, to make her known, loved, and served, totally convinced that we shall not lead people back to Jesus except through His most Blessed Mother, because we believe . . . she is a complete reason for us to have hope . . . our Mother, our refuge, our help, our strength, and our life.”¹¹

Blessed William Joseph Chaminade

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Father Chaminade spoke of our common identity and mission in these words:
“Ours is a great work, a magnificent work. If it is universal, it is because we are missionaries of Mary, who has said to us ‘Do whatever He tells you!’ Yes, all of us are missionaries; each of us has received from the Blessed Virgin a commission.”

Take some time to reflect on how you participate in Mary’s mission of bringing Christ to the world in your daily life at work, in your family, and in your church and community. Describe your daily attempts to “Do whatever He tells you” in each of these places.

2. In what ways do the characteristics of the Marian Church described above exist in your parish church?
3. “Expressions of Marian Devotion” can take many forms. What personal devotion, if any, do you use? How has this devotion led you to mission?

What other cultural expressions of devotion to Mary are you aware of?

Further Reading: Section Four “To Serve”

Things Marianist, “What Do You Mean, ‘I’m a Missionary’?” by Adolf M. Windisch, SM, and Daniel M. Jordan. Our Marianist Founders have told us that “we are all missionaries,” and we are to continue Christ’s mission in today’s world. What did they mean by the term “missionary,” and how can members of the Marianist Family live out a missionary life in modern society?

“Mary Was a Lay Woman Who Lived in Community” by Carol Ramey, pp. 437-54, *The Promised Woman*, ed. Lawrence J. Cada, SM, NACMS Monograph Series, Doc. 37, 1995. This volume contains 24 papers presented at the 1992 International Symposium on Marianist Spirituality. Ramey’s paper addresses three components of Marianist spirituality: empowerment of the laity, Mary, and community. The historical relevance of the establishment of lay groups in Bordeaux is compared in two major biographies of Father Chaminade, and the characteristics of the early communities are presented as a model for today’s Church. Mary is described as a person who teaches us pondering, hopefulness, and compassion—stances we assume as we join in her mission to bring Christ to the world. Some troubling aspects of how community is lived in Marianist circles in North America are considered.

A Closing Ritual

Things Marianist, “Setting a Marianist Table” by Carol Ramey and Laura Leming, FMI. This is a script groups can follow to present, in a visual and creative way, the characteristics of Marianist spirituality. The simple, everyday action of setting a table for a family meal provides symbols to explain aspects of gospel living we as Marianists have been called to make especially vivid in the Christian community. Readers may use the script in a group or just read through it, allowing their imaginations to furnish the experience and the meanings.

To order reading materials, contact:

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www.nacms.org

Endnotes

¹ Anna Huth, “Emphases and Dynamics of Marianist Spirituality Alive in Today’s Reality” in *The Promised Woman*, ed. Lawrence J. Cada, SM, NACMS Monograph Series, Doc. 37 (Dayton, Ohio: NACMS, 1995).

² Carol Ramey, “Mary Was a Lay Woman Who Lived in Community” in *The Promised Woman*, ed. Lawrence J. Cada, SM, NACMS Monograph Series, Doc. 37 (Dayton, Ohio: NACMS, 1995).

³ Stephen Glodek, SM, “Notes Toward a New Magnificat: Marianist Spirituality Within the Culture of the United States” in *The Promised Woman*, ed. Lawrence J. Cada, SM, NACMS Monograph Series, Doc. 37 (Dayton, Ohio: NACMS, 1995).

⁴ David A. Fleming, SM, “Marianist Spirituality Today: A South Asian Perspective” in *The Promised Woman*, ed. Lawrence J. Cada, SM, NACMS Monograph Series, Doc. 37 (Dayton, Ohio: NACMS, 1995).

⁵ Peter Daino, SM, “What Marianist Spirituality Is for Me and How It Works” in *The Promised Woman*, ed. Lawrence J. Cada, SM, NACMS Monograph Series, Doc. 37 (Dayton, Ohio: NACMS, 1995).

⁶ Material taken from J. Stefanelli, SM, *Marie Thérèse de Lamourous: Firm of Hand, Loving of Heart* (Dayton, OH: NACMS, 2001), p. 12.

⁷ Adèle, *Letters*, no. 128 to Agathe Diché, July 2, 1810; vol. 1 p. 143.

⁸ Isabella Moyer, “Things Marianist: What Do You Mean, Community is a Gift and Task?”.

⁹ Bernard Lee, SM, “Let the Brothers of Mary Call No Man ‘Father’” in *The Promised Woman*, ed. Lawrence J. Cada, SM, NACMS Monograph Series, doc. 37 (Dayton, Ohio: NACMS, 1995).

¹⁰ Margaret A. Cavanaugh, “A Personal Experience of Marianist Spirituality” in *The Promised Woman*, ed. Lawrence J. Cada, SM, NACMS Monograph Series, doc. 37 (Dayton, Ohio: NACMS, 1992).

¹¹ Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, “Letter to the Retreat Masters of 1839” (Bordeaux, August 24, 1839).