

Characteristics of Marianist Parish Ministry

INTRODUCTION

The Society of Mary chooses to collaborate with the people of God in animating parish communities because Marianists recognize that a parish is “a community of communities of faith that has as its mission the mission of the Church itself: to announce Jesus Christ, to be a community that testifies to the presence of God and to be of service to all people.” (*Vision and Journey*, 14). This dynamic of creating “a community of communities of faith” lies at the heart of the Marianist mission.

We understand that the parish is the primary means by which the people of God participate in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. It is from participation in that paschal mystery that the community of the parish witnesses to the world. Marianists in parish ministry proclaim Jesus Christ as son of Mary. It was Mary who formed and nurtured the growth of Jesus. It was Mary who is heralded by the Church as the first disciple. And it is Mary who models faith for all humanity, and who continues to form and nurture people today for her son. It is the core of the Marianist mission to encourage participation in that ongoing Marian formation of the people of God. It is to the formation and multiplication of these Marian communities of faith and service that Marianist parish ministry is directed.

Marianists contribute to the life of the Church by living and teaching the spirituality of their founder, Blessed William Joseph Chaminade. Marianist spirituality understands five key elements as foundational to that spirituality: faith, Mary, the discipleship of equals, community, and mission.

The mission that is actualized from this spirituality leads the parish community to prayer, gathering, teaching and serving, as it announces the good news of Jesus Christ and cares for the least among us. Blessed Chaminade has always challenged his followers to understand that faith formation extends from the cradle to the grave. Marianist participation in parish ministry is a key mission opportunity to fulfill the founder’s challenge.

CHARACTERISTICS

Marianists understand six characteristics as basic to their participation in parish ministry. A Marianist parish ministry:

- forms in faith;
- is Marian;
- witnesses to a discipleship of equals;
- develops community;
- sends people on mission;
- promotes peace, justice, the integrity of creation and service.

Marianist parish ministry forms in faith.

Understanding the Eucharist as the source and summit of the Christian life (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*), the Marianist parish community gathers weekly for the Sunday Eucharist. This Eucharist of the Lord's Day is the foundation of the faith life of the parish. The Eucharist is always celebrated well in order to allow parishioners to participate and deepen that faith life. Blessed Chaminade stressed that the Creed is foundational to one's prayer and faith. The parish, therefore, provides opportunities for parishioners to gather for education and reflection upon the Creed. Ongoing education also includes the opportunity to meet and reflect on the sacraments, Scripture, Church, and faith and culture. This ongoing education is a continual rediscovery of the community's role as Christian witnesses to the world. Marianist parish ministry gives special attention to the gathering and education of youth and young adults.

Marianist parish ministry is Marian.

Marianists believe that "Mary shows us the way of true Christian life. Following her example of faith, poverty of spirit and attentiveness to the Lord, we hope to reflect to those around us Mary's warmth of welcome to God and to others" (*Rule of Life, 8*), and, as such, is the model of Christian life. Mary is the one who prayed and pondered God's action in her life. Trusting in the will of God which she discerned through prayer, Mary was a woman of strength and courage. This was a courage that would lead her both to the cross and to the empty tomb. It was her strength that formed and nurtured Jesus. In turn, Mary forms and

nurtures God's people in the mysteries of Christ through our committed cooperation with her.

All members of the parish are called to share Mary's dynamic role in the Christ event. Marianist parish ministry provides opportunities to educate parishioners about Mary's participation in the mysteries of Jesus, so that they too can become bearers of Christ to our world. It is this fundamental dynamic that provides the basis for an ecclesiology that is Marian, and whose implications are described in the next several characteristics.

Marianist parish ministry witnesses to the discipleship of equals.

A foundational aspect of the Society of Mary is its mixed composition. This mixed composition means that brothers and priests live in community and mission with differing roles but equal rank. If we extend this Marianist concept of mixed composition to the life of the parish, we come to understand that all parishioners – clergy, religious and laity – have different and specific roles. But these roles are rooted in a fundamental discipleship received through their baptism.

The *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* from the Second Vatican Council states that parishes gather diverse people and insert them into the universality of the Catholic Church. Marianist parish ministry provides opportunities to enhance the gathering of diversity and to witness to collaboration in mission. Marianist parish ministry demonstrates participation in mission by creating opportunities for all parishioners to recognize and offer their skills to the parish mission and its leadership. Collaborative structures in governance and leadership of the parish ensure participation and an acknowledgement of each person's responsibility to assist in building the reign of God.

Marianist parish ministry develops community.

Marianists choose the formation and multiplication of community as a key dynamic in bringing about the reign of God. Marianist communities aim to be an image of the first community of Jesus' disciples united with Mary and filled with the Holy Spirit. Marianists understand community as a means to witness to God's love, to attain holiness and to assist in the mission of the Church. Marianist parish ministry begins the formation of a parish community by living a spirit of family, by welcoming all people, and by being hospitable to all who are welcomed.

Marianist parish ministry provides opportunities for parishioners to gather, to share life and faith with one another and with those who have not yet heard the good news of Jesus Christ.

Marianists understand the parish as a "community of communities." From within that dynamic of community comes the invitation to consider Church vocations and to participate in consecrated Marianist lay communities.

Marianist parish ministry sends people on mission.

From the challenge of our founder that "You are all missionaries," Marianist parish ministry prepares people to be evangelizers of the Gospel. The first audience for the evangelizer is the family. Special concern in Marianist parish ministry is given to opportunities for family faith formation. Opportunities also are provided for community and sharing among often-neglected parish populations: young-married persons, young adults, persons choosing the single life and so forth.

In Marianist parish ministry people are educated to understand that there are two dynamics involved in community: gathering and being sent. Being sent commissions the individual Catholic Christian to go beyond one's self to the family, the neglected of the parish, and even beyond parish boundaries. Marianist parish ministry creates opportunities for individuals and communities to discern where and to whom they are called to be witnesses for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Marianist parish ministry promotes peace, justice, the integrity of creation and service.

Marianists understand that the direct proclamation of the Gospel and cultural transformation must be accomplished in union with those who struggle for justice, freedom and dignity for all people. Marianist parish ministry is noted for its care of the least and the forgotten, both inside and outside the parish. Work for justice in Marianist parish ministry takes the form of advocacy, education and service. More importantly, Marianist parish ministry provides educational opportunities to train parishioners in methodologies to transform the social structures that cause injustice, war, and the abuse of God's creation.

CONCLUSION

Marianist parish ministry is empowered by the faith formation, community formation, and spirituality that form its core. Marianist efforts to form in faith, to be Marian, to witness to the discipleship of equals, to send people on mission and to promote peace, justice, the integrity of creation and service enhance the basic mission of the parish to announce the Good News of Jesus Christ. Marianist parish ministry calls its parishioners to participate fully in the life of the Church and to be bearers of the Good News to present and future generations.