



September 20, 2005

TO: Provincial Chapter  
FROM: Provincial Council  
RE: Report on the progress of parish study

In April of 2004, members of the Provincial Council presented a report to the gathering of parish ministers in Dayton, Ohio which raised the concern about the age and availability of our parish ministers. This same report was given to the Chapter and the Chapter suggested a study be done about our future efforts in parish ministry. In the past year the Assistant for Religious Life has visited all of our existing parish ministry commitments. His reflections indicated that parish ministry is a valuable, vital and valid ministry for Marianists. The feedback from parishioners at our Marianist parishes is that our Marianist charism makes a significant difference.

In spite of the evident vitality of each of our parishes, we are still confronted by the age and the availability of our Marianist religious ministers. We do not have the religious personnel to continue to minister at all the parishes we have. Our resources are stretched thin. The Council believes that we need to take a pro-active stance toward parish ministry so that we simply not die by attrition. We also need to act in collaboration with the dioceses that are ultimately responsible for parishes. We need to give them some lead time to make decisions.

The Council has been discussing the parish situation over the past four months and is beginning to move to concrete plans. The Council has agreed upon the following principles as the basis for our decisions.

### **Principles of Discernment**

- 1. Marianist parish ministry communities must reflect healthy religious community living and our mixed composition.*  
Parishes which allow for healthy religious community living and the possibility of authentic mixed composition will be a priority.
- 2. The Province Mission statement sets a priority for ministry to persons who are poor and marginalized and ministry to youth.*  
Parishes which serve the poor and marginalized and/or have exceptional youth ministry programs will be a priority.
- 3. The Province Mission Statement sets a priority regarding the opportunity to create Marianist small faith communities.*  
Parishes which provide this opportunity will be a priority.

4. *Diocesan acceptance of the Marianist style of parish ministry.*  
Since parishes are diocesan entities, the ordinary of the Diocese must indicate his acceptance of the Marianist style of parish ministry. This includes priorities regarding the mixed composition of the Marianist parish community and a particular emphasis on the development of lay leadership in the parish community.
5. *We are unable to adequately staff all of the present parish commitments of the Province.*  
The availability and willingness of priests to serve as pastors of parishes and the willingness of brothers to live in or minister in parish communities is a critical concern. The priority of maintaining mixed composition in houses of formation and some particular communities has taken precedence over placement of priests and assuring mixed composition in the parish communities. There are also the other priorities of educational ministry, retreat ministry, etc.
6. *Because of the sacramental nature of parish life and the present canonical norms, Marianist participation in parish ministry is dependent on providing priests to serve as pastors or negotiating alternative structures with the ordinary.*
7. *Geography.*  
Because of the particular historical moment we are in as a Province, consideration needs to be given to the particular geographic locations in which the Province maintains parish ministry.

With this update to the Chapter, the Provincial Council is proceeding to move toward concrete plans which will reduce the number of Marianist parishes. Other religious communities have been involved in a similar process. The Council is checking with those congregations to see what we can learn from their experience. The Council will continue to dialogue with the parish ministers as we proceed. The Council understands that there is a need for a great deal of confidential conversation so as not to create unnecessary fears and doubts. Over the coming two or three months, a plan will be put in place. We are aware that our parishes meet multiple priorities and our Marianist parish ministers believe they have met the Characteristics of a Marianist Parish. This is what makes these decisions so difficult. The Council expects to make a report to the March 2006 Chapter.

The goal of this process is to ensure our Marianist Charism continues to enliven parishes. The Council realizes that with the diminishing numbers of Province members stateside that this reflection and decision making will be necessary for all of our ministries.