

## **Marianist Lay Formation Initiative**

November 2005

### Goals:

- To implement the mission of the Marianist Family in North America
- To develop a strong network of individuals committed to Marianist life
- To engage members of the cohorts in a multi-faceted formation process
- To begin new communities and enliven existing communities in North America
- To establish communities which are gathered and sent

### Introduction

As a result of the Marianist Lay Formation Initiative, I was invited to be an Observer at the International Meeting of Lay Marianist Communities in July. During this time I was privileged to talk with Marianist from around the world. It was a humbling experience to receive such hospitality. Our time together allowed me a chance to reflect upon the great diversity of culture and leadership in this Marianist Family. It gave me a first hand opportunity to see the transition to the new leadership on the Council and all the promise this new team holds.

My work with the Initiative has also opened new doors for collaboration with the Society of Mary. I have been asked to serve on several committees including: the Marianist Volunteer Program, Board Formation, and Ministry cluster. Participating in the work of these committees provides a means to gain further insights from many sources.

On campus I see new interest in developing and forming individuals steeped in the Marianist charism. There is an openness to explore effective ways of integrating the Marianist mission more fully on campus. The work with the Initiative is a gateway for conversation and strategic planning. The possibilities seem to be endless.

### Progress report

Since the last report to the Family Council in June significant progress has been made with the current cohort. Planning for the second Formation weekend took place. In addition to designing the content for the weekend, arranging for transportation, speakers, resources, and meals occurred during these months. The Marianist sisters opened their residence for housing and meeting space. Additional housing was supplied by the brothers in the form of the guest housing on campus.

Last weekend the cohort met in San Antonio. The original group had ten members. One individual withdrew from the group upon returning to her home to Hawaii. When we gathered in Texas, Conor McIntyre was unable to be present as his wife had just delivered their son who was premature by two months. Conor was in contact with me prior to my arrival at the meeting and has stayed in touch with the group since our return. He is interested in remaining involved but his family situation prevented him from attending the meeting.

In the late afternoon on Friday the Formation weekend began. As has been stated earlier, these individuals are highly committed to the Initiative and bonded on a personal level with one

another. After the flurry of excitement in seeing one another, we began with prayer and sharing of events in our personal lives. Following dinner, each individual reported on the progress of creating and sustaining their community.

*Coming from established communities:*

Cynthia Estella: “Re-Creating and re-building” describes her community. Kay Stone recommended Cynthia to the Formation Initiative. They are both in the same community. As an established group, the community was seeking a boost. The community has continued to meet although with little regularity. They are now exploring the possibility of providing more structure to the community. Upon her return to Hawaii, the community together on Wednesday and they are meeting next week to begin to discuss the *Being in Community* document. Cynthia has gleaned much from the readings and discussion with the cohort. As such she is now sharing more responsibility in the community. Kay Stone is serving as a mentor for Cynthia.

Patti Gehred: “Trying to move forward, currently in neutral” are words to describe this community. Serving as an intern with the North American Center for Marianist Studies, Patti brings a wealth of knowledge to her established community. Patti has shared with the cohort; the discussion of case studies from our last meeting has been extremely important in developing strategies to move the community to the next level. Recently the community used the Marianist Reader to better understand the Marianist mission in the United States. The community is attempting to work through the Fitz Center at U.D. to establish an on-going relationship with one of Dayton’s inner city schools. Carol Ramey is the mentor for this community.

*Establishing new communities:*

Maria Gomez: “Gathering tools and resources” sums up Maria’s experience. Attending the first weekend last winter, Maria brought with her a strong commitment and youthful enthusiasm. Upon her return to St. Mary’s University, Maria gathered some students to begin a community. They did meet several times but a community did not take form. She was finishing her graduate degree so much of her time was devoted to her studies. Currently Maria is seeking employment in Cleveland. Once established there she intends to try to build a community. The Walters have offered to assist her as they know of interested persons in the Cleveland area.  
Mentors: Brother Mike Sullivan and Andy Hill

Jessica Gonzales: “Defining and seeking community” identifies Jessica’s stage of

development. Jessica and Patti collaborated in attempting to establish a community at the University of Dayton. Their hope was to build on the successful monthly series "Food for the Soul". As Jessica stated during our weekend together, they gathered a group but not a community, people attended expecting a program. Jessica is committed to different approach with new individuals. Mentor: Joan McGuinness Wagner

Conor McIntyre

"Knee deep in life and community building" is Conor's situation. Working at the University of Indiana, Conor has gathered a group to begin building community. They began quickly in the winter of 2005, meeting once a week. Progress on this has been less than regular but Conor remains committed to this additional initiative. Because of the early birth of Casey and the ramifications of his condition, these efforts are on hold. Mentor: Laura Leuhrmann Both Laura and Conor are excited about this but again both are in personal situations that challenge their ability to be present to one another.

Mike and Vanessa Walter :

"Community gathering and seeking" describes this new community. As graduates of the University of Dayton, Mike and Vanessa came to this project with a sense of the Marianist spirit and zeal to know more. The new community has called itself, SEEDS. This is a gathering of individuals who were acquainted with one another prior to the formation of the community. They meet every other week, and are committed to exploring issues of social justice. One recent focus of discussion is being called to simple living. They have also spent time reading and reflecting on Catholic Social Teaching.

Annette and Mike Wasno:

"Community in infancy" is how Annette and Mike describe their community. The Wasnos began a new community in the late winter. Their community is composed of couples and their children. The format they have adopted is to begin with everyone participating in an opening prayer, followed by the children having a separate session with an organized activity. The parents are using the Founders books as a source for discussion and then all members join for final discussion and prayer. This is a very active community due in large part to the strong organizational (and networking) skills of Annette and Mike (a former contact with the Society of Mary). During this short time, they have met with their pastor and are collaborating with the parish's social concern committee in service projects. They are also "twinning" with a community in Ecuador. They drove to St. Joseph's parish in Eldensburg, MD and met with the coordinator of small Christian communities and the assistant pastor.

*Newest established community:*

During the weekend in San Antonio, members of the cohort committed themselves to form a community in the model of the State community. Supporting and challenging one another to live their lives as lay Marianists, the community is called Delphos. The next gathering is planned for April in Indiana. Considering attending the Continental Assembly, members are checking their calendars and finances. The community is expanding to include new members. This information is being sent to MLNNA.

I would like to highlight two exceptional areas of the weekend. Saturday afternoon began with a stroll over to the Marianist community where Bernard Lee resides. Bernie welcomed the group and then for the next two and half hours engaged the cohort in conversation centered on "Being in Community". His knowledge and honesty regarding community allowed for open discussion about the problems and possibilities of community building. Each person commented they left wanting more information while feeling affirmed and challenged by this great endeavor.

When the cohort took the VLC course on the Founders in the spring, we had outstanding facilitation by Isabella Moyer. The course went wonderfully under the insightful direction of Isabella. After the course was complete, Isabella was asked if she would be interested in joining us the next time we gathered. She graciously accepted the invitation. When it came time to reserve the flight, the fare from Canada was very expensive. Frequent flyer miles were donated so that Isabella could attend. Her presence made a substantial contribution to the weekend. The members of the cohort completely embraced her. She provided two important presentations for the weekend; first she described Marianist Family structure and the importance of connecting communities. The second presentation was the discussion of the document, *In Alliance with Mary*. One of the goals of the Initiative is to "develop a network of individuals committed to Marianist life". It is essential for members of the cohort to understand their role and responsibilities in a larger context. Isabella provided a vehicle for that.

Formation continues with this cohort as they have decided to enroll in the Virtual Learning Course on community offered through NACMS and UD. In addition, each member of the cohort will be leading an email book discussion of *A Manual Marianist Spirituality*. The "formal" formation for this cohort ends in January but their interest in immersing themselves in the pool of Marianist resource is evident.

*Future cohorts*

The second Formation weekend will occur in Dayton in January. As discussed in previous conversations, retaining the original speakers and format will be important to assess the Initiative. Speakers from the weekend in January 2005 are being confirmed. Recommendations for candidates for this new cohort have been received from the existing cohort members, members of the Advisory Committee, members of the S.M. and the F.M.I. and MLNNA as well as Brian Reavey from LIFE, Maureen O'Rourke participant in the Adele project and Anthony Fucci, director of the Cape May retreat center.

With the help and vision of Brother Ed Brink, a third cohort will be formed the summer of 2006 for LaLanne teachers. We will be asking interested persons to arrive on campus several days before the beginning of their summer courses. The Formation will follow the same format but

will be tailored to incorporate the nuance of *living* in community.

### Conclusion

This has been a life giving project. The Initiative has enabled me to meet persons from all parts of the continent (and around the world). It has been a rich experience working with some of the strongest leaders in formation. Collaborating with them has been the best educational opportunity and a joy personally. I am very grateful.

The first cohort produced nine highly committed leaders, who represent seven current communities. With the addition of two cohorts, the project is well on its way. As Vincent Vasey, S.M., states in, ***Chaminade, A Portrait***; "... in sum, the innovation of Father Chaminade was really a restoration. His idea was...to reach the ideal of the primitive church of Jerusalem where all were of one mind and one heart...he dreamed of proving to the world that the Gospel could be lived in all its perfection and freshness as in the apostolic community of Jerusalem as described in St. Luke...The life and teaching of Christ are there continually crying out that this ideal is pure Christianity." (159) This Initiative is a restoration to the work begun by our Founders. These past months have revealed there is a need in the world, and a desire to both come together the spirit of Christian love as well as a desire to be the change the world needs. Forming these leaders for working in community is a gift the Marianist Family can continue to give to the world.