



Marianist International Volunteers

MARIANIST FAMILY - Newsletter 1 - August 2004 - www.marianist.org



¿What is the Marianist International Volunteers?

Catholic volunteers; a year of living generously (part 1).

Experiencia de voluntariado en El Callao, Perú.

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In this third year of existence of the Marianist International Volunteers (MIV) program, we have decided to publish this periodical on-line newsletter to make the whole Marianist Family know about the latest news about current and former volunteers, who have been working alongside many marianist works all around the world for many years now.

Each MIV newsletter will describe a particular volunteer program, will illustrate this program with the story of a volunteer, and will also deal with a particular formation topic for volunteers.

As this is the first MIV newsletter, we would like to explain some concepts regarding marianist volunteers, since we know that not all the members of the Marianist Family understand the goal of the MIV program and the mission of marianist volunteers in our Family.

In this first newsletter we would like to share with you the experience of a

volunteer program in El Callao, Peru. Its director, Bro. Phil Melcher SM, is a keen supporter of marianist volunteers, and has benefited from the contribution of several lay marianists, who in turn have had a rich experience of service, inculturation and deepening of their faith and of their marianist charism.

As from August 2004, two lay marianists from the University of Dayton, Patrick Elliott and Amy de Matteo, will join the volunteer program in El Callao. Pat and Amy have contacted the MIV through Bro. Robert Rapp SM, director of the volunteer program in the Valley of Uxpanapa, Mexico. Pat and Amy were originally interested in volunteering in this program in Mexico, but there were already five prospective volunteers for this program, and for financial and structural reasons the program could not accept so many candidates for this upcoming volunteer year. Thus, the MIV has put Pat and Amy in contact with the volunteer program in El

Callao, and they are now very enthusiastic about the prospect of volunteering for this marianist work in Peru.

We hope that all the material published in this newsletter may be of interest to all the members of the different branches of our family, even to those who are not directly involved with the volunteers.

We would really like to have your feedback on the material published in this newsletter. Feel free to send your comments and suggestions via e-mail to joseluisperez@sinectis.com.ar

Know that all the information about the different marianist volunteer programs, as well as stories of volunteers in these programs, can be found in the MIV website both in english and in spanish at www.marianist.org

We appreciate your interest in all this information about marianist volunteers within our Family, and do not hesitate to share it with other people

interested in volunteering that you may know and that the MIV can not reach.

Strong in Faith,

José Luis Pérez CLM
MIV Coordinator



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A marianist volunteer is someone called to leave their place of origin to do a term of full-time service in areas of pastoral work or human promotion during a pre-determined period of time. Volunteers work for parishes, schools, NGOs, etc. and they receive permanent support from the local Marianist Family.

The MIV is a program that networks the whole Marianist Family to receive and distribute information about those parts of the world with lay volunteer programs and to know how they operate.

The MIV centralizes all the information about marianist volunteer programs (description of each program and permanent communication with its directors), current marianist volunteers (stories and pictures of current marianist volunteers), former marianist volunteers (stories and pictures of previous voluntary experiences in some of the current marianist volunteer programs) and prospective volunteers (counseling, support and networking with programs directors and with marianist volunteers).

Previous preparation

Necessary discernment process with spiritual counseling, and with the support of the MIV and of other marianist volunteers.

Requirements

Minimum age 21 (some programs accept volunteers over 18), very good command of the local language, previous experiences of service or mission, skills or profession relevant to the local needs and letters of recommendation

Term of service

From 6 months to a year, renewable to two.

Types of placement

Some marianist volunteers work in pastoral areas (catechism, liturgy, evangelization, community leadership), others in human promotion (urban or rural development, education, health, case work, mediation) or in both, depending on the real needs of the place where volunteers serve. In general, volunteers work in areas related to their fields.

Community life

Marianist volunteers may live in community with other volunteers of their same program, with volunteers of other programs, or with lay people or local families.

Marianist support

There is always marianist presence (lay or religious) in the community that hosts volunteers, to accompany and support them throughout their experience.



A year of living generously

Cliff and Trudy Sousa, a retired couple from Bartlesville, Oklahoma, answered an ad in the National Catholic Reporter and learned that the Claretians were looking for volunteers. “Life had been good to us,” Trudy Sousa says. “So when Cliff retired from Phillips Petroleum in 1985, and I retired from my work as a dental hygienist, we wanted to do something for others.”

They were assigned to Hayti, Missouri, an economically depressed area. With their arrival, the number of Catholics in Hayti totaled four; the nearest Catholic church was in the next town. Nonetheless, they adjusted to their

new life, were eventually accepted and loved, and stayed in Hayti from 1985 to 1987.

The Sousas thought they’d use the skills of their professions – engineering and dental hygiene – when they got to Hayti. Trudy Sousa says, “Cliff thought maybe we could repair houses, and I thought I’d help clean teeth and raise health standards.” When they got to Hayti, they changed their minds.

“We decided to tutor and do ESL (English as a Second Language) because education was what was needed more than anything else. Education could help the people fight poverty.”

Vanessa White, co-director of the Claretian Office of Ministry Opportunities (COMO), says, “It was difficult for us to find volunteers willing to go to Hayti. The people there were suspicious of Catholics. It was very rural and very segregated. Some volunteers

have romanticized ideas about a rural area. But there was such deprivation in Hayti that many volunteers could not last a year. It’s one thing to see poverty overseas, but it’s shocking to see such poverty here.”

The Claretians were delighted that the Sousas were willing to take on this challenge. Perhaps they had success because they didn’t force themselves on people. “We believe that evangelization is presence,” Cliff Sousa says. “We didn’t have to say anything.”

Can you give us a hand?

The Sousas are just two of an increasing number of Catholics who see volunteering as a way to renew their spirituality and find a satisfaction that is missing in their lives.

Most people know about such volunteer programs as Peace Corps.

But many are not aware of the dozens of Catholic volunteer programs with a similar, albeit larger, vision. Just as the Peace Corps does, many Catholic programs ask volunteers to make long-term commitments and live simply while serving others in the United States or abroad.

Cate Brosig, Catholic National Volunteers Service (CNVS) market director and full-time lay volunteer, says that the experience of volunteers are so varied that it’s impossible to call any one of them typical.

“I was a Catholic volunteer just out of college who lived with a family in Florida and worked in a non-profit food bank. Another volunteer in the program was a retired military man who had a wife and grown children. He and his wife lived in the back section of a women’s pregnancy clinic, and he worked down the street with runaway boys. And another volunteer was a



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**“You can change the world in a year,” says one volunteer.
“The way you do it is by changing your perspective.”**

woman who took a year’s sabbatical after twenty years with a phone company to work with computers in a volunteer office.”

It takes all kinds.

Just as it’s impossible to describe a generic volunteer experience, so, too, is it impossible to describe a typical volunteers.

In the past, Brosig explains, the traditional volunteer was often a student just out of college; but today that’s not so. For instance, many retired men and women, like the Sousas, are joining the ranks of volunteers.

She points out that this increase in retired volunteers may be attributed to people retiring earlier, staying healthier, and finding themselves better off financially than in former years. As a response to this interest, CNVS is increasing its target to the retired population.

“Many groups are now specifically looking for older people with experience – especially in foreign programs,” says Brosig.

In many Catholic programs listed in the CNVS opportunities catalog, a volunteer gives a substantial amount of time working in a different locale and receives only a small stipend.

Before going to Belize, Heidi Cerneka was asked to show her commitment to the Jesuit International Volunteers (JIV) by raising U\$S 2000 to help pay for her two years of service. It wasn’t a bottom line, she adds. If she hadn’t raised it, the Jesuits wouldn’t have said, “Sorry, you can’t go.”

“The Jesuits were clever with their advice,” Cerneka says. “They said, ‘If you’re going to a conservative church, you say you’re a missionary. If you’re going to a liberal church, say you’re a volunteer.’”

Significantly smaller than the JIV, the Claretian Volunteers (CV) work in the United States and Guatemala in both rural and urban settings, soup kitchens, shelters for the homeless, parishes and clinics.

A Claretian Volunteer generally serves for one year, which begins in August with a one-week orientation and concludes with the following year’s orientation. Lay missionaries who go to Guatemala are asked to serve two years after a six-month training period in the United States. Commitments can be, and often are, renewed.

CV enrollment reflects the increase in volunteering across the nation. When the program started in 1983, nine volunteers signed up for a period of six months or one year to serve either in the United States or in Guatemala. The Claretians’ 1990 figures showed twenty volunteers serving; eleven in Chicago, Illinois; three in Perth Amboy, New Jersey; three in

Springfield, Missouri; and three in Guatemala.

Volunteers work with battered women, homeless persons, infants and children with AIDS, students in Catholic schools, refugees from Central America, and in parish and campus ministry. In Guatemala they work in agriculture, health, and education.

“Usually we work together with volunteers to decide what is best for them,” says White. “Even ten they should be flexible. Sometimes after they get a work site, they have to change.”

Diana Milesko – Pytel



A leap of faith

For me this experience proved to be a year of never before experienced challenges through which I grew and learned like never before. It all began after graduating from the University of Dayton (UD) in May of 1999. I had decided, based on my experiences at UD of service and social justice and through spiritual guidance by various Marianist Brothers, that I wanted to do at least one year of voluntary “service” in Latin America. Fortunately for us here at UD we have Bro. Phil Aaron, S.M. as director of International Service Programs and Phil has substantial knowledge of the Marianist works around the world. Thus, taking advantage of this knowledge base,



Phil Aaron then put me in contact with Bro. Phil Melcher, S.M. in Peru where he is director of the Instituto Chaminade Marianistas.

Once contact was established with Phil Melcher in Peru, a dialogue began. Through this dialogue, we came to know each other, I came to know about the Instituto Chaminade - the work and mission there, we discussed goals, objectives and expectations related to this potential experience, and of course many logistics were slowly and laboriously worked out – funding, health issues, living issues, etc. Since there was no formality or established process to create this type of experience, we were in uncharted waters and simply feeling our way through this – keeping the lines of communication open and honest. Through this dialogue, through prayer and through a developed trust I came to the conclusion that going to Peru was what I felt called to do.

I arrived in Peru on the 15th of January, of the year 2000. My

original goals were rather simple, at least simply stated. One of my principal goals, and actually a necessary process, was to get to know and gain a better understanding of: the community/culture at large where I would live and work; the mission, work and the vision of the Institute; and the mission / purpose of the Marianists in Peru.

Related to this, an additional goal was to do my best to live the culture and to live in solidarity with my neighbors, the students and the people with whom I worked. One step I took toward this goal was by choosing to live with a host family in the barrio.

Another critical objective was to work on my Spanish language skills, which I felt would be my greatest weakness at first. Thus, I made it a goal to study my grammar and to do my best to only speak Spanish upon arriving.

Also, I really wanted to use my skills and knowledge to be of benefit to the Institute and local community.



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Therefore, an important goal for me was to constantly be aware of who and how I am benefiting and to periodically evaluate the appropriateness of my work. Finally, one of my most important goals was that I be open to learn and grow from the people: my colleagues, the students, the Marianists, my host family and the community in which I lived.

So, in order to accomplish all of my goals and objectives, I needed to commit my self to work hard, listen, participate, have faith, pray and most of all - LOVE.

My year began working mainly in maintenance and installation at the Institute and enjoying that – getting my hands dirty and working up a sweat – taking my time to slowly work my way into the job and to the trust and friendship of my colleagues. I was being drained by the combination of adjusting, working and most of all, conversing in Spanish.

After the first five weeks there, I was in need of a spiritual renewal and the perfect opportunity came. I went on a retreat up into the Andes Mountains to the Marianist Rural Mission Center. Those days there in the mountains allowed me the time to reflect and pray and through this I found the resolution I needed.

Many of the changes I wanted to make were related to my work at the Institute. I wasn't having much contact with the students and was not working in the areas where I felt I could be of help. I had a meeting with Brother Phil Melcher, and we evaluated my time and made many changes in my role at the Institute.

I soon found myself involved up to my elbows in a multitude of projects and tasks at the Institute and was having fun with it while trying to maintain some type of order and balance to my schedule. I began working longer hours and over the ensuing months I became more and more an integral part of the administrative team at the

Institute. I became better each day with my Spanish skills and this, along with my increased experience there, allowed me to make a greater and more positive impact in my work and through more profound dialogue. My improved speaking abilities meant that I could have better conversations with the students and therefore I began to form more positive and friendly relationships with them.

However, it wasn't all peachy keen. Frustrations still existed about some cultural issues that really ate at me. Additionally, I was frustrated often by a few of my colleagues who did not pull their weight and lacked a sense of dedication to the mission of the Institute. Also, I became frustrated by the fact that I was not able to fully use my technical skills as an engineer. Phil and I had many conversations through this time and he did his best to listen and work with me.

By the first part of July, about the six-month mark, I felt very confident about my language skills and had

become very accustomed to the culture. I was working long hours – about 80 hours a week including Saturdays – and soon realized that I was burning myself out.

I was visited by a good friend in the middle of July, which was a refreshing experience for me and marked another turning point for me along my journey through this ever-challenging experience. As a result, I made some conscious changes in my work and personal habits and began to get out more, periodically removing myself from Santa Rosa, the barrio in which I worked, slept, ate, played and in a sense – drowned.

Due to some organizational circumstances in the Institute, coupled with my renewed spirit and newfound passions for my life and work at the Institute, I again refocused my role. I still maintained a substantial hand in many of the technical projects, however, with the hiring of a new competent technical leader I was able to put more time and energy into the



pastoral /youth ministry work at the Institute.

So, with having the support and encouragement of Phil and most of the administration at the Institute, I began working with the Pastoral Team along with a few other faculty, and initiated a few new activities for the students. In the past there had been some interest shown and potential talent in theater. Well, it had been a dream of mine ever since I participated in it three years ago to put on the Musical "Godspell" with a group of students. I shared this dream from the start with Phil and in particular Rosa, the Administrator at the Institute who had participated in Godspell before.

After two full months of frustrating hard work, lengthy practices, struggling with the kids, arduous preparation, and much laughing, crying, praying and a hell of a lot of singing and dancing the big weekend finally came. After a disastrous Friday night dress rehearsal, the dedicated cast of 28 students and faculty

rebounded exuberantly back to life for each of the live Saturday and Sunday performances, proudly and boldly presenting "Godspell." Each show played to a crowd of about 200, and all 200 were emotionally and spiritually energized at the end of each performance and also very surprised at the caliber of our performance.

The dates of the presentation of Godspell had fallen on my last full weekend in Peru. I was to leave the following Saturday without knowing if I would ever return. The final two months were for me the most challenging, yet they were by far the most rewarding, likely because they were so challenging.

Godspell provided a wonderful and very appropriate closure for me to the extremely challenging and emotional year I had shared with the Marianists (lay and religious) in Peru. Just as the story of the life of Christ we had presented, my year was a positive struggle with many issues including faith, relationships, work and

confidence among others. This year was, as Christ's life was, filled with sharing, love, frustration, hope and friendship. And also, as Christ was to leave his friends, I was to leave mine. However, as Christ also did, I pray that I will not forget these friends and that some day I shall return, to continue the sharing of faith and love with these friends who have marked my life -God willing- forever.

Chris Schmidt

Marianist lay missionary
in the Instituto Chaminade-Marianistas
in El Callao, Peru
between January and December 2000

"...we choose to stand in solidarity with our sisters and brothers who are poor, collaborating with those who attempt to change the social structures which institutionalize poverty and injustice..."

"...to witness that communion is possible by our efforts to form community with all who touch our lives. We commit ourselves to closer partnership with the other branches of our Family in formation, spirituality and mission..."

Texts of the introduction of "Partners in Hope", final document of 31st General Chapter of Company of Mary (July, 1996).



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Volunteer's Program in El Callao, Peru / "Instituto Chaminade"

Goal	Contribute cross-culturally to the technical, physical, mental and faith growth of poor youth from Callao meanwhile enriching volunteers with cultural values and people in Peru.
Activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Contributing to youth pastoral activities, youth group and the promotion of faith communities (Comunidades Laicas Marianistas, CLM).2. Sharing of Marianist Charism and spirituality with students and staff.3. Facilitating "Humanities" formation: social, cultural and faith dimensions of life.4. Contributing to workshops in theatre, dance, music, oratorio, ecology, etc.5. Coaching and contributions in computing science, telecommunications, English, mathematics and other technical-academic fields.6. Contributing technically in computer science, telecommunications, electronics or other fields.
Term of service	At least 3 months
Requirements	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Open attitude to learn and become enriched by the culture and the people in Peru.2. Recommendation letter from a Marianist Religious3. Post-high school studies.4. Spanish speaking skills (minimum 70%).
Housing	With a local peruvian family; paying for the minimal expenses (about \$100/month).
Contact person	Bro. Felipe Melcher SM, director fmelcher@chaminade.edu.pe / www.chaminade.edu.pe