



## Thanksgiving LIFE meeting

Opening Prayer

Jenn

Dear God,

Throughout my life you have blessed me with many things. All too often I forget to say “thank you” for all these blessings. Help me to thank you and the people around me more than just at Thanksgiving. I know that you give me these gifts for a reason, help me to remember the giver of these gifts. Amen.

**Lauren:** So many times people ask, “How do you define Marianist? What is unique or cool about Marianist life?” Right now we are going to try to answer these questions by relating to everyday experience of setting the table for a meal. Each of the items that will go on the table, in fact the table itself, will have some special meaning. As with most images, this table setting may make you remember something special or may mean something special to you.

The term ‘family’ is frequently used to describe all those who live Marianist life, either as lay people or as sisters, brothers, and priests. The items placed on the table will be symbols of how this family lives together – on good days and on not so good days! The things carried to the table will offer images depicting who the Marianist family is and who they strive to become. Like any family, our Marianist family doesn’t always live in a perfect state. So let us begin.

*The table setter **MaryBeth** carries a colorful tablecloth, unfolds it to place on the table.*

**Andy:** Become aware of the roundness of the table. At a round table there is no head of the table. We are all honored and special at the table. No one is given a special place because of their title or responsibility. All the gifts brought by the people at the table are important. In the Marianist family, we acknowledge, celebrate, and honor the differences among us, but we don’t give certain privileges to anyone because of the role they have in the family. Lay members, priests, sisters, and brothers are equal within the family.

**Emily** *Flowers, a lovely arrangement of several kinds of flowers are placed on the table by the setter.*

**Danielle:** The flowers are very warm and welcoming. The different flowers represent the Marianist charism, especially the hospitality for which the Marianists are well noted. Making someone feel welcomed and wanted is important to the Marianists. We also become more aware of the beauty of God’s creation when the flowers are placed in front of us.

**Chance and Nick** *Candles are placed next to the flowers and the setter then lights the candles.*

**Kara:** Lighting candles before a special meal is an ancient tradition. The candles help us to remember to set aside everyday tasks and chores and allow time and space for the holy, the sacred. It is time for us

to take a step back and see where God is evident in our lives. This is very much part of the Marianist tradition.

People come to the table to be nourished – in body and in spirit. The Marianist founders believed that the experience of community was the best way to support people and their growth in Christ's life. At the table we will need many items to make sure everyone can enter fully into community. So, our setter(s) will now carry a series of items with which we will create a nourishing community.

**Jenn** *Knives, forks, and spoons will be placed on the table first.*

**MaryBeth:** Knives, forks, and spoons are essential for our meal. The utensils represent the people in the family who by their talent or education bring very concrete skills to our family. Maybe, the spoons remind us of those who can lead prayer; the forks might represent those on whom we rely to help with conflict resolution.

*Next, **Lauren** brings napkins.*

**Andy:** You are probably wondering why napkins are needed. Sometimes a mess will be made and we need something or someone to clean it up. Sometimes we bite off more than we can chew. Spills are going to happen, sometimes tears are going to fall – no matter what the spill, someone needs to be the napkin to wipe it away.

**Danielle** *now carries dishes to the table.*

**Emily:** The empty plates represent those people who come to our family. They anticipate that good things will be served. There are times, though, when we have seen someone come to the community carrying a full plate with no room to receive. Sometimes we find a plate among us that is cracked or broken: it won't be able to hold food until it is put back together. And there are painful times when what we serve does not fill the hunger, so the person leaves.

*Water glasses and a filled pitcher are now put on the table.*

**Chance:** As each glass is filled, we think about the mystery of water: Water is essential to our survival. When a new person comes to our community we are asked to trust that even though they may be somewhat of a mystery to us at first, we will be refreshed, as a community, by their presence.

**Kara** *then brings in a large platter or basket containing a golden, hearty loaf of bread.*

**Nick:** In some cultures, to have bread is to have a full meal. In our church, bread signifies Christ. We believe we meet Christ in one another; we feed one another with Christ's life. Some days we eat bread in joy; some days we eat in sorrow.

*Now **Jenn** will add a few last items to the table.*

**Lauren:** Now for some final touches... A carafe of wine (*cranberry juice for LIFERs*) to symbolize how we love to celebrate together. We are the living fruit of the vine, Jesus. We are called to share our stories and celebrate who we are.

**Mary Beth** *picks up and turns over the salt shaker, letting a few grains gently fall into an open hand, tasting the salt.*

**Andy:** Just as salt helps the body bear and retain water needed for life, we are reminded of the things that are vital to Christian life. For the Marianists, Mary plays a significant role. She helps up bear and hold Christ in our lives. ... The table is now ready for our meal, but we need people around our table.

**Danielle** *goes out and invites those assembled to stand and gather closely around the table*

**Emily:** As we eat we tell our stories. Through our stories we are educated, inspired, and reconciled. We hope that others will be attracted to us. There are no chairs at our table to remind us not to linger too long. We must go out: other tables must be set. We build community not just for ourselves but for the Church, for the whole world.

**Chance** Break the bread, feeding the person next to you. Then break into small groups, sharing a short reflection on anything that strikes you from this session.]

**Kara** CLOSING PRAYER: Loving God, let us move away from the table setting mindful of the thanks in our hearts for the treasures of Marianist life; mindful of the generations of women and men who were called to spend their lives within this family and who preserve its vitality for us; mindful of our own concerns, apprehensions, and uncertainties about the future and our ability to continue family life in whole, creative and effective ways. In your name we pray. Amen.

*Invite everyone to the cafeteria for dinner*

**Nick** After dinner, start affirmation, prayer over each other, standing in middle of circle shoulder to shoulder (like last day of summer LIFE camp)

Small groups

What were your thoughts as we set the Marianist Table?

What does Thanksgiving mean to you?

What traditions does your family have for Thanksgiving?

Closing Prayer

**Jenn**

Dear God,

Thank you for all that you have given us, especially our families, including our LIFE family. Help us to appreciate all that we have. Show us the way to be closer to You and each other. AMEN.