Avoiding Prescriptions

Marianist Education is characteristically the same in all of our schools, but the particular ways in which it is lived differs from school to school. As a member of a Visiting Team, you will be observing the manifestation of the Characteristics of Marianist Education within a particular school culture.

As a part of the Visit Report, your team will be making recommendations for the school to address challenges it faces in improving its delivery of Marianist Education. When making these recommendations, it is important to focus on the "What" rather than the "How." Avoid prescribing specific solutions as a means of accomplishing the recommendation. For example:

- "Investigate ways of addressing faith development among the faculty and staff" rather than: "Start a faculty faith-sharing group."

- "Explore ways to increase knowledge of Marianist heritage" rather than "Require all new faculty to take the on-line Marianist Founders course."

It is perfectly proper to suggest such things as faith-sharing groups and courses as possibilities to be considered, but not as mandates that must be adopted. Sharing your own knowledge and experience of these possibilities, whether you have experienced them yourself or seen them at work in other schools, may be very helpful. Just be careful that you don't present these possibilities as things the school must do. You are highlighting challenges to be addressed. Rely on the members of the school's own Mission Integration Team to implement your recommendations in ways that are most appropriate for that school community.

Even though you and the educators you will be visiting are all part of the Marianist Family, a Team Visit is not a social call. As members of the same family, you care about the school community and want to see it thrive. The Team Visit provides a means to structure that caring into an effective vehicle for the improvement of Marianist Education.

Skills for the Visit

The purpose of a Team Visit is to gather evidence that the school being visited has followed its plan to improve the Marianist character of its education. Gathering information will include reviewing printed materials, observing the environment and the interaction of people within it, and engaging in conversation with members of the school community.

In inviting you to be part of a Visiting Team, we recognize that you possess the skills necessary to serve as a school visitor. This brochure highlights some of those skills you will be called upon to use.

Other brochures in this series include:

- Overview of the Process
- The Team Visit
- Visit Ethics and Attitudes
- Team Leadership
- The Visit Report

If you have questions regarding the content of this brochure, please feel free to contact:

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Formal Conversations

During your visit, you will be meeting formally and informally with a variety of individuals and groups. At least some of these will take the form of structured conversations, with members of the school community presenting information and you asking questions to solicit further information.

Introducing Yourself and Your Mission

While most of the people with whom you are meeting will have at least some idea of why you are there, do not assume that they are fully aware of your purpose. Begin each meeting by introducing yourself and sharing briefly about your experience in Marianist Education. Spend a few minutes briefly describing the overall purpose of the visit. Let those with whom you are meeting know what you hope to learn from meeting with them. Assure them that the purpose of the visit is not to evaluate individuals, but to assess how well the school as a whole embodies Marianist Education. Give them the opportunity to introduce themselves to you. The rapport established at the beginning of your meeting will often determine how forthcoming people are with the information you seek. Let them know that you value what they have to say. You may want to let them know you will be taking notes during your conversations.

Listening

You are there to gather information, specifically, evidence of how the school conducts Marianist Education. Listening is a critical skill for this task. During your conversations, you will be posing some questions you have prepared in consultation with the other members of your team. Try to ask open-ended questions that will give participants the opportunity to share broadly about their activities and programs. Give the speaker your complete attention. Maintain eye contact. Listen carefully to the responses and be prepared to ask follow-up questions that may deviate from your original plan.

Note-Taking

Unless you have a remarkable memory, taking notes during an interview will be necessary. You may not have the opportunity to meet with the same people again, so accurately noting what they have said is important. Visits often require you to move from one meeting to another in rapid succession, with little or no time between to correct your notes, so make sure you will understand what you have written a few hours later. Taking meaningful notes while maintaining a reasonable degree of eye contact is a skill that will improve with practice.

Visit Management

Team Visits are intense experiences. You have much to see and do and a very limited amount of time available. Do your best to stick to the schedule provided. Within meetings, manage the time to make sure you have the opportunity to gather all of the information you need. When meeting with a group of people, allow for discussions to be as informal and free-flowing as possible, but make sure all have an opportunity to participate and that the group remains on task. End the session as much on time as possible. If you fall behind, it will probably impact future meetings. If you have two or more sessions scheduled without a break, try to take at least a few minutes between them to complete your notes and to collect your thoughts for the upcoming session.

Remember that you will have much to do in addition to the formal conversations. You will need to spend time observing informal interactions, touring school facilities, and scanning school publications. The Chair of your team will have scheduled times for team meetings. You may find it helpful to plan out even the unscheduled portion of your day. Don’t forget to allow yourself some down time to relax and clear your head.