



INTERNATIONAL TEAM / MARIANIST LAY COMMUNITIES
EQUIPO INTERNACIONAL / COMUNIDADES LAICAS MARIANISTAS
EQUIPE INTERNATIONALE / COMMUNAUTÉS LAÏQUES MARIANISTES

Knowing, loving and serving the Fraternity -Paths of fraternity in the MLC-

Circular n°2

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Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I am very happy to join each one of you, on the occasion of this second circular, on this day when we celebrate Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

Marianist Lay Communities from all over the world are preparing for the 8th International Meeting of the Marianist Lay Communities in Guadarrama, near Madrid, Spain. We are all looking forward to this meeting and thank God for what this assembly will allow us to experience as an International Community. It also closes the mandate of the members of the International Organization that you have chosen for the years 2018-2022.

It has been an honor to serve the CLM as President at the international level. And it is not without emotion that I end this mandate which has brought me much joy. Your faces, the meetings, will remain engraved in my heart and they will accompany me in the future missions that the Lord will entrust me in the Church. I want to thank you all for your trust and support.

I wanted to deliver to you the second and last circular of my mandate. It is inserted in a time of Church rich in reflections. Pope Francis calls for fraternity and "a social friendship" in his Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, promulgated in 2020, in the midst of a pandemic that has only worsened global imbalances. He also summoned the Universal Church to a synodal process that began in September 2022 and will continue until October 2023 with the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. It is not by chance that this circular has as its theme the paths of fraternity in our MLC.

Our communities are called "fraternal" communities. In many places, they are called "Fraternities". This shows the importance we attach to this dimension. But Pope Francis is calling us today to deepen this dimension, which is so essential to our life in MLCs. His Encyclical awakens and alerts us, MLCs of the whole world. It helps us to redefine our vocation, as lay Marianists, to live the Fraternity in our communities. Why is this so? Without doubt because we

always need to be renewed in what we live. There is no finish line on the road to fraternity. There is only a path to follow to humbly accomplish our mission.

KNOWING THE FRATERNITY

God's plan: living as brothers and sisters

Let us return to God's plan. In the biblical accounts of the Creation (Gn 1 and 2), God's project places man at the center of its most beautiful realization. He creates simultaneously man and woman as if to say that man is structurally related. Alone, he is incomplete and in need. God leaves him free to situate himself, to look for himself in the setting of an external paradise, naked, without shame of the opposite. He also lets him locate himself in his inner paradise, where the awareness of nakedness creates mistrust and fear of the other, generating a feeling of solitude.

The relationship is not acquired but in the making. It is both a gift and a task. What choice then? To be with oneself? To be with others? The man who receives the breath of God at Creation is a living being who comes out of himself. An exit that puts him in relation with what surrounds him. Is this not "ex-ist", "e-ssere" in Italian? To go out "ex" to be? To exist is then to leave oneself to go towards the other and to meet him. It is to understand and compose one's life with the other, not against him.

In the Tower of Babel episode, people do not understand each other.

"How to live in harmony (...). This (Hebrew) tradition states that the constructions began to worship the tower and despised the life of the men who worked. (...) For men to live in harmony among themselves, a common language is probably not enough. It is necessary, according to the Hebrew, to speak true and be true "אמת". It is when everyone is true, and communicates with sincerity, that harmony "תאמת" between men can be established (...). According to the Hebrew, it is through proper conduct in harmony with truth and sincerity that one comes closer to oneself and to others. (...) If truth and harmony are sought individually, they are to be lived and experienced with others. It is the word you אמת" (always a plural in Hebrew) that indicates this. As if a higher authority were saying to men, "the truth" is found in the place where you men live in harmony with each other "you ».¹

In Hebrew the same root in the words "harmony, truth and others" tells us how they are linked and have a common destiny. These are the conditions for building fraternal relationships.

Jesus' announcement: « love your neighbor as yourself »

In the New Testament, Jesus reminds us very often of what we exist for and how we should live together. "You are brothers" (Mt 23:8), "Love your neighbor as yourself". Jesus speaks of the fraternity of "sons of God" who have the same Father: "Abba". Being sons of the same Father is to know and experience that we are on the same footing. It means welcoming the other because he is our brother, listening to him, trusting him and giving ourselves to him (Jn 15:9). Jesus watches our humanity being torn apart already in Jerusalem when he weeps over it. He also looks at our indifference towards our brother when men pass by a man in distress in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

¹ Irit Slomka-Saguy, *Lettres hébraïques, miroir de l'être*, Editions Grancher, 2016, p.87-88-89

"In the New Testament, the Gospels give priority to the most fragile. Christ's attitude is clear in his relationship with the sick, sinners, those excluded by society or the law, as well as in his welcome of women and children. He reminds us of this in connection with the Last Judgment: the criteria of holiness are compassion and justice towards the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, the prisoners and the strangers (Mt, 25). The parable of the Good Samaritan has served as a constant reference in the Church since its foundation to remind us of the priority to be given to the wounded of life, without excluding anyone from this attentive and creative charity, regardless of the origin of the beneficiary. The universality of mercy is thus proclaimed: the neighbor is every human being who needs me, who looks at me, who turns his face towards me.»²

The Acts of the Apostles: « one heart and one soul »

The challenge is clearly expressed in the Acts of the Apostles where we see that the first Christians know that they have a vocation to live together with the reticence of each one. The resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost makes us brothers and moves our hearts in the direction of community, the sharing of wealth, the common good and the place of each one. Not without difficulties in daily life. But what is exposed here is not just an ideal, it is the divine reality, a gift and a task. Community is not based on the juxtaposition of people but on living together, praying and celebrating. What brings people together despite their differences is Jesus. They want to live with Jesus as he did. A liturgical song in France expresses it beautifully: "Like Him, knowing how to set the table, like Him, tying the apron... to get up every day and serve out of love... like Him!" The experience of Jesus transforms us into brothers and unites us. This way of living together and the visible testimony that Jesus is present, that he is the one sent by the Father and that he unites us through his Spirit.

Our Founders: the intuition of the « Congregations »

These early faith communities inspired our Founders, Blessed Guillaume Joseph Chaminade and Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon, when in 1808 they had the intuition of "Congregations". This is expressed in the Constitutions of the Society of Mary of 1839, article 339 :

"How many conquests modern philosophism has made in the kingdom of Jesus-Christ! Faith has weakened, its torch has been extinguished in a great number of individuals, and even in entire corporations. The principles of religion are becoming more and more corrupted. How little Christian education there is! The new generation finds so few teachers who take pains to train their minds and hearts in Christianity! What remedies can be applied to so many evils? »

Father Chaminade had the courage to undertake a "new struggle", "nova bella³ », to revive or rekindle the torch of faith everywhere. The method of evangelization is essentially community-like. For him, only the community can convince.

The faith communities that over the centuries will become communities of lay people, of seculars, religious, and nuns, signifies that the Marianist Family, composed of our four branches (MLC, AM, SM, and FMI), strives to live together, inspired by Jesus' commandment to love one another day by day. In the spirit of our Founders, it is not about creating "separate" or better groups.

² Bernard Ugueux, *La Fragilité, faiblesse ou richesse ?* Editions Albin Michel, 2009, p. 183

³ « Nova bella elegit Dominus », according to the version of the Vulgate, in Jg 5, 8.

The call that we have received, especially for lay people, religious women and men, is that of living fraternity in community, each one following the vocation that is proper to him or her, and of living today as a "Community of communities", especially by making our Family Councils exist and live, whether it be worldwide, regional, national or local. This is our evangelical journey for each and everyone in the Marianist Family.

The Alliance Mariale, because of its specific vocation to be fully inserted in the world, does not live in community, but it is concerned to live the community life of the parish and of the associations. It is aware of this dimension as well and it makes it live.

LOVING FRATERNITY

In the Community (Fraternity): being fully realized

To love is to realize oneself fully as a man and a woman and this means

"Stop worshipping our own statue, break all the ties that bind us to our own self, transform aggression into love and use all this energy to stimulate, welcome and love our brothers. Thus we will feel fulfilled. »⁴

It is like saying "Blessed are the pure in heart" ... they will be able to love the brothers. The pure heart constantly looks at God and focuses on the person of Jesus. It is this contemplation that transforms the way we look at our brothers and sisters and that makes us lose focus of ourselves and our own interests. We no longer have anything to defend or any reason to be suspicious of others. All that remains is to open ourselves to our brothers. Our communities - our "fraternities" - are the place for this realization. Living in fraternity joins our deepest call to complete fulfillment and, mysteriously, it passes through the gift of oneself and the relationship with others by living together.

Let us not be afraid to love Fraternity! Let us not be afraid to love our Fraternity! It is the way to our happiness beyond or through our own reluctance. Relationships in fraternity build us up, liberate us even if it is at the price of some sacrifices and many conciliations. The obstacles to love are not outside of us, but within us. They come from our psychology, our habits, our refusals. Fraternity helps us integrating these obstacles and overcoming them in order to enter a dimension where the love of Jesus is stronger, more solid and more lasting. It unites us in an indestructible way and leads our Fraternities on the path of true love.

"Each of us can perfect ourselves, complete ourselves" שלום (peace). Reconciliation with others allows us to do this. It allows us to accept quality exchanges. It allows us to perfect ourselves through the contribution of each other, which is only possible in harmony and peace. Peace, we have everything to gain. The verb to pay "שלם", comes from the same root as peace. Do we have to pay for our peace? Certainly, we have to invest and pay with our person to reach peace (...) become peaceful, we are able to share peace with others. The more we irradiate, the more it becomes "contagious". It spreads and amplifies like a flood, from near and far. A hebrew says that we then become "machal - משל, examples. »⁵

Let us love our communities! Let us love our Fraternity! Fraternity in our Fraternities is not an option. It is what builds them up. In the Fraternity we give and we receive. We must accept that it is not perfect, that it will never fulfill all our expectations. And we must accept to give

⁴ Ignacio Larrañana, *Sali con me- La vità de fraternità*, Edizioni Messaggero Padova, 1986, p. 87

⁵ Irit Slomka-Saguy, *Lettres hébraïques, miroir de l'être*, Editions Grancher, 2016 P. 112-113

ourselves: to give our time, our skills (sometimes as spiritual guides or leaders), to give ourselves in our exchanges, to expose ourselves in all confidence without assuming the gaze or judgment of others. Let us understand that this path is the path of our own realization by others.

Receiving life from the Fraternity

In our Community we receive and we give life. The presence of each member in what he or she has and is unique gives strength and life to the whole. It is not necessary to be numerous for this! The energy and life of a Fraternity is not measured by the number of its members, but by the investment and openness of each one, by the quality of his or her presence and sharing. It depends on how we look at ourselves, how we consider ourselves, and how we value ourselves in the original sense of the word: "to give value to the person". The Spanish term "menospreciar"... "to give less value" and therefore "to despise", says a lot about this value that we sometimes give with difficulty to each member of our Fraternities for many reasons, but mainly because he is not like us.

"Jesus gave his life for us. So we too must lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. (1 Jn 3:6). It is the demanding and concrete love that gives life to our Fraternities, according to the law of renunciation. To give life in our Fraternities is to give one's life... it is to give oneself and, like Jesus, it is necessarily to die a little. Jesus gave himself "to the extreme" by dying on the cross, "so that we may have life and have it to the full" (Jn 10,10). Life, in order to germinate and mature, needs warmth. The members of a community also need a warm atmosphere, full of affection and attention, in order to germinate and produce all these fruits.

Love in the Fraternity: an act of faith

Love in the Fraternity is an act of faith. Natural, spontaneous friendship grows naturally. There is no real need to develop it. Love in the Fraternity belongs to another category since it is not spontaneous but the fruit of a conviction: what we have in common is much more important than what differentiates us. What we have in common is Jesus, our history with him, our life of faith assumed and deliberately shared. Our conviction is that we are called to love in the way that St. Augustine expresses it:

*"Love and do what you want. If you are silent, you are silent for love ; if you shout, you shout for love ; if you correct, you correct for love ; if you save, you save for love. Let the root of charity be found within. From this root nothing but good can come forth."*⁶

Let us know that the Fraternity – our Fraternity – does not exist in itself. It exists because we make it exist and because we exist in the Fraternity. The presence, the dialogue and the commitment of each one generates, builds and transforms it. Conversely, the lack of presence, of openness, of welcoming the other can damage and destroy it. Our Fraternity is a creation that is renewed every day with the help of God who continues his works of creation even today. And every day we must strive to take care of it and cultivate it like "a fragile plant".

*"Life survives where there is a bond, a community, a fraternity; and it is a life stronger than death when it is built on true relationships and bonds of loyalty."*⁷

⁶ *Commentary on the 1st epistle of Saint John* VII,8, translation D. Dideberg, Bibliothèque Augustinienne 79, p. 305

⁷ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti - On fraternity and social friendship-*, Bayard Editions-Name- Les éditions du Cerf, 2020, n°87

SERVING THE FRATERNITY

Witnessing the Universal Fraternity

The fraternity that we try to live in our Marianist Lay Communities finds its source in the Gospel and in the intuition formulated by our Founders. Since then, our International Documents have constantly referred to the role that our MLCs have in the Church and in the world. Our communities are signs of Jesus' love for the world.

"The love of Jesus urges us, as it did the first Christians, to form communities around Him. Our communities are signs of Jesus' love for the world, and they prepare us, send us, encourage us, purify us and support us in our mission. »⁸

Our communities are a sign of something much bigger than ourselves: the Universal Fraternity.

"In the face of individualism we choose to live our faith in community; we can present to the world a real experience of a God, liberator, symbol of love and joy for all those who experience a spiritual void, typical of our time"⁹.

"This experience of God pushes us to have a free and open mind to dialogue with all and allows us to collaborate in the construction of a more just and united society. Our communities are characterized by a welcoming attitude and approach to people, respect for the times and style of each person. The spirit of Jesus urges us to welcome and accept people as they are, as Jesus did »¹⁰.

Our mission as lay Marianists is to be first of all "Community", "Fraternity", before being an action and a commitment in the world. Better said, our commitment in the world is to be community.

"Our Marianist mission is first of all to be communities that bear witness to the world through our lives. The Marianist family strives to be a family that respects the gifts of all its members and allows them to use them as fully as possible. We must now share this reality with others »¹¹.

« In the midst of growing polarization and division, we are called to foster a family spirit, not only in our communities and in the Marianist family, but also in the Church and in the world. In the midst of unbelief, we are called to joyfully live the Gospel message of love, peace and justice, to evangelize with our lives and through the gift of community »¹².

Community is our way of being present in the Church and in the world. Our communities are also called to work for the "social friendship" of which Pope Francis speaks in his Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. Our mission thus goes beyond the community and transcends it. It engages us in our world so that it may be more just and more fraternal.

⁸ *The mission in the MLC*, Liria-Spain, 1997, n°3.3

⁹ *The MLC in the Church and in the world*, Nairobi, Kenya, 2009, 2.3

¹⁰ *Idem*, Nairobi, Kenya, 2009, 2.4

¹¹ Isabella R. Moyer, - *Being marianist, being family*- Circular n°1, 2010

¹² Isabella R. Moyer, - *The faith of heart in the heart of the world*-Circular n°4, 2013

Recovering a sense of humanity

We lay Marianists can promote the value of human beings. Everything around us about violated rights, exploitation of humans by humans, the primacy of any kinds of powers and strengths generating injustice and poverty, must challenge us and incite us to rediscover the meaning of the human being, of what he is, of his unique value.

« There is something fundamental and essential to recognize in order to progress towards social friendship and universal fraternity: realizing how much a human being is worth, how much a person is worth, always and in all circumstances.¹³»

« Serving means taking care of the fragile members of our families, of our society, of our people" (...) "service always aims at the face of the brother, it touches his flesh, it feels his closeness and even in some cases suffers it and seeks the promotion of the brother.¹⁴»

Our community and individual mission places us very often in the field of education, health and therefore human promotion.

« The work of education, the development of habits of solidarity, the ability to think about human life in a more integral way and spiritual depth are necessary to ensure the quality of human relations, in such a way that it is society itself that governs in the face of these inequalities, its deviations, the abuses of economic, technological, political or media powers.¹⁵ »

Yes, we lay marianists in community, we can contribute to the advent of a new world, transformed by the encounter, the culture of dialogue and the attention to the weak.

« Through social love" (St. John Paul II, Redemptoris Hominis, 1979, no. 15) it is possible to progress towards a civilization of love to which we can all feel called. Charity, with its universal dynamism, can build a new world, because it is not a sterile sentiment but the best way to reach effective paths of development for all. ¹⁶»

« The proper and specific mission of the laity must take place in the world, so that, through our witness and our activity, we contribute to the transformation of realities and the creation of just structures.¹⁷ »

"I am convinced that the incarnation of man is the ultimate plan of Creation. It is our freedom that we must jealously guard to conquer; we are given the chance to create around us the world that we wish, in relationships with others. We must not forget that this is our primary task: "I am here, my mission is to care for others.¹⁸»

Let us continue to develop the "Civilization of Love" where we live and in our mission lands. "Its universal dynamism can build a new world of development for all," as Pope Francis says in Fratelli Tutti. We are already doing it. Let us continue our efforts so that this new social order based on justice and equal opportunities emerges everywhere in the world.

¹³ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* - On fraternity and social friendship-, Bayard Editions-Name- Les éditions du Cerf, 2020, n°106

¹⁴ *Idem*, n°115

¹⁵ *Idem*, n°167

¹⁶ *Idem*, n° 183

¹⁷ *The MLC in the Church and in the world- Nairobi, Kenya, 2009, 4.2*

¹⁸ Xavier Emmanuelli, *La Fragilité, faiblesse ou richesse ?* Editions Albin Michel, 2009, p. 149

"Dreams are built together »¹⁹

We lay marianists have the richness of belonging to a Family. Our identities at the heart of a Family with many faces make us complementary and stronger. Our fraternity, lived as a Charismatic Family, opens the way to a greater and more dynamic fraternity. It bears witness to a universal fraternity where difference is not a threat but an opportunity. By living it at this level, "we will move towards building a civilization of harmony, of unity, where there is no room for the culture of rejection"²⁰. In this call to transform our world, having at heart to commit ourselves as a Family, each branch with its own vocation and its own wealth. The path of this advent, which starts from recognizing and sharing our diversity, will help us to bear fruit and give more and more life to our Family.

*« Being a Family takes a lot of work. But we know that the reward goes beyond the good of the Family itself. The gifts that are nurtured within the family overflow into a world that truly needs mature, faith-filled women and men working together for the good of all, to incarnate Jesus in their own place and time. This is our mission, in union with Mary, and through her, in union with our Marianist Family. May we learn from Mary, and with her, how to think deeply, discern wisely, and act justly and courageously as a Family that proudly bears her name ».*²¹

Mary, perfect sign of unity and fraternity

Mary is the perfect sign of unity and universal fraternity.

*« For many Christians, this path of fraternity also has a Mother, named Mary. At the foot of the cross she received this universal maternity (Jn 19:26) and she is full of concern, not only for Jesus, but also for the rest of her children (Rev 12:17). Strengthened by the power of the Risen One, she wants to give birth to a new world where we will all be brothers and sisters, where there will be room for each of the outcasts of our societies, where justice and peace will shine forth.»*²²

*« We recognize the mission of Mary in the history of salvation. In Mary, God shows us a way to be present in the world. Sensitive to the needs of people, we want to follow her recommendation "Do whatever he tells you". »*²³

As the same document on the mission of the MLCs reminds us, the way we carry out our mission is inspired by Mary's attitudes : "listening to the Word, openness to the action of the Spirit which leads us to prophetic action, availability to the will of God, simplicity and fidelity in action. United with her in her Magnificat, we want to be witnesses in the world of God's preferential love for the poor."

The marian face of the Church is one of welcome, equality, participatory governance and dialogue. It is a Church that stands courageously in solidarity with the poor and oppressed. Mary represents for us lay marianists the essence and the way. Let us turn to her to ask for the grace of the audacity of interior displacement, the dynamism and the joy of meeting, of listening to the suffering heart. With her, let us be brothers and sisters of our humanity, which is divine.

¹⁹ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* - On fraternity and social friendship-, Bayard Editions-Name- Les éditions du Cerf, 2020, n°8

²⁰ Message of Pope Francis for the virtual meeting on the relaunch of global compact of education for an inclusive and responsible education against the culture of indifference, October 15th 2020

²¹ Isabella R. Moyer - *Being Marianist, being family*- Circular n°1, 2010

²² Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* - On fraternity and social friendship -, Bayard Editions-Name- Les éditions du Cerf, 2020, n°278

²³ *The mission in the MLC*- Llíria-Spain, 1997, 4.1

« Let us dream as one humanity, as travelers sharing the same human flesh, as children of the same earth that shelters us all, each with the richness of his or her faith or convictions, each with his or her own voice, **all brothers**. »²⁴

This is what Pope Francis' Encyclical inspired me for our fraternities today. Our International Documents are particularly relevant in the light of *Fratelli Tutti*. Let us not hesitate to return to these founding documents from our first International Meetings, as well as to the circulars of Isabella R. Moyer and Félix Arqueros, my predecessors, to find in them the formulation of our charism for today. All these documents tell us who we are and where we are going.

It is now time for me to take my leave. Thank you so much for reading. I hope I have convinced you "a little" that the fraternity... is meant for US, Marianist Lay Communities, TODAY.

I assure you of my affection and my prayer, wherever you are in the world, all of you, members of the Marianist Lay Communities, friends, and all of you, dear sisters and brothers of the Family.

May the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
be glorified in all places through the Immaculate Virgin Mary.
Amen



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²⁴Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* - On fraternity and social friendship -, Bayard Editions-Name- Les éditions du Cerf, 2020