

Helene Carion: What Is the Role of the Marianist Family in the Future of the Church and of Society?

[*Editor's note:* Helene, from Leon, France, wrote her essay as part of Marianists Write Now!, a NACMS-sponsored writing program held virtually from Friday, June 11 to Saturday, June 12, 2021. Each participant in this session of Marianists Write Now! wrote a personal reflection on the following question: "What is the role of the Marianist Family in the future of the Church and of society?"]

Difficult question! Just before sending us off to write, George Lisjak said: "Focus on the word *role*." But I thought, "*future* is important, too." *Future* is essential! In my "rebel heart," I sometimes ask myself if we really want a future as a family, the Marianist Family, or even believe in the future; it is a really despairing way of thinking because if we stop having faith, we simply die! So, it seems that it is a matter of life or death: no role, no future! In my more "faithful and trusting heart," I believe the Marianist Family has a lot to do now and in the future. And, as I belong to the Marianist Family, I will say "our role" and not "its role."

If we aim to have a role in the future of the Church and of society, we have to be involved in both, belong to them both, act within them both, and behave as members of them both. We should be grounded in reality, in the real world, eyes looking to the world and looking for God working inside it, listening to His call, all at the same time. We have to say "yes to all that is good," as Faustino would say, and to say this "yes" together as a family. We have to listen to the world and the Church, especially the most suffering and poorest parts of it.

Our role is to welcome with open arms anyone coming near us. We have to be acutely aware of everything surrounding us, pray a lot, and seeking help in Mary. We can follow her—let ourselves be formed by her, looking at her and walking in her steps—and become missionaries with her. Thanks to our different states of life and being in many places throughout the world, we can have many kinds of missions; we have to be creative and daring, showing solidarity. If we don't do it, who will? Somebody certainly will do something, but not in this Marian way, not as the Family of Mary we are. Should we act in a Marian manner, it would be good for everybody, everywhere. We have to be convinced that Jesus is the right way and be willing to share and spread this Good News. We have to be courageous, hardworking, and never give up that which we believe.

The question is not to do everything differently or new, no need for a violent revolution, but to see the world with fresh eyes, eyes of love, eyes of Mary. We, as a Family, really have a duty for optimism and hope. Together, we must believe and recognize that, despite all its shadows, this world is beautiful, a gift from God, and that there really is a future, a future in which any creature has its place. We have also to believe that the Church is a gift from God. As communities, we have to testify by our lives that faith is lovable, audible, attractive, and a sound and sure way!

As a family, we can't be a closed world or a closed community. We can't ignore the outside world, putting it far from us or at a "safe distance," not accepting to be disturbed by it. We do not choose our brothers and sisters; they are given to us, a gift no matter what. We live with them, and we may love them, despite things that may happen.

As a family, we have to admit that we are not perfect, but we have to try to be true, behave like a real family, humble and simple. We have to put faith in others, trust each other, and walk together. And we also have to trust ourselves, to be confident enough to act, to dare to speak, and to take part in the mission. We ought to be inspired by the adage, "They didn't know it was impossible; therefore, they did it!" No doubt our founders had many "highly intelligent and wise counselors" telling them it was impossible to achieve what they wanted to do. Fortunately, they listened to other and more inspired words, and . . . here we are!

We ought to put our divisions aside, to put an end to them even, and be able to forgive because how could we be a light in the world and try to make it better without forgiveness? We have to accept we are a real family, with its failures and sins, not a perfectly dreamed one. We experience joys and sorrows and have to live as any human community, faults and all. Principles and life must always be confronted in a constructive dialogue. New realities sometimes imply new ways of thinking, different decisions or actions, and talking with others can help us to think wisely and peacefully.

In the first Marianist lay communities, everyone had a mission, a small one at the beginning, and then a more important one, depending on the community's needs and the person's skills, but at all times, everyone had to be useful. Our mission in society and in the Church could be to find ways to make anyone useful for the community. Nobody should feel useless, ever, and it is up to us to ensure that that does not happen.

As in Cana, even if it does not make any sense, we can be filled with wonder when witnessing all the little or great miracles happening around us. Every day, we should notice all the good that is happening and give thanks for it. It is much easier to see grace in community because several will notice so much more than one alone. We must have faith in God, in the world, in the Church, in others, and in the future; our role could be to make that confidence loud and clear around us.

Our role is also to be little and simple hearts, conscious that we can only be drops of water, but acting with all the other drops of water, we can change the world. Being a family present on all continents, we can be many drops of water all over the world. Being a family present in many countries, we can learn from each other within our family, be informed of the state of our world and get to know our brothers and sisters better everywhere, get to understand different cultures and ways of life. It is a great richness that we could share around us.

Alone we can do little things, sometimes maybe striking things, but mostly on short-term issues. As a family, we can have a greater role and do much more, even if it has to be a little slower, on long-term missions in a sure and loving way, Mary's way!