

Common Rule of the Visitation Marianist State Community (VMSC)

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Explanation of 2012 Update

Since the COMMON RULE describes the faith and identity of a living community, occasional modification of the document is necessary. The Marianist State Community reviewed the COMMON RULE in 1990 and again in 2008 and we celebrate the fact that it continues to express and give meaning to our commitments and to challenge us to interpret and ponder the complex and varied realities of today's world. In 2012, after a process of discernment and reflection of over a year, the community selected a name. The name 'Visitation Marianist' has been inserted through the document in front of 'State Community'. A few paragraphs follow that express the rationale and moving of the Spirit concerning the selection of a name.

After forty-six years as the "Marianist State Community", why would we choose to adopt a new name? Some would respond, "Isn't a forty-six year old name a settled issue?" A valid point. Others might say, "Let's stay open to the possibility of re-naming because 'nothing is impossible with God'." The key to answering the question lies in response to the Spirit's promptings and a period of prayerful community discernment. Over the years, some members of the community experienced an unsettled feeling that our name needed to resonate more with our identity and distinguish us from other State communities. After an extended process of prayer and dialogue among community members, on April 27, 2012, we chose *Visitation Marianist State Community* as our new name. So why did we choose "Visitation"?

As Marianists we are called to embody the spirit of Jesus and Mary. The story of the Visitation encapsulates the requisites of that call. Once Mary consented and received Jesus into her life, she followed an urgent prompting to share the Good News. Luke tells us Mary "went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country" (Lk 1:39) to visit her cousin, Elizabeth, a woman who was not only barren but also "getting on in years". Both women experienced miracles in their lives in that each was pregnant for, indeed, nothing was impossible with God. Mary and Jesus were received with joy by both Elizabeth and John the Baptist. Mary responded with her deeply meaningful and powerful *Magnificat* that describes her spirit--of gratitude and challenge, humility and strength, steadfastness and risk-taking--dispositions which we aspire to embody.

Elements of the Visitation that resonate with us include paying attention to internal promptings of the Spirit, bearing the Good News in mission to others, welcoming visits joyfully, providing hospitality, bridging generations, honoring and connecting with family, forming community, giving service, mentoring younger ones, and lifting up the lowly in justice.

As the community "gets on in years", we can identify with an Elizabeth who heartily welcomed Mary and Jesus into her home. As Marianist Family, we honor their relationship and give witness to the power of community. By living the elements mentioned above, we echo Mary's "yes" and join in her mission of bearing Jesus wherever called. As the Visitation Marianist State Community (VMSC) we expect miracles of fruitful change along the way as we work together to uplift the people of God in a more just and peaceful world--for nothing is impossible with God.

Linda Zappacosta, August 31, 2012

The name of the Office of Recruitment has been changed to better reflect the actual role and is now called the Office of Outreach/Hospitality.

We affirm our intention to revise this document as we see ways to express our mission more fully.

COMMON RULE OF THE VISITATION MARIANIST STATE COMMUNITY¹

INTRODUCTION

1. Blessed William Joseph Chaminade believed that those persons he drew together in a spirituality and mission based on Mary's role in the Church would "prove that the Gospel, in all its depth, is as practicable today as it was in the early Church."² Religious life was for Blessed Chaminade a radical embodiment of the evangelical counsels. The lay groups he formed, as well as the ones which continue his vision today, have a special concern in seeing that the Gospel is embodied everywhere and in all aspects of life. The Marianist Family, then, is made up of numerous lay communities (and sometimes individuals) and the religious institutes (the Society of Mary and the Daughters of Mary Immaculate).
2. After more than fifty years of development we have come to believe that the founding of the Marianist Family was an act inspired by the Holy Spirit. The principal animators of the Marianist Family were Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, Blessed Mother Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon, and Venerable Marie Thérèse de Lamourous. Their collaborative work was inspired by the vision of the early Church gathered together, inspired by the Spirit, with Mary in their midst. Their fruitful work mirrored the communal spirit of the early Church and is a sign for us of not only our lived baptismal commitment but also the life of the Trinity. Together they undertook the call to be in a state of permanent mission, bringing Christ to all in a spirit of Marianist discipleship and devotion.
3. One of the unique vocations within the Marianist Family is what Fr. Chaminade called the State of Religious Living in the World. Our COMMON RULE flows from our recognition of the State as a vocation, a call from God, and provides a framework within which this vocation might be most fully lived today. Today, we describe it as a commitment to live a vocation dedicated to prayer and our relationship with the Divine, a vocation devoted to the needs of our fellow human beings and the planet we share.
4. Nonetheless, it is important to see all that follows within the context of a continuing search for the meaning of our vocation. It is a search for God as we have been called to follow God. We must remember that our vocation, our call, is, like any vocation, also a mystery and thus something that we ourselves will never be able to completely define. "A mystery is a reality we can never fully put into concepts or word. We can never fully understand it, we can never see all of it at once. The only way we can possess a mystery is by living it."³

¹ 1979, as adapted from 1972 position paper; edited 1990, 2008, 2012, 2013, 2019

² Fr. Chaminade to Fr. Noailles, February 15, 1826, *Letters*, Vol. 2, No. 388.

³ Rev. Quentin Hakenewerth, SM, *Mary in Modern Spirituality*, St. Louis, Maryhurst Press, 1967, p. 27.

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5. The COMMON RULE should not be seen, therefore, as the definitive, unchanging statement of what it means to be a member of the State. It is not intended to be a constitution, but rather should be read as an expression or description of the State. This expression will certainly evolve as we all grow and mature in our understanding of this vocation.
6. The COMMON RULE is divided into two main sections. Part I identifies and describes those aspects of a State commitment that are at its very foundations. It reflects the long process of establishing the basic elements of a State commitment in our present circumstances. Part II presents some ways in which we can assist one another in living out this commitment in the VMSC.

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PART I: THE STATE AS A VOCATIONAL CHOICE

7. There is a good deal of anxiety and uncertainty today regarding what specifically is involved in the choice to commit oneself to a person, mission, or ideal. Those who have made a commitment in the State are not immune to these feelings of tenuousness and doubt. This is particularly true since we are all in different local communities and life situations. The important thing is that we seek out the unity in our diversity, discern growthful patterns within rapidly changing conditions, and work with the tensions caused by our binding commitment in a society that allows little permanency. All these—the differences, the changes, the tensions—demand that we accept a certain amount of ambiguity. If we are to keep from being immobilized by this ambiguity, we must delve into the basics, the essential elements of our commitment.
8. First, and ultimately, our commitment is to God, our Creator, through Jesus, the Christ, in the Spirit. As a community, we seek to embody St. Paul's words: "There is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit; there are all sorts of service to be done, but always to the same Lord; working in all sorts of different ways in different people, it is the same God who is working in all of them."⁴ We have been called to be among the People of God; we see ourselves as members of the body of Christ: "Just as a human body, though it is made up of many parts, is a single unit because of these parts, though many, make one body, so it is with Christ."⁵
9. Secondly, we have chosen to emphasize in our life of following Jesus, the Christ, the role of Mary—to learn from her how we are to become closer to her Son. We are committed, then, to personally grow in faith within the community of those dedicated to Mary: The Marianist Family.
10. Thirdly, as members of the VMSC, we are religious persons who live in the world.
11. We are spiritual persons. We are vowed laity. As such we direct our lives and actions toward calling forth in those we touch an awareness of the spiritual reality that grounds our existence. Ours is a mission to form faith-filled people and faithful communities. We seek to assist others as they search for the deeper meaning of their lives, for the meaning of God in their lives. So, too, in our personal lives we strive to make all our decisions in light of how they could further our growth in faith. We consider it essential to make decisions such as those concerning our life directions—whether to marry, choice of career, place of residence—based on how they will affect our growth toward union with God and to the Marianist Family.
12. In particular, we try to better appreciate and use our possessions, time, and money. In this concern for a simpler lifestyle, we emulate Mary, who was willing to let go of whatever was necessary to help her Son build the Reign of God. Examples in Mary's life include: her pregnancy before marriage and the shame both she and her fiancé endured, fleeing with Joseph and Jesus to Egypt to ensure her Son's safety, encouraging her Son into mission in a dangerous world (Cana), standing with her Son at the foot of

⁴ I Corinthians 12:4-7.

⁵ I Corinthians 12: 12-13.

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the Cross, and helping to birth the new community at Pentecost. Emulating the Woman of Nazareth is, for many, a virtue that is part of their VMSC commitment and, for some, a movement toward living simply in a sustainable lifestyle.

13. We live in the world. We do not seek to separate ourselves from the world. We do not minister solely to the spiritual needs of people. Rather we work very much in the milieu of the secular. We are confronted by the same pulls of the secular world as all people. We have jobs, families, secular concerns. We are very much immersed in the reality of the world. We choose to work through our specifically secular lifestyles to create a just social order and to bring people to God.
14. We see the world and all that God created as good and graced. Where else would we live but in the world? God's good creation and all the living creatures in the world are graced with dignity and worthiness. Our call to live in the world is also a call to respond to God's call and Mary's example to work for justice for all God's people and to preserve and protect the integrity of God's good creation. Thus we are committed to our own ongoing conversion as we accept Mary's mission to "do whatever he tells you."
15. To be true to our vocation, therefore, involves a very delicate balance, a tension, between living in the world and working in the milieu of the world while maintaining a specific spiritual direction in our lives. It is this tension that we embrace when we choose the State as a vocation.
16. As Fr. Chaminade urged the first members of Marianist lay communities (sodalists) to look at the signs of the times in determining mission, it is with an open heart that we look at our COMMON RULE through signs of our times. There is no way any one of us can begin to get a real handle on the influences of our culture, but together as community, we try to develop language in keeping with our faith as we interact within the world. That language forms our imaginations, forms our words, forms our actions. Given our common language, our common rule influences our actions and prayer. It is ultimately the legacy we hand down to future Marianists to build upon. Truly, we are compelled to try to keep our vision fresh and our mission timely. In the words of Fr. David Fleming, SM, "What seems essential is a common missionary vision to motivate and structure deeper communities of people who find the courage and feel empowered to organize themselves and take initiative."⁶

Vow

17. Making a vow to God in the spirit of Mary is an essential part of making a commitment in the VMSC. Our hope is that Mary's spirit of faithfulness, hope, and prayerfulness will permeate our lives. Our vow is an enduring one of Stability, taken in common, and personalized yearly to each individual's unique life situation. By making this vow, we promise fidelity to our calling within the Marianist Family and express our determination to nurture the growth of the Marianist Family. This commitment may be lived out within

⁶ Fleming, S.M., David, *A New Fulcrum: Marianist Horizons Today*, Dayton, NACMS, 2014, p. 194.

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a local Marianist faith and/or State community; demonstrated through our life's work, prayer, family, in building community; or in faith and justice work in our local situation.

18. We see our vow as a call to abiding commitment to God, to one another, and to a world in need of transformation. Our vow encourages us to work for justice and the integrity of creation, to work in the market place and to embrace and build upon the Marianist values of discipleship of equals, faith of the heart, mission, reverence for Mary, hospitality, inclusivity, and compassion. In reality, our vow celebrates God's faithfulness to each of us and gives witness to the outflowing compassion of God and Mary's love of her son. Our vow is an amplification of our own baptismal promises and speaks to our formation in and through Mary as we seek to accept our call to "do whatever he tells you."

Prayer

19. Growth in faith does not happen by chance. We actively seek to discern the action of the Spirit in our daily lives. We seek to deepen our relationship with God in an intentional way. We yearn to pray without ceasing and to develop a direction and consistency to our prayer. Regular, personal, private prayer, as well as spontaneous prayer, help us to see our work and mission as important ways of encountering God, and help us more consciously consecrate the whole of our lives to the Creator. Times to be alone and quiet with the Lord, times to seek God through community, times to let God come unexpectedly—all are essential.
20. We deeply value the communal prayer life of our community, especially when we are gathered for retreats. Of special importance to us is the Three O'clock prayer, of which there are many versions, including the VMSC version that follows. This prayer is an expression of solidarity with the Marianist Family.

Three O'clock Prayer

We pause in a busy day to stop the busyness,
to remember that your great work, Jesus, frees us from fear of death
and brings us in a Person, an incarnated, visible sign of the Creator's love for us.
We stand at the foot of the cross in solidarity with you, Mary, and John,
and all in the Marianist Family, as we endeavor to further your mission.
We strive to

- be faithful to prayer daily
- form persons and communities of faith
- advance justice, compassion and reconciliation
- align ourselves with the poor, and
- respect the integrity of creation.

From deep within our hearts, we thank you.
May the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit
Be glorified in all places
Through the Immaculate Virgin Mary. Amen

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Rule of Life

21. We commit to regularly evaluate the direction of our lives, our activities, and our practices. Are they consistent with the beliefs we profess? Are our present involvements still the best way of living our commitment in the Marianist Family or should we redirect our energies? Are the things we are doing working or should we try another tack? We commit ourselves to regular prayer and reflection and attempt to understand the direction and rhythms of our lives so that we might live out this vocation of vowed laity. In short, we are called to develop a rule of life.
22. Historically, a rule of life has been viewed as a specific set of routines or practices by which an individual gives his or her life over more completely to God. A rule of life might also be thought of as the practice of those elements that define who we are as vowed laity. A rule might include common Christian practices such as prayer, spiritual direction, evaluation of our life's direction in light of our vow and beliefs, times for listening to the Spirit, as well as regular reflection about how we use our gifts and talents for good. For many, it includes the study of the Marianist vision and heritage or accepting responsibilities within local, regional, or national communities. Commitment to attendance at retreats and programs of the VMSC should be considered.
23. We intentionally reflect and challenge one another to use our gifts and talents for good.
24. Spiritual direction, where possible, is an important aid in living our Marianist commitment. We affirm the value that another person can be in assisting us to interpret the action of the Spirit in our lives.
25. As a community, we have come to realize how important our relationships with the Earth are. We recognize and respect our profound relationship to all living things, and with the land, water, and air on which all living things depend. We embrace the call for justice and integrity of creation as affirmed by *Laudato Si*.
26. We seek to partner with other people of good will and welcome them as companions on our journey.

Community

27. Much of what has been said, however, reflects only on our growth in faith as individuals. It is also necessary to recognize the communitarian nature of our vocation. As stated by the Vatican Council in *Lumen Gentium*, God has chosen to make men and women holy and to save them not merely as individuals but by making them into a single people who acknowledge and serve God in truth and holiness.⁷
28. The charism of the Marianist Family has always included commitment to initiating, living in, and developing Christian community. Community is essential because of our own and other's imperfections. We are incomplete in ourselves and thus the diversity which

⁷ *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), Chapter 11, #9.

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marks our activities and personalities only serves to emphasize the need to use this diversity as one of our greatest strengths. Our incompleteness demands our dependence on others. We recognize the Spirit in each other and are committed to bringing the presence of the Spirit to each other. This includes sharing with one another the means we find for listening to the Spirit. Also we acknowledge our personal needs for support and nourishment and minister to these as well as our spiritual needs in order to revitalize our energies to serve God. Thus, most are led to build local communities. Since no local community is complete in itself, we join together with people in other cities who are pursuing the same commitments in other situations.

Mission

29. We understand our mission as one of service and faithfulness to the Marianist Family, which usually means involvement in community-building. It is not easy, however, to build lay communities or Christian communities these days. Being a member of a Marianist lay community is itself a vocation and certainly all will not choose it. We build the Marianist Family in a variety of ways because there is no single way of drawing others to Marianist lay communities, a style of Christian community we have known and seek to share with others.
30. As Marianists, we are called by God, formed by Mary, and sent in mission to bring Jesus into the world. Our zeal for Mary's mission calls us to an interdependence with others to develop human values or work toward changing societal evils before presuming to draw them into a conscious relationship with Christ. At the same time, we view such involvement itself as an important way of building the Reign of God now. For we seek to lead all to the fullness of Christ, all the while recognizing that our efforts at building a just and human social order in fact make Christ more fully present today in our world.
31. Some within the VMSC build the Marianist Family very directly by accepting leadership responsibilities within existing local, regional, national, or international groups, working internally to nurture and sustain these groups. Others may live for a time without benefit of a local community because of study, work, or life circumstances. We endeavor to support all in building the Marianist Family and communities.
32. In reflecting on our mission of building lay communities within the Marianist Family, it is significant to remember that God loves all people. Somehow God touches everyone with presence and love. Since a relationship with God and faith are deeply personal, they are also profoundly individual. It is our calling as Christians to respect God's work. While God has commissioned us to do this work, it is easy to become over-zealous and put ourselves in the place of God's will or despair over people not understanding community or Marianist lay communities. In short, we in the VMSC, regardless of how we have chosen to build the Marianist Family, must always remember that our attempts to draw others to God require sensitivity and flexibility in order to respect each person's life with God.
33. As vowed laity in the Visitation Marianist State Community, our community has come to understand that it is important to focus our attention in some specific ways.

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- We recognize we are one in mission with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and thus accept our responsibility in the unfolding of divine creation.
- We recognize we are profoundly linked to Marianists, now, in the past, and in the future. Through a unique charism, we are formed in Marianist spirituality and the thoughts of Blessed Chaminade, Blessed Adèle and Venerable Marie Thérèse.
- We are committed to prayer and discourse in its many forms and practices, staying intentional about our vocation.
- We are committed to restore compassion to the center of morality and religion, calling us always to treat others as we wish to be treated ourselves.
- We work closely with Marianist institutions in our local communities and around the world to spread the Marianist charism.
- We are open to the wisdom of other religious traditions, recognizing and often participating in the life giving nature of other faith traditions.
- We seek and work toward justice in the work place, church, civic, and family settings adding to the quality of life in all situations, for all people.
- We work closely with institutions not specifically associated with a faith tradition to help carry the work of justice forward.
- We have come to realize that the earth itself is a primary revelation of God's unfolding love, and we realize in profound ways that the cosmos itself participates in the paschal mystery of Christ.

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PART II: THE MEANS TO REALIZE OUR VOCATION

34. To provide a structure for the VMSC beyond the local level is a response to the practical situation in which we find ourselves. That is, if we are to work out the identity and meaning of our State vocation, we are going to have to do it together, finding ways to assist one another in working and living it out. We must recognize the difficulties of physical separation and all that it involves. We recognize that those with commitments to Blessed Chaminade's "State of Religious Living in the World" can be found across North America and around the world. We hope for the day when State members from every culture and geographic region will gather together to celebrate our common Marianist heritage.

Retreats

35. The gatherings of the VMSC are holy times, times when we come together to reflect on how we have been living as vowed laity. The fact that people from various parts of the country gather helps give a new perspective to our own work. It provides renewal of our commitment and refreshes us with new creative ideas. Others not in our local situation cannot usually work problems through with us or lend constant support or follow-up, but their presence is stimulating to us because of our diversity. The gatherings and the structures we set up should help us to appreciate and grow from our diverse approaches to the State commitment. Our diversity thus becomes a source of nourishment. We strictly establish the majority of time spent together as a retreat and limit business at each retreat. The content of retreats is planned and implemented primarily by the Head of Spiritual Life, with the assistance of the Steering Committee. These persons often ask others to prepare prayer, liturgies, or presentations.

Steering Committee

36. We recognize that most members of the Visitation Marianist State Community will direct their energies to their local situations, but we ask some persons to also take responsibility to oversee and provide direction for the VMSC. A Steering Committee discerns the needs and concerns of our Community to determine appropriate activities for gatherings, and to direct the acquisition and distribution of resources. The Steering Committee also recommends policy and procedure changes to the VMSC for review and approval. We expect the Steering Committee to keep Marianist heritage and spirituality before us and ask one or more offices to maintain ties with other Marianist Family groups.

37. At this time the Steering Committee positions include a Coordinator, Heads of Spiritual Life, Outreach/Hospitality, and Instruction, and a Community Companion. We believe that the Spirit works with and through these individuals. We ask Steering Committee members to stay in close communication with all members of the Visitation Marianist State Community both electronically and by phone. Through this contact, we ask the

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Steering Committee to assess common problems, interests, and needs within the VMSC. It is our understanding that we hold each other accountable to our commitment to the COMMON RULE. The specific tasks of each office, as well as the election process and terms of office are outlined in our POLICIES AND PROCEDURES document.

Membership

38. We define membership in the VMSC as those lay persons who have taken the vow described in Part I, paragraph 17, of this COMMON RULE, who have expressed a willingness to embrace and work out in their lives the elements and the spirit of the COMMON RULE, and who attend our retreats. We acknowledge our responsibility to grow and recruit. Therefore, we invite to our retreats persons who are familiar with the State vocation and who may be interested in membership in our VMSC. We ask these individuals to discuss membership with the Head of Outreach/Hospitality. We realize that each new person entering the VMSC will bring new ideas and concerns and the Community will be challenged to grow by these ideas and concerns.
39. The process of discernment which includes the community offering feedback when appropriate about an individual's readiness to join, will be designed by the head of outreach and hospitality.

Other Activities

40. In between the gatherings of our VMSC, we provide support to one another in limited realistic ways. Again, we recognize the limitations of geography and the necessity to work primarily in our local situations. Some ways of sharing make use of current technologies (i.e. the internet, audio and video conferencing), as well as circulate taped lectures, literature, booklists, meditations, etc. The Head of Instruction usually facilitates these formal communications. It has been one of our strengths that there has always been much informal communication and exchange among VMSC members in different cities.

Revision of this Document

41. Finally, we reiterate an earlier statement that we expect this RULE to be altered or amended as we mature and grow individually and as a community. The Steering Committee is charged with deciding when revision is needed and indicating procedures to do so.

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Vow Statement of the Visitation Marianist State Community

42. The vow of Stability in the tradition of the Marianist charism is an immersion into the mystery of our Marianist Family vocation. The vow expresses the Marian implications for Christian life that we seek to live out.
43. The vow challenges members to deeper and broader commitment and the community rejoices in the variety of ways in which the vow is expressed. It respects the gifts and callings of those who come to the VMSC and has both individual and communal dimensions.
44. The meaning of the vow is growing and emerging and cannot be expressed once and for all time.
45. The vow is a sacramental celebration of God's call and sustaining faithfulness. It symbolizes the life and experience the members have shared together and the hope for future life together.
46. The strength and source of the vow is God's faithfulness to the VMSC and to its members. The vow embraces concrete demands and responsibilities for building the Reign of God and may be lived out in a variety of lifestyles.
47. The vow reflects bonds of faith, vision, spirituality, and friendship among the members.
48. The community values all members equally.
49. The vow is a covenant that transcends categories of time and measurability.
50. The vow expresses an enduring, ordinarily lifelong, commitment for all who take it.
51. The members of the Visitation Marianist State Community reaffirm their vow annually to aid in recalling important values and in maintaining a perspective of faith.
52. The vow, taken publicly and reaffirmed periodically, defines membership in the VMSC.

Vow Statement, written November 7, 1982, revised November 27, 2019

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53. Vow Prayer of the Visitation Marianist State Community

Loving God, who exists in mystery and community,
who is the first and shall be with the last,
you give strength to the powerless,
freedom to the oppressed,
and shelter to the poor.
You call us into the wilderness
to live as your sons and daughters
and to be formed as your people.
We are bound together by your faithful care
and our common hope and love.

We will respond to your call
as did our brother Jesus Christ.
He is a road in our wilderness,
water in our desert,
and a light in our darkness.
Christ's mother Mary is our model
of stability, of commitment.
We join with the entire Marianist Family
in seeking to live
in faith despite uncertainty,
in hope despite evil,
in pondering despite distraction,
and in service despite fear.

Your Spirit has breathed life into creation and
guided your people to a New Land.
She has proclaimed Christ to the world
and inspired our disciples.
Send her to guide us so that
we may see your Reign
and live out our promises
in our own lives
and in this community
especially during the coming year
and for years to come.

Amen.

Vow Prayer, written 1985

Steering Committee

54. The Steering Committee has ultimate responsibility for the direction and decisions made within the Visitation Marianist State Community. It has the responsibility and discretion to:
1. determine which issues need to be considered by the entire VMSC and which issues can be handled by the Steering Committee;
 2. work through sufficiently and clarify issues that are to be presented to the entire Community so that in most cases decisions can be made at one general meeting. Steering Committee decisions are subject to review by the entire VMSC.
 3. review the COMMON RULE periodically and set up methods to revise or amend it as such action seems needed.
55. The above mentioned decision-making role of the Steering Committee requires that it maintain fairly close contact with VMSC members in order to be sensitive to what issues need to be dealt with and whether the Steering Committee or the entire Community should consider and resolve these issues. VMSC members must also be willing to see certain questions through to their resolution when being considered by the entire VMSC.

56. Composition of the Steering Committee

Coordinator
Head of Spiritual Life
Head of Outreach/Hospitality
Head of Instruction
Community Companion (member of the Society of Mary, Daughters of Mary Immaculate, or Marianist layperson, non-voting)

57. Election of Steering Committee Members

58. Steering Committee members should be elected on the basis of who can best fulfill, in terms of time and talent, the responsibilities of the Steering Committee and the individual office.
59. Steering Committee elections are held on a 3-year cycle. The Coordinator and Head of Outreach/Hospitality are elected the same year; the Heads of Spiritual Life and Instruction are elected the next year. Terms of service for all positions is 3 years, with no elections held in the third year.
60. All members of the Visitation Marianist State Community are eligible for each office unless after serious reflection they disqualify themselves.
61. The process and procedures to be followed to determine two candidates for each election begin 3 months before the fall retreat.
- 1 month to discern your own availability
 - 1 month to nominate self or another

- Everyone is invited to nominate a candidate
- A description of why you chose a person should be included
- A deadline to submit nominations will be provided
- The members with two or three highest number of votes for each office will be the nominees
- Those members will be contacted and asked to discern if they accept the call to serve the community. If they discern that they cannot accept the call at this time, the persons with the next highest number of votes will be contacted.
- 1 month to vote
 - Once nominees have been selected, each community member votes via e-mail to a neutral independent person to assure confidentiality
 - Person receiving the most votes will be commissioned at the following retreat

62. Each office may be held for two consecutive three-year terms. If an officer is open to running a second term, it is assumed he/she is already nominated.

Responsibilities of the Steering Committee Members

63. Steering Committee Coordinator

- conducts all meetings of the VMSC;
- convenes and chairs meetings of the Steering Committee;
- maintains communications within the Community by regular reports to the members;
- encourages cohesiveness and unity within the VMSC through informal contacts with members;
- acts as the formal representative of the Community to those outside the community;
- seeks ways to foster sharing and interdependence with other branches of the Marianist Family.

64. Head of Instruction

- assists members and the Community as a body in relating the current situation of the culture and of the Church to our efforts in evangelization and personal development;
- assists members and the Community as a body in looking at what the Church and the Marianist Family are being called to at the present time;
- shares, with the Community Companion, the responsibility to maintain awareness within the VMSC of our Marianist heritage.

65. Head of Spiritual Life

- coordinates the semi-annual retreats;
- selects pertinent themes for the retreats which reflect the needs of members;
- is responsible for the ongoing development of the VMSC vow, its ceremony, and meaning;
- assists members in developing a rule of life through providing adequate retreat time and resources;

- provides spiritual development resources for members.

66. Head of Outreach/Hospitality

- coordinates the movement of new members into the VMSC by keeping in touch with the recruiter, informing the Steering Committee of new persons expected at upcoming retreats, and by taking whatever steps necessary to increase the welcome of new members;
- develops appropriate policies regarding membership;
- provides instruction to members regarding inviting new people into the Visitation Marianist State Community,
- develops and produces, in conjunction with the head of Spiritual Life, ceremonies and practices appropriate to the admission of new members;
- conducts appropriate communications regarding outreach/hospitality to similar communities within the Marianist Family.

67. Community Companion

- provides assistance in planning the retreats;
- maintains an awareness within the Community of our Marianist heritage;
- calls members' attention to the resources within the Marianist Family.

See Appendices B and C for the summary of responsibilities for and process for selection of the Community Companion.

Community Membership

68. Visitation Marianist State Community members are those who have taken the vow described in the COMMON RULE and expressed a willingness to work out and embrace the elements and spirit of the COMMON RULE. VMSC members also attend the semi-annual retreats.

Recruitment

69. Guidelines for recruitment include:

1. An outward direction and attentiveness to God's activity outside this Community or local and regional communities;
2. Recruitment to the Community and its mission, with the understanding that each new member, through his or her faith, will in some way re-form in part our Community and mission;
3. Ongoing attention with the VMSC to the recognized internal obstacles to recruitment, particularly aimed at breaking down any cliquishness that might exist.

70. Procedures for the admission of new members:

1. Prospective members should only be introduced to the Visitation Marianist State Community after having some acquaintance with the State vocation.

- A VMSC member working with a prospective member should establish contact with the Head of Outreach/Hospitality to have an initial conversation/review of status and interest
 - Head of Outreach/Hospitality sends new person the VMSC welcome booklet
 - Head of Outreach/Hospitality assigns a mentor/contact member from the VMSC
2. New person must attend at least two VMSC retreats for an experience of the community. When prospective members attend their first retreat, the vow should not be taken. At that retreat, the VMSC should acknowledge the prospective member by welcoming him or her at the beginning of the retreat and exchanging introductions.
 3. New person is encouraged to seek out additional Marianist resources, especially the on-line courses (the VMSC may offer to pay for the courses.)
 4. Mentor and new member have final conversations with the head of Outreach/Hospitality
 5. New member and head of Outreach/Hospitality mutually agree to proceed with taking the vow at the next VMSC retreat.

Vow of Stability

71. Visitation Marianist State Community members renew the vow publicly once a year at the fall retreat with celebration and solemnity.
72. As a community, the following principles regarding the vow ceremony are followed:
 1. Eucharistic – The vow in its most profound sense is an amplification of our baptismal commitments. Since the Eucharist is the place where we celebrate our baptism into Christ, it makes sense to have our vow ceremony within the Eucharistic celebration.
 2. Response to the Word of God – Our vow is a response to the Word. Our call to faith is a response to a word spoken to us by our Creator; our faith is fostered and supported through the collective words of the community, both verbal and non-verbal. We know that in the Eucharist there is an intimate connection between the Word and the Eucharistic celebration—so intimate that the Constitution on the Liturgy states that the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist cannot be separated either in time or place. Thus, the vow would naturally take place after, or in place of, the homily.
 3. Expression of group identity:
 - a. lighting of individual candles from the central candle;
 - b. singing of the Magnificat or other Marian song;
 - c. reciting together the Vow Prayer of the Visitation Marianist State Community.
 4. Statement of Vow – A certain flexibility should be maintained to allow for individual expression. Since there is a common sense that the vow expresses an intention of perseverance or stability in regard to the Marianist Family, simple statements such as “Loving God, I commit myself to you in the spirit of Mary . . . ” or a prayer expressing the

same sentiment to which the community responds 'Amen' seem to be the most normal expressions.

Retreats

73. Retreats are held semi-annually (Spring and Fall) with the Head of Spiritual Life being responsible for their planning. In order to emphasize the retreat aspect, we limit our business discussions to a couple hours at the end of Retreat. The vow is renewed only once a year at the fall retreat.

Visitations

74. If a member is temporarily or permanently unable to attend retreats because of finances, distance, or unusual circumstances, the opportunity to participate remotely via audio or video conferencing is suggested. If for some reason remote participation is not viable, the following practices might be considered:
 1. The Visitation Marianist State Community will reimburse members for travel expenses, if they are for some reason unable to afford these.
 2. When a member is temporarily unable to attend retreats regularly, a member of VMSC will assume responsibility for maintaining contact with that person via phone, email, videoconference, etc. Such a liaison should begin only after the Steering Committee has approached the individual to see if he or she feels the need for such contact, how contact could best be handled, who would be the best contact person, etc.
 3. Within the context of Item 2, the VMSC is willing, if necessary, to reimburse travel expenses for periodic visits between the two people.

Finances

75. One member of the VMSC with financial expertise serves as treasurer, handles money matters, and reports to both the Steering Committee and the VMSC. The report includes a financial accounting of the past year, a projected budget for the coming year, and a suggested level of contribution during the coming year. The treasurer is in charge of the VMSC checking account. A second VMSC member has signature authority on the account and is familiar with transactions in case the treasurer is temporarily unable to carry out the duties.
76. Each member of the Community is asked to make an annual contribution. At the present time, the suggested level of contributions is 1.25% of gross income, with no additional charge for attendance at semi-annual retreats.

Visitation Marianist State Community Seed Grants

77. An expression of our commitment to "do whatever he tells you" in support of Mary's mission to respond to the needs of the world, we choose to put some of the resources with which we have been blessed at the service of others. We are particularly committed to enabling small communities and fledgling service projects to thrive, to respond to the genuine needs of the young and the poor, and to engage in the struggle for peace and justice.
78. The Visitation Marianist State Community will award grants in December each year to groups or ministries within the United States. The proposed projects will be submitted for consideration by a Marianist Community member as either ministries they participate with directly or support.
79. Proposals are accepted for programs or projects in **four categories:**
 - A. Strengthen Marianist Lay Communities and Network
 - B. Assist in building the Catholic Church
 - C. Impact the faith and involvement of young adults in the church
 - D. Social justice including
 - a. Economic Justice
 - b. Environmental Justice
 - c. Human Rights

Travel Reimbursement

80. Should the Steering Committee members be required to travel on VMSC business they will be reimbursed for their travel expenses on the basis of the prevailing IRS business rate for mileage for auto travel and full cost (economy rate) for public transportation.
81. Retreat resource people will be paid travel expenses on the same basis as for Steering Committee members. Because of the tradition of service among members of the Marianist Family, a stipend will not be provided to Marianist Family members who serve as resource people, however all housing expenses will be provided. External resource persons will be offered a reasonable honorarium and coverage of all housing expenses.

Appendix A: VMSC Community Companion – Summary of Responsibilities

January 2015

The Visitation Marianist State Community, as has been its tradition, asks someone from the Marianist Family to journey with us as a Community Companion. The expectations for the Community Companion are to:

- Walk with the community as a partner, sharing in our journey equally, and giving us a different perspective as we draw from our common Marianist tradition and spirituality.
- Use his or her vision, skills, and experiences to challenge us for the future, especially as we read the signs of the times.
- Be a good and patient listener who can be detached from conversations, and who knows when to speak, when to advise, and when to be silent.
- Have experience with, or be a member of, a Marianist Lay Community. The person may be lay or vowed religious.
- Join the community at our twice-yearly retreats.
- Join the VMSC Steering Committee (composed of the coordinator and heads of spiritual life, hospitality and education) in planning meetings or phone calls, as invited. (A phone call to review the retreat activities often occurs soon after the retreat.)
- Agree to be in the position for a three-year term, after which time the VMSC and the Companion may agree upon another term.

Appendix B: VMSC Community Companion – Selection process

Approved February 2015

1. The Steering Committee invites all Community members to nominate persons to be the Community Companion. Nominations are sent to the Coordinator. Nominations should include a brief description of the reason for the nomination and contact information for the nominee.
2. The Coordinator sends a list of nominees to VMSC members along with the reasons they were nominated.
3. The Community uses the list of candidates at the next retreat for discussion and selection of up to three nominees, in priority order, who are acceptable to the Community.
4. The Coordinator contacts the nominees, in priority order, describing the responsibilities and ascertaining if they are willing to serve. The first one to accept the position becomes the Community Companion.
5. The Coordinator is responsible for orienting the Community Companion before the Companion's first retreat with VMSC.