Mission & Charism: *Reimagining the Dream*, a Marianist Missionary Narrative for the Twenty-First Century

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Introductory Overview

As Marianists in the United States take stock these days of our contemporary situation and our future prospects, we hear calls for the development of a "common missionary vision" or "new missionary narrative" for the years ahead. *Mission & Charism* offers itself as a contribution for this developing conversation among us.

The focus on the *missionary* is key. For that purpose, I begin by seeking a clarification of the terms and relations between Marianist mission and Marianist charism. While deeply related to each other, one is not the other. Reference to Marianist charism these days, however, functions all too often in such an all-encompassing way that it tends to shroud our foundational Marianist mission. The paper calls for mission and charism to be treated as in a dynamic polarity. Addressing one pole calls for speaking of the other.

Taken in the context of developing a contemporary Marianist missionary narrative for the twenty-first century, the role of mission is to the fore. I focus initially on the role of missionary apostolic in the mind of Father Chaminade, and on the establishment and promotion of the Sodality as the embodiment of his foundational missionary enterprise upon his return to France from exile in Saragossa. Expressed in contemporary terms, I understand that the foundational Marianist mission is the multiplication of communities of faith in mission. For its part, Marianist charism is taken to refer to the animating heart of the mission, the mystery of Mary and our alliance with her mission of forming the Church ever more fully into the body of Christ given for the sake of the world.

The paper ultimately proposes to contribute to a missionary narrative for our time by advancing a particular proposal: the promotion of the Marianist mission, understood as the multiplication of communities of faith in mission, in the context of promoting a small church community vision for the American parish today.

We speak today of *Reimagining the Dream.* On the way to developing a missionary narrative for today, I begin by recalling the Founder's dream, how it was both realized and sidelined in the unfolding of the early Marianist narrative. I focus on the emergence and development of the Sodality, on its ups and downs in the revolutionary period, the eventual formation of the Society of Mary and its intended primary role as the ongoing guarantor of the Sodality. The emergence of work in schools, promoted by the Founder as a privileged means of evangelization in a secularistic age is acknowledged, along with notice taken of the gradual overshadowing, indeed the virtual replacement, of Chaminade's foundational mission, a narrowing of which he resisted until his death.

From there I turn attention to the coming of European Marianists to the United States in 1849 and their bringing with them their experience as teachers and specialists in primary education. This "work" is what characterized Marianist presence in this country for about a hundred years until our transition to secondary education in about the middle of the twentieth century.

After so many years of our involvement as teachers in schools, in a time of aging and decreasing numbers, a time of acute diminishment, we find ourselves looking inward to reaffirm who we are and looking outward to see what the signs of the times are calling us to be about. This discernment calls us, I believe, to reconnect ever more deeply to our foundational mission.

To that end, I consider the gradual recovery of the Founder's original vision, the initial reemergence of the high school sodality and the eventual development of Marianist Lay Communities. Reflection on MLCs leads to a call for a heightened sense of the fundamentally ecclesial character of both MLCs and the Society of Mary itself, as the foundation for calling for the cultivation of a collaborative kenotic disposition on the part of the Marianist branches in promoting a small church community vision for the American parish.

The paper then identifies and addresses the multiple hesitations that often surface about Marianist involvement in parish ministry. Having addressed these hesitations, I acknowledge that while it is not the job of the Society to be running parishes, any more than it is our job to be simply running or sponsoring schools, it is our job to be pursuing our foundational mission, the multiplication of communities of faith in mission in contexts that lend themselves to the realization of that mission.

At this point, I address my own experience of promoting a small church community vision for parish for almost three decades as a diocesan office director and doing so with an explicit Marianist consciousness and an eye to the potential connection of this work to the advancement of the Marianist mission.

Reflecting on our Marianist story and my pastoral experience these past years leads then to calling for a fundamental refounding of Marianist parish ministry in the United States along the lines of a very concrete proposal: our prospective Marianist investment in two collaborating parishes, one urban, the other suburban, in a diocese hospitable to a Marianist mission-focused vision for parish. A proposal that explicitly addresses the development of MLCs in this context, it envisions a whole new line of development for Marianist Lay Communities.

Reflecting on community as the visible expression of invisible communion, the communion of our God as communion, and on the flow of communion into solidarity, the paper moves finally to seek connections with *Reimagining the Marianist Family* the Raymond Fitz, SM, paper on the so-named Marianist Movement. In doing so, I acknowledge the import of addressing the silent violence of poverty and the need for an ecclesiology of the metropolitan region to bring healing to the Fractured City. While I take issue with the relevance of the so-called "ecclesial movements" to the American ecclesiastical scene, I suggest that the eucharistically-grounded parish, as the place where communion is meant to flow into solidarity, is the place from which to advance the healing of the Fractured Church, the Fractured City, and our Fractured Planet.

In his final chapter of *A New Fulcrum*, David Fleming, SM, affirms, "Today Marianist life is at a crossroads. To me" he continues, "it seems the spark of vitality among us needs rekindling." He calls for us to develop a "new vision." It is my hope that the reflections offered here will stir our imaginations to the possibilities of a vibrant Marianist future.

While *Mission & Charism* forthrightly advances a distinct point of view, I do not presume to think that it is the last word, much less, the only word. I hope, however, that it offers a significant word, a genuine contribution to a larger Marianist conversation.

Observations, questions, suggestions, refinements, and animadversions are welcome.

Marianist Mission—Marianist Charism

In Marianist circles these days there is a great deal of conversation about the Marianist charism—including references to "living the Marianist charism," "cultivating the Marianist charism," "spreading the Marianist charism," "implanting the Marianist charism," "sharing the Marianist charism," and "replicating the Marianist charism." The frequency and multiplicity of these and similar expressions lend themselves to the impression that "handing on the Marianist charism" *is* the Marianist mission. It is not.

To be sure, charism and mission are intimately related. They are like the two sides of one coin, but one is not the other. Mission is heads, as it were, charism is tails. Mission *leads*; charism *backs* mission. Put dynamically, charism serves to animate, energize, and inform the mission. To speak of one, it calls us to address the other. Yet, not infrequently, one may hear or see generic, catchall references to the Marianist charism without any direct or immediate connection to the Marianist mission. Such talk about charism tends to absorb and hide the mission. Charism comes across as the all-encompassing category under which mission is simply being subsumed. Mission needs to be freed from the shadows, brought to the fore. More importantly, the vision that mission represents needs to be more fundamentally retrieved.

Of course, charism is not a term Chaminade ever used. It has come into common parlance only in these latter days in the wake of Vatican II. If, however, the term charism was not part of Chaminade's vocabulary, *mission* most certainly was. Indeed, mission was a gripping term for him. Its power leaps out at us from the deeply significant ecclesiastical title he sought for himself when returning to France from exile: missionary apostolic. A title he so deeply prized, it defined his sense of call for the rest of his life. So meaningful was it to him that he sought and received the title as an inheritance for his successors as Superior General.

While, in our day, we might be inclined to see the title of missionary apostolic as a simple honorific, David Fleming's research demonstrates that it is a title with keen historical significance. Missionary apostolic is a title originally designed in the seventeenth century to facilitate pastoral work in "emergency situations" where the hierarchy was not or could not yet be established. "Missionary apostolic," Fleming notes, "thus became a title, status, and role

conferred by the Holy See on men who could be trusted to innovate and improvise with a view toward laying solid foundations for more fervent and orderly ecclesiastical life."[1]

The foundational mission of the Society of Mary, as I have understood it, lo these many years, is primordially and preeminently the multiplication of communities of faith in mission. With a view to the rekindling of faith, the rebuilding of Church and society in the wake of the French Revolution, the centerpiece of Father Chaminade's missionary vision and plan was the animation and promotion of the Sodality communities. While he eventually moved forward with an openness to a "universality of works," this multiplication of communities of faith in mission was not simply "a work." Various "works" may be accomplished alongside the promotion and development of the Sodality communities; for Chaminade, the Sodality held a rank beyond "works." The multiplication of communities of faith in mission, as we might express it in today's language, was the enduring heart of his missionary vision, plan, and apostolic method. This is what stands as the foundational Marianist mission.

It is the mystery of Mary—woman of faith, first Christian, Mother of the Lord and Mother of the Church—and our alliance with her in her continuing mission of forming the Church ever more fully into the body of Christ given for the sake of the world—that serves as our charismatic center point. Or as expressed in Chaminade's language, "The spirit of the Institute is the spirit of Mary." This is the animating heart that serves the promotion of the Marianist mission. Eduardo Benlloch, SM, captures this relationship between mission and charism when he says, "The alliance with Mary accentuates the essentially missionary dimension that is always part of the foundational charism of Father Chaminade."[2]

The Marianist charism is meant to be shared, certainly; it is meant to shine through in the promotion and realization of the mission. It is meant to give shape and color to our missionary style. While there are corollary themes related to the charismatic heart, mission is not a mere corollary. It is not simply an add-on.

How might it be, one may ask, that charism comes to be the overarching category to describe what we are about as Marianists these days? It stems, one may suspect, from the development of ministry over mission. It stems, I believe, from "a work" of the Society, namely, the conduct of schools, overtaking the foundational mission and so becoming in time the virtually all-encompassing focus of the Society.[3]

In a Marianist world where a work, however privileged it has been, encouraged even by Chaminade himself, has overtaken the foundational Marianist mission, it is more comfortable in our day to speak of Marianist charism in a comprehensive way. It enables us to avoid recalling

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[1] David Fleming, SM, *A New Fulcrum: Marianist Horizons Today* (Dayton, OH: NACMS, 2014), 19.

[2] Eduardo Benlloch, SM, "Filial Devotion or Alliance with Mary," NACMS, https://nacms.org/epubs/special-articles/filial-devotion-or-alliance-mary.

[3] When it comes to charism, there are resonances between Marianists and Marists. With respect, however, we are not Marist Brothers, whose Superior General, Ernesto Sanchez, FMS, in response to an inquiry about the Marist mission, said simply, "The conduct of schools for the young with an eye to evangelization." Third Age Program, Manziana, 2018.

and confronting unfortunate memories. It allows us to side-step facing the overshadowing of the foundational mission and still portray ourselves as being about the preeminent Marianist thing.

Perforce the unique challenges we face today, however, the notion of mission, is coming to the fore. From several quarters, we hear multiple calls for a renewed sense of mission. Fleming calls for a "common missionary vision." Fitz, SM, speaks of the need for a "new missionary narrative." Younger religious are pressing for something similar. I share this sense of urgency.

Reimagining the Dream is the province catchphrase of the day. Really? Whose dream? What is this dream that we are called to reimagine? And how do we translate the dream into a twenty-first-century missionary narrative for our time and place?

Retrospective Anticipation of a New Missionary Narrative: Remembering the Original Dream

To set the table for reimagining the dream and developing a missionary narrative for today, it will be helpful here to recall concisely broad outlines of our foundational Marianist narrative, how it has unfolded, and how we have reached the point at which we find ourselves today.[4]

In the wake of the French Revolution, and having been exiled from France in 1797, Chaminade returned to France from Spain late in the year 1800. After three years of reflection and prayer, he returned with a clear vision of what was needed and what he felt called to do, to rekindle the faith and rebuild a devastated Church and a wrecked society in France. He set to work immediately. From the beginning, his foundational missionary impulse was to reach out to and gather young adults from throughout Bordeaux, young adults who were eager to deepen their faith that had been so under assault during these Revolutionary years. Not three months after his return, on February 2, 1801, the first 11 members of the Bordeaux Sodality made their public commitment to re-imbue Christian faith and life in a ravaged Church and society.[5]

Within months of his return to France, Chaminade received the title of missionary apostolic as a warrant to empower him to respond broadly and boldly to what Fleming describes as this "pastoral emergency situation." Linking this title from the beginning to the establishment of the Sodality, he appealed to this title repeatedly and to the Sodality as its embodiment.

In 1814, for instance, more than a dozen years after its reception, he recalls its significance, i.e., its linkage to the Sodality in a letter to Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon:

> I am going to tell you my whole secret…. Fourteen years ago I returned to France as Missionary Apostolic throughout our unhappy land…. There seemed to me no better way of exercising these functions than by establishing a Sodality like the one now existing.

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[4] For this account of our early Marianist narrative, I draw substantially and appreciatively on the research and reflections of David Fleming, SM. In addition to *A New Fulcrum*, I draw on the fall, 2018 draft of his unpublished essay, "Chaminade as "Missionary Apostolic" ("CMA").
[5] Fleming, "CMA," 11.

Each sodalist, of whatever sex, age, or condition of life, is required to become an active member of the mission.[6]

Many years later, almost 40 years after his reception of the title, he is still underlining the connection of the title to the foundation of the Sodality communities. In his 1838 letter to Pope Gregory seeking approbation for his two new religious orders, before getting to the purpose of the letter, he speaks first of heaven having inspired him to request the title of missionary apostolic:

[S]o as to enliven and rekindle on all sides the divine torch of faith by showing everywhere to an astonished world imposing masses of Catholic Christians of every age, sex, and state of life, who belonging to special associations, would practice our holy religion without human respect, in all the purity of its dogmas and its morality.

Having noted the date of his reception of the title, March 28, 1801, he then continues:

"From then on, Most Holy Father, fervent sodalities for men and for women were formed in several cities of France; our religion had the happiness of counting a rather large number of them in a short time, and much good was accomplished."

Joseph Verrier, SM, echoes the connection Chaminade made between the title missionary apostolic and establishment of the Sodality when he remarks that Chaminade chose "to exercise his pastoral ministry through a Marian Sodality . . . [as] the pivot of the religious restoration of his homeland and the means par excellence of honoring the title of missionary apostolic conferred on him by the Congregation of the Propaganda."[7]

Verrier offers what we may take as an initial bird's eye overview of Chaminade's lifelong perspective:

If Father Chaminade organized a Sodality in 1800, the reason was that in 1800 the Sodality was, in his mind, the most appropriate work for a missionary. And if after the Concordat, he remained devoted to the sodalities, it is due to the fact that in spite of the Concordat, the sodality still appeared to him as the best form of missionary undertaking. If after the overthrow of the Empire, he commended the sodalities more than ever, the reason was that then more than ever he saw in the sodalities the most efficacious means for re-Christianizing his country rapidly and permanently. Finally, in the Constitutions of the religious society he founded, he wrote that for the priests of the Society of Mary the sodalities ought to be "the work of their hearts." Thus, he intended to found a Society of missionaries, and by so doing he wished to place in their hands the best missionary instrument he knew.[8]

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[6] Chaminade, *Letters*, no. 52 to Adèle, Oct. 8, 1814; vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 132.

[7] Joseph Verrier, SM, "Jean Lafon: Leader of the Malet Conspiracy," *Marianist International Review*, no. 13.3 (Oct. 1992), 71-102, as cited on the NACMS website, https://nacms.org/epubs/special-articles/jean-lafon-leader-malet-conspiracy.

[8] Joseph Verrier, SM, "The Sodality and the Apostolate," *The Verrier Collection*, pt. 1. (Marianist Resources Commission, November 1973. P. 42. (Provided through the courtesy of Stephen Glodek, SM.)

By no means merely pious, self-referential, intramural ecclesial communities, Chaminade contrasted his Sodality to what he considered "old-time Sodalities," for which, he suggested:

> [T]here was scarcely any other purpose in view than to sustain pious Christians in the way of goodness by mutual edification. But in this age, an age of renewal, religion demands something more from her children. She calls for the concerted action of all to support the zeal of her ministers and, under their prudent guidance, to labor at her restoration. This is the spirit which the new Sodalities inculcate. Each director is a permanent missionary, and each Sodality is a perpetual mission.[9]

And, he understood, the animating, energizing, informing, i.e., charismatic heart of this mission was Mary:

> . . . new Sodalities are not only associations in honor of the Blessed Virgin; they are a holy militia that advances in the Name of Mary and clearly aims to combat the powers of hell under her very guidance and in obedience to the One who is to crush the head of the serpent.[10]

From the beginning then, the Sodality was engaged in mission and focused on the active recruitment to the Sodality. As he said to Adèle in the letter referred to above: "Each sodalist, of whatever sex, age, or condition of life, is required to become an active member of the mission." Concerned not only with formation in faith, but also about social transformation, Chaminade put these sodalists to work from the start at such social concerns "as visiting hospitals and prisons, teaching literacy, [operating a lending library], founding Christian schools, and caring for chimney sweeps ("street children of the era").[11]

The early Sodality and its ministries flourished:

> [T]he Sodality very rapidly grew within a single year to 100 members, men and women, who were to form a leadership core for several generations of lay Catholic life in the Church of Bordeaux. . . . the Sodality continued to grow rapidly, until by 1808 it reached 1,000 members from all the parishes of Bordeaux.[12]

While the early sodalists were drawn from throughout Bordeaux across parish lines, Chaminade was not a parochial poacher or an independent operator simply doing his own thing. He had a deep commitment to the Church, including Church as institution. He collaborated actively with the local Church. Encouraged by these Sodality communities, Archbishop d'Aviau assigned the Madeleine Chapel to Father Chaminade to support this mission. (In today's terms, the Madeleine might even be understood as a nonterritorial, virtual parish.)

When opposition from the civil authorities to the Sodality emerged in 1809, this did not deter Chaminade from his mission. In that year, members of a Paris sodality earned the wrath of Napoleon because of their active publication of the papal bull related to Napoleon's

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[9] Fleming, *New Fulcrum*, 26.

[10] Fleming, *New Fulcrum*, 27.

[11] Fleming, *New Fulcrum*, 43.

[12] Fleming, "CMA," 13.

excommunication on account of his divorce and remarriage. A key actor in this publication, Fleming points out, was a Paris sodalist, Hyacinthe Lafon, who previously had been the prefect of the Bordeaux Madeleine Sodality.[13] Napoleon's surveillance of public meetings in general, including those of the sodalities, resulted in a decree forbidding further meetings of sodalities throughout France. The Sunday-evening gatherings of the Madeleine Sodality were soon forbidden. This threat to the Sodality actually served to deepen it. No longer able to hold public meetings of the Sodality, Chaminade's ministry once again went underground. He focused on one-on-one spiritual direction of Sodality leaders and on gathering them in small, informal groups to continue their many ministries throughout Bordeaux.[14]

It is during this underground period that Chaminade gathered some of the key Sodality leaders into small groups whose members took "short-term vows of chastity, obedience to their spiritual director, and the submission to him of their lifestyle and economic decisions. Sometimes they seemed to have added a promise or vow of "stability" in the service of mission within the Madeleine Sodality." Referred to as "the State of Religious Living in the World," this group eventually furnished key founding members of both the Society of Mary and the Daughters of Mary.[15]

> The existence of the State would be secret and the reunions infrequent, but two or several religious would be able to live together, or in case of proximity, to agree to perform certain exercises in common: "It would be only to the advantage toward the goal to be attained, to give the impulse to the sodality, to be in some manner the soul of it." Zeal, the object of a vow with the young men and a promise among the young girls would bear on and be concentrated on "the preservation, the augmentation, and the perfecting of the sodality."[16]

With the departure of Napoleon from the scene and the reestablishment of a Catholic monarchy, a new religious openness emerged. There was active collaboration with Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon by this time, including imagining the establishment of two new religious orders, one for women, one for men. Writing to Adèle about a number of persons who were expressing a desire for religious life, he ties these prospective new foundations to the promotion of the Sodality:

> Right now several would like to live a regular community life, abandoning all temporal concerns. This inspiration ought to be acted upon, yet care must be taken that it does not essentially change the work of the Sodality, but that it rather helps it along.[17]

Speaking of events leading to the foundation of the Society of Mary, Fleming recounts that following the preaching of a Lenten mission in the cathedral of Bordeaux in 1817, "the 22 year

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[13] See n. 7 for reference to Joseph Verrier's account of the Lafon story.

[14] Fleming, "CMA," 15.

[15] Fleming, "CMA," 17.

[16] Joseph Verrier, SM, "Devotion to Our Lady in the Sodality of Fr. Chaminade," *The Verrier Collection*, pt. 2 (Marianist Resources Commission, June 1974), 59-60. (Provided through the courtesy of Stephen Glodek, SM.)

[17] Chaminade, *Letters*, no. 52 to Adèle, Oct. 8, 1814; vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 132. (Citation provided through the courtesy of Brandon Paluch, SM.)

old Jean Baptiste Lalanne, long an enthusiastic activist in the Madeleine Sodality, came to Chaminade to tell him he felt called to a religious vocation and would like to work with Chaminade and extend his mission."[18]

Chaminade and Lalanne went about recruiting other sodalists as potential candidates for this new order. That October, from a group of sixteen who gathered for a retreat at Chaminade's Saint Laurent farm, seven pledged to move into the new religious community soon to be established. By December, these first members made their initial short-term religious vows in the Sodality's house, as it were, in the sacristy of the Madeleine Chapel. Eight months later, in September of 1818, they professed the traditional religious vows, to which they added the vow of stability, understood as a permanent commitment to the new community dedicated to Mary and to its mission.[19]

Addressing the nature of the congregation's foundation, Fleming remarks:

> The primary mission the new community of Marianist Brothers at Bordeaux had in mind was the maintenance of the Sodality itself. . . . They continued to participate as active members of the Madeleine Sodality. They looked ahead to the possibility of establishing similar groups focused on young adults in other cities beyond Bordeaux. They came to see themselves, in a phrase coined a bit later by Chaminade himself, as "the man who never dies," in order to prolong and extend the charismatic life of lay groups of active Christians like the Madeleine Sodality.[20]

It will not be until seven years after the foundation of the Society of Mary, however, when responding to objections to the Sodality by local pastors, that Chaminade actually speaks of the new religious order as "the person who never dies." In doing so, Chaminade is explicitly addressing the role of the congregation as the enduring guarantor of the Sodality:

> A person who never dies, that is a society of people dedicated to God for this work, who would carry it out in their mature years after having been formed in it under holy obedience, and who would pass on to one another the same spirit and the same means.[21]

Adding an interesting detail relative to the investment of the first religious, and to the congregation as such, in the Sodality, Lawrence Cada, SM, observes that all the early members continued to pay dues until the year 1826. "The Head of Temporalities paid the dues in a lump sum for all the members of the Society of Mary."[22]

Speaking of the concrete, down-to-earth circumstances surrounding the foundation of the community, Fleming observes:

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[18] Fleming, "CMA," 18.
[19] Fleming, "CMA," 19.
[20] Fleming, "CMA," 19.
[21] *New Fulcrum*, 28.
[22] Lawrence J. Cada, SM, *A Short History of Marianist Spirituality* (Madrid: General Administration of the Society of Mary, 2000), n. 12, p. 28.

> [I]n the planning process for the new religious community it was evident that some other kinds of common work beyond the sodalities would be necessary. The time and energy of all the members could not be universally absorbed by the work of sodalities alone, nor could this key work enable them to earn their corporate livelihood. Some common employments would help the members earn their living, pool their energies, and grow as a young community.[23]

It is these practical factors, along with broader interconnected sociocultural and ecclesiastical factors—the emerging need for universal primary education and the opportunity it offered as an opening for evangelization in a secularistic age—that promoted the early community embracing the work of schools. It is at this point, under these circumstances, while the work was clearly encouraged by Chaminade himself, that a trajectory is set in motion that will soon shift the focus of the Society, in spite of the Founder's continual resistance, from "the mission" to "a ministry," a shift that will come to dominate the Society for more than 200 years.

Some of the first members, particularly Lalanne and Auguste Brougnon-Perrière, promoted this involvement of the early religious in schools. Brougnon-Perrière, someone who would later withdraw from the order to join the Jesuits, was the only member of the early group who already was experienced as an educator and principal. By mid-1819 the new religious community of men moved to the site of its first school (Institution Sainte Marie on Bordeaux's Rue des Menuts).[24]

In contrast to Lalanne and Brougnon-Perrière, Chaminade's own interest with regard to schools had to do especially with free schools for the poor. Verrier amplifies Chaminade's thought in this regard:

> Let us recall the conditions in which he worked, and we will better understand his thought. In his day there was no organized instruction for the poorer classes. Nearly all of the existing schools charged tuition. For this reason, the children of the poorer classes had no access to such establishments, and they received no instruction or education.

> Yet these children formed the majority of all French children and the majority of the families of France. Therefore, by opening free schools for the people one would secure a means of influencing the masses and of restoring Christianity in France through the Christian education of that class of children which was most numerous.

> The schools of Father Chaminade are in fact works of Christian conquest. They are not so much designed to receive the children of Catholic families, to preserve them, and to bring them up according to the convictions of the parents. Their purpose is to make contact with the majority possessing an un-Catholic mentality in order to Christianize it. Teaching is the bait; the success of the Society's

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[23] Fleming, "CMA," 20.
[24] Fleming, "CMA," 24.

methods is the means of making it more attractive; and the re-Christianizing of the great masses of the people is its goal."[25]

In 1823, an invitation from St. Remy to work with all the teachers in the diocese led Chaminade to a whole new level of investment: teacher training schools.

> He was above all impressed by the idea that normal schools could be opened in all the academic districts and that if they were set up according to his plan, they would give the Church a decisive influence in the formation of the majority of the French children. He could not get rid of this idea. It fascinated him; it kept on developing on [*sic*] in his mind and inspired him with plans of incredible daring up to the Revolution of 1830, so that this period of the history of the Society of Mary, that is, from 1823 to 1830, can be called the period of the Normal Schools.[26]

Throughout this period, however, Verrier makes the point that Chaminade "remains always a convinced defender and a zealous propagandist" for the sodalities. "He still desires to see these associations formed throughout the whole of France."[27]

In 1824, seven years after the foundation of the Society, it is, while defending the Sodality from the criticisms of local pastors, that the import of the Sodality in Chaminade's vision is still being affirmed. Speaking of what is needed in this continuing time of pastoral emergency, the fulcrum of which he speaks is the Sodality:

> Why do new needs require new and greater help? Since the catastrophes of the Revolution, who is the wise man who does not see that the levers which move the moral world need, in some ways, other fulcrums?[28]

For all of Chaminade's investment in schools, it was not his intention that teaching in schools was to proceed simply alongside the promotion and development of the Sodality; the involvement in schools was meant to serve as a gateway to the Sodality. Chaminade speaks:

> This nucleus of middle-class children—such is the work of the Institute; it will receive them into its schools and will sustain them still in the midst of the world by the Sodalities. The Institute will thus form the dike to oppose the torrent of evil; right now the Jesuits and the Christian Brothers both form the edges of this dike. . . . We have conceived the plan of forming institutions such that man, passing from one to the other, would be cultivated from his infancy to the grave in piety and conduct by the Institute. Let us say that children will be received into our schools; from our schools they will pass on into the Sodalities for Young Men and Young Women, then into the Sodalities for

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[25] Joseph Verrier, SM, *The Founder's Thought on the Apostolic Action of His Followers*, 10. (Provided through the courtesy of Thomas Giardino, SM).
[26] Verrier, *Founder's Thoughts*, 14.
[27] Verrier, *Founder's Thoughts*, 29.
[28] Fleming, *New Fulcrum*, 26.

> men and women of mature age. The Society then ought to tend continually toward this
> double end: to open schools and to form Sodalities.[29]

This last evocation of Chaminade's words leaves this Marianist with the enduring impression that, for all of the good accomplished in our schools throughout our history, we have been generally conducting ourselves for most of the past 200 years more as Marist Brothers than as the Marianists Chaminade intended.[30]

How could this come to be the case?

Given the major early investment in schools, before long, the largest number of the young religious were teachers responding to this growing desire for universal primary education.[31] Within the first decade of both Marianist Sisters and Brothers, teaching in primary schools became their key task everywhere.[32] With more and more young men coming to the Society, desirous to be teachers and with no prior experience of the Sodality, the congregation's on-the-ground commitment to the Sodality began to wobble.

With the coming of new revolutionary upheaval in July of 1830, the Bordeaux communities were attacked by the Masons. Faced with the rallying cry that these groups were being "Chaminaded," (*enChaminades*), notes Fleming, the Founder, seeing himself as the focal point of this hostility, withdrew from the city to take the pressure off his followers. Unfortunately, it would be six years before he returned to Bordeaux.

With the guidance of the Sodality during the 1830s falling to the less than effective Father Caillet, "recruitment slowed and fervent enthusiasm subsided."[33] Then, under the guidance of Father Perrodin in the 1840s, the situation was no better. The Sodality continued to weaken. In addition to civil disruption and this weakness of internal leadership, Fleming notes, there was the further deleterious effect of a rising French clericalism that resisted new initiatives. [34]

Antonio Gascón, SM, has suggested that the eventual extinction of the Sodality also was due to a failure to "modernize its methods," or in the words of Father Charles Klobb, SM, its failure to adjust "its internal forms or its missionary methods" to the needs and circumstances of the times.[35] As such, it may be suggested that this is a variation on the theme of weakness of leadership.

When Chaminade returned to Bordeaux in 1836 at the age of 75, he was deeply involved in matters pertaining to the development of the still young religious order and with seeking its approbation by Rome. It was during this time he prepared his letter of appeal to Pope Gregory (referred to above) in which he once again began with his appeal to the title of missionary

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[29] Verrier, *Founder's Thoughts*, 48.

[30] See footnote 3.

[31] Fleming, *New Fulcrum*, 23.

[32] Fleming, *New Fulcrum*, 26.

[33] Fleming, "CMA," 33.

[34] Fleming, "CMA," 34.

[35] Antonio Gascón Aranda, SM, *Historia general de la Compañía de María*, vol. 1 (Madrid: General Administration of the Society of Mary, 2007), 265-68.

apostolic. While he will rely heavily on the teaching work of the Society as he seeks Vatican approbation, he begins by speaking of the foundational work of the Sodality.

Noting that the Society of Mary morphed more and more into a teaching congregation as the nineteenth century moved on, Fleming remarks that young adult lay communities like the Madeleine Sodality, Chaminade's founding inspiration, weakened and faded away. Sodalities, where they existed, he remarks, came to be understood simply as religious organizations for young students in Catholic schools.[36]

Reflecting on the aftermath of the 1830s, Cada remarks:

> For all intents and purposes, Marianist lay communities had passed out of existence. Marianist sodalities had been outlawed by the Revolution of 1830, and they were never revived as such. Their place was taken by Marian confraternities, where a remnant of the first lay Marianists continued their experience of Marianist spirituality as they grew older. However, adult Marianist lay communities in the classic form in which they had emerged in the early part of the century were a thing of the past.[37]

Speaking of this eclipse of "the Chaminade spirit," Verrier puts it this way:

> The purpose of both the Daughters of Mary and the Society of Mary was to give impetus to the Sodality movement, and the schools had been projected merely to have early contact with the individual. But the anti-Sodality campaign launched in 1826, the financial straits that bogged the two societies for several years, and the cry for new schools after the law of 1833 distracted Marianist attention from the Sodality. Some survived here and there, but the Chaminade spirit was lost.[38]

Well into his senior years in the 1840s, internal forces made it difficult for Chaminade to keep the Society focused on its foundational vision and mission. If the manipulation and mistreatment of the Founder began with the instigation of the infamous Father Narcisse Roussel, it was embraced and perpetuated by the other members of the General Council (Father Caillet and Brother Clouzet).

Their campaign against the Founder endured relentlessly for nine years until Chaminade's death in 1850.[39] In these last years, when Caillet succeeded Chaminade as Superior General, the Founder complained strenuously about abuses in the Society, beginning with the conduct of the General Administration itself. He was even brought to the point of speaking strong words. Fitz quotes Father Joseph Stefanelli, SM, in this regard: "Chaminade fought to preserve the purity and integrity of his vision against what he saw as Caillet's effort to limit and even 'bastardize' it. (Chaminade's words)."[40] Vasey is even more concrete and quotes Chaminade directly from a

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[36] Fleming, "CMA," 32.

[37] Cada, *Marianist Spirituality*, 72.

[38] Verrier, *Verrier Collection*, pt. 2, 22.

[39] Vincent Vasey, SM, *Last Years of Father Chaminade (1841-1850)* (St. Louis: Maryhurst Press, n.d.).

[40] Cf. Raymond Fitz, SM, *Reimagining the Marianist Family in the United States: Continuing the Conversation on the Marianist Movement*, NACMS, p. 19, https://nacms.org/epubs/reimagining-marianist-family-united-states-continuing-conversation-marianist-movement.

letter to Caillet: "Do not believe, my dear Son, that I want to hurt you in calling bastard the Society of which you have made yourself the head." While Chaminade addressed concrete infractions against the Constitutions, his protest of abuses can be summed up in the final analysis as a loss of "the spirit of faith."[41]

Caillet's abuse of the Founder continued even as Chaminade lay dying. It extended even to the threat of refusing Chaminade the last sacraments unless he agreed to statements demanded by Caillet and his cohorts. Speaking of Chaminade's last hours, Vasey observes that, intending to draw him (Collineau) into their machinations, "[t]he only condescension they had for him [Chaminade], was to invite Father Collineau, one of the first priest sodalists of the Society to assist the Founder." Curiously, Vasey continues, telling us that Collineau "had been already many years out of the Society. . . . He did not want to teach nor to be chaplain in a school. . . . He had left because he thought he was called to works of the ministry," among which Vasey names, "direction of sodalities of men."[42]

Thus, while it was the animation and promotion of the Sodality that propelled the work of the missionary apostolic on his return to Bordeaux from exile in Spain and continued to be the missionary priority throughout his life, finally, in the presence of Collineau and in the description of Vasey, it is an image of the Sodality that hovers at the hour of his death.

When Chaminade was succeeded as Superior General by Father Caillet, Marianist focus shifted almost entirely to the work of multiplying educational works. This shift was greatly facilitated by the policies of the Second Empire under Napoleon III, who wished to provide universal primary education as soon and as cheaply as possible. Religious men and women were eager to claim the domain of education as a means of reinforcing the Catholic element in French culture. To profit from the government's largesse, superiors assigned large numbers of young religious to this work.[43]

When Chaminade died on January 22, 1850, the Society was expanding very rapidly, but by then his original vision almost seemed forgotten. There was, Fleming declares, "simultaneously an explosive pattern of growth and an unmistakable loss of broad vision, a narrowing of focus."[44] Sodalists were being absorbed into parish life with most former sodalists continuing throughout their lives to take a very active role in the highly-structured ecclesial life of their times.[45]

Speaking of the Founder's last years, his death and our enduring challenge, Verrier tells us:

> Father Chaminade never lost courage. "With a firm conviction that the Sodalities were one of the means which God wished to use for the rebirth of France and with the hope that his views and his works would someday be backed by superior authorities," he wore himself out for thirty years trying to conduct his little community, to destroy prejudices, and to prepare the way for the future. He died without seeing his wishes come true—it is

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[41] Vasey, *Last Years*, 104-105.

[42] Vasey, *Last Years*, 139.

[43] Fleming, *New Fulcrum*, p. 108-12.

[44] Fleming, *New Fulcrum*, 107.

[45] Fleming, *New Fulcrum*, 107.

the fate of all founders of movements—but the members of a religious Society, through a direct request of the holy missionary, must make the sodalities, as he wanted them, "The work of their hearts."[46]

The early 1850s saw the SM begin to staff almost 30 new schools. In 1852, the Society of Mary in France began to staff eleven; in 1853, twelve, in 1854 six. A similar pace of growth continued steadily for almost 2 decades.[47]

"By the 1870s," notes Fleming, "Chaminade was nearly forgotten, even in Bordeaux, and his successors as religious superiors of the Society of Mary unfortunately preferred to keep him a bit in the shadows, because of the tensions among them in his final years."[48]

By this time, "across France Marianist religious were by then known principally for their educational work, much more than for any role in any form of lay ministry. The dynamic young lay movement of the early century had faded away."[49]

Leadership's loss of appreciation for Chaminade's foundational missionary impulse would continue to have repercussions in the years to come. Verrier notes the following:

> It is typical that while he was revising the constitutions of the Society of Mary, Father Simler did not notice the essential difference between the out-of-school Sodalities which Chaminade had conceived of to enable priests to continue their apostolate of the Madeleine, and the little groups in the schools with an emphasis on piety. It is unfortunate that the actual wording of the Marianist rule on this point renders the Founder's thought very imperfectly.[50]

For Verrier, however, faithful to his Founder, Chaminade's vision continues to live:

> The sodality was in Bordeaux a center of religious renewal. It preserved, it reconquered, it radiated, it aided parishes, seminaries, religious societies, the diocese—its beneficent action made itself felt everywhere; forty groups in the south of France lived by the same spirit, sought in devotion to Mary the secret of a Christianity as integral as it was fruitful; two religious societies approved by the Church were born from this "movement" in a manner so natural that the sodalists' reunions having ceased at Bordeaux, one can nevertheless affirm, without paradox, the persistence of the sodality of Chaminade: it lives always in its elite, in its groups of fervor. Let each community of Daughters of Mary, let each community of Brothers of Mary assemble around itself throngs of Christians of both sexes to whom they will communicate the devotion taught by Father Chaminade, and then what was seen at Bordeaux from 1800 to 1830 will be seen again.[51]

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[46] Verrier, *Verrier Collection*, pt. 1, 79-80.

[47] Fleming, *New Fulcrum*, 108-9.

[48] Fleming, "CMA," 34.

[49] Fleming, "CMA," 35.

[50] Verrier, *Verrier Collection*, pt. 2, 22-23.

[51] Verrier, *Verrier Collection*, pt. 2, 66.

A Retrospective Summary

This review allows us then to summarize the witness to Chaminade's investment in the Sodality in several key points:

- Chaminade's development of the Sodality began immediately on his return to France from exile; its promotion embodied his understanding of his role as missionary apostolic. By 1808, the Sodality had reached 1,000 members.

- When the Sodality was under civil threat in 1809, he continued this focus with Sodality leaders underground, leading some eventually to what became the State, whose principal work was to support and promote the Sodality ministries.

- When some of the members of the State wanted to move toward religious life, it was to extend this mission. Chaminade explicitly and specifically counseled Adèle that those desirous of becoming religious should not only not change the work of the Sodality, but they also should advance it.

- The first religious understood the primary mission of the Society to be that of promoting the Sodality. While practical and other factors led Chaminade to encourage the early religious to involvement in school work, it was meant not simply to be accomplished alongside the Sodality, but to serve as a gateway to the Sodality.

- The early religious maintained their membership/involvement in the Sodality, even continuing to pay dues for years.

- Seven years after the founding of the Society, while defending the Sodality from local pastors, the Sodality is the *fulcrum* of which Chaminade speaks, "to move the moral world" in the new times.

- It is the promotion and continuation of the Sodality that he assigns as the Society's role when he speaks of it as the "person who never dies."

- In 1838, when he writes his letter for approbation of the Society, and in which he so strongly commends the school work of the Society, he begins first by speaking of his title missionary apostolic and the foundation of the Sodality as its embodiment.

- In his final years, when faced with the waning of his foundational vision, Chaminade would even come to speak of the *bastardization* of the Society.

So, while as much as Chaminade promoted the work of primary education and normal schools, he never gave up on the Sodality as his first and fundamental mission. While early on, seeing the potential of school work for the rekindling of faith in France, as well as understanding its import

for the common person in the developing industrial world, it was never his intention that work in schools should supersede the foundational mission of promoting the Sodality.

Marianists in the United States: From Arrival to Our Present Situation

When the first Marianists came to the United States in 1849, naturally they brought with them their experience in primary education. What else could be expected given the Society's investment in schools at that point? Continuing Chaminade's own predilection for common people, these men reached out in particular to German immigrants who wanted to integrate into American life while holding on to their Catholic identity. Primary education was the pattern of Marianist ministry in this country for about a hundred years, up to the time of the Second World War.[52]

As the twentieth century unfolded, Marianist presence in rural areas declined. Our early constituency was beginning to move into the middle class; along with that rise came their need for high school education. Primary education was slowly de-emphasized in favor of secondary schools. Religious withdrew from their remaining primary schools, and Marianists became largely identified as specialists in Catholic secondary education.

Over many years, Marianist schools have made a significant contribution to the lives of many, to the Church and the world at large. And our involvement in secondary schools also has been a rich source of religious vocations.

We, however, find ourselves in our time and place when, in an era of aging and decreasing numbers of religious, all our ministries are up for grabs. In this time of acute diminishment, a school paradigm continues to play a fairly dominant role in focusing Marianist attention. Searching for ways to maintain the ministry, our long-standing commitment to schools expresses itself these days in the sponsorship model. It is a noble effort, perhaps, if also a questionable project.

Absent the on-site presence of Marianist communities staffing Marianist schools and enveloped by a diffuse notion of "sharing the Marianist charism," this project extends today even to the sponsorship of at least one school, not only with no on-site Marianist presence, but also with no historical connection to the Society of Mary. What is the point? In this era of advancing diminishment, this good faith effort carries with it the feel of whistling past the graveyard.

If I lack confidence in the sponsorship project, I do not mean to disparage the Marianist school. It has had a flourishing and fruitful history. Indeed, I am one of its grateful beneficiaries. It has been my happy lot to have experienced it on both sides of the desk in multiple settings.

However, having basically moved in the direction of turning the schools over to others variously related to the Society, we find ourselves in a situation that begs key questions: What's left? Who

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[52] Fleming, "CMA," 41.

are WE, the professed? Why do WE continue to exist? What are WE about? How do WE pursue the Marianist mission in our time and place?

Recovery of Our Foundational Marianist Mission: Backward, Step by Step

It is time to redress the imbalance of ministry over mission by a more substantial retrieval of our foundational Marianist mission so long overshadowed by the early concern for universal primary education that moved us more and more into the promotion of schools. While focused in terms of evangelization in a time of "pastoral emergency" in France, universal primary education has long since been achieved as has universal secondary education in this country as well. Having been so focused for 200 years on "a work," it is high time for us to recover our roots more deeply, to recover our ecclesially grounded foundational Marianist mission in a yet more focused, fuller, and explicit way.

This retrieval of connection to our foundational Marianist narrative has been a long time in coming. Gradually, increasingly, we have become more comfortable with the language that speaks of the multiplication of communities of faith in mission. But it still gets squeezed, surrounded as it is by all sorts of other language wrapped up in talk about Marianist charism.

While Chaminade's rehabilitation began with the research of Father Simler in the latter part of the nineteenth century, it would not be until the 1950s that the beginnings of a serious recovery of the Founder's fundamental vision would begin to emerge from the work of Marianist scholars here in the United States and around the world. Since then, happily, there has been a steady stream of research that has come to influence us more and more.

I first encountered the Society of Mary in the mid-to-late 1950s, at a time when this serious recovery was just beginning to emerge. As a young student at Chaminade High School, Mineola, I did not, of course, understand what was at stake, but being exposed to Katherine Burton's popularization of the life of Father Chaminade and the school's Sodality, I experienced the early fruits of this recovery.

An attentive student at Chaminade (Mineola) would come to know that the Marianists considered participation in the Sodality as a high value. Every homeroom had one. Father Anthony Jansen, SM, played a major role in projecting its importance throughout the school. Though still under the substantial influence of a Simler/Neubert-focused "filial piety" spirituality, there also was something, however incipient, clearly missionary about it. The Sodality was meant to influence the rest of the school. While yet to fully assert itself, something of the recessive Marianist DNA was straining to come to expression.

The message was clear: being a sodalist was the thing to do at Chaminade. This student was caught up in it from his freshman year. One's homeroom teacher doubled as Sodality moderator. My freshman homeroom teacher was a brilliant mathematics instructor, but when it came to the Sodality meeting, it was clear to me, experientially, if not critically appreciated at the time, that

this brother did not quite know what to do with us. He was a dutiful homeroom Sodality moderator, but his discomfort with it all was palpable.[53]

While a few years later, in the postulate, the notion of the Sodality was basically nonexistent, in the novitiate it was quite another matter. The novitiate experience focused classically on formation for religious life; yet the centrality of the Sodality in Chaminade's vision was clearly to the fore. As novices, we were introduced to the work of Father Ferree and strongly oriented to pay attention to Father John Dickson when we would reach the scholasticate.

Ferree and Dickson were major lights for us in the scholasticate, tutoring us into things Marianist. We were introduced to Ferree's *Texts of Capital Importance,* to the act of social justice, along with the notion of the institutional apostolate and principles like cradle to the grave and like-on-like.

Visiting the scholasticate as a member of the General Administration, Ferree encouraged us to become "second founders." He interviewed each scholastic. When he inquired about the extent of my SM reading, I tried to beg off on the grounds of my preoccupation with course work at the university. Ferree was not to be deterred. He negotiated a commitment, asking finally, "Can't you find 15 minutes a day?" "Yes, I could do that," I replied. And I did.

For all of Ferree's general influence on us, John Dickson was the regular on-site spokesperson for what might be called Marianist studies. In his regular lectures to the scholastics, the import of recovering Chaminade's foundational vision was front and center. The Sodality was crucial to it all.

There came a point in 1961 when imminent anticipation of the establishment of the New York Province was in the air. So focused was Dickson on the Sodality and Chaminade's vision, that in the lead up to the establishment of the new province, he could not contain himself. One fall evening, during his regular lecture to scholastics, the usually quiet, personally reserved Dickson went off script, as it were, waxing eloquently about his dream for the new province and his hope for what the new provincial would be all about. The atmosphere in the Marianist College dining room where we (about 240 scholastics) met was charged.

This soon-to-be New York Province scholastic was enthralled because rumors were rife that Dickson himself would be appointed the provincial of the new province. When the establishment of the province was announced, along with his appointment as provincial, East Coast scholastics in general were jubilant. Quickly seeking out the tape recording of that prescient lecture from just a few weeks before, I taped copies of his special remarks:

> It would be interesting, now that we are forming a new province, if someone were to get a hold of the man who would be appointed the provincial of that province and say to him, "Now look, let's sit down, just for the sake, just for the fun of it; let's take this geographic area that becomes the new province; let's take the personnel that's assigned to this new province; let's take the types of schools that we have given to this new province, the missions and what-not that we have; now let's sit down and map out on paper as

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[53] Side bar: Three of us from that freshman homeroom would eventually come to the Society of Mary.

clearly as we possibly can, how we could put the whole scheme of Father Chaminade's ideal, idea, his whole apostolate into reality in this province; no matter what it cost us in personnel, see. Let's try it; right from the very beginning we would establish that whole thing in this province; we would make it a reality—Father Chaminade's whole system would live again right here. The cost would be tremendous, no doubt; the struggle would be great; the obstacles would be many, but wouldn't it be a wonderful experience just to be able to sit down and see someplace in the Society of Mary, just any old place, even if it does have to be New York, you see, but just to see someplace in this crazy world of ours where Father Chaminade's whole system is actually in the area of reality." Well, we can dream, I suppose.[54]

When he became provincial, John Dickson was still "reimagining the dream." In his first circular he wrote:

> It is our ardent desire to establish Father Chaminade's plan for social and moral reconstruction in its entirety in our province. We are not simply teachers strapped to a desk within the confines of a classroom but rather Marian Apostles ready and competent to attack the forces of evil on all fronts. This was the view of our venerated Founder and it is our view as well. Under Mary's banner, let's move forward![55]

He did not just reimagine the dream. As provincial, along with the multiple tasks of establishing a new province, Dickson moved to implement the dream early on by establishing a province Sodality Secretariat with Brother Kevin O'Reilly at its helm full time. While, as a man of his time, he was still shaped by a school consciousness, Dickson was looking forward even as he looked back to Chaminade's fundamental vision. Not "strapped to a desk within the confines of a classroom," he looked beyond high schools and established the Marianist Center in Chester, PA, as an on-the-ground adult lay formation venture in the Marianist spirit.

Dickson went further in October of 1963 with his *Circular 12*, announcing a detailed province policy with respect to the Sodality. It represented the fruit of what he referred to as Marcy II, itself a follow up to the meetings of Marcy I that was held fifteen years earlier. This earlier meeting of Sodality moderators, Dickson mentions, was prompted "by the ever-growing demand that our sodalities conform to the ideals of Father Chaminade." Marcy II, a gathering of "our Province Sodality Moderators Council," he continues, was held to evaluate the work of the previous 15 years "in light of the history and tradition which is our wonderful heritage." On the basis of the experience of these years, it was time, Dickson indicated, "to set out in bold relief the purposes and goals, clearly define terms, and spell out the direction we must take as a Province, so that our work be, in fact, an integral part of the master plan of Father Chaminade." A detailed 20-page policy and commentary, "Official Statement of Policy of the Sodality Council of the New York Province of the Society of Mary," followed.[56]

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[54] Transcription from October 26, 1961, audiotape.
[55] John Dickson, SM, *Cir. 1*, Nov. 27, 1961.
[56] John Dickson, SM, *Circ. 12*, Oct. 1963.

Not content simply to reimagine the dream, Dickson was moving the province toward its realization.

Sadly, however, as the later 1960s unfolded, disastrous events in the new province overtook him, and Dickson's tenure was tragically cut short. Absolutely demoralized by the traumatic disruption that would eventually lead to the destruction of the integrity of the New York Province, Dickson abruptly resigned as provincial.

In spite of this profound setback, the effort at reconnecting with Chaminade's dream continued to gather momentum. During these same years, having been a collaborator with Dickson at the University of Dayton since before Dickson became provincial, Hugh Bihl, SM, was working actively to develop sodalities, later to be called Marianist Lay Communities, with young adults at the university, including one community which would eventually emerge, and continue to this day, as something of a State community. On the ground then, not just in research, retrieval of Chaminade's foundational vision was beginning to reemerge.

While our recessive genes have been seeking reexpression, we seem, however, to be retrieving Chaminade's foundational dream step by step in reverse. Noting the loss of Chaminade's vision for the Sodality in the aftermath of the 1830s, Fleming made the point, as we noted earlier, that Chaminade's basic vision having faded away and for all practical purposes having disappeared, sodalities, where they continued to exist came to be understood simply as religious organizations for young students in Catholic schools.

We lost even them for a time as well, when as Marianists came to the United States, the total focus was on primary education, until the eventual move into secondary education. The first step back to on-the-ground retrieval was the resurrection of the high school Sodality as we moved into secondary education. As Marianist retrieval was beginning to emerge in the 1950s, this was basically my own experience in high school. Bihl's work on the university level with young adults, including a community claiming the identity of a State community, was another step backward in the right direction. In the years since, adult Marianist lay communities have continued to develop throughout the country. In time, there emerged the Marianist Lay Network of North America, now the Marianist Lay Community of North America. At this point, a National Lay Marianist Assembly is becoming a regular event. While there has been a progressive step-by-step backward retrieval, we are not quite back to the foundational vision yet.

I have great respect for the investment members of Marianist Lay Communities have made, many for a good number of years. Yet, I am not sure that MLC members know how it all holds together. I am not sure how they all hold together. Nor is it clear at the present time where they are headed. And yet, Marianist Lay Communities today seem poised for something more.

What, however, to make of the phenomenon of individuals as lay Marianists apart from communities is not clear to me at all.

Issues of concern about the contemporary situation of MLCs are heard from a number of quarters. Fleming focuses his concern this way:

With the exception of several noteworthy groups, Marianist laity on the whole do not yet constitute an ecclesial reality that not only takes initiative for the life of its members but also enters into mission for the vitality of the contemporary Church.[57]

For his part, Thomas Giardino, SM, speaks to the issue of commitment:

In the United States, that college-age members in a Marianist Lay Community are open and willing to make a promise as a lay Marianist is a re-emergence of a longstanding part of the Marianist tradition. While this is normal in other countries with Marianist Lay Communities, this has not been the case with middle-aged and older members of Marianist Lay Community-type groups in the last several decades in the United States. There is still some hesitancy on the part of many adults to make a commitment in a community.[58]

With respect to commitment—the "hesitancy on the part of many adults to make a commitment in a community"—Robert Wuthnow[59] addresses this issue in the context of his research on the small group phenomenon in American life today, responsibility for this presumed lack in MLCs is more complicated.

While mission and commitment are the issues to the fore here, I suggest that the importance of deepening an understanding of what Fleming names their "ecclesial reality" is what underlies them both. And this deepening of understanding is needed, I believe, on the part of both the Society of Mary and MLCs.

With appreciation for the independence of the branches of the Marianist Family, there is meant, nonetheless, to be an intimate relationship between the Society of Mary and Marianist Lay Communities, the Sodality of today. Given its intended role as "the person who never dies," the deeper responsibility here has to do with the extent to which the Society of Mary itself is in touch with its foundational mission and how well we have focused the Marianist mission today in our relationship with Marianist Lay Communities. How clear and how concrete is it to what MLCs are being invited to commit?

Marianist Branches as Ecclesial Bodies

Before they are Marianist Lay Communities, MLCs are, first of all, ecclesial lay communities. Church bodies, incarnated realities, they are meant to be grounded in a local place/church as were Chaminade's Sodality communities grounded in Bordeaux. The import of developing MLCs on a broader basis, as grounded ecclesial communities, is an issue requiring further development. More about this later.

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[57] Fleming, *New Fulcrum*, 179.

[58] Thomas F. Giardino, SM, *The Promise and the Path: Starting and Sustaining Marianist Communities* (Dayton, OH: NACMS, 2011), n. 4, 77.

[59] Robert Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey: Support Groups and America's New Quest for Community* (New York: The Free Press, 1994.

First, we must address the "ecclesial reality" of the Society of Mary in our time and place. Since Vatican II we have been summoned to be fully inserted into the local church. The Society of Mary is not an end in itself. It is, in the first place, an ecclesial community. As such, it is focused, not on itself, but on the Church, and in alliance with Mary and her mission, on the formation of the Church ever more fully into the body of Christ given for the sake of the world.

In tune with the spirit of our foundation, building a new missionary narrative for our time begins, I believe, from our developing a sharper sense of the Society as an ecclesial body. I believe that we are being called today to a certain disposition of Marianist kenosis, an emptying of our charismatic mission into the local church, an emptying which will help animate new life in the local church of our day, and will at the same time, it may be hoped, also bring new life to the Society of Mary.

Fleming's recent book, *A New Fulcrum: Marianist Horizons Today* is a masterful interpretive retrieval of multiple dimensions of our tradition. In response, but not as a quibble, if I understand correctly how he is using his title, I would suggest that it is not so much a matter of needing to develop a new fulcrum in our time as much as it is putting our hand directly to the fulcrum of which Chaminade spoke. This is not a call for some anachronistic return. It is a matter of reading the signs of the times in Church and culture in this North American setting and responding accordingly in tune with the foundational Marianist mission.

In the language of his time, Chaminade's dream/vision was the promotion of the Sodality communities as a permanent mission. Translated in terms of today's language, Chaminade's foundational dream is the multiplication of communities of faith in mission.

The Marianist Mission and Marianist Parish Ministry

Given the ecclesial and social situation in which we find ourselves today, a contemporary "pastoral emergency," I propose that the signs of the times urge us to pursue the foundational Marianist mission, the multiplication of communities of faith in mission, today in the context of promoting parish-based small church communities as central to a long-range vision for the American parish as "a community of communities in mission." [60]

The multiplication of communities of faith in mission is language Marianists have become increasingly familiar and comfortable with, even as we struggle trying to understand what implementing that mission means today on the ground. The notions of "small faith communities," "small Christian communities," and "communities of faith in mission" fit together well enough in our understanding as cognate terms. Intertwining our understanding of "the multiplication of the communities of faith in mission" with "parish" is something of a stumbling

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[60] For an extended social and ecclesial analysis of the relevant signs of the times, see the consensus draft proposal of a corporate vision for Marianist parish ministry developed in 2007-8 by then Marianist parish ministers under the auspices of the Office of Religious Life.

block for us. Our deeply developed identity as teachers and our long-standing investment in schools tend to blind us to the perception of new possibilities.

Hesitations expressed about our involvement in parish ministry are multiple:

> 1. Chaminade did not invest in parishes, so neither should we.
>
> 2. Objection to a certain Marianist parish ministry arrangement is seen to undermine the warrant for Marianist involvement in parish ministry.
>
> 3. The quip that "Marianists are good for parishes; parishes are not good for Marianists" is meant to suggest that one's identity as a religious tends to get swallowed up in the role of parish minister, and the demands of parish ministry are incompatible with religious community/common life.
>
> 4. Religious life, it is affirmed, pertains not to the hierarchic dimension of church in which a parish participates, but to the prophetic dimension of church to which religious life more properly belongs. Thus, with parish so intimately a part of ecclesial structure, it is suggested, Marianists should situate themselves more at the margins, at the edge of ecclesial structure.
>
> 5. There is a perceived lack of interest among Marianists to be involved in parish ministry, especially among younger religious. Troubling out the role of the lay religious in the setting of Marianist parish ministry is an issue that lurks here.
>
> 6. Our aging and decreasing numbers make it simply unrealistic to expect the Society of Mary to be able to staff parishes in the years ahead or even at the present time.

Each of these hesitations needs to be taken seriously. Each may be addressed.

1.) Chaminade returned to France in the wake of the Reign of Terror/French Revolution to a Church and society in ruins. Parishes were devastated, dioceses destroyed, clergy were in disarray. There were no resident bishops. It would not be until 1802 that Bordeaux would have a bishop. The reorganization of the French dioceses would not be completed until 1804.[61] Of course, Chaminade did not focus on parishes; there were few, few that were legitimate. The semblance of parishes functioning on his return was manned basically by schismatic clergy. While he was charged with helping to regularize these priests, Chaminade's ministry transcended parish in a time of *pastoral emergency*. He was not opposed to structure or to parish or to diocese. He became an honorary cathedral canon. He was even for a time the administrator of the Diocese of Bazas. Responding to the signs of the times, Chaminade dealt with the situation as he found it. He sought to reach out to a people largely disconnected from, alienated by, or otherwise indifferent to the

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[61] Fleming, *New Fulcrum*, 17.

Church. In time, however, he would come to speak of the Sodality communities as "seedbeds for parishes."[62]

We also live in a time of pastoral emergency, of a different type perhaps, though in some respects not so dissimilar from the time of the Founder, and certainly no less serious. In our time and place, however, parish is the ordinary experience of Church for most American Catholics who are in any significant sense connected to Church. Yet, for internal and external reasons, this is a challenging time for the parish in this culture.

Numbers can be a crude measuring stick when speaking of the life of the Church, but they also can be instructive. From a high point of about 55 percent weekly participation in Sunday Eucharist in 1970, weekly attendance is now down to about 21 percent.[63] With the rise of the "nones" and weekly participation dropping even more quickly among the young than among more senior Catholics, how much of a parish, it may be asked, will there be at the end of the twenty-first century? Surely, this is a pastoral emergency.

Reading these signs of the times alone, as a Chaminade of today might, suggests that the parish might well be perceived as an altogether worthy object of Marianist mission-focused solicitude.

2.) Reservation about a certain approach to Marianist parish ministry has been associated in the past with Father José María Salaverri, SM, Superior General at the time. Salaverri's objection was focused on the then prevailing European situation of individual Marianist priests working alone in their individual parishes. A worthy objection in itself, this does not undermine the foundation for Marianist involvement in parish ministry as such. Moreover, if sometimes honored more in the breach than in the observance, it has been provincial-level policy in this country since the 1980s that the fundamental condition of possibility for Marianist parish ministry rests on a corporate commitment to the parish, namely, the on-site presence of a community of at least three professed reflecting the mixed composition of the Society. (This does not even have to be the case these days with respect to the Marianist school, not to mention other sponsored schools.)

3.) While it is indeed possible for the identity of an individual religious ministering alone, apart from the presence of his or her religious community to the parish, to be swallowed up in the parish, the presence of a religious community in service to the parish mitigates against such and indeed allows for a corporate impact of the religious community in the parish as a whole.

As for living religious community/common life, there can be challenges in any ministerial setting. Adjustments from a classical pattern may sometimes be in order in the

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[62] Fleming, *New Fulcrum*, 28.
[63] Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 2019.

setting of parish ministry, but these can be altogether legitimate. Given the communitarian nature of its mission to the parish, a Marianist religious community will be especially conscious of, and attentive to, the quality of its shared life, into which parishioners will be invited to participate. *Nemo dat quod non habet.* ("No one can give what he or she does not have.")

4.) Whatever merits one may assign to the distinctions between hierarchic and prophetic dimensions of Church, they need not or should not be so severely drawn so as to amount to separations. Religious have served the structure/institution in many prophetic ways throughout history, especially in times of crisis and reform. Insofar as religious are called upon to exercise an effective prophetic ministry in the Church, they must be close enough to the structure to be heard. In our time and place, working for the development of small church communities as basic units of parish in a long-term vision for the life and mission of the parish is work at the margins. It calls for a close-in ministry that, at the same time, could not be a more prophetic service to the local institutional Church.

5.) As for lack of interest in parish ministry among us, the brethren in general have relatively little real sustained involvement in parish. Historically, our ministerial attention has generally been focused elsewhere. Unhappy past experiences of parish sometimes also have been an inhibiting factor. While there is a lack of interest in parish ministry among some younger religious, it is not universal. And that presumed lack of interest is altogether understandable. Little has been done to expose them to the possibilities in Marianist parish ministry.

The presence of lay religious in the setting of Marianist parish ministry is integral to the communitarian/communal witness of Marianist presence. The role of the male or female lay religious in the setting of Marianist parish ministry has substantial possibilities. They range from service as the canonical pastoral administrator of the parish to that of pastoral associate, director of parish social justice ministry or religious education, youth minister, business manager, etc. The presence of active retired religious can be a significant support to the promotion of the Marianist mission to the parish in many meaningful ways.

Already bringing many ministerial experiences with them, we are told that young people attracted to religious life today are looking for community. In this regard, the SM is a natural. That is all well and good, but for Marianists, community is not an end in itself. Community is for the sake of the mission. Community, we say, is the primary instrument of the apostolate. Young people coming to the Society of Mary need to be formed for the Marianist mission as well as for community.

The real challenge concerning any lack of interest in parish ministry, whether among the young or more mature, has to do with the lack of imagination and leadership among us, the lack of a clearly articulated, commanding, corporate, Marianist mission-driven vision

for Marianist parish ministry—as integral to any credible new missionary narrative for the twenty-first century. (Not to be too cute about it: "Build it and they will come.")

Finally, the results of the recent province survey about interest in Marianist parish ministry are noteworthy: 76.7 percent of the respondents (or 81) men indicated that they are open to serving in a setting of Marianist parish ministry, while 39.6 percent of respondents (or 32 men) indicated their openness to serving in leadership as administrator or pastor in a parish served by Marianists.

6.) The brute fact of an aging and decreasing number of religious is not insignificant. That concern pertains to all our works of course. In any case, Chaminade began with only seven. We're not that small—yet. But this brings us back to the question of our mission. The fundamental issue is the need for imagination and leadership, the need, let it be said again, for a clearly articulated, commanding, corporate, Marianist mission-driven vision for Marianist parish ministry—as an integral part of any credible new missionary narrative for the twenty-first century.

Now, with these preceding hesitations about Marianist parish ministry having been recognized and addressed, let it also be frankly acknowledged that it is not the job of the Society of Mary simply to be running parishes—any more than it is the job of the Society simply to be running or sponsoring schools. It is the job of the Society to be about our foundational mission, i.e., the multiplication of communities of faith in mission, and the pursuance of that mission in response to the signs of the times, in contexts (works) that lend themselves to the promotion of the mission.

The American parish today presents itself to the Society of Mary as such a context. The pastoral emergency is keen. The need is clear. The small church community[64] vision for parish is apt for our time. The contemporary American parish situation offers the Society of Mary a distinct opportunity to directly pursue its mission of multiplying communities of faith in mission. Parish offers us something we need. We can offer the parish what it needs. The revitalization of the parish and promotion of the Marianist mission in our time and place is a hand-in-glove fit.

Pastoral Department for Small Christian Communities
Diocesan Ministry, a Marianist Perspective

Such a suggestion will come as no surprise from someone who has spent almost thirty years at work in the promotion of parish-based small church communities. In fact, with that much of myself invested in the effort, what else might I be expected to say? But I say this not merely because I have done this for so long. This is not nostalgia. And it did not take 30 years to reach

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[64] The "small church community" designation is preferable to "small faith community" or even "small Christian community" for such groups, I suggest, for a couple of reasons. It underlines the fact that such groupings are not simply religious self-help groups. Their members are participants in something larger than themselves, the body of Christ. Further, as ecclesial groupings, they are called to be communities of missionary disciples.

this conclusion. If truth be told, it was my early intuition of how the promotion of parish-based small church communities might relate to the Marianist mission that drew me to accept the unsought invitation to direct the Hartford archdiocesan effort in the first place. The possibilities and implications have only become clearer and clearer over time.

Resourcing small Christian communities with the publication of the *Quest/Summer Reflections* lectionary-based material may have been the most concrete thing associated with the office, but it was not the most important. What was most important was the on-site vision work with parishes—pastors, pastoral staffs, parish leaders, and small church communities.

While I directed what was known as the Pastoral Department for Small Christian Communities (1989-2017), my first concern was not the development of a few more nice small groups for people to feel good together about being connected to God. My first concern was parish; doing what we need to do to animate healthy, vital parish life and mission so that we may hand on the Catholic treasure well to the Church and world of the twenty-first century. Small church communities are not ends in themselves. It is in the context of vision for parish that they find their particular meaning in today's Church in the United States, a Church that Francis challenges us to be a community of missionary disciples.

The publication work of the office was enormously successful for decades. The vision-focused efforts on the ground in parishes were but modestly fruitful at best. While there are hundreds of small communities spread over about half the parishes of the archdiocese, few pastors became invested in the larger vision. Even then, follow through at the parish level was a challenge.

While remaining an invigorating adventure for me, it became clearer and clear over time that the parish-based small church community enterprise entails something of a Catch-22, and this at two levels:

> *Level one*: The very busyness and noisiness of contemporary life that underlies a significant part of the warrant for small church communities, that very busyness and noisiness undercuts the ability of many people to respond to the invitation, even when they think it is a good idea.

> *Level two*: The very busyness of parish life short-circuits the ability of the harried and tarried diocesan pastor to invest himself in the promotion and development of small church communities, even when he thinks it is a good idea, because he is otherwise spontaneously inclined to think of small communities as one more thing, just another program.

The hectic pace of all too typical parish life makes it extremely difficult for the single diocesan pastor working alone to sustain being focused, intentional, and persevering in the promotion of small communities as basic units of parish in a long-term vision for the parish. This situation led me more and more to appreciate the role a religious community could play in promoting this vision.

Given the witness of their own lives in communities of faith oriented to mission, religious congregations ought to be superbly situated to serve as animators of this vision for parish. And

among religious congregations, given our foundational mission, our Marian charism, our mixed composition, our principle of community as primary instrument of the apostolate, and our investment in the development of Marianist Lay Communities, the Society of Mary, in collaboration with the whole Marianist Family, is a particularly apt congregation to be promoting this vision for parish in this contemporary American sociocultural and ecclesiastical situation. In addition, Chaminade's vision for the role of the Society of Mary—vis-à-vis the Sodality communities as "the person who never dies"—is not irrelevant.

At the same time as it becomes a unique opportunity for the pursuit and realization of the Marianist mission, the promotion of a small church community vision for parish can be our distinctive contribution to the U.S. Church today. For the opportunity to be maximized and the contribution to be realized, however, a substantial reorientation of our approach to Marianist parish ministry is required, one which may or may not include any of the parishes where we now serve. Indeed, any credible future for Marianist parish ministry in the United States depends on it being fundamentally re-founded.

That some of us find parish ministry to be simply a very satisfying experience of ministry is all well and good. But this is an insufficient warrant for Marianist involvement in parish. Neither is it our job simply to be about generic parish ministry. Nor should we be about aiding and abetting the all-too-typical program-centered, activity-dominated approach to parish today.

While Marianist parish ministry entails a commitment to effective parish ministry across the board, it is above all, a question of priorities. For us, it is a matter of mission over ministry, yet a mission pursued with a cultivated ecclesial consciousness.

The Society of Mary is in the first place an ecclesial body. It is in alliance with the mystery of Mary, in tune with her mission of forming the Church every more fully into the body of Christ given for the sake of the world, that we have the animating power for our mission. Living out of our Marianist charism, I believe we are called to the pursuit of the Marianist mission today from a particularly cultivated spirit of Marianist kenosis, with a wholly conscious disposition of full insertion in the local church.

Concrete Proposal

Now to be very concrete about it all: Animated by intensely collaborative Marianist communities, with the community director serving as point person for the mission and the pastor or administrator as director of the work, I imagine one or more situations where we are invested in two mutually-involved parishes in a given hospitable diocese,[65] one in a suburban setting, the other in an urban setting, with both communities/parishes consciously, intentionally, perseveringly, and collaboratively focused on the development of the parish as "a community of

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[65] On the principle that a continental province deserves a cultivated continental presence, it may be suggested here that an institutionally grounded major Marianist initiative is needed on the East Coast of the United States. Given the decades long drain of East Coast Marianists for service in other parts of the U.S., service not at all inappropriate, proportionate reciprocity from the rest of the province is long overdue.

communities," communities of missionary disciples. These parishes would pursue the development of small church communities, not as a program, but as basic units of parish in a long-range plan for the development of the life and mission of the parish.[66]

I imagine that in time *x* number of these parish-rooted small communities would come to double as Marianist Lay Communities, intimately invested with us in the Marianist mission for the sake of the Church and society, but turned not toward us, but with us toward the parish, its life and mission, and that of the larger local Church.

Understanding these Marianist involvements in parish first of all as mission-, not ministry-, driven investments, I imagine a specifically projected time-limited commitment of *x* number years to a given set of parishes. The specificity of time is meant to concentrate attention above all on realization of the mission: the implantation of small church communities in the parish with *x* number of them coming to double as Marianist Lay Communities. Anticipating that the Society of Mary would be moving on in time to serve in another set of parishes, these parish-grounded Marianist mission-driven MLCs, remaining in full communion with succeeding parish leadership, would continue to serve the development of the parishes in question as "communities of faith in mission."

Further, I imagine our effort in this overall regard to be focused not just in terms of the parishes in which we serve themselves but also in the spirit of full insertion in the local church, done in a way that engages with and, eventually, even models the possibilities for other parishes in the diocese.

The goal is not to produce Marianist parishes. There can be no such thing. While there may be such a thing as a Marianist school, in the sense that we own, shape, and staff at will such an institution, the parish belongs first of all to itself and to the larger local church of which it is a part. We are called to pursue our mission in a spirit of Marianist kenosis in alliance with Mary's mission of forming the Church more fully into the body of Christ given for the sake of the world.

Implications for Marianist Lay Communities

This proposal calls for the essential collaboration of the Marianist branches in a Marianist mission-driven investment in the development of a small church community model of the American parish as "a community of communities in mission."

While in no way intended to disrupt what is already in place, this proposal clearly envisions a new line of development for Marianist Lay Communities, a line of development that takes seriously MLC members' primary ecclesial identity as parishioners.

Chaminade was not about establishing Marianist Lay Communities. He was about developing grounded lay ecclesial communities animated by the spirit of Mary. His sodalists did not come from parishes, but they were grounded in Bordeaux. Their communities and their ministries were

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[66] For discussion of what is involved in the development of parish-based small Christian communities, see the unfortunately side-lined consensus draft proposal of a corporate vision for Marianist parish ministry developed in 2007-8 by then Marianist parish ministers under the auspices of the Office of Religious Life

rooted in the local church of which they were a part. To be grounded in the local church today does mean, first of all, being rooted in parish. Chaminade himself, it should be remembered, came to speak of the Sodality communities as "seedbeds for parishes." Having said this, the MLC appellation continues to be appropriate even as we understand that MLCs are in the first place lay ecclesial communities oriented by the spirit of Mary and joined in alliance with her mission.

Marianist Lay Communities of our day have developed apart from direct connection to the local church or to the parish. They have developed in relation to us. While some MLC ministries may well be grounded in their geographic locations, they may have little relation to the local church. Other MLC ministries often seem more associated simply with the Marianist branches (e.g., the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative).

While I am not fully informed about the situation of Marianist Lay Communities today, I have the impression, that while there are concentrations of them here and there, it is also the case to say that they exist singly here and there throughout the country. It seems to me that their missionary effectiveness is tied to their presence as ecclesially-grounded, concentrated multiples.

Rooting the MLC in terms of its "ecclesial reality" in parishes offers a path, I might suggest, to address the concerns noted above by Fleming and Giardino in terms of commitment and mission.

From Communion to Solidarity

This broad vision for Marianist-mission focused investment in local church/parish is not simply a self-referential preoccupation with saving a threatened institution; it is rather about animating a vital parish as a community of communities, communities of missionary disciples.

Speaking the language of "community" so facilely calls for us to pause and take note of the depths it really entails. The community of which we speak is but the visible expression of invisible communion, a participation in the communion that is our God. We live, move, and have our being embedded in this trinitarian mystery that pours itself out on our behalf in Creation, Redemption, and Inspiration. Our God is a mystery of communion and mission—mission, we know in faith, which leads to final communion.

We live eschatologically oriented, yet historically grounded. God's reign is at work among us, but we have work to do on the way. Living from a eucharistic spirituality, we are called to become what we eat, good bread for the world. It is in the flow of communion into solidarity that the community of missionary disciples finds itself propelled to the work of peace, justice, and the integrity of creation.

It is in this flow of communion into solidarity that we may now, hopefully, find convergence between the *Mission & Charism* narrative proposed here and that advanced by Raymond Fitz in *Reimagining the Marianist Family.*

Mission & Charism . . . and *Reimagining the Marianist Family*

Reaching for Connections

For some time now, I have followed Fitz's developing notion of the Marianist Movement. I encountered it first of all when he presented at the National Marianist Lay Assembly in 2017; later in a hardcopy version, *A New Moment for the Marianist Movement*; more recently in its 2018 iteration, *Reimagining the Marianist Family in the United States*.[67]

Reimagining the Marianist Family offers a commanding social analysis of the contemporary national suburban/urban scene and an equally commanding call for a focus on metropolitan regions. Deeply concerned about the silent violence of poverty in what it names the Fractured City and the Church's role in that, it inquires after the type of ecclesiology and ecclesial structures the Church in metropolitan regions needs "to be of and for the poor." It likewise inquires about how what it names the Marianist Movement can be a catalyst in bringing about this new way of being Church.

While I resonate with the need for an ecclesiology of the regional Church, it is exactly at this point that I have a fundamental concern. What does this ecclesiology look like and more importantly—before we imagine what role the Marianist branches may play in that effort—how does an ecclesiology of the regional Church get implemented on the ground in any local place?

Oriented by a generally shared version of the early Marianist narrative, *Mission & Charism* (*M&C*) and *Reimagining the Marianist Family* (*RMF*) share a fundamental concern for a vibrant Marianist future flowing from a new missionary narrative.

Mission operates in two intertwined senses in these Marianist conversations. They need to be clearly distinguished from one another, even as they are essentially related to one another. They both have a bipartite character:

> I. The first sense goes to the heart of the Marianist mission, which, as I understand it, is (1) the multiplication of (ecclesial) communities of faith (2) in mission.

> II. The second sense has, then, to do with the mission of the (ecclesial) communities of faith, which mission is itself also twofold, i.e., (1) the transformation of Church and (2) the transformation of the world.

The *M&C* perspective begins from an emphasis on the first part of the first sense of mission (I.1), the multiplication of communities of faith.

The emphasis in the *RMF* perspective is centered above all on the second part of the second sense of mission as described above (II. 2.), the transformation of the world.

The occupational hazard to be avoided in our respective emphases is that the former not get itself caught by an exclusively *ad intra* ecclesial preoccupation and the latter by one that is completely

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67 Fitz, *RMF*.

ad extra. Both are needed. Both are bound up with one another. Thus, vis-à-vis the second sense of mission above (II), this both/and mission perspective is better expressed as the transformation of the church for the sake of the transformation of the world.

In the preface to *RMF*, Fitz asks, "Is it helpful to look at Blessed Father Chaminade as a founder of a faith-filled Marian social movement"? To which I reply, "Yes and No." It is more adequate and critically important to understand and speak of Chaminade as the Founder of a faith-filled Marian ecclesio-social movement. And a Marianist conversation in this regard begins, I suggest, from an ecclesial point of departure.

Chaminade returned to France from exile as committed to the rebuilding of the Church as he was to the reconstruction of French society in the wake of the Revolution. Put in the language of *RMF,* Chaminade was committed to the healing of both the Fractured Church and the Fractured City in his time and place.

It is my hope that the parish may serve as the fruitful meeting place for our respective efforts to develop a new Marianist missionary narrative. Our respective accounts of the early Marianist narrative resonate in their acknowledgment that on his return to France from exile, Chaminade's ministry side-stepped parish. That this was the case in that situation in his time does not mean we are called to do the same. Indeed, as has already been suggested, the signs of our time seem to call for just the opposite.

While the 2017 paper, *A New Moment for the Marianist Movement*, exhibited scant attention to parish and diocese, *RMF* now offers multiple acknowledgments of the need for "vital parishes." "While we need parishes that are vibrant, faith-filled communities with a missionary orientation," Fitz goes on to affirm that "we also need an ecclesiology of the regional Church, a new way of how we see the Church and its role in the metropolitan region.[68]

How, it must be asked, do we animate "vital parishes" today? How do we ground them in the context of a regional ecclesiology?

Including a place for what it names "the small faith communities," in its reference to parish, *M&C* and *RMF* are almost at a point of convergence when *RMF* acknowledges:

> The parish community is a resource for becoming missionary disciples and for growth in the virtue of solidarity. In the parish community, we have opportunities to break open the Word of God, to celebrate God's love manifested in the sacraments, and to extend love and care for our neighbor. The parish, especially the small faith communities, provides an ideal setting to bring the Catholic faith into dialogue with the region as a Fractured City and the silent violence of poverty that results.[69]

These reflections begged to be unpacked. They remain RMF's essentially undeveloped part of what can be an exciting new Marianist missionary narrative. RMF needs a yet more robust acknowledgment of the role of the local church, parish, and diocese. The Marianist mission-driven promotion of a small-church-community vision for the life and mission of the parish

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[68] Fitz, *RMF*, iv.
[69] Fitz, *RMF*, 76-77.

remains, I believe, the missing piece, the necessary foundation, and the condition of possibility for implementing RMF's Marianist missionary narrative as a grounded pathway to the healing of both the Fractured Church and Fractured City.

The roadblock on this pathway, I believe, is the correlation *RMF* draws between the Marianist Family and the contemporary "ecclesial movements." These "ecclesial movements (generally understood to include groups such as Focolare, Communion and Liberation, and the Neocatechumenate, etc., while perhaps helpful on the international scene) are on the American ecclesiastical scene essentially irrelevant, if not problematic.

Some years ago, Allen Figueroa Deck had an article in *America* magazine touting what he regards as the potential fruitfulness of these "ecclesial movements" for the Church in the U.S. Early in the article, he makes the point that 45 percent of Spain's Catholics connect to the Church, not through the parish, but through the "ecclesial movements." Whatever may be the case in Spain, this is not the case in the U.S. Church, nor should it be expected to become the case any time soon.

As already has been observed, parish, for better and/or for worse, is the ordinary experience of Church for most American Catholics who are in any significant sense connected to Church. The American parish structure is the most developed (you might even say overdeveloped, like much in this sociocultural scene) of any nation around the globe. The parish will remain the ordinary experience of Church for most American Catholics for the foreseeable future.

Whatever the utility of the contemporary "ecclesial movements" in other parts of the world, up against all of the challenges that we have to do parish well in these United States, focusing attention and energy on these movements is basically a distraction from the fundamental task of building up the Church and its mission in the United States, as it is concretely experienced by most American Catholics.

The U.S. parish as a structure and its people need and deserve all of the energy and attention we can muster to animate vital Catholic life and mission in our time and place. Without dwelling on the issue, the "ecclesial movements" are not without problems. At least in certain cases, one can observe an elitist behavior that comes across as building a certain parallel church or church within a church.

Eschewing the negative, however, it is possible to approach the suggestion that the "ecclesial movements" are a distraction from a more positive angle. While these movements often draw people of substantial faith, men and women who have or who seek richer religious lives, people who are prepared to make substantial commitments within these movements, they drain energy that is needed in the parish. The parish needs these people. It needs their faith, their energy, and their commitment to building up the Church and its mission on the most local level.

Vis-à-vis the "ecclesial movements," I share the basic suggestion of Father Alfonso Navarro, founder of the parish-centered small church community method known as SINE (Systematic Integral New Evangelization), when I heard him declare some years ago, "It is time for the movements to die into the parish."

While promoting a vision for the Church that would address the fragmentation and injustice of our urban regions simply on a scattershot parish-by-parish basis is inadequate, the "ecclesial structures" of parish and diocese are where a realizable vision must be grounded if this vision is to be understood as "an ecclesiology of the regional Church, a new way of how we see the Church."

How can an authentically "new way of being Church" untethered to the institution be built? How can such a regional ecclesiology be realized apart from taking the structures of the Church seriously, warts and all? How do we do this without working and transforming these structures?

M&C lays out a vision for the American parish with small church communities as basic units of parish as central to a new way of being Church in this American sociocultural and ecclesiastical scene. I see these communities of faith in mission as critical to moving an agenda for social justice in this nation. In a Marianist mission-driven approach to parish ministry, I envisage Marianist Lay Communities functioning as the fulcrum Chaminade envisioned them, to be effective instruments for the realization of this vision, a new way of being a Church of missionary disciples.

Pursuing a small church community vision for parish is no mean task. And dealing with the dimension of mission is a key part of that task. The call to a missionary orientation for the small community is rooted, first of all, baptismally/eucharistically as a participation in the mission of the Church (parish). As with big church, a fully-fledged small church community is both "gathered and sent." Observing the parish small church community scene, Bernard Lee, SM, has often commented that "the gathering is easier than the sending." Without diminishing the import of his focus on sending, I also would suggest the situation is more complicated, i.e., the gathering is not so easy either.

Lee tests the authenticity of a small church community on its investment in mission understood above all in terms of the pursuit of social justice. I have suggested in turn that while there is a great deal to be done in terms of moving parish-based small church communities more into the work of justice, it is my experience that these small church community members individually and corporately are among the most invested members of a parish in the life and mission of the parish. Typically, they are deeply involved, in particular, in direct service, the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Advocacy work in support of larger issues of justice on the regional scene is also present. Nevertheless, to address the metropolitan region along the lines laid out in *RMF,* there is much to be done.

Further, in response to Lee, who focuses particularly on the individual, preferably intentional community, in contrast to the parish-based small community, I have suggested that no individual small church community is going to be any more effective in the pursuit of social justice systemically than any single individual working alone. I do not think of small church communities singly. Specifically, vis-à-vis this issue of mission, especially in terms of addressing the metropolitan region from the perspective of an ecclesiology for the metropolitan region, I think of parish-based small church communities as connected multiples, and not simply on a parish-by-parish basis. To maximize an ecclesial impact on the metropolitan region we need to activate the collaborative focus and energy of connected multiples across parish lines in a

given region. I am not naïve about the challenges involved, but the Church as institution has readily available structures that could be brought to bear in this regard. They are known as deaneries and dioceses. We do not have to reinvent the wheel.

Where the Society of Mary is invested in two collaborating parishes, one urban and the other suburban, parish-rooted small church communities doubling as Marianist Lay Communities can serve as a yeast for this missionary effort. Indeed, is it too much to expect that there might well be a multiplier effect of Marianist Lay Communities from both parishes where we might be serving that allows us to work together to advance the common good of the metropolitan region?

In addition to advancing *RMF*'s call for a two-generation approach to the healing of the Fractured City, both parishes, served by Marianists, lay and professed, could find themselves addressing together their mutual self-interest and the larger common good by focusing as well on the healing of the Fractured Planet. For if this challenge is not presently addressed, there may be no healing for either the Fractured Church or Fractured City.

RMF offers a correct social analysis on the need for a focus on metropolitan regions and for an ecclesiology of the regional Church. *M&C* proposes that the parish, as "a community of communities" in league with other such parishes, offers a basis for that ecclesiology to be realized concretely in a local place. In tune with its foundational mission and moving forward in a spirit of kenosis, the Society of Mary is poised to make a substantial contribution to Church and society in our time. Collaborating with us, MLCs can serve as the fulcrum in the parish on the way to positioning the Church, on a macro level, as a community of faith in mission; not only for the transformation of hearts, but also for the transformation of structures, so that God may be all-in-all in a transformed world.

Conclusion

We pursue our Marianist mission animated by our Marianist charism, our alliance with Mary in her mission of forming the Church more fully into the body of Christ given for the sake of the world. This is the foundation for our Marian spirituality. A Marian spirituality that sustains our participation in that mission is essentially an ecclesial spirituality. An ecclesial spirituality is first of all a Eucharistic spirituality. A Eucharistic spirituality, grounded in word and sacrament, is rooted first of all in parish, the most local experience of Church. The parish begs for our kenotic Marianist attention.

David Fleming begins the final chapter of *A New Fulcrum* saying, "Today Marianist life is at a crossroads. To me," he continues, "it seems the spark of vitality among us needs rekindling." He hopes that his reflections in this book will stimulate others toward "a new vision."[70] He concludes the final paragraph of that last chapter calling for "a common missionary vision."[71] Hopefully, these pages contribute to such a vision.

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[70] Fleming, *New Fulcrum*, 177.

[71] Fleming, *New Fulcrum*, 194.

Any new missionary vision worth its salt begins, I believe, from a full retrieval of our foundational Marianist mission. If the "person who never dies" is meant to survive through these times, it may well depend, I suspect, on our deep recovery of the role assigned to the Society of Mary when the Founder coined that phrase.

It is my hope that in *Mission & Charism* and *Reimagining the Marianist Family* we find basic elements that may contribute to the makings of a unitary Marianist missionary narrative for the twenty-first century.

We can take the first steps to rekindling the spark of vitality by clarifying our thought and expression about our Marianist mission and our Marianist charism.

As John Dickson might say anew today, "Under Mary's banner, let's move forward!"