

# Guide to Life

in the

## Marianist Lay Community of North America



**MLC-NA**

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## INTRODUCTION

We the Leadership Team of the Marianist Lay Community of North America (MLC-NA) present to our fellow members this revised Guide to Life in the MLC-NA. This Guide is a living document and is intended to be adapted and changed over time in order to apply the essential, spiritual core of what it means to be a Lay Marianist in North America to the particular circumstances of the times. While the essence of the Marianist charism, mission, and spirituality remain the same from age to age, the ways in which those gifts are made manifest in concrete reality depend both on internal factors within the Marianist Family as well as broader social and cultural factors in the church and world.

From the first International Marianist Lay Community Gathering in 1993 much grace-filled work has been done to identify who we are based on the charism of our Founders, Father Chaminade and Mother Adèle and also Marie Thérèse de Lamourous who was an influential collaborator and is a model for Lay Marianists.

Inspired by our Founders, we are rooted in a spirituality and mission that aims to bring about a continuous rebirth of Christ on Earth and that raises the dignity of each person. We identify with Mary's model of listening, openness, and hospitality as we build a new family of faith and hope. Under the leadership of Mary, we exist primarily in community; we are a community of communities operating interdependently but in coordination with the Society of Mary, the Daughters of Mary, and the Alliance Mariale. We seek to establish the common good at the social levels where we have influence and we relate with any others with whom we can collaborate.

The primary purpose of this Guide is to interpret the broad, spiritual definition of what constitutes a Lay Marianist into practical terms that can be applied to individuals and communities in the MLC-NA as well as to individuals and groups aspiring to join the MLC-NA. More specifically, the International Organization of Marianist Lay Communities has defined a Lay Marianist as one who KNOWS, COMMITS TO, and LIVES the Marianist charism. This Guide provides further specificity to that broad definition to the North American context to help address three questions.

The first section applies this definition more concretely to the question of what it means to be a Lay Marianist in order to provide a common language for Lay Marianists to describe who they are and what they do. This section also has the additional benefit of helping distinguish between two different, but equally important groups in the Marianist Family. On the one hand, there are Lay Marianists who make a personal and intentional commitment to the Marianist charism and collectively constitute one of the three branches of the Marianist Family active in North America.

On the other hand, there are Marianist Collaborators, who have not made a personal and intentional commitment to the Marianist charism, but are nevertheless inspired by our charism and spirituality and, quite often, are highly engaged in advancing the Marianist mission. As with all distinctions between ways of participating in the gift of the Marianist charism, the distinction between Lay Marianists and Marianist Collaborators is not a

distinction of greater or lesser value, importance, or so forth. Instead, it is intended more simply as a means of naming the different ways in which people respond to the charismatic gift of the Holy Spirit that lives in the Marianist Family so that all people inspired by that gift may know and feel that they have a valuable place within our charismatic family.

The second section of this Guide applies the spiritual definition of a Lay Marianist to the question of what it means to become a Lay Marianist. This process is threefold, beginning with discernment, continuing with formation, and culminating in one's commitment to the charism. While there is no singular process or program for becoming a Lay Marianist in North America, there are nevertheless certain elements that must be present in each authentic journey. The purpose of this section is therefore to describe these essential elements in the journey to becoming a Lay Marianist in order to empower members of all branches to participate in the mission of inviting and welcoming new members to our lay association.

The third and final section of this Guide details the official processes for recognizing Lay Marianists and Marianist Lay Communities (MLCs) within the MLC-NA. Being and becoming a Lay Marianist or MLC is first and foremost a response of those specific people who are called by the Holy Spirit to know, commit, and live the Marianist charism. Nevertheless, because our charism is authentically held only in community with one another, it is necessary that the leadership of the Marianist Lay Community of North America recognize and validate all individual members and communities. This recognition not only preserves the authenticity of our charism throughout history, but moreover provides a basis for the unity, communication, and shared resources of Lay Marianists in this area.

## A Brief Marianist History

On December 8, 1800, Father William Joseph Chaminade held the first gathering of what would become the first Sodality.

The Marianist Lay Communities were officially born on Feb. 2, 1801 when 12 people, a symbolic number, ready to initiate a new life, professed their first Act of Consecration. They started to be known as the "Congregation of the Immaculate Conception."

The growth of the Congregation was spectacular. A year later there were already 100 members, and 300 at the beginning of 1803.

In the summer of 1804, the young Adèle de Batz de Tranquelleon, the future founder of the religious Marianist sisters, decided together with a female friend, to found in Agen an association of young people very similar to the one founded by Father Chaminade, which would be called "Little Society." In 1808 this "Little Society" was united with the Bordeaux Congregation. The Congregation of the Immaculate Conception spread first through the South of France and later throughout the country.

These groups were original since their inception: their orientation was towards an intense apostolic action and they were present wherever needs were identified. They were open to all social classes, intensely concerned with the problems of the society of the time, full of

courage and keen on being a revitalizing spectacle on behalf of the Christian faith. In this vein they wanted to contribute significantly to reestablishing the Christian faith in France. They regarded themselves as an instrument of Mary's action in the world; they were animated by a great family spirit and lived in small communities that they endeavored to multiply.

A group was born of this Congregation called "The State" (of Religious Living in the World), which still exists today. It evolved from a few early Sodalists who wanted to make a deeper commitment to Chaminade's vision while still maintaining their jobs and families. Thus they made a vow of stability and to live the spirit of the evangelical councils of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Out of these groups of the Congregation was born the Institute of the Daughters of the Immaculate Mary (FMI) (1816) for Marianist women religious, as well as the Society of Mary (SM) for Marianist men religious (1817).

These groups grew up and developed around the Marianist religious' communities and works. They never disappeared. They were made up of young people from the male and female religious schools and parishes. In keeping with their age and character they lived out the demands of Christian life in the Marianist style.

In the aftermath of the Vatican Council a true re-foundation of the lay branch of the Marianist Family took place. It developed into an autonomous group of the Marianist Family, in coordination with, but apart from the religious branches and Secular Institute (Marian Alliance). The lay movement gradually spread through 30 countries and grew in number (at present some 6,000). It set up an organization and a structure for self-animation and government.

In this process, the International Convocations have played an important role. Representatives of almost all the countries where there were communities attended the first convocation in Santiago, Chile (1993). There the first Identity Statement (statutes) for the Marianist Lay Communities all over the world was elaborated and approved as well as a governance structure. Mission was the subject of the second convocation, which took place at Liria (Valencia, Spain) (1997); the governance structure was also revised and improved.

In 1996 the World Council of the Marianist Family was established. It holds a meeting once a year attended by the General Councils of the male and female religious orders, the International Team of the MLCs and a representative of the Alliance Mariale. This Council has been responsible for the elaboration of the mission of the Marianist Family in the world as well as for joint activities and ventures.

On February 22, 2006 Marianist Lay Communities received canonical recognition as a Private Association of the Faithful under the auspices of the Pontifical Council for the Laity by Canons 298-311 and 321-329 of the Code of Canon Law. Marianist Lay Communities are governed internationally by the International Organization of Marianist Lay Communities and locally by national entities such as the Marianist Lay Community of North America.

## I. BEING A LAY MARIANIST

Within the lay branch of the Marianist family in North America, laity express their Marianist identity in a variety of ways. Each expression is welcomed and respected as a response to our baptismal call. First and foremost, as a response to our baptismal call, being a Marianist is a vocational choice. More concretely, the International Organization of Marianist Lay Communities (IO-MLC), said in its 2016 document, *What It Means to be a Lay Marianist within a Marianist Lay Community*, that a Lay Marianist is one who KNOWS, COMMITS TO, and LIVES the Marianist charism.

**To KNOW** means that the Lay Marianist has learned the basics of Marianist history, understands the significance of the Marianist mission, and has had a personal encounter with the Marianist charism. Encountering the Marianist charism is a deeply personal experience that typically involves getting to know members of the Marianist Family, seeing how they act and live firsthand, and coming to an understanding of one's own vocational calling by the Holy Spirit to Mary's mission. Acquiring this kind of knowledge is a lifelong journey, and never a finished task. However, all Lay Marianists have at least a foundational and personal knowledge of the charism, mission, and history of the Marianist Family.

**To COMMIT** means that after initial formation, the individual makes an explicit commitment to accept the Marianist charism to guide their life. To be a Lay Marianist is not a private commitment but should be shared with others. Lay Marianists are recognized by the International Organization of Marianist Lay Communities (IO-MLC) through a country's national president/chair or their delegate. Commitments are usually renewed annually.

**To LIVE** as a Lay Marianist means that commitment is not a one-time event but rather an ongoing lifestyle in which one continues to grow in understanding one's vocation and participation in community life. Lay Marianists live in service to the church and world, and to the wider Marianist Family.

Lay Marianists across North America collectively make up a larger faith community, known as the Marianist Lay Community of North America. As members of a private association of the faithful, we have a responsibility to our faith community. This Guide articulates basic expectations for lay individuals and communities who identify as Marianist. These expectations shape us as individuals and as a faith community.

This Guide synthesizes documents and guidelines promulgated by the International Organization of Marianist Lay Communities. The international statutes and documents can be found at [www.clm-mlc.org](http://www.clm-mlc.org).

In their entirety, these documents serve to define the expectations of Lay Marianists and Marianist Lay Communities and provide guidance on how they are to live their Marianist vocation through their commitment to their faith, Mary, community, inclusivity, and mission.

## To KNOW

Knowing the Marianist charism involves more than the acquisition of certain facts and pertains instead to the type of knowledge involved in knowing a good friend or relative. This type of knowledge is not acquired once-and-for-all, but is rather a personal dynamic that implies an ongoing relationship that can be continually broadened, deepened, and explored in new ways. Therefore, regardless of how one learns about the Marianists, being Marianist involves a sustained intentionality. This intentionality is reflected in the way Lay Marianists know, commit to, and live the Marianist charism in their daily lives.

The broad notion of knowing the Marianist charism can be broken down into four overlapping content areas:

1. **Knowing the Marianist Family:** While no Lay Marianist will ever form a personal relationship with all members of the Marianist Family, one important aspect of knowing the charism is being in relationship with other members of the Marianist Family, both lay and vowed religious. This is because the Marianist charism is not the insight or accomplishment of individuals, but rather a dynamic of the Holy Spirit that is received, known, loved, and joined in and through communal relationships. To know the Marianist charism and to having meaningful, spiritually fulfilling relationships with other Marianists therefore go hand-in-hand.
2. **Knowing the Essential Aspects or Pillars of the Charism:** The Marianist charism can be described in different ways, but one of the most popular ways is to describe it in terms of what may be called five characteristics, essential aspects, or pillars. Those pillars of the charism include the cultivation of a faith of the heart; being in alliance with Mary; being in and for community; promoting inclusivity and a discipleship of equals in our Marianist Family, church, and world; and joining in Mary's perpetual mission to the church and world. Lay Marianists have a personal knowledge of the meaning and value of these essential aspects and strive to realize each of them in their own life.
3. **Marianist Spirituality:** Our charism, which is a distinct gift of the Holy Spirit given in service to the church and world, is accompanied by a distinctive spirituality. Coming to know and be formed in this spirituality is a lifelong endeavor and includes growth in the System of Virtues that originate from the vision of Fr. Chaminade, a continual discernment of the signs of the times, an intentional presence to the interior life of oneself and others, and a life of prayer in the Marian tradition.
4. **Marianist Founders and History:** Lay Marianists are part of a long lineage of people who have received and handed on our distinctive charism and its accompanying mission and spirituality. Knowing the basic history, life, context, and mission of William Joseph Chaminade, Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon, and Marie-Thérèse Charlotte de Lamourous is an essential basis for continuing their great work today.

## To COMMIT

Through our baptism we become part of the body of Christ. Through our formation and discernment we learn that the Marianist Family has a unique charism and spirituality. As Lay Marianists, we strive to embody the Marianist charism in our daily lives and join Mary in her mission of bringing Christ to the world. The Marianist charism is a discerned and chosen way to live and express our baptismal call.

As there are many expressions of the Lay Marianist vocation, individuals make varying degrees of commitment to a Marianist way of life. An intentional and public commitment is the most declarative way to identify one's self as Lay Marianist. An intentional commitment is what sets apart someone who conscientiously and purposefully commits to a Marianist way of life from someone who has learned about and been formed in the Marianist charism but doesn't actively perpetuate it or only applies it within the context of specifically Marianist ministries (e.g. one's employment or participation within a Marianist setting).

As an inclusive family, we recognize that we are blessed to have alongside us lay people who are employees, collaborators, educators, participants in Marianist programs, etc. who have some allegiance to the Marianist charism but are not members of MLC's and do not participate in the life and activities of MLC-NA or local Marianist Family Councils. These collaborators often receive formation in the Marianist charism so that their work may reflect the values of the Marianist sponsored ministry. If after discernment, the collaborator wants to intentionally commit to being a Lay Marianist and join an MLC, then they too could become a Lay Marianist.

Commitment as a Lay Marianist enrolls a person in the Marianist Lay Community of North America, the national Marianist community accountable to the International Organization of Marianist Lay Communities, a private association of the faithful officially recognized by the Church. A documented commitment and enrollment in MLC-NA are essential steps in identification as a Lay Marianist. For archival and directory purposes, communities are asked to annually submit to MLC-NA a copy of their roster and commitment ceremony.

To commit means that after initial formation, individuals make an explicit commitment to accept the Marianist charism to guide their life. To be a Lay Marianist is not a private commitment but should be shared with others. Commitments are usually renewed annually.

**All who identify as lay Marianist should make some form of intentional commitment.** MLC-NA suggests the following as examples:

Annual Renewal of Baptismal Promises – appropriate for individuals discerning a lay Marianist vocation or a member of an MLC who is active in an MLC but perhaps doesn't have the formation he or she feels is necessary to make a Marianist commitment.

Annual or Temporary Commitment or Act of Consecration – appropriate for Lay Marianists to commit to one another, a Marianist ministry, or the Marianist Family, in mutual support of living the Marianist charism, dedicating one's self to God, in Mary's name. An MLC may want to have an annual renewal ceremony to honor each member's commitment to the community, their faith, and the Marianist charism.

Permanent Commitments – Some Lay Marianists take a Vow of stability (as in the Visitation Marianist State Community). Others make a lifelong Act of Consecration. These are



appropriate for someone who has extensive life experience as a Lay Marianist, is committed to on-going formation, and has an enduring commitment to live as a Lay Marianist. The desire to profess a vow is typically discerned with other members of the Marianist Family, including community members or others who have professed the vow. Most vows are done publicly in the presence of other members of the Marianist Family. Those who profess a vow might do it once for a lifetime, annually, or on a regular basis.

**Communities may adapt any of the examples above to reflect the composition and intentions of the community.**

Lay Marianist Affiliation – a unique expression of commitment within the Marianist Family and the Church for a lay person to spirituality align one’s life with the vowed religious of the Marianist Family. The discernment, formation, and approval for commitment are administered by the vowed religious. Lay Affiliates may or may not be members of MLCs.

## To LIVE

“... Societal change occurs because groups of individuals are effective as change agents, and MLCs can and do often organize to effect change. We share a vision of a world of justice and peace where human potential flourishes. For this reason we have chosen to think of community not only as a pleasant reality and model of a new society, but as a method of change. Our only explicit mission is to enable community and to enable others to form and enliven communities. Thus, community becomes simultaneously a means of changing the world and showing the church at its best. Communities in the Marianist tradition pray, but are not prayer groups; provide mutual support, but are not self-help groups; serve, but are not service organizations; and are rooted in Marian spirituality, but are not exclusive. Like a family, like the fabled communities of the early church, like a utopian vision of the future, they are complex and organic and serve many purposes.”<sup>1</sup>

While complex and organic, Marianist Lay Communities have identifying characteristics and expectations of their members. In order to carry out one’s vocation as a Lay Marianist, it is helpful to have practices that unite us and give form to our commitment. In the *Guide to Lay Life in the Marianist Tradition*, the International Organization of Marianist Lay Communities identified and elaborated on seven characteristics of lay Marianist life. Many of the characteristics correspond directly to the pillars of the Marianist charism. Lay Marianists are formed in these characteristics and commit to living according to them. Each characteristic is stated below and is followed by practical examples for how the characteristics may be lived in the life of a Lay Marianist. Other practical examples are possible. These listed below are not meant to be all inclusive.

**Lay Marianists are formed by knowledge of the Founders and collaborators of the Marianist Family and how the Marianist charism is a gift both to the Church and to the larger world.**

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<sup>1</sup> Marge Cavanaugh, former MLC-NA President, *MLC: Of, By, and For Community*“(Just) Do Whatever He Tells You”, p.67.



- ❖ Lay Marianists learn the history of the Marianist Family, the pillars of the Marianist charism, and the roles of Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon, and Marie Therese de Lamourous.
- ❖ Lay Marianists participate regularly in on-going/life-long formation to deepen their faith, knowledge and commitment to the Marianist charism.

**Lay Marianists are people of prayer and faith.**

- ❖ Lay Marianists pray together as a community.
- ❖ Lay Marianists participate in liturgical/prayer events sponsored by local Marianist Family Councils, Marianist ministries, or other branches of the Marianist Family.
- ❖ Lay Marianists pray on a regular basis.
- ❖ Lay Marianists pray the Three O'clock Prayer.
- ❖ Lay Marianists pray and seek to live the spirit of Mary's Magnificat.
- ❖ Lay Marianists pray the Marianist Doxology.
- ❖ Lay Marianists pray and reflect on the Apostle's Creed.
- ❖ Lay Marianists practice the System of Virtues as a means of spiritual growth.
- ❖ Lay Marianists use spiritual direction/guidance and/or input from community members and spiritual companions.

**Lay Marianists grow in understanding of and relationship with Mary.**

- ❖ Lay Marianists grow in understanding Mary as Mother, disciple, and role model.
- ❖ Lay Marianists ponder how we are formed by Mary for the mission of Christ.
- ❖ Lay Marianists observe Marian feast days.

**Lay Marianists help create and sustain communities of faith and hope.**

- ❖ Lay Marianists typically participate as members of a Marianist Lay Community that meets at a frequency determined by members of the community (typically once or twice a month). Some Lay Marianists are members of more than one community.
- ❖ Lay Marianists in a locale with no other Marianist presence maintain some Marianist connection and commitment to the Marianist Family/MLC-NA in various ways through participation in virtual communities, Marianist courses, attendance at Marianist events, etc. and are encouraged to create new Marianist Lay Communities.
- ❖ Lay Marianists, particularly those in a locale where there is no other Marianist presence, may also choose to live their Marianist vocation in the context of other faith communities through parish groups, bible studies, and small Christian communities while maintaining some connection to the Marianist Family.

- ❖ Lay Marianists use the life and practices of community to support their life of faith, both as a Christian living in the church and as a human being living in the world. Community meeting formats are determined by community members but typically include fellowship, prayer, topic for discussion, faith sharing, and a mission-focused call to action.
- ❖ Lay Marianists welcome diversity and work to build an inclusive environment within their communities.
- ❖ Lay Marianists practice servant leadership and encourage the use of everyone's gifts and talents, particularly through the Three Offices.
- ❖ Lay Marianists evangelize and grow the community by welcoming new members.

**Lay Marianists embrace the mission of Jesus that is expressed in Scripture: "Do whatever He tells you."**

- ❖ Lay Marianists bring Christ to others and others to Christ through word and deed.
- ❖ Lay Marianists form apostolic communities of faith, including starting new communities.
- ❖ Lay Marianists read the signs of the times and respond accordingly to aid the poor, hungry, vulnerable, and marginalized by engaging in Marianist ministries or other charitable organizations of one's choice.
- ❖ Lay Marianists work in solidarity for justice to foster systemic change and join in advocacy campaigns on matters of social justice.
- ❖ Lay Marianists participate in initiatives of the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative, one's own community, the wider Marianist Family, and other social justice/charitable initiatives.

**Lay Marianists grow to be a prophetic sign within the Church.**

- ❖ Lay Marianists discuss local, national, and international issues and discern appropriate ways to individually and collectively respond.
- ❖ Lay Marianists and their communities sometimes gather with other local MLCs or local Marianist Family Councils to discuss issues of common interest.
- ❖ Lay Marianists and their communities include Marianist writings in their discussions, including documents of the International Organization of Marianist Lay Communities (IO-MLC).

**Lay Marianists give time and talent to the Marianist Family and give treasure to support the lay movement.**

- ❖ Lay Marianists assume leadership roles in their own communities and the larger Marianist Family through discernment that considers the opportunity and the person's skills and abilities.

- ❖ Lay Marianists participate (and take an active role) in events hosted by local Marianist Family Councils or other Lay Marianist leadership groups such as MLC-NA, other branches of the Marianist Family, or Marianist ministries.
- ❖ Lay Marianists support their own involvement in activities (pay as you go, or through a community treasury).
- ❖ Lay Marianists (or MLC's on behalf of their members) register with MLC-NA and financially support the efforts of the wider Marianist Family via MLC-NA.

## Special Topics

### Marianist Affiliates

There are many ways to live out one's vocation as a Lay Marianist. One unique vocation is that of the Marianist Affiliates. Marianist Affiliates are Lay Marianists and have a distinct role in the lay branch of the Marianist Family. Affiliation is a lifelong commitment, and affiliates are guided by a vowed Marianist sister, brother, or priest. While Marianist Affiliates do have a distinct vocation within the lay branch, they should nevertheless be considered Lay Marianists and members of MLC-NA.

### Lay Marianists without an MLC

All Lay Marianists are encouraged to belong to an MLC. Lay Marianists who have been formed in and made a commitment to the charism, but temporarily find themselves without an MLC can stay active Lay Marianists to the extent that they maintain the disposition of hopeful discernment.

Hopeful discernment involves more than a historical connection to a Marianist institution or community and requires that one continue to live a commitment to the charism personally while also participating in discussion with others on the signs of the times and the opportunities that become available to the Lay Marianist. At the same time, it is possible to maintain this form of discernment even when circumstances prevent participation in an MLC. This is where the aspect of hope is particularly important. Hopeful discernment is possible even in situations where patience – and even lament – are called for. Any individuals who were, but are not currently in an MLC, and can honestly say that they continue to hopefully discern a path forward to life in an MLC should therefore continue to be recognized as Lay Marianists and members of the MLC-NA.

### Marianist Collaborators

It is important to note that not every layperson who shares in the Marianist charism, spirituality, or mission of the Marianist Family is necessarily a Lay Marianist. In addition to vowed and Lay Marianists, there are also many people who collaborate in one way or another with the Marianist Family in a personal or professional manner but without having the same commitment to and life in the charism as Lay Marianists. Marianist collaborators include

many employees, educators, and participants in Marianist programs and schools. These collaborators often receive formation in the Marianist charism so that their work may reflect the values of the Marianist institution or sponsored ministry. However, the difference between Marianist collaborators and Lay Marianists is that the latter make a *personal* commitment to the Marianist charism and membership in the Marianist Lay Communities.

Collaborators often have a deep relationship with the Marianist charism and spirituality, and they play a vital role in advancing the mission of the Marianist Family. Marianist collaborators are not members of any of the branches of the Marianist Family; nevertheless, MLC-NA joins with all branches of the Marianist Family in its gratitude for the life and work of such collaborators and seeks to recognize Marianist collaborators and include them in its activities to the greatest extent possible.

While there are many ways in which Marianist collaborators relate to the three branches, their schools and institutions, and their sponsored ministries, one special type of collaboration is that of the Marianist Educational Associates (MEAs). MEAs are part of an initiative among the three Marianist Universities to build strong partners with members of the Society of Mary. MEAs participate in a formation program filled with readings, reflections and sharing of insights. Some, but not all, MEAs are also Lay Marianists. This is because the MEA program is a means of collaborating with the Marianist Family in a professional manner and remains distinct from the personal vocation to know, commit to, and live the charism as a Lay Marianist. Other examples of Marianist collaborators include many retreat center participants, Marianist parish members, volunteers at Marianist schools and ministries, and others who participate in the life of the Marianist Family without making a personal commitment.

## II. BECOMING A LAY MARIANIST

Becoming a Lay Marianist is a process in which one begins the lifelong journey of coming to know, commit to, and live the Marianist charism.

The journey toward becoming a Lay Marianist is deeply personal, and no two journeys are the same. However, there are three parts to the journey that all Lay Marianists go through: discernment, formation, and commitment. No part of this journey is ever complete. Lay Marianists are continually engaged in discernment, formation, and renewing their commitment to the charism and mission. Therefore, becoming a Lay Marianist is not a process that completes these three parts of the journey once and for all. Rather, becoming a Lay Marianist is a matter of completing an *initial* process of discernment, formation, and commitment that will continue to unfold throughout one's life in the Marianist Family.

### Initial Discernment

The first step in one's journey toward becoming a Lay Marianist is discerning that the Marianist charism, spirituality, and mission is the right fit for them. This discernment has two main components: experiencing the Marianist charism and hearing the call to a vocation as a Lay Marianist.

Many lay people experience the Marianist charism by meeting vowed religious, by working at a Marianist institution or ministry, or by attending Marianist sponsored programs such as high schools, universities, Living in Faith Experience (LIFE) or retreats at Marianist retreat centers. Some individuals learn about the Marianists from Lay Marianists who reach out to them and invite them to experience a Marianist community. Others seek to learn more about the Marianist Family because of their interest in our Marian spirituality or our emphasis on community.

After experiencing the Marianist charism, some people hear a vocational call from and toward God to live and share in its distinctive spirituality and mission. This calling is sometimes articulated as a feeling of deep personal resonance with the Marianist way of life; other times it is described as a feeling of belonging.

Discernment provides an opportunity for an individual to explore more deeply the call to live the Marianist charism in his/her life. Discernment is very personal but doesn't have to be formal. When not already connected to a Marianist community, the first step in learning more is to contact the Marianist Lay Community of North America. MLC-NA Leadership can help to identify one's interest and offer a recommendation for ways to learn more. One might also seek a Lay Marianist or a vowed Marianist religious to be a spiritual companion or mentor. Many members of Marianist Lay Communities discern their interest in the Marianist Family by

experiencing a Marianist Lay Community. In this way they observe the spirituality, dynamics, relationships, etc. of the community to see if it is a good “fit.”

No matter what shape one’s personal discernment to the Marianist Lay Communities takes, the end result will be that the individual will be able to affirm that they have had an authentic experience of the Marianist charism and that they hear the call to begin accepting the Marianist charism freely and as their own.

## Initial Formation

Because there is such diversity in how people come into the Marianist Family, formation can be as formal or informal as fits each person’s needs. The goal of formation is to learn about the Marianist history, charism, and mission so that an individual can discern their interest in making a commitment to live the charism. This formation includes learning about and understanding the founders and the common elements of the Marianist charism and spirituality. The specific style and length of this formation may vary from country to country, and community to community as long as the process reflects the spirit of our international documents which can be found at [www.clm-mlc.org](http://www.clm-mlc.org). Usually, this process covers a period of time from six months to several years.

Formation happens in a number of ways, formally and informally, for both individuals and groups. Formation consists of more than education or steps in preparation of a one-time commitment. It is ongoing. Nevertheless, there are core aspects of Marianist formation that each person looking to become a Lay Marianist must know and be able to apply in their own life. These core aspects are described in the section “To Know” above.

In order to begin the process of formation, the individual seeking formation must select a sponsor who is an active Lay Marianist in good standing. Sponsors may, but are not required, to provide formal formation during this time. Rather, the role of the sponsor will be to accompany the aspiring individual throughout the formation process. Moreover, each sponsor is responsible for affirming that the process of formation and the desire of the individual being formed to become a Lay Marianist are authentic.

By the end of initial formation, the aspiring Lay Marianist will have internalized the Marianist charism, spirituality, and mission as her or his own and be willing to either join or start a new Marianist Lay Community. The sponsor for the aspiring Lay Marianist will be able and willing to affirm the authenticity of both the formation process and the aspirant’s desire for a commitment as a Lay Marianist.

## Initial Commitment

Through our baptism we become part of the body of Christ. Through our formation and discernment, we learn that the Marianist Family has a unique charism and spirituality. As Lay Marianists, we strive to embody the Marianist charism in our daily lives and join Mary in her mission of bringing Christ to the world. The Marianist charism is a discerned and chosen way to live and express our baptismal call.

As there are many expressions of the Lay Marianist vocation, individuals make varying degrees of commitment to a Marianist way of life. An intentional and public commitment is the most declarative way to identify one's self as a Lay Marianist. An intentional commitment is what sets apart someone who conscientiously and purposefully commits to a Marianist way of life from someone who has learned about and been formed in the Marianist charism but doesn't actively perpetuate it or only applies it within the context of specifically Marianist ministries (e.g. one's employment or participation within a Marianist setting). A public commitment is one that is made in a shared context, such as within an MLC or a gathering of the Marianist Family.

As an inclusive family, we recognize that we are blessed to have alongside us lay people who are employees, collaborators, educators, participants in Marianist programs, etc. who have some allegiance to the Marianist charism but are not members of MLC's and do not participate in the life and activities of MLC-NA or local Marianist Family Councils. These collaborators often receive formation in the Marianist charism so that their work may reflect the values of the Marianist sponsored ministry. If after discernment, the collaborator wants to intentionally commit to being a Lay Marianist and join an MLC, then they too could become a Lay Marianist.

Commitment as a Lay Marianist enrolls a person in the Marianist Lay Community of North America, the national Marianist community accountable to the International Organization of Marianist Lay Communities, a private association of the faithful officially recognized by the Church. A documented commitment and enrollment in MLC-NA are essential steps in identification as a Lay Marianist.

To commit means that after initial formation, individuals make an intentional and public commitment to accept the Marianist charism to guide their life. To be a Lay Marianist is not a private commitment but should be shared with others.

### III. RECOGNITION OF LAY MARIANISTS AND MLCs

As a private association of the faithful, it is the International Organization of Marianist Lay Communities (IO-MLC) that determines one's status as a Lay Marianist and the recognition of communities as Marianist Lay Communities. This authority is delegated to the national organizations which then report to the IO-MLC. **The directory of Lay Marianists and Marianist Lay Communities in the United States, Canada and Haiti is administered by the Marianist Lay Community of North America.**

#### Registering as a Lay Marianist

As noted in the section on Initial Commitment, MLCs must enroll their members in MLC-NA to be recognized as Lay Marianists and be included in the membership directory. Becoming a Lay Marianist requires that the individual aspiring to become a Lay Marianist:



- a) complete a formation process recognized by the Leadership Council as outlined in this *Guide to Life*,
- b) make a commitment to a Marianist way of life as described in this *Guide to Life*, and
- c) register as a member of MLC-NA with the Leadership Council and receive official recognition of one's formation and commitment as a Lay Marianist from the council.

## Renewing Active Status as a Lay Marianist

The MLC-NA Leadership Council will gradually implement the processes of renewing one's membership as a Lay Marianist detailed below. Lay Marianists will be encouraged to participate in the annual renewal process for the 2023 calendar year, but will not be required to do so until the 2024 calendar year.

Renewal of one's membership status consists of:

- a) verifying one's ongoing commitment as a Committed Lay Marianist and/or membership in an MLC, and
- b) making an annual financial contribution of any amount.

Membership renewals may be carried out by individuals, by household, or as an MLC. For record keeping purposes, the Leadership Council verifies active membership statuses by calendar year, and kindly requests that all members of MLC-NA renew their membership in the "renewal period" consisting of two months before or after January 1 of each year (i.e. between November 1 – February 28). Membership contributions made after the renewal period will still be accepted and applied to the current calendar year's membership or – if made after November 1 – to activate the next year's membership.

Annual contributions to MLC-NA are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

## Creating and Renewing Marianist Lay Communities

Marianist Lay Communities are the foundational means by which Committed Lay Marianists live the Marianist charism. The MLCs are foundational in the sense that they form, support, and give shape to the entirety of each Lay Marianist's sense of the charism, spirituality, and mission, as well as their unique vocation, ministry, and life.

Because MLCs are inherently inclusive in nature, they may also include members who are not Committed Lay Marianists. These members are distinct from a community mentor, formator, or spiritual director who may, but are not always, counted as a fully participating member of the community since they retain some degree of being an "objective outsider" that supports

the community's life in a companion role. Some common types of members of MLCs who are not Lay Marianists include:

- Individuals who are in discernment of or aspiring to a Marianist vocation
- Individuals who are in a process of formation to become a Lay Marianist
- Marianist sisters, brothers, or priests
- Other individuals who wish to participate in the life and mission of an MLC, but are not Lay Marianists for some other reason

All Marianist Lay Communities in the United States and Canada must be officially recognized by the Leadership Council of MLC-NA and maintain an active community contact with the council. In order to preserve the essential identity of MLCs, the Leadership Council will not recognize any group as an MLC in which a majority of the members are not active Lay Marianists.

MLCs are not required to make community contributions to MLC-NA; however, they are permitted to make an annual contribution on behalf of all of their members. MLCs making annual contributions on behalf of their members will be asked to verify their roster of active members, and all verified members of the MLC will automatically have their membership with MLC-NA renewed.

MLC-NA authorizes and approves the creation of new Marianist Lay Communities. The process for recognition of a new MLC in North America is:

1. **REQUEST** - An emerging MLC requests recognition through the MLC-NA Leadership Council, who will identify the next appropriate steps the community should take. These steps may already be prescribed by existing formation programs but the community must still request status as a Marianist community and provide a membership roster.
2. **DISCERNMENT & FORMATION** - During, and following, the formation period the emerging MLC and MLC-NA Leadership Council (or its delegate) discern together the readiness of the MLC to make a commitment within the Marianist Family.
3. **RECOGNITION** - Upon making a commitment as an intentional Marianist Lay Community, written notification of its recognition will be issued by the MLC-NA.

The process for maintaining an active community contact includes:

- Each MLC must keep at least one community contact on record with MLC-NA
  - Each MLC may have up to two community contacts.
  - Community contacts will receive information to disperse from the Leadership Council, requests for information from their community, and invitations to meet with other community contacts, area representatives, members of the Leadership Council, and MLC-NA staff. Information sharing and meeting

- requests can be fulfilled by any community member; the community contact is responsible for ensuring that the information or request is received and handled in whatever manner the MLC sees fit.
- The community contact may, but does not have to be, a person with a leadership role within the community
  - Each MLC must provide an roster of its active members