

# Lay Marianist Formation Program

Summaries and Questions for Sponsors

Unit 3: Community

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*The following summaries and discussion questions are to help you, as a sponsor, orient yourself to the conversations your aspirant has been having. It is intended as context and a conversation starter, not as a checklist or limit to your conversations. You are encouraged to use your own knowledge of your sponsored aspirant and follow the movement of the Spirit in your conversations.*

The topic of “community” in the Marianist tradition is twofold. In the first place, the notion of community relates to the Marianist mission of animating inclusive, lifegiving communities throughout the church and world – that is, that are not necessarily within the Marianist Family. In that vein, our formation program considers general principles and practical ideas for how Lay Marianists can deepen the intentionality of all of the various communities in their life. In the second place, it is important that Marianists have a Marianist Lay Community in which they can explicitly and intentionally celebrate, support one another, and continue to grow in the charism that is shared by all community members. In this final unit of our formation program, we treat these two aspects of community as follows:

**Summary of Marianist Principles for Animating Community:** Participants reflected on what it means to animate community in the church and world.

- There are many different *types* of community that Marianists engage. These include: natural communities (eg. families, neighborhoods, etc), communities of a shared characteristic, volunteer associations, and religious communities.
- No matter which type of community we are talking about, Mary’s way of animating community is inherently “bottom up” in nature. Like Mary, we are attentive to both the needs of the community as well as the ways in which goodness and grace are already flowing. Marianists work most effectively by attending to, amplifying, and coordinating those movements of grace.
- Our program focused on three principles for animating community in a bottom up manner:
  - Intentionality
  - Stability
  - Adaptability (Adaptation and Change)

**Summary of Principles for Marianist Lay Communities:** Following Bro. Tom Giardino’s stages of development, our program discussed practical tips for starting and sustaining MLCs at:

- **Community Beginnings:** The beginning of a community is a delicate balance of many aspects. The group must be open and inclusive, though not so much that it loses its identity and focus and devolves into a mere social club. The group must find activities and “do something” – though not to the point of becoming only concerned with service and without time to reflect and grow as a community. The group must focus on its purpose and mission, though not spend so much time working on a mission statement that it becomes an institution or nonprofit organization. Finally, the group must find ways to support one another, without being only a service organization. Attention to all 4 of these poles will help the group become a true *community* – which Giardino describes as being “person-centered with a mission strategy.”
- **Early Life:** In the early life of an MLC, the community begins to think about its norms, its way of making decisions, a name for the community, and whether or not to have a community mentor
- **Affirming Identity:** As the community grows into itself and its identity it is important to focus on the bonds of the relationships to prevent from becoming stale. Getting to a point where each

meeting is about more than fulfilling each individual's needs is important, as is finding ways further build one-on-one relationships between each community member.

- **Cohesion:** The community has a good sense of peace. There are ebbs and flows, wins and losses, members gained and lost – all with the essential essence of the community left intact. Communities support one another in mission either in through a common ministry of the MLC, or by supporting each individual in their own way(s) of living out the mission.
- **Breakdown:** All good things come to an end, including MLCs. Bringing intentionality to the end of a community's lifecycle – rather than just stopping or fizzling out – can help bring a sense of thankfulness and completion to the community, bring closure to each member, and help set the stage for possible new community life.

**Discernment Starter Questions for Discussion:**

- What (non-Marianist) communities are you already a part of? In what ways are you already successfully animating that community? What are ways that you think you can bring additional intentionality to your relationships in those communities?
- What is your current relationship with an MLC? Thinking about Bro. Tom's model of community lifecycles, what stage do you think that MLC is at now and which items that were discussed in the formation program do you think the community should be attentive to at this present stage?
- As you prepare to make your Lay Marianist commitment for the upcoming year, what are ways that I, as your sponsor, can continue to support you going forward?