



MARIANIST LAY COMMUNITY OF NORTH AMERICA

Guidance on Vocational Commitments

This Guidance on Vocational Commitments is approved ad experimentum for a period of three years by the Leadership Council of the Marianist Lay Community of North America as of December 8, 2025, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. The purpose of this document is to provide both a consistent vocabulary and set of procedures to be implemented as Lay Marianists join and renew their membership within the Marianist Lay Communities.

Summary

The Marianist Lay Communities are an international association of the Christian faithful in the Catholic Church. Members of the Marianist Lay Communities, known as Lay Marianists, make a vocational commitment to living out the charism shared by the entire Marianist Family within the context of the association. The heart of the Lay Marianist commitment is the renewal of one's baptismal promise in a particular manner that places one in alliance with Mary and her enduring mission to the church and world.

Membership in the Marianist Lay Communities is constituted through official recognition and acceptance of a vocational commitment. There is only one vocational commitment to the Marianist charism within the Marianist Lay Communities, but this commitment is undertaken in two forms: annual and definitive. Annual commitments are normally taken and renewed each year, while definitive commitments are marked by intention to maintain the commitment for life. Both forms of the commitment are equal in status, and Lay Marianists are fully incorporated into the association through either form.

I. Vocational Commitments

A Continuation of the Baptismal Promise

All members of the Christian faithful "are called to the fullness of Christian life" (LG 40). Through baptism, each person is consecrated into the people of God, which entails "participation in the salvific mission of the Church itself" (LG 33). A vocational commitment in the Marianist Lay Communities is a particular means of renewing and living out these universal baptismal promises.

The Marianist commitment is vocational in the sense that it is a response to a call from God to a specific way of life. Vocations are commitments of the whole person, meaning that they are particular ways of serving to build up the reign of God in all parts of our personal, professional, social, and familial life.

As with all vocational commitments within the Marianist Family, a person's commitment is an intentional and explicit means of accepting and living out the Marianist charism in alliance with Mary. However, the vocational commitment of the Lay Marianist is distinctive in two ways: because it is lived as a means of fulfilling the vocation and apostolate of the laity, and because it is lived in and through membership in the association of Marianist Lay Communities and the small faith communities for which the association is named.

A vocational commitment within the Marianist Lay Communities may be described using the terms Marian consecration or consecration to Mary because it renews the consecration of our baptism in the spirit of Mary and with the specific intention to know, love, and serve Mary ever more deeply. However, care should be taken not to conflate the vocation of Lay Marianists with the other branches of the Marianist Family who are known as consecrated laity (Alliance Mariale) or consecrated religious (Marianist sisters, brothers, and priests) because of their vows embracing the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

Alliance with Mary

The defining characteristic of the vocational commitment in the Marianist Lay Communities is that it places the person into a special relationship with Mary, that is, in alliance with Mary. Fr. Chaminade is clear that our Alliance with Mary is an authentic covenant with three dimensions: Mary's alliance with us, our commitment to Mary, and the community of those in alliance with Mary.¹

First, there is the relationship that Mary has with us. Mary has been given to us as our own spiritual mother, and so she loves us, helps us, and guides us. She continues in this role because of her unique place within the history of salvation. "Mary, through her love, cooperated in giving the world a Liberator," and it through the power of this love that she continues to relate to us today in so many ways.²

Second, there is a commitment on our behalf to know, love, and serve Mary.³ As a means of becoming more like Jesus, we take Mary as our mother, educator, and model, thereby becoming more like Jesus by becoming more like Mary. In so doing, we join in alliance with Mary's mission of bringing Christ to the world. As collaborators in her mission, we shape communities that make Christ present in all sectors of

¹ See the Fifth Meditation of Fr. Chaminade's Retreat of 1817 and Twelfth Meditation of Fr. Chaminade's Retreat of 1819, available in: Chaminade, William Joseph Chaminade. *Marian Writings*, vol. 2, pars. 739-742 and 751-753.

² Chaminade, William Joseph. "Foundations of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin." *Marian Writings*, vol. 1, pars. 69-70.

³ This formulation is found in Fr. Chaminade's Letter of August 24, 1839 to the retreat masters. See: Chaminade, William Joseph, *Letters of Father Chaminade*, vol. 5, no. 1163; reprinted as *The Letter and the Spirit*, edited by Thomas A. Stanley, SM and Robert H. Hughes, SM, Marianist Press, 1979. This framework was utilized as the framework for "In Alliance with Mary," ratified by the General Assembly of Marianist Lay Communities in July, 2005 in Bordeaux, France.

society through our careful attention to the needs of people, the signs of the times, and the movement of grace in the world.

Finally, we are aware of the community of all people who share in this mutual alliance with Mary. In this sense, we recognize an alliance of all people who have taken Mary's mission as their own, and therefore, a fundamentally communal character to our commitment. Fr. Chaminade makes this communal character of the alliance explicit: "You are making this agreement with Mary; you are to be a family peculiarly her own."⁴ Through our participation in the Marianist Lay Communities, we seek to strengthen the movement of this alliance throughout the rest of the Marianist Family as well as in the broader church and world. Moreover, we know that we can depend on the mutual support of this community of communities as we carry out the mission on our own vocational paths.

Living the Charism

Entering into alliance with Mary through a commitment in the Marianist Lay Communities means accepting the gift of the Marianist charism and living it vocationally. Like Mary, we hear God's personal call to us and respond, thoughtfully and actively, with our own "Yes!" to this call. We recognize that this calling is a responsibility, but even more so, we accept and live this calling as a gift.

Our response to God's vocational calling is a commitment to Mary's mission of bringing Christ to the world. It is in this spirit that "we seek to collaborate in all missionary activities aiming at the multiplication of Christians and the development of a world that is more just and compassionate, more free and more interdependent."⁵ This mission is rooted in faith, and therefore we are committed to ongoing spiritual growth in order to remain "strong in faith, a faith of the heart inspired by love, by which we persevere in hope."⁶ Carrying out this mission can only be achieved through animating and participating in inclusive, life-giving communities, for "we believe that we find salvation, freedom, and justice in and through community."⁷ Therefore, "community is experienced as gift and task. Community is called forth by the Spirit, and is not only our own work. We understand it as a call by the Spirit, as a vocation, and as a life choice."⁸

Living the Marianist charism vocationally means that we are committed to our particular form of service to the church and world even though the circumstances of our personal life, our church, and our world will continue to change. Therefore, our vocational commitment of a life in the Marianist charism is also a commitment to continue interpreting the "signs of the times"⁹ and discerning how we can follow the words of Mary and "Do whatever he tells you," (John 2:5).

⁴ "Retreat of 1819", *Marian Writings*, vol 2., par 751.

⁵ General Assembly of Marianist Lay Communities. *The Mission of Marianist Lay Communities*, 1997. Second International Meeting, Llira, Spain, par. 1.4.

⁶ General Assembly of Marianist Lay Communities. *The Identity of Marianist Lay Communities*, 1993. First International Meeting, Santiago, Chile, par. 2.1.

⁷ General Assembly of Marianist Lay Communities. *Being in Community*, 1993. Third International Meeting, Philadelphia, USA, par. 1.1.

⁸ "Being in community," par. 1.5.

⁹ Second Vatican Council. *Gaudium et Spes*, December 7, 1965, par. 4.

A Vocation of the Laity

A commitment as a Lay Marianist is a commitment of a member of the laity, which includes “all the faithful except those in holy orders and those in the state of religious life.” The commitment of a Lay Marianist is distinguished in that it is lived out as a member of the laity who, “by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God.”¹⁰ In other words, all sectors of life – including personal, family, social, political, and professional life – are domains in which Lay Marianists “work for the spread of the Reign of God in the world.”¹¹ A vocational commitment as a Lay Marianist is a promise to continue to carry out Mary’s mission in this lay state of life.

The vocational work of the Lay Marianist is also necessarily collaborative in nature. As members of the People of God, the laity “are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world.”¹² The Marianist Family has made these functions of Christ our own through our method of organizing according to the offices of temporalities, spirituality, and education.

The scope of this great work is truly magnificent, and no one person can commit to all the aspects of Mary’s mission that the laity are collectively called to serve. Therefore, through their vocational commitment, each Lay Marianist dedicates themselves to the work of spreading the Reign of God in the world through the temporal, spiritual, and formational means available to them. This dedication especially includes efforts to build up the temporal, spiritual, and formational means of the Marianist Lay Communities. However, the commitment of each Lay Marianist must seek out collaboration with the gifts, talents, and opportunities of other members of the Marianist Family, as well as other members of the broader church and world, in order to work towards the fulfillment of the entirety of Mary’s mission.

Marianist Stability

All vocational commitments in the Marianist Family are marked by the practice of Marianist stability. In other words, Marianist stability is lived out by members of all the branches of the Marianist Family because stability is implicit in our alliance with Mary and our acceptance of Mary’s mission. A distinct, although highly related, concept is the notion of if, when, and how stability is made explicit through a vow that members of each respective branch make to persevere in upholding the practice of Marianist stability. The broader character and practice of Marianist stability will be described first, and the distinction between how stability is explicitly vowed in the context of each branch will follow.

Marianist stability has roots in other Catholic charisms; however, its character is distinct from these other traditions and flows directly from our particular alliance with Mary. In the Marianist tradition, stability means more than simply remaining in the association or religious institute that one has joined. Rather, stability has a threefold meaning.

¹⁰ Second Vatican Council. *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, par. 31.

¹¹ *The Identity of Marianist Lay Communities*, par. 3.1. See also, 3.3.

¹² *Lumen Gentium*, par. 31.

The first dimension is that we participate in the universal and enduring character of Mary's mission. God continually works for the salvation of the world in and through Mary. As Fr. Chaminade describes this situation: "Mary, through her love, cooperated in giving the world a Liberator; that is the principle. Here is the consequence: God having decided to give us Jesus Christ through the Blessed Virgin, no longer changes that decision, for God never revokes a choice (see Rm 11:29). It is and will always remain true that, having once received from her the universal principle of grace, we shall also receive through her mediation its various applications in all the stages of the Christian life."¹³ In other words, we partake in God's stable presence with and for the world made Incarnate through Mary. Stability is therefore a necessary characteristic of being in alliance with Mary that we receive in our daily means of living out Mary's mission to the Church and world.

Second, stability refers to the means by which Marianists respond to the call to bring Christ to the world through making Mary known, loved, and served in community. This response is found in each Marianist's commitment to the charism and life in service of the mission. Additionally, a key aspect of stability is the means by which Marianists give life to all those in alliance with Mary by contributing to the temporal, spiritual, and educational well-being of the Marianist Family. In each of these ways, vocationally committed Marianists help anchor, center, and provide a stable core for to all the various ministries and apostolates of the Marianist Family.

Finally, stability refers to the assurance that each Marianist gives to persevere in their commitment to and alliance with Mary and her mission. The precise nature of this assurance varies between the branches because it is lived out in different states of life and in relationship to each of the different branches. In the Marianist Sisters, stability is made explicit through a vow of stability made during their temporary profession of vows. The Society of Mary differs slightly in that stability is made explicit through a vow of stability made during perpetual vows. In the Marianist Lay Communities, stability is implicit in both annual and definitive commitments and is only made explicit through an optional vow of stability.

II. Membership in the Marianist Lay Communities

Any member of the baptized faithful is eligible to enter into the association of Marianist Lay Communities. Members are incorporated into the Marianist Lay Communities through the profession of a vocational commitment joined with a legitimate recognition and acceptance of their commitment.

Within the United States and Canada, the profession of a vocational commitment within the Marianist Lay Communities may be recognized by the national responsible of the country, a representative appointed by the national responsible, or any Lay Marianist of the country in good standing acting in the capacity of a sponsor. A vocational commitment is accepted by the Marianist Lay Communities when notice of the commitment and its recognition has been communicated to and acknowledged by the national responsible or an appointed person or entity.

The intentional and explicit renewal of an annual commitment suffices to renew one's membership in the association without the necessity of official reception or acknowledgement.

¹³ Chaminade, William Joseph. "Foundations of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin." *Marian Writings*, vol. 1, pars. 69-70.

Once incorporated into the Marianist Lay Communities, individuals enjoy all rights and responsibilities of membership in the association as provided through canonical and civil law, the statutes of the Marianist Lay Communities, and the authoritative determinations of MLC-NA.

III. Two Forms of the Vocational Commitment: Annual and Definitive

There is only one vocational commitment to the Marianist charism within the Marianist Lay Communities, but this commitment is undertaken in two forms: annual and definitive. Both are manifestations of the same inner experience. Likewise, a person may be fully incorporated into the association through either form of the vocational commitment.

Making a Commitment

All commitments are to be made in an intentional and explicit manner. In order to be intentional, the commitment must be made without coercion and only after an authentic period of formation and discernment so that the individual fully understands and assents to the consecration. An explicit commitment is one that is made in a shared context, such as within an MLC, a mass, or a gathering of the Marianist Family.

The normal commitment journey for Lay Marianists is to begin with an annual commitment. After a period at least three years, the Lay Marianist will express their intention to make a definitive commitment or to continue renewing their commitments every year. Making a definitive commitment is not a requirement of any person, regardless of their time in the Marianist Lay Communities. Both temporarily and definitively committed Lay Marianists are full, active members of the Marianist Lay Communities.

Annual Commitments

Annual commitments are made for a period of one year and are renewable. These commitments are most typically made on an annual basis. Because annual commitments are full vocational commitments to the Marianist charism, they should only be taken by individuals who are prepared and consciously express the intention to dedicate themselves fully to all aspects of the Marianist charism. Individuals who are in the early stages of inquiring, learning more about the Marianists and discerning a committed Marianist life are encouraged to participate in the life of the Marianist Family, including Marianist community life, ministry, prayer, and other activities before entering into initial formation and making a commitment.

Character of the Annual Commitment

There are two bases for the annual commitment. The first is that the annual commitment marks the beginning of a journey in the Marianist Lay Communities. Beginning one's committed life in the Marianist Lay Communities with a annual commitment does not reduce the level of commitment or the

depths of one's experience or faith. Rather, the annual nature of the commitment for those beginning their journey preserves the freedom necessary to authentically discern whether a Marianist vocation is the right particular path for the individual in their lifelong journey of following Jesus.

Second, annual commitments create an inclusive space in the Marianist Family for those who wish to make sincere vocational commitments in alliance with Mary, but feel inhibited to make a definitive commitment. This means that Lay Marianist may continue to renew their annual commitment indefinitely without being required to make a definitive commitment. Because annual and definitive commitments differ in duration, but not degree or significance, this allows all those who are vocationally committed to life in the Marianist Lay Communities to live out the fullness of their vocation without being hindered by the realities of lay life that may preclude definitive commitment.

First Commitment

In order to first make an annual commitment, one must have enough personal experience of the Marianist Family and charism to make their commitment authentically and in good faith. Moreover, the individual must have completed a degree of formation adequate for full participation and membership in the Marianist Lay Communities.

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. At the conclusion of the individual's formation process, the 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.

Before making their first vocational commitment, 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. Upon making an authentic commitment, the individual will be recognized by the Marianist Lay Community of North America as a Lay Marianist and a member of the international association of Marianist Lay Communities. The sponsor for the aspiring Lay Marianist must 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 for the individual's first commitment to be officially recognized.

Renewal

Marianist commitments are renewed daily in one's interior faith of the heart and action in the world. However, because of the fundamentally communal nature of the Marianist charism, it is necessary to renew one's annual commitment intentionally and explicitly on an annual or other basis, as appropriate to the duration of the commitment. The intentional nature of the commitment implies that the Lay Marianist should actively discern the renewal of their commitment rather than passively continue the status quo.

At the same time, an individual's discernment to following Jesus through a vocational commitment in the Marianist Lay Communities may, over time, give way to a sense of being called to a different spiritual path or community. It is a natural part of human growth to make new choices based on lived

experience and ongoing discernment. Should this occur, such a decision must be made freely, responsibly, and with the same spirit of intentionality that marks all Marianist commitments. This choice should be lived with peace and trust, confident that one's relationship with God and path of discipleship is continuing to grow and develop.

Definitive Commitments

Definitive commitments are of the same fundamental nature as annual commitments, with the exception that they add an additional sign and effect of Marianist stability through the intention of extending the commitment for life. For this reason, definitive commitments are typically joined with a vow of stability.

Definitive commitments are normally made after a Lay Marianist has been a temporarily committed member of the Marianist Lay Communities for at least three years, although national leadership bodies may allow for exceptions to this norm.

Vow of Stability

The Vow of Stability is a tradition shared by all branches of the Marianist Family. The vow of stability is explicitly added as part of the temporary religious profession of the Marianist Sisters and the perpetual religious profession of the Society of Mary. In the Marianist Lay Communities, the vow of stability is an optional vow that may be expressed during or after the making of a definitive commitment.

A vow is a deliberate and free promise made to God about a possible and better good,¹⁴ which in this case is a promise to persevere and grow a life-long alliance with Mary.

Canonically, the vow of stability made by Lay Marianists is a private vow.¹⁵

Duration of the Definitive Commitment

The vow of stability within the Marianist Lay Communities is endowed with the characteristic of permanence, but not of irrevocability. Permanence means that it is the sincere intention of the individual to persevere in this commitment as a life option. They will endeavor to uphold this commitment through the inevitable times of both prosperity and difficulty.

Nevertheless, it is the nature of the life of the laity that one's environment and circumstances may produce a situation that affects the intention of stability to such a degree that it is no longer tenable. Lay Marianists who made a definitive commitment are encouraged to discern the implications of such changes in life within their MLC and spiritual director, for the grace of God and protection of Mary that

¹⁴ *Code of Canon Law*, c. 1191, in Beal, John P et al. *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*. New York: Paulist Press, 2000.

¹⁵ *Code of Canon Law*, c. 1191-1198.

comes to us through the bonds of community may find a way for one to persevere when it otherwise feels impossible. God asks for fidelity through the vicissitudes and difficulties of life, and our commitment, spirituality, and community are there to support us in these moments. Nevertheless, stability within the Marianist Lay Communities does abnegate the lay state of life or the relationships, obligations, and circumstances inherent in this state that may make stability impossible. Ultimately, the final and decisive decision to relinquish a definitive commitment lies with the individual Lay Marianist.

Renewal

As with annual commitments, a definitive commitment as a Lay Marianist is renewed daily in one's interior faith of the heart and action in the world. Because of the characteristic of stability, it is not strictly necessary that Lay Marianists with a definitive commitment renew their commitment in a public forum. However, an annual and explicit renewal of one's commitment has the effect of strengthening and supporting both the individual's commitment to persevere as well as the gift of their stability to the Marianist Family. Definitively committed Lay Marianists are therefore encouraged to renew their commitment annually within their MLC and at any other time in which they have the opportunity of joining with fellow Marianists in a renewal of commitments.