MARIANIST LAY COMMUNITY OF NORTH AMERICA



Marianist Lay Communities

About Us

Overview

The Marianist Lay Communities (MLCs) are an international Catholic association of the faithful. Its members—known as Lay Marianists—are women and men who have discerned a vocation to live their Christian faith in a particular way: in alliance with Mary, for the mission of bringing Christ to the world.



Lay Marianists are organized into Marianist Lay Communities, small faith communities that serve as places of prayer, formation, discernment, and mutual support.

Lay Marianists take Mary as their model and teacher for how to live a life of discipleship. From the Annunciation to the Upper Room, they find Mary continually discerning how Christ meets the needs of the world and acting to meet those needs in the context of community. Their calling and mission follow Mary's way and are lived out across many cultures and countries, by people in diverse stages of life and professions.

OUR CHARISM

A *charism* is a gift of the Holy Spirit, given to people in order to serve the Church and world in a particular way, at a particular time. The Marianist charism was given to the Church through its founders in the wake of the French Revolution.

The purpose of the Marianist charism is to help the Church adapt to the new structures of modern, secular society by promoting lay leadership in carrying out the Church's mission. The model for this style of leadership, and the way of being Church that it implies, is found in Mary of Nazareth, mother of Jesus.



Faith of the Heart

For Marianists, faith is lived out in active participation in both the Church and the world. Lay Marianists raise families, are active in their neighborhoods and parishes, and have careers in all sectors of society. In each part of their lives, they witness to the gospel message of love, peace, and joy through their actions and words.



Alliance with Mary

The Marianist charism and spirituality invite Marianists to collaborate with Mary in her mission to make Christ present in the world. From Mary, they learn to trust the divine will, be attentive to the needs of others, sing of God's solidarity with the poor, afflicted, and marginalized, and let the Holy Spirit work in them to bring Jesus and his ministry into the world.



Mission

Because of their faith and alliance with Mary, Lay Marianists are in permanent mission in both the Church and the world. Within the Church, Marianists build inclusive structures that promote the active participation of the laity in the life of the Church and invite people to explore their faith in the context of intentional community. In the world, Marianists witness to the gospel message through works of charity, education, and social justice.



Being in Community

The Marianist charism is essentially communal. Lay Marianists gather in intentional faith communities called Marianist Lay Communities (MLCs) not only to support the spiritual and missionary life of each member, but also to build a common life of faith and action.



Inclusivity

Lay Marianists promote a spirit of hospitality and openness of mind to all people and experiences in their own communities, in the Church, and in society as a whole. They believe that unity is best upheld in and through diversity. The Marianist Family is a discipleship of equals, meaning that all branches are called to participate fully, as equals, in the Marianist charism and mission.

Foundations



The Marianist charism was born in the aftermath of the French Revolution, a time when the Catholic Church in France was devastated by persecution, exile, and the near-total collapse of its public life. Revolutionaries attacked the Church as a pillar of the old order, rich in land and privilege, and many went further, dismissing faith itself as superstition. Churches were desecrated, clergy were imprisoned or killed, and the faithful were left without access to the sacraments. The Revolution's critique was not entirely without merit: the Church had come to look more like an institution of privilege than a community of believers. Some welcomed the Church's collapse; others hoped simply to rebuild what had been lost. But the Marianist founders saw something different: the need not for less faith, but for a new way of living it. They rose to meet that moment, planting the seeds of what would become the Marianist Lay Communities.



Even before the worst of the persecution had ended, **Marie-Thérèse de Lamourous** was already keeping the faith alive in France. At great personal risk, she opened her home for secret Masses celebrated by **Fr. William Joseph Chaminade**. Meanwhile, in the countryside of southern France, a young **Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon** was building her own response to the crisis: a network of young women, spread across the region, who sustained one another's faith and spiritual life through regular correspondence. This "Little Society" proved that physical distance was no barrier to deep Christian community.

Foundations

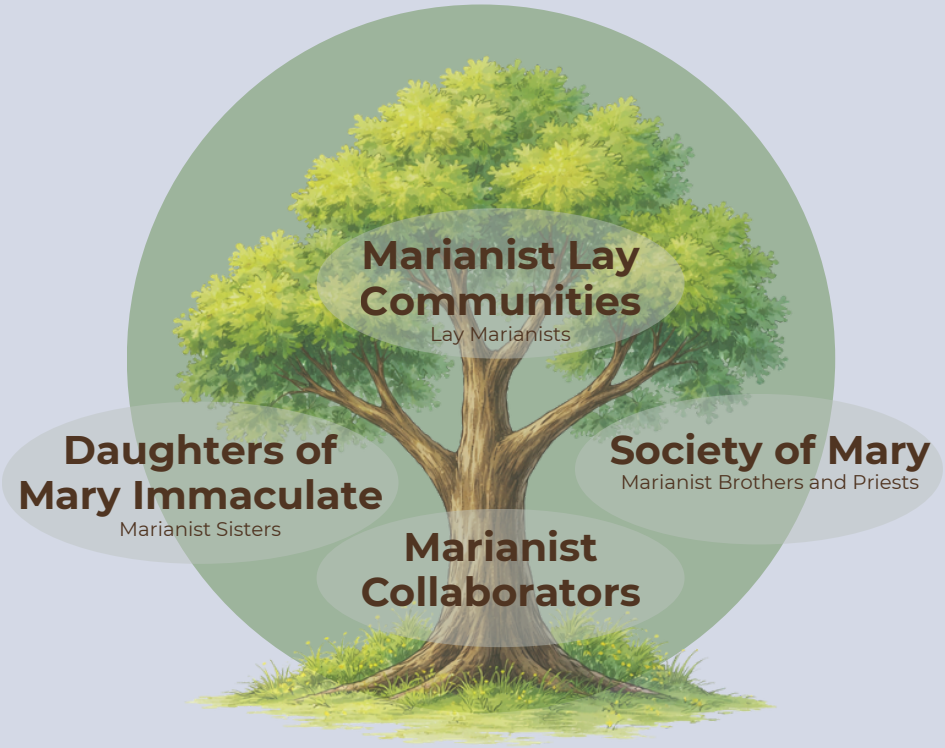
Fr. Chaminade was exiled to Spain in 1797, where he was inspired by a vision for rebuilding the Church. Behind this vision was a conviction that Mary of Nazareth—a laywoman who said yes to God's mission without title or institution—showed the Church the way forward. When he returned in 1800, he witnessed firsthand that the faith survived the Revolution largely because laypeople kept it alive. In Bordeaux, he gathered laypeople into a new kind of association—the Bordeaux sodality—organized into small groups that met regularly for prayer, formation, and mission. The sodality gave structure to the growing idea that laypeople, gathered in intentional community, are central to the Church's life and mission. Meanwhile, Marie-Thérèse grew the Maison de la Miséricorde ("House of Mercy") in Bordeaux, a home where women leaving prostitution could rebuild their lives in community. Together, these three incredible individuals continued to gather more people together, giving rise to all the lay and religious branches of what we now call the Marianist Family.



Mary, Mother of God, by Gracie Morbitzer

The Marianist Family

The Marianist Family is a charismatic family made up of three branches—the Marianist Lay Communities, the Marianist Sisters (FMI), and the Society of Mary (SM)—as well as a large number of people who collaborate in the Marianist mission, share in its spirituality, or are inspired by its mission. In some countries, but not in North America, there is a fourth branch of consecrated laity called the Alliance Mariale.



The Marianists:

All branches of the Marianist Family make some form of vocational commitment and are canonically recognized members of their respective association. For the Marianist brothers, priests, sisters, and members of the Alliance Mariale, this vocational commitment takes the form of vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Lay Marianists do make a vocational commitment, but this commitment does not require vows. All vocational commitments within the Marianist Family are marked by the character of Marianist stability. For the religious branches, this character is sealed by an additional fourth vow of stability. For Lay Marianists, making a private vow of stability is optional for members who have made their definitive commitment.

Collaborators and Associates:

In addition to the three branches, the Marianist Family is proud to include a wide range of individuals who collaborate closely with the Marianists in many ways. These individuals do not make a vocational commitment or have membership in one of the branches, but they are often well formed in the Marianist charism, work for a Marianist institution, or support a Marianist branch or organization with time, talent, and treasure. The Marianist Family and its mission would be incomplete without this wide range of collaborators and associates.

The Marianist Family

A Global Family:

The Marianist Family is a truly global family, active in 34 countries around the world. Each branch of the Marianist Family is organized at different levels (international, national, and local). In the case of the MLCs, affairs are organized at the highest level by an International Team consisting of a President and the Regional Responsible for each of the 5 global regions (North America, Latin America, Europe, Africa, and Asia).



The United States and Canada manage their national affairs together as the **Marianist Lay Community of North America** (MLC-NA). MLC-NA is governed by a Leadership Council consisting of both elected and appointed members.

Additionally, each branch collaborates with the others as a discipleship of equals. Collaboration often happens organically, but there are also formal entities for collaboration between the branches known as Marianist Family Councils. Family Councils exist at the world, national, and local levels.

Marianist Works:

The Marianist Family is well known as a leader in **Catholic education**, with 20 high schools and 3 universities in the United States. Additionally, the Marianist Family engages in good works including:



Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (3): Mission of Mary Cooperative (Dayton, OH), Marianist Social Justice Collaborative (National), Marianist Environmental Education Center (Dayton, OH)

Retreat Centers (4): Marianist Family Retreat Center (Cape May, NJ), Marianist Retreat and Conference Center (St. Louis, MO), Bergamo Center for Lifelong Learning (Dayton, OH), and Governor's Island (Huntsville, OH)

Parishes (2): St. Francis de Sales (Cincinnati, OH), Our Lady of the Pillar (St. Louis, MO)

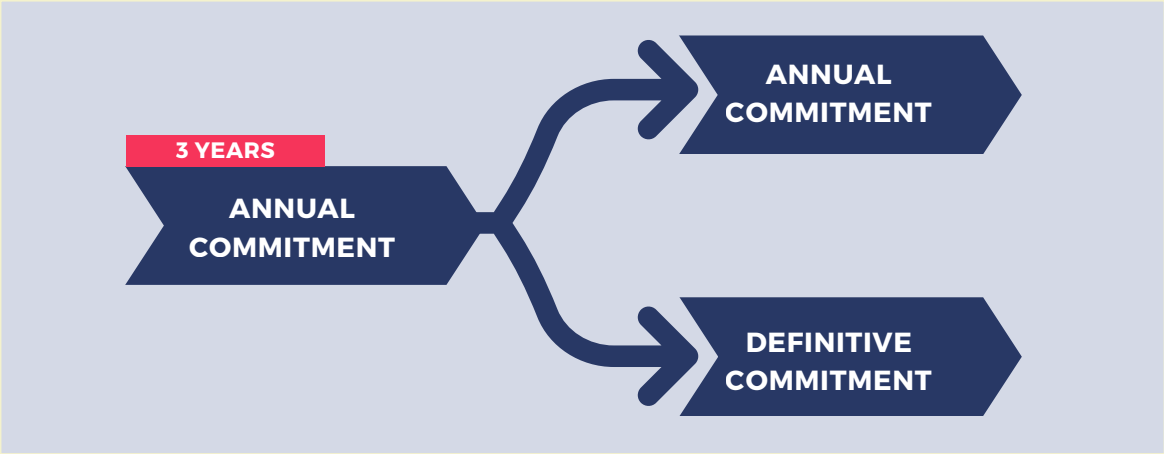
Lay Marianists

A Vocation Rooted in Baptism

A Lay Marianist is a layperson who has discerned a call to live the Marianist charism as a life-shaping vocation. As a vocation, being a Lay Marianist is more than a club, volunteer activity, or even a job. Becoming a Marianist is a commitment of the whole person—an essential part of who you are and how you show up in every other area of life.

This commitment grows out of baptism. Like all Christians, Lay Marianists are called to holiness and mission. What makes the Marianist vocation distinctive is the intentional renewal of baptismal promises in alliance with Mary, understood not simply as devotion, but as partnership in her mission.

Vocational Commitments



Lay Marianists make a ***vocational commitment*** to living out the charism shared by the entire Marianist Family within the context of their association. This commitment is renewed *annually* for at least the first three years of membership within the Marianist Lay Communities. After three years, Lay Marianists may choose to either continue renewing their commitment annually or make a *definitive commitment*, through which the individual expresses an intention to remain committed for life. Both forms of the commitment are equal in status and marked by the characteristic of *Marianist stability*, although some definitively committed members also choose to make this characteristic more explicit through a vow of stability.



Marianist Lay Communities

Lay Marianists are organized into Marianist Lay Communities (MLCs). An MLC is a small faith community where Lay Marianists and fellow collaborators gather regularly to live their faith together and support one another in living out their respective vocations.

Together, MLCs:

- Foster shared prayer and spiritual growth
- Support ongoing formation and discernment
- Build authentic community and mutual accompaniment
- Encourage members in their personal and communal mission

Types of MLCs

Overview

Although they all share a strong family resemblance to one another, MLCs are not all the same. Each MLC has its own rhythm and means of living out the Marianist mission. But in general, there are three types of MLC: local communities, virtual communities, and ministry-based communities. The inspiration for these ways of being can be found all the way back in the lives of Fr. Chaminade, Adèle, and Marie-Thérèse. In the Marianist foundations, each of these types of community animation is visible, as well as a strong trend toward collaboration and interrelationship between communities.



Types of MLCs

Three Models

Local Communities

Inspired by Chaminade's sodality in Bordeaux, local communities are small faith communities where members are able to meet regularly in person. These communities focus on the integration of faith and daily life, serving as the primary site of belonging and mutual accompaniment for the Lay Marianist. Local communities typically follow the rhythm of being gathered and sent—that is, they come together for support and formation, and are then sent back out in mission.

Virtual Communities

Drawing inspiration from Adèle's Little Society, virtual communities use digital tools to sustain a shared spiritual life across geographic distances. In addition to video calls, virtual communities often do come together for special meetings and in-person retreats. Additionally, their frequent use of technology often inclines them to use more informal conversations and gatherings to keep the spirit of community alive between gatherings. In this way, virtual communities find ways of accompanying one another through all the ups and downs of daily life.

Ministry-Based Communities

Ministry-based communities take their inspiration from the Miséricorde of Marie-Thérèse. In these communities, community life is closely woven into the mission of a particular institution, which is often - though not always - a Marianist one. The hallmark of such communities is that they become a visible witness of the Marianist charism within the institution they serve.

The Marianist Mission

One Mission, Many Expressions

OUR MISSION

The purpose of the Marianist Lay Communities is to inspire people of faith to join in alliance with Mary's mission of bringing Christ to the world through the animation of inclusive, life-giving communities in the Church and world.

The Marianist mission is consistent; the ways it is lived are diverse. Marianists will often use the terms *ministry* or *apostolate* to describe a particular way of living the mission.

Lay Marianists live this mission first and foremost through their daily lives—in work, family, friendships, civic engagement, and social responsibility. MLCs support their members by helping each person reflect on their experiences, discern God's presence, and respond faithfully.





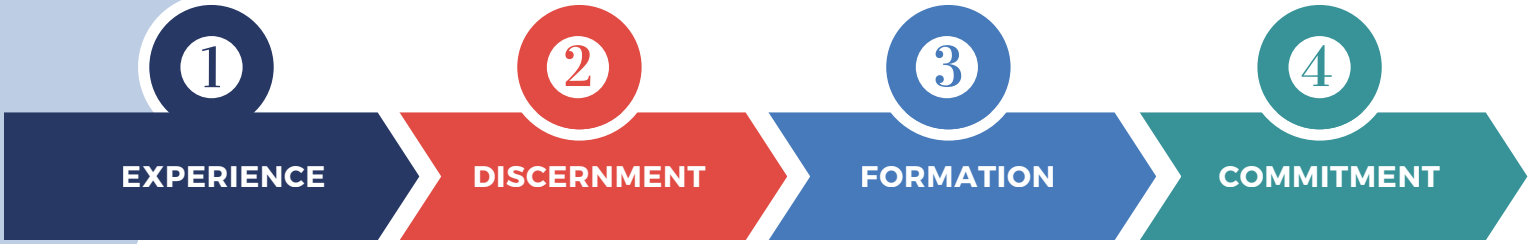
Developing a Shared Ministry

Some communities also share a common ministry, such as education, justice work, or pastoral service. Additionally, Lay Marianists contribute time, talent, and treasure by:

- Serving in leadership and formation roles
- Accompanying those in discernment
- Supporting the MLCs and other Marianist initiatives financially
- Collaborating with Marianist schools, parishes, retreat centers, and ministries such as the Mission of Mary Cooperative and the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative

Marianists understand the difference between mission (the enduring purpose) and ministry (specific expressions that may change over time). This flexibility allows each Lay Marianist to stay faithful to their enduring vocation throughout life's many seasons.

Becoming a Lay Marianist



The process of becoming a Lay Marianist can be broken into four stages. The exact timing and means for each stage will depend on the candidate's prior level of engagement with the Marianist Family, and whether they are starting the journey as an individual or a group.

1. **Experience:** An authentic experience of the Marianist charism by spending time with Marianists or through participation in one of their communities or ministries is the best way to learn what becoming a Lay Marianist is all about.

2. **Discernment:** Prayer, contemplation, and conversation support you in discovering your vocation, whether that is ultimately in the Marianist Family or not. *MLC-NA will work with you during the experience and discernment stages to match you with someone who can accompany you along the way.*

3. **Formation:** Lay Marianist formation is a journey of taking on the habits of Mary, so that you have the knowledge and skills to live her mission, support and be supported by an MLC, and grow in faith and love. *This is most frequently done through an MLC-NA formation program (virtual or in-person), or in the context of an MLC.*

4. **Commitment:** Lay Marianists first make annual commitments to live the charism in and through the association of MLCs. After three years, they have an option to make a definitive commitment. *Candidates are officially recognized and welcomed into the association by a Lay Marianist sponsor.*

Becoming a Lay Marianist

There are two ways of entering the process:

Starting Individually and Finding an MLC: Some people begin their journey to becoming a Lay Marianist on their own (or sometimes with a spouse or partner). Individuals may already be familiar with an MLC that they wish to join, or if not, MLC-NA will accompany them through the experience and discernment stages to meet and find a community match.

Starting as a Group and Forming a New MLC: Sometimes people begin the journey of becoming a Lay Marianist together as a group, with the intention that the group will become an MLC. The stages of becoming a Lay Marianist are the same for groups, but much of the experience, discernment, and formation will occur together.



Getting Started

Want to talk more?

Whether you feel sure a Lay Marianist vocation is for you or you simply want to learn more, the first step is to reach out to MLC-NA. Our friendly team will take some time to get to know you and help set up the right next steps.

In many cases, the right next step includes building a relationship with one of our Accompaniment Guides. These are trained Marianist volunteers who will not only get to know you better, but also connect you with additional people and information to continue your discernment.


Email: info@mlc-na.org


Online form: mlcna.org


Phone: 937-347-3470