

Celebrating the Beginnings of the SM Province of the United States

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Vision 2020: Gather at the River

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If smiles are contagious, then this video is bound to give us all a serious case of the grins! For me, the one word reflected in these wonderful photos is JOY. It's a simple word, but one that holds so much potential for effective change. We cannot underestimate the POWER OF JOY in a world, and in a church, so in need of good news. Blessed Chaminade knew this when he spoke of CONTAGION. His vision was to build communities of men and women who were truly a beautiful spectacle of saints, radiating a joy that was so contagious that others would see them and 'want what they have'! These photos are contagious....I want what they have!

I bring greetings from our Marianist Lay Communities around the world! It is good to be here! It is good to be here, not as a guest....or a token lay person....or, even worse, a token woman! It is good to be here as a member of our family! Yes, we are gathered here, at the river, as family. Although our roots trace back to the same spiritual foundation, we are still learning how to be family in a more genuine and effective way...as all families must. It's not a light task, but we've come a long way in the past eight years and more.

In July, 1998, while I was still a newbie with the Marianist Lay Network of North America, the MLNNA leadership team met with the leadership of the Marianist conference and the provincial council of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate at Eureka, Missouri. This was a BIG moment! It was the first time that the leadership of the three branches met to share current situations and vision together for a future as a Marianist family in North America. Many people who were at that meeting are in the room today.

The meeting was not without its difficult moments. The possibility of unification of the four SM provinces was already the buzz along with the challenges it would bring. There was tension when the issue of finances arose. This may have been my first encounter with uncomfortable family discussions over money, but it was surely not to be my last! Yet the seeds for a deeper and more intentional growth as a family had been planted. The North American Marianist Family Council was born from the discussions that took place at Eureka.

Vision 2020 calls for greater collaboration within the Marianist Family. The past eight years, chronicled so well in our 'contagious photos' provide many examples of what that collaboration looks like. I will focus on one that is near and dear to us as Marianists....Formation.

There has been amazing progress in formation initiatives in North America in the past eight years. The online Marianist courses developed and presented by NACMS, in partnership with UD, provide

formation across the miles and across family branches. In any given class, the facilitator and students might be SM brothers, FMI sisters, lay Marianists, or those wanting to know more about our Marianist spirituality. This is collaborative formation at its best.

The Marianist Lay Formation Initiative, under the initial leadership of Joan McGuinness Wagner and now Pati Krasensky, has formed cohort after cohort of lay Marianists who have used their knowledge and zeal to support new and existing communities in their area. This year they have become international with the inclusion of Johneleen Lardera, the National Responsible for the Philippines MLC.

The Alliance for Marianist Lay Formation, an initiative of Bro. Jack Ventura, brought together a small community of Marianists, lay and vowed religious, who are involved in lay formation in their leadership roles. We share our works, support each other in our ministries, and seek ways to connect formation efforts among our various entities.

In my own leadership work, I owe a debt of gratitude to many individual Brothers in the US Province. David Fleming, George Cerniglia, Tom Giardino, Tim Phillips and Ed Violet have helped me to traverse the often choppy waters of international work. Here in North America, Jack Ventura has been not only a vocal and active supporter of lay Marianists, but he continually challenges us to work interdependently with the Marianist Brothers and Sisters. Dennis Schmitz has modeled collaborative formation and community mentoring in Hawai'i where we've experienced an amazing growth in our lay communities and family spirit. He ensured that good news was shared with the larger MLC community so the contagion could spread. Of course, it helps when the background scenery is so gorgeous....I love the beach photo!

This is a very small 'shout out' to some Brothers whom I have worked with personally. Looking around this room, I think of how many of you have given your time, your energy, and your friendship to our Marianist Lay Communities. As a Province, you have supported us fraternally, prayerfully and financially. If every small act of kindness has the potential to multiply exponentially, then contagion is alive and well in our family!

Brother Steve Glodak wrote:

Beyond our best efforts, it is the Spirit of God who guides our community and Mary whose mission we serve. They will reveal how we participate in that mission in the years to come. We must kneel, dear brothers, because it is much bigger than our efforts. But our efforts must be big enough and creative enough to encompass what we see in our prayer.

Please know, dear Brothers, that we are kneeling beside you and with you. As lay Marianists, we too are seeking ways to be more intentionally present in the Church and in the world, working for justice and peace and bringing hope where hope is too often fading. We, too, are eager to explore the energizing vision of a Marian model of Church. And, we are learning more and more that our visions are not ours alone. They are also your vision and the vision of our Marianist family, as a family. We are at an exciting moment in our history. Here's to journeying together towards 2020 and beyond.