

A CHARISMATIC FAMILY, THE MARIANIST FAMILY

I. CHARISMATIC FAMILIES, A GIFT FOR THE WORLD AND FOR THE CHURCH

1. A GROWING REALITY

a) A sign of the Spirit

The current emergence of many charismatic families is undoubtedly a sign of the Spirit: under its impulse, something new and unexpected is developing in the Church¹. Some impetus is manifesting itself and new paths are opening up, with rich consequences for Christian life and mission. New forms of ecclesial life are gaining strength and bringing a renewal to our perception of what the Church and its mission in the world is called to be. The progressive development, since the middle of the last century, of the Marianist Family belongs to this trend and has its own value. By deepening this reality, the members of the Marianist Family can better respond to their vocation.

b) A fruit of the ecclesiology of Vatican II

The current movement has its roots in the ecclesial renewal implemented by the Second Vatican Council, particularly through its dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*. In his exhortation on the laity, Pope John Paul II develops this theology:

"In Church Communion the states of life by being ordered one to the other are thus bound together among themselves. They all share in a deeply basic meaning: that of being the manner of living out the commonly shared Christian dignity and the universal call to holiness in the perfection of love. They are different yet complementary, in the sense that each of them has a basic and unmistakable character which sets each apart, while at the same time each of them is seen in relation to the other and placed at each other's service. (...) All the states of life, whether taken collectively or individually in relation to the others, are at the service of the Church's growth. While different in expression they are deeply united in the Church's "mystery of communion" and are dynamically coordinated in its unique mission." (Christifideles laici, 1987, n. 55).

Thus, the ecclesiology of communion emphasizes three aspects that are, in themselves, very important in the life of charismatic families: the dignity afforded through baptism; the universal vocation to holiness; and the common responsibility for mission.

c) Under the effect of the variety of charisms

Charismatic families are born under the influence of charisms which are the fruit of the creativity and generosity of the Spirit in response to the ever-changing needs of the world. All the

¹ In a charismatic family, the same charism unites several groups and institutes. The various emphases given to this charism by each of them and the variety of forms of life that we see in these groups make visible the value of the charism for the life and mission of the whole Church.

foundations inspired by the same charism constitute a charismatic family whose components - the branches - are in relationship with each other. As a result of this particular inspiration, each one has its own characteristics and is structured in an original way. Some families have few branches, sometimes only two, others many, up to about thirty for the largest.

The itinerary that led to the formation of each of these families and the type of relationships that have been established between its different branches are extremely variable and express the variety of ways of constituting the Church and fulfilling its mission through the complementarity of vocations. It is part of the message offered by each charism.

2. CHARISMS: A GIFT OF THE SPIRIT FOR THE GOOD OF ALL

The multiplicity of Families highlights the variety of charisms brought about by the Holy Spirit. What they are cannot be understood except in reference to this particular gift made to each of them. But what is a charism?

a) A gift of the Holy Spirit

The charism is a gift of the Holy Spirit, a living inspiration destined to be incarnated in people, structures and projects.

Through those who live it, it makes visible and active an aspect of the person of Christ and his action. The diversity of charisms makes more visible the inexhaustible richness of Christ and his message. The different charisms complement and reinforce each other, as do the members of a Body (1 Cor 12:4-27). Each of them helps the Church to be more fully and effectively a sign and instrument of God's salvation through Jesus Christ in the world (Cf. *Lumen Gentium* 1; 9; 48; 59).

Gifts of the Holy Spirit, charisms, are born and deepened under his influence from which they cannot be separated. Without union with the Holy Spirit, and with Christ who is its provider, they are only a theory, or even an ideology, without impact. Lived faithfully, they are a source of fruitfulness, strengthen the gifts of the Spirit (cf. Isaiah 11:1-3) and increase their fruits (Gal 5:22).

b) Received by a Founder

In each Institute or movement, the charism is received by the **Founder**, surrounded by a group of collaborators, in response to calls perceived in a specific context. It is definitely linked to the person of the Founder and to this founding experience. The life and action of the Founder, the Foundress, and these disciples around him or her, constitute an essential way of discovering and deepening the charism. This is not limited to intellectual learning, to historical study, for example, but it also requires a living and present relationship with them, since they continue to inspire the work to which they have given birth.

c) Characteristics

The charism is by nature:

Incarnated: otherwise it is only a theory without influence.

Offered to all: it can be experienced by anyone who experiences the call to it.

Communitarian: it is intended to be lived by a community, in the broad sense of the term, it structures it and gives it its own physiognomy in the Church.

Ecclesial: Its authenticity must be discerned by those who have the authority to do so.

Missionary: he or she is inspired by the Spirit to extend Christ's action in history:

- to make it known,
- to participate in his mission: to make his Father known and to establish the Kingdom.
- according to the way and means specific to this inspiration.

It ceases when the needs that were at its origin have died out or when the group that embodies it has ceased to adapt it and keep it alive by means of creative fidelity to the new situations of its time and in response to the calls of the Spirit.

d) Expressions

The charism is realized in different ways. It generates:

- A **spirituality**: a way of entering into a relationship with God and letting God act; a spiritual pedagogy allowing us to progress progressively, according to stages; biblical texts as sources; forms of prayer, even sometimes of devotion; certain typical prayers.
- Privileged **missionary choices** indicating priority recipients, a method of action, a way of relating to the world (goods, people, social structures, etc.)
- An **ecclesial and communitarian form** that manifests itself in the organization, in the style of relationship generated between members, in the relationship established with the local and universal Church and in the form that government takes.

II. THE MARIANIST FAMILY

We now want to describe some of the characteristics of our Family, as we understand it today. This family finds its origin in the Marianist Charism that calls each one, through a missionary covenant with Mary, to follow Jesus, Son of God, who became Son of Mary, in order to grow in his likeness and to place oneself at the service of the coming of His Kingdom. This journey is nourished by faith and is marked by a strong community spirit.

1. ORIGINS

a) Since the time of the foundations

Many of the Charismatic Families have developed over the past thirty years. But, a particular aspect of the Marianist Family is that it finds its roots from the very first moments of the founding project inspired by Bl. William-Joseph and Bl. Adèle. Even if history has changed the work they have set in motion and if our conception of what a family is, is linked to the current ecclesiological vision, it is clear, however, that our Founders were pursuing a global project and not a succession of foundations that were independent of each other. A good number of clues show that they perceived the common spirit and the charismatic links between them.

b) Common inspirations

Our Family history began with the foundation of two lay groups one in Bordeaux, in 1801 (the "Congrégation de l'Immaculée" / "Sodality of the Immaculate Conception") and one in Agen, in 1804 (the "Petite Société" / "Little Society"). Those two groups discovered, from their first

contact, in 1808, a surprising communion of spirit. The gradual strengthening of common practices led to their merger into a single group in 1813. Marie-Thérèse de Lamourous was an important collaborator of Fr. Chaminade for the birth of the sodality in Bordeaux.

From 1808 onwards, attempts at religious life in the world appeared in Bordeaux, which developed as groups of fervor of the sodality. From 1809 to 1814, their existence was decisive for the survival of the secular branch despite its official suppression. In 1817 a secular Third Order was born in Agen from the lay congregation and linked to the convent of the Daughters of Mary. In the words of Mother Adèle, its members are "*called to do on the outside what we may not because of our cloister.*" (L. 453.2). Those groups bore witness to other ways in which the Marianist vocation could be lived; they showed the richness of the Marianist charism and prepared the way for what has become, in our time, the Alliance Mariale.

When the time came to found the first religious congregation, Fr. Chaminade spoke to the Foundress, Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon, the future Mother Mary of the Conception, of "*sodalist religious ... or ... of active sodalists, [who] wish to live the regular life of the religious...*" (L. 52). He wants them to be true missionaries, but he recommends to Adèle that she "*take care that [the new foundation] does not essentially change the work of the Sodality, but that it rather helps it along.*" (L. 52). More than two years after the foundation, he described the first thirty religious as being "*formed originally in the heart of the Sodalities*" (L. 111). He founded the Society of Mary in the same spirit of respect for the lay branch and in strong relationship with it.

The two religious congregations are also very closely linked. Mother Adèle announces the birth of the brothers by speaking of "*male religious of our order*" (L. 327.4) or "*religious men of our Institute*" (L. 360.4; 417.5) while Father Chaminade writes to her: "*for the past several months I have been busy with the work in which you have a part*" (L. 97) or tells him that they "*are, as it were, the foundation upon which we are building*" (L. 99). They are "*your Brothers*" (L. 108); they have "*the same spirit*" and undertake "*the same course*" (L. 110). Together they form what Fr. Chaminade and Mother Adèle will long call "the Institute" and they follow the same rule with the few necessary adaptations (L. 110). Most of them will receive the same decrees of praise from the Holy See; Fr. Chaminade writes common circulars to them. In 1836 the Third-Order Regular of the Daughters of Mary emerges in Auch.

The opportunities for encounter and collaboration between the different foundations and the different generations that make them up are numerous and constitute one of the strengths of the witness that this new reality offered in French society and the Church.

Highlighting the exact links that have existed between the various foundations (more numerous than the four we know today) is a subject that still awaits further study. When they come, they will help us to continue on the road with more foresight in the midst of the new circumstances we are now facing.

c) Renaissance and structuring

The 1830 Revolution forced Fr. Chaminade to leave Bordeaux and forced the lay congregations to cease their activities again. Attempts to resume are not conclusive and congregations remain only as apostolic groups of students. It was only around 1950 that

Marianist groups of committed lay people, young or adult, resurfaced in Spain, then in France, Chile, Argentina, the USA... Little by little a true Marianist lay movement emerged that was structured and became aware of its identity.

In 1960 the *Alliance Mariale* was born and gradually progressed towards the status of a secular Institute granted to it in 2019.

Among religious, the 1971 General Chapter of the SM invites us to "*establish and develop the different associations which make up the Family of Mary . . .*" (Doc. 2:12). During this same period, the links between the two religious congregations were strengthened.

In 1993, the lay branch organized its first international meeting in Chile and appointed an international President assisted by a Council and adopted the name of Marianist Lay Communities. It takes its autonomy from the religious congregations on which it depended since its re-foundation. In 2000, it was officially recognized by the Holy See as an "international private association of faithful lay people".

In 1996 the World Council of the Marianist Family was formed. It shows the spirit of collaboration that the four branches want to develop. Other Family Councils are gradually emerging in the world, beginning in 1992 in France and then after 1996 in many other countries.

The current understanding of what a charismatic family is results from current ecclesiology. What we say about the Marianist Family is at the same time the fruit of the thoughts and intuitions of our Founders and the result of the interpretation we give it today, guided by the Spirit.

2. FRATERNITY: A MARIAN FACE OF THE CHURCH

The birth of a **charismatic Family** reveals the ability of the charism to unite the diversity of vocations it has inspired into a symphonic vision. The Holy Spirit unites without confusing and distinguishes without separating. From this action of the Spirit is born a harmonious whole. The charism gives rise to a new face of the Church.

a) Distinctive features

What makes the face of the Marianist Family clear is the combination of different particular traits:

Unity in diversity. The Marianist Family is made up of four branches: a lay movement, a secular institute and two religious congregations, one of women and the other of men. The Society of Mary brings together lay people and priests.

A "**union without confusion**". This traditional Marianist expression describes the relationship between the different branches and their members. Union does not make us lose the specificity of each vocation and state of life, on the contrary, it invites us to give it all its value for our own good and in the service of all.

Equality. None of the branches leads the others and cannot consider itself superior to the others. Within each of them there is equality of rights and duties.

b) *Cor unum et anima una*

This expression used in the Acts of the Apostles (4:32) to describe the first community in Jerusalem has inspired the Marianist Family since its origins. It shows that unity comes from within but also that it is realized through the constituent elements of a community: fraternal life, prayer and sacramental life, adherence to the same faith, received from the apostles and lived in the Church, and the sharing of goods, whether material or not. Each of these elements develops according to Marianist sensitivity and tradition. Their implementation in the context of the Family progress through the discernment of each other and the common will to strengthen our bonds.

c) A Marian face

Since it is a Marian community, the very identity of the Marianist family is marked by the influence of Mary, present among its members as she was in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14).

Mary's presence is made manifest because of the traits that are specific to her and that the members develop under her influence: mutual service, humility, simplicity, a sense of welcome, attention to others and to God, interiority, audacity and availability, joy,...

The Marianist Family presents these characteristics and highlights the maternal and feminine qualities that the Church possesses in her being and in her action. She favors a fraternal style of presence in the world, which she prefers, over what is more hierarchical or authoritarian.

3. A SPIRITUALITY

The Marianist Family has a Christocentric and Marian spirituality.

a) To the Son through the Mother

The Marianist way proposes to the Christian to become ever more similar to Christ by making, according to his own call, a covenant with Mary (Cf. John 19:25-27). Mary can thus fully exercise her spiritual motherhood, inaugurated at the time of the Incarnation, by facilitating the action of the Spirit who transforms everyone into the image of Christ.

Under this influence, the Marianist works to develop in him or herself the very features of Christ and to be formed into the "new man/woman" who began to live in Christ with baptism and grows under the action of the Holy Spirit.

b) An active faith

Cultivating a **strong faith** that permeates the whole of life is, for the Marianist, both an objective and a means to enable God to act in the depths of the person, beginning with oneself. Faith enlightens one's understanding of events and guides one's personal and missionary choices.

To achieve this, the Marianist gives a privileged place to personal meditation, which is an exercise of faith. Bl. Chaminade has left a rich teaching on this subject to bring about the "faith of the heart" that permeates all life. To this end, he proposed, in particular, to practice meditation on the Creed. Union with Mary in prayer promotes attention to the Holy Spirit.

The **method of virtues** makes it possible to know oneself better and to make oneself more available to God's action for missionary life. It is a way to make the old man die and the new man grow.

c) Listening to the Word until holiness

Mary is the Virgin of listening. Her whole life is marked by her availability to the Word. To God she answers: "*Let it be done to me according to your word*" (Luke 1:38); it is for her a true principle of life. She believed in what God told her and actively collaborated with her whole being (Luke 1:45). In her heart she has preserved, meditated and been present to the Word and events (Luke 2:19,51). She did not listen to the Word with a distracted heart, rather, she translated it into her life (Luke 11:21).

Inspired by her own example and that of the Jerusalem community, the Marianist Family always wants to listen better and put the Word into practice. It wishes "*to present to the world the spectacle of a people of saints, and... to prove by the fact, that today, as in the early Church, the Gospel can be practiced in the full rigor of the spirit and the letter*" (Bl. Chaminade, Letter 388, 15.02.1826).

Examples of Marianist holiness encourage us on this path. Our blessed ones lead us and offer us an authentic interpretation of the Marianist charism. The Marianist likes to walk in their presence, to dialogue with them and to be inspired by their example. The plurality of Marianist vocations offers a variety of ways to respond to the universal call to holiness.

4. A COMMON MISSION

The Marianist missionary plan was inspired by God to Blessed William-Joseph Chaminade and Blessed Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon in response to the calls of their time. They were themselves ardent missionaries. Each new project was carried by a founding group that assimilated the spirit of the project before transmitting it to the new members. The missionary plan was thus clarified and then gradually adapted to new situations in time and space.

In the Preamble to its Statutes, the World Council states: "*This Family considers itself sent by the Church to the mission of evangelization which is born of its charism.*" What are the principles of this mission?

a) With and for Mary

The **alliance made with Mary** is missionary. It commits the Marianist to collaborate with her to offer Christ to the world and make his presence known. Since Mary has no other desire than to make Jesus known, loved and served, making her known, loved and served makes it possible to bring men and women to Christ through her. This is the method of evangelization that Marianists prefer to use. Mary assists the Marianist in this missionary call and in all aspects of the Christian life.

b) Open to all means deemed favorable

The Marianist mission has a **universal dimension**: Bl. Chaminade invites his disciples to respond to Mary's call: "do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5), "*not to exclude any kind of work*" and to be open to "*all the means that Providence [orders] them*" in order to achieve missionary objectives. Nevertheless, from the beginning, the privileged recipients of their activity have been **the young and the poor**, in particular through education and the formation

of faith communities where the gospel can be discovered, lived and witnessed². The spirit of universality invites us to always seek ways to reach the greatest number, "**multiply Christians**", and achieve the objectives in the most complete way possible. The use of the Three Offices reflects the desire to work by all kinds of material, intellectual and spiritual means.

c) Audacity, zeal and vigilance

Our founders did not hesitate to propose the Gospel within a context of indifference or hostility. They were **bold and creative** pioneers, they took new paths, without letting nostalgia or penchant for ease stop them. Fr. Chaminade said that "*The Lord has chosen new wars*" (Jg 5:8) (*The Chaminade Legacy* V.17) because "*times are not the same*" (L. 621) and that the proclamation of the Gospel needs to be based on new fulcrums (cf. *Cham. Leg.* I.154[4]). He preferred to create "*New Institute(s)... adapted to the times, the places, and the circumstances*" rather than revive the old ones (L. 85).

This attitude is in profound harmony with the current calls to be part of a Church "*which goes forth*" to the world, to take the initiative and to live a "*pastoral conversion*" so that "*the Church's ... structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation*"³.

The Marianist is animated by missionary zeal. **Zeal** is one of the Marianist's particular characteristics. "*A small nucleus of apostles is worth a legion of listless people*", said Fr. Klobb⁴. Adele invites her friends to "*serve God with a renewed zeal and a fresh enthusiasm*" (L. 222.4). Fr. Chaminade writes: "*We should go to the ends of the world, my dear Son, if God so calls us*" (L. 233). Adele adds that there is a need for "*strong souls*" filled with "*apostolic spirit*" to "*make [Christ] known and loved, even to the farthest reaches of the world*" (L. 567.2).

These attitudes require a burning heart. That is why our founders recommended that we exercise **active and positive vigilance** to maintain enthusiasm, without falling into lukewarmness, indifference and passivity. It is a source of freedom and trust to engage with the world. Vigilance is supported by habitual contact with Christ, by discernment, and by the fervor of the community as a place of spiritual, fraternal and apostolic renewal.

d) Diversity and union

The **mission** of the Marianist Family is **common** because it is animated by the same inspiration and serves the same plan of action in the Church: to lead others to Christ through Mary. Each branch has its own way of emphasizing the different elements of the common charism and choosing the corresponding missionary means. These choices are influenced by one's way of life, by the particular circumstances of one's foundation or by one's current situation. This diversity does not harm the unity of the Family, but on the contrary, it enriches it and enhances the fruitfulness of the common gift. The Family grows to the degree that each branch is faithful to its own way of welcoming and living the charism and by how it expresses this charism through its mission.

² See, for example, the document of the INTERNATIONAL MEETING OF MLCs in Philadelphia: *Being In Community*, Philadelphia, USA, 2001: http://www.clm-mlc.org/old_website/eng/MLC-DocEN-3IM-Community.pdf.

³ POPE FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium*, ## 13; 27.

⁴ Letter of December 10, 1903 to Father Maurice (AGMAR 187.2.69.21).

The common mission can sometimes be expressed in a common work in the service of the same project. Most often it consists, for each one, in working on the Marianist mission as it is indicated through one's branch. It is then expressed above all in the union of heart and mind, within the same charismatic family, participating in the same global project of evangelization according to the spirit received from our Founders⁵.

Frequently, **collaborators** participate in Marianist missionary projects, especially when they are works carried out by one or more branches. The members of the Marianist Family welcome these opportunities for collaboration. Mutual knowledge makes it possible to grow in the esteem of what each one brings to Marianist life and mission and provokes an enrichment that is beneficial to all. Growth in the knowledge and transmission of the Marianist Charism is a common necessity. It is welcomed by some who are members of the Marianist Family, and by others who are collaborators in the mission of one of the branches.

5. A PATH OF APPROPRIATION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE CHARISM

The charism is the source of the life and mission of the Marianist Family; it ensures its unity in time and space. This charism is our family property. From it comes what we are called to be and to do in the service of the Church and the world. Each branch is responsible for adapting it, in its own way, to a new and multiple human, ecclesial, theological, missionary context.

a) Fidelity and adaptation.

Without fidelity to the origins, contact is lost with the founding inspiration; the charism allows us to re-read and evaluate what we are and do today. Without adaptation in its expression, the charism loses contact with current reality and atrophies itself and reduces itself to a set of abstract elements without consequences in the present. Fidelity and adaptation are both essential and inseparable.

Lived authentically, the charism does not isolate, but on the contrary, it brings others together and strengthens the communion of the whole Family in the service of the Church; it does not lock itself in a bygone past, but, on the contrary, it allows us to be open and responsive to the current situations of the world.

The form that the mission takes, through the choice of works and specific means of action, expresses the charism without exhausting it. Sometimes, the charism is identified with the works it inspires; this does not reflect its richness and risks limiting its creative force over time and in different historical and cultural contexts.

b) A Marianist pedagogy for appropriation of the charism

A journey to integrate and live the charism has been transmitted to us by Father Chaminade: to know, love and serve. It is call for each one of us: we know through intelligence; we love through heart and interiority; we serve through our actions. These three aspects interact, so

⁵ See on this subject: CMFM, *The "Common Mission" in the Marianist Family*, 2012: https://marianist.org/PDFs/eng/world_council/WCMF-ComMis-Eng.pdf

they are not successive steps. It is possible to access the charism through each of these three ways: through knowledge, love/interiorization or service. Each of these paths then leads to the other two, which provide an essential complement. What would Marianist life mean if it were only intellectual or emotional or action-oriented?

c) Interpretation: role of the Branches and the World Board

Each of the four branches, especially because of its ecclesial recognition, has real authority to interpret the charism, explain it, and transmit it in a lived way. Each branch exercises its competence especially on all that concerns its own life and mission; it also provides what is necessary for an appropriation of the charism by its members, in particular by those who are new.

The **World Council of the Marianist Family** also has a specific capacity to play this role. It benefits from the reflection and experience of each of the branches. It adds a new and irreplaceable dimension: the richness that the Family experience allows. Some dimensions of the charism can only be fully revealed at this level.

That is why, and according to this spirit:

- The Council promotes the study and diffusion of the Marianist charism throughout the Family.
- It is entitled to express his opinion on certain aspects of the charism in order to clarify them or to set certain criteria for their interpretation, in particular with regard to all the branches.
- It is committed to an ever-deeper understanding of the Marianist Family and its mission.
- It promotes collaboration between branches at all levels, especially at continental or national levels, and specifies its spirit and criteria.
- It encourages opportunities for meeting or collaboration with those who, without being members of the Marianist Family, share its spirit by working in the service of the works and projects of the various branches.
- It has the capacity to welcome new branches that would like to join the Family by indicating the necessary conditions.

6. A FORM OF ANIMATION AND GOVERNMENT

a) Autonomy and union

Within the Marianist Family, these two principles coexist and are mutually balanced. Each of the branches is autonomous, has its own government established according to its statutes and chosen by its members. However, those who exercise government are concerned to strengthen the communion of the whole Family and to act in a way that promotes its good. For this reason, they are attentive to the life of the other branches and listen to their leaders; they are happy to consult them.

It is not only a fraternal duty, since each of the branches reaches its full maturity of life and mission in communion with the whole Family. It's a charismatic call. Communion between the branches serves the good of all members and strengthens the missionary impact of each and every one.

b) Family Councils

At all levels, whenever several branches are present, a Family Council can be created. Its role is to strengthen dialogue and communion between these branches and to promote Marianist life and mission according to the possibilities and reality of the corresponding sector. It may set up certain joint projects whenever it is desirable. These councils promote collaboration with other Church bodies present at the same level. They can be local, regional, national, continental or global.

c) The World Council of the Marianist Family

The World Council of the Marianist Family was born in 1996. It includes the leaders of the four Marianist branches. At the global level, it plays a role similar to that of the family councils described above. It is essentially a place for dialogue and common reflection, making it possible to strengthen the sense of belonging to the same Family, to deepen the common Marianist vocation or in the particularity of each of the branches and to act in a concerted way among all.

Its composition allows it to inspire the life and work of the four branches as well as other councils, in particular national councils.

It adopts common guidelines every four years.⁶

Its statutes are available on the Family website.⁷

d) Links with the Church

A charism is created for the good of all. The Family is happy to be able to place at the service of all the gifts it has received, through its presence, its witness and its activity. For this reason, encouraged by its leaders, it is a part of the **local and universal Church** and shares the gift of Marianist life and mission. Its structure and way of being are part of the message it offers to the Church, which can thus become more aware of this particular way of achieving its identity and mission. By this means, the Marianist Family is called to exercise a **prophetic mission** that can be more or less easily welcomed. This mission challenges the Family to be faithful to what it should be.

Communion with the Church and its pastors was an important aspect for our Founders. The Family and each of its members are attentive to the orientations received from the universal or local Church. They bring their own gifts to joint reflection or projects.

The **official recognition** of each of the branches is a recognition of the charism and its value for the whole Church, especially in the different forms of life represented in the Family. It is also a call to fidelity to the gift received and to be always ready to place it at the service of the Church, universal and local, to assist her in her life and mission. The Church, through institutions or persons who have this specific responsibility, is the ultimate interpreter of the Marianist charism and its implementation.

e) Relations with charismatic families

The variety of charisms is admirable. It allows the Church a multiple presence and expresses the unfathomable richness of the person of Christ. Dialogue and collaboration between

⁶ <https://marianist.org/site.php?menuaccess=292> .

⁷ <https://marianist.org/site.php?menuaccess=23> .

Spiritual Families enhance and strengthen gifts. These are complementary and mutually⁸ enriching. It is a new opportunity to experience the Church as a communion, "*like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race*" (LG 1). It is a communion for the mission.

f) Synodality

A synodal form of exercise of authority is particularly suited to a charismatic Family. It is based on the common listening of the Spirit who speaks to all in the diversity of life situations and responsibilities⁹. To this end, the leaders are both "masters and disciples"¹⁰. From what they have heard, they discern to reach a consensus, the fruit of a "*common obedience to the Holy Spirit*"¹¹ which also comes from listening to the calls received by the very members of the Family.

All members are called upon to participate in the realization and implementation of what has been decided, in the variety of places and cultures.

Combined with other, more traditional forms of government, this form of government makes it possible "to value the contribution that each individual offers to the one Family, thus to express more fully the multiple potentialities that the charism encompasses."¹²

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CONCLUSION

The same spirit permeates the entire Marianist Family, each of its branches and each member. In short, we can summarize it by saying:

The spirit of the Marianist Family is the spirit of Mary.

⁸ "*Arrange ... to know the experiences of other charismatic families ... and thus have an opportunity for mutual enrichment and support.* (POPE FRANCIS, *Letter to Consecrated Persons*, 21 November 2014, 1)

⁹ "**A synodal Church is a Church which listens ...** *It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the "Spirit of truth" (Jn 14:17), in order to know what he "says to the Churches" (Rev 2:7).*" POPE FRANCIS, Address at the ceremony of the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the Synod of Bishops, October 17, 2015.

¹⁰ "*The Bishop is both teacher and disciple. He is a teacher when, endowed with the special assistance of the Holy Spirit, he proclaims to the faithful the word of truth in the name of Christ, head and shepherd. But he is a disciple when, knowing that the Spirit has been bestowed upon every baptized person, he listens to the voice of Christ speaking through the entire People of God, making it 'infallible in credendo' ".* (POPE FRANCIS, *Apostolic Constitution Episcopalis communio* on the Synod of Bishops, 15 September 2018, n. 5).

¹¹ They are "*Attentive to the sensus fidei of the People of God*" *Id.*, n. 7.

¹² "*Dear brothers and sisters, I encourage you to always cultivate communion among yourselves, in that synodal style that I have proposed to the entire Church, listening to one another, and all women and men listening to the Holy Spirit, so as to value the contribution that each individual offers to the one Family, thus to express more fully the multiple potentialities that the charism encompasses. Be ever aware that 'it is in communion, even when this proves painful, that a charism is seen to be authentic and mysteriously fruitful' (Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii gaudium, 130).*" POPE FRANCIS, to the Camillian Family (March 18, 2019).

* * *

*Ours is a great work, a magnificent work.
If it is universal,
it is because we are missionaries of Mary,
who has said to us,
“Do whatever He tells you.”
Yes, all of us are missionaries;
each one of us has received from the Blessed Virgin
a commission to work at the salvation of our
brothers and sisters in the world.*

(Blessed G.-Joseph Chaminade, August 24, 1839)

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