

**Fr. William Joseph Chaminade and Marie Therese de Lamourous:  
A Tradition of Collaboration**

*(Directions – You could insert the International Marianist Family vision statement or your own country’s vision of Marianist Family- see below of for Vision Statement of the Marianist Family of North America)*

The Marianist Family Council of North America (group of Marianist priest brother sisters and laity) writes a vision for the Marianist Family for the year 2020. “Through a discipleship of equals among its lay members and vowed religious, the Marianist Family in attractive faith communities will sustain, establish and expand programs to be more like Mary giving birth to and nurturing Jesus Christ in today’s world.”

While this statement reflects of the work of the Marianist Family Council of North America, I believe it also presents a goal which is in keeping with our international efforts of collaboration of the Marianist priests, brother’s sisters and laity throughout the world as we respond to our mission in the church. This history of collaboration is nothing new, but is woven into the very fabric of the history of the Marianist Family since its beginnings. While our Marianist history has many members who collaborated with Fr. Chaminade, of recent interest is his work with Marie Therese de Lamourous. The purpose of this paper is to briefly trace the history of the collaboration between Fr. William Joseph Chaminade and Marie Therese de Lamourous and more importantly, to learn from their lives and apply it to the needs of the worldwide Marianist Family today. Their devotion to supporting each other as faith filled individuals, using their complementary gifts for the good of communities and responding to the needs of society are perpetuated today as we join in a celebration of the Chaminade Year.

Some of our Marianist researchers, writers and writers have already identified the contributions of Marie Therese. Of note are Fr. Joseph Stefanelli, S.M., Sr. Laura Leming, FMI, the extensive history of Marie Therese interpreted from the French book by M.L’ Abbe Pouget and Ben Dougherty who has given access to articles that are available on the internet through the North American Center for Marianist Studies. Each shed light on the contributions of Fr. Chaminade and his work with Marie Therese. I am writing this reflection on the feast of the Holy Trinity at the Marianist Family Retreat House in Cape May, New Jersey which models collaboration in their daily ministry working to support families. It is also the place where my own vocation as a Marianist sister began. For the first part of this paper, I would like to outline the history of Chaminade and De Lamourous collaboration. In the second part of this paper, I will make application and provide discussion questions for us as Marianist Family today.

## **Collaborators in the Spiritual Life**

Some contributors have identified Marie Therese as a co-founder of the Marianist Family. Both Fr. Chaminade or Marie Therese were working under extraordinary circumstances. As Parker Palmer in his book, *Let Your Life Speak*, describes the exercise of leadership in community, “there are places where people who have known great darkness have emerged to lead others to the light.” The beginnings of their collaboration were rooted in the upheaval of the French Revolution and the Spirit’s call to rebuild the Church of France. (“A Spiritual Crucible: The Life of Mille de Lamourous During the French Revolution” by Benjamin Dougherty).

Faith was at the heart of both the life of Marie Therese and Chaminade. Their first meeting comes from her desire for to continue to seek spiritual direction, when in 1795-96 she meets Fr Chaminade, a priest from Mussidan who had come to Bordeaux to exercise his ministry. They continue in the development and support of their faith life even during Chaminade's exile in 1797-1800 through correspondence continuing to share their spiritual life and learn each other (Stefanelli p. 8).

Marie Therese is soon called to put her faith into action. Appreciating the role of Marie Therese as a woman leader in the church and pastoring a community can be more understandable by shedding some light on the background of the role of religious women during the French Revolution as described by Susanne Dean in her article, “The Role of Women in Religious Riots during the French Revolution”. The religious activism of women during the French Revolution had a profound impact on community dynamics and gender roles noting their traditional roles as guardians of family and community values. While women did not have the same rights of men to petition and vote, women led protests demanding church keys or evicting republican schoolteacher since they believed that they had a religious right and duty to fulfill preserving the integrity of the parish and the community of believers who worshipped. Upon her arrival in the local parish of Saint Seurin she learns that the church is being administered by a Juror priest. Since Fr. Andrieu had taken the schismatic oath to the New Republic, she refused to attend any of his services. Thus we find Marie Therese also taking on responsibility for her parishioners. She begins to gather the faithful and to teach prayer and catechesis. Upon the request of the parish people, she continues to provide spiritual guidance even after a legitimate priest is appointed. Through their dependence on prayer, Marie Therese and Chaminade both committed their lives for the sake of the gospel and led others to faith and action.

## **Collaborators in Mission**

Fr. Chaminade continued the spiritual companionship through letter writing even during his time of exile. Upon Fr. Chaminade’s return to Bordeaux, he must have recognized Marie Therese’s leadership qualities as he encourages Marie Therese to take on this mission of developing sodalities especially for young women. Her name appears as one of the first disciples who signed the registry of sodality members. Her own call evolves to provide a safe haven, resources, educational, skills and faith formation to

women involved in prostitution. The article, “A Sociologist Considers the Contributions of Marie de Lamourous by Sr. Laura Leming, FMI,” provides a valuable insight to her resourceful and compassionate nature in the work of the Misericorde. Rather than this being a time of conflict it becomes an opportunity for collaboration and advancement of the mission. Marie Therese manages to assist Chaminade’s project which also enabled sodality members to work at the Misericorde and in turn women from the Misericorde joined the sodality. We see Fr. Chaminade’s appreciation of her leadership qualities as he describes her as tactful, resourceful and reliable when writing to Adele concerning the foundation of the Daughters of Mary. She in turn realizes that Adele is also well qualified and competent for the mission she is undertaking and Fr. Chaminade on Marie Therese’s advice names her the first superior. There is evidence that Fr. Chaminade and Marie Therese counted on each other in their missionary work: Marie for her wisdom in finances, resourcefulness in dealing with authorities and Fr. Chaminade for his spiritual insight, animation and structural organization of communities. Their respect for each other’s gifts and skills, leave us a legacy of mutuality in animating communities, hope in the midst of trials, a complementarity of the gifts men and women, religious and lay, not in competition with each other but in joint responsibility.

### **What Does Our Tradition of Collaboration Mean for the Church today?**

Marianist documents have used the term “discipleship of equals” rooted in the language of the Pauline letters and the world of the gospels as a description of Marianist life, especially the relationship of priest and brothers in the Marianist religious order and an understanding of work within the Marianist Family (see Bro Steve Glodek’s article, “Who Wine Is it? Reflections on the Discipleship of Equals in Marianist Communities).” Equality does not mean sameness but a respect for the gifts that each brings as persons made in the image and likeness of God. Unity in diversity, a hallmark of Fr. Chaminade, means that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. All gifts are needed for the building up of the body. This notion of “discipleship of equals,” is also witnessed in the life of Marie Therese and Fr. Chaminade we see that each one exercised leadership that was rooted in prayer, humility and a desire to build a faith community. Neither used leadership as power but sought ways to continue the development of community that would continue even after their death. Their partnership in ministry and acceptance and nurturing of the gifts and vocation of others provided for the building up of the whole community. Fr Chaminade and Marie Therese modeled for us the ability to discern what was needed as they responded creatively to the situations of their day. From their charism and spirituality arose a type of apostolic service in which they responded to the needs of the Church and society. In the twenty-first century, we also experience the secularization of society and misuse of power. The Church today asks us to assist in scrutinizing the signs of the times and to interpret them in the light of the gospel. They were both faced with the limitations of personnel and resources and their own human frailties and eventually fading health, however, they continued to take on the challenges of their day and learn from each other in responding to the crises at hand. They model for us the need to rely on others. Parker Palmer describes in his book, “If we live our lives fully and well, we must learn to embrace opposites, to live in creative tension between our limits and our potentials. We must honor our limitations in ways that do not

distort our own nature and we must trust and use our gifts in ways that fulfill the potentials that God gave us. We must take the no of the way that closes and find the guidance it has to offer-and take the yes of the way that opens and respond with the yes of our lives.” This hope-filled way of living and finding a way when no way seemed to exist is the legacy of Chaminade and Marie Therese who continued in collaboration throughout their lives.

During this 250 year anniversary, we have the opportunity for a new occasion of grace in which the Marianist family has to reinterpret its joint responsibility and collaboration for the charism to continue. On the feast of Joachim and Ann, we can celebrate the way Jesus and Mary guided the lives of Fr. Chaminade and Marie Therese and continue to guide our own. As the Church today calls us to joint responsibility and collaboration in the mission of evangelization, the Marianist Family has a rich tradition of collaboration and apostolic response.

### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

Instructions: A group of Marianist religious and lay members could gather together to discuss the paper and use the following questions for reflection:

What are some of the efforts in your country or internationally that demonstrate the charism of collaborative is alive today? What are some examples in your country of collaboration of men and women, religious and lay in ministry? Are there ways we need to support each other locally, regionally nationally or internationally in responding to the needs of our Church and Society?

How do we as Marianist Family witness in the Church to our gift of collaboration in our spiritual life and faith formation? How do we support and learn from each other lay and religious, men and women the treasure of our gift of Marian dimension of our spirituality? What are the challenges in our collaborative efforts? How can our Marianist resources on the internet and programs of faith formation assist us in ongoing dialogues?

### **RESOURCES**

Joseph Stefanelli, S.M. Mlle de Lamourous: Marie Therese de Lamourous, Firm Hand, Loving of Heart: NACMS, Dayton, Oh 2001.

Benjamin Dougherty. The Life of Mlle de Lamourous During the French Revolution: NACMS, Dayton, Oh 2008.

Steve Glodek, SM. “Whose Wine Is It? Reflections on the Discipleship of Equals in Marianist Communities.” Things Marianist. NACMS, Dayton Oh 1997.

Laura Leming, FMI. A Sociologist Considers the Contributions of Marie Therese de Lamourous, NACMS, Dayton Oh 2010.

M. L’abbé Pouget. Vie de Mademoiselle de Lamourous: Foundress, dite la bonne Mère. translated by the Author of The Heir of Redclyffe, London: 1858.

## **2011-7 – Prayer Service Honoring the Collaboration of. William Joseph Chaminade and Marie Therese de Lamourous**

**OPENING PRAYER:** In the Eucharist we are united with Christ. As Christians and as Marianist Family the way of servant leadership becomes our own. Drawing strength from our union with Jesus and Mary, let us reflect the gifts given to Fr. Chaminade and Marie Therese to lead, serve, encourage others to grow and animate communities of faith. Let us begin this time of prayer with joy, celebrating our Marianist tradition of collaboration as priests, brothers, sisters and laity.

*Psalm 1*

*Psalm 31*

*Scripture:* 2 Tim 1: 1-3, 6-12

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Place a picture of Fr. Chaminade and Marie Therese in a prayer space.

A member or representative from the Marianist Family can light a candle or use a little incense to symbolizing the sparks of light that Fr. Chaminade and Marie Therese held up for us as each intention is prayed.

**INTRODUCTION:** Fr. William Joseph Chaminade and Marie Therese de Lamourous led people to the light even in the darkest of hours. Let us shine a light on their history and be willing to stand for what we value and respond with courage as they did.

1. Let us pray for the Church that all who share a common baptism might learn to use their gifts for the service of the Church in unity amidst diversity.

*Response:* Marie Therese and Chaminade, collaborators in faith, intercede for us

2. Let us pray for the world that leaders of nations might not use power to oppress but might be servants of justice and defenders of the needy

*Response:* Marie Therese and Chaminade, collaborators in courage, intercede for us

3. Let us pray for our parishes, educational communities, health, social and environmental ministries that all might be strengthened with a greater appreciation of the gifts that are given to each and opportunities for renewed collaboration.

*Response:* Marie Therese and Chaminade, collaborators in mission, intercede for us

4. Let us pray for ourselves that we might recognize new possibilities and be open to the workings of the Spirit no matter our age or limitations

*Response:* Marie Therese and Chaminade, collaborators in hope, intercede for us

Let us pray that we may be animators of communities of ( Name a community, or ministry that is a collaborative effort of lay and religious/men and women in the Marianist Family that you would like to mention in prayer)

***Closing Prayer:***

Like Mary, we ponder the word and events of our lives in the Marianist Family. We give thanks for the witness of Fr. Chaminade and Marie Therese. May they continue to inspire us as we seek ways to serve our common mission in the Church.

May the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be glorified in all places through the Immaculate Virgin Mary. Amen

*(Prayer Service Composed by Sr. Grace Walle, FMI)*

