

CIRCULAR N ° 5

MARIANIST RELIGIOUS VOCATIONS TODAY

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12 September 1999
Feast of the Holy Name of Mary

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DAVID JOSEPH FLEMING, S.M.
Superior General of the Society of Mary,
Missionary Apostolic, to all his fellow
Marianists throughout the world.

MARIANIST RELIGIOUS VOCATIONS TODAY

Dear Brothers,

In my visits to Marianist communities everywhere, I hear more questions and more concern about religious vocations than about any other topic. In this circular, I would like to share with you a few reflections on this urgent concern.

In May, Father José María Arnaiz and I took part in a session of the Union of Superiors General about the vocation crisis in Europe and North America. Then, during the first week of July, I had the opportunity to participate in a very stimulating meeting organized by Father José María in Rome for Marianists in charge of vocation ministry in our units of Europe, America, Korea and Japan. Next year, a similar session is being planned for those who work in lands where vocations are abundant: the seven countries where we are present in sub-Saharan Africa, and India. The goal of these meetings is to “present a new proposal of the Marianist vocation” for our time: in other words, to relaunch vocational ministry in our provinces, regions, and sectors.

Vocation ministry is not a question of methods and techniques. In any case, these must be adapted to each country and culture. What we are lacking all too often is the motivation and the clear-sighted commitment necessary to invite people to share our life. The vocation ministers present for our Rome meeting radiated joy and enthusiastic generosity, fraternal support and happiness in their Marianist religious life. If we can multiply such people in the Society, our new proposal of the Marianist vocation will be a powerful sign to the people we meet, a real invitation to many of them to “come and see.”

The Attractive Power of the Marianist Charism Today

Actually, the vocation crisis we experience in our traditional areas of strength is neither a worldwide phenomenon nor a crisis of the Marianist charism itself. It affects certain parts of the world much more than others. In Europe and North America it is a genuine crisis of the Church, in which we take part, together with most other religious congregations.

Today we have more than 200 young men in our houses of formation, from the level of pre-novitiate until perpetual profession. This represents around 15% of our total membership - far from enough, but still not a small number. Every year we have around 70 novices, twice what we experienced a decade ago. The great majority of these young men - about two-thirds of them - are in our youthful Regions and Sectors of Africa and India. Several Marianist Units in Latin America also have a steady number of candidates, and the establishment this year of

the new common novitiate in Santiago should be a help in their formation, perseverance, and corporate sense. The Region of Korea also has a smaller but consistent record of entering candidates.

There should be no doubt that Marianist religious life has a bright future, but we must recognize that the future will be different from the past - less European and North American, more varied in culture and nationality, more diverse, more present among people who live surrounded by religious multiplicity and by poverty. As a Society we should welcome this new future positively and thankfully, as a grace the Lord and Mary are preparing for us these years. It is important for all of us to be grateful for the vitality of new religious vocations in new places in our time.

The Marianist charism is also demonstrating great vitality among lay people in many countries. In today's world about ten thousand Catholics, religious and lay, consciously live Fr. Chaminade's charism of Marian consecration-alliance. It is encouraging to see that so many lay people are responding to the invitation to share Marianist spirituality, community, and mission. Never before, in all our history, have so many people understood themselves as "Marianist." We all need to work together to deepen and strengthen this still-nascent sense of belonging to the Marianist Family. But it is clear that our charism has a great attractive power for many people in today's world.

Graces and Challenges of the Vocation Crisis

At the same time, we cannot ignore the significant and prolonged crisis of vocations to the religious life, particularly in Europe and North America, those continents where the majority of Marianist religious still live. In the spring of 1999, we had only four novices in Europe and four in North America. We must find ways to work together towards a significant improvement. But first let us pause to consider some of the graces and challenges that accompany this vocation crisis.

I am convinced that in the last analysis this crisis can only be explained as part of a deep purification through which the Lord is asking us religious to pass in these decades since Vatican II.

The vocation crisis is giving us a lesson in humility and trust. In the past we were often tempted to rely on large numbers of young members, on their gifts and talents and their fine educations, maybe even more than on God's grace. We sometimes boasted a little about our ability to attract talented people and sustain works of great prestige and influence.

Good as all these things are in themselves, today the Lord is calling us to a corporate humility, to a sense of trust in Providence rather than in our talents, numbers, institutions and reputations. The work that needs to be done to build the Kingdom in our time will be done because He wills it, even if our own contribution seems weak and fragile. Mary will continue to bring forth Christ in our world, even if we, her missionaries, are highly conscious of our inadequacies.

In fact, our response to this purification too often includes a great deal of guilt, blame, discouragement and pessimism. I believe a proper response would involve all those virtues of purification that Father Chaminade stressed: confidence in God, distrust of self, recourse to guidance, long-suffering patience, frequent prayer, and the firm renewal of our commitments.

Would we have had the vision and courage to share our mission in education and in other ministries so broadly with lay people, if the Lord had not led us through this crisis of religious vocations?

Without the crisis, would we have felt so urgently the need for a new option for the poor, for an outreach to new parts of the world, for creativity in our pastoral methods, for the development of lay ministry?

Without the crisis, would we have felt so strongly the need to return to the roots of our charism, to invite others to share the charism with us, to join us in Mary's mission?

Without the crisis, would we have been so welcoming to the contributions of Marianists coming from new foundations in the Third World, which are so enriching to the western cultural and ecclesial viewpoint?

If you or I were running the world, perhaps we would not have chosen the method of a prolonged vocation crisis in order to emphasize these graces and challenges. But who are we to question God's methods? We are often stiff-necked and hard-headed, and I believe God is breaking through our defenses so that we will better cooperate, with greater surrender and trust, to His plans for the Church and world in our time.

The fast-approaching beatification of Father Chaminade is an occasion to reflect on God's plan for the Marianist charism in our day, to cooperate and find new courage and new resilience in our journey under the guidance of the Lord of history.

Some Words of Encouragement

To motivate us in our vocation ministry, we have the reassuring words of Pope John Paul II in *Vita Consecrata*: "You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished! Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things"(par. 110).

Recognizing the heavy burden on religious institutes and on the whole Church caused by the vocation crisis in the developed world, the Pope urges us to maintain our "confidence in the Lord Jesus, who continues to call men and women to follow him" and to invest our "best resources generously in vocation work" as "the most authentic way to support the Spirit's action"(par. 64).

Even though he acknowledges that no individual institute has a "claim to permanence," he expresses his conviction that the "ecclesial mission of the consecrated life...is destined to perdure." He invites us to face the crisis "with the serenity of those who know that what is required of each individual is *not success, but commitment to faithfulness*" (par. 63).

These profound words are at once hopeful and realistic. They can be summed up by saying that God wants our humble fidelity and our joy, our trust and generosity. We can leave the results to Him. In our case, we can also entrust these results in a very particular way to Mary, in whose name and for whose honor we have embraced this religious life.

The Religious Life as an Excellent Way

Before Vatican II, a commonplace of vocation ministry was the teaching that the religious life was “more perfect” than other forms of life, a better way to follow the Lord. In emphasizing the common vocation to holiness of all Christians, the Council made such a theology obsolete. We came to say that religious life was just “another way” of following the Lord, and we were almost apologetic when we admitted the obvious fact that many lay people live a holier life than many religious. The whole teaching on the outstanding excellence of our way of life was thus left in a shadow.

No one becomes a Marianist simply because of some abstract “excellence.” Rather, people join us because they feel a call to follow Jesus and see our life as an excellent help to follow that call. Still, I believe that the time has come again, not to make pretentious and inauthentic claims of superiority, but to stress this outstanding excellence of our way of life.

Consecration by religious vows offers us the possibility of total commitment of all aspects of our life for the Kingdom of God. What is most personal and intimate in each of us as a human person - for example, our identity in the spheres of love and family, our ability to work and gain economic power, autonomy in directing our life as we like, the capacity to make lifetime commitments - all this is transformed and channeled through religious vows. Religious life is a particularly excellent way to follow the Lord because it disposes us to develop an “undivided heart” (*Rule of Life* 18) that is more readily available to the Lord, to the Church, to the Kingdom, and to the Family of Mary.

Of course, many lay people, including lay Marianists, are holier than many of us religious. We cannot claim any monopoly on holiness, which remains a “universal call.” Still, we need to communicate, modestly but emphatically, the excellence of our way of life. In particular, we need to communicate this conviction to the young people around us. We should not hesitate to invite them to consider the possibility of choosing this uniquely excellent way. If our life is not excellent, presenting certain special advantages, why should they choose it?

I have the impression that in many countries we have not succeeded in communicating this excellence to lay people, young or old, sometimes not even to Marianist Lay Communities. I am not sure we have reflected in enough depth on the indispensable role of religious in the whole Marianist Family: “with them, we are Marianists; for them, we are religious.”

All too often, even practicing Christian parents discourage their children from considering a religious vocation. Many people greatly appreciate the service and witness of our lives, but they have yet to recognize the link between this esteem and the intrinsic excellence of the vocation to Marianist religious life.

Why Do we Need Vocations?

There are many reasons why the Church and the world need religious vocations today. I don't think I need to enter into much detail in explaining these reasons. I would just like to evoke a few of them:

1. There is a *great thirst for spirituality* among people of all ages today, especially among youth. In many cases, people feel a lack of spiritual substance and spiritual structure in their lives. In contrast to about twenty years ago, today not many are in revolt and rejection against

spiritualities (possibly misunderstood ones) that they consider oppressive and dehumanizing. Lacking a background of childhood training in religious traditions and intellectual analysis of religious concepts, many feel a spiritual vacuum and grab on to any teaching that seems to offer hope of an experiential contact with God or with something transcendent.

We religious have rich spiritual traditions that can slake this spiritual thirst. But we will be able to communicate these traditions only if we ourselves live them authentically and project them first of all by our way of life, and then by our words. When we succeed in communicating the spiritual riches of the Marianist charism, again and again we find a wholehearted response. The first and most fundamental need for religious vocations is to offer “experts” (that is, people with genuine experience) in spirituality to a world in search of meaning and of God.

2. People today are also *looking for community*. Modern culture tends to individualize and isolate. Marianist religious are also meant to be “experts” (people with genuine, realistic experience) in community. With our strong tradition of community and family spirit, we offer people an appealing sense of acceptance and belonging. Through the experience of Marianist community, they learn the discipline and forgetfulness of self that paves the way for corporate dedication and corporate joy. We need Marianist religious vocations, as Father Chaminade did, to help multiply the opportunities to experience this kind of faith-community.

3. We also need Marianist religious vocations because of some “*compelling missionary projects*” to which the Lord and His Mother are calling us through the mediation of the Church in our time.

We have some wonderful *institutions*. We need to stress that these institutions are excellent apostolic instruments to meet new challenges in the present and future. Most of us are convinced that this is indeed the case, but I doubt if we are articulate enough in communicating this conviction. Few people will be motivated to choose religious life simply in order to maintain something that already exists. They will want to commit their energies to our institutions only if they can clearly see their apostolic potential now and into the future.

We need religious to work, side by side with a growing number of committed lay people, in maintaining and stimulating the Christian and Marianist character of these excellent apostolic instruments.

4. Because of the apostolic freedom, mobility, and availability that characterizes our religious life (*Rule of Life* 64), we are uniquely equipped to take up new missions. We can be *pioneers and pathfinders* of new frontiers, of what Pope John Paul II calls the “*new areopagi*” of evangelization. Such was certainly the conviction of Father Chaminade when he took up the task of founding a new religious congregation in the Church. We need new vocations to meet emerging needs.

Today these emerging needs seem to be grouped around three poles:

- The *preferential option for and with the poor* is leading to a marvelous development in our time of Marianist services in education, formal and non-formal, among the poor; in development programs; in technical training; and in pastoral presence in neglected areas, both urban and rural. All these new ministries cry out for the service of more religious.

- The *evangelization of contemporary culture* is especially urgent. The means of communication (music, films, television, Internet, art, and the printed word) present great, underused opportunities for mission. We need more religious trained and skilled in such evangelization of culture.
- The *worldwide presence of the Church* is finally becoming a reality in our time, after two thousand years, with the help of contemporary communications and transportation. The Marianist charism has a great deal to offer in many places where it does not yet exist.

5. Religious life, today as always, is needed because of its capacity to *bear prophetic witness* in a world full of suffering, loneliness, and confusion. Prophetic witness includes denouncing evil and announcing the Good News of Jesus. It implies a life-style that makes visible the fact that the Kingdom of God is already among us, that it is possible to live in a different way. People need to see this kind of witness concretely. Our vowed way of life equips us to offer such witness. If we live it visibly and joyfully, people of high spiritual quality will want to join us.

The Capacity of our Provinces and Regions to Attract Vocations

In visits to the Units of the Society, I note a close correlation between the urgency of missionary thrusts and the situation of vocations to Marianist religious life. New vocations are greatly attracted by experiences of spirituality and community, but only those units with an intensity of apostolic focus seem to succeed in attracting and retaining many vocations.

Some Units have difficulty in articulating any clear thrust. When a young person shows interest in joining, these Units do not find it easy to insert him into any corporate ministry. Marianists have a hard time explaining what they are inviting new candidates to do. Naturally, vocations in these Units are rare.

Other Units do not appear to have any corporate aim beyond maintaining their current institutions. Perhaps these Units take for granted that their works are important for today and tomorrow. But this importance needs to be made palpable to those considering a lifetime commitment as a Marianist. It must be clear to them that we are not simply a “business” trying to keep selling its “product” or maintain its “clientele.” These Units attract a few vocations, but those who come soon feel overburdened and frightened by the expectations thrust upon them from an early stage. They easily “burn out.”

Still other Units appear to tolerate a multiplicity of apostolic and communitarian projects, but more as individual initiatives than as a corporate thrust. The few vocations who enter these Units have a hard time sensing an overarching corporate purpose, and many of them fall by the wayside.

Some Units have a burdensome, over-ambitious focus. They want to do everything. They are intent on maintaining all existing works and also want to take up quite a variety of new ones. Potential candidates experience the religious of these Units as over-busy, over-worked, over-pressured. The few who enter easily get discouraged and tired.

A more positive picture is presented by Provinces and Regions where vocation ministry is a high priority. In these Units, vocation ministry is an integral part of all ministry, especially youth ministry. Thus each member shares in the responsibility for inviting people to consider

a religious vocation. These Units have a sense of ongoing development and a corporate capacity to maintain existing works, in growing collaboration with lay people, as well as undertake new projects from time to time. These Units have the patience to allow new members to grow and mature before burdening them prematurely with heavy institutional responsibilities. Of course, this description represents an ideal, but I see a number of Units of the Society approximating this ideal.

Vocations and Marianist Revitalization

It is clear that vocations are closely linked to the revitalization of Marianist life. This is not to claim that vocations are some kind of reward God gives to good renewal programs, or that every Province or Region with a strong revitalized life will automatically have many new vocations. The vocational picture also depends in great degree on the overall religious atmosphere of each country. But it is sure that vocations will come more readily to groups that are full of vitality and fervor. As Fr. Arnaiz reminds us, “vocations don’t ripen at a low temperature.”

Some of our Units may have too low a temperature. One of the vocation directors at our meeting in Rome contrasted a “gray religious life” with a “bright and vibrant” one. The “gray” or “drab” religious life he described as bureaucratic, focused on rules, routines, and administration, tired and over-worked, centered on getting a task done. The “bright and vibrant” type of religious life he presented as friendly, joyous, available to people, meaningful, radical, offering attractive witness, centered on mission rather than task.

The same presenter spoke of “embolisms,” dead zones that have to be diagnosed and treated in our corporate life. Such might be, for example, a tendency to withdraw behind locked doors, to hide our community life and prayer from others, to become so secularized, so genteel and comfortable, so like everyone else, that the sign-value and visibility of our Marianist life disappears.

It is surely a “bright and vibrant” religious life, one lived with intensity and visibility, that will attract new members. This truth is today especially evident in the western world where vocations are few: the small number of groups that succeed in attracting new members in this post-modern situation are all characterized by a certain intensity, visibility and clarity of focus.

Franciscan vocation directors often say that the appealing figure of St. Francis remains their greatest “recruiter.” I believe Mary plays a similar role for us. Many of us were attracted to be Marianists because we sensed something of the missionary dynamism, the formative warmth, and the intensity of faith that the Church has always perceived in Mary. The Marian dimension is a key part of the charismatic motivation that will motivate young men to enter the Society of Mary. We are inviting people to join in our consecration-alliance with Mary.

The way we live our community life often spells success or failure for our vocation ministry. Community life is usually both our strength and our weakness. The *Rule of Life* reminds us that “the whole of our community life is inspired by the new commandment of love. If we forget it, our life together will be a source of ruin; if it directs our actions, community life will rekindle joy, inspire love and esteem for our vocation, attract others to share in our life, and strengthen our apostolic dedication” (art. 38). If we live together in support and mutual stimulation, others will want to share our life. If we live in tension and uncommunicative

irritation, going our own individual ways, living alone for all practical purposes, even if we are under the same roof with a few others, we will have few vocations.

When young people join us, it is important to welcome them and let them feel that their voice can be heard, their concerns addressed, in our corporate life. In too many of our Units, members have the status of “junior Brothers” until well past their silver jubilees! Of course we must not load our members down with too many burdens of leadership too soon, but they must be able to feel that their capacities, their experience and their insights are important. We should not wait too many years to look among them when we are choosing directors of communities and works and electing Chapter members.

The background paper for the Rome Vocations Meeting sums up the relationship between our revitalization and our vocation ministry in a clear and succinct way:

- Young people join groups that are characterized by a hopefulness that is obvious in the happiness of the members.
- Young people seek out groups that have a strong sense of community. They are looking for friends who welcome them to share the journey of apostolic life.
- They come when they see people who are life-giving, generous in committing their energies unselfishly for others.
- They come to open communities that do not fear to share their sincere struggles to live as brothers, their successes and failures, their experiences in prayer, in the living of celibacy for the Kingdom and in the attainment of satisfaction and fulfillment.
- They come to praying communities that invite others to pray with them.

Vocation Ministry as Integral to all Our Work

Last year the Vatican sponsored a Congress on “New Vocations for a New Europe.” Perhaps its most striking point was the call to integrate vocation ministry once again into all Church ministry. The element of calling and inviting to commitment is an integral part of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus. The Church must create a “vocational culture,” where everyone is presumed to have a calling from God and where it seems normal to reflect on a life-commitment as a response to God. Such a vocational culture existed in the past, but in some places it has been lost today.

We Marianists need to examine the way we go about all our work to see whether we have sufficiently integrated this vocational element. Perhaps we have sometimes been so intent in our ministry on reassuring or consoling or correcting, that the vocational aspect has suffered. At any rate, whether we are dealing with primary-school children or senior adults, all ministry involves inviting people to respond positively to the Lord and make appropriate life-decisions motivated by the Gospel.

Vocations and the Marianist Family

Religious vocations are also the responsibility of our entire Marianist Family. Chaminade founded his two religious congregations because he was convinced that religious would have an irreplaceable, permanent role among all those who share the Marianist charism. We must

sharpen our sense of the role that is uniquely ours and invite Marianist Lay Communities to help us in the work of developing religious vocations.

Collaboration within the whole Marianist Family in vocation ministry means that when we propose the possibility of any Marianist vocation, lay or religious, we should present the full gamut of possibilities for living out our charism in a variety of states of life. It means that we should consider the Marianist Family as a normal context for nourishing and developing the vocational culture mentioned above. It also means that we should be clear in presenting what is specific to each state of life within the Family, the unique and irreplaceable role proper to each choice. It means that we should invite lay Marianists to collaborate in specific actions for the promotion of religious vocations.

In some places, this approach has already begun, illustrating the *Rule of Life's* assertion that "contact with other Christians committed to the Family of Mary allows us to attain a better understanding of ourselves as religious" (art. 1.2). Yet I was struck this year in some visits when I discovered that graduating students in our schools are invited to commit themselves to the Marianist charism in a lay community without any reference to the possibility of being a religious!

Contemporary Youth Ministry

Vocations to religious life may perhaps come at any age, but they most often appear today among young adults who are discerning life-directions. Many of our Units no longer have many contacts with such young adults. Our work tends to focus on school-children, few of whom now seem ready to make a life-decision, and on married adults and their families in parishes. Ministry to young adults is a key need for the Church in our time, and an obvious choice for emphasis in vocation ministry. What contacts do you have, does your community, Province or Region have, with young adults who are ready to make life-choices? What do you need to do to have more such contacts? Perhaps more of us need to get out of our offices and into more direct personal contact with these young adults.

Dealing with post-modern young adults is a new experience for some of us. Many of them are generous and idealistic, easily motivated to concrete actions of solidarity and service. Many of them are seeking deeper spirituality and community.

They usually do not have much religious background or much sense of structure and direction in their religious experience. They may tend to treat religious ideas in a way that has been called "consumeristic," choosing a little of this and a little of that, doing obeisance to all the gods and all the spiritualities, looking for instant experiences rather than long-term disciplines and commitments.

They feel a little paralyzed in making life-decisions. The idea of permanent commitment is very difficult for them. Maybe they are right in recognizing its gravity; they have certainly not been inspired by the frequent examples of infidelity among their elders.

Chastity often seems a mystery to them. Popular psychology and the modern media have made them suspect that it is not really normal and healthy. Yet they suffer from the casual, non-committed relationships they see around them.

Vocation ministry is a “mission land” for many of us today. We should not presume that the background of today’s young people is just like ours. We must become “inculturated,” understand and empathize with their positive values, learn to speak their language, use their gestures, respect their concerns, respond to their needs. We need more than just occasional contacts. We need to “accompany” them, patiently, gratuitously, in their long and cautious search for their way of responding to God’s call. Only then can we be credible in inviting them to share our life.

Generous and faithful young adults exist today. Many of them are capable of heroism and eager for creative service. They are good prospects for a Marianist vocation if they believe in Jesus Christ and the Church and are ready to commit themselves to a community dedicated, after the example of Mary, to formation in faith, especially among the young and the poor. We regularly find such people among our more mature students, among members of our lay communities, among those who volunteer their services in ministry. We need not fear to imitate the directness of John Paul II in addressing these people: “To you, young people, I say: if you hear the Lord’s call, do not reject it! Dare to become part of the great movements of holiness which renowned saints have launched in their following of Christ” (*Vita Consecrata*, par. 106).

A Word to the Discouraged

A mentality of discouragement is too frequent among us. A certain number of Marianist religious appear to live without much hope for any corporate future. Their pessimism is in danger of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy: they have little hope for vocations, so they make few efforts to encourage them.

This mentality of discouragement often includes elements of guilt and blame, as if the crisis were all our own fault, or as if some particular reform, a change in attitude of superiors, a return to some religious practice, might force God to give us abundant vocations again. This mentality includes considerable distrust, a tendency to be suspicious of any stirrings of new vocations and to distance oneself from involvement with them.

As well-trained intellectuals, many of us have a certain hypertrophy of the critical sense. We are good at analyzing problems, explaining causes for our lack of vocations. But we are slow to take significant action. Our utterances on the problem tend to be so abstract as to lose all force. We brilliantly catalogue the deficiencies of modern youth, including our own candidates. We set standards so high and are so impatient with the process of growth that few young people can ever satisfy us. We spend more time cursing the darkness than lighting a few candles.

Above all, the mentality of discouragement includes an element of great tiredness: despite all our prayers and efforts, in large parts of the Society not many vocations have come. “We have piped and you have not danced, we have sung dirges and you have not mourned” (Matthew 11,17; Luke 7,32).

People with this mentality tend to regard any new proposal of the Marianist religious vocation as nearly impossible. At least they think it would require a great deal of new effort and oblige people who are already seriously overburdened to take on still more activities. In fact, as we have seen, the new proposal calls for an integration of vocation ministry into all our efforts, rather than the multiplication of new programs.

If you fall into this discouraged group, please renew your confidence! In particular, I invite you to re-read the Pope's encouraging words quoted in several places above.

Giving Higher Priority to Vocation Ministry

The conclusion of this Circular is obvious: I am inviting you all, as individuals and as Provinces and Regions, to give much higher priority to vocation ministry. This is an urgent need, and we should not waste time in getting down to it.

The Vocation Directors present in Rome have sent a message with twelve practical recommendations to everyone in the Society. I urge you to begin now to implement these recommendations.

In particular, they recommend that every Marianist "dedicate a significant amount of time to vocation work" (no. 2), and they assert that "vocation ministry is a common thread in all our apostolic work" (no. 11). Marianist religious vocations are not the responsibility of superiors, formators, or vocation ministers; they are the work of every one of us. If we truly understand the need to integrate the vocational dimension into all ministry, and especially into an increased focus on young adults, it will not seem strange to speak of each of us dedicating a significant portion of his work to this concern.

Ultimately, all our efforts at vocation ministry depend on the Lord and on Mary's intercession for her Society. Most communities mention this intention almost every day. Our regular prayer for vocations must go beyond formalistic routine. We need to pray with faith that God is answering us, and we need to be concrete and specific in praying for persons around us who are considering a life-commitment as a Marianist religious.

With the confidence that these prayers will be heard in the way and at the time the Lord knows best, I invite you to take special action for Marianist religious vocations during the coming year, as we celebrate the Jubilee of our Redemption and prepare for the beatification of our Founder.

Fraternally,

David Joseph Fleming, S.M.
Superior General