## The Marist Way of Promoting Lay Leadership – Part 1

Fr. Colin envisioned that the laity would play a primary role in carrying out the mission of the Society of Mary, which is to be or to "channel" Mary's presence so that she would be with the Church today as she was at its beginning. He had the laity in mind when he expressed with great exuberance that he desired the whole world to be Marist.

Founders are prone to such enthusiasm and are not meant to be taken literally. In another place, Fr. Colin admitted that not everyone would be called to join the Society of Mary. When it came to vocations to the priest branch of the Marist Family, he encouraged Marist vocation directors to send them to other religious orders before accepting them into the Marist formation program. Still, when God blesses us, we naturally want as many as possible to share in our joy. That dynamic is at work here. The Society of Mary is a gift, a blessing, to the Church, and like all gifts given to us by God, they are meant to build up the Church.

The Society of Mary is embedded in the Church and carries out the mission of the Church that is rooted in baptism, but in a Marist or Mary's Way. Rather than repeat myself here, I urge you to go to those reflections where I define who makes up the laity in the Church. They received their mission in baptism when they were united to Christ and given a share in his ministry as priest, prophet, and king (leadership). The laity are called by name by the Risen Christ to participate in his salvific mission, but in *his* name with all that implies.

For those who feel this is an imposition since they were not asked, consider those who lament not knowing what they are to do with their lives or question the meaning of life, including their own. In baptism, Christ answers both those questions. He calls us to holiness by uniting ourselves to him and conforming our lives to his. He calls us to mission, which is to share in his salvific work as priest, prophet, and king (leadership).

When the baptized receive the sacrament of confirmation, they are asked to renew their baptismal promises. That is when the Risen Christ calls upon them to speak for themselves what their parents or godparents had said for them when they were baptized. When the response is yes, they accept being transformed into Christ's image and likeness. By living up to the name of Christian, Christ can work through them to sanctify the world by announcing the good news in this time and place in history. To make the world holy is to advance God's Reign (Kingdom) so that God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven. The sacrifices the laity suffer to make the world more just and compassionate are how they exercise the priesthood of the faithful. Those sacrifices are united with Christ's sacrifice on the cross, which is brought from the past to the present but in an unbloody way when we celebrate the Eucharist.

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, promulgated by the Second Vatican Council on November 21, 1964, puts it this way:

> "For all their works, prayers, apostolic undertakings, family and married life, daily work, relaxation of mind and body, if they are accomplished in the Spirit – indeed even the hardships of life, if patiently borne – all these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (#34)

The laity's participation in Christ's ministry of priest also includes prayer. Praying for those closest to them, the needs of the world, especially the poor and the sick, and the Church is an essential ministry of the laity. "Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge." (Psalm 62:8)

Priests also lead the community in prayer. The laity should take their call seriously to pray for their families or other groups. They should also bring their families to the Sunday Eucharist (worship). The priest's primary

role is to lead the community in worship, with the Eucharist being the highest form of worship and prayer. The laity fulfills that aspect of the priesthood of the faithful by setting an example.

Finally, the word priest comes from the Latin word *pontifex,* which means bridge builder. The laity exercise their share in Christ's priesthood by bridging the gap between people alienated from God by introducing them to Christ. The Marists would prefer a gentle approach which Fr. Colin captures in his words, "as if hidden and unknown in the world." That can be translated to mean introducing people to Christ by building a relationship first and gaining a person's trust. It could take a while before questions of faith are asked, but the Spirit is at work in the dynamic described in a truly hidden and unknown way. That is where "as if" comes into play. It may look like nothing is happening, but that doesn't mean the Spirit is not at work.

Vatican II called for the full, conscious, and active participation of every baptized person in the liturgy of the Eucharist. When the laity goes to Mass and prays, sings, responds, listens, sits, and stands, that is how they participate in the celebration of the Eucharist and fulfill their priestly vocation. Laity also exercises their priestly ministry when they read at Mass and serve as song leaders, members of the choir, acolytes, musicians, greeters, and Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist. Eucharistic Prayer II captures this sentiment beautifully when the priest prays, "We thank you for counting us worthy to stand in your presence and serve you." The gathered community is the Church, the Body of Christ. In serving the community through these liturgical ministries, the laity is serving the Risen Christ.

That means the laity must become familiar with what it means to be called by the Risen Christ, conformed to him, and share in his ministry of priest, prophet, and servant-king. Rather than repeat myself here, I urge you to go to those reflections where I define who makes up the laity in the Church and explain in greater detail the laity's mission, which is to sanctify the world in the name of Christ.

In the following reflection, I will touch upon the laity's call to exercise Christ's ministry of prophet that we share with him through baptism.