

Marianist Educational Associates: Common Guidelines

[November, 2013]

I Introduction

In 2005 members from all three Marianist universities responded to the call from the Association of Marianist Universities [AMU] Board to build a partnership between members of the Society of Mary, the sponsoring religious body, and a cadre of lay collaborators that would together sustain and renew the mission and identity that was Catholic and that embodied our Marianist educational tradition.¹ The first cohort of Marianist Educational Associates [MEA] entered into an initial formation program and the adventure began.

In 2009 the AMU Board and a group of MEAs reviewed the activities, initiatives, and efforts of the initial years and made plans for growing this movement of lay leadership for Catholic and Marianist mission and identity of our Marianist universities. Among the recommendations developed and accepted was a revision of the original statement of the Core Commitments and an exploration of common guidelines for the MEA experience at all the universities.

At the 2012 Strategic Directions retreat of the AMU Board, the development of common guidelines was given high priority. The present text was developed and approved by the AMU Board on October 15, 2013 after consultation with MEAs, the Sponsorship Officers [Rector/VP for Mission] and the AMU Board.

II Rationale and purpose of the MEA initiative

In times of rapid social change, Father Chaminade, founder of the Society of Mary, encouraged members and communities of the Marianist Family to enter into what today we call “dialogues of faith and culture.” He encouraged and modeled these dialogues using the light of faith to critically probe these social changes to understand the deep unmet human needs present within them. At the same time, he showed the ways we can let insights contained or manifested within social change help the community recover basic understandings of the Christian faith tradition. In this way we can incorporate these insights into a new model for rebuilding and transforming the Church and society.

As the AMU Board probed the situation of our Marianist universities, it was clear that the Holy Spirit was calling us to something new. The consolidation and revitalization of four Provinces of the Society of Mary into one Marianist Province of the United States has given our three universities one common sponsoring religious community. The formation of the new Province has brought about innovation in the way the Society of Mary sponsors its universities, new modes of collaboration, and a more flexible pool of religious for the Society’s ministry of higher education. Although fewer Marianist religious will be available for higher education ministry in the future, the Province has undertaken a new sponsorship structure to collaborate more effectively with the boards, administrators, staffs, and volunteers at its universities. Included in this project is an ongoing formation effort aimed at sustaining the gift of Blessed Chaminade and the Marianist educational tradition into the future.

¹ In 2004, the AMU Board approved a proposal and rationale for the creation of the MEA initiative.

To ensure that Marianist universities sustain a strong Catholic and Marianist mission and identity, it was important to accomplish three vital tasks. First, there must be a significant number of persons who are employed at the universities who are steeped in and appreciate the Catholic and Marianist traditions of education. Second, these persons must have the capacity and willingness to work together to incorporate these traditions into the culture of Marianist universities. Third, these persons would be committed to adapt and transform the traditions so that Marianist universities forge an engaging response to the challenges facing American higher education while contributing to the task of working toward global justice, so integral to the Marianist charism.

In order to meet the challenge of continued vitality of our Marianist universities, the Association of Marianist Universities decided to undertake the development of Marianist Educational Associates in each of the Marianist universities. To aid this development on each of our campuses, the Board of the AMU developed a working definition and some characteristics of Marianist Educational Associates.

Marianist Educational Associates are members of a professional community intentionally committed to strengthening, developing, and advancing the Catholic and Marianist mission and identity of Marianist universities. Marianist Educational Associates support one another in growing in the knowledge and appreciation of the Catholic and Marianist educational traditions. They also work together to incorporate these traditions into the culture of Marianist universities and to adapt and transform these traditions so they are responsive to the challenges facing our Marianist universities. Individuals from all sectors of our Marianist universities are invited to be Marianist Educational Associates.²

III Core Commitments of the Marianist Educational Associates common to all three universities

1. All MEAs strive to be a professional presence on the campus that promotes the Catholic and Marianist mission and identity of our Marianist- sponsored University.

MEAs are lay persons who are, first of all, employees of the campus community that are hired to perform in a professional role in the work of Marianist higher education. MEAs make an intentional choice to use that professional role to partner with the Marianist vowed religious on campus to strengthen the Catholic and Marianist mission and identity. All MEAs are committed to using their sphere of influence to strengthen the Catholic and Marianist mission and identity in ways that are effective and appropriate, i.e., in ways that respect subsidiarity and the university organization. MEAs are committed to a journey of personal and professional growth in understanding and embracing the gift of the Marianist charism.

2. All MEAs are committed to ongoing learning about the Catholic and Marianist traditions as they apply to higher education.

For MEAs to be effective and know how to operate in an appropriate Marianist style, it is important for them to know and appreciate the Catholic and Marianist traditions as they apply to higher education. MEAs participate in initial and ongoing formation programs that

² Much of this text and the following regarding the Core Commitments are based on the work of Raymond Fitz, SM, first Executive Director of the AMU, based on conversations with MEAs and the AMU Board.

introduce them to and deepen their appreciation of important concepts and themes of Catholic and Marianist higher education. MEAs develop a sense of the Catholic and Marianist traditions as living traditions and as historical realities that change and develop as the people of Marianist-sponsored universities confront new challenges. MEAs, in partnership with the Marianist religious, work to develop and enrich these traditions.

3. The MEAs are committed to forming a community of challenge and support with other MEAs that strives to embody and give witness to the Catholic and Marianist traditions of education.

In the Marianist tradition, personal commitments are strengthened and enriched in a challenging and supportive community. MEAs form a community on their campus for the sake of sustaining one another in their commitment to strengthen the Catholic and Marianist mission and identity of the University. These communities develop appropriate means of organizing themselves. The MEA communities also develop appropriate means to hold each other accountable for their commitments and to assist one another in carrying out important tasks that the community decides to undertake.

4. All MEAs are committed to being part of a university community of positive influence on campus that is engaged in reading the signs of the times and learning to utilize the Catholic and Marianist traditions in forging responses to these signs.

MEAs as individuals and as a community endeavor to positively influence the University culture, especially as that culture supports the Catholic and Marianist mission and identity and engages it in initiatives responsive to the signs of the times. Collectively, MEAs are cultural catalysts on campus by being attentive to issues, by deliberating on options for change, by organizing people and marshaling resources to bring about the intended change, and by learning from the change through reflection. Being a cultural catalyst requires respect for the University as an institution of higher education and learning how to work within the organization in an appropriate manner. For example, it is important to respect subsidiarity and thus to address the problem or issue at a level where the decision maker has responsibility for this problem or issue. Accordingly, it is important for MEAs to continually develop the skills of being a cultural catalyst.

5. All MEAs make a public affirmation to live their commitment as MEAs.

MEAs make an annual public affirmation within the University community to live their commitments. This public affirmation gives witness to their fellow MEAs and to others on the campus that they want to continue this journey of understanding and growth in the Catholic and Marianist traditions of higher education and that they want to be held accountable for this commitment.

Core Commitments but Different Journeys: The five Core Commitments outlined above define part of what is common to all MEAs in Marianist-sponsored Universities, recognizing that there will be some processes and practices proper to each university. The MEA commitment does not require a person to be a Catholic or a Christian; but it says that the person making the MEA commitment strongly affirms many of the basic beliefs, practices,

and norms of the Catholic and Marianist traditions of higher education and wants to work at incorporating them into the culture of the Marianist-sponsored universities. Some MEAs may decide to explore further the Marianist charism, with its spirituality and apostolic methods, and become a member of a Marianist Lay Community or an affiliate of the Society of Mary or Daughters of Mary Immaculate.

IV The Association of Marianist Universities and the Marianist Educational Associates

The Association of Marianist Universities — established in 2003 — is the collaborative organization that aims to support, promote, and advance Marianist higher education. The AMU does this by facilitating an environment to sustain cooperation and the exchange of experience and information among the members.

The AMU is the primary sponsor of the MEA initiative, though it is ordinarily lived out on the individual campus. As sponsor, the AMU fosters, supports, and oversees the development of the MEAs as a network of persons committed to enhancing the mission of Marianist universities. To this end, the AMU takes responsibility for programs of initial and ongoing formation of MEAs that complement those of the local university. The President and the Sponsorship Officer of each university select the candidates and notify the members of the university. As a symbol of the partnership with the AMU, the AMU Executive Director sends a letter of acceptance to each person selected to enter the initial formation program. Upon making their initial public commitment, MEAs receive a pin common to all Marianist Educational Associates. Also, a common MEA information piece will be developed and will be available on the AMU website.

V Common guidelines for recruitment and selection of MEAs

1. For consideration to be an MEA, one must be a full-time employee of a Marianist university at the time of one's initial commitment. MEAs who move to formal "Emeritus" status may continue to be considered as MEAs upon mutual agreement with the Sponsorship Officer.
2. To be considered for MEA selection, one must have been employed for at least three years in one of the Marianist universities or related Marianist institution. In the latter case, the AMU Executive Director approves the exception.
3. Information and invitation to apply to be an MEA is made available to all in the university; how this happens may be different at each university.
4. The selection process begins with the Sponsorship Officer and includes the Dean, Vice President or supervisor of the person and ends with the President and Sponsorship Officer approving.

5. Ordinarily, the yearly number eligible for initial formation from each university is as follows: Chaminade University of Honolulu 4-5; St. Mary's, 7-9; University of Dayton, 9-11. Actual numbers will depend on circumstances.
6. If it remains the candidate's intent, one becomes an MEA after participation in and the successful completion of the initial formation program sponsored by the AMU. This includes making the MEA statement of commitment during the closing ceremony.
7. Some characteristics of a person to be considered as an MEA are:
 - a. Already involved in strengthening the Catholic and Marianist Mission of the university
 - b. Is well respected by their colleagues and supervisors for their professional performance.
 - c. Demonstrates a collaborative spirit
 - d. Demonstrates an ability to impact others in their sphere of influence
 - e. Is likely to continue regular and active participation in MEA activities past the first year and has the flexibility and commitment to participate in ongoing formation.
 - f. Respects the Catholic and Marianist traditions

VI Common rituals and practices across the campuses.

1. A public commitment ceremony for a new MEA happens within the first year after the initial formation program on the "home" campus.
2. The timing of the ceremony is a matter for individual campus decision.
3. The common elements of the ceremony are the following:
 - a. The ceremony is to be in the context of a prayer service or liturgy open to the university community.
 - b. For the initial public commitment by an MEA, he or she would state his/her commitment individually; in subsequent years, this may be stated as a cohort or other grouping, since the numbers are growing larger.
 - c. The individual and group statement of commitment, received by the Sponsorship Officer, is based on the five Core Commitments common to all three Marianist universities and is as follows:

As a Marianist Educational Associate, I pledge [renew my pledge] to strengthen, sustain and develop the Catholic and Marianist mission and identity of _____ . I will continue to read, reflect, and collaborate with others to insure the continuation of the programs, processes, and behaviors that make us a Catholic and Marianist University.

I promise to support others in growing in the knowledge and appreciation of our Catholic and Marianist traditions in order to embody and witness to these traditions and their benefit to our world.

Furthermore, I promise to give myself to the larger community as fully as possible by remaining spiritually present, alive, and open to the call of the Marianist charism as I am personally able.

4. A symbol in the form of a pin common to all the universities is given to each MEA at the time of their initial public commitment.

VII Organizational and ongoing formation matters

1. Along with regular participation in their campus MEA activities, MEAs are expected to continue their formation in local and/or national ongoing activities of growth and development.
2. At least once every three years, each MEA meets with the Sponsorship Officer to discuss their participation and possibilities in MEA life on campus. The Sponsorship Officer initiates the conversation.
3. Each campus develops some structure of leadership and organization (e.g., a coordinator or coordinating team) which promotes participation, responsibility, subsidiarity, and accountability. This structure is accountable to the Sponsorship Officer.
4. If an MEA decides not to renew their annual commitment, they cease to be a part of the MEA community. If an MEA is not able to renew their commitment with the group due to circumstances, then he or she works out a specific arrangement to renew it [e.g., signing the commitment pledge] with the Sponsorship Officer.
5. In extenuating circumstances, an MEA may ask for a leave of absence from the MEA community. After one year, the MEA, in dialogue with the Sponsorship Officer, makes a decision to continue as an MEA or to leave the program.
6. If an MEA moves to employment in another Marianist university, he or she may become a part of that MEA group by mutual consent with the Sponsorship Officers.
7. The Sponsorship Officer, upon due consideration and with the approval of the President, may in extraordinary circumstances dismiss a member of the MEA

community for conduct inimical or contrary to the MEA Core Commitments, Catholic and Marianist traditions, or the mission and identity of the university.

8. The MEA programs at the local and national levels reflect ecumenical and interfaith/interreligious sensibilities as integral to the Catholic and Marianist tradition.

VIII Conclusion

“If we intend to do business by halves, it will not be worth the while to take so much trouble. ... Above all I am determined to form really good establishments, before being solicitous about their numbers.” [Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, *Letters*, vol.1, no. 202 to Mertian, June 18, 1822]

This foundational intent of Fr. Chaminade finds continuity in the vision of the Association of Marianist Universities to bring together “the diverse gifts of each of the campuses into a dynamic network that enables the Marianist universities to be leaders in American higher education.” Marianist Educational Associates are one of these diverse gifts and the fruit of these really good establishments. They take the trouble to learn and embrace the Catholic and Marianist traditions of higher education personally and professionally for the sake of the common good of the Church and world.

These “MEA Common Guidelines” are an attempt to assist MEAs in their desires to live fully – not by “halves” – their Core Commitments. The Commitments are challenging, but MEAs are not alone in the journey. God’s Spirit and Mary, patroness of each Marianist university, are with each MEA and MEA community. Also, the witness of gifted and committed colleagues in service of others inspires and supports the MEA movement along the way. To this purpose, the “Common Guidelines” is a living document and will evolve as the MEA journey develops and flourishes.

