

No.

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**TO:** All the members of the Society of Mary  
**FROM:** Thomas F. Giardino, SM – General Assistant for Education  
**SUBJECT:** Teamwork in the Society of Mary Today



## *Teamwork in the Society of Mary Today*

### **Introduction.**

1. One day during the recent renovations of our residence at Via Latina, 22, I noticed a serious and sometimes heated discussion going on among several workers. They were trying to come to a decision about what was the next task to be done in the matter of painting the corridors. It was clear that they were not agreeing about the direction to take. After several minutes of discussion where each talked, the exchange began to become more animated, they began to talk at the same time, and then suddenly one of them threw up his hands and walked away. His co-workers looked at each other in a puzzled manner and then went about doing something else.

2. I watched this situation with interest and sympathy. While it is true I did not really know all of the circumstances surrounding the interchange, I felt that I had experienced similar predicaments more than once in my life. To remain in dialogue with a co-worker about differences in goals or approach is simply hard work. I have often succumbed to the temptation to withdraw from the situation when things get complicated or if I feel threatened, confused, or rejected. I do not know the motivations of those construction workers. But for all Marianists, the question of teamwork involves matters of the virtue and skill needed to cooperate better in Mary's mission.

3. Beyond my personal experience, I have noticed circumstances similar to those described above in visits, conversations, and reports from various Units throughout the Society of Mary. This prompted me to write in my report to the General Chapter of 1996 about *the importance and urgency of enhancing our desire and ability to work as an apostolic team*. In the report I said:

“There seems to be no easy way to say this except that I notice that many of us have real difficulty working together. We often prefer to work alone or with laity rather than as a ‘unified apostolic group’ of the Society of Mary (see RL 68).” The Chapter responded asking the General Assistant for Education “...to work with our units...to enhance in our brothers the desire and ability to work as an apostolic team in institutions and local communities of which they are a part.” (*Partners in Hope* 72) Since the time of the report to the General Chapter of 1996, there has been a growing awareness in many Units of this issue and various attempts to understand and respond to this challenge. This article is a contribution to the ongoing effort.

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*I would suggest that to benefit the most from this article, it would be good to think of a team that you are presently a part of or one from your past experience. Interact with the ideas and examples given here: critique, confirm, and improve the article. Periodically there will be questions for your reflection or for you to use with a team of which you are a part. There is a larger left margin for you to note your thoughts.*

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4. First of all in this article I briefly present the characteristics or definitions and some assumptions or foundations for teamwork; then, the main obstacles that I see to moving in the direction of our desires in this matter. I will present some points about the importance and benefits of teamwork, the challenges involved especially in our socio-historical context, and finally some avenues for developing the attitudes and behaviors needed to grow in this direction.<sup>1</sup>

5. For the purposes of this article, I describe a team in its most basic sense as **a group of persons who are united in a common task or mutually determined goal and who bring complementary skills, judgments, and information to the effort.** While teams and communities are not identical, the relational dynamics and the sense of interdependence for the sake of a common mission are related. Much of the literature from education or organizational development regarding teams speaks in terms of bringing together a specific group of persons in an organization to work on a particular goal or task or to solve a problem after which the team dissolves. We also do this in our communities and works.

6. There are some ways, however, in which local communities can act as an *ongoing* team. I will be referring to this phenomenon when I cite the provision of the *Rule of Life* 68 that “the community as such should always be a **unified apostolic group.**” Teams in apostolic works (whether made up of all SM religious or mixed with others) often have experiences of community, but they need not consider the experience of community to be an end in itself. “Teamwork” refers to the manner in which an authentic team habitually and intentionally operates. Characteristics of teamwork are:

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the literature that I have used in preparing this article includes the following: Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams* (New York: Harper Business, 1994); “Travailler en équipe,” *Enseignement Catholique Actualités* (Paris), no. 216 (Janvier/Février 1997); Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: the Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday Currency, 1990); Peter R. Scholtes et al. *The Team Handbook* (Madison, WI.: Joiner Associates. 1989); Eddie Obeng, *Putting Strategy to Work: the Blueprint for Transforming Ideas into Action* (Pitman Publishing: London, 1996); and a variety of other articles, notes from lectures, etc., that I have collected over the years.

- **developing and sustaining common goals;**
- **dialoguing about differences;**
- **evaluating each other's work;**
- **sharing responsibility for work; and**
- **relating with colleagues and authorities in the style of subsidiarity.**

7. There are two foundations or assumptions regarding teamwork in our context as a Marianist apostolic Religious Institute. Without motivation and prayer, much of what follows falls on sterile ground. For these areas I refer you to the recent circulars of the Superior General, Father Fleming. In the first place, it is indispensable to develop a **motivation** arising from a vital missionary project that responds to the times with our God-given charism and that is integrated with our personal project (Circulars Nos.1,2,4). In the second place, **prayer** clarifies motivation and undergirds an apostolic spirituality needed to develop and maintain the virtues that sustain the skill building and dialogue integral to the characteristics of authentic teams. (Circular No. 3)

8. Briefly, the main obstacles I have seen to working as an apostolic team are the following:

- the lack of clear and compelling goals and shared purpose for the mission or task in the community or work;
- inability or resistance to dialogue with colleagues or leadership; a similar inability or resistance to give feedback to colleagues and leadership or to receive it from them;
- ignorance of the skills or disciplines needed in developing a team;
- an emphasis (in some parts of the SM) on individual performance as the most critical factor in accomplishing common goals;
- difficulty in the relationship between the common goals of a local community or apostolic work (or Unit) and the individual goals of members.

9. The topic of working together as a team is vast; and the varied contexts in which we work, along with the diverse age groups and experience of our membership, all influence the desire and ability to work in teams. Given these limitations, I will attempt to treat certain aspects of the matter in the Society of Mary today in the context of the larger Marianist Family.

### **The Importance and Benefit of Teamwork.**

10. For us, growing in our desire and ability to work in a team is not simply a matter of learning some new techniques for more effectiveness and efficiency in accomplishing our organizational goals. It is that, but there is more to it for Marianist religious.

11. Similarly, I want to say at the outset that **teams are a means, not the end. The end is the mission.** The effort at teamwork is important for us because it is also related to spirituality, to corporate and individual identity as disciples of Jesus and Mary, to a witness that impacts our vocation ministry, and to the mystery of human freedom. Hence, it has to do with the deepest reasons that each one of us said “yes” to God in becoming a Marianist and sealed this intent with a vow of Stability.<sup>2</sup>

12. Maintaining this simplicity of intention is not easy as years pass and times change. But the question is not new. Brother David Monier, one of Father Chaminade’s earliest and closest collaborators put it this way in the *Grand Institut* that served as our first Rule of Life: “But one thing should be sought in religion and that is, to serve God alone. Without that simplicity of intention, peace will never be found there, and the risk is taken of working much and long for nothing.” (#381)

13. I see that most of our brothers work “much and long.” But working as a unified apostolic group involves more than just effort and good will. It calls for a different kind of discipline: the asceticism of dialogue and openness, in which we face the risk that Jesus spoke of when he said that we must lose our lives to find them. He promised that this is how deep peace is experienced.

14. Perhaps a story will help to advance our reflection.

*The Zen Master gave the woman a sieve and a cup and they went to the nearby seashore where they stood on a rock with the waves breaking round them.*

*“Show me how you will fill the sieve with water,” he said.*

*The woman bent down, held the sieve in one hand, and scooped the water into it with a cup. The water barely appeared at the bottom of the sieve, and then was gone.*

*“It is just like that with spiritual practice,” the master said, “while one stands on the rock of I-ness and tries to ladle the divine realization into it. That’s not the way to fill the sieve with water or the self with divine life.”*

*He took the sieve from her hand and threw it far out into the sea, where it floated momentarily and then sank.*

*“Now it is full of water,” he said, “and it will remain so. That’s the way to fill it with water, and it’s the way to do spiritual practice. It’s not ladling little cupfuls of divine life into the individuality, but throwing the individuality far out into the sea of divine life.*

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<sup>2</sup> The larger ecclesial context for a spirituality of teamwork is found in the “Body of Christ” and charism imagery of St. Paul, e.g. in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. The icon of a unified apostolic group for Marianists is Mary and the disciples in the midst of the early Christian community. Cf. RL 34.

15. In many parts of the Society of Mary, especially among those between the ages of 50 and 70, there is a certain fear that the legitimate honoring of the individual good that has developed in the larger culture as well as in the SM is under threat today. For some there is an attempt to “ladle little cupfuls” of community or teamwork into a collective and professional life that has become more isolated. For others there is the fear that the “teamwork” emphasis will mean that personal professional excellence and individual charisms will be submerged in the deep, dark sea of corporate organizational goals.

16. Most young brothers, on the other hand, are not in fear of losing their individuality. They take this for granted.<sup>3</sup> In fact, for some, a certain isolation was their main experience in family, church, or work. They entered Marianist religious life not to do a good work by themselves, which they may have been doing already as a lay person, but for a “community in mission” in which they can find God and a deeper meaning for their lives in what Father Fleming in his Circular No.5 ( “Marianist Religious Vocations Today”) called the “particularly excellent way” of religious life. I hear from young people today that they feel called to be and to do something together as Marianist religious that they cannot be and do alone. Not working as an apostolic team threatens certain cherished Marianist communal values.

17. This line of thinking is not another tirade against “individualism” in the false duality of individual versus community. The situation of consecrated life in the Marianist tradition is undergoing a profound reflection about self-identity, as is consecrated life in general. Older Units and newer Units face differing circumstances, but as Father Fleming said in Circular No. 4 (“You Are All Missionaries”), there is a humility and purification that all of us are experiencing. The challenge is to bring the great gifts of the individual good, which education, economics, and technology in many countries now allow to be developed in new ways, to the evangelization of a world immensely more complex than Brother David Monier and Father Chaminade ever imagined.

18. Yet, Father Chaminade was not just some 19<sup>th</sup> century romantic when he said that “our mission is grand, it is universal....” He actually believed that he had been called and given a spirit and a method (*charism*, we would say today) “inspired by heaven” to work at the transformation of the social order. He understood the way that the Jesuits and the various missionary groups of his day went about developing disciples and building the church. He appreciated the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius that brought individuals to conversion and fortified them for intense apostolic activity, often alone, as in the case of Francis Xavier. Missionaries were well known in Bordeaux during his day for preaching retreats or missions for large groups in parishes that often inspired persons to continue in daily parish life the graces experienced during the retreat.

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<sup>3</sup> In making such generalizations, I recognize that there are cultural differences involved in this matter. But even, for example, in countries of new implantations where a sense of the common is stronger, problems often arise where older men from other cultures are in leadership and formation positions. A young brother said to me that in his group of 10 novices, they were not taught to work as a team, only as individuals. Of the 10, he said, only 3 were given real responsibilities. The others were not, perhaps because they were not as docile or they raised disturbing questions. “All should have been given some responsibilities, so they would all identify with the group. We have no sense of being a vow group. We’re only individuals.”

19. But Chaminade sought to develop disciples and the church in a *communal* manner, as he understood Mary did. “All must act together. The work is a common endeavor. Each one is jointly responsible to a certain extent for the entire work ....”<sup>4</sup> For us as Marianist religious, the added dimension to effectiveness is *witness*. That is, just as a charismatic person has a certain “presentation” of self, or a married couple has a “presentation” of themselves as a unit, so too a unified apostolic team of Marianists has a certain “character” that in itself is more than the sum of personally or professionally excellent individuals. This set of interdependent relationships is special and attractive, captures the imagination, and in its own way is creative of the gospel witness. The witness is also a point of reference for the Marianist religious vocation of potential candidates, especially those immersed in cultures marked by an exaggerated individualism.

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*Have you ever been a part of a well-functioning team? If so, what did it feel like? What did other people say about this team? What did you notice about its effectiveness and your own contribution? If you have not been part of such a team, have you ever seen a good team in action? What did you notice that was special?*

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20. In RL 67 we say: “The community itself is a primary instrument to fulfill our mission.” This witness of the dynamics of the relationship among the members themselves can also be applied to apostolic teams. My point is that our working together as a unified apostolic team, as part of a local community or a particular ministry is related to our self-understanding as SM religious who have been given a particular charism for the sake of the reign of God. This effective witness is particularly needed in our time when the benefits of plurality, often coming from the heightened awareness of culture and language, enlarged personal choices, and an education, economy, and technology that allow for individual professional excellence, are struggling to be integrated with the common good.

21. The benefits of working as an authentic apostolic team accrue from the points above. When the mission calls for multiple abilities, experience, information, and wisdom, teams outperform individuals acting alone. Thus the overall result of the ministry or evangelization effort is enhanced.<sup>5</sup> This is especially true in the environment that we live in today, which is characterized by massive and rapid change and an increased awareness of the needs and rights of individual cultural groups. We are more likely to experience broader and deeper personal growth when working as a part of a team. There is no question that there is a certain natural resistance by some to take responsibility for the performance of others or to open ourselves to others’ offering “guidance” or “evaluation” (RL 68) for our performance. As I will comment in more depth later, the point is that we benefit individually and collectively if we undertake the disciplines needed to

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<sup>4</sup> *Lettres 3*, to Chevaux, Feb. 7, 1834, no.725, p.379. Here Chaminade is speaking directly about the educational apostolate, but the idea could also refer to parishes and other works. Likewise, while I refer mainly to SM Marianist religious in this paragraph, here and in other places I believe the ideas can apply to those in other branches of the Marianist Family.

<sup>5</sup> See the *Characteristics of Marianist Education*, especially the sections under “Educate in Family Spirit.”

work as a team. And the motivation as Marianist religious is embedded in our commitment to a common mission for the sake of the Reign of God.

22. This last sentence, though obvious, is critically important in the matter of working as a unified apostolic team. I say this because some may be wondering when I will begin talking about the *techniques* of “becoming a team.” While not denigrating the importance of these skills, there is growing clarity that these techniques are not the primary focus.<sup>6</sup> It is important to nuance these statements, since the issues for teamwork differ for various age groups, cultures, and Units. As mentioned before, most of our men work long and hard and with deep evangelical motivation, but they were formed to work individually or only under direct order from “superiors.” Others have lost motivation and have carved out a niche in ministry or community in order to make some sense or meaning in their life, given so much uncertainty in our individual and communal contexts. Still others, often younger men, have strong motivation, but lack direction from ministry or Unit administration or the discipline and skill to bring their talents and good will to fruition in a group.

### **The Difficulties Involved in Working as a Team in Our Socio-historical Context.**

23. I have already alluded to some of the difficulties that come from the particular dynamics of religious life today. Let me expand on these and weave in some of the socio-historical influences that help and hinder the effort of teamwork. In the ambiance of purification and humility of which Father Fleming spoke, the words of Chaminade about a grand mission may seem utopian. It seems hard today to conceive of a mission that is long-term and of a large scale. The temptation for some members is to reduce their perspective of the mission to individual ministries that deal with the immediate on a relatively small scale, either in terms of geography or population or tasks to be done. In this ambiance, just being a good social worker, teacher, pastor, etc., seems good enough and difficult enough. And besides, there is the conventional wisdom that if you want something done right, do it yourself!

24. But the challenge of the social change to which Father Chaminade and his successors have called us to makes teamwork all the more necessary, I believe.

“Now take a look at the times....today both mind and heart are diseased, and the corruption of the mind is infinitely more dangerous and more incurable than that of the heart....God calls us not only to be holy ourselves, but to go out to restore the faith...in the entire world!...It is for that very purpose that from among so many others, God has chosen you”! (Father Chaminade, Retreat of 1821)

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<sup>6</sup> “A demanding performance challenge tends to create a team. The hunger for performance is far more important to team success than team-building exercises, special incentives or team leaders with ideal profiles. In fact, teams often form around such challenges without any help or support from management. Conversely, potential teams without such challenges usually fail to become teams.” Katzenbach and Smith, *Wisdom of Teams*, 3. I think this is an important point, but there are also some issues of which I will speak later regarding influences in the SM culture having to do with difficulty in speaking and listening to “performance challenges.”

“In fact, in our Marianist tradition, we have chosen to focus on education because we believe it is no less than a way of transforming the world. We believe that patient work with students in their formative years, dialogue and reflection with them about values and goals in life, will make a great difference, not only for them individually but for the whole of society in the coming generations.” (Father Fleming, “3 Offices”, No.85)

“The urgency of a dynamic missionary project is only possible, I think, if we see some difficult good that has enough ‘size,’ is big enough and gripping enough, that is gravely threatened by existing conditions and merits a struggle and the dedication of our best talents and energies for a long time.” (Father Fleming, Circular No.2)

25. The “existing conditions” call for teamwork since the socio-religious problems we face are complex, involve long-term trends and patterns, and the underlying structures of society. Hence evangelization in its many forms calls for apostolic teams who can engage in continual and collective learning and avoid the temptations of quick and simplistic solutions. It may be that we need to focus our efforts in works where apostolic teams can most benefit the mission. Discernment becomes critical so as not to try to fulfill any and every need. To be involved in systemic change today means recognizing that the harder one pushes the system, the harder it pushes back (there is usually someone making money from people being poor, for example). Likewise, yesterday’s solutions are often today’s problems: food assistance may lead to over-dependency or to people living longer which leads to more malnutrition (unless the system changes); within the SM, small communities, which offered more emphasis on interpersonal dynamics and faith-sharing, became overburdened with the demands made on their reduced membership. The examples could be multiplied.

26. Another part of the existing condition is the fact that an increasing number of people are actually experiencing more “freedom” in their lives. That is, they have more power to control their own destiny and to influence the decisions that affect their lives. This is true of members of the Society of Mary also. The change of mentality regarding obedience has many positive benefits. It also calls for a new asceticism as one must learn how to handle freedom, where to “place” it, and how to discern its limits. Here, the “preparation and consummation virtues” of the ascetical system characteristic of Marianist spirituality are invaluable in developing self-knowledge, self control, and humility. These are the qualities that members of an apostolic team need. Many “secular” spiritualities associated with the business world today have come to see this and regularly teach such practices.<sup>7</sup>

27. Another difficulty that affects our desire and ability to work in a team is that, given the current malaise in many people regarding the “what” and “why” of consecrated life, there is little creative energy to find a “how.” In a certain sense, I believe that when the *what* and *why* become clearer for individuals and groups, they ordinarily find an effective *how*. The history of religious life over the centuries demonstrates that during times of change in the “dominant image” or understanding and style of religious life, it is usually groups of persons who undergo a conversion in their experience of Jesus Christ who find the new “how” to respond to the signs of the times. This was surely the

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<sup>7</sup> Two of the more popular books of international fame in this regard are *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen R. Covey and *The Fifth Discipline* by Peter Senge.



experience of Chaminade. Therefore, as mentioned above, our lives of communal and individual prayer are involved in teamwork as Father Fleming has reminded us in his Circular No.3, (“The Life of Personal Prayer”).

### **Avenues for Developing the Attitudes and Behaviors Needed to Grow in Working as an Apostolic Team.**

28. What do we need to do to respond to the challenge to combine working together and personal excellence to better serve the reign of God through the mission of Mary? No group works perfectly together, but *learning how to improve* is the hallmark of a team that will prove more effective and satisfying for all involved. I suggest five areas in which we need to enhance our desire and ability:

- To develop and sustain shared goals or objectives;
- To dialogue about differences regarding the project and our style of working;
- To examine and implement the factors that lead to team development and team effectiveness, which include the support, guidance, and evaluation of individual performance (RL 68);
- To share responsibility for carrying out the work (task) and maintaining effective and satisfying interpersonal relationships (maintenance) in a collaborative style;
- To engender and nurture an atmosphere in the team that fosters the creative utilization of all the resources – individual and collective – at its disposal.

### **Developing and Sustaining Shared Goals or Objectives.**

29. First of all let me acknowledge that terms such as “goals,” “objectives,” “aims,” etc., are often used interchangeably. Here is what I mean when I speak of goals: a goal is a statement that describes the results or end state or outcome that the team intends to realize in a specific period of time. Developing a good shared goal is essential for teamwork since it captures some of the hopes and dreams of the group *because they have helped to define it*. The goal ought to be expressed in practical action-oriented terms. Good goals are developed by the group, are specific, measurable, challenging and exciting to the group, and are realistically attainable under the present circumstances.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> “Research during the last 20 years...has shown...that the single fact of assigning a goal leads to motivation, as long as the goal is accepted. And this is true regardless of any compensation that is involved. The goal, the objective, its clarity and precision, is the necessary condition and often the sufficient condition for motivation.” Claude Lévy-Leboyer, “Le coeur à l’ouvrage,” *Science Humaines*, no. 99 bis, (November 1999): 9.

30. In the past few years, I have been pleased to see more and more of the leadership in our apostolic institutions (in a variety of cultures) become skilled at developing goals with these characteristics. In a school I visited recently in Latin America, I saw plans for developing “family spirit” as a Characteristic of Marianist Education in the school that started with the description of the present situation, then outlined objectives, the levels or grades in which action would be taken, and then specific actions detailed for students, teachers, and parents at each level. This may seem very rational to some. Yet how it is developed and carried out need not be dry nor impersonal.<sup>9</sup> There is no inherent contradiction between participation and accountability. Likewise one need not become a slave of the process. Good *apostolic* teams always recognize the human condition and leave ample room for the mysterious action of the Holy Spirit.

31. On the other hand, I have often seen goals in communities which are vague and well-meaning (“we will be more tolerant of our differences”) but that rarely describe what actions would be needed to accomplish this goal. In the case of this example from a community I visited, neither was there motivation given as to how being more tolerant would be related to the larger purposes or mission of the community. Typically, after some weeks when the initial fervor wears off, there is often little motivation to continue the effort. And at the beginning of the next year when the Unit Administration asks for the community goals, the same old tired statements are often handed in without serious examination as to what was done well, what done poorly, what has been learned from the efforts, and what will be done differently.

32. In initial formation situations, learning to formulate good goals and follow through with them is simply one of the skills that needs to be learned. What is critical in this situation is that these goals be about real actions that affect people’s lives so that the group will experience the positive and negative consequences of whatever is or is not done. Often there is a problem with formators who are nervous at living with the consequences of failures. In houses of formation where there are only one or two persons in formation, a particular effort needs to be made to connect the candidates or temporary professed with others to develop these attitudes and skills.

33. When young brothers are not given the opportunity to learn to develop goals together and carry them out interdependently, the result is often what I read in the report of a European Provincial Director of Education when he called for the need to reinforce the spirit of teamwork: “Al director,

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<sup>9</sup> “Teachers very often point out difficulties connected with time, the heaviness of meetings, the limitations of working together. Everything takes place in an atmosphere of sacrifice. In this sort of situation it is difficult to develop motivation. We must dare to once again give priority to ‘take pleasure in one’s work’.” Luc De Backer, “Les ‘parcours,’ l’équipe et le plaisir...,” “Travailler en équipe,” *Enseignement Catholique Actualites*, no.216 Janvier/Février 1997. p.22. The entire set of four articles are excellent for giving concrete examples of teamwork among educators along with linking teamwork and dialogue. The other articles are entitled: “Travail d’équipe et concertation”; “‘Réunionniste’ ou concertation?”; “Travail en équipe: nouveaux rôles, nouvelles actions”. Copies of this set of brief articles (in French) are available from the General Office of Education upon request.

por un lado, y al responsable de pastoral, por otro, es frecuente dejarlos solos; y ellos no saben o no se plantean cómo crear unión en torno a la acción educativa.” (The principal on the one hand and the director of campus ministry on the other are often isolated; and they don’t know how nor do they attempt to create a unity in terms of educational activities.) One of the things that Japanese business enterprises taught the rest of the world was that the time that is spent on developing consensus and good goal definitions in the initial stages of a team’s life, results in less time needed to carry out the action and less time needed later to resolve problems and misunderstandings. A team develops and nourishes commitment when there are *shared* images of the future that are transformed into goals. When these common images are combined with a shared commitment to the discipline needed to achieve the vision and the goals, then a team heightens its possibility of becoming effective and satisfying. Dialogue is part of the discipline needed.

### **Dialoguing about Differences Regarding the Project and the Style of Working.**

34. The importance of dialogue has been amply spoken about in religious, educational, political, and social spheres. Pope Paul VI called dialogue “the new name of charity,” and Pope John Paul II never tires of urging his audiences of this necessity today nor did Federico Mayor, the previous Director-General of UNESCO . Ordinarily the issue for most of us regarding dialogue is to move from an “espoused value” to a “value in action.”

35. Characteristically this skill of dialoguing about differences is subject to difficulties of human respect and activism. In terms of the latter, most of us find that serious dialogue takes too much time and we simply want to be about doing good for people. Learning to notice critical but gradual processes requires slowing down our frenetic pace and paying attention to the subtle as well as the dramatic. Unless teams learn to take the time to dialogue about their differences and styles (and other dimensions of their task), it will be unlikely that they will see the gradual changes in their environment that often pose the greatest threats.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, one of the ways to insure that teams or individuals do not change is to keep them very busy. The characteristic Marianist asceticism that emphasizes habits of reflection and quiet (“the essential is the interior”) is a great aid here.

36. Dialogue is not the same as discussion (the latter term I am using here meaning verbal interchange characterized by advocacy, debate, and decision). In dialogue all the parties must hold in suspension their particular “assumptions” and “positions” even while they offer their perspective in the search for truth or at least the most adequate means to accomplish a task or goal. When a team is in a dialogue mode, each person offers their assumptions for examination. That is, I let you know *why* I think this or that, and I ask you the same along with what experience is behind your statement or how you came to it. Hence we observe our own thinking and share it. **I allow my view to be open to influence.** This helps us to recognize that in fact our views *are* usually based on assumptions or “mental models” rather than incontrovertible fact. This allows me as a team member to get beyond thinking, for example, that there is only one best way to tackle this problem

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 57 ff.

or perhaps to recognize that I was thinking that I was the real guardian of the Marianist charism in this group and thus had to defend my way of doing something.

37. All of us come to the work of a team with preconceived ideas and models from our past experience. This is not bad if we are aware of it. In fact one of the most important mental models that a “unified apostolic group” or team needs to dialogue about is one’s model of what a “team” is. It is not that there is a right or wrong model for most things, but rather if my model is unexamined or not open to be influenced, it can be a problem especially in a time of rapid and significant change. For example, most of us have a mental model of “Why young people join religious life.” Is this open to be examined?

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*Spend some time in your group sharing your mental model or metaphor of “team.” Is it a football team? a symphony orchestra? a jazz band? an artist colony? What are the attitudinal and behavioral consequences of your metaphor? For example, do I believe that every decision in a team must be by consensus? Can there, or should there be a “leader” in my understanding of team? Etc..*

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### **Examining and Implementing the Factors That Lead to Team Development and Effectiveness, Which Include the Support, Guidance, and Evaluation of Individual Performance. (RL 68)**

38. I have noticed over the past several years that article 68 of the *Rule of Life* has been cited more frequently in Marianist writing. The *Rule* does its job when it holds up cherished values in front of us, educates us toward those values, and gives us some motivation, direction, and a way to be formed in those values. This article – with its key phrase, “But the community as such should always be a unified apostolic group which supports, guides, and evaluates the work of each member” – is such an educator in the whole context of Chapter 5, particularly with “We know that the quality of our life has greater impact than our words. Therefore, together we seek ways to bear living witness to our shared faith” (RL67).

39. When I think of *support* I recall a poignant conversation I had with a brother whom I had lived with for many years. He was thinking of leaving the Society of Mary and he told me that part of his pain was that he never thought that I or others in the community valued his work. In fact I had been in awe of his talents, but I realized that I must not have communicated well my support of his very important contribution to a community that I believe was really a “unified apostolic group.” I am not naive as to other variables in the man’s life that contributed to his pain, but I am more aware that we often take each other for granted when a word or two of support can make a great difference.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Support is a bit like affection, I think. Who ever gets enough of it? The reality is that just as plants are “heliotropic” and turn in the direction of the sunlight, we humans are “affirmotropic” and we move in the direction of affirmation. The consequences seem obvious for communities and teams.

40. Each of the verbs in this sentence (“supports,” “guides,” “evaluates”) holds a value and a challenge. If the group is to benefit from each, then along with building a climate of trust and group confidence, it would be important for the group to take time to explore what the meanings of these words are for each person.<sup>12</sup> Lest this become abstract, an example: each person on the team or in the community could describe a time when he felt supported or was a part of a unified group that gave helpful guidance and evaluation. No doubt there is some reaction nowadays to the idea of “evaluation.” However, the more mature the persons and the group, the more openness there is to being held accountable for shared goals and tasks. This journey is one of spiritual freedom and of particular skills.

41. There is a large body of literature these days on the skills of giving and receiving constructive feedback, which is regarded as one of the most important means to personal growth or to resolve a problem. Let me just outline some guidelines that might be of some help and that would need to be developed by the group itself:<sup>13</sup>

- Acknowledge the need for feedback
- Give both positive and negative feedback
- Understand the context
- Know when to give feedback
- Know how to give feedback: *be descriptive; do not use labels or be judgmental; speak for yourself; talk first about yourself, not about the other person (e.g. “I feel annoyed when you are late for meetings.” rather than, “You are frequently late for meetings;” talk about things you know for certain.*
- Know how to receive feedback: *breathe and relax; listen carefully; ask questions for clarity; acknowledge valid points; take time to sort out what you heard.*

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*What keeps you or the apostolic group you are a part of from activities of guiding, supporting and evaluating? Would it help to engage the services of a consultant to teach some new skills in this regard? Perhaps the group could take a workshop together on learning to give feedback or related skills. Does the group ever pray together for the courage and humility to support, guide, and review each other’s activities?*

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<sup>12</sup> A *sine qua non* for this interaction as for the dialogue and feedback to be treated below is that the members of the group regard each other as “colleagues” (or “brothers” in the full sense of that term in the SM ). This lessens the effect of the vulnerability I may feel when offering my work for comment, because I trust each member of the group to also regard me as a colleague or brother. This holds when there are differences in age or seniority and also for those who might have a certain role authority in the community or group. **Each person must want the benefits of the dialogue more than the privileges of rank or age.**

<sup>13</sup> Adapted from Peter R. Scholtes et al. *The Team Handbook*, 6-24 ff. While these guidelines need to be adapted to various situations and cultures, I was pleased to hear from a young African brother to whom I gave a draft of this paper to critique, that he underlined the importance of these guidelines and said that this line of thinking was not just Western.

## **Sharing Responsibility for Carrying Out the Work and Maintaining Effective and Satisfying Interpersonal Relationships in a Collaborative Style.**

42. To keep a healthy tension between the work to be done and the positive relationships among the members is a daunting task. Most cultures tend toward an emphasis on one pole or the other and thus must stretch their attitudes and abilities to move toward a more integral sense of teamwork. This is not to deny the gift of the contribution of a particular culture, but to recognize that no cultural characteristic is absolute and that we can learn from each other. It is one of the great gifts of an international congregation.

43. In this area we are thus talking about persons in a web of relationships who are about a common work. If this web or system is to function well, then certain attitudes and behaviors are called for. Some years ago I read a quote that summarizes some of these “necessities” in the functioning of a good team:

The first necessity is that there be accurate movement of information: in human terms this means honesty. The second necessity is that some parts of the system be willing to bring about change when change is needed: in human terms this means responsibility. The third necessity is that no part of the system try to take over the rest of the system: in human terms this means humility....The fourth necessity is that no part of the system try to preserve its exact place in the system but be willing to be flexible as conditions change: in human terms this means love.<sup>14</sup>

In this I hear an echo in our *Rule of Life* 7.2 when we speak of our service as characterized by “responsibility, participation, subsidiarity, and accountability.”

## **Engendering and Nurturing an Atmosphere in the Team That Fosters the Creative Utilization of All the Resources – Individual and Collective – at its Disposal.**

44. Strong teams always provide ways for individuals to make a contribution and to be appreciated for it. A combination of personal excellence and working together engenders the best of the Marianist tradition. Weak teams waste great amounts of time and energy when individuals work very hard but they are not in harmony nor aligned with the common purposes of the group. This presumes that there *are* common purposes, as mentioned above, which are well defined and articulated in a manner that is also understood as an authentic extension of the member’s personal goals. This means teamwork presumes a certain free desire to be involved, as the article from the French educational magazine *Enseignement Catholique Actualities* asserts: “Le travail d’équipe ne se décrète pas. Il s’organise si l’envie et la nécessité s’en font sentir. Il fonctionne d’autant mieux

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<sup>14</sup>Robert Theobald, *An Alternative Future for America II* (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1968), 39f.

qu'un certain nombre de conditions favorables sont réunies.<sup>15</sup> (Teamwork is never forced. Teams get organized when the desire and the need for them are felt. They work even better when a certain number of favorable conditions converge.)

45. But before listing such conditions, I must emphasize that there is no way for a team to be successful without disciplined action. A collection of individuals becomes a team when “They *shape* a common purpose, *agree* on performance goals, *define* a common working approach, *develop* high levels of complementary skills, and *hold* themselves mutually accountable for results.”<sup>16</sup> The expressions of this may look different in various cultures, but I believe the basic values are cross-cultural.

46. Much of what I have said in earlier sections relate to creating this atmosphere. Hence in this final section, I will simply outline a number of “ingredients” for successful teams. Some of these summarize and overlap with items mentioned above. The point here is that these create an atmosphere for successful apostolic teamwork.

- Belief that the Holy Spirit is at work in each individual and in the team as a whole. (Ephesians 4, 4-7; 11-16)
- Clarity in team purposes and goals.
- Flexibility in selecting means or procedures for the tasks to be accomplished.
- Clearly defined and understood roles which make intelligent use of the talents of all in the group to some degree.<sup>17</sup>
- Direct, open, and clear communication among the members of the group.
- A plan for periodic review of the interpersonal processes, problems and the task of the group along with determining what advice, assistance, materials, and other resources may be needed to continue or improve.
- Procedures for making decisions that are agreed upon ahead of time and that are appropriately flexible for the various types of matters dealt with; i.e. not all matters need to be handled by consensus nor by voting nor by decision of the leader, rather all of these may be used at different times .
- Not being dominated by the leader or by any of the members; i.e. balanced participation with all sharing roles of certain types of leadership and of caring for how the group is working together (the interpersonal dynamics of the group).

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<sup>15</sup> A. M. Guinard and Ch. Philibert, “Travail d’équipe et concertation”, in “Travailler en équipe”, *Enseignement Catholique Actualities*, no. 216 Janvier/Février 1997, 21.

<sup>16</sup> Katzenbach and Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams*, 14f.

<sup>17</sup> “On the playing field, it is the time spent in training, the will to win, and the recognition of each person’s role which transforms a group of players into a team.” Luc De Backer “Les ‘parcours’ l’équipe et le plaisir...” in “Travailler en équipe”, *Enseignement Catholique Actualities*, no. 216 Janvier/ Février 1997, 22.

- A high degree of cohesiveness while not stifling individual freedom nor submerging individual differences.

47. As is obvious, it is much easier to list the above criteria than to put them into practice. However, I do believe that an awareness of these criteria can lead to conversation in apostolic teams about how the group is already doing these activities and about which need to be improved or implemented. This very conversation calls for the virtues and skills of dialogue mentioned above. Many teams are often “easy” on themselves when doing self-criticism, at least at the beginning. An outside observer or consultant is often helpful as the team develops the desire and skill for a new way of working together.

### **Conclusion.**

48. “Our common mission leads us to an apostolic attitude in ordinary daily tasks, in the life of prayer, and in the acceptance of suffering” (RL 70). Working together in Marianist apostolic teams involves all of these. The apostolic history of the Society of Mary within the Marianist Family is replete with stories of the evangelical good resulting from teamwork at the local and Unit levels. We continue that tradition by assuming the challenges to learn the virtues and skills for our day that assist Christ and Mary in bringing about the reign of God.

49. Let me briefly summarize some avenues for actions regarding these challenges:

- Team leaders in any context provide for training in the skills of dialogue and other team behaviors and members of teams provide an openness to learning;
- Directors of initial and ongoing formation provide support and sponsor activities and events that encourage practical learning in these areas;
- Unit Administrations provide motivation and support for the above suggestions and review the teams in the communities and works in their Units along these lines.

50. Working together well as a team in the Society of Mary today involves dialogue, goals, support, and creativity in the “ordinary daily tasks” of mission. Most of all, however, it is about taking seriously the apostolic spirituality of Father Chaminade based on the Incarnation – following in a special way Jesus Christ, Son of God, become Son of Mary for the salvation of all. Chaminade’s life, message, and work, now recognized by the whole church as especially significant, is centered on the transformation of the social order by working together to rebuild communities. Our faithfulness and our success in the past and for the future lies on this same path of creative fidelity.

*“Through him the whole body grows, and with the proper functioning of the members joined firmly together by each supporting ligament, builds itself up in love.”*





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