Key Principles of a Marianist Approach to Dialogue

by Jason E. Combs

[*Editor's note*: Jason Combs is a principal lecturer in the Department of Communication at the University of Dayton (UD) and the inaugural coordinator of the University's Dialogue Zone, where faculty, staff, and students can have challenging conversations about topics that otherwise might divide people, so as to build mutual understanding. In *Key Principles of a Marianist Approach to Dialogue*, Jason references UD documents, but his intention is to build a Marianist approach to dialogue that extends far beyond any specific Marianist institution. Read on to find how a Marianist approach to dialogue both enhances and perhaps challenges current thinking in the field and practice of dialogue.]

The concept of dialogue has figured prominently in public discourse, especially in the last decade or two. Dialogue has appeared as a central concept in many leading works involving organizational learning and change over recent decades.[1] It has also emerged at the heart of much of the academic discourse relating to social justice and identity.[2] At the University of Dayton, an effort to bring together these different streams of theory and practice, through the efforts of many offices, departments, groups, and individuals, has been developing for a decade or more. This effort culminated in the establishment of the Dialogue Zone in 2019, an organization focused on building capacity for faculty, staff, and students to engage in challenging conversations with the goal of reaching understanding.[3] Though the Marianist charism of the University of Dayton has inspired much of this work, a fuller articulation of what a Marianist approach to dialogue entails has yet to emerge.

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[1] For example, D.A. Garvin, *Learning In Action: A Guide to Putting the Learning Organization to Work* (Boston: Harvard Business School, 2000); P.M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 1990).

[2] For example, D.R. Kaplowitz et al., *Race Dialogues: A Facilitator's Guide to Tackling the Elephant in the Classroom* (New York: Teachers College, 2019); David Louis Schoem and Sylvia Hurtado, *Intergroup Dialogue: Deliberative Democracy in School, College, Community, and Workplace* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

[3] The Dialogue Zone, *Dialogue Zone* (Dayton, OH: University of Dayton, n.d.), retrieved from https://udayton.edu/centers/dialogue-zone/index.php.

This paper offers some initial thoughts about what such an approach would involve. It identifies several principles that figure prominently in core Marianist documents and statements, and explores what these principles and concepts related to them mean for the practice of dialogue. It argues that, through a Marianist lens, dialogue can be understood as a process of collective inquiry among participants who are striving for the common good. This process is necessarily inclusive, involves critical analysis of the times in which one lives, and expresses at its root spiritual qualities that allow participants to transcend narrow self-interest and approach each other as beings created in the image and likeness of God. Four themes and their implications for the practice of dialogue will be explored: that dialogue is a collaborative search for the common good, that it is a necessarily inclusive process, that it involves the critical analysis of society, and that it is an expression of virtue.

Dialogue Is a Collaborative Search for the Common Good

In a Marianist approach to dialogue, participants strive not merely to increase their understanding of each other's perspectives, but to discern and ultimately realize the common good. Pope Paul VI in *Gaudium et Spes* defined the common good as "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily."[4] Pope John Paul II elaborated on this conceptualization in *Centesimus Annus* by explaining that the common good is "not simply the sum total of particular interests."[5] It is rather "an assessment and integration of those interests on the basis of a balanced hierarchy of values; ultimately, it demands a correct understanding of the dignity and the rights of the person."[6] The Marianist concept of the common good derives from the belief that, having been created in the image and likeness of God, every person has essential dignity. This dignity is not contingent on any social distinctions, such as race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or socioeconomic class. It belongs inherently to all people. Upholding this dignity has both

[4] Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), (Vatican: 1965), § 26. Retrieved from https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

[5] John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (Encyclical Letter to His Venerable Brother Bishops in the Episcopate, the Priests and Deacons, Families of Men and Women Religious, All the Christian Faithful, and to All Men and Women of Goodwill on the Hundredth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*), (Vatican: 1991), § 47. Retrieved from https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus.html.

[6] John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, § 47.

an individual and collective dimension. At the individual level, in their many interactions, human beings are called to engage each other in ways that respect this fundamental dignity. At the collective level, in ever-widening circles, from dyads to groups to entire communities, they are called to create social conditions that make such interactions possible. For Marianists, such efforts bring Christ to the world and reflect the coming of his promised Kingdom.

For Marianists, discernment of the common good requires both reason and faith. Truth is one and independent of human perception, yet both faith and reason as faculties allow human beings access to it. In any given matter, should what is known through faith and what is known through reason seem to contradict each other, the oneness of truth calls people to reexamine how they know what they know. The document *Common Themes in the Mission and Identity of the University of Dayton* articulates this principle:

> At the University of Dayton, the search for truth is based on the belief that truth is ultimately one and can be more fully known through both faith and reason. If what is held through faith or what is held through reason appears to be in conflict, then something must give way to reconsideration: one of the things held, or both, or perhaps the larger framework within which the apparent contradiction arose. Inquiry then must be carried out both with academic freedom and with openness to the transcendent dimension of life.[7]

This acceptance of both faith and reason as valid means for discerning the common good implies that neither the "heart" nor the "intellect" is prized above the other. Discernment of the common good is not an essentially intellectual activity, nor is it an intuitive or emotional one. It involves multiple ways of knowing.

This acceptance of faith and reason as different but compatible ways of knowing expresses itself in the Marianist pursuit of a "dialogue" between "faith and culture." Marianists acknowledge their place in a pluralistic world, in which many peoples with diverse faiths and intellectual perspectives live alongside each other, each seeking prosperous, happy, and meaningful lives for those who adhere to them. Moreover, they recognize that the adherents of these different perspectives bring experiences and understanding that can illuminate the common search for truth. Their participation is

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[7] Mission and Identity Task Force, *Common Themes in the Mission and Identity of the University of Dayton* (Dayton: University of Dayton, 2013), 14.

necessary in any efforts to create or transform social conditions so they better uphold the essential dignity of each person and thereby promote the common good. Accordingly, dialogue among people with different perspectives, each expressing the faculties of faith and reason in different ways, is facilitative of the search for the common good.

For this reason, *Common Themes in Mission and Identity at the University of Dayton* describes the "partnership for the common good" as lying at the heart of Marianist education.[8] Dialogue is a primary mode through which this partnership unfolds. According to the document *Characteristics of Marianist Universities,* fostering this dialogue is an obligation of all Catholic universities:

> Catholic universities have a particular obligation to foster dialogue between faith and culture and to embrace the task in its complexity, given the multiplicity of faith perspectives and cultures that comprise our world. Dialogue serves the Marianist mission of educating the whole person when it enables participants to integrate the heart and the intellect as they express an informed understanding of their own faith and culture and engage in active listening to persons of other faiths and cultures, as well as those with no religious faith. To become an actual community of learners requires a dialogue marked by humility and trust among all participants who strive to move beyond simple tolerance toward respectful collaboration in our common educational mission.[9]

Through dialogue, people become a "community of learners," who manifest in their interaction "humility and trust." They also strive to go beyond "simple tolerance" in their engagement with each other and build a "respectful collaboration" in a common mission. In other words, participants in dialogue work together in the shared task of ascertaining what promotes the best interests of the community as a whole. As people meet each other in dialogue, they multiply their capacity to discern the common good. Their respective views are not merely tolerated; in a spirit of humility and trust, participants see the expression of these views as contributory to their shared search for the common good.

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[8] Mission and Identity Task Force, *Common Themes*, 25.

[9] *Characteristics of Marianist Universities* (Dayton, OH: Association of Marianist Universities, 2019 ed.)—produced in coordination with Chaminade University, St. Mary's University, and the University of Dayton—12.

For this reason, dialogue undertaken through a Marianist lens is not simply a process of attaining mutual understanding among participants. Mutual understanding is necessary insofar as it enables participants in dialogue to transcend their individual interests. Moreover, making a sincere and compassionate effort to understand the other person is a way of recognizing and respecting the inherent dignity of that person as a being that was created in the image and likeness of God. However, a Marianist approach to dialogue seeks to move beyond this recognition and respect and create social conditions that allow for the dignity of *all members* of the encompassing community to be upheld, not only those who are immediately present, but also the many others to whom they are connected outside the dialogue.

In practical terms, dialogue undertaken in this way demands that participants make use of certain skills and methods. On one hand, it advances when participants strengthen their capacity to understand each other. For instance, skills for active listening, such as asking clarifying questions, probing for additional information, paraphrasing, and perception checking, allow them to enlarge and refine their understanding of what other participants bring to the dialogue. Participants also do well to strengthen their ability to express their views in dialogue, such as telling stories about personal experiences, naming their emotions, and reflecting on their experiences. Skills and methods that create an environment in which members feel able to share their views and are encouraged to listen generously to the views of others also help dialogue approached in this manner to advance. These include building community norms, creating a common frame for the dialogue to come, helping participants to share airtime, and building a supportive climate.

On the other hand, dialogue advances when participants use skills that help them to evaluate their views in light of the needs of the community at large and to explore agreement in the face of their diverse positions. As participants work through their diverse viewpoints, their ability to discern the common good is strengthened when they can recognize both key differences and points of unity. Identifying and applying universal standards, such as relevant moral principles or authoritative texts, and weighing statements in the light of valid and reliable factual information, such as findings from credible scientific research, help to move the sensibilities of participants away from attending to their own individual interests to attending to those of the community as a whole. Examining the diverse foundations for participants' views and the authoritative sources of information on which these views might rest is fundamental to this effort. For instance, Marianists would seek to understand how the perspective of the Gospels

illuminates any matter under consideration. Though others might not accept the Gospels as a moral authority, in dialogue, they can explore how the concepts and principles in the Gospels shed light on the search for the common good. At the same time, Marianists recognize the value of dialogue with those who hold other cultural perspectives and would be similarly encouraged to appreciate how the authoritative texts within these viewpoints shed a similar light. As participants work through their diverse perspectives, consensus-building techniques, such as the single-text approach to drafting a common vision, Nominal Group Technique (NGT), Delphi method, and multi-round voting, can help them arrive at some shared stance as they strive to ascertain the common good.

Whatever methods are taken, it is important that participants not rush to agreement and risk a false consensus. Any agreement to which they come regarding the common good ought to proceed from the participants' collaborative discernment of the common good in light of the views that have been shared. Attempting to convince others to accept one's position without allowing the diversity of participants' views to illuminate the shared search for truth departs from the Marianist principles of partnering for the common good. Striving to create an environment in which each participant can contribute their views freely and openly to the dialogue is a necessary condition of such a partnership. In some instances, overarching agreement might not be possible. Some scholars and practitioners of dialogue, for this reason, separate dialogue in which consensus might occur from other forms of communication in which consensus is integral, such as discussion, while recognizing that both can play a part in an encompassing process of action.[10]

That the participants have achieved a fuller understanding of their own views in light of the exigencies and conditions of the community as a whole creates a foundation on which they can continue to engage each other in subsequent interactions, even if a consensus has not developed. That the participants have approached each other as partners in the search for the common goal is itself conducive to the common good. By approaching each other in this way, they have recognized and respected each other's inherent dignity as beings created in the image and likeness of God. Whatever understanding they might attain of each other's experiences and perspectives has value in itself for promoting conditions in which the dignity of all is upheld and their common

[10] For example, D.A. Garvin, *Learning In Action*; and P.M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*.

commitment to the betterment of all is affirmed. Their efforts to include each other in the search for truth reflect another key principle of a Marianist approach to dialogue.

Dialogue Is a Necessarily Inclusive Process

In a Marianist approach to dialogue, participants strive to include others, both as a moral ideal and a practical necessity. Including others in the process of building and transforming community is fundamental to the Marianist viewpoint. This principle derives from the core belief that every person has been created in the image and likeness of God. As such, each person is worthy of respect and fair treatment. *Principal Characteristics of Marianist Administration* articulates this view:

> The cornerstone of CST [Catholic Social Teaching] is that of the human person as created by and in the image and likeness of God. Because of this, a fundamental dignity inheres in all persons not because of their state in life, their accomplishments, their gender, or their ethnicity, but because they were created by God. Being created by God, each person possesses universal, inviolable rights.[11]

Inclusion in essential social and administrative processes is among these rights. Drawing from this same belief in the inherent dignity of each person as a being created in the image and likeness of God, the University of Dayton's *Commitment to Community* explains that, because of this relationship between the individual and God, any form of social or cultural discrimination "must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design."[12]

This principle of inclusivity relates to a concept featured in the Marianist charism: *family spirit*. Family spirit means essentially that all members of the community see each other as members of one family and that they accept and are committed to each other's growth as people ideally are to their own family members. *Characteristics of Marianist Education* describes this attitude:

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[11] *Principal Characteristics of Marianist Administration* (Rome: General Administration of the Society of Mary, 2013), 7.

[12] Paul VI, as quoted in University of Dayton, *Commitment to Community*.

> Every type of Marianist community accepts members in the same way that a family accepts theirs; committed to support their members for continued growth and development. The sense of family enables Marianist universities to challenge faculty, staff, and students to authenticity, excellence, and maturity; because the acceptance and love of a community gives its members the courage to risk failure and the joy of sharing success while remaining appropriately professional and impartial.[13]

The same document identifies this attitude explicitly with the ideal of inclusivity:

> The culture of acceptance that Marianists call family spirit focuses on the quality of relationships among the members in the community. It is essential that all members embrace the diversity of cultures that surrounds them by communicating with respect and treating one another as equals. Over the long term, these habits acknowledge the value of inclusivity and the dignity of every member cultivating the ground in which genuine relationships can take root and flourish.[14]

Engaging others with family spirit upholds the dignity of each person as a being created in the image and likeness of God by welcoming them in a relationship and culture that communicates acceptance, respect, and equality. Such relationships and a culture do not have only a momentary impact on the individual, but also a "long-term" effect that furthers their "continued growth and development."

This concept has origins in Father Chaminade's approach to rebuilding the Church in France in the aftermath of the French Revolution. This approach included the formation of *sodalities*, or small communities grounded in faith, which were focused on prayer, education, and performing acts of service to the surrounding community. For Chaminade, these communities brought many people together to share in a mission of social transformation. As *Principal Characteristics of Marianist Administration* explains, the inclusion of people from various backgrounds is an essential characteristic of the vision of community that comes from Father Chaminade's efforts:

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[13] *Characteristics of Marianist Universities*, 17-18.
[14] *Characteristics of Marianist Universities*, 18.

> These communities are not homogenous groupings. They include people from different segments of society and from a variety of professions and backgrounds. All are welcomed together for the purpose of the mission; and because the mission is common to all, all have the same rights and responsibilities. . . . The diversity of membership, coupled with its inherent range of gifts and talents, creates a dynamic complementarity in the community which is a unique resource for mission.[15]

Marianists strive to create communities that welcome people regardless of identities or identity-related characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic class, religion, language, nationality, and physical ability. Welcoming these others is not rooted in "simple tolerance" but rather in a desire for "respectful collaboration" in a shared mission of discerning and promoting the common good.

Engaging others with family spirit is not incompatible with sharing views that clash or otherwise contradict each other. The communities sought in the Marianist perspective encourage healthy discourse among their diverse members. As *Characteristics of Marianist Education* explains, one must not make the mistake of confusing the emphasis on friendship and welcoming in these communities with an avoidance of conversation in which a vigorous exchange of different, perhaps even contradictory views occurs:

> Such a vision of community and friendship runs the risk of misinterpretation. It must therefore be recalled that friendliness and hospitality are genuine expressions of a process that necessarily includes healthy discourse, disagreement, and dialogue. Yet, those grounded in the Marianist vision of education realize that only with precisely this mix of hardships and triumphs can authentic communities be formed. Growth in Christian faith is now what it has always been—inevitably an experience of entering an ancient and ever new community of unique individuals, all of whom sought and seek what it means to believe in the midst of the complexities and ambiguities that are inescapably part of living in a faith community that respects the achievements of reason.[16]

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[15] *Principal Characteristics of Marianist Administration*, 7.
[16] *Characteristics of Marianist Universities*, 18.

The communities envisioned in the Marianist viewpoint are "authentic" in that they do not shy away from the challenges that arise from their participants' diverse experiences, beliefs, and perspectives. The community's discourse provides an opportunity to lean into those challenges and explore "the complexities and ambiguities that are inescapably part of living in a faith community that respects the achievements of reason." Both "hardships and triumphs" become occasions to reflect on the life of the community and its members and examine how it can advance in the realization of its mission.

The metaphor of the "family table" reflects this spirit of welcoming, acceptance, and recognized interdependence. Members of a Marianist community are encouraged to come together to address the tests and difficulties that arise as they work toward the fulfillment of their mission. Just as the members of a family must navigate occasional tensions, disagreements, and discord in their communication, so too must the members of a Marianist community. Threats or challenges that originate outside the community also become opportunities for gathering at the proverbial "table" and exploring what must be done in pursuit of the common good.

> Our sense of hospitality and welcome must be inclusive. We must welcome all members of the University to the "family table" and develop a campus culture that recognizes and welcomes the gifts and experiences of our diverse members and that creatively weaves these gifts into rich contributions to our common mission. We must continually develop our skills of "staying at the table" when conflicts and tensions arise. To build a community that is like a family, given that the University is a large, complex organization, we must constantly expand our ability to listen to and appreciate others who are different, to share our beliefs and convictions in a way that touches the experience of others, and to creatively merge and expand our ideas into solutions that work for the good of the whole University community.[17]

This metaphor demands that community members have the capacity not only to welcome all to the table but also to stay at the table when conflicts arise. The diversity of views that comes from the various backgrounds of the participants is a capital strength in their effort to discern the common good, but working with and through that diversity is a

[17] Mission and Identity Task Force, *Common Themes*, 21-22.

fundamental challenge that, even in the most benevolent circumstances, is not easy to overcome. Differences of views do not, in themselves, amount to conflict. However, conflict is likely when such views are expressed, especially in a society in which power has often been used to advantage certain groups at the expense of others. Participants in dialogue need to know how to work through conflict, if it arises, and possibly grow in maturity, knowledge, and ability while doing so.

There are many implications for dialogue undertaken through such a lens. Creating an environment in which all are welcome to engage in discourse about the needs of the community is fundamental. Establishing community norms, or shared expectations about how people will engage each other, helps to create such an environment. Doing so gives participants an opportunity to talk about ways of engaging others that enable them to feel comfort, safety, and ownership of the process. Some participants might not have a clear mental model for what dialogue entails; therefore, beginning the interaction with an effort to build a common vision of dialogue can also be helpful. Building this vision gives participants an opportunity to talk about the interaction they intend to have and how it, as a dialogue, differs from other forms of interaction, such as discussion and debate. Their backgrounds might have primed them for these ways of interacting in lieu of dialogue. Participants from one culture might bring a proclivity for debate: advocating for their individual viewpoints and defending them from attack. Participants from another culture might bring a tendency toward discussion, in which examination of feelings and personal experiences tends to carry lesser value than deliberating about action. Having a common frame for the interaction at the outset helps participants to orient themselves as they need to do so in light of their respective backgrounds. Establishing this frame is itself an inclusive practice.

Many of the skills already mentioned in this paper promote the inclusion of others once the dialogue begins. Asking probing and clarifying questions, paraphrasing, and other skills for active listening help other participants share their diverse views. Given that the diversity of viewpoints is likely to evoke friction among participants, clashes of differing opinions, or contention, skills and techniques for managing conflict are often beneficial for participants. These skills and techniques include:

- identifying the flashpoints that incite conflict,
- helping participants to articulate and reflect on their perceptions of themselves, others, and the situation,

- exploring underlying assumptions and how those assumptions might fuel conflict,
- validating others,
- creating a supportive climate,
- encouraging participants to describe their feelings and emotional responses to what is said and done,
- acknowledging triggers that might complicate one's ability to engage others in ways that continue dialogue,
- finding points of unity amidst participants' differing views, and
- if other participants are amenable, generating and considering possible paths of action beyond the present situation that might strengthen collaboration in the face of the challenges before them.

All these skills help people to "stay at the table" when conflict arises and they otherwise might want to disengage out of fear for where the conversation might lead. As such, they are integral to the practice of the Marianist ideal of "family spirit."

In many cases, the use of a trained facilitator can enhance inclusion. The practice of *multipartiality* by a facilitator can strengthen participants' ability to hear viewpoints that otherwise might not be shared, given the composition and dynamics of the group. In multipartiality, those who are facilitating the interaction recognize how power affects the likelihood of certain voices entering a conversation. Participants who come from marginalized or underrepresented groups—whether they are based in race, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, language, socioeconomic class, religion, political affiliation, or some other social characteristic—may struggle to express their views in a group in which they are among a minority of participants. The facilitator in such cases attempts to exercise some sensitivity to the power dynamics likely in play and, where possible, helps viewpoints that are unique to this perspective to enter the conversation. In some instances, participants might be considering a topic that has implications for a particular group of people, yet no one from that group is participating in the conversation. In this case, without speaking for that group, the facilitator might help the participants to be aware of the relevance of the topic to that group and ask the group to consider what the implications might be. Given enough time to prepare, the facilitator might bring texts or artifacts that communicate with the voice of that group into the dialogue for the

participants to engage, if inviting a member of that group into the dialogue is not possible.[18]

Being multipartial does not mean being loyal to any one gender, race, ethnicity, or other social identity and preferencing that identity over others. It focuses rather on strengthening the ability for a multiplicity of voices to enter the dialogue. In certain circumstances, people who identify with a majority demographic group in the wider society might be the minority within a particular dialogue. In such instances, the practice of multipartiality would demand that the facilitator be sensitive to the possibly diminished ability of those participants to enter the conversation and, if necessary, would strive to balance the power dynamics accordingly. Being multipartial means employing those skills and techniques that help the dialogue to be as inclusive as possible to the benefit of all participants. Welcoming people to the family table is only a first step; people must have the ability to express their views once the conversation begins. By practicing multipartiality, a facilitator can help the group as a whole to navigate those obstacles that would discourage or prevent certain voices from participating as fully as others.[19]

Welcoming these diverse voices is integral to discerning what is in the interests of all. Without inclusivity, participants in dialogue risk ascertaining not the common good, but rather one or a few people's perspective of the common good. The more inclusive the process, the more capacity the participants as a group have for understanding the full panoply of needs, experiences, aspirations, obstacles, hopes, fears, and other conditions facing the many stakeholders involved in the situation at hand. For this reason, inclusion is not just a moral ideal but also a practical necessity for a Marianist approach to dialogue. That necessity is rooted partly in the multiple perspectives that diverse participants bring to any effort to discern the common good. The inclusion of such perspectives enhances the capacity of participants, both individually and collectively, to engage in critical inquiry. This brings us to another principle of a Marianist approach to dialogue.

Dialogue Involves the Critical Analysis of Society

In a Marianist approach to dialogue, participants undertake dialogue as a means of analyzing the conditions of society as they currently exist and exploring what changes are

[18] D.R. Kaplowitz et al., *Race Dialogues: A Facilitator's Guide*.
[19] D.R. Kaplowitz et al., *Race Dialogues: A Facilitator's Guide*.

needed to realize the common good. As *Characteristics of Marianist Universities* explains, this critical spirit lies at the heart of the Marianist perspective:

> A Marianist education teaches one to think critically, to advocate and act for justice, always supporting the dignity of each person, to engage in deep social analysis, and to undertake research and initiatives that address actual social and moral problems. We do so in the spirit of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*'s observation that "If need be, a Catholic university must have the courage to speak uncomfortable truths which do not please public opinion, but which are necessary to safeguard the authentic good of society."[20]

In the Marianist context, thinking critically means developing and drawing upon a "substantive knowledge of the past, analytical tools for understanding the world around them, and critical thinking skills to mindfully respond and shape the unknowable future."[21] Engaging in deep social analysis includes identifying conditions that prevent attainment of the common good and understanding the forces that perpetuate them and those that promote justice. Participants need to work with credible research about these various social conditions and must be conversant with works that will help them to understand their moral dimensions and implications. At times, they might need to "speak uncomfortable truths which do not please public opinion, but which are necessary to safeguard the authentic good of society," an act that requires courage and a profound commitment to justice.

The inclusion of diverse voices, described in the previous section, is not only a moral ideal; it also allows participants as a collective to recognize obstacles to the common good or conditions necessary for its attainment, of which they as individuals might be unaware. The synergy that develops through dialogue among these diverse participants then allows the group to analyze those conditions in ways that would not be possible, were it not for the inclusion of those voices, and to consider ways of addressing those obstacles that would be otherwise inaccessible to them. Dialogue is not problem-solving in the conventional sense of the term, but rather a shared effort among participants to envision and actualize a better future, for which participants take collective responsibility and ownership.

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[20] *Characteristics of Marianist Universities*, 20.
[21] *Characteristics of Marianist Universities*, 23.

This critical spirit is reflected in many other perspectives and approaches for dialogue current in the fields of academic study and practice. Brazilian philosopher Paolo Freire presents a view of dialogue that reflects this same critical spirit. Freire describes dialogue as "the encounter of women and men in the world in order to transform the world"[22] and as a form of "authentic revolution."[23] For Freire, dialogue is a process whereby participants overturn conditions of oppression in society and co-construct a more just social order. They do so by engaging in action and reflection through which they become collaborators in changing the conditions of their lives. As Freire states, "to supersede their condition as objects by the status of Subjects—the objective of any true revolution—requires that the people act, as well as reflect, upon the reality to be transformed."[24] Practiced in this way, dialogue becomes more than "talk." It is a form of praxis: the application of knowledge in action for the transformation of society.

The process of consultation developed by the Persian author and founder of the Baha'i Faith, Baha'u'llah, and his son 'Abdu'l-Baha reflects this same spirit. Consultation as a process aims at the transformation of society through a dialogic process whereby participants share all relevant information about the situation at hand. All participants are encouraged to express their thoughts freely, and once a thought is expressed, it is understood to be the property not of individuals, but of the group as a whole, to consider, modify, enlarge, or discard. This examination of the current reality often involves conferring with stakeholders in the situation and the study of reliable sources of data about it. As participants examine the situation before them, they strive to understand the current reality in light of moral principles, such as the equality of the sexes or the elimination of prejudice, and explore alternatives for action. Once participants agree on a course of action, they are enjoined to carry it out in the field of action in a unified manner. Later, they are called to come together and reflect on what they learned through their effort. In this way, the attempt to transform society generally moves through recurring cycles of study, consultation, action, and reflection, a process through which, over time, participants learn how best to improve their lives.[25] These

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[22] P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* 30th anniversary ed., M. B. Ramos, trans. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2000), 129.

[23] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 128.

[24] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 130.

[25] *Transforming Collective Deliberation: Valuing Unity and Justice* (New York: Baha'i International Community, Feb. 3, 2010). Retrieved from https://www.bic.org/statements/transforming-collective-deliberation-valuing-unity-and-justice.

perspectives share an understanding of dialogue as a form of critical inquiry. This understanding relates to two concepts fundamental to the Marianist viewpoint: practical wisdom and solidarity.

Practical Wisdom

The concept of *practical wisdom* reflects the critical spirit inherent to dialogue as understood through a Marianist lens. *Common Themes in Mission and Identity at the University of Dayton* defines this concept: "Practical wisdom, in the classical and Catholic tradition, is excellence in practical reasoning. Practical reasoning represents the capacity to draw on knowledge and intellectual skills to engage concretely in the world. Practical reasoning allows the individual to go beyond reflection to deliberate and decide upon the best course of action within a particular situation."[26]

The aim of practical wisdom is the attainment of the common good. Practical wisdom allows people to examine problems and issues in ways that reveal their causes, to imagine a better state of affairs and consider actionable steps to bring it into being, to implement those steps in the current situation, and to reflect on what follows. This capacity involves not only taking action but also learning from that action. The exercise of practical wisdom allows people to "untangle the complex web of experience and to draw practical knowledge from this experience."[27]

Dialogue is a powerful context for the exercise of practical wisdom. According to *Common Themes in the Mission and Identity of the University of Dayton,* practical wisdom develops over time and best occurs in the company of others collaborating in the field of action as they address real problems within a specific context. These collaborators form a "community of practice."[28] Collaborators are not merely talking about social and moral problems in some abstract way; they are engaging in "conversations of inquiry, action, and reflection."[29] Dialogue interweaves with action as a primary means of learning about themselves, the situation, its stakeholders and their needs, and what works and what does not work in attaining the common good. Practicing dialogue in this way requires an ability to "read the signs of the times," which combines a "deep knowledge of the trends within one's world" and "knowledge of an intellectual and

[26] Mission and Identity Task Force, *Common Themes*, 17.
[27] Mission and Identity Task Force, *Common Themes*, 18.
[28] Mission and Identity Task Force, *Common Themes*, 19.
[29] Mission and Identity Task Force, *Common Themes*, 19.

moral tradition that allows one to evaluate these trends."[30] Participants in dialogue need analytical and diagnostic skills to help them understand the situation before them. They also ideally have access to theoretical and moral lenses that can help them make sense of what they are seeing in their investigation of that situation. Close accompaniment from others with special knowledge or experience relating to these lenses or the situation at hand likely would assist the participants. Moreover, as their efforts to address the situation unfold, participants will need "to be skillful in adaptation and change," as not only the situation, but also their own place within it will undoubtedly change over time.[31]

Several scholars and practitioners in the academic and professional world encourage a similar view of dialogue. Peter Senge, a senior lecturer at the MIT Sloan School of Management, for instance, identifies dialogue as a key process of organizational learning. Following the work of David Bohm, Senge[32] differentiates dialogue and discussion. The goal of discussion, for Senge, is to make a decision. In discussion, participants present different views, defend their views, and the group comes to some agreement about the way forward. Collective action follows from discussion. The goal of dialogue, in contrast, is achieving a fuller understanding of a complex issue through collaborative exploration. Participants present different views not to come to an agreement, but rather to discover new views. Discussion is convergent, while dialogue is divergent. Dialogue can lead to action, but action is not the immediate goal. An effective team, for Senge, moves among discussion, dialogue, and action as circumstances warrant. Dialogue and discussion both enhance a team's ability to act, though they have different purposes and different ground rules. Effective teams do not confuse the two. The value of dialogue, for Senge, lies especially in reflection and inquiry, though when action is needed, participants must shift to discussion.

The After Action Review (AAR) process also illustrates the use of dialogue as a process for reflection in connection to action. Pioneered by the United States military, After Action Reviews are facilitated conversations among participants in any initiative or action that have the purpose of discovering together what happened in practice and learning what can be applied to enhance future efforts.[33] The specific conditions under

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[30] Mission and Identity Task Force, *Common Themes*, 19.

[31] Mission and Identity Task Force, *Common Themes*, 19.

[32] P.M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*.

[33] Combined Arms Center-Training (CAC-T), *The Leader's Guide to After-Action Reviews* (AAR), 2013. Retrieved from https://fs-prod-nwcg.s3.us-gov-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023-06/army-leaders-guide-to-aar.pdf.

which an After Action Review takes place vary. However, through dialogue, participants explore the same key questions:

1. What did we set out to do?
2. What actually happened?
3. Why did it happen?
4. What are we going to do next time?[34]

An essential requirement of the process is that participants address these questions through dialogue, not lectures or debates. A facilitator should speak relatively little, with participants talking as much as three-quarters of the time. The facilitator's aim is to introduce topics, keep the group on track, establish and enforce ground rules, transition from one question to the next, and summarize what emerges from the dialogue. The facilitator also helps in setting the tone and ensuring that an egalitarian dynamic runs through the interaction. Differences in rank among participants must be set aside or, at least, minimized. Disagreements are not only tolerated but also explored.[35] As in Senge's work,[36] dialogue in After Action Reviews is an expression of practical wisdom, whereby collaborators learn from action in conversations organized for that purpose.

Solidarity

Solidarity is another concept from the Marianist viewpoint that relates to critically analyzing society through dialogue. In the Marianist context, solidarity involves a recognition of the fundamental interdependence of all human beings. This interdependence comes from the belief that everyone was created by God. "Solidarity calls us to recognize that being created by God we form a single human family. As such, we are tethered to one another in society. Not only are we responsible for one another, regardless of differences, but we also have a responsibility to foster interdependence, so that everyone achieves their potential in a manner that is respectful and free."[37] Because all people were created by God, they are essentially members of a single human family.

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[34] D.A. Garvin, *Learning In Action.*

[35] D.A. Garvin, *Learning In Action.*

[36] P.M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*.

[37] General Administration of the Society of Mary, *Principal Characteristics of Marianist Administration*, 4.

Solidarity shapes how participants in dialogue approach the critical evaluation of the times in which they live. The recognition that all people are members of one human family carries with it a responsibility to ensure that everyone can achieve their potential in a manner that is "respectful and free." This attitude constitutes a form of deep compassion for others. One accepts one's responsibility for the whole of humanity and acknowledges that one's own actions impact the lives of others in complex ways. This acknowledgment makes one's analysis of the times fundamentally personal—personal in the sense that one's actions affect the lives of specific others, and personal in the sense that one's actions are potentially part of both the problem and solution. This means, in part, standing with the other and sharing in their sufferings and joys. As *Common Themes in the Mission and Identity of the University of Dayton* states, solidarity "is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good."[38]

The implications for dialogue are profound. On one hand, dialogue provides a way of being present with those who are struggling. One does not consider the sufferings of others from afar and contemplate them from a distance. Participants strive not to solve the problems that others are suffering *for* them, but rather to stand *with* them and, as collaborators, address the current reality that somehow is limiting people's ability to achieve their fullest potential. On the other hand, dialogue functions as a space for learning with and from those who are struggling. By inviting these others into dialogue, one is not only communicating support and consubstantiality with them; one also opens oneself to what they can teach, given their unique experiences. Approaching others in this way requires humility and respect. One must be able to acknowledge the limitations of one's own vantage point and the knowledge that one has developed through one's finite experiences and recognize in the other perspectives and understanding that one does not have.

This attitude is reflected in the way that various scholars approach dialogue. Martin Buber, one of the most influential scholars in the study of dialogue, differentiates between the I-It and the I-Thou attitudes that one can take in one's efforts to engage others.[39] In the I-It attitude, one approaches the other through the lens of one's

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[38] Mission and Identity Task Force, *Common Themes*, 23.

[39] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 2nd ed., R. G. Smith, trans. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958). (The original was published in German in 1923.)

knowledge. One assumes the other to be a knowable entity and draws upon one's accumulated store of experience to label, analyze, diagnose, frame, interpret, control, move, or conceptualize the other. The other becomes the object of one's knowledge and understanding. Practical considerations figure prominently when one interacts with the other through the I-It attitude. In contrast, in the I-Thou attitude, one approaches the other as a being that is essentially unknowable. The other as a "Thou" is someone with whom one can enter a relationship but never definitively comprehend. In the I-Thou attitude, one forgoes any attempt to impose one's limited knowledge on the other. The other is not an object but a partner. For Buber, the unlimited nature and unknowability of the "Thou" derive from each person being a reflection of God: "Every particular *Thou* is a glimpse through to the eternal *Thou*; by means of every particular *Thou* the primary word addresses the eternal *Thou*."[40]

For Buber, engaging others through the I-It attitude is a practical necessity and is ultimately unavoidable. Nonetheless, meeting them through the I-Thou attitude is the essence of true relationship between human beings. One cannot "relate" to or "meet" a thing. In the I-It attitude, people manage the world of things in a way that is predictable and coordinated, but "you cannot meet others in it."[41] Without the I-Thou, one lives in a world of things and reduces everyone one encounters to a thing among the many others one has encountered. Ultimately, engaging others only through this attitude diminishes one's own humanity. Buber summarizes this view: "without *It* man [*sic*] cannot live. But he [*sic*] who lives with *It* alone is not a man."[42]

Emmanuel Levinas, another highly influential scholar, offers a similar view.[43] For Levinas, the other in dialogue is the Stranger, one who is fundamentally mysterious. The mystery of the other comes from the fact that the other lies beyond the reach of perception. Perception touches the other but never brings the other within the limits of what Levinas calls "exteriority." Because the other lies always just beyond the reach of one's perceptions, the other has the power to affect one's understanding in ways that do not originate within the interiority of one's being. The other always beckons one from beyond and enables what is exterior to one's being to affect one's being. For this reason,

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[40] Buber, *I and Thou*, 99, italics in the original.
[41] Buber, *I and Thou*, 49.
[42] Buber, *I and Thou*, 52, italics in the original.
[43] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, A. Lingis, trans. (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University, 1969). (The original work was published in French in 1961.)

Levinas calls the other "the Teacher." He explains this fundamental act of "teaching" that occurs every time a person encounters someone else as the Other. "Teaching is a discourse in which the master can bring to the student what the student does not yet know. It does not operate as maieutic, but continues the placing in me of the idea of infinity. The idea of infinity implies a soul capable of containing more than it can draw from itself. It designates an interior being that is capable of a relation with the exterior, and does not take its own interiority for the totality of being."[44]

Separation, for Levinas, consists of the attempt of one to close themself off to what the Other brings to the encounter: one strives to take one's own interiority for the totality of being. Acquiescence to the Other means allowing what the Other brings to come into one's own being and thereby change that being. In this way, Levinas' work encourages not only a respect for what others bring to dialogue but also a reverence for them as other, an attitude that is also reflected in Buber's notion of the I-Thou attitude.

Buber's and Levinas' works suggest that approaching others in the spirit of solidarity, as encouraged in the Marianist perspective, is not merely something one does for the sake of the other. Approaching them in this way expresses a recognition of what the other as "Thou" and "Teacher" can teach oneself. The other sees and understands things that one does not and cannot. Through one's encounter with the other, one learns what one otherwise could not understand. Solidarity, thus, is not simply an expression of benevolence or love, but is conducive to the critical examination of society. The other teaches us from a place of being that lies beyond our ability to know through the interiority of our own experience. However, our ability to benefit from that teaching depends upon the attitude that we bring to our interaction with them.

Dialogue Is an Expression of Virtue

Consideration of this attitude brings us to another key principle of a Marianist approach to dialogue. From a Marianist perspective, dialogue is an expression of virtue. *Virtues* are spiritual qualities that enable people to transcend their limited self-interest and baser inclinations in their engagement with others. The concept of virtue has figured in religious and philosophical thought for thousands of years. Aristotle, one of the most foundational authors on the topic, describes virtue as "states of character" that reflect

[44] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 180.

"moral excellence."[45] Virtues, he explains, develop by choice, not accident or disposition. Justice, for instance, is not a personality trait, nor is it something that one does without intention. One becomes just by engaging in just acts. To determine what acts are virtuous, Aristotle offers the concept of the golden mean. The excellence of virtuous acts lies in their conformity with rational principle. For Aristotle, this means acting in moderation and avoiding extremes. For example, true courage is the mean between foolhardiness and cowardice. True generosity is the mean between wastefulness and miserliness. Ultimately, acting in accordance with virtue leads to happiness, not in the sense of momentary gratification but lasting fulfillment. That virtues develop through choice and that they can be strengthened throughout one's life differentiate virtues from personality traits, which are largely established by the end of early childhood and are generally obdurate to change. In his foundational work, *Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle identifies many virtues, including temperance, courage, generosity, tact, and justice.

The Marianist concept of virtue resembles Aristotle's. Virtues are qualities of moral excellence that develop through the choices people make. However, they do not exist through conformity with some abstract principle as Aristotle described, but rather through obedience to the Word of God. Virtues are spiritual qualities. As Father Joseph Lackner, SM, suggests, one can learn them by following the example of Jesus as that Word manifested in the world and his mother Mary, an exemplar of obedience to God's Will.[46] Living virtuously means to mirror the qualities exemplified by these two holy beings. Following their example involves discipline. It demands forsaking many worldly things and concerns, yet it does not mean "aestheticism" in the conventional sense of that term.[47] It does not come out of a concern solely for people's "own personal good, but . . . to become like Mary, fit instruments for God's activity in this world."[48] It also is not something that only individuals do; groups and communities can foster and practice these qualities through their actions. In fact, it is partly in recognition of this "sociological dimension of the formation of personality" that Father Chaminade emphasized building communities that reflected these qualities of moral excellence.[49]

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[45] Aristotle*, Nicomachean Ethics*, rev. ed., D. Ross, trans. (London: Oxford University, 1966). (The original work was written in Greek in 350 BCE.)

[46] Joseph H. Lackner, SM, *Virtues for Mission* (Dayton, OH: NACMS, 2003).

[47] Lackner, *Virtues for Mission*, 6.

[48] Lackner, *Virtues for Mission*, 6.

[49] Lackner, *Virtues for Mission*, 6.

In an extensive study of Father Chaminade's work, Lackner identifies a litany of virtues that define Marianist spirituality. Following Chaminade, he divides these virtues into three major categories: preparation virtues, purification virtues, and consummation virtues. These three categories make up Chaminade's System of Virtues. *Preparation virtues* focus on readying oneself to act in accordance with God's Will. They include what Chaminade calls "the Five Silences":

1. The *silence of words*, which includes not only abstaining from noise, but also weighing the words one uses;
2. The *silence of signs*, which involves practicing awareness of how one's nonverbal behaviors and manner of speech affects others;
3. The *silence of mind*, which consists of attending to one's own thoughts and memories and understanding how they might affect one's interactions with others;
4. The *silence of imagination*, which involves envisioning oneself living in ways that reflect the examples of Jesus and Mary and focusing on one's expectations of self and others;
5. The *silence of passion*, includes naming one's feelings and being aware of how one's desires help or hinder one's conduct in various situations.[50]

Other preparation virtues include developing the power of *recollection*, which relates to focusing one's energies and living fully in each moment. *Preparatory obedience* means developing a measure of personal flexibility that can enable one to remain open to others, even deferring to them at times, while we seek to act in ethical ways. Another virtue, "support of mortification," involves reflecting on those factors that "tangle our energy and attention,"[51] naming them, and then weighing the good that might come from enduring them. Lackner identifies multiple examples from the life of Jesus that reflect this quality, including his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and acquiescence to God's will and his courageous silence in the face of Pontius Pilate.

Purification virtues are those qualities that assist one to continue acting in conformity with God's will in the midst of action. Lackner identifies several such qualities reflected in Chaminade's work, including confidence in God, distrust of the self,

[50] See Lackner, *Virtues for Mission*, 11-24.
[51] Lackner, *Virtues for Mission*, 32.

recourse to counsel, patience, perseverance, and resistance to temptations.[52] As the name suggests, these qualities have the common quality of "purifying" one of those inclinations that might undermine one's ability to act in this way and developing habits that enable one to stay the course. For instance, *distrust of self* does not mean having genuine self-esteem or commitment to some position one has taken. Rather, it means being able to admit that one might be wrong, to suspend one's judgment, to look at matters from a different perspective, and to recognize the partiality of one's own viewpoint.[53] Unchecked, confidence in one's own viewpoint can lead to an inability to listen to others, to benefit from the insights they bring, to collaborate with them, and to build community. *Recourse to counsel* relates to one's openness to the guidance of others. These others include other people, though as Lackner states, "As Christians, the deepest source of counsel is found in God in Jesus Christ," and "His advice comes in prayer, in the Sacraments, in the movement of our hearts, in the words of Scripture, and in the voices of creation."[54] Developing this quality involves gaining awareness of the habits and inclinations one brings to seeking counsel and the ways in which one does so in the midst of decision-making, exploration, and inquiry.

The final category, *consummation virtues*, includes those spiritual qualities that develop as outcomes to a life lived in conformity with the will of God. Lackner identifies four. First, *humility* involves living one's life in a way that resists the temptation "to believe or act as if we are the center of all that is or to make absolute our concerns and will."[55] Humility is not simply a form of "deflating" the self; it does involve acknowledging strengths and experiencing gratitude for them. Nonetheless, as in the examples of Jesus and Mary, one finds these strengths through service to others and "letting the needs of others change the pattern of our lives."[56] Second, *modesty* means focusing on the good to be done and not the person who is doing it. This especially means not emphasizing one's own accomplishments. As with humility, modesty does not mean deflating the self. It involves a "mature sense of our talents and strengths, of our competence and confidence."[57] Lackner cites the example of Jesus who, in the Gospel of John, "always refers to the glory beyond himself" (Jn 8:54, cf. Jn 3:32, 7:16, 8:28-29).[58]

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[52] See Lackner, *Virtues for Mission*, 37-64.
[53] Lackner, *Virtues for Mission*, 43.
[54] Lackner, *Virtues for Mission*, 45.
[55] Lackner, *Virtues for Mission*, 69.
[56] Lackner, *Virtues for Mission*, 72.
[57] Lackner, *Virtues for Mission*, 75.
[58] Lackner, *Virtues for Mission*, 75.

Third, *renunciation of the world* means not a form of aestheticism, but rather "renouncing those elements within worldviews, cultures, or societal organizations which are marked by sin, perpetuate sin, and enslave people."[59] As explained earlier in this paper, a Marianist perspective means seeking the common good and standing in solidarity with those who have been marginalized or disadvantaged. Renunciation of the world means, in part, abandoning those ways of engaging others and the world that perpetuate the conditions whereby some people are made to occupy such a position in society. It also means eschewing ways of influencing others that involve manipulation, deceit, control, guilt, condescension, or similar methods of disparaging or undermining others in order to get one's own way. Lastly, *abnegation of self* means guarding against self-centeredness. This involves being aware of the many ways in which one "centers" oneself in interactions with others and striving for the opposite: "de-centering" the self, so that one understands oneself as one in the great body of humanity.[60] It also means exercising some vigilance about the many physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual measures one might take "to protect the self as the focal point of everything."[61]

An approach to dialogue that recognizes the role of virtue would examine how these various virtues individually and collectively enhance participants' ability to discern the common good in dialogue with others. Attention would be given to what each virtue looks like as one interacts with others. Specific behaviors, practices, and approaches might reflect particular qualities and function as means of expressing each. For instance, the LARA method seems to reflect several, if not all, of the purification virtues, including patience, resistance to temptations, and perseverance. LARA, an acronym, is a four-step method that one can use to listen affirmatively to someone in the midst of conflict. It stands for Listen, Affirm, Respond, and Add.[62] The method involves using active listening skills to ensure that one understands what another person is saying and validating the contribution they are making to the dialogue before offering one's own view on the topic. At the end of the method, one invites the other person to respond to one's own response and thereby to help continue the conversation. One clearly exercises patience in using the method, for one forgoes reacting quickly and thoughtlessly to the other's statement without taking the time to understand the other's meaning as fully and

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[59] Lackner, *Virtues for Mission*, 77.
[60] Lackner, *Virtues for Mission*, 82.
[61] Lackner, *Virtues for Mission*, 82.
[62] Michigan Online, "Diversity and Dialogue: Dialogue," Jan. 5, 2018, YouTube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rj9LdReLhow.

accurately as possible. One also exercises resistance to temptation, for instance, the desire to correct the other person, to attack them, or to withdraw from the conversation. Moreover, one exercises perseverance, for one stays at the table in the midst of conflict, a situation that many people find to be uncomfortable and difficult to bear.

Such an approach also would explore how people can develop these qualities, especially as they are expressed in dialogue. Because virtues consist of habits of moral excellence, proponents of a Marianist approach would strive to understand those practices that grow this disposition over time. As Lackner suggests, the development of these qualities requires discipline. Accordingly, it is not something that occurs once and once only. Drawing on the concept of practical wisdom, one might approach the growth of such qualities as a process that involves action and reflection over time. As one acts, one learns how to mirror these qualities in one's interactions with others. Mistakes or shortcomings are inevitable, but reflection can allow one the opportunity to learn from experience and improve over time. Study also might play a role in the acquisition of these qualities, especially by examining the lives of those worthy of emulation. From a Marianist perspective, they include Jesus and Mary; however, in keeping with the Marianist principle of a dialogue between faith and culture, there are many other examples in many other traditions, both religious and secular, from whose actions one could glean insights.

Conclusion

This paper has offered some initial thoughts about what a Marianist approach to the practice of dialogue involves. As understood through a Marianist lens, dialogue can be understood as a process of collective inquiry among participants who are striving for the common good. To discern and ultimately realize the common good, this process is, by necessity, inclusive. It involves critically analyzing the society in which one lives insofar as dialogue is part of the ongoing effort to transform the world so that it allows for the well-being and prosperity of all people, not the relative few. Given that it is a spiritual and not a purely material process, it necessitates the expression of virtue, those qualities of moral excellence reflected in the examples of Jesus and his mother, Mary. Key concepts that inform this approach include the Marianist ideal of family spirit, the notion that all people are children of the same God who were created in his image and likeness, practical wisdom, and the principle of solidarity. Dialogue is not the same as decision-making, discussion, or deliberation. Nonetheless, it is essentially connected to action, for

in the end, it is not merely an attempt to discern the common good, but to actualize it in a concrete way.

One need not be a Marianist to practice dialogue in a way that draws on Marianist principles and concepts. It would be a departure from the Marianist perspective to suggest otherwise. The Marianist perspective understands itself as being in a dialogue between faith and culture. Accordingly, all people potentially bring the light of understanding and truth to the general effort of humanity to discern and actualize the common good. The same is true for dialogue. One's understanding of these principles and concepts is likely to be different if one holds in a more complete way the spiritual worldview of which they are part. However, adhering to that worldview is not a prerequisite for engaging others in the ways described in this paper. The lives of Jesus and Mary, his mother, are examples on which all humanity can draw, and insights regarding the wisdom, beauty, and integrity of their lives are not restricted to the people of any one creed, order, or following.

It is hoped that this paper can serve as a springboard for further conversation about this theme. Promising next steps include taking the concepts and principles identified in this paper that reflect the Marianist perspective and associating them in a more comprehensive manner with concrete practices relating to dialogue. Such steps also include bringing together those with a deep knowledge of the Marianist viewpoint and those with a similarly deep knowledge of the theory and practice of dialogue and exploring these intersections further. Such steps must, of course, be coupled with learning through action. As insights develop from the pursuit of these steps, they can be applied in the field of practice. Timely reflection can distill additional insights from experience, and overarching concepts and principles can be revised, extended, and refined.