

Introduction

It is December 1939. In just 2 years the United States would be plunged into what would be called the Second World War. But in Chester, Pennsylvania things were fairly tranquil; the first signs of recovery from the devastating depression were evident. My Mom and Dad had been married for 5 years. It would be ten more years before children graced their marriage.

As one of my mother's early Christmas presents, My Dad presented her with tickets to the new movie, *Gone With the Wind* starring the legendary Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh. And on a Friday evening after work, they took themselves off to the Stanley Theater in Chester to be captivated by this grand epic of passion, love, and fierce loyalty set in another wartime period of our history.

My mother fell in love with the movie. And a few weeks later on Christmas my father presented her with two porcelain figurines of Rhett Butler and Scarlet O'Hara.

For the next sixty years those figurines would be as permanent a part of the family living room as we were. They were lovingly transported to my brother's house, along with my Mom and Dad, when illness forced the sale of the family homestead. And when both my parents died, these figurines from so long ago

were given to my niece. They now sit in her bedroom, a reminder of her beloved grandparents.

Treasured family gifts are always that: treasured. But the emotional content of the treasuring changes a great deal as generations pass. Those figurines were always the same, but: the young married couple looking at them in 1939, the old married couple looking at them on their 60th wedding anniversary, my aged father looking at them after the death of my mother, and my niece who now possesses them. All will invest different meaning in the same figurines at any different time.

We Marianists have a treasure from our founder, Blessed Chaminade, a treasure that we call by the strange name of *mixed composition*. I will attempt in my remarks this afternoon to look at this precious treasure and what it means for us today. Most basically, mixed composition stems from the Marianist vision of church that priests and lay persons are together equally, by virtue of their baptism, in a Society seeking holiness and sharing in Mary's mission.

As we look at this treasured gift of our Founder, we are faced as a Province, and as a Society with a multi-faceted challenge. I am indebted in my remarks to the writing and conversations of Carol Ramey, Larry Cada, and Tim Philips in some of my remarks.

This afternoon I will trace in very broad strokes some of the larger questions that the issue of mixed composition has raised in recent years. It is my hope to initiate with this talk a Province-wide reflection in the communities on this topic in the coming year. The International Center for Marianist Formation under the

leadership of Thomas Giardino will over the summer be producing some excellent materials to assist in that community reflection.

The 2006 General Chapter

In the 2006 General Chapter document, *In Mission With Mary*, the brothers of the General Chapter offer the society this challenge: **To reaffirm that our mixed composition is a basic element of our charism as well as a gift, a richness that we must transmit to the Church** (page 23). The General Chapter was concerned with both clericalism and clericalization. Clericalism is a matter of attitude, namely, the attitude that ordination confers a privileged place in the community outside the duties of liturgical presiding and leadership in prayer. Clericalization is a matter of policy related to the number or proportion of priests and brothers in the community. The more pressing concern of the General Chapter was clericalization: some units of the Society are composed of either equal numbers of brothers and priests and heading toward having a larger number of priests than brothers. They are many complex factors involved in this situation in some units: choices of parish ministry over formal and informal educational works, the attitude in a particular culture regarding ordination, and a view on the part of some that mixed composition should be maintained society-wide (as a congregation) but not necessarily in each unit of the Society.

The Province of the United States

In our own Province the situation is no less complex, except that the questions take on a slightly different angle.

- We have grown as a Society in the United States in our expectation that each Marianist community will be served by an ordained Marianist. Our *Rule of Life* speaks quite clearly about the centrality of the daily Eucharist in our life as a religious community. Since about 1950 this has been commonly interpreted as daily Eucharist *within* the community.
- We as a Province have prided ourselves on our heritage of mixed composition as being fundamental to who we are as a Marianist community. The challenge will be not only to maintain mixed composition in community but in terms of ministry as well.

Priests under 60:	20	(26%)	Brothers under 60:	56
Priests under 50:	5	(23%)	Brothers under 50:	16

- Our priests are ordained *mensa communis*, to the common table. While all religious priests are ordained *mensa communis*, which is a technical term in canon law related to the source of their support. But this term has taken on mythical significance in Marianist circles meaning that the first obligation of priestly ministry for Marianists is to the local community. There is a lot of discussion around the question of Brothers' presence in parish ministry. There is little discussion around priests' presence in any significant way in the other ministries of the Province, except when a *community* is without a priest for the daily celebration of the Eucharist. Is mixed composition a gift to Marianist mission and ministry?

- With the increased education and participation of lay people in all ministries and to some extent governance of the Church, the identity and visibility of the brother's vocation has come into question.
- The equality between ordained and non-ordained members has been a long-treasured tradition. Because of the Roman classification of the Society as a clerical congregation, there have always been governmental roles reserved to the ordained members: the Superior General, the General Assistant for Religious Life, as Vicar General and until the Chapter of 1981 the Director of novices and the provincial.

There is however an inequality built into our tradition of equal numbers of ordained and non-ordained members on all Chapters and Councils of the units and the general level. Less than one third of our membership fills one half of governance positions. This will become a critical question in units where the number of priests is both aging and diminishing. The call to ordination in some units including our own is also a call to Provincial council and Provincial Chapter leadership. This will most certainly be a challenge for the next generation of leadership here in our Province.

These are a few of the present challenges that the issue of mixed composition, our precious heritage offer to us. I would like to now turn to some historical commentary and conjecture.

Some Historical Comment and Conjecture

The vast numbers of early communities in the Society of Mary were without priests. It would not be until 1970 that the percentage of ordained members of the Society would rise above 20%. While the Founder certainly understood the

role of priests as integral to the mission of the Society, there is no historical record of any sort that I was able to find that bemoans the fact that so many communities in the Society were without priests.

A detailed account of the animadversion crisis in our struggle to gain Vatican approval for our Constitutions (1865-69) is beyond the scope of these remarks. It is covered very completely in Jean-Claude Delas, SM's wonderful *History of the Constitutions of the Society of Mary*, note especially Chapter II. Suffice it to say that the reaction of the Society to the First Animadversion from the Holy See, which read: *Special care must be taken so that in the future the number of priests in the pious institute be increased to the point that at least the superior in every house may be a priest* was immediate and violent. Priest and brothers were united generally in their hue and cry that the Founder never intended this. It was the intention of the Founder to create a mixed religious congregation of lay religious and priests all having the same rights. Cardinal Mathieu of Besancon was appointed apostolic visitor to the Society and presided at several succeeding General Chapters. His patience and firmness allowed the Society to reach compromise on the issue and Rome modified the animadversions. In 1868 at the height of the animadversion crisis there were 1067 members in the Society of Mary, 48 were priests.

As reflected in the primitive constitutions of the Society (1839_ and else where in the founder's writings, he wanted a separate novitiate for the priests; such existed until 1865. He spoke of special communities of priests specifically for their ministry and establishing Marian shrines throughout France, run by priest, and of having mission bands of priests. None of these intentions of the Founder were ever accomplished. We can conjecture that the Society was too busy about

other things, especially education, and he did not want to separate the priests from the communities and ministries already established.

Somewhere around World War II the Society of Mary seems to have developed an oral tradition about having a priest in every community, at least as an ideal. The number of ordinations within the Society begins to rise dramatically; ordained membership in the Society reaching its highest proportion of membership, slightly less than 1/3, in 1987.

It was post World War II that the Society consciously and consistently redirected its ministerial focus in this country from parish-based elementary schools to secondary schools, not necessarily connected with parishes. With the huge rise in membership in the Society in the two decades between 1950 and 1970 and the large numbers in communities serving secondary schools, we could conjecture that it became increasingly inconvenient for large communities to attend daily Eucharist together in the nearest parish Church.

And so in 2007

The issues and questions surrounding our inherited treasure of mixed composition are different in different units of the Society:

In some units there is an increasing proportion of priests, some units now with more than half priests. In other units other questions arise as the number of priests age and diminish. Such is the situation in our Province.

I have attempted to touch on a few of the challenges that face our Province and which will provide the basis of our reflection in the communities during the year:

1. In a Province where the reality will no longer be a priest for each local community, how does the community give reverence to the Rule of Life's call for the centrality of the daily Eucharist?
2. Do we need to do some serious reflection in the communities about the style and content of our prayer together as a community?
3. What witness value/what impact is there today for maintaining mixed composition in the ministries of the Province? Does it make a difference, brothers and priests ministering together? Should that be one of the major criteria for focusing or continuing in a particular ministry?
4. What is the sense among our ordained members of being ordained "for the community?" In small communities of 3 and 4 and 5. Is that a viable concept?
5. Do we dare to call men forward who had not considered being priests to be priests among us?
6. What do we think about equal representation on Council and Chapters, given the proportion of brothers and priests?

Our Province has indeed been blessed with ordained members who are and have been exemplary examples of priestly ministry at the service of community and mission. Their celebration of liturgy and the other sacraments, their pastoral care and their gifts of apostolic service to us and the Church have been most wonderful contributions to the Province mission.

If we are to continue to treasure together this gift of mixed composition in our communities, our ministries and our mission, we need to ask difficult questions and search together for the answers. It is in the interest of beginning and continuing this critical conversation that I have attempted to focus a few of the key issues that I sense around mixed composition.

In August each of the communities will receive a packet of resources from the International Center for Marianist Formation. This resource packet will provide materials and further questions for community reflection during the year.

We need together to see what those precious figurines that have been handed down to us mean and how we will treasure them in a way that will always be at the service of the most faithful imitation of Jesus Christ, Son of God, become Son of Mary for the salvation of all.

Thank you.

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