

## **Missionary Families of Christ**

### **ENGAGEMENT IN PARISHES AND DIOCESES**

Our covenant in MFC states that we will witness to God's love by loving and serving our parish. One of our 7 Core Values is being a servant to the Church. We do these by serving in the parishes and dioceses, especially in the areas of evangelization and family life.

As such, following are the premises for our engagement in the parish:

MFC will look to active participation in the life and mission of the parish.

MFC will serve the parish in the many different ways available, but with particular emphasis on the areas of evangelization and family renewal.

We support the parish in the following ways:

- 1) Many of our members who are parishioners serve in the parish.<sup>1</sup>
- 2) We serve in the context of the Parish Pastoral Plan.
- 3) We proactively lead in evangelization efforts of the parish.
- 4) We are enablers in the establishment and support of BECs.
- 5) We look to the situation of the poor in the parish and advocate the establishment of Restoration Villages.<sup>2</sup>
- 6) We look to the parish priest as the Spiritual Adviser for the chapter.
- 7) We will serve in the Parish Pastoral Council if invited.
- 8) We respect and interact lovingly with other parish groups.

All the above point to looking at our life and service in the parish as an important aspect of our overall work. As such we will strive to balance our time, energy and resources between our trans-parochial work and our engagement in the parish. This translates to the following principles:

We are actively submitted to the parish priest and strive to keep him up-to-date on our life and activities in the parish.

- 2) We will coordinate MFC plans for the year with the parish in order to avoid conflicts.<sup>3</sup>
- 3) We will strive to avoid, to the extent feasible, any MFC activity on Sundays, which are designated for rest, family and parish.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In addition, some are granted the privilege of doing mission in other parishes. This actually should be part of parish life and mission, to share with other parishes its gifts and resources.

<sup>2</sup> A preferential option for the poor is one of our Core Values. Through the Live Christ, Share Christ (LCSC) mission, via its Live Full pillar and in particular the No One in Need (NONE) movement, we help establish Restoration Villages, which are physical communities for the poor. This is a holistic program that includes shelter, livelihood, health, education and values formation. The role of MFC is to support LCSC/NONE in advocating and providing the template, but would look to all parishioners and parish groups to provide funds, programs and resource persons. This work will be directly under the parish, vicariate or diocese, with oversight and coordination work by LCSC/NONE.

<sup>3</sup> In case conflict does arise due to unscheduled parish activities, we will try to reschedule our activity if we still can. If not, we will divide our membership to be able to support both activities.

<sup>4</sup> We do understand that in some situations Sunday may be the only free day available for spiritual activities. This is the case with many overseas workers.

- 4) We will normally participate in Eucharistic celebrations in our parish, except for very special MFC occasions that include Mass.<sup>5</sup>
- 5) We will not hold alternative MFC activities and will participate in the parish celebrations of major events such as Advent, Holy Week, feast of Christ the King, and the parish feast day.
- 6) We will participate in special activities of the parish (as well as diocese and vicariate) when called upon.
- 7) Our members will share their personal financial resources with both MFC and the parish.<sup>6</sup>
- 8) We will integrate, wherever possible, our programs with that of the parish (such as work with the poor and work for life). Where there are no existing parish programs, we will make our programs available for the use of the parish.

On the diocesan and vicariate levels, MFC works on the following principles:

Submission to the bishop.

Collaboration and consultation with the vicars forane.

Service to the diocese in whatever way we can, especially in the areas of evangelization and family renewal.

Active participation in important diocesan and vicariate celebrations and activities.

A basic challenge to our life and mission as MFC is the balance between our trans-parochial activities<sup>7</sup> and our engagement in the parishes. To guide us, we look to the following principles:

- 1) Our basic charism is evangelization within the context of family renewal. This is what makes us MFC.
- 2) Our covenant that includes loving and serving our parish and our core value of being a servant to the Church direct us to be involved in the parishes.
- 3) Our work of evangelization and mission is a constant, while our engagement in the parishes is dependent on a number of factors, including the following:
  - a) Acceptance by the parish priest.
  - b) Adequacy of our membership (warm bodies).<sup>8</sup>
  - c) Availability of parish services, given other individuals and groups serving in the parish.
  - d) The natural fit of whatever services are available or being offered with our basic charism of evangelization founded on family renewal.
- 4) We serve the parish in order to live our charism within the context of the local Church, and not for the sole purpose of recruitment into MFC.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> These are just a few events, such as the anniversary and international conferences.

<sup>6</sup> We basically teach our members to give their financial support to MFC and to the parish. The percentage sharing is up to them.

<sup>7</sup> Any activity that is held outside the parish.

<sup>8</sup> When our membership in the parish is still small, we normally would not volunteer to serve the parish as a community as yet.

<sup>9</sup> However, it will be true that as we serve, there will be those parishioners who will want to be part of our community.

How then should we approach parish involvement?

- 1) Individual MFC members are encouraged to see how they can serve in their personal capacities in the parish.
- 2) Given adequacy of members, MFC should then look into parish involvement as a community. In this we need to ask some questions:
  - a) Do we have members who are willing and able to serve in the parish? Also considering our one-service rule?
  - b) Are there services available that are in line with our charism?<sup>10</sup>
- 3) We look to supporting parish life and formation by encouraging attendance at parish value formation programs and major activities.

What parish services are ideal for MFC?<sup>11</sup>

- 1) Evangelization
- 2) Pre-marriage seminar<sup>12</sup>
- 3) Marriage enrichment retreats<sup>13</sup>
- 4) Seminars/teachings for young couples
- 5) Seminars/teachings for youth
- 6) Seminars/teachings on Pro-Life
- 7) Liturgical Bible Study
- 8) Setting up a parish-based Restoration Village
- 9) Migrants ministry<sup>14</sup>

How should we relate to the parish priest?

- 1) Defer to him with honor and respect.
  - a) Be patient and tolerant when treated by him in a less than upbuilding way.
  - b) Be understanding and supportive, knowing that he carries a heavy burden and oftentimes does not get adequate support from others.
- 2) Be honest and up front with him.
  - a) Regarding our capability to take on services. Do not unduly raise expectations that we will be unable to meet.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> While individual members can serve in any way they like, MFC as a community should only take on service that draws on and enhances our basic calling. Otherwise we might be so burdened with parish service that we neglect our basic mission as MFC. Since we have to juggle our time, energy and resources between community and parish, it becomes win-win if our parish service is in line with our charism. Then there is no conflict as we are able to accomplish both.

<sup>11</sup> Our individual members can also look to becoming Eucharistic ministers and to becoming members of the Parish Pastoral Council.

<sup>12</sup> We can use either our own module or the parish pre-Cana seminar.

<sup>13</sup> It is possible to lead off with the MER for parish couples. Those who become interested can move on to a CLS afterwards.

<sup>14</sup> This directly relates to the challenging situation of migrant families, of which there are so many in the parishes. Furthermore, this makes use of our worldwide presence to network.

<sup>15</sup> It is natural for a parish priest to get excited about the potential of a committed group such as MFC in serving the parish. But if we are overloaded with work, that will eventually take its negative toll.

- b) Regarding conflicting activities that will need to be resolved.
- c) Regarding not taking on services that are not in line with our charism.<sup>16</sup>
- d) Regarding our inability to handle fixed allotments for fundraising.<sup>17</sup>
- e) Regarding the need to help us with our evangelization in order for us to come up with more warm bodies that will serve the parish.
- 3) Build up a personal relationship with him.
  - a) Invite him to family meals as often as possible.<sup>18</sup>
  - b) Invite him to special occasions such as birthday parties.
  - c) Invite him occasionally to a household meeting.
- 4) Keep him informed and updated on MFC life and mission.
  - a) Work out the schedule of activities of both MFC and the parish, and as much as possible avoid conflicts.
  - b) Share significant developments as they happen, especially as it relates to MFC and the Church.<sup>19</sup>
  - c) Give our printed materials, such as the SG's books.
- 5) Invite him to occasionally give a talk to the chapter.<sup>20</sup>
- 6) Greet him on his birthday and ordination anniversary.
- 7) Pray for him often.

What if we are not welcome in the parish?

- 1) We then wait for a more opportune time. In the meantime, we strive to get into the good graces of the parish priest.
- 2) We can look to serving in our individual capacities.<sup>21</sup>
- 3) Our basic work of evangelization goes on, with our programs and activities done outside of the parish.<sup>22</sup>

Some practical pastoral considerations:

- 1) One of the best services we can extend to the parish is to help them develop an evangelistic mindset. A big majority of Catholics are not that active in their faith or parish life. We should strive to help the parish become a missionary parish.<sup>23</sup>
- 2) We can support the BEC. Ideally our brethren can be leaders of the BEC.

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<sup>16</sup> Explain that this will just exhaust us and in the long run prevent us from serving the parish better.

<sup>17</sup> Especially as we see that this will adversely affect our own financial giving to MFC.

<sup>18</sup> This should be rotated among MFC members, so that one or a few are not burdened. This also affords the parish priest an opportunity to meet his parishioners up close and personal.

<sup>19</sup> Such as Church appointments of MFC leaders. Or our pro-life involvement.

<sup>20</sup> It is also all right for him to give a talk in a CLS. Just encourage him to basically follow the outline.

<sup>21</sup> This is one good way of eventually getting into the good graces of the parish priest, as he sees the committed service of our members.

<sup>22</sup> It is our basic right as Catholics to form associations and to participate in the mission of the Church. This does not need the permission of the parish priest or bishop.

<sup>23</sup> Parish services benefit those who are active in the parish, but are of no benefit to those who are inactive or who do not attend church activities.

- 3) We can support the PREX. As graduates of the PREX seminar are encouraged to find their place in the different groups and associations in the parish, some may even desire to move on to MFC.
- 4) We should develop good relationships with other parish organizations. We should never be in a competitive mode. Rather, we should cooperate and collaborate, recognizing the good that they do for the parish.

### **Some FAQs:**

Q: In case of conflict in schedule between a parish activity and an MFC activity, which prevails?

A: Both are priorities, so neither should necessarily prevail over the other. We should try to avoid conflict by planning ahead, and coordinating our plans with the parish priest and the PPC regarding parish activities for the year. Despite this there might still be conflicts, in which case we assess the particular situation. If we can reschedule our community activity without much difficulty, let us do so. If not, then let us decide if one activity should be favored over the other. If both are important, then we can divide our members and attend both.

Q: I am a Special Minister of Holy Communion. Which of the two, parish and community, has the priority in regards to service to the Lord?

A: As mentioned above, both service to the parish and to the community are important and are priorities. If one can only do one and not both, then one has to choose. In either case, one serves the Lord.

Q: How should a member with 2 or more services (including in the parish) and who wants to adhere to the one-service rule disengage from his other service?

A: He should discern what he can handle, and given that he cannot handle 2 or more services, then discern where God wants him. This is done together with his leaders and peers. Before disengaging, he should explain his decision (to the MFC head and/or the parish priest/PPC) and provide for some replacement or transition time so that continuity is not disrupted.

Q: What is the meaning of the one-service rule?

A: It means we focus on handling one major service so as to do it justice. Unless one is a fulltimer or is retired or his circumstances allow him to take on more, one should take on only one major service.

Q: What should be done to a Household Servant who because of parish involvement can no longer perform his pastoral duties?

A: Any leader who can no longer perform his pastoral duty in MFC should be replaced, for his own good and for the good of those whom he serves. We follow our basic one-service rule.

Q: What if an MFC leader is asked by the parish priest to handle a regular program of the parish?

A: We should be open to serving in the parish, especially if the parish priest requests it. But we should also consider if the service is in line with our charism of evangelization and family renewal. If not, the MFC leader can still consider taking on the service, if he feels called to it, especially if it will not affect his present service. If it will affect his MFC service, then he should consider if

someone can take over his present service, or if someone else can take on the parish service.

Q: Since we are an evangelistic community, should we not concentrate mainly on evangelization instead of serving in other ways?

A: Evangelization is indeed our basic mission and the reason for our existence. We must never forget or neglect our evangelization. Every MFC member is an evangelizer. We do this in the normal day-to-day circumstances of our lives. So whatever else we do, like secular work or parish work, should not be cause not to evangelize. We must have our regular CLSs. Thus, since we are also involved in the parish and we also have different pastoral services in the community, there is a division of labor that happens. Everyone is an evangelizer and invites people to our CLSs, but different people and groups then do different things, such as handling households, holding CLSs, promoting pro-life, going out on mission, serving in the parish, etc.

Q: Why do we keep MFC Kids and MFC Youth separate from the parish kids and youth ministries?

A: MFC is an ecclesial movement that focuses on family renewal. God gave us our different MFC Sections in order to provide a good support environment to our members at the different stages of their lives. We have already seen how effective this is through the years. On the other hand, parishes might not have effective groups for youth or kids. But we are also parish-based, and so we should try to see how our own MFC Kids and MFC Youth can intersect in the parishes. If the kids and youth programs are assigned to us, then that might be ideal. If not, then we just have to see how we can help out in the parish ministries.

Q: Our chapter tithe collection is adversely affected because we have many members and leaders serving the parish who already have to shell out money for parish projects and fundraising. How do we handle this?

A: We are committed to support the parish and this includes money. However, we should also support our community, and we see how massive is the work that we do and can still do. If one were only to give a full tithe (that is, 10%), then there should be no problem at all, and both community and parish would be satisfied. But since most, unfortunately, do not give a full tithe, then one must decide how one splits his contribution between MFC and the parish. The effort of leaders should be to push for true financial stewardship among our members, so that there would be enough for both our community and our parish.

Q: Why do we avoid Sunday assemblies when we are mandated to observe the “day of the Lord” with our community that is the parish?

A: Sundays should be our time for Mass, for rest and for family. What we try to avoid, if possible, are MFC activities outside of the parish on Sundays. It would be nice if we had an MFC Sunday activity that is also a parish activity and that included our whole family.

Q: As Family Life Ministry couple coordinators, one of the programs we have to implement in the parish is Marriage Enrichment. Is it all right for us to attend the Marriage Encounter weekend conducted by the parish?

A: The ME weekend is helpful, and if one can attend it, then it would be good to do so. It would

then be good to follow up with our MER. This is a service we can do for the parish.

Q: Can we introduce our other modules such as MER, Spiritual Gifts, etc. to non-members of MFC? Can we modify them to include CLS talks so that we could have different entry points?

A: Yes, we can introduce or offer our formation modules to parishioners who are not MFC members. In fact, we are already doing so through LCSC. Just be prudent in the offerings. For example, the Spiritual Gifts course is founded on having gone through the CLS and the Covenant Recollection (CR). One who has not had exposure to charismatic renewal may not appreciate this course. It would be best to keep the formation modules as they are, not “chop-sueyed” with inputs from other courses. There will be time enough for the CLS. Indeed, offering the courses would be entry points for our parish involvement. From there, hopefully parishioners would want more, in which case the CLS can be offered. Other entry points would be LBS, work with the poor, pro-life, migrant ministry.

Q: Can we hold a CLS for the parish without mentioning the name MFC?

A: Yes, by way of the LCSC, which conducts the Life in Christ Seminar (LCS), which has the same content as the CLS. We do this as a service for the parish. Follow-through can be monthly charismatic prayer meetings, where there is worship, a teaching, possibly sharings, possibly discussion groups, and fellowship. From those who continue to participate in this, there will be those who will want a deeper commitment. Then we can invite them to continue in households, on to the CR, then on to membership in MFC.

Q: Can we get the support of MFC from other parishes and/or full-time workers when parish activities require resource persons/speakers?

A: Of course. We are a servant to the Church. In fact, it is our wide resources and varied experiences that are helpful in helping particular parishes.

Q: Can you clarify our “Church Relations”?

A: In general, the Church liaison (diocesan, vicariate, parish) looks into the relationship between MFC and the parish, vicariate or diocese, and helps ensure that such relationship is going well, with MFC adequately involved in Church service and activities. He/she cultivates and maintains relationship with the bishop, vicar general or parish priest, respectively.

Q: Can we engage in other parishes other than the parish where we are based?

A: Some parishes will need help from outside, especially if our membership in the parish is still small. So yes, those outside the parish can help out in a particular parish. Ultimately it would be good if parishioners are the ones serving in their own respective parishes.

Q: By becoming parish-based, have we ceased being trans-parochial?

A: We are both. As an ecclesial movement that is present in many different parishes, dioceses and countries, we are still trans-parochial. However, our localized units that are the chapters are in effect parish-based. The challenge is how to live out both.

Q: What do we do in case the parish priest is lukewarm or worse has negative reception for MFC?

A: As Jesus instructed his disciples, you can shake the dust of the parish from your sandals. Look for receptive parishes. There is so much work to be done, and if our service is rejected in one place, then we are able to serve Christ in other places. However, our members in their individual capacities, not as MFC but as parishioners, can still try to serve in various ways. Finally, continue to pray for your parish priest and look for opportunities to develop a positive relationship with him.

Q: As MFC, what shall we do if the parish priest has favoritism in terms of religious organizations in the parish?

A: You can start to serve as individuals in various ways, and as the parish priest sees how reliable and dependable you are, he might be more open to considering MFC as a partner in serving the parish. If not, and if the other religious organizations are serving well, then simply rejoice.

Q: How do we say no to the request of our parish priest without making him feel rejected?

A: Explain why you are saying no. Suggest alternatives to his need. Suggest other ways by which we can help in the parish.

Q: Are we going to accept services like spearheading a Santa Cruzan or *pabasa* that is not related to family and life?

A: Our charism is evangelization and family renewal. It is best if our service is along these lines. However, we are also committed to just be a servant to the Church. So we may accept such services. One aspect to consider: it is as we become known by parishioners, both individually and as a community, that we can be more accepted and thus more effectively do our work of evangelization and family renewal.

(SG. Oct 7, 2019)