

## Marianist Resources for University Governance

(N.B. not to be used without permission of the author: [mmustain@stmarytx.edu](mailto:mmustain@stmarytx.edu) )

AMU Lecture Series 2015

Megan Mustain

I'll begin by saying something that we all know, or at least that we all feel: as institutions go, the contemporary university is a rather odd duck. Its institutional culture, its organizational and governance structures, and its decision-making processes blend the self-regulating community of medieval guilds, the managerial hierarchies and fiduciary duties of the post-industrial business world, the bureaucratic systems of the modern state, and the checks and balances of multi-cameral legislative systems. Moreover, each university does this in its own way, emphasizing different models in different units, synthesizing them by different means and with different degrees of success. On the whole, though, our universities have borrowed some elements here and others there, creating a *reasonably* well-functioning patchwork of governance ideals and structures.

This patchwork strategy is not without its issues, however. Many of the more intractable disputes on our campuses arise from the conflicting priorities enshrined in these modes of operation and governance. In particular, the sometimes dramatic conflicts between faculty and administration (or academic and non-academic units) arise from the tensions between and among the different *ends* and the different *means and methods* of the various governance models and processes at work on our campuses.

## *A Compacted History*

In its earliest days, a university simply *was* a faculty guild. They were synonymous. (Indeed, the term “universitas” was originally used by craftsman’s guilds—the joiners’ or stonecarvers’ university—and was adopted with equivalent meaning by the universities of scholars and students.) The faculty managed itself; determined its own membership, activities, and policies; made decisions regarding its direction and operations; and negotiated on its own behalf with local, state, and church authorities. Administrative roles were held by faculty—Chairs, Deans, Provosts, and the like—and the entirety of the institutions and their management was explicitly and clearly academic in purpose and function. Outside the classroom, these early universities looked very different from the schools of today. There were no co-curricular programs, no gymnasiums, no dormitories or cafeterias, no athletics, no financial aid offices, campus police, nor even libraries. In short, universities were not *places*; they were first and foremost *associations* of teacher-scholars. To put it into context, we could take our current organizational charts and simply delete everything that isn’t under the Office of the Provost (and some of the stuff that is, too).

Even after universities evolved into *places*—with campuses, residence halls, admissions offices, and the like—the faculty remained the central focus (and locus) for carrying out each institution’s educative mission. Decisions about admissions, facilities, budgets, extra-curricular activities, library resources, and the like were made by the faculty and faculty-administrators. And, significantly, at *Marianist* universities the faculty was made up of Marianist religious. The administration was Marianist religious. And, for the most part, the professional and non-professional staff was Marianist religious. Thus, while certainly *not* a guild, the Marianists’ common formation, their shared vocation as educators, and their lives in tight community

dovetailed nicely with the universities' guild-roots. The formative organizing of *our* institutions was thus (a) rooted in a guild model of governance, and (b) in important ways commensurate with the guild model until quite recently. [*ML Hill: They all ate dinner together!*]

The landscape of our universities today looks rather different. We have:

- Predominately lay faculty, staff, and administration;
- Larger and more complex institutional structures and substructures;
- Increased external pressure from accreditors, federal and state agencies, following from increased recognition of state interest in higher education; and
- Dramatic increases in the numbers of students served and institutions serving them:
  - o 1859: 381 Higher Education Institutions in US (TX=5, OH=30, HI=0\*)
  - o 1869: 563 Higher Education Institutions in US; 63,000 students
  - o 1919: 1,041 Institutions; 598,000 students
  - o 1959: 2,004 Institutions; 3,640,000 students
  - o 1989: 3,535 Institutions; 13,500,000 students
  - o 2014: 4,599 Institutions; 21,000,000 students<sup>1</sup>

For most universities, these changes have served to radically outstrip the resources of the guild model, and non-academic full-time administrators were brought in to take over much of the increasing work of institutional management. With this shift in personnel came the introduction of new ways of talking about our institutions and new ways of working within them, many of which are borrowed or adapted from the corporate sector. We added new Offices, with professional Vice Presidents, Associate Vice Presidents, and Directors to manage and direct their work. Each university's organizational chart shows its unique working out of the divisions of labor, the lateral and hierarchical reporting structures, and the assignments of decision-making authority of these units and sub-units. Terms like "strategic planning," "zero-based budgeting,"

---

<sup>1</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, "120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait," January 1993.

“peer institutions,” “compliance reports,” and “value-added” came to become regular parts of our conversations. Flows of information became increasingly regularized, such that we now have a policy, a form, and/or a committee for almost everything—including hitherto unthinkable things like learning outcomes reports, parking appeals, and social media use.

The guild remains, however uncomfortably, in the midst of all of this. Faculty members, academic disciplines and departments, and Colleges/Schools still work much as the guilds did. They define themselves and their curriculae; discern their collective priorities; hire, form, and promote their own members; and select their own leaders and representatives (not incidentally, election/selection is frequently thought of as “taking one for the team” rather than something *sought after* by those chosen). The titles that matter most to faculty members are the marks of guild-membership: Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Full Professor. And though we deeply appreciate their service, even such titles as “Department Chair” and “Dean” strike many of us as somewhat extraneous to our vocation, so much so that we are somewhat suspicious of any among us who actively seek such roles.

The faculty guild has the most profound historical claim to a clear, singular governance model for higher education. This history is not incidental, though. Given that education is not an *industry* that follows a producer-consumer model, and that its *end* and its *process* are one and the same—i.e. the searching together for truth—education rightly demands a special form of community and processes of deliberation and decision-making that sustain such a community.

And yet, the context of higher education today is too much for the faculty guild to bear on its own. With the State’s interests in higher education and the increasing numbers of students and universities that emerged in response to this State interest (with its attendant funding) come the

sorts of economic pressures, regulations, and external accountabilities that sounded the death knell of the craft guilds.

The point here is this: when we look honestly at our situation, we find ourselves caught, trapped. We *need* the community of scholars, the guild, which comprises the center of education. And the guild *needs* self-governing community in order to keep to its mission of truth-seeking. Yet, at the same time, we *need* to (a) keep the doors open and (b) care for the real needs of our students and our colleagues outside the classroom. In our context these concerns require significant expertise and time commitments in such areas as finance, advancement, enrollment, facilities, financial aid, human resources, student development, and athletics. And these units, in order to function well, *need* the authority to make the decisions and employ the means that are appropriate to their essential work.

On the whole, we have tried to reconcile these conflicting demands by creating representative bodies, Faculty Senates and Staff Councils, which see themselves as information hubs, consultative bodies, and/or as advocates of shared governance (and vocal critics of its absence). We have appointed or elected faculty members to serve on university and Board committees. With these strategies we are in the mainstream of American universities, using the means of democratic representation and decision-making as tools to clarify and amplify the voices of groups with a vested interest in the working of the institution. But too often such bodies become ineffectual, either by their own doing, by being sidelined and avoided, or both. Too often, representation is merely a token presence, a single voice or vote among many. Here again is another mismatch with the hierarchical business-model, in which decision-making authority flows from above and information from below.

In a nutshell, then, we have:

1. A faculty that remains mission-central, but is significantly disempowered and disconcerted by the intrusion and proliferation of the methods, rhetoric, and priorities of the corporate world and government bureaucracies into what they see as a sacred vocation.
2. A growing number of professional administrators and staff who are bewildered and frustrated at the intrusion into their work of voices outside the chain of command and the non-responsiveness (or outright resistance) of the faculty to methods, decisions, and initiatives that would make the business of the university run more smoothly, efficiently, and accountably.

As one surveys the landscape of American higher education, one feels at times that the only way out of this is the total eclipse of one group by the other.

**And yet**, I will argue, we are, by virtue of our Marianist heritage, in the best possible position to negotiate this difficult terrain. In particular, I wish to highlight two elements of the Marianist “way”—the charism of its founder Blessed William Joseph Chaminade—that may serve as guides, resources, and even as a set of diagnostic tools for thinking about and doing university governance.

## **II. Marianist Organizational Structures**

In 1835, William Joseph Chaminade wrote, “I have knowledge of the formation of a certain number of religious orders, ancient and modern. I do not know one which began with as many formalities capable of inspiring confidence as the Society of Mary.”<sup>2</sup> Chaminade’s work establishing the Bordeaux sodalities and his collaborations with Thérèse de Lamouous in

---

<sup>2</sup> *Lettres 3*, to Lalanne, Dec. 24, 1835, no. 811, p. 547. In Vincent R. Vasey, SM, *Chaminade: Another Portrait* (Dayton, OH: Marianist Resources Commission, 1987), p. 136.

establishing the Miséricorde and with Adèle de Batz de Trenquëllon in establishing the Daughters of Mary confirmed in him that the organizational structures and practices—the ‘formalities’—began there and codified in to the Constitutions of the Daughters of Mary and the Society of Mary were both practically and philosophically sound: “You could adopt another plan; but it would not be so good, at least, for us. Everything in a society must be coordinated to its spirit and ends.”<sup>3</sup>

What are these ends? And what is this spirit? What is, in short, our spiritual patrimony (*Patrimonium Instituti*)? I do not pretend to exhaust this question. Instead, I focus on two *pieces* of this inheritance.

### ***Mixed Composition***

Our first Marianist resource is “mixed composition,” the full and equal inclusion of laypersons, Sisters, Brothers, and Priests in the Marianist family. William Joseph Chaminade modeled the composition of Marianist community on that of the Church, the Body of Christ, properly conceived. The Church was *not* its priests, though they were essential. Nor was it its non-clerical religious, though they too were essential. Nor was it its committed laity, though we similarly cannot conceive of the Church without them. Chaminade looked to Jesus’s own community, those he gathered and sent, and saw a group whose mixed membership was not to be dismissed as mere historical accident. Its composition, and that of the early Christian community, was decidedly mixed—including men, women, poor, rich, tax collectors, and fishermen. (If anything, the demographics skewed noticeably toward fishermen.) For Chaminade, the fact of mixed composition was *meaningful, prophetic* and thus *ideal*, and *aspirational*. He sought to

---

<sup>3</sup> *Lettres 3*, to Lalanne, July 5-7, 1831, no. 594, pp. 37-38. In Vincent R. Vasey, SM, *Chaminade: Another Portrait* (Dayton, OH: Marianist Resources Commission, 1987), p. 179.

emulate the early Christian community's "union without confusion." Thus Vincent Vasey writes of Chaminade's vision:

He saw his foundations as the Church in miniature, a reflection, among other things, of the Church's own catholicity or universality. The Church had to be Catholic in doctrine, in sacraments, in membership, of all ranks of society, for it is the continuation on earth of Christ, His Mystical Body. So too the Society was to include all persons, and because it accepted Mary's own mission, open, in principle, to every form of apostolate, to use all means comprised in the term education in the broadest sense.<sup>4</sup>

This foundational inclusivity offers us a source of wisdom and strength that many Catholic universities lack. I recall talking with a colleague from the University of Dayton after-hours at a gathering of Catholic university professors. Many of the day's discussions with other professors had been filled with angst and hopelessness about how to handle the declining numbers of religious at American Catholic universities. When we were alone, over a glass of excellent wine, she commented that Marianist universities had less cause for such despair, that "we've got this covered." We have, 'baked in' as it were, the cultural and spiritual resources with which to invite and foster *all* members of our community into the fullness of our mission. It is as James Joyce said of the Catholic Church: "here comes everybody."

Thus, though we must remain concerned about the dwindling presence of vowed religious on our campuses, we can and must *think about our laypersons as bearers of the mission*. We can and must *invite them into a life of permanent mission*. And, with creative response to the "signs of the times," we can and must *nourish mission-centeredness in all our works*—from the classroom to the boardroom, from the dormitories to the bookstore, from the bursar's office to the campus police. To do this, we must *form ourselves and each other*, and recognize that formation, in Chaminade's vision, requires both reflection/study and practice.

---

<sup>4</sup> Vasey, *Chaminade: Another Portrait*, 158.

Again, Chaminade's model is Christ, whose wholeness and perfect integrity allowed him to attend to everything, understand everything, and weigh everything in his decisions. For Chaminade, we are, each and all, the Body of Christ—we aspire to be it because we are that Body in germ, however imperfectly realized. And, like Mary, whose 'yes' brought Jesus into the world, we imagine ourselves as mothers and nurturers, bringers-forth of a bold, vibrant, and inclusive community.

### ***The Three Offices***

Chaminade was acutely aware that such inclusiveness, if it is truly to be “union without confusion,” demands careful attention to the shared formation, structures, and processes of the community. And perhaps the most distinctive shared structure in the Marianist family is that of the Three Offices.

This structure is modeled again on the person of Jesus Christ, specifically his “offices” or “roles” as priest, prophet, and king. Jesus was all three of these simultaneously, and in his hands the three functions—those of sanctifying, teaching, and earthly governance—were in perfect harmony. Oversimplifying for a moment, we might say that the *why*, the *what*, and the *how* of Jesus's work were each individually, and taken together, in perfect accord.

For Chaminade, the Church (the Body of Christ) and the Marianist family that sought to emulate Jesus and his Church, were charged with sharing and uniting these three concerns, working to bring the why, what, and how of human living into ever more perfect harmony.

Chaminade did not shrink from the grandiose nature of such a charge; thus in his letter to the retreat masters in 1839 he wrote, “ours is a great work, a magnificent work.”<sup>5</sup>

To give shape to this “magnificent work” Chaminade developed the Three Offices system, which was to structure all Marianist communities, from the individual houses to the General Chapter. The Offices parallel those of Christ: Zeal (priest), Education (prophet), and Temporalities (king). At every level, Marianist communities organize themselves with three assistants—one for each Office—and an elected Superior/Director to whom the Assistants report and with whom they consult in Council. At Council, the concerns assigned to each Office are brought to bear upon one another: “the good functioning of the community presupposes frequent exchanges of views among the Assistants.”<sup>6</sup> The 1967 Constitutions of the Society of Mary frames each office as follows:

“The Office of Zeal [Religious Life]...has as object to nurture and increase fervor in each of the religious and in each of its works according to the spirit of the Society....

“The Office of Instruction [Education] has for its object intellectual, moral and professional formation at all levels of education and the promotion of the lay apostolate in the Church....

“The Office of Temporalities has for its object the management of the material goods of the Society and its works, the promotion of social justice, and the formation of those engaged in these activities.”<sup>7</sup>

Following my earlier oversimplification: *Zeal* is concerned to nurture our common purpose, ensuring that we grasp and share the “why” of our work; *Education* concerns the “what,” the principal work itself—that is, the development of persons in and for community; and

---

<sup>5</sup> William Joseph Chaminade, “Letter to the Retreat Masters of 1839,” translated by Lawrence J. Cada, SM (Dayton, OH: Cincinnati Province of the Society of Mary, 1989), 10.

<sup>6</sup> Constitutions of the Society of Mary, 1967 (St. Louis: Maryhurst Press, 1967), p. 75.

<sup>7</sup> Though the work of a particular apostolic community might fall under one of these Offices (as our schools and universities fall under the domain of the Office of Instruction), Chaminade’s structure calls each to be internally organized and governed in accordance with this Three Offices structure, but also, through the Office under which it falls, to remain answerable to the other two Offices at the next highest level. Through its Council of Assistants and Director/Superior, each “level” of Marianist community is charged with harmonizing the three co-equal concerns in its planning, its decisions, and, indeed, in all the activities of the community and its members.

*Temporalities* concerns the “how,” creating and sustaining the financial, logistical, and material foundations of our work. Each Office bears special responsibility for expertise in and attention to its area of concern, and its close collaboration with the other Offices ensures that all decisions consider and reconcile *together* the tensions between “why,” “what,” and “how.” As Joe Stefanelli tells us, the special expertise of each office does not imply a narrowness of purpose, for they cannot truly be conceived without one another: “*each* Office is concerned with the attainment of *all three* objects.”<sup>8</sup>

The Marianist *Rule of Life* elaborates the connection between the structural and the spiritual operative here: “The Offices are an instrument for the renewal of persons and communities, for constant adaptation of our apostolic mission and for promoting the participation of all in our common responsibilities.”<sup>9</sup> On a more personal level, Bro. Tom Giardino writes, “they call us to be concerned with our spiritual life, to develop our intellectual abilities as a way to understand ourselves and the world, and to emphasize our relationship to the material world as we seek to help it become one of justice, peace, and integrity of creation.”<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, even if it is the case that our universities cannot be (or should not be) *restructured* whole cloth, we may look to the spirituality of governance that the Three Offices represents. In so doing, we allow Chaminade’s thinking about Marianist institutions to offer us powerful insights with which to critique our structures and practices, and with which to reshape them in creative response.

### **III. A Spirituality of Governance: Preliminary Insights**

---

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Stefanelli, SM, “The Three Offices,” in *Commentary on the Rule of Life*, p. 1175.

<sup>9</sup> *The Rule of Life of the Society of Mary*, Art. 106.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas F. Giardino, SM, *The Promise and the Path: Starting and Sustaining Marianist Communities* (Dayton, OH: North American Center for Marianist Studies, 2011), p.45.

What are the insights to glean from this? What can we learn from Blessed Chaminade's gifts to us? How can our Marianist heritage help us to prevent and respond to the tensions we face in our university communities? I will offer but a few suggestions, as such discernment cannot and should not be done by a single person.

- Marianist governance insists that areas of concern should be clearly defined, but that the responsibility of each is to the whole community.
- Such shared responsibility demands more than development of specialized expertise (though that too is crucial); it requires ongoing *formation* through involvement in discussions of what we do, why we do it, and how it gets done.
- The presence of each member of our community is a precious gift, without distinction or exception. Neither rank, nor role, nor any other form of status affects the infinite worth of a person *in herself* or *to our community*. Each person's voice contributes something; its silence or its absence is always a loss.
- Decisions should be as thoroughly collaborative and inclusive as possible, even at the expense of efficiency. Decisions about decision-making processes are particularly important to take to the community. Non-collaboration should be justified, either by collaboratively developed rule or on an *ad hoc* basis.
- Collaboration and shared responsibility require the fullest possible transparency and communication, both horizontally and vertically. (Chaminade was known to copy his memoranda and letters to everyone even peripherally involved.) Exceptions to transparency and communications should be justified, either by collaboratively developed rule or on an *ad hoc* basis.

- In all that we do, the three concerns—the why, the what, and the how —are co-implicated and co-equal in importance. We must strive for ever more perfect harmony among these, both internally (i.e. for our institutional structures and processes) and externally (i.e. for our outward-facing activities and projects).
- *Tension* can be creative. It is not “un-Marianist” to disagree. We seek harmony, but should not gloss over disharmonies with mere pleasantries. We must build the sorts of trust and mutual respect that allow us to disagree—even strongly—and to offer and receive criticism, even across ranks and areas. (Not incidental here is the special privilege of tenured faculty to voice opposition. This should not be diminished, by any means. Rather, I think that ‘voice’ should not be a special privilege—it should be encouraged and protected for all members of the community.)
- Finally, a return to the beginning: The processes and models of governance I referred to in the first section *may* each have roles to play. But decisions about which processes and models we use should be a matter of careful deliberation by the community, with the unity of the Three Concerns front and center in our conversations. To quote again Fr. Chaminade: “Everything in a society must be coordinated to its spirit and ends.”

In all of this, I hoped to offer both hope and caution, both insight and critique. But above all, I hoped to offer fodder for discussion, and a call for *each of us* and *all of us* to continue the work of formative discernment to which our Marianist heritage gathers and sends us. Any successes we create will benefit our own institutions, certainly. But more than this, we three Marianist universities, with our commonalities and—just as important—our differences, stand a real

chance at developing means of governance that could serve as models even to non-Marianist and non-Catholic institutions.

[Also: If you find yourselves thinking about governance issues, I highly recommend the newly published *Principal Characteristics of Marianist Administration*.]