



# MIV

## Marianist International Volunteers

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Marianist Family  
[www.marianist.org](http://www.marianist.org)

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Dear friends of the Marianist Family,

As the year 2008 is already in full swing, we feel a renewal of our energies and expectations to keep on working for peace and social justice in this world, especially from the opportunity to serve that the MIV proposes to the Marianist Family, not only for our volunteers, but also for all those interested in supporting this venture.

And it is precisely this very last point that we think it's very important to call to mind: our volunteers are far from being «lonesome rangers» who choose a place of mission by themselves, who arrive some place to serve for a certain period of time, and who re-enter with no support. Conversely, our Marianist volunteers are already members of the Marianist Family, where they have matured and pondered in community over this possibility to serve as an international volunteer, and those who do not belong to the Marianist Family but who feel the call to serve with the MIV, are immediately invited to participate in their local Marianist Family activities, as an MLC member, as a part-time volunteer in a local Marianist ministry, etc, and they are strongly encouraged to choose a Marianist lay or religious spiritual guide to accompany them throughout their preparation, formation and discernment process. When our volunteers are ready to start their term of service, they are placed in an existing program (religious ministry or social-justice oriented) run by another community of the Marianist Family in the world, or sometimes in the same country. This means that there is always a community that SENDS our volunteers and another that HOSTS our volunteers, both parts belonging to the Marianist Family, and when our volunteers finish their term of service, they are welcomed and supported by their local community. This very last aspect is a very important one, sometimes a lot of focus is given to volunteers' preparation, formation and support previous and during their mission, but they are sometimes neglected upon their re-entry. From the MIV, we see to it that our volunteers, when possible, can apply all they learnt and lived during their mission in their local Marianist communities and that they can feel supported by them.

All this is to remind ourselves, as members of the Marianist Family, that we also have a nice and challenging mission to accompany and support our volunteers. We all know that this is an opportunity of life and service that not many people can live, but as members of the Marianist Family, there are myriad ways we can support our volunteers, both materially and spiritually, and this is one of the most important reasons why we are publishing this Newsletter: to inform you about what our volunteers are doing in different parts of the world, may be in your country, and to spread the word, so that others who feel the same call can get the inspiration from others who are already volunteering. And speaking of inspiration, we have included in this issue some stories and reflections from the US Marianist Volunteer Program (MVP), which, even though is a program that only accepts US volunteers, has a richness of its own that can be very inspirational for other people, who can later volunteer in any other corner of the world where the Marianist Family is present.

We hope that the articles in this Newsletter are of your interest, and as usual, never hesitate to make comments, questions or suggestions about the contents of this publication.

May the Spirit of the Resurrected renew our forces to work for another world possible for all of us.

**José Luis Pérez**, MIV Coordinator

## MIV Nature and Mission.

In its last meeting back in November 2007, the World Council of the Marianist Family, after much reflection and prayer, has come to the following conclusions about the Nature and Mission of the MIV. We've decided to publish a part of this document in this Newsletter to help better understand the responsibilities of the MIV towards the international mission of the Marianist Family.

VIM was an initiative undertaken in the year 2001 with the indication that it would be evaluated after three years. In 2004 it was decided to continue the program. Now, at this point, in 2007, stemming from our experience over these years, and augmented by plentiful dialog among the members of the Council, an agreement has been reached as to the nature of VIM, based on the following points:

- a) It intends to be an instrument for the **promotion of volunteerism within the Marianist Family.**
- b) Means to achieve this goal:
  - ... by **the collection and diffusion of information** regarding volunteers as to their locations and projects which derive from within the Marianist Family around the world;
  - ... by **the advising and accompaniment**, from the legal and formative points of view, of those who send volunteers, as well as those who receive them;
  - ... by the placing in **contact with each other possible volunteers and possible places in which they may lend their services.**
- c) The proposed activities for the volunteers, as well as the volunteers themselves, **should pertain to at least one of the Branches of the Marianist Family, or be endorsed by one of them.**
- d) The sending of volunteers presupposes from the start a firm commitment on the part of the party who sends and the party who receives. This commitment is to assure and guarantee training and supervision of the volunteer, as well as that the service will, indeed be rendered. With this in mind, VIM **facilitates and advises the interaction between the parties involved, but it is not the one who either sends or receives.** Therefore, VIM does not assume any responsibility for either sending or receiving.
- e) VIM is established, sustained and directed by the World Council of the Marianist Family.
- f) For the carrying out of its work, an Executive Coordinator is named by the said Council (José Luis Pérez, MLC Argentina) who will act in conjunction with a Delegate of the Council (Anthony Garascia MLC USA) who has been designated by a vote of the Council members. In addition he works to form a network among the local heads of those entities in different places which send or receive the volunteers.
- g) Funding for VIM will come from the World Council. The expenses will be distributed among the different Branches proportionally.

We hope that this excerpt will clarify the mission and nature of the MIV, and again, we'll be happy to receive your comments, reflections and suggestions for a better management of the MIV program.



The World Council of the Marianist Family in their last meeting in Rome, November 2007.

The  
Democratic  
Republic of  
Congo: a  
new  
challenge  
for the MIV.

Congo is a very surprising and captivating country. Its reality has oftentimes made me ponder: why am I here? Will my effort bear any fruit? Will it be good for something?

Many times throughout my term of service I've had the chance to interact and share with volunteers from other NGOs. I don't regret the choice I made at all. Volunteering with the MIV and the DCC together (Catholic Delegation for Cooperation) is a unique experience. The most important aspect when it comes to integrating to a new culture is to live WITH the people in Congo. I remember that when I was trained by the DCC before coming here, one of our teachers would say: when you live an international experience, you will walk a road towards the culture of the «other», but you will never be able to go all the way. The longer you stay there, the further you will go. And then, when you reenter your country of origin, you will realize that you have also become more distant from your own culture. Now I see how true all these teachings were, and I truly think that the MIV and the DCC can help each other build bridges and help volunteers «melt with the landscape». I have a French friend who is currently volunteering with a very big international organization. She suffers really badly because she spends the whole day locked up in her placement, and at home she also lives locked up, in order to prevent possible crimes. After volunteering in Africa with the DCC for 2 years, she doesn't understand at all why her organization forbids her from integrating into the Congo culture, supposedly for safety reasons. Safety is truly important, I have suffered some consequences myself when I was mugged by some armed street kids, called here segues, and later I was almost attacked again, but I was able to get through this second time. At any rate, I'm not in favor of taking exaggerated security measures, even if these aggressions have left a mark on me.

As regards the future of the Marianist school here, the new teaching material has already been selected and ordered. It will now start its long route to arrive here in Congo. This material will give the school the chance to be equipped with updated technology, which will pave the way for a more peaceful and organized education, especially for the more practical, hands-on courses, which are almost inexistent in schools in Congo.



At the Saint Raphael School, things are running pretty smoothly. However, the reality is pretty far from the clichés of African schools in which in its overpopulated classes, students are extremely eager and enthusiastic to learn. Unfortunately this is not the case here: classes are truly overcrowded, sometimes there's up to 80 and 90 students in each one! But it's terribly difficult for a European to teach and to control them, which is linked to the degree of credibility of what we say to them. The youth believe that there is no future, fatal events occur all the time in Congo, and they are persuaded that at the end of their studies they will be confronted with unemployment and all kinds of limitations. My impression is that people don't want to struggle any more; they no longer have the courage to struggle to improve their own conditions and to help their country get out from under. The effort we make



in explaining to them how necessary it is to study to have a better future seems to be in vain. They don't believe in our message, and I sometimes even wonder if we are not causing the opposite effect.

I hope that in the future the efforts of those who do believe in a better future and in hard work will help improve the living conditions in Congo, and that everyone will have equal opportunities for this.

As to my personal situation, I'm coming to the end of my mission, and I feel that I did what I could: I have taught, I have helped in the organization of the new school here, I have collaborated with the Scouts group... I soon realized when I arrived here that I would not be able to change the world. I knew this even before I left France, but well, at least now I know that I collaborated with one stone in the construction of the building. I hope that my students will remember the teachings I could give them. I still have three months ahead before the end of my year as a volunteer, and I know that many new discoveries are awaiting me in the horizon!

**Jean-Emil**  
**MIV Volunteer**  
**from Haiti**  
**to Congo-Brazzaville**

**A Lay**  
**Marianist**  
**from Haiti in**  
**mission in**  
**Congo -**  
**Brazzaville!**

I work at the Monkondo library in the Sainte Rite School as an archivist and librarian from 8 am to 1 pm. I take care of the students, the library members, and the people who spend some reading time here. There is only one more person here who works with me, Brother Omer SM, an MLC coordinator. Every Saturday I participate in the MLC meetings to share my experience and help animate the MLC communities in Brazzaville. Besides, I have one morning prayer and one evening Mass every day with the community.



This experience has been very important, and I've learnt a whole lot in my job, which may not seem to be extremely demanding, but it has been kindly accepted and deeply appreciated by the Superior General of the Marianists and by the Provincial in their respective visits in Brazzaville.

However, there are times when my experience as a volunteer calls for a time of deeper reflection about what I'm living and learning here. This year as a volunteer is not, to be honest, a very easy experience: you need to leave your country of origin to adapt yourself to another language and to a very different culture. I want to make an invitation here to all those who also feel the call to live this experience and thus, to have another perspective of life, to change ideas, culture, language, and to discover the mission that God has confided in us: to be missionaries like Jesus and leave our homeland to share the Good News all around the world.

I hope that this experience will be followed by those of many other volunteers.



**María**  
MIV Volunteer  
from Spain to Kenya  
(2006, 2007 and 2008!)

## Lights and shadows about volunteering in Africa.

Here I am again, the «Kenya fan» as my youngest students at school call me. It's just curious to see how fast kids can put you up in a pedestal!!!



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The other day I had a talk with them about Kenya and I showed them a DVD with many pictures of my last trip there; they were just dying to hear again all my stories in Nairobi. Now they all want to be volunteers in the future!!!!

So well, I did tell them that it's a wonderful experience, since helping others is always something wonderful, and as you can see, I have already bought the ticket for my next trip to Kenya this coming summer, to spend some time with my little kids there, for the FOURTH time, in Nairobi.

It sure is a wonderful experience, but it's also pretty tough. Volunteering is awesome, but there's a lot more to it than that: it takes time, energy, and much effort. I work in the outskirts of Nairobi, one of the poorest in the world, where the living conditions are inhuman, and even the most basic things for life are missing: hygiene, water, etc. The school there has nothing to do with the school where I work here in Valencia, they need many teaching materials. And the way to get to school truly is a challenge! We spend 30 minutes on a «matatu» a sort of mini van supposedly for 14 people with as many as 30 on it, together with all kinds of huge cereal bags, chickens, goats and sheep!!! What a trip!!! A whole odyssey!!! And after this 30-minute ride around the outskirts of Mukuru, we finally get to school, which everybody calls «oasis», because that is what the school is, a real oasis in the middle of the desert, in a totally isolated area, which none of us can ever imagine what it's like.

But despite all these inconveniences, I can't wait to go back there. My students here could not believe their ears when I told them these stories; they think that everything is wonderful, fantastic, a sort of adventure. It's tough; there are moments of loneliness, frustration and hesitation as to the real usefulness of what you're doing, now and in the future. The degree of poverty there is really incredible, so many people need us, it's just incredible!

And I live all these experiences with my guardian angel, my shadow. He goes everywhere with me, Moses, a local guy who is already a part of my life. I wouldn't be able to do absolutely anything without him, he truly is my angel. Kenya is not only one of the poorest countries in Africa, it's also one of the most dangerous ones. But here I am, enduring. A white woman alone in these outskirts! And that's an easy target!

And these past Christmas? I went back to Nairobi, to spend the Season with them. If you are not in the know, I tell you that there were elections there, but with many irregularities that the country did not acknowledge. They were close to a Civil War, and over 1,500 people lost their lives in less than a month. More than 300,000 people were displaced and relocated, and Kenya became totally unrecognizable, even for the Kenyans. And I was there at the time, scared to death, scared to die, not knowing what to do, where to go, unable to leave the country. I was really desperate. There was a curfew, and I couldn't leave the community during all the time I spent there. This is also what Kenya is like, unfortunately... This is also a part of them, of a country that needs us. It was awful, something that nobody should live in this world.

In spite of all this, I'm very happy to go back there in July to share my vacations, my time with them, with those who most need us. And at this point I reckon that I also need them. I would go back to Kenya one and one thousand more times!

Greetings to all, and until the next time.

**Emileah Aguilar**  
MVP Volunteer  
(2007 - 2008)

## Marianist Volunteers In the United States.

Father Chaminade once said, «Do not reject as wholly bad that which is not wholly good.» This year of living in community, simplicity and in the Marianist Charism is difficult, but it is a great growing experience - one that is propelling me forward.

As a guidance counselor at St. John's Residence for Boys, I am learning about social justice in a way that brings to life all of my justice-oriented classes at the University of Dayton as well as puts faces on the abandoned, neglected and abused children of God. The young men I work with every day have faced obstacles I will never experience, and they desperately need advocates. The social workers and social service providers who work at St. John's are so dedicated in a system which fails these kids everyday; their work is beyond inspirational.

One opportunity I've had at St. John's really sticks out in my mind. Twice a year, Brother Tom Trager takes a group of boys from St. John's to a place in upstate New York where they have the opportunity to relax and have a lot of fun. I was a little nervous at first about going «camping» with a group of NYC teenagers, but it was an incredible experience.

The boys' joy was so intense it couldn't be contained by their growing bodies. They played all day, swimming in a pond, hiking through the woods (unable to walk silently, I swear boys talk more than girls do), playing with a dog and enjoying the wilderness. They ate like they'd never seen food before and slept in tents, terrified that the bears would get them.

Who can stay frustrated with these boys, who just need a little help along the way? The experience helped me to understand them outside of my guidance role—which can often lead to frustration when too little progress is made.

My roommate, Cynthia, is such a blessing. I'd be lost without her. On the really tough days she gives great insight and her consummate generosity is a great model for me. Our adventures in the city are not always the most exciting (though we have been to great concerts, world class shows and salsa dancing) because the majority of nights we end up watching a documentary, reading books from the Queens library or playing Scrabble. We've made our huge beach front apartment (we have six bedrooms and three and a half baths for the two of us) our home for the year, painting when we're feeling creative and moving anything and everything that we can lift!

We compost, practice simple living by purchasing some food from the city farmers' markets and try to be conscious of our energy consumption.



Today, as I write this, it is Ash Wednesday, and I'm thinking of ways to be more God-centered during Lent. Seeing that God is in all things, I might be eating a lot more chocolate ice cream in order to feel a closer union to God. Maybe I'll pray more often.

I may get a tattoo of the prayer of St. Francis on



my right hand. Whatever I do this Lent, I know that I'll be conscious in the future of the importance of putting my faith into action. And I'm learning not to judge people so quickly, because often, you realize that not only are people rarely «wholly bad,» they are mostly good. Like the boys at St. John's, they are just waiting for someone to accept them.

## About MVP Midyear Retreat

The MVP volunteers participated in a mid-year retreat Feb. 11-13, 2008 at TECABOCA retreat center. Upon arriving in San Antonio, the volunteers enjoyed an evening out on the Riverwalk for dinner and conversation.

On Sunday, the volunteers attended Mass at the Chapel of the Assumption on the campus of St. Mary's University followed by brunch with the Marianist sisters at Our Lady of the Pillar convent.

Once at TECABOCA, the volunteers reflected on various aspects of their jobs and ministry, living in intentional community and the joys and struggles of embracing a simple lifestyle. They also participated in a community social night and looked forward to the remaining six months of their commitment with the MVP.

The retreat was facilitated by Meagan Broman (MVP 2006-2007), Ruth Hinde and Jennifer Talley (MVP local coordinator).

