

Report on the Missionary Cenacle Family  
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The Missionary Cenacle Family is understood to be the sum total of three different groups founded by Thomas Augustine Judge -- the Missionary Cenacle Apostolate (MCA), the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity (MSBT) and the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity (ST) -- and the Blessed Trinity Missionary Institute (BTMI), which was formed in the 1960's in the spirit and charism of the founder. The Missionary Cenacle Family is more than any one of the branches alone.

At the time the original three branches were founded, Fr. Judge held forth a Family Ideal, that is, that these groups would be guided by a common mission -- the Preservation of the Faith -- and by a common commitment -- the Development of an Apostolic Laity within the Providence of Everyday Life.

Unfortunately, Fr. Judge left no blueprint as to how this "Family Ideal" was to be developed and led. He left us no viable structure to accomplish this dream. He left us no directions how this ideal would need to be adapted and lived over time and in new cultures.

Each branch of the Missionary Cenacle Family developed separately but with similar characteristics: a General Custodian and Council, emphasis on taking counsel, commitment to the poor and abandoned, similar symbols and rituals, the usage of the word Cenacle, etc. The two religious congregations must also act within the boundaries of Canon Law.

The MCA initially held private vowed lay members within it. In 1961, seven members made the move to become a pious union as understood in the writings of Pius XII. In 1964 Cardinal Spellman of NY approved 15 members as a Pious Union. The BTMI thus became the fourth branch of the Missionary Cenacle Family.

Over the years, the "Family structure" that developed came out of the experiences of the Missionary Cenacle Family Council, which has representation from all four branches, as well as through gatherings of Cenacle members for celebrations, where various members of different branches served on planning committees together. Recent international Cenacle Family gatherings have allowed for the input from a growing diversity of members about how the MCF is understood and perceived among the branches and members. The latest gathering, MCF100, provided direction for the present evolution of structure and thinking about the Family. It gave the clearest direction to date about the need to think systemically about the "Family" as an organization and not merely an ideal.

Over the last five years, the work of the Missionary Cenacle Family has brought forth both strengths and weaknesses in developing the MCF as an organic whole. Three significant points are:

1. Family Area Councils (FACs) were approved as a structure in 2010. Presently, the six active FACs continue to search for a clear and realistic purpose and clarity of membership. Their struggles help to clarify issues in developing the MCF in local areas, namely: a) taking and giving counsel to leadership; b) planning for and bringing together MCF members in an area to celebrate the "Family Spirit"; and c) sustaining a presence when the religious members of a particular FAC are changed.

2. Leadership of the MCF needs to be recognized as a systemic reality and clarity is needed around the difference between taking counsel vs. having a council. This clarification will help separate the idea of Councils as a governance structure (as in the two religious congregations and copied in the lay groups) and the tradition developed by the Founder that no decision of importance should be made without taking counsel of the members.

Today, the leadership authority for the MCF as an entity lies within the four General Custodians acting as one (in other words, no one General has the authority to make a decision that affects the Family as a whole). In order to give direction to the entire MCF, it is critical that leadership has clear and up-to-date information about the Cenacle Family as it is being lived in different parts of the world.

In order for counsel to be taken, new methodology and technology must be developed and used. It is extremely important that the FACs take up their role and provide a method for both giving and taking counsel to/from leadership.

Is it time to focus on new methodologies and to stop copying structures that might work well within the religious congregations but are cumbersome for the MCF as a whole?

3. The position of Executive Director for the Missionary Cenacle Family is a new and emerging role for the MCF. This new role has created a negative reaction in some members, primarily within the two religious congregations. For some, the role is viewed as a pseudo-custodian role, and the question of authority is a constant point of friction. For others, the Executive Director is viewed as a "secretary" to the four General Custodians, a view which underestimates the importance of the role in developing systems and processes for the MCF.

Since the Executive Director is hired by and accountable to the General Custodians, it is important that they, acting as one, have clarity about the role and reinforce the work of the Executive Director with their members. While the title "Executive Director" is not as familiar in religious congregations as in the secular world, it makes sense in the context of the MCF seeking to create a new organizational structure outside the traditional congregation model.

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The questions facing us as Missionary Cenacle Family are threefold:

1. Are we willing to allow the Family Ideal to exist as a reality in a structure and to understand that it is greater than any one of the branches?
2. Are we committed to see this structure develop for the Church and the mission of Jesus? (The power and witness of the whole vs. the one)
3. Are we willing to allow the NEW to develop beyond our self- understanding as a branch?