

All Aboard... for Spreading the Gospel with the Immaculata

One of St. Maximilian's genial qualities was his ability to share the MI ideal and mission with persons all ages, nationalities, backgrounds, and walks of life. From the beginning of his priestly ministry, as soon as he returned to Poland after his studies in Rome, he began to engage priests and lay persons, men and women, young people and adults, inviting them to embark in a spiritual journey of total dedication to the Immaculata.

In Krakow, a university town, he approached students and seminarians, as well as freelance professionals, workers and families. He started formation gatherings for various groups, but he soon realized that this was not enough in order to reach all people. As a result, he launched a humble magazine, *The Knight of the Immaculata*, and called MI members to action everywhere: in their own families, at work, in the schools and in every area of life... Accordingly, during the past 100 years, the MI has continued to spread worldwide and to welcome new members from among the People of God, so much so that on October 16, 1997, the Church numbered it among the International Public Associations of the Faithful.

If the MI was born within the Franciscan community, from the very beginning St. Maximilian was convinced that Our Lady wanted to gather around herself a true ecclesial family, in which everyone, according to each one's vocation, would place his or her talents at the service of the Gospel, by living and working in communion so as to spread the Kingdom of God.

St. Maximilian's vast correspondence shows how he was always in dialogue with the most diverse recipients: Franciscans from various countries, lay men and women, priests, women religious, young people... He shared his dreams and plans, encouraged them in difficulties, and tirelessly passed on the ideal that the Immaculata entrusted to him. He built bridges, wove relationships, stirred up the spirit of initiative, inviting his interlocutors to contribute their gifts and talents according to their means and abilities. In other words, he elicited everyone's participation so that the message might penetrate everywhere and reach everyone "as soon as possible."

St. Maximilian was indeed a pioneer in this and offers a legacy of great importance today. In the Church and society, often marked by sharp polarizations, the MI is called *to be a family* in which we strive for holiness in the footsteps of Mary while welcoming and harmonizing the variety of vocations and gifts in the unity of our Catholic faith and of our common ideal. How could we ever forget how St. John Paul II emphasized the urgency of embracing a *spirituality of communion*? We are to be a family gathered around Mary so as to become witnesses and instruments of that plan for communion which is the crowning point of human history in God's design.

St. Maximilian entrusts to each MI member his charism and vision, and invites us to give ourselves without reserve to the Immaculata and to be passionate messengers of the overflowing Life and Love of God that comes to us through Our Lady's Immaculate Heart.

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