

Catherine Amore: What is the Role of the Marianist Family in the Future of the Church and of Society?

[*About the author:* Catherine Amore, from Brooklyn, New York, is a preschool teacher. She was introduced to the Marianists at age twelve while on a Family Retreat at the Cape May Marianist Family Retreat Center. After volunteering for years at the Center, she was hired as the intern in 2015 and has continued to volunteer in numerous ways for the Marianists. Catherine wrote the following reflection as part of Marianists Write Now!, a NACMS-sponsored writing program held virtually from Friday, June 11 to Saturday, June 12, 2021. Each participant examined the question, “What is the role of the Marianist Family in the future of the Church and of society?”]

Heaven on Earth. Imagine what that might look like. Can you picture it? What do you see? What is your place in it? What is your purpose? How can we, as Catholics, create and maintain this beautiful world? Is that not the mission of every Catholic—to create as close to a heavenly life on earth as possible? Are we not each called to live as Jesus lived, with compassion for all those around us and the world as a whole? What, then, is Catholicism today?

“Ours is a grand work, a magnificent work. If it is universal, it is because we are missionaries of Mary, who says to us, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’”¹ This is a famous quote for us Marianists by Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, one of the Founders of this wonderful Catholic spiritual movement that many of us call home. According to Chaminade, creating the ideal world that God is asking each of us to create is as simple as “doing whatever he tells you”; hence, Mary is our model of living the Christian life. It is indeed a grand and magnificent work, and it *must* be universal because that is the simple definition of “catholic.” If it’s that simple and universal, why then is this mission to create a beautiful world made in God’s image so hard for human beings?

Take, for example, the story of the wedding feast at Cana from the Gospel of John. While this is precisely the story from which Chaminade pulled his all-important quote, it also documents the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. Mary brought salvation into this world—both in body and spirit—and here is where the record begins with Jesus’ first miracle. Thousands of years later, across every corner of the world, we read and repeat and experience this story over and over again, and still, the message continues to be, “Do whatever he tells you.” Do you remember to whom Mary addressed this simple phrase and who followed her words? It was the servants.

The servants knew who had turned the water into wine when the head waiter and bridegroom had no idea. The servants saw the changing of the water into wine with their own eyes—or, at the very least, they witnessed the before and after and knew that their own hands had not changed anything. The servants must have believed that there was something special about Jesus for this miracle to have occurred. The servants—the lowest of the low, the ones carrying out all the tasks for this extravagant feast, the poorest people present at the party—*they* knew. Don’t you think that after they saw this miracle with their own eyes, they heeded Mary’s words even more? Did one or two or even twenty servants’ knowledge of this miraculous event change the course of the world as we know it? Most likely, it did not. Were their eyes the first to witness what a perfect world could be? The answer is most definitely, yes! However, all of the others who questioned the miracle and did not serve as witnesses to it must not have received enough inspiration to change their futures. Is that how Catholics function today?

How do we see ourselves as servants while living out our Marianist lives? Do we view our daily life as one of service to others? Do we view each God-given day as a miracle and, therefore, look to our future as full of hope? Or do we see others as examples for the world and what it could be? Do we look at the daily news and use that as the basis of how we should also live? Do we see wars being fought, peoples being oppressed and killed, lives being lost in the name of something other than what is good in this

¹ Chaminade, *Letters*, no. 1163 to the Preachers of the Retreat, Aug. 24, 1839; vol. 5, p. 60.

world, and are we influenced negatively by it? Have we not lived through troubling times ourselves in the last year? How do we come forth from this struggle and choose good? How do we choose not to be influenced by those in power who are not serving humanity but instead destroying it? How do we choose life in this world that constantly promotes the death of body and spirit? How do we live as universal servants when it seems like so many other Catholics do not?

“Do whatever He tells you.”

What *does* he tell us?

I'd like to think it goes something like this:

You are beloved.

You are loved. You are enough.

You are part of this world of many troubles.

You are loved. You are enough.

Your world is filled with strife, with neglect, with defeat, with loss of purpose, and with loss of self.

You are loved. You are enough.

You've lived through times of trouble, times of agony, and times of constant letdowns and negotiation.

You are *more than* loved. You are *more than* enough.

You cannot fathom how much your journey is cherished, celebrated, and accompanied by everlasting joy.

You have been loved all your life and will continue to be loved all your life.

You are *continuously and unabashedly* enough.

Your work is important, your life is important, and your love is important.

Your love for others is important.

Your love of self is important, no matter how big or small.

Your limits, your transgressions, and your failures are just as important as your successes.

Your union with humanity is your most influential purpose.

You are human. You are love.

We are all loved.

We are all one.

We will do this together.

We will love together.

We are enough *together*.

In the words of the beloved Catholic hymn, “One Bread, One Body,” written by John Foley, SJ, and made famous by John Michael Talbot, which is inspired by Gal 3:28, we sing that we are “Gentile or Jew, servant or free, woman or man, no more.” We are free of how society defines us, free of what we have heard negatively about ourselves, and free of that which doesn't provide us joy and grace. We can choose to be defined by how God defines us, as loved beyond all reasoning. “To love another person is to see the face of God,” says Jean Valjean in the musical *Les Misérables*. We are called to share Jesus' message of love by showing humanity as a whole—*all* are deserving of redemption. We are one bread, one body; we cannot function without each other in this great mess of a world. We must come together, universally, as Catholics and human beings, to create what God has promised for our world: a world of hope, peace, and love for all.

While my reflection might easily end here, I am writing as a part of NACMS' “Marianist Write Now!” program. Therefore, I am responding to the questions, “What is the role of the Marianist community in the future of the Church and of society? I will follow this question with some wisdom from Father Quentin Hakenewerth, SM, from *A Manual of Marianist Spirituality*. “The radical change that our

Marianist vocation demands is usually gradual and progressive. It is seldom sudden, and it is never violent. It is Mary's way of forming us."²

Mary's "yes" brought Jesus into the world. The servants' "yes" brought Jesus' miracle into the world. The disciples' "yes" brought Jesus' message throughout the world. And finally, Jesus' very human "yes" brought redemption into the world. How then are we called to answer "yes" as Chaminade did when he chose to use Mary as a model? Both Chaminade and Mary knew that this ideal world would grow gradually. They knew it would be progressive. Marianists, more often than not, choose to follow a progressive model in comparison to how some other Catholics view their religion and place in the world. Pope Francis is viewed as a more progressive pope, but he still opposes gay marriage and will not condone ordained females in the Church because tradition and other rules dictate. Are Marianists progressive enough? What more can we Marianists do without being shunned by our own religion? Not all Marianists choose to be extremely progressive, but all do choose to follow the model of Mary by living a life of service, inclusivity, community, and love. How can we, as Marianists, spread this model to the rest of Christianity and then to the rest of the world?

Even after participating in three "Marianist Write Now!" sessions over the course of eight months, I must say that I do not possess any concrete answers to these critical questions. I can confidently say, however, that I am appalled at the state of Catholics in the world today, as some treat their fellow human beings so despicably. So, in opposition to my standard essay conclusions—which often end in a curious question to engage you, the Marianist reader, in more thought—I will confidently pose my proposed solutions now.

- 1) Be an active advocate to all those who are less fortunate, particularly those who have been oppressed and continue to be oppressed daily by seen and unseen policies and laws in the world today. (To provide direct and important examples: Black Lives Matter and Love is Love. All human beings deserve dignity.)
- 2) Continue to learn about that which I do not know and spread that knowledge so as to educate others better and lessen the very human coping mechanisms of complacency and ignorance.
- 3) Vote. Vote to make positive change. Vote not for any one belief system or political party but for what I know to be right in my heart. Vote for the present and the future and know that change is gradual as long as we choose to be consistently active.
- 4) Live as simply as possible so as to leave this planet in better condition than when I found it (and I, as a millennial, found it in a pretty crappy situation, to begin with).
- 5) Find joy in the small things every day.
- 6) Educate the youth of the Church on how to question their religion. Without questioning and further exploration, ignorance and complacency (and, therefore, inaction) become prevalent. That is not how the Church will grow.
- 7) Educate the adults of the Church to live their lives by the Marianist way. Promote the Cape May Family Retreat Center to my fellow peers and other adults in my life. Share links to social justice Marianist groups to showcase how much we still must do to change.
- 8) Choose service and inclusivity every day, without fail, no matter how big or small. Actively choose to create community wherever I may be.
- 9) Advocate for myself and my joys and my gifts. What a wonderful life I have been given; I will choose to live it to the fullest of my ability every day.
- 10) Love.

Just love

Always and forever.

Amen.

² Quentin Hakenewerth, SM, *A Marianist Manual of Spirituality* (Dayton, OH: NACMS, 2000), 21.