

Luke Hoenigman: What Does It Mean for Me to Lead a Committed Marianist Life?

[Editor's note: Luke, from San Antonio, Texas, wrote his essay as part of Marianists Write Now!, a NACMS-sponsored writing program held virtually from Friday, March 12 to Saturday, March 13, 2021. Each participant in this session of Marianists Write Now! wrote a personal reflection on the following question: "What does it mean for me to live a committed Marianist life?"]

"Welcome to the best party of the weekend!" These words were greeted with a cheer every Sunday at 9 P.M. at the University of Dayton. Father Ken Templin, SM, always referred to Sunday Mass as a "party," which was fitting because nobody I knew approached the Mass with as much joy as Father Ken. The students always called it the "Ghetto Mass," named after UD's unique student neighborhood. (University of Dayton officials refer to this same area as the "Student Neighborhood.")

Mass was held in a large meeting room surrounded by student housing. The seats filled up quickly, and the rest of the congregation was crowded together on the floor. Eucharist was distributed in the hallways, and hosts were often divided into halves, quarters, even eighths because of the size of the crowd. The first time I attended this Mass also happened to be the first time I wanted more when the Mass came to an end. It did not take me long to notice something else: it wasn't just Father Ken who made this Mass what it was. I had always experienced the readings in English, but at this Mass, students proclaimed the Word of God in both English and Spanish. In most parishes, the sign of peace is about a minute long. Five minutes were set aside for handshakes, hugs, and high fives at this UD Mass. The music is what got my attention the most. The choir consisted of piano, guitars, drums, and a huge congregation of singers. I am a musician, but I mostly played guitar and sang on my own at that point. When I saw that choir, I knew I had to be a part of it. What I didn't realize at the time was that becoming part of the choir was the beginning of my commitment to the Marianists.

It has been almost two decades since the last time I was a part of Mass at UD. For me, it was the perfect model for Marianist community. Though Father Ken had been the presider, his gifts were only part of what made this Mass special. The lectors, the choir, and the whole congregation changed the way I saw what a Christian community truly is. I now teach at Central Catholic High School, an all-boys Marianist school in San Antonio. In class, we cover the story of William Joseph Chaminade and the foundation of the Marianists. We highlight the five Characteristics of Marianist Education, the Marianist virtues, and various topics related to our Marianist identity. But all these things can become nothing more than slogans on the wall if Marianist community is not made visible. Our students at Central often talk about being part of a "brotherhood." Students are reminded that faith is a key component of their high school experience, and their school day begins and ends in prayer (as do most of their classes.) Students

are required to perform service to the community, and several groups allow them to do just that. My role in all of this brings me back to where I started: I am the liturgical choir director.

I have had so many amazing experiences of the Marianist charism, but what brought faith to the forefront for me was the “best party of the weekend” at the University of Dayton. This weekly liturgy transformed Mass from an obligation to something I looked forward to; I now hope I pass this same connection along to my students. Being a committed member of the Marianist Family is important to me. Through my vocation as a teacher and choir director, I hope that I can bring the Gospel to others in a real and genuine way. A neighborhood college Mass was that for me; I hope I help bring aspects of the Marianist charism to others.