

Luke Hoenigman: How Am I Called to Be Marianist?

[Editor's note: Luke, from San Antonio, Texas, wrote his essay as part of the inaugural session of Marianists Write Now!, a NACMS-sponsored writing program held virtually from Friday, November 13 to Saturday, November 14, 2020. Each participant in this session of Marianists Write Now! wrote a personal reflection on the following question: "How am I called to be Marianist?"]

I remember an exchange I had with a young lady in the early stages of discernment to religious life. I worked with a youth group at the time, and she visited one more time before entering formation. She told me how important the youth group was to her in high school and how it inspired her to consider a religious vocation. "I feel like I really have to give it my all," she told me. "If I don't take vows and become a sister, I'll feel like I failed." This was the first time I met this woman, so I know she didn't know my story. To be honest, I wasn't offended by her remark because I remember that stage of discernment.

"Well, I guess by your definition, I'm a failure," I said with a smile. "I was in formation with the Marianists for two years." Her eyes widened, and she fumbled around, trying to justify her comment. "It's okay," I told her. "I know what you mean because I've been through it. Just try not to put that pressure on yourself because whatever you discern, it will be God's calling. One thing I'm sure of is that you'll be grateful for the process." I never saw that young woman again, and I am not sure what path she took, but I believe in the answer I gave her.

When I was an aspirant in San Antonio, Texas, I was in formation with three other men. When my novitiate year began, four became six when two other men joined us in Dayton, Ohio. Out of those six, three took vows as brothers. One was ordained to the priesthood. Three (myself included) entered into the marriage vocation. All answered Christ's call. I am confident that the formation we all received as Marianists was a part of that call.

The gift of the Marianist charism is that it doesn't end with the vowed religious brothers and sisters. When I decided not to continue into the second year of novitiate, I still felt welcomed by members of the community. In what would have been my third year of formation, I was once again in the novitiate chapel. My niece received the Sacrament of Baptism from Father Dave McGuigan, SM, my former novice director. When I moved back to San Antonio and married my wife, Maria, Father Cris Janson, SM, presided at our wedding. Though I no longer lived at Casa Maria—the brothers' house at St. Mary's University—I spent a lot of time playing music and telling stories with one of my closest friends, Brother Dennis Bautista, SM. When he took his perpetual vows, Brother Dennis asked Maria and me right before Mass, "Can you sit close by? I'm a little nervous." Maria was six months pregnant with our oldest son during Dennis' vows ceremony. When our son was born, we took him to meet "Uncle Dennis." All three of my children now know him as "Uncle Dennis." When I began teaching at Central Catholic High School, I was excited to have the opportunity to tell the story of William Joseph Chaminade and his remarkable ministry of bringing the Gospel back to the people of France after a bloody revolution. I was blessed to share a classroom with Father Don Cowie, SM, who shared his love for teaching every day. In his last year, Father Cowie taught his classes through the pain and suffering of cancer. I held his hand on the day he passed and told him, "We love you, Father Cowie."

Even though my discernment led me not to pursue a religious vocation, the Marianists never stopped including me in their way of life.

When I think of the young woman I mentioned before, I hope she was successful in her discernment. I hope she discovered who she is as part of the Body of Christ and that her gifts and talents are being put to good use. If it is the will of God, I hope the call to religious life suits her well and that she is happy. What I have learned from my experience is that religious discernment is a gift. For those who take vows and enter religious communities, discernment is a gift. For those who decide that the

consecrated life isn't the right fit, discernment is a gift. I have been transformed by the Marianists in so many ways, and I am forever grateful for the gift of discernment that I shared with them.