

Mary Snyder: How Am I Called to Be Marianist?

[*Editor's note:* Mary, from Cape May, New Jersey, wrote her 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?”]

“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.”¹

The statement above is so true. When I think of my walk with the Marianists, I wasn’t even Catholic. I had a friend who was Catholic, and she said she would be my sponsor if I wanted to attend RCIA. I had been helping Father Ted Cassidy, SM, at the time, and he never pressured me to become Catholic. It just seemed to happen, and I attended RCIA for two years. The second year is when I smelled flowers almost all the time. I didn’t think too much about the meaning behind the smell at Church, but someone said, “That is the Blessed Mother.” That was my first walk with becoming a Marianist. It was very natural for me to love Mary, to the point where I felt sad that I had not paid attention to her all of my Christian years.

Father Ted must have seen something in me because he wanted me to attend Marianist classes on the founders and Mary.

I started going to some of the retreats. I especially loved the Marianist Associates. I loved the respect and trust they showed for each other. I always felt at home. I eventually became an Associate. I became involved in racial justice issues with Father Ted. I read his dissertation on racial justice when he received his doctorate. He even took me to racial justice meetings in Camden, NJ. He wrote a book, and I proofread it. My name is in the acknowledgments of his book, *The Hurricane of Racism*. This book is as helpful today to stem racism as it was when he wrote it. In fact, it may be more useful. After Father Ted left Cape May, I only went to the Retreat House for the prayer retreats, but I traveled more to different Marianist events.

I attended a Changemakers Retreat, and there were breakout sessions that anyone could attend. One breakout was on welcoming LGBTQ people into the Church; another was on music. I attended the breakout session discussing the Marianist Visitation State Community—a community I went on to join.

I also became interested in the programming and courses available through the North American Center for Marianist Studies. NACMS has been “continuing education” for me. The programs and courses encourage me to read Marianist books I never would have read otherwise. I learn so much about the Christian lifestyle and our Marianist Founders. I can’t express how important this has been for me. I have made wonderful new friends. I also belong to a Marianist group that meets every Saturday morning for prayer via Zoom. Most of the group’s members are Affiliates.

Calling and Cape May

My call to be Marianist was very gradual, and it is very progressive. I started volunteering at the Marianist Family Retreat Center, and I stuffed and sealed envelopes. Then, I taught Brother Stan Zubec, a member of the brothers’ community connected with the Retreat House, to sight-read music. The directors discovered that I’m good at getting spots out of quilts or mattress covers, which eventually became one of my jobs. It is my job to make sure holiday cards get out. I have even gotten to the point where I work in the yard. I’m never quite sure what my job will be next! Sometimes I just talk, and I have made many new friends with retreatants who come to visit. I also play music at special Masses, like the fiftieth

¹ Quentin Hakenewerth, SM, *A Manual of Marianist Spirituality* (Dayton, OH: NACMS, 2000), 21.

anniversary Mass we recently celebrated. I believe that is how I am called to be Marianist. Anthony Fucci, the director, invites me to everything the staff does—staff Masses, birthday lunches, just plain lunches, Christmas dinners, or retreats. Anything, I am one of them

Things do not always run smoothly. Sometimes I have differences of opinion with someone, but Mary always works her magic, and things get resolved.

(PS: My children love my connection with the Retreat Center. They love that I am enjoying my life. Having a Marianist missionary focus allows me to have independence and provides for a more meaningful connection with my children when we are together. After all, these two hallmarks of Marianist life—ministry and family—are part of Mary's way!)