

*Sharing Our Marianist Stories*, Episode 47 Transcript  
A Continental Shift: From Dayton to Rome (Bro. Dennis Bautista, SM)

**00:00 - Mike Bennett**

I think you are the first sitting member of the Society of Mary's General Administration to be in our studio.

**00:08 - Bro. Dennis Bautista, SM**

Who, me? I know, it's still surreal.

**00:12 - Mike Bennett**

This episode of *Sharing Our Marianist Stories* features an interview with Bro. Dennis Bautista from October 2024, just days before he moved from Dayton, Ohio, to Rome to serve on the General Council for the Society of Mary. The General Council serves as the governing body for the Society of Mary worldwide and consists of the Superior General and the Assistants for Education, Religious Life, and Temporalities. Bro. Dennis begins his story by recounting his experience from the Society of Mary's General Chapter in the summer of 2024, where elections for the General Council took place. I'm Mike Bennett, Media Administrator for NACMS.

**00:55 - Bro. Dennis Bautista, SM**

When it happened [on] July 19, 2024, about 10:30 AM, Roman time. That's when my life changed. Not something that you expect. You hear rumors, you see the indicative votes, and you hear the numbers, but then when it actually happens, you're like, "Oh my god, is this how my life is going to turn out?" Instantly, [you have a] six-year appointment in another country, the opposite side of the planet where I'm from, having to live in another country and much less learn Italian, a language I never thought I would have to learn. It took me three days to sit with it and realize this is really happening.

**01:30 - Bro. Dennis Bautista, SM**

It was a Friday morning when the election happened. Sunday night before evening prayer, I was sitting in my room on the fourth floor of the building, and I was sitting. I'm thinking, "Why am I so sad? I feel like I'm grieving." And grieving is losing control of your life, or a sense of losing control. And then I said to myself, "Wait a minute, didn't I already give up control of my life when I said *yes* at first vows?" That's echoing articles from our Rule of Life, that we surrender to Mary and to her mission. And so, then, it moved from grief to closure. And then, when I knew I was going to move, this was so fresh in July. When I went back to the US, I had to make an appointment with the Italian consulate to have an interview for a visa. The earliest appointment I could get was two months later, late September. So, okay, I guess that's how it's going to work out, a lot longer than I would have liked because you're elected, and you're immediately on the council. The others are already there. I always take pride in being efficient and showing up for my responsibilities and work, but this two month extra was like, "Oh, I don't like being MIA [missing in action]."

**02:39 - Bro. Dennis Bautista, SM**

At the same time, I appreciate that as maybe the Holy Spirit saying, "Okay, these are the two months you can have for closure." And as everyone encouraged me on the General Council, as well as Fr. Oscar [Vasquez], our provincial, said, "Go visit your family." Okay, I got a chance to visit family. We had a nice celebration with the brothers at Hale Malia. I got to see my alma mater. My family got to visit campus, because Chaminade University has been a big

part of our family for many years. So, that's a second home to me. And in the morning of the mass and dinner that the brothers were having, Ed Brink [SM] texted me and says, "Oh, just a heads up: A university photographer is going to be there and President Lynn Babington and President Glenn Medeiros." And so, I said, "Oh, thanks for the heads up. That means I have to wear a nice shirt and pants." So, it was like, wow, this is really a big deal. My high school friends, I got together with them. Even my family threw a small surprise party for me also. When I had to leave Hawaii, I was sad, but then at the same time, I was departing Honolulu, going to San Antonio, my other home for 15 years.

### **03:43 - Bro. Dennis Bautista, SM**

And so, it was a little bit of a mixed feeling. When I got to St. Mary's University and San Antonio, the brothers also did a special farewell for me. All the brothers came in, and the reception had steak and lobster tail... And the brother said to me, "We never have both of them at one time. This is a really big deal, a special blessing." And then, when I got here to Dayton, they had another special celebration for me. Oscar calls it the "royal farewell tour." I look at it like the living funeral – not in a morbid way because there's a special prayer, there's blessings. I was standing in front of people where a casket normally would be, people raise their hand, and they recite a special blessing for you. They thank you; they say all nice things for you. And then, there's a reception with food. It follows a similar script of a funeral. In fact, even the worship aids for these blessings had my photo on it. And I was thinking the only thing that was missing is my date of birth and death. But it literally feels like a whole changing point of my life. I feel like I'm being born again, learning a whole new language, having to live in a whole new community. I've been asked to be in a position that helps guide young members and their newest members [on] how to fit in and find their place.

### **04:53 - Bro. Dennis Bautista, SM**

Now, I'm going to have to practice exactly what I'm preaching through a different experience that's cultural. But in some ways, I know that I'll always be taken care of. I know that I'll always be blessed with spiritual richness and also, in some way, temporal richness. I know that in Marianist communities, I'll never go hungry. I'll always have my own bed to sleep in, right? In some cases, your own bathroom, too. And then, there's that spiritual richness that we're blessed with. I know that there will always be a place to pray, that we will always be focused, to look at our work. The difficult decisions I anticipate the General Council to have to make within the lens of faith, trying to practically weigh some of the consequences of a choice, some of the feelings associated with that, and knowing heavy decisions can affect people's lives. And I know that in those roles, that's not an easy thing to do, but thank God, it's not only up to me. I'm part of this new team, which I'm looking forward to.

### **05:54 - Bro. Dennis Bautista, SM**

I don't know how things work, but I know what I can bring. I know what my interests and skills and my background is. I can bring that. And I'll see what I can do to compliment. And that's what I'm looking most forward to about my time there, is learning and to try to see how all of the things that we hold valuable in the words that we read in our Rule of Life and that we say in prayer, to put that into lived action at decision making at the highest level of the Society of Mary. What a privilege! What a scary privilege it is! But if this is how Mary wants me to serve - As people have told me, "Mary wants you there. This is how your life is going to turn out."

**06:34 – Mike Bennett**

I'm curious if you can paint a picture of what it might look like to be on the General Administration and in your particular role?

**06:43 - Bro. Dennis Bautista, SM**

Well, we've already started receiving emails from all of the units. So, because we are the centralized location of governance, all of the different units are sending us their unit leadership minutes from their meetings. And so, I'm reading things in Spanish, having to translate that in Google and then French. There's a huge learning curve. I think going into it, it's just a matter of how do I apply good decision making as a person of faith? And of course, someone with some professional skills in logic and decision making and teamwork and working together, how do we apply that with faith and the values that we write in our Rule of Life?

**07:22 - Bro. Dennis Bautista, SM**

And then, specifically for me, through working with the area of education, I'm of course expecting that I'm going to be working with the schools. I think at the heart of what we try to do is to impart knowledge to another group of people, especially the youth. And as someone in communication, it's just trying to make a message as clear as possible, and maybe even look visually appealing and memorable. Those are some of the skills that I think I can bring. I'm looking forward to learning how does the Society of Mary work, and how can I bring this part of my life about faith, having been a formator in the last three years in the novitiate, and how can we blend that emphasis on spiritual faith and growth within our school system and the way we educate our youth.

**08:10 - Mike Bennett**

You've alluded a little bit to the dynamics of prayer that went into this transition and the immediacy of it at the General Chapter. I'm curious if you can talk a little bit about what fuels your faith life.

**08:24 - Bro. Dennis Bautista, SM**

I look at that as a connection of vocational wellness. First of all, what is it that I spend the most time on in my life, and does the amount of time that I spend doing something match what my values and priorities are? And I have to say, yes. Three years as a novice director, I had to live and teach a way of life. And if I'm not practicing that, then I'm not going to be able to be successful in passing that on to the novices. And so, I totally appreciate the importance of the role, the importance of prayer, the importance of good community life. Those are all valuable, important, foundational things for me. And when I'm invited to try to transfer those values and perspectives into other things, such as this work I'm about to do, I feel that might be the most important criteria. Everything else comes through learning, and I enjoy learning new things.

**09:17 - Bro. Dennis Bautista, SM**

Sometimes, yes, I can get impatient. I want to perfect it right away. Like in fact, during the [Covid-19] pandemic, I spent hours editing a virtual choir video for St. Mary's University. And it was a melding of musical talent, audio engineering, video editing, and deadline and timing. And of course, communicating to all the different choir members how do they record and sing and then synchronize everything together. So, I spent so much time and effort and energy that, sometimes, someone would say "Wow, you're really obsessed with that." And [I say] "No, I just want to figure it out. I want to figure it out, and I'm interested in doing it."

And so, when I get excited and interested in doing it, it doesn't feel like work. It feels like something that I enjoy. And then, eventually, you produce a product that other people can enjoy and [that] brings pride. Discovering how you've been formed can yield new abilities and gifts translated into different kinds of ways you can contribute to forwarding this mission that never had been done before.

**10:11 - Bro. Dennis Bautista, SM**

I think about my experiences growing up in Hawaii, studying communication, going to the mainland for graduate school, being interested in music, playing the ukulele, all of these different interests that I have, and it helps me feel grounded. And I enjoy when I meet people who have that same interest and growth and just learning how to be a better person based upon their own values. That kind of thing excites me, and I hope that maybe in my new role, I'll be able to try to translate that to the different units, that they can then translate it to their own appropriate areas in their time and place, and how they do education in their units throughout the world.

**10:49 - Mike Bennett**

I know you have experience as a radio disc jockey, graphic designer, multimedia specialist, and you have taught at the university level. I remember also being a little bit surprised to learn about some of those professions, because I don't think they're what we might typically expect of a Marianist brother or priest. Now, there's a wide variety of things we can expect... I think it seems like you've been able to really integrate a lot of different dynamics in your life. And that's, I think, what you're touching on in that last response. How has that sense of integration been instilled in you?

**11:27 - Bro. Dennis Bautista, SM**

I guess you could say I'm a "jack of all trades and a master of none." But at the same time, I think you don't need to learn too many different things. You just need to know how to apply all of the different experiences you've been given to the next step. And I can only be me, right? Yes, I know I have a crazy story: baptized by a Marianist and only finding out when I went to my first vocation retreat about 25 years later. What?! It was almost like these last couple of months [have been] like the Easter Vigil service, where you have Old Testament readings recalling salvation history. How God has touched my life in all of those different unique places that don't often get connected?

**12:05 - Bro. Dennis Bautista, SM**

And maybe this is how God and Mary want me to connect all those different divergent worlds into one: from Hanabata days in Hawaii – [speaking with a heavy Hawaiian accent] “Eh, bro, you know, I stink a pigeon like that. You know, I’m from Ewa Beach. I talk like that.” – to working at Chaminade University as a communication major and discovering how much I love my field. Of course, working for [in a radio broadcaster’s voice] “KNDI Honolulu, the broadcast house of the Pacific, 1270 on your AM dial.” Of course, taking broadcast voice lessons and everything. Then going to graduate school I earned a Master of Arts degree in Communication, and then I have a Doctoral degree in Intercultural Communication. I can also operate in those fields of scholastic research and academic jargon, but that's not really who I am.

**12:47 - Bro. Dennis Bautista, SM**

And then, being a teacher in front of students and youth, you have so [many] opportunities to influence them. It's important to teach them the content knowledge, like it is in the university

to prepare them for their careers. And I did that, and I am very proud of that, having taught some of the hardest-working, talented students. But sometimes what makes the most lasting impressions, I get surprised. Like, on the teaching evaluation I get, “Teacher was happy every day. He smiles.” And so, that started reminding me about it's not necessarily what you do. It's how you do it. And that's what we use as some of our vocation poster marketing taglines, right? It's not about what you do. It's the quality of your presence. That's what Chaminade said, right? “The quality of our presence is more important than the quality of our work.” That comes directly from Chaminade. So, I'm thinking, like, the brothers at Chaminade University did an excellent job in terms of subtly forming me in that mold that eventually I found so valuable that I wanted to give my life to it. And that's what I try to teach our novices these past three years, that hopefully you found something that's so important and so valuable that you want to give your life to it.

### **13:48 - Mike Bennett**

What was it that felt so important that drove you to vowed religious life with the Marianists?

### **13:55 - Bro. Dennis Bautista, SM**

I was a sophomore, I think, at Chaminade University, and I took a course on liturgy. It was an upper division religion requirement. It opened my eyes on prayer as learning to apply what you read in the readings of mass with your own experience of the day. So, if you had a struggle with another student or a teacher or an event in your life, that has something to do with what the readings are, and maybe it can give you a guide as to how to respond to that. At the time, I had thought prayer was pretty much memorizing the Rosary, Hail Marys, Our Fathers. And what opened my eyes was faith sharing in a small group, and you reflect on the Gospel of the day, and you discover, “Hey, I connect with that experience. How then can I use that as a compass, a guide, a map for me to enjoy life better and not get so stressed out of those petty little things that are part of our human existence?” So, that was the first way that that opened me up. It's like, wow, there's a different way to pray.

### **14:51 - Bro. Dennis Bautista, SM**

And then, when I was part of this small group faith community, which was the Chaminade Pohaku Community, as a junior, we were living in two rooms. The men's room was four living in one, the women's was next door, and the brothers were upstairs with three. And we would gather three times a week for prayer and shared reflection, and once a week for prayer, mass, and dinner. And I liked that idea of being in a big family and a table of meals, and it was very Marianist, but I didn't use those words at the time. And so, something about that attracted me. It was like an extended family life where you get to sit with your roommates and some of the brothers, pray, share a meal, talk about your day, and then close with prayer. And I thought, “Hey, this is a good way to dedicate a part of my life to my faith practice.”

### **15:38 – Bro. Dennis Bautista, SM**

When I started working at Chaminade University, the brothers were very creative, because at the time I still had been living at home, working on a Chaminade University salary in Hawaii, right? You cannot buy your own place living next to campus. So, I lived at home, which was technically 26 miles from Kalaipohaku campus. But with Honolulu traffic, it would take about two and a half hours to get there. And I just spent 20 hours a week commuting, and that was rough. So, one day, Bro. Dennis Schmidt said, “You want to do a live in?” I said, “What is that? That's kind of weird.” [He replied] “No, live in is [where] you just live with us for a week. You don't have to commute, and you can do your job, but join us for morning prayer, evening prayer and meal.” And I'm like, “Oh, that's not too bad.” I remember doing that, and

I'm like, "Wow, I can save 20 hours of my life. I get that all back, and I'm not as stressed fighting traffic and commuting back and forth." I remember after that experience, I started saying things like, "Hmm, I think I could do this if I wanted to."

### **16:33 - Bro. Dennis Bautista, SM**

When I went to graduate school, I missed that small faith community of the Marianist style. I was active in the Neuman Center. I played for their choir every Sunday mass and everything, but there was something missing in my faith practice that I missed and I liked. And eventually, when I got my job at Chaminade University, after two years working there full time, I said to then the provost, Bro. Bernie Ploeger, "There's two things I want to tell you and ask you. One is I'm going to resign from my job as an instructor of communication. And can you write me a letter of recommendation to enter the aspirancy?" So, he actually wrote that letter of recommendation for me. So, he's part of the beginning part of my life.

### **17:11 - Bro. Dennis Bautista, SM**

So, I got accepted. And then, I went to the aspirancy at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas. I remember the first week I said to myself walking around campus, "Wow, this feels just like Chaminade University. You walk into these offices, people want to stop and say hi, and they want to talk story, except that it's Texas. The pervading culture is not Hawaiian, but Mexican, and there's just a very familial atmosphere about it" that I appreciated. At the end of that aspirancy year, I asked for novitiate, which brought me to Dayton. And living in Dayton and the novitiate was a bit different, larger community and a little bit more rigorous life. There's some things that I certainly learned that were very helpful. I certainly did confirm my vocation. And when I professed [temporary] vows after two years, I got sent back to St. Mary's University. And I was really excited because I wanted to be at another Marianist university, this time as a brother. And I was so impressed with the campus and the programs they had there that little did I know at the time in 2006, when I began as an assistant professor of communication, that it would become a 15-year run. And that's where I say to people, "That's where I grew up as a Marianist." I professed my final [perpetual] vows at Guadalupe Chapel on October 24, 2009, and I confirmed my vocation. I'm very proud of being able to, on the second round, earn tenure. I grew up there, and that's where most of my foreign experience has happened, and I'm so grateful for that.

### **18:36 - Bro. Dennis Bautista, SM**

And then, I went on a sabbatical 2018 / 2019, and it was what I knew I needed in life. I think that's part of a good prayer life, is when you realize you just need time out, to spend time carved out just for God and stopped doing [things]. I think, at the time, I had been already a formation director for eight years. I had just finished a term on the provincial council as a counselor, and I was still teaching at St. Mary's University. I remember I was just feeling so burned out. And that was a point of my life when I was like, "You know what, I really need a sabbatical," and thank God the brothers supported it. And I had gone to Catholic Theological Union for the Institute for Religious Formation. It really is not a *sabbatical* sabbatical. We had homework and classes. But, hey, it was something different. Something in that year really opened me up to become much more insightful about prayer. And to this day, I still am reaping some benefits from it.

### **19:28 – Bro. Dennis Bautista, SM**

Since that time, I've kept a daily scripture journal, because the Sunday cycle is every three years, and the weekday cycle is year one and year two. I have so much notes that go back to which readings, and it's such a fascinating thing and a growth-full thing for me to be able to

look back four years ago and say, “What was I reflecting on when it was Our Lady of the Pillar in 2019?” My spiritual director says, “Wow, what a valuable gift!” But it also goes to show it's still that desire of wanting to learn. I'm maybe trying to look for patterns in my life so that when I encounter another challenge, I'll have some cliff notes to fall back on so I don't make the same dumb mistakes that I would make before.

**20:08 - Mike Bennett**

I know an important articulation of your mission as a Marianist brother is showing Christ to others. I'm curious if you can shed light on what that looks like for you at this stage?

**20:21 - Bro. Dennis Bautista, SM**

I think at this point, the world is hurting. I've been away from the university classroom for I'd say about four years, and even my last semester was all virtual during Covid. What I recognize about students [is] that there's a number of people who come from places of hurt, maybe being in situations that are difficult. If they're experiencing a difficult personal life, how can they put their best foot forward and effort into an academic professional life? I know that they're trying, and I know that is important for them to experience academic rigor. I think there'd be a number of students who would have said that I was a very tough and strict grader, but I think when you can show to people that you still care, that their story is recognized, and that you're there to help them and walk with them and accompany them, but it's up to them to do it and give them that responsibility and accountability, teach them all that, then I think you've done your job in showing Christ to others. Because, yes, you could say Christ takes us all by the hand, but there's times when you have to say, “Okay, I'm going to accompany you, point you in this direction, but it's going to be up to you to choose it.”

**21:23 – Bro. Dennis Bautista, SM**

There's a phrase that I use when I would teach on the first day of school. I would use two different analogies of how my teaching approach is. One is I would be considered a B to Y person. I'm not A to Z, because you've got to start with that initiative. Then, once you take that initiative, I'll walk with you from B to Y, but I can't finish the project or turn in the assignment for you. You've got to do it yourself. So, I'm a B to Y person. What are you going to do? Let's do it. And then, the other one is the sports analogy. I'm all of these different things for you. Number one is I will be your cheering section. I am happy when you succeed. And when you make a bad plan, it's like, “Oh, but don't worry, get up and go do it again. You can do it. Oh, but yeah, let's do it.” So, I'm going to be right here to cheer you on. And at the same time, I'm also going to be the coach. I'm going to say, “Okay, look, you need to work on this. I'm going to give you exercises and drills to get better until you can meet the standards. If you can't meet the standards, we're going to keep working on these areas to drill you and get better.” And at the same time, I'm also the referee. Not the most popular person in sports, right? Because you got to call it when they make an infraction or a penalty. If they turn an assignment late, they've got to face the consequences. If they do the illegal procedure, they've got to do all those kinds of things. So, that's the analogy I use. I'm going to be your biggest cheering section. I'm going to be your coach. At the same time, I've got to call the game fairly for everyone else. And I think what students appreciated more from me as Marianist [is that] I'm always willing to listen to their point of view, but I'm also going to try to encourage them to own it. This is a good decision made. I'm going to cheer you on. This is something that we have to fix up and clean up and you made a mistake. Okay, so then how are you going to fix it up? What did you learn from it next? And then, trying to empower students to be able to pass it on with others. And that, I think, is a very Chaminade approach. It's that whole phrase of multiplication of Christians.

**23:11 – Mike Bennett**

Before we hear Bro. Dennis' response to our concluding question, I'd like to say thanks for listening to this episode of *Sharing Our Marianist Stories*, a production of the North American Center for Marianist Studies in Dayton, Ohio. Make sure to subscribe wherever you listen to podcasts. Follow us on social media @ThisIsNACMS and utilize the resources on our website at [www.nacms.org](http://www.nacms.org). And now, let's return to Bro. Dennis for his response to our concluding question. We know the Marianist founders corresponded through letter writing. And so, if you were going to write a letter to anyone, dead or alive, and be guaranteed a response, who would you write to, and what would be the topic?

**23:58 - Bro. Dennis Bautista, SM**

Chaminade, what did you really see at Saragossa? What do you think about what's happening today? How would you have applied what you've experienced in Revolutionary and pre-Revolutionary War France into the world of today? And maybe some insights or templates into what we can do in the future and in the different places where we are at given the differences in government, culture, language, history, background. And how can we ensure - or from your perspective, Chaminade, how can we discover that secret sauce that can help evangelize what you tried to do in France into this world we are in right now?