

Sharing Our Marianist Stories, Ep. 34 Transcript

The Impact of Marianist PULSE (with Abby Shahady, Ani Artero, Dominic Sanfilippo, and Mike Bennett)

00:01 – Abby Shahady

I was really worried about, “Am I back to square one about just being a student?” But I think in terms of my vocation, it’s how I’ve been able to translate the Marianist values in medical school. And a huge part of that in vocation has really been this conversation I had a lot during my PULSE year, which was how to ensure healthy communities? And that’s a lot bigger of a goal than just having a career in medicine. And so, that’s been a huge part of my vocational growth post-PULSE, really understanding that there’s kind of a bigger goal than just the career path that I’m on.

00:39 - Mike Bennett

Welcome to *Sharing Our Marianist Stories*, a podcast produced by the North American Center for Marianist Studies in Dayton, Ohio. I’m Mike Bennett, Media Administrator for NACMS. For this episode, we sat down with three alumni of Marianist PULSE, a postgraduate year of professional nonprofit service that empowers energetic adults to make a positive impact on an urban community and embody the Marianist charism. Abby Shahady, Ani Artero, and Dominic Sanfilippo share about their journeys with Marianist PULSE and how their engagement in this year of service program impacted their lives. With that, let’s go ahead and turn it over to Abby to get us started.

01:33 - Abby Shahady

Hi, I’m Abby. I am currently at the University of Toledo for medical school. I’m a first-year medical student. When I was just part of MP6 - the 6th cohort of Marianist PULSE - I was kind of a Health Equity programs manager, so I got to work with Dayton Children’s [Hospital] and the Fitz Center [for Leadership and Community] at UD [University of Dayton].

01:56 - Dominic Sanfilippo

Hi Mike and everybody. It’s really good to be here, this is Dom again. I was part of Marianist PULSE 1, the inaugural community of the relaunched Marianist PULSE program, as we called it affectionately MP1. I joined after graduating from the University of Dayton in 2016 with a Bachelors in Philosophy and Human Rights Studies, and my service placement in ministry was at Chaminade Julianne High School, a co-ed high school in the Marianist tradition. That experience is really formative for me and ended up shaping my eventual career, which has led to the intersection of education and civics and community building. [I] taught and worked in several schools around the country as well as in local government in the Chicago land area and in different university capacities, leading me to return to UD for a Masters in Theological Studies in the pandemic time. And to my current role as the Assistant Director of LGBTQ Student Initiatives at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana.

02:52 - Ani Artero

Hi, I'm Ani. I am currently in Fredericksburg, Texas, where I am the club director at a local Boys and Girls Club. I was in MP1. My ministry was with the Rivers Institute in the Fitz Center. My main role was the River Mobile Coordinator. And after that, I stayed in Dayton for a little bit working at Daybreak. And then I came all the way to Texas to work at Tecaboca Marianist Retreat Center and Summer Camp, where I was the Program Director, which led me here. So, I've been in youth education and youth development for a while.

03:28 - Mike Bennett

Our first question is just what led you to pursue a year of service with Marianist PULSE?

03:34 - Abby Shahady

I was at the University of Dayton for my undergrad, and I graduated in 2022. I knew I wanted to take a gap year before going to medical school. That's kind of a common theme with healthcare professional schools, is you take a gap year to kind of gain other experiences or people use them to kind of build other parts of their application. And I knew I wanted to take a gap year, but it was mostly because I felt like I hadn't quite gotten to the root of who I wanted to be as a person. I felt like I really packed a lot of rigorous academics into my four years at the University of Dayton. But I almost kind of wanted to hop off the [what] I called "the conveyor belt of striving for academic excellence," and rather finding a little bit more about what makes me *me*.

04:22 - Abby Shahady

So, I always talk about the paradox of joining a year of service for myself. But there was a part of me that was like, "You should do this program because you can't just go into a rigorous career saying you want to help people without really knowing what it means to serve others and live in a community setting." So that was a really big draw to me, was not, "Oh, you need to beef up some part of your application." It was more like, "Take a step back from kind of this rigorous pathway you're on and try to humanize yourself a little bit, be in this Dayton community that you've been at school in for four years in like a whole different way."

04:59 – Ani Artero

I went to undergrad at Chaminade University in Honolulu, and that's where I was first introduced to the Marianists. As I was in undergrad, I was down the path to becoming a teacher, and I was a teacher at a private boarding school in Micronesia called Xavier High School, and I taught English and inter-cultural communications. It was a lot. But while I was there, I learned that maybe teaching wasn't for me, and so I was kind of in the place to pursue something else but wasn't sure what. And so, PULSE came about at the perfect time because at that point while I was in Micronesia there were other teachers there that were doing their own service years - or two years, really, because they were through JVC, Jesuit Volunteer Corps. - And when I learned about [a] year of service for men, I was kind of jealous. I was like, "Wow, you guys have this community. You guys have your built-in crew while you're here in a foreign place." And whenever they had community nights or spirituality nights, I'd be like, "Man, how come I can't

come?" But then I heard that PULSE was becoming and so, I applied and got in. And I'm very thankful for it because it really did help kind of steer me in what my vocation is.

06:17 - Dominic Sanfilippo

I was a senior at UD, and I'd had a lot of experiences in internships, work experiences that made me think I might want to take some of that storytelling and policy passion that I had and jump into some sort of equivalent policy role right after college, whether that be in Washington DC or back in Chicago, or on a campaign, or perhaps through study, through taking the undergraduate thesis work I've done through Dayton and taking an undergraduate study, maybe hopping back over to the United Kingdom or Europe for graduate school where I'd spent my junior year. I was thinking, "I'm 22, I'm young, I can go do this. These are a lot of really viable options." And as I was thinking about all that I was going really fast, busy through life and I really felt sort of like an unspoken need to take stock of my relationships with myself, with others and with God. I needed a kind of conduit for that. And some other folks said, "This program might be a really cool opportunity to do that." So, I'm sure the living in community, to be challenged, to move slowly and to listen, see the mosaic of Dayton, Ohio, comes together.

07:28 - Dominic Sanfilippo

And so, I really feel what it means to be part of a larger space, a larger city, a larger family. Then I jumped at it, and I was nervous. But it's unbelievable; looking back now, all sorts of things that happened afterward. Several years later, I don't know if I'd be able to say that any of it would have happened without PULSE. And the person I've grown into, the version of myself, I really enjoy that version. And I enjoy all the threads of community that make up my life. I enjoy continuing to slow down, trying not to take things for granted. PULSE is so integral to that process of self-discovery and learning how to be good for others and in a way that's fruitful and generative.

08:06 - Mike Bennett

That was about how you came into PULSE. I'm curious how your experience impacted your engagement within the Marianist Family?

08:15 - Abby Shahady

I was kind of just a Dayton native. I have lived almost my entire life in the city of Dayton. My mom works at the University of Dayton. I knew that was where I was going to go to college. And I was a Health Science major, and I had done all of the correct things that I needed to pursue the career I wanted, which was to go to Med school and become a physician. But it wasn't really until I did PULSE that I was able to kind of engage with the Marianist Family that was present in Dayton. So, I think for me it was really an eye-opening experience about the connections that I made in a place that I had lived my entire life.

08:51 – Abby Shahady

I called PULSE my toe-dip into adulthood because I wasn't connected to school or my family. It was just me living in this space and connecting to so many people that have been in this area. I

just really connected with Bro. Ray Fitz and my mentor Matt Dunn, and so many amazing people that were a part of the Marianist Family that I still am keeping in touch with now to this day. So, I think for me, it really was just these connections which turned out to be really funny because I had lived and engaged in a space with them. I was so close with them physically, but hadn't quite taken the step to engage with them until I did Marianist PULSE.

09:31 - Mike Bennett

I think that's a helpful perspective because I think there can be a lot of people considering PULSE or who end up doing PULSE who may have been students at UD or may like you be from Dayton and think, "Oh, I already know this. I should go somewhere else, expand my horizons." Hearing you say that highlights a little bit of that newness that it had for you, that new lens. Ani, I'm thinking about you coming from Hawaii. I'm sure that is there for people who are out of town but to hear that from a different angle is helpful.

10:00 - Ani Artero

Learning about the Marianists and like seeing the small differences compared to the Jesuits, it kind of was like a hug. At Xavier, we had a few nights a week where we would say the Rosary. The student communities would join after study time. We would go to the chapel and say the Rosary, and that special time with Mary was kind of formative and what I was going towards. So, knowing that I was going to be a part of PULSE got me kind of excited. And so, hearing about Dayton, Ohio, sounded like this dream world, kind of strangely from Bro. Mark [Motz]. He told us of people that are part of the Marianist world outside of Chaminade and not knowing that the Marianists were more than just Chaminade then it was kind of exciting to get to know more. So, when I was in Dayton getting to know a lot of the brothers, priests, and lay people, my world was just broadened.

10:56 – Ani Artero

So, getting to experience that life and even knowing that it's beyond Honolulu and Dayton - because, during our mid-year retreat, we went to Cape May. We went to (at the time) Bro. Mike [Chiuri] and Bro. Brandon [Paluch]'s, one of their vows in Saint Louis. So, we got to kind of travel and see the Marianists in different areas of the world. And so that even like brought me to Tecaboca, where there's more. But yeah, there's Marianists everywhere and it's just nice to know that the Family is worldwide, and we haven't even gotten to meet all of them. But we all kind of have that same sense of Family. We all have that same foundation.

11:35 - Dominic Sanfilippo

As I moved around the country, as my own pace of life has ebbed and flowed, I've really just been really grateful for this large various warm Marianist Family to be a source of opportunity in relationship building and also source of challenge - all three of those things. All really grateful for the Marianist formation I've gone through, a lot of opportunities in college, things like the Lay Marianist Formation, run by the late AJ Wagner, his wife, Joan Wagner, things like the Chaminade Scholars program working at [how] faith and reason together and how those play out their different academic pursuits, pieces of life, all of this really led to PULSE. And the

distinctive programming and formation aspect of PULSE, which is really the distinctive line that can kind of take it apart from some of the other postgraduate service programs we see around the country.

12:19 – Dominic Sanfilippo

And you're not pursuing a formal degree in PULSE, but you really are getting a degree in relationship building and sitting and processing in community meetings, and on your porch with neighbors and learning how nonprofits and religious groups and neighborhood organizations affect the life of the city, the life of the community. And you're doing it alongside an intergenerational community, a multi-generational community of Marianists. That's a very, very distinctive lesson. It's almost a degree in and of itself. And as I've gone through life, I've been quite proud to see how that education, the distinctive formation, opportunities in PULSE distinctive ways of thinking about institutions and structures and communities in PULSE have served me. In every other role in every other city, in community, I've really found myself and from there and out. I'm very grateful for it.

13:09 - Mike Bennett

So how would each of you say that PULSE impacted your vocation?

13:15 - Abby Shahady

That's something that I've really been thinking about right now, especially now that I'm back in school. I was really worried about, "Am I back to square one about just being a student?" But I think in terms of my vocation, it's how I've been able to translate the Marianist values in medical school. And a huge part of that in vocation has really been this conversation I had a lot during my PULSE year, which was how to ensure healthy communities. And that's a lot bigger of a goal than just having a career in medicine. And so that's been a huge part of my vocational growth post-PULSE, really understanding that there's kind of a bigger goal than just the career path that I'm on. And moreover, with that I think finding a personal spirituality has really made me understand a lot more about who I am. I talked about that as like a reason that I joined PULSE, was to kind of take a step back and look at myself in the mirror. And I think that's really opened up a lot of different interests and excitement in terms of how to be socially and communally connected. I know in my faith formation, we had to read Fr. [Joseph] Lackner's *Virtues [for Mission]* virtues book, which I absolutely love. I still look at it often just to read all the notes I scribbled in the margins, of Bro. Ray [Fitz] spitting just wonderful bits of wisdom. But I have to keep that in my head at all times.

14:38 – Abby Shahady

And so, really just kind of moving away from the traditional, "I went to Catholic school all my life." And there's all these traditions and history of the Christian faith, but realizing that that *Virtues* book talks about the theological psychology and that there's more to your faith and your spirituality than just these tidbits of facts and stuff that I grew up learning. That mixed with kind of the social justice piece of what I call my "commitment to creating healthy communities" has

kind of molded my vocational aspect of wanting to be a physician in a way that I don't think any textbook or class could have ever really given me.

15:13 - Dominic Sanfilippo

Going off on what Abby just said and thinking about what PULSE stirred in me, even months and years after I left our house on Wellmeier Avenue in the Linden Heights neighborhood, east out of Dayton in the original PULSE house. I keep coming back to this word “interiority,” to giving space to let one's own spirituality grow, to let yourself ask questions, to be curious and really making sure that while you're doing all those things – while I'm doing all those things - that I'm in conversation with the waters and currents which the program swims in. And it's meeting people where they're at and where I'm at, where any of us are at on the way. That was the experience I overwhelmingly had in PULSE, and it was really joyful one. And it took me a long time to unpack and integrate some of those realizations. And it really has fueled my vocational skills, my vocational passions of gathering folks together, and of creating small moments that can break paths and see paths, divides and barriers.

16:07 – Dominic Sanfilippo

All of those things have really fueled my next step, moving to South Bend, Indiana, being the point person for the University of Notre Dame for the LGBTQ Student Community, which is something I've been passionate about for a really long time. The community that grew alongside PULSE, and the toolkit and skills I worked on, all help me every day to stand with and alongside these students that I work with. But it's a true privilege, but I don't know if I would have arrived at a place like that to view my own passion, my vocation as an educator, as a community builder, working in the in-between spaces as a reconciler on my best days. If I would have viewed any of that, had I not allowed myself to move slowly within PULSE, to be wholeheartedly there, to allow myself to be challenged and to admit feelings of uncertainty, feelings of vulnerability. I mean postgraduate service programs do that at their best, and I really feel like it's the strength of PULSE.

16:57 - Ani Artero

I'd say that PULSE helped shape my vocation initially from my placement. I was really exposed to environmental education and very interested in informal education specifically. Just because I thought that formal education was going to be my path, and then learning about informal education and was just really like diving into that has really been where I thrive. And so, PULSE brought me to Tecaboca, where I was camp queen (I felt like). And then sharing [with] kids how to do things and how to conquer fears and do things that they didn't think that they could. It really just makes me happy.

17:34 – Ani Artero

And then I also think at the times that we spent on Wellmeier just playing with the neighborhood kids. We had hide and seek nights regularly. And just giving kids opportunities to be kids and have safe places to be, and I think that's very important in the upbringing of kids. And so, that's been so impactful with PULSE's foundation and how they helped to formate that in me. And

now getting to do that as a club director at a Boys and Girls Club, I get to do it every day. It seems unfair that I get paid to play, but it really is a lot more than that. A lot of programming and curriculum development and making sure that what we're doing is forming future productive citizens that are just caring for the world. And I think that PULSE helps solidify and fine tune things that I need.

18:23 - Mike Bennett

I want to touch a little bit on the experience of living in intentional community, of the rhythm, the space, all those sorts of things. So, can you talk a little bit about how living in intentional community shaped your life? And are there dynamics of that you recognize now being a few months to a few years out of the experience?

18:43 - Abby Shahady

For me, a big thing was there's both small personal instances of community and kind of the big word "community." I remember when I would get out of my car at the Grafton [Avenue] PULSE house every day, one of the neighbors would be sitting on her porch, and she would always call me "Doc." And I was like, "I'm not a doctor yet, Ms. Angelo." And she's like, "You're gonna be a doctor," and she would just say, "What's up, Doc?" I think she just loved hearing herself say that. But it was just such a fun connection every day when it was nice out, I would open my door, I would leave. I had my hospital badge on, and she'd be like, "Hey, Doc, what's up?" And we would just have such a great little conversation. But also, kind of what I mentioned about the healthy communities, that I think each individual person can be an asset to their community. And that I think was the biggest lesson I learned from intentional community because I had a smaller PULSE cohort community. So, we really did try to branch out into the larger Dayton community and engage with different groups of people in different community events going on and things like that. So, I think it really taught me a lot about, I think, a balance between both having individual relationships and forming those kinds of communities, but also understanding it at the 10,000-foot view of how to keep a community connected and engage with it properly.

20:02 - Dominic Sanfilippo

I know 100%, I'm a better listener and therefore I hope a more effective communicator because my community members helped one another enter into such an effective, intimate communicative space. And even through points of tension - and there are lots of those in community, and I deploy a ton of those skills I learned every day professionally, truly. And I try to work harder, personally, to continue to become a more effective listener, a more empathetic listener, a more effective clear communicator in all of my relationships in my life, even outside of work. And all of that emits from PULSE where we really learn that you're not roommates with another in a setting like that. It's not like your college roommates in PULSE. You're part of your community, and then you have your individuality, and but you're also thinking of the whole. What does it mean to me to move as a whole group? What does it mean to think of the good of the group in a really foundational way? And that played itself out practically sometimes. What does it mean to have a one car that we're doing all our drop offs for work in, and we have to plan our day thinking of the whole?

21:03 – Dominic Sanfilippo

That's one point, and then the other thing would really just be making sacred the little moments of the day, which are not so small or little after all. Just [being] friendly with neighbors, hanging with neighbors. Ani, just the other day, I was going through pictures on my phone, and I found some funny ones from how we [were] also stressing out all sorts of developing relationships of trust with neighboring families, which I really felt like we tried to do. And they were so receptive to us as this new group of young adult college grads coming into the neighborhood and all sorts of assumptions might happen there. Are these kids going to be rowdy (meaning us)? Are they going to be college kids who know everything coming in and trying to build community in a really strong, stubborn way? And it was really none of that, joyfully. It was really just turned into us being there together, and it can't get better than that.

21:51 - Ani Artero

It really is about relationships. So, when you have a group of people that - at least for me, I didn't know anybody - it really does kind of force you to - I don't know if "force" is the right word either - where you're learning about them, and you're accepting them for who they are and everything that comes with them, and you kind of can mold together into this community that is one life. And it affects other people, too. And as our intentional community... I think we did a good job branching out beyond the neighborhood, or beyond our house and into the neighborhood and beyond our own neighborhoods, into the communities that we were serving at our placements. At least at my placement, I'd take the River Mobile to different schools and different organizations and have community with them for a day, maybe two days. But with our neighborhood, we were there for the whole year, and we saw a lot of changes happen because of the community that we had established.

22:32 – Ani Artero

We've talked about our cookie party before. What is important about it is that we had neighbors that didn't get along with each other, and there were some that got angry at others, for whatever reason. But our cookie party, it changed our neighborhood dynamic. There had been not a physical fight, but like yelling, going on. And with our cookie party, there was reconciliation. There [were] people coming together and apologizing and welcoming each other back into their relationship that maybe wasn't there or just improving what it was before. I think that's important, just living intentionally in that way and making sure that what we were doing was beneficial, but also fun and approachable. And I think that's kind of important for communities now.

23:30 - Mike Bennett

My last question that's PULSE specific, [what] would be one thing you'd offer to people who might be out there discerning applying for Marianist PULSE, or they might be discerning a year of service with Marianist PULSE?

23:42 - Abby Shahady

I'm the kind of person that really weighs decisions like that meticulously. I think the biggest piece of advice is if you're thinking about it, just take the leap and do it. Just take that step, and that's something that I also think I learned in that year. You can be weighing these things. I can think as logically as I want to about so many things, but I really think that this experience impacted a lot more than just what my typical pros and cons list of a good experience would be. If you're thinking about it, I think you should take the step and engage with it, because I don't regret it all.

24:14 - Ani Artero

I want to say to especially applicants or people that are interested that are from Hawaii or from somewhere that isn't Dayton or anything familiar in that way, it's a safe experience to kind of learn about another culture. I know it doesn't seem like a culture, but it is. It is when it's something very different from what you're used to and what you've grown up with. You get a chance to live a life that is forming, being able to kind of have an adventure or practice adapting to something new. It really does kind of stretch you in ways that you couldn't do if you stayed in the same place. It's not forever, but it's still something that's worth it. Give it a chance. It may be a little bit uncomfortable, but it's still safe.

25:00 - Dominic Sanfilippo

I would just really echo that there are different kinds of good. And I think we often treat these major life decisions as if there's one train at a one train line, one track that we can catch that brings us to the next important decision. And if we miss this one train, we're done, we missed the boat. I really - I'm not sure that's true. As I get older, I tend to think life is more like an underground subway station with all sorts of lines crisscrossing in and out of one another, helping you get where you need to go. And if you miss just one train by a few minutes, that's all right if you're open to the journey and you're receptive to catching another one.

25:34 – Dominic Sanfilippo

In my experience, I found that I've got right in to go. I was still thinking about that. And also, for those that deserve a process and respectfully have students to consider, what parts of their education may be a little incomplete up to this point or ongoing outside of classes, projects, co-ops, internships. What lessons might one want need to continue to learn about how they are relationally? Communicatively? Where they are with God? Where they're at with thinking about how to be in community with a lot of people that are different than oneself? How are you at silence? So much of adult life is silence and quiet and all those things that you can't really learn on a test or in a class. So, I challenge to thinking about whether a postgraduate year of service might be a helpful way to continue that lifelong education.

26:18 - Mike Bennett

Before we hear Abby, Ani, and Dom's responses to our concluding question, it's worth sharing a little bit more about the Marianist PULSE program in case you or someone you know might be interested in learning more. PULSE offers volunteer positions in nonprofits serving in Health-

Equity, education and literacy, food access and justice, support of those in housing crisis and more. Volunteers live in community in the city of Dayton, Ohio, with other young adults walking this journey. PULSE provides each volunteer with mentors, a well-being guide, and spiritual director. One Friday a month is set aside for reflection, critical social analysis, professional skill development, and leadership formation. PULSE covers housing, utilities, groceries, healthcare, and loan deferment. Volunteers also receive a monthly living stipend for anything not otherwise covered and an end-of-year \$5000 allocation. To request an application, get more information, and envision how an experience like this might align well for your next steps, e-mail Maureen O'Rourke, director of Marianist's PULSE at pulse@marianist.us. That's pulse@marianist.us.

27:47 - Mike Bennett

We offer our thanks to Abby, Ani and Dom for sharing their story and a word of thanks to you, our listener, for listening to this episode of *Sharing our Marianist Stories* and for your continued support of the North American Center for Marianist Studies. Make sure to follow us wherever you listen to podcasts so that you'll be notified when we have future episodes released and follow us on our social media account @ThisIsNACMS on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube so that you have access to our ongoing educational and formational content focused on our Marianist Family, history, and charism. And now to wrap up this episode of *Sharing Our Marianist Stories*, we return with our final question. We know that the Marianists founders corresponded via letter writing, so if you were going to write a letter to anyone, dead or alive, and be guaranteed a response, who might you write to and what would be the topic?

28:50 – Abby Shahady

During my year of PULSE, one of my dear UD mentors passed away, Dr. Anne Crecelius. She was an amazing mentor, professor, everything. And during that time, Bro. Ray Fitz and I started reading *Being Mortal [Medicine and What Matters in the End]* by Dr. Atul Gawande, who's a general surgeon and just writes books and stories about that. But it's really about what it means to be mortal. Him [Bro. Ray] and I both read this book, and we sometimes talk about it. And that was kind of really an impactful part of my PULSE's journey. And I think Dr. Gawande would be a really great person. I have a lot of questions for him.

29:27 - Dominic Sanfilippo

I would write a letter in Italian - in a perfectly Sicilian dialect - to my great-great-grandfather on my dad's side, who was, I think one of the first ones to really start thinking about what it might be like for him and his kids and their families to move over to America, to the United States. And it would be such a fascinating thing for him to get that letter and see all the things that would come from our family eventually. Just some wonderful, wonderful, wonderful things that have occurred in the great, deep, wild springs of family that have happened there. I would love to connect with them via that letter.

30:01 – Ani Artero

It might be silly, but I would write a letter to Alex Trebek because I miss him and I'm so grateful for him. Because in, I think, all the stepping stones of my journey of life, I've had "Jeopardy,"

and a community around “Jeopardy” and people that I can sit and watch “Jeopardy” with and banter with, to learn... and it's just fun. And I don't know what I would ask him, but I would thank him for sure for having that piece of entertainment for people in that gathering space.