

Sharing Our Marianist Stories, Episode 13 Transcript
Responding to God's Invitation with Bro. Tom Redmond, SM

00:00 – Bro. Tom Redmond, SM

God saying I want to be with you. This sense of God, when we really start to look at who God is, is very relational, and our response is prayer. And what happens in prayer? And that's what we bring to spiritual direction.

00:28 – Patti Gehred

Welcome to *Sharing Our Marianist Stories*. I'm Patti Gehred.

00:32 – Sr. Gabby Bibeau, FMI

And I'm Sister Gabby Bibeau. So, for today's podcast, we are playing for you an interview that Patti did with Bro. Tom Redmond. So, Patti, can you tell us a little bit about this interview and about the program, too?

00:49 – Patti Gehred

Sure! This interview was mostly to get Bro. Tom to talk about spiritual direction, his experience with it as both a director and a directee. And it came from the fact that he is coordinating the Spirit of Saragossa Retreat in Daily Life, which is an ongoing program that started in January of 2020 that anyone can sign up for at anytime (and all our information is on our web page). And that retreat has been in the works for nine or ten years, from its inception where it was mostly just for vowed religious before they took their final vows, to this daily retreat for both religious and lay people. And Bro. Tom's been in this process almost from the beginning. So, I just kind of wanted to get a little background of what spiritual direction meant to him.

01:51 – Sr. Gabby Bibeau, FMI

I think it's great that we are able to offer this for people because the original retreat that was for the vowed religious was over 30 days – like, 30 days in a row. So, it was a month-long retreat which a lot of people can't take 30 days out of their life to do a retreat. So, this is sort of broken up over, I don't know, like five or six months or seven months. So, it's basically the 30-day retreat spread out over this much longer period of time. So, you are able to do the retreat kind of in your daily life. Was there anything in particular that you heard, Patti, that really kind of struck you?

02:33 – Patti Gehred

Yes, I really enjoyed speaking with Bro. Tom about being a spiritual director. And what he said over and over is that direction helps you find out where God is inviting you. I asked him several times, you know, this isn't a counseling session or even confessional opportunity when you're with your spiritual director. So, what is it for? And he mentioned several times that when you're in a transition in life or stuck somewhere, God is inviting you to something. Sometimes it's scary, and sometimes it's positive. And so, as a spiritual director, the role is just to help you know that you're being invited to something. They don't tell you what it is. They just help you be directed and have a deeper connection to your relationship with God.

03:33 – Sr. Gabby Bibeau, FMI

Yeah, I think people, many people, if they're not familiar with what spiritual direction is, they might think like, "Oh, the spiritual director gives you advice or tells you how to pray or what to do." And I think really the best spiritual directors ask good questions, and it is helping you see how God is working in your life.

03:55 – Patti Gehred

If you're considering participating in the Spirit of Saragosa Retreat for Daily Life, this interview helps you know that there's been a lot of training and a lot of reading, a lot of process, a lot of experiment. This has gone through several pilot programs with religious and lay. If spiritual direction is something you've been considering, I think this would be a wonderful opportunity.

04:22 – Sr. Gabby Bibeau, FMI

Well, we really think you're going to like this interview with Bro. Tom Redmond. So, here it is.

04:31 – Bro. Tom Redmond, SM

Bro. Tom Redmond, on staff here at NACMS.

04:36 – Patti Gehred

One of the reasons we wanted to talk about spiritual direction is because you are the coordinator of the Spirit of Saragossa Retreat.

04:44 – Bro. Tom Redmond, SM

Yes, that's right. The component of spiritual direction is an essential element of the Retreat, with the Retreat in Daily Life, usually weekly meetings between the retreatant and the retreat director.

04:57 – Patti Gehred

Lots of people talk about spiritual direction. Lots of religious orders have their ways of spiritual direction. I think it's a huge need in the world right now. So, how would you describe spiritual direction?

05:12 – Bro. Tom Redmond, SM

Basically, I think spiritual direction is one person talking to another about their life from a faith perspective. The sense of, "I'm sensing God doing something in my life, and I need to talk about it. I want to talk about it to get greater clarity." I think that's the bottom line of it: one believer talking to another believer who hopefully has some background training in spiritual direction, so it doesn't waver. It doesn't get off track. Sometimes it can lead to problem solving, and that's not the focus of spiritual direction. It's to support the individual, to go deeper into their lived experience of how they sense God touching their life.

05:58 – Patti Gehred

It's hard to take time to stop and listen and hear what God is trying to tell us. So, do you think by having a director or a companion in this, that helps you create that time?

06:14 – Bro. Tom Redmond, SM

Oh, certainly! It's usually calendared. When we have an appointment in our calendar, we start thinking about it a few days ahead of time, a week ahead of time. What do I want to talk about? What's going on? I'm often mindful of Plato quoting Socrates, "The unexamined life is not worth living." And it's looking at the importance of reflecting on our life, our lived experience.

06:45 – Patti Gehred

I just would like to add that when you say that, it makes me think of Chaminade's quote, "The essential is the interior."

06:51 – Bro. Tom Redmond, SM

Right on target. Yeah, "The essential is the interior." It's not the only thing, but it's the essential, and out from the interior then flows everything else that we're about.

07:04 – Patti Gehred

What does the process look like if someone is interested in spiritual direction, whether it's through this retreat program or just for their own edification?

07:14 – Bro. Tom Redmond, SM

I think it begins with something stirring within the individual, wanting some greater clarity about it. Frequently, we hear and sometimes ourselves say, "When I put my thoughts or feelings into words, it just adds a lot of clarity to it." And a good spiritual director will feedback, "Is this what you're saying?" And then for the individual to say, to add to more clarity to it. So, preparing for spiritual direction, it's just getting a deeper in touch with one's life. So, finding a spiritual director, talking to other people that you might trust, saying, "Do you go to spiritual direction? Who do you go to? How do you find somebody?" Calling the Diocese. Some parishes have people on staff. Retreat houses frequently have people on staff or can refer you.

08:15 – Patti Gehred

What's going on in someone's life that they would seek spiritual direction? They don't always have to be in stress

08:22 – Bro. Tom Redmond, SM

That's correct, yeah. And I think usually it's somebody feeling like there's a problem, and "I need to get clarity on this," or somebody going through a transition in life and just wanted to talk about it. And from our faith perspective, God's grace is always working, and our life is continuing to unfold. And so, talking about that, especially in times of transition when we're leaving something we know very well and moving into something that's not too clear yet, moving into the unknown, it can be scary. It can be stressful, but it also can be joyful of God calling us forth. And us responding must give God great joy.

09:13 – Bro. Tom Redmond, SM

I remember talking with someone coming for direction, and they were talking on that level of, you know, this hesitancy of moving, taking next step. And I fed back this insight of, "What do you think God is feeling in this from God's perspective?" And the person said, "God is just waiting for me, just waiting for me to take this step and open arms. Come forward." And the

person's face just lit up and looked at it from a whole different perspective. From this hesitancy and almost feeling stress about this transition to, “Oh my God, there's an invitation in this!” And it did not give any clarity of what the next step was to be, but it added a sure footing. Trust! Have no fear!

10:10 – Bro. Tom Redmond, SM

Constantly we hear that through the Scriptures. “Do not be afraid.” And that's what this person experienced like, “Oh my God. God is inviting me forward, leaving this comfortable place and moving into something that's totally new.” But the person's face just lit up, and the person's body shifted. The body posture shifted as if to sit up straight and say “I'm ready for this.” And again, it didn't add any clarity to decisions to be made, but just this deeper sense of trust and faith to move forward, that God was there, inviting this person forward. So, I think that's a nugget of spiritual direction.

10:58 – Patti Gehred

So, what I'm hearing is that it's spiritual, but it's also direction. It's not answers. It's so if you're going to get answers, spiritual direction might not – It could be, but it's not the role of the spiritual director to give the answer. So, through this talk, I'm hearing the importance of direction.

11:21 – Bro. Tom Redmond, SM

Yeah, and that word “direction” sometimes gives the impression that the spiritual director will direct the person of where to go. But I think the most healthiest form of spiritual direction is opening up the directee, the person seeking direction, to find the answers within. I'm remembering one training session was the fishbowl type. All of us participants were in the class, and then the facilitator asked for a volunteer to come forward and model spiritual direction. So, the person asked the spiritual director a question. It was rather personal, like, “Well, what do you think about this?” And the director turned it right around in a very positive way, saying, “That's a very good question. Where does that come from?” And it stirred, and it invited the directee to just look within, and not to put it out there - you know, to have the director give the answer - but to go back into within and say, “Where does that come from? That's a good question. Where does that come from? Why do you ask that?” So, I think that's spiritual direction, right on target. It's the director directing the individual back into their own lived experience.

12:49 – Patti Gehred

Is there a beginning, middle and end to spiritual direction? Do you go and think, “Okay, you've led me in the right direction. This is over.” Is this a long-term relationship? Is it both?

13:02 – Bro. Tom Redmond, SM

That's a very good question of how long do you work with a director. In my own experience, both as a person going to spiritual direction and as a spiritual director, after three or four times, just sound it out. “How's this working for you? Is it a good match?” And then, after a year or two, asking that same question. And I've experienced this in going to spiritual direction. Sometimes it just gets to the point where I need someone new or taking a time out for a couple of months. But it's really being honest with the feelings, the stirrings within. But I think that's a very good question to just to be aware of. This isn't a lifetime commitment of “This is my spiritual

director for the rest of my life.” And that honesty - and I think sometimes the director might be aware, too - of sometimes, after a while, maybe, “We've talked about this one item for several sessions now and there's no movement.” I think that's a key thing to keep in mind. Is there movement? Is there growth?

14:17 – Patti Gehred

Do people at times confuse spiritual direction and maybe reconciliation, asking for forgiveness? Or maybe asking how to forgive others? And is that a good connection, a good reason to go?

14:30 – Bro. Tom Redmond, SM

Let's look at reconciliation in the Sacrament of Confession, Penance. The setting is about three to five minutes, and it's something very focused of, “Bless me, Father, for I have sinned.” And the penitent talking about some of the things that he or she has done that's not up to par, how they've offended God or another person or themselves. The confessor will usually give some words of encouragement, the blessing, the reconciliation, the absolution, and the final blessing in three to five minutes. But it's very focused on this healing process.

15:10 – Bro. Tom Redmond, SM

In direction, it's 40-50 minutes, no more than 60 minutes. And it's focused on maybe three or four things, sometimes. Sometimes they're connected, sometimes they're not. I had a wonderful spiritual director [to whom] I was talking about three or four things, four or five things during the 15 minutes and I said, “I feel like I'm all over the place,” and my spiritual director said, “These are all pieces to the puzzle. They're going to fit together eventually.” And it was very accepting. Looking at the comparison between Reconciliation, sacrament, and direction, spiritual direction can be very healing. And I think it leads an individual to a greater depth and awareness of, “Gee, maybe I need to bring something to the Sacrament of Reconciliation.”

16:05 – Patti Gehred

And I can sort of see that you could receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation and not believe you're forgiven. And then go to spiritual direction and talk about that so you can hear that, “Yes, you've been forgiven.” I can see it working hand in hand.

16:22 – Bro. Tom Redmond, SM

I've had that experience a couple of times where a directee will be talking about something, and I think it maybe is centered on the experience that the Sacrament of Reconciliation is three to five minutes or so. Whereas the small sacrament of spiritual direction, when you're talking with someone for 40-50 minutes about something, you just go deeper and deeper and deeper, seeing the hand of God in this. There's some truth to that of, I think, spiritual direction just adds another light to the whole situation of a person's life, augmenting maybe what's happening in the Sacraments.

17:07 – Patti Gehred

And I think we touched on this a little bit earlier, but it's also not a counseling session or a therapy session. So how can you help people understand what that difference is?

17:18 – Bro. Tom Redmond, SM

That's a very fine point, a good point to raise. Counseling focuses much more on problem solving. Finding answers of a person thinking, "I can't go anymore with this. I've got to find some answers." And then seeking out a trained counselor to talk about this stuff, finding some resolution to life situations. Sometimes it's transitions and having to get out of something, move from a different job to another or something. And spiritual direction, looks at it from a faith perspective of "What's God inviting me to through this?" Maybe sometimes a person is going to direction and counseling at the same time. Not to the same person, but one week it's to a spiritual director, another week it's to the counselor. And frequently, they may be talking about the same thing, but looking at it from different perspectives: the counseling from a human sociological, psychological perspective. From the spiritual direction point of view of the faith perspective, "What's God inviting me to here?" It's starting to see the hand of God in this.

18:40 – Bro. Tom Redmond, SM

And sometimes counseling is a little more short-term, finding resolution to it and an answer to a problem, finding answers. Or spiritual direction, usually meeting monthly, it's just ongoing. As one spiritual director said, "Spiritual direction takes us into a deeper relationship with God and with ourselves." And that just continues to unfold. It's just amazing how life continues to unfold and sometimes the real need to talk about that, of this grace of God, His stirring stuff in people's lives, and "I don't know what's going on." The director [is] inviting the directee to name it. And that might take a couple of months, three months, four months. That's always an interesting thing. "I don't know what's going on, but something's going on. God is up to something here and I don't know what it is."

19:49 – Bro. Tom Redmond, SM

But just having the patience and the faith to journey with this, take the next step in faith. And in all three - the Sacrament of Reconciliation/Confession/Penance, counseling, spiritual direction - there's an overlap. We're talking about the stuff of our lives. So naturally, there's going to be some similar threads. But how we talk about them and the resolution of it and what we get out of it, I think that's the key. What we get out of each of these three different things is the difference, the uniqueness of each.

20:21 – Patti Gehred

Why were you drawn to become a spiritual director?

20:25 – Bro. Tom Redmond, SM

Couple of things. One is having some very good experiences in direction and some not so good experiences in some directors. But for the most part, having some wonderful people over the years that I've gone to spiritual direction who've listened and have just invited me verbally and nonverbally to go deeper, to talk about how God has loved me. That experience of being loved is so powerful. I remember asking my brother, newlywed at the time, "What's it like being in love?" [And he said,] "Oh, beyond words." It's even more complex when we talk about being loved by God, whom we cannot see, but whom we sense is very real.

21:16 – Bro. Tom Redmond, SM

But having some powerful experiences in Direction. And feeling called by God, but by other people, having somebody ask me, “Have you got a couple of minutes I can sound something out with you?” [I say] “Sure.” And the feedback they gave was, “Wow, you're a good listener.” So that was affirming, and then talking about it with my own spiritual director and doing some programs and a formal training. And at the end of the training, going through a discernment process. The facilitators led us through a discernment process, “Is God calling me to this?” In the wonderful experience that I had and I have had by several directors over the years.

22:02 – Patti Gehred

So, is there anything you wanted to talk about that I haven't asked?

22:07 – Bro. Tom Redmond, SM

I think something is looking at just our view of God. Maybe about the nature of God from our Christian perspective. God is Triune (Father, Son, Holy Spirit), Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier, the very names we give to the Triune God. But through creation, we see that God is a being that wants to share self. And just looking at the beauty of creation through all the seasons, the different sounds we hear through the different seasons in nature, that God wants to share God's self. And the incarnation of God's word made flesh in the person of Jesus, God's sharing again God's self through Jesus. And Jesus his words, “Come follow me,” of God saying, “I want to be with you.” This sense of God, when we really start to look at who God is, is very relational. And our response is prayer. And what happens in prayer and that's what we bring to spiritual direction. A person talking about praying a certain scripture passage and finding themselves in that passage and the words that Jesus says to someone. The person says, “I heard Jesus saying that to me.”

23:39 – Bro. Tom Redmond, SM

It is powerful. Jesus touching the wounds of the leper, and “Jesus touched my wound,” and then talking about that. It's a very, very sacred moment, something we can't talk about with just anyone. But this sense of God wanting relation with us, relationships with us is so fundamental. I remember one author writing, “If we spend 20-30 minutes with someone every day, there's going to be a deepening in the relationship.” And that's what our prayer is. If we spend an hour with someone every week, something's happening with that relationship. That's what we do on Sunday as we go to the Lord's House to celebrate, to listen, to receive, to be with the believing community. And through that, God's grace is active. One image of God's grace I like is the image of water. I mean, water is going to flow. You cannot stop water from flowing. It's going to flow. God's grace is flowing. When we become aware of that, we need to talk about it. There's a desire to give it expression. And that's the gift of spiritual direction, being able to talk about that in a trusting environment.

25:12 – Sr. Gabby Bibeau, FMI

Thanks for listening to this episode of *Sharing Our Marianist Stories*. If you would like more information about the Spirit of Saragosa Retreat, you can go to our website www.nacms.org. Just look on our front page and you'll see a place where you can click on the Spirit of Saragosa Retreat, and you can read more about it. You can find an application. You can look at all the directors that are available regionally with short biographies of them. Thanks again for listening.