

Sharing Our Marianist Stories Ep. 14 Transcript

Wisdom from Our Founders for the Pandemic (with Gabby Bibeau and Patti Gehred)

00:00 - Gabby Bibeau

Hope does not assume things aren't going to be really difficult. Hope is where you can look at the difficult things and see that God is somehow working despite them, through them, in them. And I mentioned that about Adèle, too. The hope that she had, it was not because she had an easy life. It wasn't a naive hope. So, I think talking about hope right now is not to negate the tremendous suffering that's happening, but really looking for God in it and knowing that God is here with us in that suffering.

00:47 – Patti Gehred

Hi and welcome to *Sharing Our Marianist Stories*. I'm very excited about this interview because I will be interviewing Sr. Gabby about a paper she wrote for the NACMS website. But first we have a little bit of a caveat. This may sound different to you. We are using Zoom rather than our normal podcast tools. If you listen to podcasts, you're hearing this a lot. So, if you notice a difference in the sound quality, it's because we're using a different tool. So, Sr. Gabby, would you first tell us the name of your essay, and then what inspired you to write it?

01:28 - Gabby Bibeau

Well, to be perfectly honest, I don't have the essay pulled up before me, so I don't remember what my title was that I specified, but do you have it right in front of you?

01:41 - Patti Gehred

I do. Can I read it then?

01:43 – Gabby Bibeau

Yeah, please do.

01:43 - Patti Gehred

Okay. No problem. “*Living in a Time of Crisis: It's in our Marianist DNA.*” And the subtitle: “What can we learn from our Founders in their time about how to keep the faith, maintain our hope, and grow in love in a time of pandemic and distancing from community?” Tell me why you were struck to even write this?

02:11 - Gabby Bibeau

Well, people listening might not know that part of my job at NACMS is not just programming and doing some other work with you on this podcast, but also doing research into the charism and Marianist history. So, I've spent a lot of this year reading and learning about Marianist history, especially about Mother Adèle, but Marianist history in general, and I'm often struck by

just how difficult their lives were. People listening might not know much about the French Revolution. I certainly did not before I met the Marianists. And the more I learn, the more I'm like, "Oh my gosh, it was so hard to live during that time." There was so much violence, and there was so much hatred towards the Catholic Church, towards priests, towards people, towards the nobility and the monarchy. And then vice versa, from people in the upper parts of society towards the peasants. It was just a terrible time to live in, and somehow our Marianist Family came out of all of this turmoil and this violence.

03:46 – Gabby Bibeau

And so, I thought it was important when the pandemic started and when we started getting a sense of just how huge of a problem it is, I just began to reflect more on the experience of our Founders. And I feel like I personally draw a lot of inspiration from them for how to cope with this time, and I wanted to share some of that with people, and hopefully it will help them and maybe learn more about our Marianist history and our call as Marianists.

04:25 - Patti Gehred

What I like about the essay is, you know, NACMS is known for keeping our history, sharing history, but we always try to keep and make the Family stories relevant, particularly of the Founders. I've been working at NACMS for 15 years, and there's been several times I'm like, "Wow, we can use the Founders lives." As you know, there's a parallel here. We can be inspired. But I really feel like this is particularly a time, there's so many parallels and so much relevancy. Can you tell a couple of the things that you've been reading about that make you feel like this particular time in our history is so much relatable to the times of the Founders?

05:18 - Gabby Bibeau

Yeah. So, one of the things that I have been researching a lot this past year, is the experience of the Lay faithful during the French Revolution, particularly women. So, what was it like to be a Catholic, just like a regular Catholic during the French Revolution, in the midst of the violence and whatnot? And one of the things that I learned - You know our common narrative as a Church or in Church history or even secular history is that the Catholic Church came back after the Revolution because of these great priests and religious who built it from scratch, basically.

06:06 - Gabby Bibeau

Now, there were some astounding priests and religious who helped rebuild the Church. But what I think people [and] historians are discovering is that there were in this time when the Church went underground regular people [who] kept the faith alive. So, after several years of the French Revolution, there could be no public Masses. For almost a decade, people couldn't gather in many parts of the country for Mass, and priests went into hiding and whatnot. And so, Lay people, especially Lay women, said, "Okay, well, we can't have Mass, but we know the Rosary, so we're going to gather in somebody's house with our children, and we're going to pray the

Rosary, and we're going to tell the lives of the Saints that we know, and we're going to tell Bible stories that we remember.”

07:08 – Gabby Bibeau

So, you have a whole generation of Catholics who their first experience of faith was in their home, sitting on their mother's laps, learning about Jesus and Mary and the Saints. That parallel, it is eerie how similar that is to our time right now. We can't have public Masses and so people, they're leaning on their own families, their own sense of the faith or what they do know to keep that faith alive. I find that really remarkable. And I think it's a reminder that the Church is not just a building or just the leadership, but the Churches is all of us together, the body of Christ, all of us together. So, this is one of the things that I say in the paper, is the experience in the French Revolution of the Church being underground really demonstrated how central Lay people are. Lay people are the Church just as much as the clergy and religious are the Church.

08:21 – Gabby Bibeau

So, looking back at that, it's no wonder that Father Chaminade, when he came back from exile, the first thing he did was gather Lay people together for the Bordeaux Sodality. He saw first-hand how important it is that Lay people take ownership of their faith. I think a really important person in that mix as well is Marie-Thérèse de Lamourous. She was a Lay woman who, in the absence of priests, was like, “Okay, I know good bit of the catechism, so come on over we're going to learn about the catechism. I know some priests who are hiding. I'm going to do the best that I can to help get them connected with people who need the sacraments. We'll have the secret Masses when we can.” So, I think there's so much inspiration we can draw from that, but just remembering that that's part of who we are. That's part of our Family history.

09:29 - Patti Gehred

I would like to read this quote, from Father Chaminade that he wrote to Marie-Thérèse. It's just, it could have been written today, “What is a faithful soul to do in the chaos of events which seemed to swallow it up? Sustain itself calmly by that faith, which assures us that all things work together unto good for those who love God.” And that quote... It's so hopeful. It's so faithful because things can just seem bleak. So, I thought that was a great choice of quotes.

10:11 - Gabby Bibeau

That's one of my favorite quotes from Father Chaminade, and when I was looking at Chaminade and Adèle and Marie-Thérèse as in this article, I sort of felt compelled to ascribe a certain theological virtue to each of them. And for Chaminade it was really faith. He talked about that all throughout his life, and I think you see it in that quote. And what's so important about that quote - and you said it, and I'm going to re-emphasize it - is he wrote that to Marie-Thérèse just as he was leaving France to go to Spain, to be an exile, and he was fleeing death. His name was on the list [where] if he had been caught, he would probably have been killed. And he didn't know how

long he was going to be in exile. And so, to be able to write that as your world is being turned upside down, I just think that's remarkable. And in our time, right now [2020], we have a different kind of exile. We're exiled in our homes. So, it's not quite the same, but it is a major disruption to our lives.

11:32 - Patti Gehred

And it's also not an exact parallel, but we are hiding from death. I mean, [we could] get this and pass it. We could die ourselves. And we're starting to know more and more people who know people who have died. And this isn't light. But I don't want to forget Adèle. So, I'd like you to talk about her. So much of her life she was ill, and she dealt with so much illness within the Sisters, so even something as black and white as that is relevant. But then again, just her whole attitude, so why don't you talk about that a little bit?

12:12 - Gabby Bibeau

When I was looking at the Founders and thinking about parallels to our time, when I looked at Adèle - I mean, her story is different than Chaminade and Marie-Thérèse's because she doesn't come into contact with them until 1809 or something like that, so well after the French Revolution. She was born a month before the Bastille prison was destroyed, which was sort of the beginning of - at least sort of the more violent part of the French Revolution. So, she didn't know a time before the Revolution. Her childhood was marked by this chaos and this turmoil and this violence. She also went into exile. So, her experience was a little bit different. She was one of those children who grew up in the faith on her mother's [Ursule's] lap, praying the Rosary, learning about the Saints, not making her First Communion until she was almost a teenager.

13:19 - Gabby Bibeau

When I looked at her whole life, the biggest parallel that I saw was her struggle with illness. I don't put this in the article, but her first kind of touch with illness, I think it was when she was around 18 or 19 years old. She talks about having a really serious illness... We don't know what it was, but she was sick for several months. And she describes herself as possibly having been near death. I think that gave her a sense of how short life is too, just as an immediate sense of that. But where we really see her experience with illness is after she started the Marianist Sisters. So, the Marianist Sisters were founded in 1816, and by 1818 or 1819, they started having Sisters falling sick and dying left and right. It was overwhelming. And these were young women. These were women in their... 18, 19, 20, 21 years old.

14:36 - Gabby Bibeau

And we can look back and know, based on what they were saying, that it was tuberculosis - or the word they used was "consumption" - and we've tried to reconstruct why that was. And the best we can tell is that there must have been early on, around 1818, one of the novices came into the community with tuberculosis, and people didn't realize how sick she was, and they lived so

close together... It's just so easy for illness to spread. And when you read in the letters of Adèle and in the biography that Fr. Joe Stefanelli wrote, you just get a sense of what a major blow this was. Adèle and her friends started this new congregation with all of these hopes for where they would go and what they would do, and they could barely stay alive. You'd have these women come in healthy, full of life, ready to serve God and they'd be dead in a matter of months, and there was really nothing they could do about it. They didn't have the same understanding of germs and sanitation that we do. A common treatment was bloodletting, where they actually bleed you to let out the "bad blood." Well, obviously, that only makes things worse, and one of Adèle's closest companions ended up dying. She was one of the original few Sisters, she ended up dying and that was a major blow for her, and you can see it in her letters. And I put this in the article of her asking the Sisters to pray for her that she not be overcome by bitterness or that she maintains her outlook.

16:38 - Gabby Bibeau

And I see her as a great model of hope. That was the virtue that I ascribed to her was hope, because she kept going with the work she was doing because she knew that there was something bigger that she was a part of. She had this unbelievable and incredible hope in God's Kingdom and the way that their work fit into that and hope in eternal life. So after so much time of all these Sisters dying and getting ill, Adèle herself got tuberculosis and struggled with that for the last few years of her life. And you can see in her letter, she talks about being confined to bed. She was not allowed to fast during Lent. But honestly, she couldn't eat very much at all. She could only keep down like milk and bread. But she kept doing what she could do, writing letters to her Sisters and guiding them as much as she could, all the while just having this great sense of hope that God would continue to be faithful to them and to her.

17:56 - Gabby Bibeau

It's really moving if you read the last chapter of the biography of Adèle by Fr. Stefanelli that describes her dying, and how she was surrounded by her Sisters and her departing words to them. And her last words were, "Hosanna to the Son of David." And I find that those words are full of hope because those are the words of the Jewish people to Jesus as He came to Jerusalem. They are words of hope that He was the Christ. And I think for Adèle, those were her words of hope, that "Okay, [my] time on Earth is done, but there's more than this." So, I think it's a really important perspective for us that in our modern lives, in the western world, developed countries, we can *not* think about death. We can go about our daily lives and death doesn't seem very close to us. For Adèle - and even for the other Founders, too - it was a daily reality. And you see they talk about death all the time. Every new year, Adèle writes, "Maybe we don't live to see the next new year." They were always acutely aware that their time on Earth could be short, and Adèle's was. She died at 38. She died well before Chaminade and Marie-Thérèse did. So, I think how she faced her own death and how she faced the deaths of her Sisters, the courage that she had and the hope that she had, I think there's so much we can learn from that at this time especially.

19:46 - Gabby Bibeau

There's one other thing I just want to say about hope. I've been thinking a lot, and we've been talking in our community a little bit, too, about the difference between hope and optimism. I think hope is reality-based. Hope does not assume things aren't going to be really difficult. It's like hope is where you can look at the difficult things and see that God is somehow working despite them, through them, in them. And I mentioned that about Adèle, too. The hope that she had, it was not because she had an easy life. It wasn't a naive hope. It was having lived through so much difficulty and death and suffering, she was able to maintain that hope. So, I think talking about hope right now is not to negate the tremendous suffering that's happening, but really looking for God in it and knowing that God is here with us in that suffering.

20:55 - Patti Gehred

At the end of your essay, you kind of implore that we must not go back. We must grow and change. I think of Father Chaminade coming out of his exile, and he could have had this tidy little life, and he came up totally different. Marie-Thérèse ends up being the Director of the Miséricorde, a home for...

21:33 – Gabby Bibeau

...for women who had been forced into prostitution, yeah.

21:22 - Patti Gehred

So that's not what she wanted. Marie-Thérèse had this lovely family home in Pian that she could have continued to stay there with her family, and she puts herself in this totally different environment. What do you think we can learn from this pandemic? What do you hope when we open our doors again? How are we going to leave our homes?

21:49 - Gabby Bibeau

When I look at Father Chaminade, I think there were a lot of people, a lot of other priests, who had been in exile, who came back to France and were like, “Okay, let's go back to how it was. Let's rebuild the structures. Let's do all of the same things that we were doing before.” And Chaminade was like, “We can't go back. We can't go back. We've learned too much. Too much has changed.” And that was really the key for why the Bordeaux Sodality was structured the way that it was.

22:42 – Gabby Bibeau

I hope that after this, that we as a Church have again found a sense of personal and communal and familial ownership of our faith. And, like I said before, an understanding that our faith is not just a building. It's not just an institutional structure. Although those are really important, as this time is showing us. Those are also very important, but that there's a deeper sense to it as well and

how we have to practice this faith with the people who are closest to us. So, I think that's one place where I hope that we've learned that lesson.

23:27 - Gabby Bibeau

And I think, too, just like focusing on what are our priorities? Help people, people and faith and family, that's what's important, not all of this extra stuff that we tend to put so much emphasis on. I think about art and about beauty and about music, and how those have just become so much more important at this time. It's almost like it's a nourishment that we tend to not focus on or think about as much or acknowledge their importance. I think those are some of the things. But I don't know. What about you, Patti? What do you think?

24:13 - Patti Gehred

I can say no one I know is sick. No one I know in my immediate circumstances have lost their job. We all have health insurance. I know that, but different people are having different experiences. So, from my place, right now, today - which could change tomorrow for anybody - my caveat is my family has it as good as it can. So, this simplicity, I'm enjoying this simplicity of life. And the longer we're living this simplicity, I hope we come up thinking, "Don't need that." As you're saying, what *are* our priorities? The earth is healing itself in this short time that we're not flying all over and driving all over. So, I hope we keep what's - we're narrowing down what's most important in our life and that we raise those up and don't let it get overcrowded. And even when Chaminade came back, he did say, "Things are going to change." But... he didn't say, "But I'm redoing the Catholic Church." He kept the real core of what the Catholic Church was about, and he just really kept Jesus and Mary at the forefront.

25:27 - Gabby Bibeau

Definitely. And when I think, too, about Father Chaminade coming back from exile, it was sort of like, "Okay, this is a new time, but also let's get back to the basics." So, he wrote a lot about the first Christians and the Sodality being like the first Christians. I think that's what we're learning, is back to basics, community, that essence of the faith. Yeah, I guess just getting back to basics, I think, is really important.

26:06 - Patti Gehred

I agree. We do invite you to read and share the essay that is on our web page. We think it would be good for your own personal reflection, or perhaps for your community. As you can see, it inspires good conversation, thoughtful conversation. So, I appreciate you writing and letting me talk to you about this Gabby. This has been great.

26:31 - Gabby Bibeau

Thank you, Patti. Well, we hope that all of you are staying safe and healthy. And we'll have another podcast coming out pretty soon, so be looking for that as well.