

Sharing Our Marianist Stories Ep. 15 - Transcript

Once a Missionary, always a Missionary (with Sr. Columba Yu, FMI and Gabby Bibeau)

00:00 - Sr. Columba Yu, FMI

One Brother was saying to me, “Once missionary, you will be forever missionary. That your home will be not in Earth. Your home will be on Heaven.”

00:25 - Patti Gehred

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

00:30 - Gabby Bibeau

And I'm Sr. Gabby.

00:32 - Patti Gehred

We'd like to note that we are recording this on Zoom, so the sound quality might sound a little different to you, but we have such an exciting interview. We're just going to go ahead and share it with you. So Gabby, would you like to introduce today's interview?

00:50 - Gabby Bibeau

Yeah, today's podcast is from an interview that I did with Sr. Colomba Yu back in December of this past year [2019]. Sr. Colomba is a Marianist Sister from South Korea, and we were really fortunate. She had in the Fall a Sabbatical in the United States, and she lived in my community house from, like, September through December. And she was here, she did some study at the Marian Library [at the University of Dayton], some Mariology studies. And then she would come to NACMS - what, like, two or three times a week - to do some independent study on the charism. So, people at NACMS got to know her really well, I got to know her really well, and the Sisters in our community did, too. But one of the things... one of her claims to fame is she was one of the Foundresses of the Marianist Sisters Foundation in India. So, she was in the first group of Sisters from different countries - multiple different countries, she'll talk about this - who went to India in 2006 to begin a Foundation of the FMI there. And they're still going. They're going strong.

02:13 - Patti Gehred

Well, I wanted to say how much I enjoyed listening to this interview. I just feel as if she embodies the Marianist charism. The fact that she accepted this role to be a missionary, to go to India. She did not want to do that, did she?

02:31 - Gabby Bibeau

No, and that's what I really wanted to talk to her about was that experience of being asked to go and saying, “Yes,” and what that was like. But I was really interested to talk to her about [that] - and I've reflected on a lot since then - is how she had been in India for 13 years. And when you've lived in a different culture in a different place for so long, it's like that starts to feel a little more like home, but you're also sort of an outsider. But then, when you go back to your home -

so, when she goes back to Korea - she feels like a little bit of an outsider, too. And she doesn't necessarily say this in that way, but there's so much change that happens, and I think that's part of being a missionary... And this is her words, "Your true home is in Heaven." And, I mean, that's really all of our true home. And I think the experience of being a missionary is where you don't really feel fully at home anywhere because you're just a little bit of an outsider in so many different places. And I thought she spoke to that really beautifully and simply, and I think that that's really true.

03:48 - Patti Gehred

What I also liked, and what she had me pondering after listening - You asked why she became a Marianist Sister, and she mentioned hospitality, and hospitality came up a lot. But I think the other side of hospitality is knowing how to accept it. It's one thing to be invited. It's another thing to accept that invitation and go somewhere where you are a stranger or things are foreign or unknown and be open enough to receive hospitality, and she obviously has that type of heart. As you said, it felt like she was part of the NACMS staff. She was there, like, three months, but it felt like she'd been there forever because she was so willing to join us for our lunches. She came to your Novice Class. She was open to accept hospitality. So, I think that is another way she embodies the Marianist charism.

04:47 - Gabby Bibeau

That's a really great point, Patti, and I think it's true. And we talk about this a little bit when I ask her how she feels like she's changed after being in India, and she says that she's more open. And that was something that did not surprise me, and I've noticed this about many other people who I've known who've lived in other places for many years. They do have this openness and this acceptance of hospitality. And I could tell that about her, because when she came, and I picked her up from the airport, she had like a regular-sized suitcase - not like a big suitcase. She didn't bring a whole lot of stuff. She was really interested in trying a lot of different things. Literally, a week after she came, a couple of us Sisters, we were like, "We're gonna go to St. Louis this weekend for a couple Brother's final vows." And she was like, "Oh that's so exciting. I would love that." And so, she came to St. Louis, and we went to the Arch, and it was just like totally "go with the flow" and just being very gracious and joyful about these new experiences. And it just felt like she just fit right in at NACMS and our community. And I really just think that is learning [from] those years how to accept hospitality.

06:24 - Patti Gehred

Well, I would just like to say thank you for sharing her with us. I thought that interview gave me a lot to think about, and I think it will give our listeners, lay or religious, a lot to think about, too, in their own faith journey, so thank you.

06:41 - Gabby Bibeau

Thank you. Yes, I hope so, too. And just a quick word, English is Sr. Colomba's second language, so you'll notice she'll speak slowly, and sometimes she might say a word you might not

understand. And I tried to repeat back to her a couple of words if I thought that the meaning wouldn't be clear, but you shouldn't have too much trouble. But I hope you enjoy.

07:15 - Sr. Columba Yu, FMI

My name is Sr. Colomba Yu, came from Korea, but I am working in India as missionary.

07:25 - Gabby Bibeau

And how many years have you been a missionary in India?

07:30 - Sr. Columba Yu, FMI

I have been in India for 13 years.

07:36 - Gabby Bibeau

And can you tell me how did you meet the Marianist Sisters, and why did you become a Sister? Why did you become a Marianist?

07:46 - Sr. Columba Yu, FMI

I met my Sisters through my friends. My friends joined the congregation with me, but after six months she told me, "This is more. It's not my charism, so I want to leave. I want to leave congregation." So I was disappointed, but I [say to] myself, "Okay, you go. I will be here." So continue. And till here I am Marianist. I am very happy [to] be a Marianist.

08:25 - Gabby Bibeau

What was it that was attractive to you when you first met the Sisters and spent time with them?

08:32 - Sr. Columba Yu, FMI

They were very kind, and then their hospitality is I was much attracted. This was the first impression for me. While living also everywhere, every country where I go to the Sisters' house, they are very [hospitable] and to receive the people, to invite the people.

09:01 - Gabby Bibeau

Yeah, that sense of hospitality. I think that's a big part of our charism. You know, that Mary being very welcoming. Did you have much of a relationship with Mary before you joined the Sisters? What was that like for you?

09:17 - Sr. Columba Yu, FMI

My house since when I go to the school, I need to pass my Church. In front of the Church, there is one Mary statue there. Just simply, I go to Mary, front of the Mary statue, I bow down. "Mary, I came. Mary, I am going." Every time going and coming, I was speaking with her, this was just simply, I say, and it makes me love Mary. Mary always comfort me. That I like very much.

10:01 - Gabby Bibeau

So, now I want to know more about how did you get to India? Did you tell the Sisters, “Oh, I'm really interested in going to a different country.” Did you tell them, “I'd be open to a missionary experience abroad?” How did all that happen?

10:23 - Sr. Columba Yu, FMI

When I was novice, we had the question to each one of us, “If there is a mission, will you go?” When I received the question, I wrote, “No, I never go.” I was very strong for that. Do not want to go out of the country. But Regional Superior was saying, “Can you go in this way to India?” The General Superior asked to our country, “Send two Sisters from our country. Somebody needs to go. Please can you go?” When I received that, I prayed some moment, “What is going on in me?” And finally, I was thinking, “Mary will be there. So I'll go,” and I said, “Yes, I can go.”

11:34 - Gabby Bibeau

Well, what was your reaction when the Regional Superior asked you to go to India? What was your initial reaction?

11:43 - Sr. Columba Yu, FMI

This is very funny because in our country we have Kimchi. I love Kimchi, but another country I saw there is no Kimchi. So, how I live there without my food? That was first reaction. But inside a little bit afraid, “How I go different country?” I was living there 44 years, and in the middle age, how I manage all the things?

12:27 - Gabby Bibeau

Who went with you to India? Can you tell me about the Sisters Foundation? Who was there and what year was it? How did that all work out? And also, you had to learn English, too. So, like, all of this was happening. Can you describe that preparation for that?

12:44 - Sr. Columba Yu, FMI

We, four of us, we went to India. There was one Korean Sister and I, one came from Italy, one came from Spain. There was one Sister [who] knew or little bit English better than us. And the three of us, we do not know - especially me, I do not know English. And first time when I went to India at that moment, I begin to speak English. And then, four Sisters came to India. We had one community. So when we have the meeting, community meeting, we do not understand each other. When we have sharing what they share, we do not understand each other. When we cook some food, each country food is not tasty for me. So what kind of food is there? The only different cultures we bring together and inside, the three cultures, outside, one more culture was there, so, Indian culture. And three country culture were there.

14:11 - Sr. Columba Yu, FMI

And after five months, six months, we received the candidates. Five candidates were there. One of the candidates came from Andhra Pradesh, from South. She does not know Hindi. She does not know English. But four of them, they know Hindi. They can make communication. But one

candidate she does not know. But one day, the girl was sick. I couldn't make communication with her. So nearby our house, there is one seminary. I went there. One seminarian, he came from Andhra Pradesh, and I brought him to speak, "Seminarian, speak with her." I took her with him to the hospital. Because in the hospital, also the doctor do not know Telugu. And then the man and the seminarian translated to me so that it was solved. It was very difficult to live in community life. But God's Providence, it worked very well. They took the vows, and they are living in our congregation in India.

15:56 - Gabby Bibeau

Yeah, I know language difficulties were really big. And I know that it still is difficult to - maybe not as much as in the early years, because if my understanding is correct, a lot of the women who come to the community, they come from tribal areas. And so, they speak their own tribal language, but they also know Hindi. Is that correct?

16:23 - Sr. Columba Yu, FMI

They know Hindi. They can communicate, but they also, their mother tongue, they have.

16:30 - Gabby Bibeau

Okay. Yeah, that's what I thought. So when you first came to India, you went to Ranchi, and that's where our Sisters still are, are just in Ranchi.

16:41 - Sr. Columba Yu, FMI

Yeah. We begin to start in Ranchi. And then till now, we are living in Ranchi. And now our Indian Sisters, they are 19 sisters. And then two missionaries, I and other Sister came from Spain. We have three communities now. Every month, our Sisters and doctor goes village to village and they give free checkup.

17:19 - Gabby Bibeau

Wow. So, our sisters, some of our Sisters, our Indian Sisters, they went to nursing school so they could be nurses and offer this free healthcare.

17:29 - Sr. Columba Yu, FMI

Because inside the village, people they do not come to the hospital when they see. So, we have plan for, visit the village to village every month and go give free check. They give some treatment and medicines as free.

17:53 - Gabby Bibeau

That's really cool. I don't think I knew that they went out to different villages. I knew that they were nurses, but that's really neat. So, I wanted to go back to when you first went, when you first got there, you mentioned the language, the difficulty, how language was difficult. What else was difficult at first? What was your first impressions or things that surprised you that you noticed in the first few months that you were there?

18:24 - Sr. Columba Yu, FMI

Landing down in India in airport from that moment was perfectly different from our country. Because while coming to and from airport, there is no way to go the car because motorbike, cycle, autorickshaw, cycle rickshaw, people, and some buses, and animals, all are on the way. I was surprised and surprised. And then this was for me was very, very first impression was that. And then when the driving without horn cannot drive because we need to give the sign, "I am here with the horn. Honk. Honk. I am here." So that was very different from me. When I went REDS [Ragpickers Education and Development Scheme] center, which is the rag picker children they came, and then they study there, small children.

19:42 - Gabby Bibeau

These are children, who they pick through trash and sell things. And it's a Center for them to get an education and skills.

19:53 - Sr. Columba Yu, FMI

Run by our Brothers, Marianist Brothers. So, every twice in a week we went there. It was slum. Early I was there.

20:05 - Gabby Bibeau

How did you feel seeing [that]? Had you ever seen poverty like that before? I mean, what was that like going into the slums and working with the children there?

20:16 - Sr. Columba Yu, FMI

No, before I did not have, I also did not see this much poor. "Wow, the people can be poor this much," I was thinking that. But you know that the children, they are very, very happy to be there, and they want to invite me to their house. House is not house. There is only one sheet to make roof and one curtain in the door with cloth. There is inside their house nothing, but doesn't matter. They want to invite me, and they take my hand, and they go to their house, and they gave the water, they gave the tea. It was amazing for me how these children this much in this life, happiness, brings happiness to them. But I had a meditation on that. Maybe Jesus came to his incarnation here into these children. And then he was living with them. He's living with them, maybe in the future, also, he will be with them.

21:39 - Gabby Bibeau

How have you changed from being these 13 years in India? How are you different? How has this experience as a missionary - and you're going to go back - but how has this experience changed you?

21:56 - Sr. Columba Yu, FMI

Yeah, much changings were there in this experience in India, make me [open]. And then to be happy wherever I am, and then and there I had a six and half years: six years and six months, I was leader as a District Superior. And then from there also God made me, I was not worthy to

have this leadership, but he gave me this leadership there, make me growing to leadership. And then how to love my Sisters in different area, different background, how to love my Sisters.

22:50 - Gabby Bibeau

What you were saying about openness, something I've noticed about a lot of different people - Marianist Brothers, Marianist Sisters or other religious that I've known who have been spent a significant amount of time in another place and another culture - I think that is a word that I would describe for them, is an openness and a sense of maybe flexibility, adaptability. I mean, that was a sense that I had about you coming to the United States. There's something about you I could tell that, "She's a missionary." Because of just the way that you were able to come into our community and just like, "No problem, we'll go to St. Louis." "Okay, great," like an openness to different experiences and to different people. I think I can see how being in a place for a long time can kind of create that in you in a place that's not your own culture and your own language, and that kind of thing. So, that makes sense to me. Is there anything else that you'd like to say?

24:02 - Sr. Columba Yu, FMI

One Brother was saying to me, "Once missionary, you will be forever missionary, that your home will be not in Earth. Your home will be on Heaven." Sometimes when I was in India, sometimes loneliness is coming, and then I go to Korea there also, "Oh," loneliness was coming so, "Oh. Where are you stand?" The Brother was correct. He said to me. "Ah, your home will be not in Earth will be in heaven." So we go to Heaven, continue, walk to the Heaven, walk for the Kingdom of Heaven in earth. And finally, can go to Heaven, my home.

25:12 - Gabby Bibeau

Thanks for listening to this episode of *Sharing Our Marianist Stories*. We hope that you enjoyed Sister Columba sharing a little bit about her Marianist story and her life in India. Stay tuned next month for another episode and we hope that all of you are doing well and safe and happy.

25:33 - Patti Gehred

We invite you to check out our website at www.nacms.org. Thank you.