

Sharing Our Marianist Stories, Ep. 31 Transcript

Sharing from the Heart (with Lay Marianists, Jeri Albright, Marceta Reilly, and Mike Bennett, Media Administrator, NACMS)

00:04 - Jeri Albright

You go with your heart, and it will follow. I've met some people who are alone and have established a virtual things with people. Just one other person is fine for a while, and then you can create or bring in other people.

00:30 - Mike Bennett

Welcome to *Sharing Our Marianists Stories*, a podcast produced by the North American Center for Marianist Studies in Dayton, Ohio. I'm Mike Bennett, Media Administrator for NACMS. In this episode, we hear from Jeri Albright and Marceta Reilly who are two Lay Marianists that live outside of Topeka, Kansas. And they speak a little bit about their experience of building a Lay Marianist Community in an area that could be called remote within the Marianist family. This episode was recorded at the 2023 Lay Marianist Assembly in St. Louis, Missouri.

01:11 – Mike Bennett

There's a couple of things that Marceta and Jeri will mention in their story that I'd just like to preface a little bit. One is their mention of Renew 2000, which was a program that they participated in within their parish that called people together in small faith communities for prayer and to focus on the needs of the Catholic Church as we enter the 21st century. The second is that Marceta references her brother, Fr. Dave Fleming, who was a Marianist priest and served for 10 years as Superior General of the Society of Mary in Rome. And the Superior General is basically the head of the Society of Mary globally. Additionally, they talk about when they went and visited Fr. Dave in Rome, and there's a mention of celebrating Fr. Dave's 50th anniversary and that occurred in 2006, which was when Father Dave celebrated his 50th anniversary as a Marianist. Third is a resource that Marceta references called *Things Marianist*, which is a publication available for purchase on our website. Each publication is about four to six pages and describes a key dynamic of our Marianist Charism in easy-to-understand language.

2:32 – Mike Bennett

The last thing is that a couple [of] times, Marceta and Jeri make a reference to symbols that they have brought with them, or that they have put on display. And they're just mentioning a couple [of] symbols that they brought to the Lay Marianist Assembly, where everyone was invited to bring something that symbolized their community and their commitment to the Marianists, and then to bring that up during the opening prayer of that assembly. And so that's what that is. With those things in mind, I'm happy to turn the floor over to Marceta and Jeri as we listen to them share about their Marianist story.

03:18 - Marceta Reilly

I'm Marceta Reilly, and my connection to the Marianist family is really first through my brother, David Fleming. He was a Marianist priest, now deceased. And he was a leader with the Brothers for a long time and...

03:39 - Jeri Albright

I'm Jeri Albright from Delia, Kansas. We live in the heartland [of] the US. Marceta and I've been friends since our kids were growing up and shared our parish church as well. And we've had our conversation group - study group, Bible Group for years and then it kind of evolved toward the Marianist charisms. And we loved meeting David and knowing that story as well. He grounded us, I think, too. So, we met then, and kind of have evolved since probably about 25 years or more into the communities that we are today.

04:25 - Marceta Reilly

I grew up with the Marianists, and I loved the Marianist Charism. It kept me actually in the church. But I'm not near a Marianist center, and so I wanted something; I wanted the Marianist spirit, and I wanted the Marianist community. And so, I just asked my friends if they would like to form a Marianist community. Well, they didn't know; nobody knew what a Marianist community was.

05:02 - Jeri Albright

No, we had to educate ourselves.

05:04 - Marceta Reilly

And that was what it was. It was educating ourselves. It's not like educating yourself when you're in a Marianist Center, because when you're at a university or a center, you see the charism. We didn't have a charism to see. And we didn't have that. And my experience with David and the things that we did with the brothers and those kinds of things when we went to visit with him was always; it was communal. It was having discussions. It was the gentle things and discussing things gently and accepting things that may be would really be different than what you. . .

05:59 - Jeri Albright

Right and non-confrontational entirely.

06:01 - Marceta Reilly

Non-confrontational. And not saying this is what you should - checking your finger. So anyway, this is what I kind of was yearning for. So, we came together, and where we started was with Renew 2000 was part of our Archdiocese, and we had a little thing like that. We started that. We would meet once a month. It was always dinner, around dinner because we're a farm community.

06:29 - Jeri Albright

And yes.

06:31 - Marceta Reilly

It's always about food.

06:33 - Jeri Albright

Yes, we really lured our husbands, for the most part, with wine and food.

06:39 - Marceta Reilly

Yes. Wine and food. Yes. And we went, and we talked about. . .

06:44 - Jeri Albright

A little discussion

06:45 - Marceta Reilly

A little discussion. And it was a different way of being together and talking about spiritual things. And our group was about 10 couples. And it draws people together gently.

07:06 - Jeri Albright

Right. And we could learn together.

07:08 - Marceta Reilly

And we could learn together. And I mean, some of it was radical thoughts like. . .

07:15 - Jeri Albright

For a conservative community, yeah.

07:18 - Marceta Reilly

For a conservative community. But they didn't throw us out. And actually, I tried to keep us under the radar for a long time because I was afraid our parish priest might throw us out or tell us what we should be studying. And I didn't want that.

07:41 - Jeri Albright

So, me and Marceta's personal family went with her to Rome to celebrate David's 50th anniversary, where he was the Superior. And just staying there and meeting the Brothers, that was my first experience with a group, a Marianist this thing. Well, here I was in Rome, and we were going to see the Pope, but it was just very ordinary. I mean, they were cooking. And they made all the flower arrangements. We went to the market with them, and you really couldn't pick out who's a priest, who's a brother. And it was just so ordinary and very uplifting and the calm and the quietness of it. And you didn't mind going to mass and prayer several times and all the things that they just kind of incorporated in their life. And so that was, it was really a wonderful experience. Something that I probably would never have done as far as getting to go to Rome. So, that was my experience with a larger group, and really the world community of Marianists.

09:02 - Marceta Reilly

When we started, we connected with, later, we connected with Fr. Al McMenemy and he would come to visit. And oh my gosh, our group was an older group. But oh, they just loved him because, again he just exudes that Marianist spirit, and they had never met a priest who has so humble and loving.

09:30 - Jeri Albright

Yeah, just kindness. . .

09:31 - Marceta Reilly

Kindness...

09:33 - Jeri Albright

. . . just general kindness.

09:34 - Marceta Reilly

Gentleness. Yeah.

09:36 - Jeri Albright

And he shared lots of materials with us, and we just really ate it up and looked forward to his visits. And he would visit us at least twice a year for a while.

09:45 - Mike Bennett

So, Jeri, since you were unfamiliar with the Marianist family at the time, I'm curious what that experience was like for you to be engaged with this faith community. And how did your experience of the Marianists impact your experience of this faith community?

10:02 - Jeri Albright

Well, being a convert, sometimes the rules get in the way.

10:08 - Marceta Reilly

Catholic rules.

10:09 - Jeri Albright

Yeah. Church rules. Yeah. And so, it was a nice thing for me personally. Then, just knowing Marceta and David. Their mom was wonderful. And just, I hate to say ordinary, but just you wouldn't pick them out of a crowd of not being of anything but kind and generous with their time. And David walked us around Rome, which he knew well. And did all that, drove, did all these things that were so mundane for him, and he had a really big job. But that was just the way he was. And then, in that setting there you could see that they're all that way. Marceta and her family lived the way - lived the charisms and the virtues. And so, you go to mass, and you're in a different world and then you leave, you don't maybe even think of it for the rest of the week. It's not very nice to say but - and then it also validates your personal view of what your life should

be like. And I think that we're all called to serve, and then you don't know how to serve. Marianists bring you and gives you the permission to do your own talents in some way, and there's always a way to come out and serve our own parish, which we have done. We've supported our parish in really hard times. And by lifting it up, I think, and trying to make it to the people and not the church or the clerical part of it.

11:54 - Mike Bennett

Thanks, Jeri. That's a good reminder that the often-lived experience is really what brings people into the Marianist family. Marceta, I'm curious if you could talk a little bit about what it was like to start this community, some of the dynamics that you were mindful of among starting the community. And I'm asking that because I think there's a lot of people in similar situations. They're in what we might call Marianist remote areas and struggling to find or create a sense of community. So, can you speak to that a little bit?

12:30 - Marceta Reilly

I just called some friends together that I thought might be interested and I just said, "Would you be interested in just getting a gathering and having a small faith community together? And we'll just figure it out ourselves." And I wanted to be sure it wasn't what a vision maybe is. And when you're in college and you say you're going to be in a small faith community, and you go right away into formation - formation. Well, this can't be like this because there is no model that people know. They first have to learn about what is this spirituality about. So, it's about...

13:14 - Jeri Albright

The feeling in your heart.

13:20 - Marceta Reilly

...the feeling in your heart. So, to me it's about sharing little bits of information, which is what I got from the *Things Marianists* pamphlets that are just marvelous. And they're just discussion starters, and it just gives people a different something to talk about, and also its content that people have to speak from the heart. And whenever you start speaking from - sharing from the heart, you really make good connections with each other, and that's what brings you together, and already you were kind of friends. So, that starts building the connection, and you want to start coming together, and it builds the faith community. And then, you have to become the animator. You have to be like Chaminade, and I feel like I have been the animator for these different communities because then I had to say, "Ok, we are a Marianist Community." And we start naming it, but you don't really name it right away because that would scare people away. But it's so worth it to try it. And it takes a little time, but it's so worth it.

14:35 - Mike Bennett

Yeah, it's definitely worth it. And I think you've spoken well to the work that goes into starting a community like this, and I imagine there's also work as the community evolves. So, can you touch on that a little bit about how the community has evolved over time?

14:52 - Jeri Albright

We have shared children and grandchildren, and we now have health problems and deaths.

15:00 - Marceta Reilly

She brought this picture of our community, and she said we look like. . . What did you say?

15:06 - Jeri Albright

Oh, a bingo group from a nursing home. . . announcing the front center.

15:14 – Marceta Reilly

I don't want to take it, you know.

15:18 - Jeri Albright

. . .because we progressed to that.

15:20 - Marceta Reilly

Yeah. But it's a community that is deep.

15:27 - Jeri Albright

Yes.

15:28 - Marceta Reilly

. . . all of us. It's a faith community. It's a faith-based community that never would have been without that Marianist core.

15:41 - Mike Bennett

And I think it's a Marianist core that not only calls us to grow together within community, but to also be sent and to have an impact on the world around us. Can you talk a little bit about the ways that you feel your community has had an impact?

16:01 - Jeri Albright

It kind of goes also to modeling for your children as parents. And creating something that they can grab on to as more of a way of life, or what do you do for people on Wednesday or Thursday, or any other day. And it's partly a life of service, too. And every single person in our group has been a valuable leader in our parish, you know, Eucharistic Ministers, readers, religious ed[ucation] catechists. And so, we all recognize the importance of that as well.

16:40 - Marceta Reilly

Well, and we had some troubled times in our parish.

16:46 - Jeri Albright

Right.

16:48 - Marceta Reilly

And I can tell you that there was one time when Father Al was here, wasn't he?

16:54 - Jeri Albright

Yes.

16:56 - Marceta Reilly

Our parish was just very tense. And was that when he introduced *Our Lady, Untier of Knots*?

17:05 - Jeri Albright

Yes.

17:08 - Marceta Reilly

And one of the things he said is, "You have to stop being part of the instigator of all of this."

17:16 - Jeri Albright

"Don't contribute to that."

17:17 Marceta Reilly

"Don't contribute to it." And we talked about it. And it made all the difference in the world.

17:24 Jeri Albright

It did. We started praying that, and things changed.

17:27 - Marceta Reilly

Things changed.

17:31 - Jeri Albright

And it's been more than one time that we've instituted that.

17:34 - Marceta Reilly

Right. And that's the first time. Well, it's the first time I saw that our group could be visible. And since then, we have been noticed as a small faith community.

17:52 - Mike Bennett

What advice would you give to someone in the Marianist family who finds themselves in a remote area? Or maybe someone in the Marianist family who finds themselves with a good number of friendships, but not necessarily a sense of community that they might be searching for?

18:09 - Jeri Albright

Just you go with your heart, and it will follow. I've met some people who are alone and have established virtual things with people. Just one other person is fine for a while, and then you can create or bring in other people.

18:29 - Marceta Reilly

I think just, I think that's it. You have to just go with your heart. Simply ask and start small and simply. Just invite people, and the ones who want to show up will.

18:52 - Jeri Albright

You have to take a risk.

18:55 - Marceta Reilly

And let go if somebody doesn't show up that you wish would. It's okay.

19:00 - Jeri Albright

People...we all have to be in the right place when we commit to something anyway.

19:06 - Marceta Reilly

And the same thing, like she said about our husbands, just be gentle too. Let them come in their own time.

19:17 - Jeri Albright

You know, and the key.

19:19 - Marceta Reilly

Sometimes, they just come for the wine and cheese.

19:20 - Jeri Albright

Yes.

19:21 - Mike Bennett

Something brings somebody.

19:22 - Jeri Albright

Yes, that's right.

19:33 - Marceta Reilly

I really want to encourage the singleton or the loner Marianists to reach out to others to grow the Marianist family wherever they are in little ways. I mean doesn't have to be big but to grow that charism because it's the Marian face of the church, and I just believe that that Marian face of the church is so important, especially right now.

20:06 - Mike Bennett

Don't hit that stop button yet. Before we finish with our concluding question, I just want to offer a word of thanks to both Jeri and Marceta for spending this time with us and sharing their Marianist 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 accounts at @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. So, we know the Founders corresponded with each other via letter writing. . .

21:07 - Jeri Albright

Yes.

21:08 - Mike Bennett

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?

21:21 - Jeri Albright

Well, I had that experience. I lost my husband a year and a half ago or so. And totally out of character of anything, I did write a letter that I put in his coffin. I think he's still with me, for sure. And my grandchildren thinks that he's every cardinal that they see, and we have lots of cardinals in the winter, and they're all convinced that's him watching. So he's watching over us.