

Sharing Our Marianist Stories, Episode 32 Transcript
Expecting Excellence with Bro. Bob Moriarty, SM

0:00 – Bro. Bob Moriarty, SM

The next morning, I go into Chaminade [School] and Bro. Don Bond had been a freshman teacher. I was now a sophomore, and he was one of those people who would just... You know, people would flock around, and I'd get mixed up with him a lot. I go and see him before school, and I say to him, "Bro. Don, what would you say if I told you I wanted to be a Brother." He cuts through all the playing around that we would normally do, and he just fixes me with his eyes, and he says to me, "Do you want to?"

0:32 – 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. In this episode, we sit down with Bro. Bob Moriarty, who has been a professed Brother with the Society of Mary for over 60 years. Bro. Bob shares a little bit about his journey as a Marianist, his experience in parish ministry, his vision for the Marianist Family within parish life, and a little bit about a resource called *Best of Quest* that Bro. Bob has published through the North American Center for Marianist Studies. That resource, as well as a version of the presentation he mentions from a recent Lay Marianist Assembly, are both available on our website under *E-Publications* if you go to nacms.org. With that said, let's go ahead and turn the floor over to Bro. Bob to share a little bit about where he is in the world today and his journey as a Marianist.

1:35 – Bro. Bob Moriarty, SM

Right now, I am retired from my 30-year position with the Archdiocese of Hartford directing the Department for Small Christian Communities, and I am presently living in the Philadelphia Community.

1:49 – Mike Bennett

Can you talk a little bit about how you came to the Marianists?

1:52 – Bro. Bob Moriarty, SM

I grew up in the 1940s and 50s; very different world, very different church. And I would say I grew up in a family which was quite consciously Catholic, but not pious. I mean, we didn't do prayer over meals or things like that, but it was clear that this was a very Catholic family. I mean, I absorbed those values from parents and family members early on. Being an impressionable young person, I absorbed the kind of Catholic teaching that was in vogue for the day and resonated with it. But then underneath it, I think there was something different. I would never have put it in those words. I would say that from early on I had a sense that being in touch with the mystery of God was the highest, deepest, and most all-encompassing value of my life. I would never have had that language as a child, but experientially, when I look back on it now, I know that that is what I experienced.

2:52 – Bro. Bob Moriarty, SM

When I finished grade school, for instance, I made it real clear to my parents I wasn't going to a public high school. I was going to a Catholic High School. And that wasn't a rude thing for me to

say to them. That was a perfectly natural thing you would get out of a kid in those days. And my parents just quite easily accepted that. So, I ended up at Chaminade High School in New York, and I would say from day one I was caught up in everything about that place. The opening day of the school year gathered all thousand students in the gym, and the then-incomparable Bro. John Darby gave his annual Chaminade Man speech. He just exuded a sense of expecting excellence, so I got involved in everything in the school. I mean, I was certainly taken by men religious. My first experience with them, they were men in suits, and it was a very professional thing, but it was an adult thing. Young men, many of them enthusiastic, bright and even the senior men and people like Bro. Louis Nath or George Spahn or others. I mean, they just exuded the same sense of deliberateness about everything the school represented.

4:07 – Bro. Bob Moriarty, SM

At some point in my sophomore year, I'm sitting at home one night and I'm doing a Latin homework – which I detested, and so that's probably what distracted me – but I'm sitting there and I'm just musing. I'm imagining the possibility of becoming a Marianist. I say to myself, “Oh, now I could do that.” And then, in the midst of that, it was like the question comes to me. “Well, are you or not? You decide right now, yes or no.” So, I sat there, and I said, “Yes.” And I got up out of the chair, and on the wall to my right was a framed picture of Mary that we would in those days speak of as our Blessed Mother, and I kissed the picture. [Then I] went back to my table to finish my homework.

4:55 – Bro. Bob Moriarty, SM

The next morning, I go into Chaminade, and Bro. Don Bond had been a freshman teacher. I was now a sophomore, and he was one of those people who would just... You know, people would flock around, and I'd get mixed up with him a lot. I go and see him before school, and I say to him, “Bro. Don, what would you say if I told you I wanted to be a Brother.” He cuts through all the playing around that we would normally do, and he just fixes me with his eyes, and he says to me, “Do you want to?” And so, I just repeated what I said to myself the night before, “Yes.” [And Bro. Don says] “Okay, come back after school. We can sit down and talk.” And we had a number of conversations. Eventually, he wanted to see my parents, and I was all worked up about that. And my parents leave that night to go see him, and they're obviously seeing me ramped up, and my father turns around, comes back and says to me, “Just because we're going over to see him doesn't mean you're going.” And off they go. They come back. I don't hear anything that night. I have to go after him – Bro. Don – the next morning to find out how the conversation went. It was fine, and they were fine, and eventually off I go.

6:07 – Bro. Bob Moriarty, SM

The mystery of God being the highest and deepest and most all-encompassing value would have founded and still endures as a foundation for religious life. That's not what keeps me in the Society of Mary today. I mean, I would have known nothing about the Society of Mary other than what I saw at Chaminade. But when I went to the Novitiate in 1959, this was a vast influx of people. It was part of the last big wave, and there were so many people coming at that point that we were told in our senior year in the Apostolate that now [there] was the need to create two Novitiate classes here. So, they doubled all of our classes to finish [our] high school requirements in one semester. We go to the Novitiate in January of 1959. There's already 40 novices there. In come the new 30, disrupted the place. In the following August, the normal

transition point, there was another 50. Can you imagine today that many novices at once? And it was a time when the SM was really beginning to reengage with the founding vision of Father Chaminade, and Fred Matthews was a spokesperson for that. We get into the Scholasticate eventually. John Dixon is [there], Father Ferree was also there. And I... absorbed all of that. And basically, I would say that has been my north star in Marianist life for these 60-some years: the founding vision of Father Chaminade, the foundational mission in his terms, the animation and the promotion of the sodality, in more contemporary terms, multiplication of communities of faith and life and mission.

7:56 – Bro. Bob Moriarty, SM

I taught for a number of years, enjoyed that. Then [I had] substantial time in serious graduate study. And when I finished my graduate work at Marquette, it was never my intention or plan to be a full time university professor. It was deeply connecting to the foundational mission. Well, I would go back to Connecticut, to graduate study, during holidays like Holy Week and Christmas and things like that. And I had previously arranged to meet with Sr. Anne Kane, who was then the Academic Dean at the Seminary. Gracious woman, she offers to lead me around the building at St. Thomas Seminary, introduced me to other office people there. Many diocesan offices then were located in that building. And in we go to the Pastoral Department for Small Christian Communities, and I introduce myself to Pat Monahan, who's the director of the office. Well, she's very interested in talking to me, then, about connecting me somehow to the office as a Biblicalist... I wasn't finished at Marquette at this point. And so, we agree that when I come back at Christmastime, we talk again.

9:17 – Bro. Bob Moriarty, SM

And so, I get there. She ushers me right into her office, closes the door and stands against the door. And I'm saying, "I'm trapped." "I will get right to the point," she says to me, and she explains that [Archbishop Edmund] Whelan has decided to convoke a synod and wants her to vacate the office that she's in to take over managing the synod operation. Would I be interested simply in succeeding her as the director of the office? "Oh, okay, this is fine." This leads to one thing and to another. So, that's how I got into the Department for Small Christian Communities. I resonated immediately with the imagery and the vision of the Pastoral Department for Small Christian Communities. I mean, I loved what we were doing at Sacred Heart in Vernon [CT], and we were deliberate as a community to try to develop a focused Marianist vision about it. But we missed the boat in terms of the small communities. We saw community on a global kind of a context in terms of the whole parish. And we profoundly influenced the parish in that. And even to this day, even though the parish is closed at this point, members of that parish community have absorbed that and have still appreciated what we brought to the parish.

10:33 – Mike Bennett

As you got to the way that you came to that work in Hartford, I was intrigued because I don't think a majority of Brothers are working outside of Marianist institutions. You know, I know there's some, but it's not the majority...

10:48 – Bro. Bob Moriarty, SM

And it's a major issue, really. For as much as I have tried to advocate and promote a corporate commitment of the Province – and even now the Marianist Family – into involvement in parish,

focused on the vision of developing the parish as a community of communities, we are so entrenched and in a school mentality. It's very difficult to broaden out our vision.

11:11 – Mike Bennett

I'm curious if you can say more about that experience of being a Brother for as long as you have but having worked outside of Marianist institutions.

11:22 – Bro. Bob Moriarty, SM

Yeah. Of course, when I finished at Marquette, and I returned to the parish where I had served on the staff as a coordinator for youth ministry, we still were involved in the parish. While I was moving into the role in Hartford, and I saw that [as] quite compatible. In fact, I brought that small church community vision that we were moving in at Hartford to the parish at Sacred Heart. And there was a development of school communities in the parish, quite consciously and deliberately. But after a year or two, New York Province determined that we didn't have the staff that would enable us to continue to serve the parish and withdrew from the parish. With the support of the Province, and even with the particular support of [Father] Dave Fleming, the Superior General at the time, I continued to serve there. I stayed in the house that the Marianists owned, but I was there by myself for, you know, 25 years.

12:19 – Mike Bennett

As a lay member of the Marianist Family, it makes me wonder about the significance that lay members could have within their parishes.

12:28 – Bro. Bob Moriarty, SM

Exactly! In fact, I did a presentation or workshop at the ML-CAN [Marianist Lay Communities of North America] Assembly this past June [2023] proposing basically a full commitment on the part of the Marianist Family, all three branches, in developing the North American parish as a community of communities. And I think MLC's Lay Marianists would be central to that vision. So, what I mean is, I would imagine us moving in initially into a parish, focused deliberately on the development of small church communities with a real corporate focus on it. Not just a few more nice small groups as another program, but as central to the vision of the parish. And over "X" number of years, small church communities would develop, and some of them would come to double as MLCs. And I would imagine, though eventually, that the Society of Mary and the Daughters of Mary would leave and there is just a mission-driven focus on the development of small communities, not simply general parish ministry. Once we would have established a base of small communities, "X" number of whom would be MLCs, the Society and the Daughters would move to another parish with the MLCs remaining in place in full communion with the succeeding pastoral leadership to continue to animate and promote that vision for the North American parish, consciously focused on the corporate vision for parish, not simply creating a few more nice small groups.

13:55 – Bro. Bob Moriarty, SM

Pastors were involved with that and supported that. Some of them would even be intrigued by this long-term vision question. The harried and tarried pastor in the parish today is spontaneously inclined to think of the small communities as a nice program. One more thing, and over time I began more and more to sense that a religious congregation with a relevant corporate vision over

an extended period of time, given the institutional the changes of personnel that happened, could still maintain that because it had a corporate division, whereas [with] the change of pastors, you can't guarantee what's going to happen. And who better than the Society of Mary or the Marianist Family as a whole to promote this particular vision for parish? It is our particular gift to the Church today, and it's the distinctive need of the American parish today.

14:55 – Mike Bennett

This feels like a little bit of a leap in topic, but I'm also thinking about your work with *Quest* and the *Best of Quest...* resource. So, I would like for you to talk a little bit more about what that is and your work – You know, you're visiting NACMS right now – Your work on it continuously. But I'm also thinking that that's another resource that aids in that type of structure and engagement of small faith communities. So, can you say more about *Quest*? What is it?

15:24 – Bro. Bob Moriarty, SM

Sure, and it connects to what I told you in terms of moving into that role. Hartford did this Renew program from 1983 to 1986, and Renew provided materials for that. When that was finished in '86, Pat Monahan, my predecessor, looked around and couldn't find materials for small groups. And so, [she] drew people around her, and for a couple of years created materials for six weeks in the fall, six weeks in the spring. One of Archbishop Whelan's first instructions to me was, "Find out what's really out there. Take your time but come in and give me a report." And so, we then took it on ourselves to tour 200 parishes of the diocese and meet with people who were involved in continuing post-Renew groups, however they understood themselves. And we were at parish in New Haven one night, did our little spiel, listened to people, had a coffee break. And I'm standing getting my cup of coffee, and this woman sidles up to me, and in a staged whisper says, "We're meeting even when we're not supposed to." Meaning they [were] taking on themselves the initiative to break out of the six-week model and move on. It was part of Pat's vision that this would become longer-term, year-round communities as well, but that was absolutely what was driving me. We just gradually added more weeks, and over a period of time, created a booklet that covered all the weeks of the year. Eventually the whole thing, it grew to be a major publication. Other diocese around the same time found themselves in the position that Hartford was, finishing Renew and not having any materials to work with. When the word got out, somehow or other, that Hartford was creating new materials, we had all these requests... "Would you share these with us," which we did. *Quest* eventually went to every single state. Eventually, it went to 12 English speaking communities around the world and even to Beijing.

17:25 – Mike Bennett

My understanding of *Quest* is that they take the Sunday readings for all three cycles of readings in the Catholic Church, and it's basically developed into a reflection tool that small faith communities can use.

17:36 – Bro Bob Moriarty, SM

And tries to provide the outline for a full session. So, it includes maybe some environmental suggestions, an opening prayer, reflection on the gospel, principally, some focused questions to explore together, some response and actions, images of possibility – not that you were expecting everybody to do that, but it was there – then the closing prayer.

17:59 – Mike Bennett

And so now you are working on what you're calling *Best of Quest*?

18:02 – Bro. Bob Moriarty, SM

Right. We have a 30-year library. The office was closed by the current Archbishop in 2017, and as things were wrapping up, I had people say to me, “Bob, why don't you create something like the best of Quest?” So, there was a 30-year library. I've gone through the whole thing and selected the strongest units for the possibility of doing three volumes. I'm in the process of completing one. I've been coming out here a couple of times a year to work on that.

18:28 – Mike Bennett

So, if somebody's listening to this and would really want to take a look at some of those resources, where would they find that? Or how would they do that?

18:35 – Bro. Bob Moriarty, SM

Initially... after I was out of Hartford, I wrote back to Archbishop Blair and asked permission to reproduce the materials. He was happy to let me do that. And the idea was that we would simply post it on the NACMS website under *E-Publications*, and it would be available without cost. Each unit is an individual PDF that people can click on and just reproduce the copies of.

18:59 – Mike Bennett

Oh, that's excellent. Earlier on you mentioned the principal when you were in high school [John Darby] using the phrase “expecting excellence.” I'm curious if there's ways you've seen that phrase impact you throughout your life.

19:16 – Bro. Bob Moriarty, SM

Well, I suppose it certainly meant being a good student, that's for sure. But joining the Society of Mary would have been part of responding to that expectation of excellence from John Darby, that's for sure. I mean, even the desire for serious theological study and wanting to do the doctorate in religious studies, focusing on Scripture, that was a high value. I wanted a grip on that material that I owned, and not just what people said, and doing the parish thing well, and doing *Quest* well. We had the very good fortune of a man was in his fifties who was a graphic artist who, as a seminarian just before he was ordained, offered to do artwork for *Quest*, which added a whole new dimension to the presentation. And he did that for all 30 years, at some cost to himself as he was in parish. Timelines had to be met, but he had limits that he had to deal with. And so, an edition of *Quest* was ready when he was finished. But presenting *Quest* beautifully was a high, high value. I mean John Paul II has in his letter to artists, [he] speaks about beauty as a threshold in the mystery, and John [the artist] was bound to determine he was going to present artwork that was not just conventional, holy card stuff. So, that would have been part of the desire for excellence. And for me, at this point in my life, 82, the excellence concern at this point I want to say [the] the foundational mission survive, and that is where the Society can be at its most excellent today.

20:55 – Mike Bennett

Don't hit that stop button yet. Before we get to our concluding question with Bro. Bob, I just want to offer a word of thanks to Bro. Bob for sharing a little bit of his Marianist journey with us

today and for his prophetic witness to the Marianist Family and to the church. 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 @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 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 would you write to and what would be the topic?

22:10 – Bro. Bob Moriarty, SM

It hasn't been letters. It's been emails which I have written recently to take the presentation and proposal that I did at the MLC-NA Assembly and seriously engage it. I don't expect some kind of immediate implementation of it. I think there's also a testing that's needed. I want to just see that presentation proposal on the table for the three branches individually and for the Family corporately to critically engage the values and issues at stake.