

Sharing Our Marianist Stories Ep. 35 Transcript

Marianist is Where My Heart Is (with Ann Mueller, Bro. Tim Phillips, SM, Mike Bennett)

00:03 - Ann Mueller

And I think I'm coming into my own because what I'm doing right now is, I feel like there's more for me in the Marianist Family. I don't know what that means. I don't know if that means a Lay Marianist. I don't know if that means continu[ing] to be a collaborator, just continue to be part of the Family, but I feel like I want more, which is kind of what I'm discerning right now.

00:31 - 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're joined by Ann Mueller, who shares about her experience working for the Marianists and how that experience impacted her spirituality and engagement with the Marianist Family. Given that Ann discusses her experiences of the Society of Mary within the St. Louis Province and later the US province, we thought it might be helpful to bring in our Marianist scholar-in-residence, Bro. Tim Phillips, to help us understand what a Province is, why it's significant and how the current US Province structure came to be. So, before we hand the floor over to Ann, we'll start with Bro. Tim, who we are always happy to welcome to the studio.

01:19 - Bro. Tim Phillips, SM

We can start by saying that the Society of Mary is divided into Provinces and Regions to establish, as we say, closer bonds among communities and to ensure the stability of apostolic works. It's a way to manage a society of men who are numerous and spread throughout the world in many countries with many languages, and to encourage and develop the spiritual life and apostolic life of the members. Provinces and Regions are accountable directly to the General Administration for their spiritual and apostolic life. In contrast, over the years, the Society of Mary has developed the structure of a District to develop its missionary outreach outside the territorial boundaries of a Province. In the same way as a Province or Region is accountable to the General Administration, a District is the responsibility of a Province or Region and is accountable to it.

02:20 – Bro. Tim Phillips, SM

Now a Province is a territorial division of the Society which has a satisfactory level of self-sufficiency. That means the ability to have an effective internal organization and cohesiveness, sufficient personnel to provide for initial and ongoing formation such as a Novitiate and continued support for spiritual life of the members, as well as sustaining and developing apostolic ministries. Finally, long range financial stability is a criterion. Normally a Province is not established until the membership reaches about 75 members.

02:59 - Bro. Tim Phillips, SM

A Region is similar in its responsibilities, though it would have a simpler administrative structure and the membership would probably be below 75 Religious. Regions reflect growth towards

becoming a Province on the one hand, or the recognition that a Province, due to the aging of the members or other issues, needs a simpler administrative structure or will not be able to provide certain services such as initial formation.

03:30 - Mike Bennett

Just in a brief review here, you've mentioned both Provinces and Regions and how they kind of fit together, and I know that there are four distinctions. If we were going to kind of move up a hierarchy, we'll say, I think it begins with a *Territory*, is that the phrase?

03:45 - Bro. Tim Phillips, SM

Actually, the *Foundation* is the term.

03:47 – Mike Bennett

A Foundation.

03:48 – Bro. Tim Phillips, SM

And a Foundation would be a community [that] generally would be outside the territorial bounds of a Province or a Region.

03:56 – Mike Bennett

Okay.

03:57 – Bro. Tim Phillips, SM

And as that develops, wherever that is or however many communities develop from that Foundation - often in a different territory, a different country, for instance - eventually it would be moved towards the position of being a District if under the Province or a Region, and eventually would move to becoming a Region under the General Administration, with the idea that it would develop into a Province at some time.

04:28 Mike Bennett

I see. So, working our way up, we start with the Foundation, to a District, to a Region, to a Province.

04:34 - Bro. Tim Phillips, SM

Yes.

04:35 – Mike Bennett

Okay, excellent. Well, thanks for that. And could you give us a little bit of the evolution of the Province for the Society of Mary within America? And I know Ann is speaking specifically in her context of a merger of four Provinces, and I know that will be part of the evolution. But can you just give us that evolution in a nutshell?

04:56 - Bro. Tim Phillips, SM

Yes. Well, what we were saying about Provinces and Regions and Districts and Foundations, it's reflected in the development of the Province of the United States, even though this particular language was not there at the time because we're talking about the 1850s. In 1855, the four communities of the Society in Ohio and Texas that had about 30 Religious between Ohio and San Antonio, and they were far from the General Administration in France, were organized as the Province of America.

05:34 - Bro. Tim Phillips, SM

And then in 1908, in recognition of the significant growth in the number of communities and their territorial extent from the East Coast of North America to Hawaii and from Winnipeg, Canada, into Mexico, the Province of America was divided into the Provinces of St. Louis and Cincinnati. Now from there, as growth continued, Provinces of the Pacific in 1948 and New York in 1961 were established. Most recently, as membership was aging and diminishing, the General Administration and the General Chapters took a proactive stance and developed plans for restructuring the Society of Mary with a view to making the best use of available personnel for leadership and formation. This resulted, in the United States, in the formation of the Province of the United States in 2002 out of the four Provinces of New York, Cincinnati, St. Louis and the Pacific.

06:39 - Mike Bennett

And that's where things still stand today, at least for the US Province.

06:42 - Bro. Tim Phillips, SM

Right. For the Province of the United States.

06:45 - Mike Bennett

And it might be worth also mentioning that yes, there's that US Province. There is also the Province of Meribah in New York that was founded in 1976. And then there's also the Foundation or territory in Canada,

07:00 – Bro. Tim Phillips, SM

...which began as a Province in 1964 and became a Region, and it's now called a “Territorial Community.”

07:07 - Mike Bennett

Okay. So those were kind of offshoots in the process, but in the merger of 2002, those continued to function as their own entities. I think that about covers it a little bit of a preface, so to help people understand some of the things Ann's talking about. Well, thanks for your help, Bro. Tim.

07:20 – Bro. Tim Phillips, SM

Well good. You're welcome.

07:23 – Mike Bennett

And with that, we'll turn it over to Ann Mueller, who recorded this interview with me at the 2023 Lay Assembly in St. Louis, Missouri.

07:33 - Ann Mueller

Hi, I'm Ann Mueller. I am from St. Louis, Missouri, lifelong born and raised. My connection to the Marianist Family is in 1988. I was offered a job by then [St. Louis] Provincial Fr. Joe Uvietta, and I had heard of the Marianists. My brother, who was a Diocesan Priest, had taught a little bit at St. Mary's [University of San Antonio] and loved it. So, I knew who they were, but they didn't know anything about them. I just really wanted the job. So, I took the job. Little did I know how transformative it would be in my life for the next 30 years. That particular Provincial Council, with Fr. Joe as the lead, looked at our job - I was a secretary - not as a job, but as a ministry. And that really stuck with me. They had all the hallmarks of the Marianist's way of life, charism. Their hospitality, they were always inviting us to things. They were interested in our families. They were very inclusive.

08:30 – Ann Mueller

I always said Fr. Joe was the most feminist male priest I knew next to my brother, Jim. And we just felt like we were part of a family. I worked there for 11 years. And the reason I left was I felt like it was time to just make a move. My kids were going into - I don't even know where they were. They were in grade school. They were probably in high school. And I got offered a job with the Archdiocese of St. Louis, and I decided to go. And it was fine. It was okay. And in that time, I kept up with the Brothers, various Lay people that I had known through the years, the various Sisters I had known.

09:11 – Ann Mueller

But when the Provinces merged, there was a job opening, and a couple of the dear Brothers said to the boss at that time, who was Diane Guerra, "You need to hire her back." So, she kind of approached me about this job, and I was like, "Alright, yeah, I'll talk to you. I don't know." And just walking into the building for the interview, it felt like I was back home. I didn't even know if I'd get the job. But I got the job, and I worked in communications for 19 years. I just retired last year.

09:43 - Ann Mueller

Though I had the feel of the Marianists in the St. Louis Province, I really learned about the Marianist Family more in the last 19 years. I had more interaction with the Sisters, and I really came to know the Marianist Family more. And what I loved about Chaminade from the very beginning - when I read *Running Giant* when I was at the St. Louis Province - what I loved from the beginning is he started with the Laity. Because as a woman in the Church, sometimes it's hard to see yourself in the "male-ness," and it was just really beautiful. And then it was the nuns, and then it was the Brothers. And that always spoke to me.

10:26 - Ann Mueller

It always speaks to me the discipleship of equals, that the Lay Marianists are no less important than the Brothers. The Sisters are no less important. And though I worked for the Brothers, the collaboration, while not always perfect, it was wonderful to see. And I just really enjoyed it. I'm not a Lay Marianist, but I did go to things. I went to Jubilees. I went to the Lay Assembly in 2017. I "Zoomed" in the Pandemic Assembly. I've done various things that Lay Marianists offer, you know, where I Zoom in. I just took the Marianist Spirit class with Mandy Spicer, and I think I'm coming into my own because what I'm doing right now is, I feel like there's more for me in the Marianist Family. I don't know what that means. I don't know if that means a Lay Marianist. I don't know if that means continue to be a collaborator or just continue to be part of the Family. But I feel like I want more, which is kind of what I'm discerning right now.

11:28 – Ann Mueller

And there's so many memories through the years. The Assembly, the welcoming, because - not that I'm an outsider, but because I was an employee, there's really not a name for me in the Marianist Family. I've talked to a lot of different people who say "collaborator" and all that. But I still am part of the Marianist Family. But I don't have the connections, necessarily, that I see among the Lay Marianists. So, in the last few years, I'm just like, "Well, I'm going to go and just tell them who I am, and we'll see how it goes."

11:56 - Ann Mueller

I love Marianists. The Brothers are who I've worked with for 30 years. I have a deep love for them, a deep respect for them, the good, the bad, the ugly, all the stuff. I have a deep love for them. But I have a deep love for the Marianist Family and the charism. There's a comment that sometimes people make that I'm more Marianist than Catholic. And yes, I am at fault for saying that because I know Catholic is Marianist. But Marianist is where my heart is. It's just my heart.

12:29 – Mike Bennett

Yeah. Can you think of one or two ways that the Marianist charism has impacted your spirituality?

12:34 - Ann Mueller

A lot of it has just been the inclusiveness of everybody. Sometimes people have said, "Well, you're part of the Family, but you're not a Lay Marianist." Then other people have said, "You've been around long enough. You ought to be a Lay Marianist." And then there's others that say, "You've been around [so] long, you ought to be a Brother." But I think the inclusiveness, just always including me.

12:58 – Ann Mueller

And I've always felt cared about, and my family's been cared about. The other thing is the profound effect of Mary on my life. And Mary became important to me before I ever met the Marianists when I was pregnant with my first child, Megan. I was pregnant at Christmas. And when you're pregnant in Christmas, and you're hearing all these readings, and you go, "Wow."

I can't imagine being this much pregnant on a donkey going into Bethlehem and sleep..." You know?

13:29 - Ann Mueller

But Mary's always been a part of my life, but Mary was distant from me. It was more the Mary on the pedestal. That's how I grew up. Very devotional, not relational, and working for the Marianists taught me how relational Mary is and how [in] every part of my life, I can connect with Mary. As one of my favorite - the Brothers gave this to me when I left and retired - was the Mary Seat of Wisdom that Joe Aspell did. I have it framed. And I look at it as a woman who is older and retired, and I look at her sometimes and just say, "I'm scared about this or I'm worried about this or I know you must have felt this." But all through my life, and especially, "Do whatever he tells you." I mean, just that she brings us to Christ and that's what we're supposed to do.

14:21 - Ann Mueller

I mean, those are the big influences for me. I have so many Marian images around my house. People come in and they just kind of look at me. I had this 93-year-old woman I was visiting, and we were talking about Mary one day, and she wasn't a big fan of Mary. And I just without thinking go, "Oh, Mary's a rock star, Dee!" And she looks at me and goes, "A rock star?" And I go, "Well, you know how they put rock stars out there like they're so cool and they have all these great experiences, but they can also try and relate to you." I go, "She's a rock star." She goes, "I'm going to have to really think about that for a while."

15:01 - Mike Bennett

She's probably picturing her up on a stage...

15:02 - Ann Mueller

Yeah. I guess, but that was not my intent. It was just, for me, she's just everything. She's not more than Jesus. She's not more than God, but she's our human connection.

15:14 - Mike Bennett

I love that imagery, especially as you talk about being pregnant with your first child in that December and journeying with Mary.

15:22 - Ann Mueller

Yeah.

15:23 - Mike Bennett

And just those ways of relating to Mary's humanity.

15:27 - Ann Mueller

Yeah. And that came from knowing the Marianists. Because, like I said, when I was a kid growing up, it was a pedestal. But it changed as I was pregnant, and as a mom. And all of a

sudden, I'm thinking and I'm listening to these readings. And then, as I was having Megan in March, and then it was Easter and thinking, "Oh my God! Sacrificing your son. I couldn't. I don't think I could do this with my daughter." And then, I just feel like when the job came up for the St. Louis Province, I prayed about it and I just said, "If this is what it's supposed to be, let it be." And I have always felt that it was always where I was meant to be, and I am so blessed and grateful for that.

16:16 - Mike Bennett

When you were talking about your tenure with the Marianists, you mentioned being part of that transition of the Province.

16:23 - Ann Mueller

I was gone from - the transition was starting in 1999. I mean there was work going on.

16:30 – Mike Bennett

Sure.

16:31- Ann Mueller

I left in '99 and came back in 2002, and I was there for the First Assembly, the dinner. I got invited to that. And it was shortly thereafter when I found out there was a job. But I will say, Mike, I knew the other Provinces. I knew Brothers in all the four [Provinces]. I mean, obviously St. Louis, but the California, Pacific, Cincinnati Province, and New York Province. But coming back and sitting in my office, probably in the first six months and going, "Wow, there are really different cultures at work here," and it was very interesting. Their culture of being Brothers were different. How they did Lay Marianists were different. I'm not saying the process was different, but the culture of it, and then watching it evolve through the years. And I think Bro. Steve Glodek and his team did an amazing job. I think he was the perfect person to help do that. But it really was kind of a culture [shock].

17:30 – Mike Bennett

Sure. I'm curious if there's other concrete kind of differences you noticed when you came back, kind of comparing the... Before and after that merger?

17:41 Ann Mueller

Well, the St. Louis Province was pretty relaxed, for instance, in the office, pretty relaxed. They had their clerical suits on and all that occasionally, but never hardly in the office unless they were going somewhere. The Cincinnati Province in the Provincial office [was] much more suit and coats, ties - just different. The experience of mine in the St. Louis Province and New York was they were kind of the hip, cool people. And then the Pacific Province, while they were hip and cool in their own right, they were kind of out there as well, and they were just different. And so, when they came to the St. Louis Province, sometimes the guys from Dayton would be like, "Well, we need to do it this..." They all had their ways of wanting to do things and working out, "Well, this is how we always did it. Well, this how we did it, this how we..." and finding ways to

do that. And in credit to the Council at that time and to the Brothers themselves, they get a lot of pushback. There were a lot of Brothers unhappy with this merger. "The province is too big. It's too spread out," or "It's small," just different styles of doing things. It wasn't that one was better or worse than the other. It was just different styles. And watching those styles - because they were very conscious at the beginning of the new Province to have all the areas represented so that every Province felt like they had a voice on their Council. It was interesting.

19:10 Mike Bennett

Well, I could see that approach in being indicative of the Marianist spirituality, the Marianist charism of, "We're not just going to come in here and steamroll everybody else. There's a way that we've got to bring everybody together."

19:21- Ann Mueller

We've got to bring everybody. We have to be inclusive. We can't leave anybody behind in this. Even the Brothers that weren't real thrilled about it, we can't leave them behind. And knowing some of those Brothers, they would come along. They still may not like it, but they came along, and I think they continue to. I know by the time I left, I feel like it's a pretty solid Province. There's been a real melding of how they move people around. I think there's been more melding of the Lay Families doing more together. The Sisters are primarily in Dayton and San Antonio, but having them included. I felt like it was pretty much the US Province.

20:00 - Ann Mueller

And it's probably still evolving. But the other issue now is it's evolving, but it's also getting smaller. There's fewer Brothers. And I remember at the Assembly in 2017 when they debuted *Spectacle*, a piece of *Spectacle* which was fabulous. And I was standing with the then Provincial Fr. Marty Solma. I had never been to an Assembly, and I'm standing in the back of the room after it's all over, and I'm looking at all of you young people and us older folks, but all of you that have been around for years that I had never experienced. And I looked at him and I said, "You know, if you were ever worried about Chaminade and the Marianist Family not surviving, you need to look at this room. Everybody is in good hands. Look at these young people. Look at these middle-aged people that embrace what Chaminade envisioned. We're gonna be fine."

21:00 - Ann Mueller

Because I know that's a big deal with the Marianists. And I can't imagine how hard it must be to want more vocations. But vocations are down everywhere. But I feel like with Chaminade's vision, the Marianist Family is in great hands.

21:14 – Mike Bennett

So, if you had a hope for the Marianist family?

21:17 Ann Mueller

My hope would be that the Marianist Family would influence our greater Church. Not only here in the United States, but across the world. And I think we are, but I just hope it's more. I don't

know of a religious order that focuses so much on their Laity, but I think the Marianist Family, has the potential to teach the Catholic Church what it means to be a church. And it doesn't have to just be clerics. It can be Lay people, it can be religious Sisters, it can be Brothers, it can be Priests. But I think the Lay Marianists have a lot to teach the Catholic Church. That's my hope, that people will hear and listen and be open. And I don't know how that happens because I know there [are] not Lay Marianists everywhere in the United States. But somehow we infuse the Church with that.

22:14 - Mike Bennett

Before we ask Ann our final question, I just wanted to offer a word of thanks both to Ann and Bro. Tim for your contributions to this episode. 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.

23:08 - Mike Bennett

So, we know that the Founders corresponded quite a bit in letter writing. So, if you were going to write a letter to one person, dead or alive, knowing that you would get a response, who would you choose and what would be the topic?

23:21 - Ann Mueller

I would want to write to my deceased brother, Jim, who was a Catholic Archdiocesan priest. He died in 2009 of cancer at the age of 62. We were not only brother and sister: we were best friends. And what I would write to him is, "Jimmy, look at what I have found since you've been gone. Look at the ways that I have grown and transformed." And I will tell you that I pray to him for this discernment about the Marianist Family. Look at what I'm finding in myself within the Marianist Family in a whole new way, beyond being an employee.