

*Sharing Our Marianist Stories*, Ep. 41 Transcript

An Irish Perspective with Susan Buckley and interviewed by Mike Bennett

**00:01 - Susan Buckley**

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**00:23 - 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. For this episode of *Sharing Our Marianist Stories*, I was privileged to sit down with Susan Buckley, a Lay Marianist from Dublin, Ireland, who was visiting the United States in the Fall of 2023. Some may be surprised to learn that the Marianists have a presence in Ireland, so some introductory history could be helpful. In 1967, free secondary school was introduced in Ireland. Archbishop John Charles McQuaid, Archbishop of Dublin, Ireland, wanted to increase the number of religious-run schools by increasing the number of religious orders, and he, therefore, sought the support of the Society of Mary in this endeavor. Given the growth the Society of Mary was seeing in the Cincinnati Province, Bro. John O'Connor was sent to Dublin in February 1967 to lay the foundation for St. Laurence College, seven miles south of Dublin.

**01:28 – Mike Bennett**

[Marianist] Brothers Robert Kelly and Firmin Widmer arrived on August 18th, 1967, [at] the beginning of that school year. With their arrival, the first Marianist community was established in Ireland, which was a foundation of the Cincinnati Province. Bro. Fred Rech, who is still living in the Society of Mary's community in Dublin, was part of that initial community and supervised the building of St. Laurence College. St. Laurence College began as an all-boys secondary school and soon became one of the first schools in Ireland to have women teachers in an all-boys secondary school. In 1973, the school became one of the first religious-managed co-ed schools in the country. It is distinguished for the family spirit amid all those affiliated with the school as well as its focus on teaching and learning.

**02:19 – Mike Bennett**

The number of Marianists in Ireland has fluctuated over time. Today, there are four members of the Society of Mary living in a Marianist community in Dublin. There are also a few Lay Marianists and those involved at St. Laurence College. The Daughters of Mary Immaculate have not had a presence in Ireland. In this episode, Susan refers to MLNNA, an acronym for Marianist Lay Network of North America, which is now called the MLC-NA, short for Marianist Lay Communities of North America. The MLC-NA is the Lay branch of the Marianist Family in North America and consists of Lay Marianists and Marianist Lay Communities. She also refers

to Cape May, which is the Marianist Family Retreat Center in Cape May, New Jersey, that offers communal retreat experiences in the Catholic tradition. Without further ado, let's turn the floor over to Susan.

### **03:13 - Susan Buckley**

My name is Susan Buckley. I am from Dublin, Ireland, and that's where I live, and I am just visiting Dayton, Ohio, today. By default, I ended up in St. Laurence College, which is the only Marianist-run school in Ireland and all of the British Isles. I was due to go to an all-girls Catholic girl's school, and I ended up moving from where I lived in Blackrock to Ballybrack. And I just didn't want to go back or get a bus every single day. And it happened that my cousins were going to St. Laurence's School. I'd never heard of [it], and it had gone co-ed. The school was started in 1967, and it was all-boys until 1973. So basically, as they say, the rest is history. I started in St. Laurence in '76, and my first introduction to Marianists was Bro. Fred Rech, who is still in St. Laurence College. He was my first-class religion teacher, and he is like the... everything that I later found out about Marianists, he epitomizes all of that. And so, he was such a great person to learn from, and he inspired me to stay connected. So, I left school in '81.

### **04:52 – Susan Buckley**

Although it's part of my parish, it didn't kind of satisfy your spiritual needs. So, I would have been part of the small faith community, which was a Marianist small community, kind of for five years, and I was part of another one. And I've stayed connected to the Marianists, not so much to the school. Although all my siblings went, all five of them went to St. Laurence's, my two grown-up nieces went there, and my son went there - he finished there about two years ago - and I've a grand-niece now.

### **05:25 – Susan Buckley**

Living in Ireland in the heyday of St. Laurence College, parents were part of lay communities and then students who had left were part of lay communities. But kind of as things dwindled over the years and the Church has changed in Ireland, there was less and less people. So, my connection then was about 17 years ago, I became part of a cyber community, which is Our Lady of the Round Table. And there are people from... Australia, France, Canada, Africa and then some women from the [United] States. And that has been like a Godsend. But I've also kept in contact with some of the Brothers who were teachers who taught me, my principal over the years as well. So I've had the opportunity to visit the US, last year was part of the International Lay Assembly in Madrid, which was fascinating. Yeah, there was 98 people from 28 countries, like countries I didn't even know there were Marianist in. And it was a great opportunity to see so many differences, but yet commonality, because differences – culturally, also financially - between Africa, Europe, and North America and South America as well, they were all represented.

**06:57 – Susan Buckley**

Even though I live on an island, there are still four Marianist Brothers in Ireland, but I am kind of on my own there. But it's never lonely because now with the Internet and Zoom, and you're always connected. And 25 years ago, I actually became a spiritual affiliate of the Marianists. So, this year, I will celebrate 25 years [as] an affiliate. I definitely think my life would have been completely different had I gone to that all-girls school. It has given me opportunities that I never would have had. I was lucky enough seven years ago to go on a Marianist pilgrimage and visit France and Spain and walk the streets where Chaminade walked, go to visit Adèle's house, go to visit Le Pian, where Marie-Thérèse was finally buried, and go to Saragossa and sit in front of Our Lady of the Pillar. You can understand where Chaminade got his excitement and his vision. I know the story was that he was there on the eve of Our Lady of the Pillar, and he saw how fervent the Spanish are. And they still are, if you happen to be lucky enough to be there. I always have that in the back of my mind that that's what Chaminade saw, that it inspired him to go back to France and say, "Well, that's what I want." But I've been very lucky in that respect.

**08:37 - Mike Bennett**

Well, that's great. That's a really comprehensive experience of the Marianist Family, and certainly a testament of lifelong engagement in the Marianist Family. I'm curious if you could talk a little bit more about, you called it a "cyber community" or often I hear it referred to as a "virtual community." Can you talk about, logistically, what the engagement of that community looks like, and then also how that experience of being in that community has impacted you?

**09:07 - Susan Buckley**

So, people that were involved in the community originally were part of the University of Dayton community course program. And they encourage[d] people basically to form a small community. And when they were finished, they didn't want to stop. So, they continue to get together, and I came along kind of probably a year or two after they had started, because Dan Jordan passed through Ireland, and he thought of the situation I was in, and he goes, "There might be something there that might fit where you are." So, he put my name forward. At the very beginning, you were encouraged to lurk, to see if it hit you. And so, originally, we would meet. It was very intense. It was five days a week. We would do Lectio Divina, and it was all done by e-mail.

**10:04 – Mike Bennett**

Wow.

**10:05 – Susan Buckley**

So, regardless of where in the world you were, it didn't matter because you just posted. So, we would... for Lectio Divina, you take your word, your phrase, you would write a little bit about what inspired you to use that word, and then you would write a short prayer. So, naturally enough, through all of that, we form friendships. And I think sometimes, with the anonymity of

e-mail and the Internet, you could actually be your best person because there's no preconceived ideas or a quick judgment about somebody. So, I think that was one of the benefits. So, we did that intensely, probably for about 10 years, and we were lucky enough in 2010 to actually meet in Ireland in-person for a retreat. And the Brothers were kind enough - they had a big house at that stage, and we actually met there, and I... moved up the road from my house for the duration of the retreat. And it actually inspired the Brothers because they saw the commitment of Lay people. [We] prayed every morning, we prayed every evening, and then we would join the Brothers for Mass. And even when we were finished, we sent each other out and blessed each other. And I think they were taken aback by that sort of commitment. So, it was good for them to see that even though we're Lay people, the commitment is still very strong. The pilgrimage was six of the women from our Lay community, and then some other Brothers joined us. And we were really blessed to have Dave Fleming as our guide, because one of the women in our group is Marceta [Reilly], his sister. So, she [twisted us?]

**12:06 – Susan Buckley**

And that was something you would never repeat because Dave Fleming, [he] is just the encyclopedia of everything Marianist. So, to have him on tap for like two weeks was just an unbelievable privilege because he is just so involved and in-depth, and we learned so much. And he said Mass in Chaminade's bedroom [in France] at the table where he wrote his letters. Now, we meet once a month by Zoom. So, we're doing that long before Covid [Pandemic] came, and Zoom was important or came into play. So, I think we're doing that probably [for] about five years. So, we meet on the third Monday of every month, and we have an hour-long Zoom. And we would have prayer and check-in and maybe have an article to talk about.

**13:01 – Susan Buckley**

Part of some of my visits to the States - well, most of my visits - have been because of my virtual community, because the friendships I have made over all those years. By going to the international meeting last year was through my involvement with the virtual community as well. But although we're not in person, you're still feeling as connected. I said at the beginning you had the anonymity. In some respects, you became true friends because of having no hidden agenda. That was one of the benefits. And our prayer life at that time, especially when it was five days a week, there was huge commitment, so we just kind of readjusted as the time went on.

**13:54 - Mike Bennett**

Yeah. How has that experience impacted you personally in your commitment to the Marianist charism?

**14:02 - Susan Buckley**

I'm not isolated the way I would have been if there hadn't been the Internet, and it was one of the benefits of Covid because the world actually became smaller. You could watch Mass in any

country in the world. A lot of stuff from NACMS or MLNNA, they were online. So, you were able to join in. Time zones were the only thing that went against maybe not doing everything. One of the first things was actually the Lay Assembly was online. Now, that would have been something I wouldn't have been able to go to, but I was able to go to it because it was online. And even doing these podcasts, anyone can now be part of it, where[as] before you'd have to live in a place where there were Marianists.

**14:52 - Mike Bennett**

I'm curious if there's an example or two of how your experience of being educated within a Marianist institution really impacted you.

**15:03 - Susan Buckley**

At the time I started school, in our school, it was very much a mix of people. It was people from the local area, but people that came in from outside of the area. It was a mix of those that had money [and] those that hadn't got money. It was very much like what Chaminade started as the Lay community because he welcomed everybody. And so, you had a very round connection with the people that were in your class or in the school. The school's quite small, so people got to know other classes, but in St. Laurence's, it's always been about the whole person. It's always been very pastoral. It's not just the academics. And so, if somebody lost a parent or some[thing], the whole school would mourn the loss as opposed to just the person.

**16:00 – Susan Buckley**

And it's still to this day very pastoral and very much about the whole person. Like anxiety, now, would be a huge issue for young people in Ireland. Mental health would be a huge problem, and they are very much still part of dealing with everything. I was lucky enough when I was in school, there [were] a lot of Marianist Brothers in the school, so you saw their example. Now we're lucky enough to see [an] example through Lay members as opposed to, years ago, our example was only through the religious. They certainly lived out their hospitality. You could see their faith and their love for people, and I think that definitely made a huge impact. I feel really lucky to have been kind of in that time and place.

**16:56 - Mike Bennett**

I'm curious if you can say more about what the Marianist Family looks like in Ireland?

**17:00 - Susan Buckley**

Ireland was Holy Ireland. It was nearly 95% Catholic. You know, there was some Church of Ireland, and the Church has really taken a bashing, and that's still very much part of the down of the Church. So, that's really taking its toll on Catholic faith across the board. And sometimes it's hard to actually be Catholic in Ireland, which is an unusual thing to say. Ireland is definitely not what it was. There are very few small faith communities of any description for any organization.

Within the school, the ethos is still there, and the *Characteristics of Marianist Education* are still taught. A lot of our youth don't have any religious connection. There is Mass within the school at certain times. They'll go to that because [it's] part of the school.

**18:00 – Susan Buckley**

That's why, for me, the virtual community and my individual Marianist connections and going to something like the International Meeting or, a long time ago, I came here for continental assembly. Those kind of things are what feed me, and that's why to be able to do that from my island has become very important for me. We're just living in a different world now. I still believe in the vision of Chaminade and Marie-Thérèse and Adèle. And especially as a woman looking up to Marie-Thérèse and Adèle, what examples to follow because they both were so different, but yet they came together.

**18:54 - Mike Bennett**

You've mentioned a couple of times the International Assembly in Madrid.

**18:59 - Susan Buckley**

Yeah.

**19:00 – Mike Bennett**

Can you talk a little bit about what your experience of that was like?

**19:05 - Susan Buckley**

Well, my first thing is hot! So, I was very lucky to be one of the delegates for the MLNNA, because the Marianists who came to Ireland were American, they were from the Cincinnati Province. Our connection has always been to the US and then language definitely has brought us back to the US. So, with the MLNNA, it was North America, Australia, and Ireland. I am always part of that group as well. So, it was fantastic. It was a very intense program. The fact that there's so many cultures, we worked very hard, and the international team do fantastic work, especially the fact they all do it voluntarily. The outgoing team fits so well. I have to say, I give Marceta credit because she was one of the ones that very much brought them together by Zoom and all of the team that were going from North America, we all met. So, when we got together, we all knew each other. So, we were [a] team before we went.

**20:18 – Susan Buckley**

The fact that Fr. André [Fétis], the Superior General who's just one of everybody else, sat among us, participated. There's very few places you would see that kind of interaction because, sometimes, a Superior General will be put up on a pedestal. And the only reason the FMI Superior wasn't there was because they had just had finished their Chapter, but she spoke to us on Zoom. And they had translators, which was great for us as well. But they really made us feel

at home. And definitely it was an eye-opener in relation to the cultures, and some of the African members would say, “Sometimes we don't have electricity.” And you're going, “Well, you know, and I'm worried about the charger on my phone or something,” something minor. So [it] really kind of made you think.

**21:16 – Susan Buckley**

Every region took a turn literally, and we were lucky, we ended up on [the] Feast of St. James, which is a Spanish feast. And St. James is connected with Saragossa, and then there was the voting and stuff like that. So, I never been part of that. It's all very structured very proper, and it's authenticated. Everybody went away having felt the experience. So, it was [a] wonderful experience. It's kind of when you see something that's greater than yourself, and you kind of see how big our Marianist world is, especially when you're live - I'm sitting on my island. You can feel that there's no one else there, so seeing something like that is brilliant. Even having the two Dayton perspectives, the San Antonio perspective, and my perspective just within like the four members of the Youth panel were eye-opening. It was interesting because it gave a different dynamic to the Assembly itself.

**22:34 - Mike Bennett**

What would be a hope that you have for the Marianist Family?

**22:36 - Susan Buckley**

The hope would be that we keep growing, that certainly other branches would see the enormous talent and commitment of the Lay branch... In a practical sense, definitely more online stuff in relation to bringing people in, especially people on the fringes that are not part of an in-person community. Definitely for me, that's being a Godsend. It's given me the opportunity to stay connected. And connection is one of the biggest hopes and you never stop learning. The hope is that the connection continues and that we do [talk?]. One of failings can be where you talk too much, and you keep talking about something that needs to be done, but it's never done. Whereas you see definitely the young people that were there, they're doers. They took the reins when they were asked to step up.

**23:49 - Mike Bennett**

Before we hear Susan's response to our concluding question, I'd like to express our gratitude to Susan for doing this interview with me and sharing a bit of her Marianist story. And I'd like to offer a word of thanks to you, our listeners, for listening to this episode and for your engagement with the North American Center for Marianist Studies. Make sure to subscribe to *Sharing Our Marianist Stories* wherever you listen to podcasts. And follow us on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube @thisisNACMS. Now, to wrap up this episode, 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?

**24:43 - Susan Buckley**

My initial communication with the Brothers who left Ireland that I'm still friends with now were through letters and...

**24:52 - Mike Bennett**

So, you're like, "I'm already doing this..."

**24:57 - Susan Buckley**

I'm already doing this. I love writing letters. So, I still do that. A few years ago, I came to Cape May Point for a women's spirituality retreat, and one of the things was we had to make a greeting card. So, on the front of it was "So thankful for you." We'd write the card and send it to somebody who you have always wanted to thank, but never got the opportunity to thank. So, for me, that card went to Bro. Fred, because for me, that was the seed that was sown, that brought me to this point. It has certainly changed my life for the better.

**25:42 - Mike Bennett**

Well, thank you so much for spending some time with us and certainly for sharing your story.

**25:45 - Susan Buckley**

Thank you for having me.