

## **Elizabeth Lau Skelton: What Does It Mean for Me to Lead a Committed Marianist Life?**

*[Editor's note: Elizabeth, from San Francisco, California, wrote her essay as part of Marianists Write Now!, a NACMS-sponsored writing program held virtually from Friday, March 12 to Saturday, March 13, 2021. Each participant in this session of Marianists Write Now! wrote a personal reflection on the following question: "What does it mean for me to live a committed Marianist life?"]*

To live a committed Marianist life is to make Mary a large part of my daily activities. In meditating on the five concepts—faith, Mary, mission, inclusivity, and community—that comprise a committed Marianist life, I try to make conscious decisions to do Mary's bidding, to "Do whatever He tells you."

My first activity is to try and pray the rosary every day. Most weeks, I am successful, but there are occasional weeks when I miss a day or even two. When this happens, I double down the next day and pray with purpose the day's designated mystery cycle, and I read from a rosary book or something on Mary. Praying the rosary is my time to be with Mary and to be in a spiritual space of accompanying her through the mysteries of the life of Jesus. I own many books on the rosary, all of which I read and reread.

Praying the rosary was neither easy nor a matter of course for me. I had to teach myself and memorize the mysteries and the responses from studying rosary books. I persisted when I didn't see results or get the "feel-good" effect with this regular prayer. I learned to make beaded rosaries by hand; for me, this is being a companion to Mary and is prayerful, too. After continual repetitive daily prayer, things started to change for me. I felt calmer, more confident, and less alone. I believe that benefits will be realized with consistent and frequent rosary prayer.

Repairing broken rosaries for people is a favorite thing of mine to do. Sometimes they are vintage rosaries that belonged to their parents or are from their childhood. I feel the love in these old rosaries, and I get to hold and touch some amazing crucifixes. I have a friend who sends me vintage rosaries she finds at estate sales. She is a retailer for vintage jewelry, and she finds old Catholic sacramentals, missals, etc., and sends them to me.

A couple of years ago, she sent me a rosary that I was afraid to use. It had two worn and rubbed reliquary medals attached: one of St. Jude and the other of St. Charbel, both miracle workers. I was afraid because I knew that this rosary belonged to someone who had a desperate situation, and this former owner was now deceased. I have recently pulled it out and prayed fervently because my best friend is battling cancer.

A few years ago, I misplaced on three separate occasions a rosary I had made. I found it the first two times, but I had no idea where it was and weeks passed after I lost it the third time. I drew a picture of my rosary, offered prayers to St. Anthony, and placed my picture of my lost rosary on my altar.

I took my dog to be groomed (he goes every five weeks), and the groomer presented my rosary and asked, "Is this yours?" I gasped and was astonished. It must have fallen out of my purse five weeks before when I had reached in to give Nicole her tip.

To live a committed Marianist life, I pray and ask Mary for her intercession. I am assured that she hears my prayers and presents them to her Son on my behalf. Even in my direct prayers to Jesus, I always ask Mary to intercede because I have been taught that Jesus does not refuse what his Mother asks, and I am powerless without Jesus. I learn additional Marian prayers and memorize parts that I recite as a preface to my rosary recitation. The one I recently found in a Knights of Columbus prayer pamphlet is a Marian hymn from the thirteenth century: "Come, Lady, upon the heights; Mary visit us; you who already brought such joy to the house of your kinswoman." When I meditate upon this stanza, I think about my pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 2012 and the visit to the hilltop town of Ein Kerem, where Mary journeyed to Elizabeth's home.

Currently, I am in the process of renewing my consecration to Jesus through Mary, using Louis de Montfort's *True Devotion to Mary*. My 33 days will conclude on the Feast of the Annunciation. For me, this process is one of the most beautiful ways I know to honor Mary. Each of the 33 days, I pray the *Ave Maris Stella*, the Litany of the Holy Ghost, the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and a reading from the Gospels or *The Imitation of Christ*. This prayer time is one I look forward to each night before I retire.

Also, I have another friend, a director of Family and Children's Ministry, who is making this same prayer journey to conclude on the Annunciation. Kathy introduced this practice to me when I attended her women's bible study at my parish; this marks her fifth time for renewal. I am always learning from her. In return, I painted the little wooden figures for the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Atrium and have contributed various slide talks on creating sacred space in your home and other topics.

I teach others and share my love for Mary by talking about her. I tell people who don't know her and teach others to love and give her honor for making great sacrifices for the salvation of humanity. I was a catechist for five consecutive years, preparing children to receive their First Reconciliation and Holy Communion. Children are so receptive to the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and to Mary. The purity of children's belief is like no other, and if adults could retain or obtain that same unquestioning faith, doors and windows leading to mercy would fly open for them!

I teach at a girls' Catholic high school; many students are from the public school system and have different faith backgrounds. Immaculate Conception Academy (ICA) is a Cristo Rey School with outreach to girls with a corporate work-study/tuition subsidized program. Catholic social justice is a large component in the curriculum, and Mother Mary's intercession in prayer is invoked in faculty meetings and classroom prayer.

My school is an inclusive school and some of our students identify as LGBTQ, and we celebrate and acknowledge diversity. There is significant emotional trauma in some of our students' lives due to family poverty, substance abuse, suicide, addictions, parental deaths, and poor health and living conditions, and ICA is the perfect school for these girls because we have services on campus to support them. Mary and Jesus are at my school on the front line.

Another aspect of my commitment as a Marianist is my ongoing choice to take classes about Mary and participate in workshops or courses offered through NACMS. I want to continue to learn about Mary and my faith. I felt welcome at NACMS events, even when I was new. The community spirit at NACMS Zoom events is an integral part of belonging, and I am witness to the achievement of Marianist community. I started to take classes about Mary so I could know her better and draw her image better through my art. I know that my art falls short because Mary is perfect, but I feel she appreciates my efforts.

Lastly, my commitment as a Marianist is through writing and sharing my story. This is a path to fulfilling my mission to help Mary bring more people to Jesus. Hopefully, by sharing my writing, others will find inspiration to do the things that I have loved doing for Mary, and they will have bigger and brighter ideas that they will share! Whenever NACMS invites my participation to an event, my response is "yes," provided my schedule permits. The invitation is always extended in a manner that makes me feel I am wanted. I am grateful for the generosity of NACMS because the organization reflects Marianist values; it reflects Mary. I feel blessed that I can participate in Marianist activities and have grown spiritually. I thank everyone at NACMS.