

## Mary Snyder: What Does It Mean for Me to Lead a Committed Marianist Life?

[*Editor's note:* Mary, from Cape May, New Jersey, 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?" In Mary's paper, the quotations in bold herein are from the poem "Wild Geese" by Mary Oliver.<sup>1</sup>]

"My God, I trust in you. You care for me, give me peace" (Ps 131). You care for me even when I don't realize it. Even when I feel lost and confused, you care for me.

**"Tell me about your despair, and I will tell you mine."** It reminds me of how we do not have to tell God our despair. He knows ours; if we listen, we know his. And, as he is taking care of me, life is true and **"wild geese high in the clean blue air, are heading home again."** We can depend on his creation. The stability is there: his stability. There is God's love all around us, holding us, carrying us through when we feel we can't carry on ourselves.

He brings people into our lives who are caring and gentle, loving and kind. He shows us a path when we are not able to see the path. That is my walk in my committed Marianist life, even when I don't realize it.

Last year when the pandemic hit, I was isolated from my friends and family. I didn't realize what was happening. There was no communication for me. I would go out for a drive and the streets were empty. If I saw a person, it was a welcome sight. Sometimes I would drive down by the bay and watch the water. Something that I took so much for granted became a part of my life. Once when I was at the bay, I noticed two women working in the back of their house. It looked like they were trying to build a deck. I became mesmerized just watching life.

I watched Mass on television, trying to hang on to some sanity. I said the Rosary with the people on television. If my family came to the house, they didn't come in. All visits were outside, six feet away. No one wanted to be responsible if I became deathly ill from COVID-19. I started to think maybe it would have been better if I did get sick. I understood why people who were addicts turned back to their habit with a vengeance and even why some turned to suicide.

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Oliver, "Wild Geese," in *Wild Geese* (Hexham, England: Bloodaxe Books, 2004).

I started to read *Consecration to St. Joseph: The Wonders of Our Spiritual Father* by Donald H. Calloway, MIC. It is a beautiful read. There are many quotes in it by Father Chaminade. He was very committed to St. Joseph and told of how important Joseph was in the lives of Jesus and Mary. My pandemic-era walk back to Marianist life began when Brother Stan Zubek, SM, set up Zoom meets for us to do music. It was the first connection I had with someone for at least a month. I didn't realize it, but spring was starting to work in the ground. I still couldn't cope. I didn't have the ability to reach out.

After a while, I started to go to Mary's Retreat House (in Cape May, NJ), even if I just pulled weeds. I still wasn't allowed to go into the buildings. "Fooch" (Anthony Fucci, Mary's House Director) didn't want to be responsible if I contracted the deadly disease, Covid-19. But I would spend some time with Brother Stan and sometimes pull weeds. I didn't stay very long. I just wanted to connect with someone and feel the closeness to Mary that the Retreat Center always gives. I began to understand the importance of community. Fooch was very upbeat. He took the time to paint the Retreat House inside and out and did other renovations that were easier to do when no one was around. It gave me hope in the future just to see it, even though I wasn't a part of it.

Then, I was invited to join a Marianist prayer group on Saturday mornings via Zoom. It included only about eight people. That was a great help.

As time went by, Marianist doors opened. NACMS was inviting people to write about their life as a Marianist. I was very eager to be a part of that. But my thinking wasn't clear because of my recent experience of isolation. My very good friend Patti Gehred was a facilitator, and she was assigned to critique my work. She was very, very kind. She gave me as much time as I needed. I just couldn't get down on paper what I wanted to say. I had developed a great devotion to St. Joseph and just couldn't seem to express it in the manner that I would have liked.

As weeks went by with the Zoom meets, Patti and I began sharing our different experiences with what the isolation had done in our lives. Sometimes I would cry and sometimes she would cry. It was another experience where God was leading both of us on the path, and I don't think either of us saw the path. **"Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine."**

As time went by, I was allowed to return to the Retreat House to volunteer and be a part of the staff again. I was invited to join a Zoom meeting on Wednesday nights to discuss Ilia Delio's work. And, the beat goes on.

Without my realizing it, I am living a Marianist committed life. There were times when I tried to pinpoint the feeling I had that was so disturbing when I was isolated. At one point, I didn't recognize a person in a car whom I knew very well. At this Marianists Write Now! weekend, Sister Gabby's prayer service and Mary Oliver's poem, *Wild Geese*, allowed me to name the feeling. The feeling I had was "lost." I was totally lost. All of the help I had to get back to a functioning lifestyle came from the

Marianists. I had been asked to connect with members of the Visitation Marianist State Community in the form of sending a meditation on the “Three O’clock Prayer,” which I enjoyed doing. It is a part of my commitment to Marianist life.

I am finding that the way I commit to Marianist life is by first volunteering at the Marianist Family Retreat Center, which includes being there for people, just like Brother Stan and Patti Gehred were there for me.

**“You do not have to walk on your knees for a hundred miles through the desert repenting. You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves. Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.”**