

Sharing Our Marianist Stories Ep. 17 Transcript

Chaminade Beatification Memories (with Fr. Peter Heiskell, SM, Bro. Tom Giardino, SM, Bro. Tim Phillips, SM, Anthony Fucci, Erin Fucci, Steve Mueller, Sr. Gabby Bibeau, and Patti Gehred.)

00:00 - Erin Fucci

You know, somebody in our group was doing that like taking pictures and they're like, "You gotta stand on your seat and look around." And so, I stood up. And I was just stunned at how many people fit in that space. Because on TV it was the only time, I'd ever seen St. Peter's Square. So, you have no appreciation for what an immense space that is filled with people. But it was pretty mind-blowing.

00:31 - Patti Gehred

Welcome to *Sharing Our Marianist Stories*. I'm Patti Gehred.

00:36 - Gabby Bibeau

And I'm Sr. Gabby Bibeau.

00:38 - Patti Gehred

Our topic today is the beatification of Blessed Chaminade. We are celebrating the 20th anniversary, and we interviewed several people to share their memories.

00:52 - Gabby Bibeau

This is notably, I think, our first podcast that we did all of the interviews and everything virtually. Is that right, Patti?

01:03 - Patti Gehred

I believe so, and not only virtually. Some people were on their cell phones, some people were on Zoom, some people were on another type of software. So, in a way, it adds to the different voices.

01:18 - Gabby Bibeau

Part of the reason that this is all virtual, all the interviews were done virtually, was because of COVID for safety reasons, but also it allowed us to hear from voices literally across the globe. So, we talked to a Brother who lives in Kenya. We talked to a Brother who lives on Long Island, some couple of people who live in Dayton, a couple other people in New Jersey. So, the technology allows us really to hear from a lot of different people.

01:58 - Patti Gehred

Yes, we sent out an invitation in our newsletter a couple of months ago inviting people who would like to share their memories to contact us, and we were very happy that several people did agree to share their memories. And I think they've created a beautiful story here, Gabby.

02:15 - Gabby Bibeau

Patti and I both took turns interviewing some of the different people who volunteered, and I took the audio and sort of spliced them together to try to tell the story of the beatification. And I sent that to Patti to take a listen to before we recorded this. So, Patti, what did you think as you were listening to all of these different stories?

02:42 - Patti Gehred

I so enjoyed it. I was surprised at how it wove a tale from beginning to end. I interviewed Bro. Tim Phillips and Anthony Fucci and his wife Erin.

02:54 Gabby Bibeau

I interviewed Fr. Peter Heiskell, who lives in Long Island, Bro. Tom Giardino, who lives in Dayton, and Steve Mueller, who's a Lay Marianist who also lives in Dayton. And it was really interesting to hear how they all went to the same things, but they all had different experiences at those places. So, they talk about the gathering at the school the day before, at the school in Rome, which had a culture night, and they have their different reflections on that. They talk about the beatification itself, the Mass of Thanksgiving after the beatification. So, it was really interesting to hear all of these different voices in different places reflecting on the same experience.

03:48 - Patti Gehred

And it was 20 years ago, and the memories seemed fresh. And you can hear the enthusiasm in each of our guests' voices.

04:00 - Gabby Bibeau

Yeah. And I think that some of the similar reflections that people offered were like one, just an experience of the global Marianist Family. How meaningful and how powerful that was to see Marianists from around the world gathered in one place. And that was just an awesome experience of the global Marianist Family. And then also, it was interesting to hear from a few different people about what the legacy of the beatification was.

04:38 - Patti Gehred

So, we think you will all really enjoy the memories that are shared, and we invite you to contact us if you have anything you'd like to share.

04:55 - Fr. Peter Heiskell, SM

My name is Fr. Peter Heiskell. I am in Mineola, NY in the Province of Meribah, on Long Island, teaching and Chaplain at Chaminade High School now. We wanted everyone to be able to go with our community or our Province. We really had, I guess, over 35 people that could have gone. And I remember it was just great excitement. We left on a Thursday afternoon, and many

of us have not flown overseas or gone away in a long time, and we were all traveling together without students and things like that. So, it was very exciting.

05:32 - Steve Mueller

My name is Steve Mueller. I was lucky enough to be able to attend the beatification 20 years ago. In fact, it was 20 years ago this very minute that we were - Well, we were probably this time of the day finishing up and already out of the St. Peters Square. But yes, my connection with the Marianists is at the time I was working at the University of Dayton. I was involved with Student Development at the Counseling Center and wellness kind of programming. And the invitation came about, I think it was obviously involved through the Rector's office, and what a wonderful five or six days. It was quite an experience.

06:17 Anthony Fucci

My name is Anthony Fucci. I am the Director of the Marianist Family Retreat Center in Cape May Point in New Jersey. I've been the Director there since 1999, and that's my main connection to the Marianist Family.

06:31 - Erin Fucci

Hi there. I'm Erin Fucci and I'm married to Anthony, and I also work there as a volunteer, often with the women's retreats and helping to lead women's retreats throughout the year.

06:44 - Anthony Fucci

Yeah, it was a beautiful experience. You know, we were pretty young in our marriage. I mean, we went in 2000, we were married in 98. So, we were we were still sort of honeymooning, you know.

06:55 - Bro. Tom Giardino, SM

So, I'm Bro. Tom Giardino. I'm presently on the campus at the University of Dayton as the Director for the Association of Marianist Universities. At the time of the beatification and before that, I was on the General Administration of the Society of Mary. And as part of the General Administration, we had the responsibility for setting it up and appointing people to have the Eucharists and all of the accoutrements surrounding that. But the Jubilee year was coming up, and we had heard through the grapevine, as it were, that Pope John Paul II was interested in a person with a Marian spirituality for the beatifications of that year.

07:53 - Bro. Tom Giardino, SM

Now, the reason why we knew that was that Fr. Enrique Torres, who was our Postulator General - meaning the person who works with the causes of Marianist Saints - he was really good. Weekly, weekly, he went to the Congregation for the Saints and developed relationships. And so naturally, he had his ear to the ground, as it were. And when he heard what Pope John Paul wanted, he was there. And so, I think we could say, as Father Chaminade, "My Providence was involved in this, the designs of Providence."

08:35 - Bro. Tim Phillips, SM

I am Bro. Tim Phillips. I am in Limuru, Kenya, just outside Nairobi, in Eastern Africa. By that time, I had been in Rome. I had been asked to be the Assistant Director at the Seminary the year before. I don't remember how excited I was, but I do remember that there was a lot of work involved, and we were all doing a lot of things to put things together. I remember collating a lot of things to get ready.

09:12 - Bro. Tim Phillips, SM

That's the part I remember, but there was a lot of welcoming of people. I mean, the house was full, of course, but there were a lot of things to be done before the beatification itself, and I was there. So, I co-opted in. I mean, basically what I recall has to do more with being part of the hospitality crowd, welcoming people, and in this case welcoming a lot of the Kenyans.

09:43 - Anthony Fucci

You know the events leading up to the beatification really sort of primed you for the excitement of the actual day of the beatification.

09:54 - Steve Mueller

One of the images that comes to mind the quickest is sitting in the courtyard like the day before the beatification in, I think, they called it the College of Saint Mary's [Collegio Santa Maria]. I think it was a Marianist high school that we all gathered thousands of people. And people were interacting, chatting. There were a number of presentations. There was entertainment, there was food. It was all classic Marianist kind of stuff.

10:22 - Fr. Peter Heiskell, SM

We gathered in their, like, courtyard. And it was this huge crowd of people from all over the world. [There] had just been a World Youth Day, but this was like a Marianist crowd. And they were very pumped up and they were singing all different songs. And there was this whole spectacle or show, whatever. And everybody had scarves, so you could recognize fellow pilgrims in the city.

10:44 - Anthony Fucci

At the gathering at the school, part of that was a big, fun celebration and all the different cultures from around the world were invited up onto the stage and to share something from their culture. And they came in with these beautiful bongos and the dancing and the singing and all that, and different parts of the Marianist family were represented. And Fr. Ted was part of our contingent, Fr. Ted Cassidy. And he got up there and his contribution from the United States was the chicken dance. And we were doing the chicken dance on the stage as our contribution to culture. So, there you have it. There's Fr. Ted.

11:28 - Erin Fucci

Even though I knew there were people in other countries, I didn't know how many; I'm like "Oh my gosh. There's a lot of us." So, and everybody had to hold... our programs for the evening

were like yellow, and everybody from Uruguay had ones that were purple, and people from each country had them in their own language in their own color. And you had to hold up your program, when they said, “Everybody from the US, hold of your program, so we can see who you are and where you are.” You know, it was just amazing. We're very let's say an outgoing and welcoming people. No matter where you are as a Marianist in the world, that just comes through so clearly. Just so much of the Holy Spirit just is automatic, I think, in that whole charism of being welcoming and including everybody.

12:20 - Steve Mueller

Well, the beatification itself, I can go on about that. Some of the practical parts is - so we're “up and at ‘em” of course at 6:00, get on a bus and get there at I think around 8:00 in the morning. Get in line to actually get into St. Peters Square the day of the beatification, and we had these red tickets. They made a big deal out of these. “You've got your red tickets? Don't lose your red ticket. That's going to get you a chair.” And a chair, because we're going to be there for four [or] five hours, that's like gold. So, we're okay, we're excited about that. As we arrive, we all go right to where they told us we should go with our red tickets, at least our group, and *no chairs!* Everybody's already seated. All the chairs were taken. We're saying, “We got the red ticket.” They're saying, “Sorry.” Because of course, there's all kinds of people telling you where to go or not to go.

13:16 – Steve Mueller

And from there, we said, “Okay, I guess we have to improvise.” There were different sections, giant sections in St. Peters, and we were about maybe a third of the way back, and we were able to get into a section where we could get up to the front of that section and lean on some barriers. So, we actually had some place to sort of lean. So, we kind of tried to spread out and save those spaces because we knew leaning would help you for four or five hours in the sun. And it was a sunny day. And then, we had we had the space in front of us because it was the emergency access space. So, we knew we would have an unobstructed view. So that ended up being relatively okay.

13:59 - Fr. Peter Heiskell, SM

We all had to get up really early. I guess the beatification... let's say there were five people being beatified. So, there were lots of other pilgrims, including... John XXIII and Pius IX, I think. And so, I remember we got there pretty early. We all went [into] sort of smaller groups, but we all got pretty good seats. And people saved seats, and we ended up a lot of us were together. And then, there were other people from other countries there for Father Chaminade. So, it was really nice, like you could walk around while we were waiting then and just talk to all these people that we knew had come, but we weren't all together the whole time. And it was just nice to have so many people excited about our Founder and the name of our school as well.

14:45 - Bro. Tim Phillips, SM

I remember being in St. Peters Square because we had very nice seats, very close to the altar. And, of course, the banners that were hanging from the facade of St. Peters, they were big. And there was Fr. Chaminade, right there on the front of St. Peters.

15:08 - Erin Fucci

Got there so early in the morning. We were there at like 5:30, and we were fairly close up to the front, and people were like coming in behind us, which I wasn't really aware of or paying attention to until, a lot of people over time were like standing up on their seats and, like looking around... You know, somebody in our group was doing that like taking pictures and they're like, "You gotta stand on your seat and look around." And so, I stood up. And I was just stunned at how many people fit in that space. Because on TV it was the only time, I'd ever seen St. Peter's Square. So, you have no appreciation for what an immense space that is filled with people. And I forget how many thousands can fit in there, but it was pretty mind-blowing. I do have to say that's the craziest Communion I've ever attended where it was just like everybody was trying to help everybody, and...

16:06 - Anthony Fucci

I think it took two hours to give out Communion.

16:09 - Bro. Tom Giardino, SM

What I remember, especially... Pope John Paul, spoke of Chaminade as an Apostle of the Laity, and that one of the things that Chaminade helped to do was to bring people closer to Christ who might not have found their way to Christ in other manners. And that was very moving, and I thought really very important then and now for our day.

16:38 - Fr. Peter Heiskell, SM

You know, hearing the Pope speak about your Founder, and just hearing him publicly explained and proclaimed and praised in front of this whole crowd, and seeing his banner come down, that was really special.

16:55 - Steve Mueller

Of course, the beatification was wonderful and [in] a couple of different languages. Afterwards, our location ended up being very fortuitous because the Pope came around in his, as they say, the "Popemobile," and it came within four or five feet of us. So, the whole contingent was just - we were so thrilled to have clicked on that spot. And so, we were very lucky to be able to see him, and I've got a couple pictures of him from four, five, six feet away as he went by in his little motorcade or Popemobile. So that was just wonderful.

17:33 - Anthony Fucci

It's an experience that I think all Catholic faithful people, it'd be a blessing if they could experience an event like that because it really helps to solidify your faith. For people to be able to experience that community on that large of a scale, like when you're in St. Peter's Square and

everybody's yelling, "Viva il Papa! Viva il Papa!" and Pope John Paul II was such an amazing figure. It just was extremely moving.

18:11 - Steve Mueller

Some of the older Brothers who were on the trip, you know, many of them said, "We've been talking and praying about this ever since I entered the order that he would be beatified. And now that this is happening, you know, life feels fairly fulfilled."

18:28 - Bro. Tom Giardino, SM

I was able to because I was on the GA and participate in what's called "bacio mano." Bacio mano is Italian for kissing your hand. So, one of the things that happens with a select group of people after beatification is you get to meet the Pope. And typically people, at least in the past, would kiss his hand. But I remember talking to him, and you get about 20 seconds. He gives you a Rosary, and you hold his hand and say something to him. And I just wanted to say to him I was Director of Education to let him know that the Marianist schools around the world were dedicated to Mary, and that we were trying to be the best Marian and Marianist schools as possible.

19:19 - Fr. Peter Heiskell, SM

What was really special - the other thing that happened - was, I guess the night of the beatification, we were all invited to the GA, just SM's, for a meeting and a celebration. And that was really cool because I had never seen that many Marianists in one place. But a lot of our men, especially guys that had been in formation, the guys before our Province was formed, they knew guys from New York and Cincinnati and Dayton. And so, all these guys, a lot of reunions of men that hadn't been together for 25 to 30 years, and that they were having a lot of fun with that. But it was really just cool to see that many Marianists Brothers in one place, so that was a fun event, too.

20:03 - Steve Mueller

That Sunday was very powerful, but then the next day, we had - I think at St. Paul's Outside the Wall - was the first recognition Mass for Chaminade. And so that was the place where now, again, in my spirit of bringing people together, now these are all Marianists contingencies from around the world that maybe weren't there on Saturday night at the Marianist High School, but now they came for this Mass. And that was just very powerful because the woman who [experienced] the miracle that allowed for the beatification to move forward, she was there. And you talk about moving, that was just a very moving experience to say, "Here's a woman who's alive because of Chaminade." That brings it to life that there are miracles out there, and here's living proof of that walking right in front of you. What a wonderful experience! Life changing for, I think I can't speak for everybody, but for me, very life changing kind of experience.

21:13 - Bro. Tom Giardino, SM

When I think about the experience as a whole, I guess it was the universality of the Marianist Family that I found - I mean, it was almost overwhelming and in an encouraging kind of way. I

was really part of something from people from just everywhere in the Marianist world. And, at that time, [the] Marianist world was over 35 countries. And these people believed in and had given their lives to Chaminade in the same way I had, and so it was deeply moving.

21:49 Erin Fucci

There's always that feeling of Family, and that always comes through. So, it doesn't matter whether you're with one person sitting on rocking chairs on the porch or if you're with 300-400 people that are all from different countries, there's was the same feeling of Family. It was like no difference.

22:11 - Fr. Peter Heiskell, SM

It was fun coming back to school, and the kids all knew that we had all gone away for this, and we put it into our yearbook. I was the Yearbook Moderator then, and I remember designing that and being very excited. "Here's the picture of this. Here's where we sat, guys," like having a lot of fun. We did put a big display up in one of our display cases and you know, the scarves and photos, other of the paraphernalia that was given out and things like that. So it also - we talked a lot about our Brothers, but I think in the school it also hyped up discussion of it, got the kids talking about this guy, too. And it was fun to talk with them and gave us a point of contact. Just, they could see how excited we were, and our fellow faculty as well, where it was just a big talk of the town for a long time that school year.

22:58 - Fr. Peter Heiskell, SM

We did teach our Founder to the kids. We used that like the Chaminade coloring book. But we didn't have a lot of celebrations or quote him in homilies and things like that. And I think when we found out that he was going to be beatified, it was like, "Whoa... this opens up, this gives a green light to do much more than we used to do." I think that freed us up and opened us up to, "Hey, let's promote this guy," and talk about it more. And so yeah, it was very exciting that way that - not only that we could, but I think it pushed us to do something that we hadn't been doing. And so, as a result, now I think he's much better known and spoken about and seen in our schools - though we always had pictures of him in every classroom. Now we do a lot more posters with quotes, and we celebrate his birthday every year in the home. We give out free food that day. On his 150th birthday, we did a huge thing in 2011. And so... I think it got all of us as a community speaking about Chaminade as a person, and a man, and a Founder.

24:12 - Steve Mueller

From my opinion, that really was a spark for things like the Marianist Educational Associates to start happening. We want to keep this spirit alive. There were more staff, Marianist Staff retreats, Marianist Faculty retreats. People were now saying, "Okay, the Marianists have something to offer." This is real. This sense of discipleship of equals, and the fact that relationships are so powerful and important in our life. Life is more full when it's lived in relationships that are effective and helpful. And that Chaminade's charism, Chaminade's ideas, supported by Adèle and Marie-Thérèse, those are powerful ideas, and they're worth taking a look at. They're worth thinking about that. It's important that this charism stay alive.

25:11 - Erin Fucci

We actually were at the Provincialate. They have a room there where they have all these stacks of drawers that have the actual writings between Adèle and Chaminade. And I'm like, "Oh my gosh, there's actually pieces of paper that they wrote on," and they actually were real. They actually do exist. It's not just kind of like these sort of people from ancient times that you hear about, but you're kind of like, "Well, maybe they did exist, maybe they didn't exist." They were real people. So, I think it does impress upon you how much one person can do and accomplish and to spread to so many other thousands of people throughout the world is pretty remarkable.

25:51 - Fr. Peter Heiskell, SM

Pope John Paul II wrote a letter to the... Society of Mary. I think maybe it was for the beatification or for the General Chapter right before or after it. There [was] that phrase put out "into the deep" in it, and it was like just this is really positive, but also [a] challenging letter in the sense of like, "Hey, this is great for you guys and also take this now and go forward without fear. Go into the deep as a society." I remember that being very inspiring for myself, personally, but I think for the Brothers as a whole, too. And we've gone back and quoted that, gone back to that letter many times over the years.

26:25 - Bro. Tom Giardino, SM

I think the very symbolic thing that we say "Blessed" before Father Chaminade - Blessed Father Chaminade - that symbol has given us some encouragement in sort of the day-to-day stuff that we have to do. Because, of course, we've said that about so many other important *beati* - you know, Saints, if you will - And then to be able to say that about our Founder is really very encouraging and helps us to see that the kind of thing that we're involved in is beyond our small little city, our small little school, or small little Marianist Lay Community or parish or whatever. I think that the power of that symbol is what one of the things that it meant for us.

27:41 - Patti Gehred

And Gabby, I believe you helped set up a portion of our website dedicated to the beatification. What kinds of articles and things can people find?

27:52 - Gabby Bibeau

Well, it's very exciting because we have a web page on our site that is a beautification virtual time capsule. So, this was actually compiled by Bro. Tom Redmond, and he has just a short little article... that's a reflection on Chaminade's journey to beatification. There's a couple of articles from the Marianist Family album from 2000 that has information about the miraculous healing of Elena Graciela Otero, who was an Argentinian woman who was healed of cancer. That was the miracle before the beatification. It includes the homilies in Rome from Pope John Paul II and Fr. Dave Fleming, who was the Superior General at the time. Just a lot of lot of fun things.

28:51 - Patti Gehred

So, I'd just like to remind you that our website is www.nacms.org. That's www.nacms.org, and you can also hear this podcast among several others that we've recorded through the years. And we thank you for listening.