

Sharing Our Marianist Stories Ep. 11 Transcript
Finding Family Far from Home, Lay Assembly 2017 (with Jessica Gonzalez-Uhlig, Patti Gehred, Gabby Bibeau, Juliet Fromholt.)

00:00 - Jessica Gonzalez-Uhlig

I've been blessed with being met where I was at certain locations of my journey, of my personal journey, my professional journey, my spiritual journey. And there's always been a member of the Marianist Family that has been there.

00:27 - Patti Gehred

Welcome to a new season of *Sharing Our Marianist Stories*.

00:32 - Gabby Bibeau

So, today's episode is an interview with Jessica Gonzalez-Uhlig, who is a longtime Lay Marianist who lives in San Antonio, but she lived in Dayton for many years and worked at the University of Dayton. This interview was recorded two years ago at the Lay Assembly. And Jessica talks in the interview so much about how much the MEA program, or the Marianists Educational Associates program, meant to her.

01:02 - Gabby Bibeau

For those of you who don't know, the MEA program is a program for the three Marianist Universities that offers formation in the Marianist charism so that people who work at the University can really bring that charism into their work. So, what I think is interesting is she speaks so highly about her experience with the MEA program, and since then she has actually started working at St. Mary's University in formation of MEAs. So, this program that's meant so much to her, now she's able to contribute to it. Patti what did you think of Jess' interview?

01:43 - Patti Gehred

I really enjoyed Jessica's interview a lot. As I was listening, I could hear that she brings the Marianist charism into her personal and professional life. And I also noticed throughout her interview - and she did not do this intentionally - she mentioned all five characteristics of the charism. She mentioned *faith*, and it started with her father and her family, her growing up Catholic. *Mission*, every job she's had has been with the Marianist University. So I think... part of her mission is to continue bringing in and inviting people into the Marianist Family. *Community*, she's been part of several Lay Communities she talks about. She always builds community within the places where she works, *inclusivity*. And I really enjoyed how she talked about *Mary*. So, she talks about all five characteristics, and it just sort of flows into her life. So, I think this interview is a very good example for a lot of Lay Marianists, for people new to the Marianist Family.

02:50 - Gabby Bibeau

What you'll hear in this podcast is Jessica being interviewed by Juliet Fromholt, who helped us with interviews at the Lay Assembly two years ago. So, you will hear Juliet interject some questions in the interview. We hope that you enjoy and learn something, too.

03:14 - Jessica Gonzalez-Uhlig

My name is Jessica Gonzalez-Uhlig. My Marianist story really began when I was little, because my father is a former member of the SM, of the Society of Mary. So, I grew up hearing these stories of his friends, and I grew up in San Juan, Puerto Rico. So, my dad had all these wonderful friends from Dayton, OH, Cincinnati, New York. And fast forward, University of Dayton became [my] college of choice. So, I left Puerto Rico at 17 to come to UD, which is where he got his undergrad at Marianist University. And the rest is history because I got to meet all these friends of his that I kept hearing stories about when I was little. They're real! They were my professors, my advisors, and eventually my friends and mentors.

04:04 - Jessica Gonzalez-Uhlig

You couldn't have asked for a more different environment. Spanish is my first language, but I chose to be an English major and to really, really embrace the culture and the environment. But I wanted the dorm life. I wanted the seasons to change. I actually wanted snow! And it was very challenging at first. Other students from Puerto Rico and myself would gather at 6:00 pm every evening for dinner just to speak Spanish, because our heads were about to explode with having to speak English all the time. But it was wonderful experience. We were involved in campus ministry. [We] Started and were very active, but really started an active campus ministry program for Spanish speakers and Spanish retreats, Spanish masses, and always had the support of the Marianist Brothers and Priests who were available and those who spoke Spanish, too.

05:00 - Jessica Gonzalez-Uhlig

I graduated. I did some volunteer work. I actually got to travel, went to Europe for the first time. But two years later, I came back to the University of Dayton and my first full time job was as an admission counselor. And going through the process of learning how to articulate what the mission of the University is, and the Marianist charism through university education, was fascinating. So, it was really transformative for me. I worked in the Office of Admission for about nine years. Last couple of years, I actually intentionally went through formation, Marianist formation for Marianist educators. It's the MEA concept, and maybe other MEA's have shared their stories. But it's learning to articulate and to share how to be Marianist within what we do in our jobs on a day-to-day basis, especially in a Marianist environment.

05:56 – Juliet Fromholt

How have you experienced community through your Marianist Family, your work and in gatherings like this?

06:06 - Jessica Gonzalez-Uhlig

I've really been blessed because my friends are connected to the Marianist Family, and it really has been my family away from home... Because I never went back to live full time in Puerto Rico, only for a very short period of time, actually connected with the Marianist High School down there [Colegio San José]. But here in the States, my Marianist community, I was part of Lay Communities, and I also was very, very committed to the MEA community.

06:40 - Jessica Gonzalez-Uhlig

When you work with people that you enjoy being with and that you share so much, they really, truly become yours. It's almost like your second home, and it was really my community that developed through the MEA program. Fast forward, now I am married to an MEA from St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas. So, I've relocated from Dayton to San Antonio and their community, which are former colleagues of mine and folks that I've known for years, are also just full of joy, and they bring a lot to my life. They bring a lot of love and support to Paul and I and to our kids as we blend the new family and we embrace this transition of our new life. And if it really weren't for the support and the love of our collective Marianist Family and friends, we really wouldn't be able to survive as well as we have.

07:32 - Juliet Fromholt

Tell me a little bit about how being a Marianist influences your day-to-day life?

07:41 - Jessica Gonzalez-Uhlig

When things get a little hairy and challenging and tough, I think, "What would Mary do?" And with Mary's "yes," it's very challenging because sometimes you're like, "Really? Do I really have to say yes?" But then you stop, and you reflect. And one of the things I learned about Mary in particular, while I was here at the University of Dayton - and this I learned from Father François Rossier, who passed away recently - But it was the different ways of seeing Mary as a teenager who was also going through her developmental issues. Having to be married. Next thing you know, "I'm having a baby. I'm having God's baby. What!"

08:30 - Jessica Gonzalez-Uhlig

So, seeing her humanity helps me process and stop, think, and say, "Okay, can I say yes to this. And I am saying yes to this not just to say yes and got kind of be done with it and be complacent. No. I'm embracing the challenge that comes with that yes, even if it's something that's very difficult for me to face." And that has been true with a lot of personal ups and downs and challenges that we all go through. But for me in particular with going through a number of years as a single parent and navigating being alone and with no family around as a stable support system, Mary helped me through. And that's the consistency, and that's very Marianist because Mary truly is that stability that the Marianists really commit to.

09:21 - Juliet Fromholt

How are you bringing the Marianist charism into your family in terms of the children in your life?

09:29 - Jessica Gonzalez-Uhlig

Being Marianist [means] everybody comes to the table. And it is a round table, and we don't have the head of a table, and we have even the difficult conversations. But it's with patience and with love and with the commitment that no matter what, God is going to see us through it and we're in this with this beautiful, wonderful faith of gratitude. Mary's very present. She's very much part of our obviously our Sunday routine, when we go to Church and when we do see in a Marianist parish that we go to the images, the symbolism and just the conversation, because I literally speak of her as if she was my friend. And now as we relocate - my son and I relocate to San Antonio - Luis will go to Central Catholic High School, which is a Marianist high school. So, Mary will be around him, even though it's not intentional and that'll be part of our day-to-day.

10:29 - Juliet Fromholt

What's it like for you coming to a gathering like this [Lay Continental Assembly 2017]?

10:34 - Jessica Gonzalez-Uhlig

Well, for this has been a gift, but the beautiful gift is connecting and seeing folks that haven't seen in a while. Friends through, again, the high school network, the university network, some of the priests and brothers that I've known since I was very young. What a beautiful blessing and a renewal, because these gatherings are truly renewal. And I think especially with this group and the commitment and the level of commitment, because of this new energy that's bubbling up about what the future will bring and the opportunities that will come, this is not the annual conference that everybody comes to and then you forget what happens on Monday morning. No, this is a lifestyle, and this is a mentality, and this is spiritual, and this is personal, and this is for life. So, it's going to continue, and this is very exciting, and it's very renewing for me.

11:31 - Juliet Fromholt

Is there anything else that you would want people listening to this, whether they are other Marianist or people who perhaps are getting to know the Marianist movement for the first time, what would you want folks listening to this to know about your story?

11:50 - Jessica Gonzalez-Uhlig

I think everyone has a story, and everybody has a wonderful opportunity to learn, to grow, to reflect. I've been blessed with being met where I was at certain locations of my journey, of my personal journey, my professional journey, my spiritual journey. And there's always been a

member of the Marianist Family that has been there and played different roles: the challenger, the supporter, the disciplinarian. And all of those have... helped shape the adult that I am right now. So, if anybody can get anything out of this, would just be “You never know. Be open to those folks that come into your lives at different stages of your lives.” And they could be Marianists, but they could be maybe from other religious orders or maybe they could be part of another type of spiritual or faith group, key people that come into your lives at different points. There's a reason for that.

12:58 - Jessica Gonzalez-Uhlig

I've always said that we are probably the best kept secret in religious communities, in ministries. And there is definitely a need and a wonderful opportunity to tell our story. So, through this mode, through sharing now, of course, on social media, through print, what a gift is to invite others to join in this ministry! And the more we have the opportunity to tell the story – And, of course, with a humble heart. You're not better than the other folks and the other orders or the other charisms out there. We're just very proud and excited of what we do, and we need to do more of that. We need to speak a little bit more to our story and invite others to join.

13:47 - Gabby Bibeau

Thank you for listening to *Sharing Our Marianist Stories*, a podcast through the North American Center for Marianist Studies. One thing that Patti and I didn't mention at the beginning of this podcast is that Jessica is now the co-chair for the next Lay Assembly, which will be next July 2020 in San Antonio. So, I think it's also kind of funny that in this conversation two years ago, she probably didn't have a clue that she would be involved so deeply in the next Lay Assembly that will happen in San Antonio. So, for those of you listening, mark your calendars, July 2020, San Antonio, Texas. It's going to be awesome.

14:29 - Patti Gehred

And we will be there, and we would love to interview you if you enjoyed this interview and several of the past interviews that we had, let us know. We'll have a sign-up sheet. We'll be ready, and we invite you to share your Marianist story.