

*Sharing Our Marianist Stories*, Ep. 23 Transcript  
The Quality of Our Presence (with Rob Brodrick, Patti Gehred, Gabby Bibeau)

**00:00 – Rob Broderick**

One of the most difficult quotes that I know of from a Marianist text says, “The quality of our presence is more important than our work.” And since I started with the Nassau Street Lay Marianist Community and then the Mission of Mary Cooperative - which that became all the way through what I'm doing now with MLCNA - that one line haunts me because by disposition, I'm about quality work and effective work and I have to say to myself now, “How have I been present to people through this?”

**00:54 – Patti Gehred**

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

**00:58 - Gabby Bibeau**

And I'm Gabby Bibeau.

**01:00 - Patti Gehred**

This is an exciting interview, Gabby, that you did with Rob Brodrick. He's the new National Director of the Marianist Lay Communities of North America. So, what was your feeling at the end of this interview?

**01:15 - Gabby Bibeau**

I have known Rob - I think the first time I met Rob was when I was a student at the University of Dayton. And he had already graduated, but he was still around Dayton as part of the Nassau Lay Marianist Community which he talks about in this interview. It was a live-in residential community of Lay Marianists in the inner city in Dayton which eventually developed into a Mission of Mary Cooperative, which is still ongoing. So, he did that for a while. Then he went away to Boston to get his PhD, and then he came back and got this job working with the Marianists, which was really exciting. He's certainly a very intellectual person. And he sees a lot of things in the Marianist Family from a very intellectual kind of big picture lens, so I appreciated his insights.

**02:18 - Patti Gehred**

After listening to the interview, it reinforced to me the importance of the presence. He talks a lot about presence, about the presence of lay people in the Marianist Family. We do a lot of interviews with people, for our *Sharing Our Marianist Stories* and so often the people that influence lay people or vowed religious to pursue participating in the Marianist Family is a vowed religious person that they watched and admired and wanted to be like. And Rob talks about Bro. Tom Pieper as one person that influenced him. And so, I enjoyed listening to Rob, knowing that he does lean in an intellectual way. He also talks about [how] he's a doer. If there's a problem, he wants to solve it. And I think all places need people like that. If you have too many just “heart” people and not enough “doers,” you do a lot of talking or feeling and not get

anything done. So, he talked about how he is so thoughtful, and he leans one way, but he watches and has learned from other Marianist leaders and is combining those things. So, I really appreciate what he shared about learning and watching and observing and understanding that he's in a role now where he's going to be watched and observed. And he takes it very seriously. He's the first National Director of MLCNA, isn't he, Gabby?

### **03:53 - Gabby Bibeau**

Yeah, he is. It's a new position. And he talks a little bit about what that entails. He's only been doing that for maybe four or five months, I think. So, some of what he's working on is keeping in good communication with Lay Marianists in North America, helping develop formation programs, that kind of thing. So, something else that I thought about that I think is interesting - and probably some of our listeners can maybe relate to - is how he talked about becoming a Lay Marianist and how he didn't from the get-go hear about the Marianist and think, "Oh, I want to do that. I want to be a Lay Marianist." It was more like the people he was surrounded by, some vowed religious, some Marianist Lay people that it rubbed off on him and he found himself just sort of drawn into it and living it out. And it seems like it just eventually became part of him. When he talks about being like, "Yeah, I am a Lay Marianist," it was from that place of really feeling drawn into it and grabbed by the charism rather than him seeking it out. And I thought that was interesting, and probably others can relate to that as well.

### **05:19 - Patti Gehred**

I agree. And again, it made me think a lot of times people talk about being Lay Marianist by kind of osmosis. But I think it's important to claim it and name it, because then it's like you see the responsibility of how you are, what your presence is, and that you are representing the Marianist Family, the Lay Marianists. And I could see that he took that really seriously. So yeah, I think you're going to really enjoy this interview. And you... had some great questions, Gabby, I think that brought some really good insight.

### **05:58 - Gabby Bibeau**

Yes, thank you. It was a good conversation and we're really happy to share it with you. So, we hope you enjoy listening. Here's Rob.

### **06:13 - Rob Brodrick**

I'm Rob Brodrick. I'm the National Director for the Marianist Lay Community of North America or MLCNA. And in that capacity, I'm in charge of all of the day-to-day operations on behalf of the Leadership Council to help run the business of the lay branch in the United States and Canada. I went to the University of Dayton for my undergraduate studies, and I knew the Marianists before then, but I would say you sometimes know things in different registers. So, I was aware of the Marianists. We had one of the rotating priests at my parish growing up was a Marianist. But more importantly, my godfather's a Marianist brother, Bro. Gary Marcinowski, who's a Marianist artist here in Dayton that a lot of people know, and he's a woodworker. So, I think the very first encounter I had with any understanding of the Marianists came from Gary.

### **07:16 – Rob Brodrick**

When our family got a package in the mail one day, my mom had me open it up because I was a kid and real excited about it and I took out a figurine. It's essentially a wooden carved torso of pregnant Mary. And it's really great. And as an adult, I really appreciate it. As a small child, I didn't know what it was at all. And my mom explained to me that that was Mary, and she was pregnant, and I said, "How would you know that that's Mary?" I just I had no [idea]. And so, she explained to me, of course, that that's from Bro. Gary and he's a Marianist brother. And one of the things that they're into is Mary. And I was like, "Okay." So that wasn't something that really - you know, I don't know what I age I was at that time, but it didn't really register yet. So, it wasn't until University of Dayton where I started encountering the Marianists more on a personal level and it would be through interacting, especially with a lot of the brothers there that was really influential to me.

### **08:35 - Rob Brodrick**

I don't think I engaged the Marianists, if I can say, as *Marianists*, that I was showing up saying, "Boy, I'd like to learn more about that Marianist thing that you do." And definitely, the direction wasn't from me to the Marianist charism. The Marianist charism came and got Rob. It wasn't the other way around. And that happened in a number of ways. One of which, I was a Chaminade Scholar. That's the Chaminade Scholars program, which in my day was a four-year program. And it was very much focused on vocation. So, that wasn't a Marianist related program, though a lot of people in that program, of course, were very influenced by the Marianist charism and spirituality, were pursuing that through some other community formation opportunities as we got older in our junior and senior year. Some folks were interested in that.

### **09:32 - Rob Brodrick**

I think another influence for me really was the UDSAP program. So UDSAP is the University of Dayton Summer Appalachian Program, and it takes UD students down into Magoffin County, Salyersville, Kentucky. And there's a house down there. We live together in community. There's a lot of formation that happens prior to all of that. And then it's essentially a summer of service program, which is not an official "Marianist program," maybe it's a University of Dayton program, it's a Campus Ministry program. But it had Bro. Tom Pieper, and so therefore was a Marianist program whether or not everybody knew it at the time. And I learned so much from watching "BT" operate. How he was there, and he was present, and he was with the community. That struck me as a different way of leading. He wouldn't lead, even. I would say mentoring, guiding, animating that community. And it struck me in many ways because it was very different than how I would have gone about it at that point in time. I think BT's way was better to be very clear. But it was very different than anything that I would have known about how to do that. So, I was kind of taking mental notes going, "That's distinctive." He had a method that I did not understand. He had a way of being that I did not understand.

### **11:18 – Rob Brodrick**

I've noticed that in a lot of Marianists - vowed, lay, and so on, and it's really a bit inspiring to a lot of the work that I'm doing right now, which is trying to figure out how do we do formation

for lay people that allows us to function that way, right? So that we don't just know about the charism. We don't just believe in it, you know, in the sense that that's something that we think is good, but something that we *are*, something that we embody. Because I watch folks like that who are just masters of this, and it's a craft almost when you watch them operate in that kind of way. They build communities like my godfather Gary might build a table or an altar. So, in some ways I would say that was really a formative encounter. So, I came back from that, had a number of other engagements with the brothers, just kind of picking some things up from them there, and then slowly becoming introduced to that there were lay Marianists.

### **12:29 – Rob Brodrick**

Although then again on a personal level, I didn't really start feeling like I was a Lay Marianist until after my undergrad experience at UD. I had started an intentional Christian faith community and started putting that together with a small group of five individuals while at UD, and we were all there for different reasons, I think, joining this community. I was interested in this community. I was very interested in the Catholic Worker Movement. I was interested in the new monastics at this time, folks like Shane Claiborne, and those kind of houses. And I was interested in community life and intentional faith communities as an active form of nonviolent resistance that that was really interesting to me at that time. And that's the way in which I was thinking about what I was up to at that time. Well, some other folks in the community were very interested in what to me was that Marianist thing from UD. And I said, "Well, that's great. No problem with that. It's not really me, Rob. I'm not a Lay Marianist, but I appreciate that they are." Well, through lots of conversations, we had lots of conversations about this community because it was a residential community. We moved into a house together. So before doing that we had a lot of talk about what that was going to be like. And we got around to deciding, "Well, it could be a Marianist community." So, we became the Nassau Street Lay Marianist community.

### **14:14 - Rob Brodrick**

And I said that's great. So, we can have a Marianist community and not everyone there has to be a Lay Marianist was the idea. And that really stayed with that community. We had a number of people join and move through that community in every capacity from - we were a house hospitality. We had some persons experiencing homelessness live with us. We had people kind of coming, a lot of which were in some ways related to the University of Dayton, had graduated or whatnot that we knew through that. And some of them were Lay Marianist and or some of them were Marianist inclined. And some folks knew that they were not Lay Marianist, but they were interested in our community and what we were doing. So that was okay.

### **15:03 - Rob Brodrick**

So, I was in that part of it for some point, and I don't know what day I became a Lay Marianist. There wasn't a day. And someone had told me it was a joke, but it was one of those jokes that's like half true, maybe a little more than half true, maybe all the way true, you can tell me. But for me it was true, they had said, I had asked, "When do you become a Lay Marianist? How do you know that you're Lay Marianist?" And they told me, "Well, you're usually at some sort of event, maybe it's a Mass, maybe it's another event, and they ask all the vowed and Lay Marianists to

stand up and you look around the room and you realize you're standing up.” And that's how I became a Lay Marianist. And I was in that kind of crowd at some point. They said, “Well, who's Lay Marianist?” And I said, “Well, I am. I've been in this community for this number of years.” But there wasn't a *day* in which I became a Lay Marianist, but it was through that community that it became intentional, and it was through learning more about the charism, trying to appreciate that charism for the sake of our community, but then also personally learning more about this, the spirituality, the virtues and those kind of elements.

### **16:15 - Gabby Bibeau**

So, at this point in your life, how would you say you live out the Marianist charism? Like, in your daily life or as part of your work with MLCNA, how do you live out the charism?

### **16:31 - Rob Brodrick**

I think one of the most difficult quotes that I know of from a Marianist text is from Fr. Quentin Hakenewerth's *Manual of Marianist Spirituality*. And it says, “The quality of our presence is more important than our work.” And since I started with the Nassau Street Lay Marianist Community and then the Mission of Mary Cooperative - which that became all the way through what I'm doing now with MLCNA - that one line haunts me. In a good way, sometimes, in a way that I know is good, but am hating at the moment because by disposition, I'm about quality work and effective work. So, how do I get things to be as effective as possible, as efficient as possible? These are things that I kind of have by nature. That's how I function. And so, I'm thinking always, “How can I build out whatever we're doing right now?”

### **17:53 – Rob Brodrick**

We started at Nassau Street with saying, “Okay, we've got these guys, they're living out back, they're experiencing homelessness. How are we going to work with them?” Well, we've got this land that we're trying to convert and restore and kind of now do an urban farming thing on it. And how do we do that same thing with MLCNA now? “Okay, we're trying to build out things like formation and mission-related activities and so on.” I want to take each of these things by nature and say, “How do I do that efficiently and as effective[ly] with the most impact?” I'm kind of thinking, I'm that guy that's thinking about. “Well, if I had to go to a funder with an impact statement, what would it look like, and what are the percentages that I would put on those kind of things?” That's how my brain works. That's how I work. And then... “the quality of our presence is more important than our work,” comes out of nowhere and haunts me. And I have to say to myself, “Well, great. Now, how have I been present to people through this?” Am I too much trying to just get in there and find the most efficient way to do that, the best way to do whatever the action item is? So, I'm just focused on that. And have I built that relationship with somebody else? And what does that look like?

### **19:11 – Rob Brodrick**

And I think right now that's a big challenge for me, with MLCNA. Because I now have, just shy of 60 communities, that I say, “Well, I need quality presence with, and I have about 1000 people that are all Lay Marianists that I would like to have quality presence with, and I need to also do

really quality programming and put together some real supports that are also able to function in real time. And do all the things that you need to do to build an institution, an institutional capacity.” So, there it is, haunting me again. Well, the quality of our presence, and how am I going to do that? And I've been really trying to focus lately on thinking about that, but also on what it means to really hear people. I need to hear really clearly them, what they're saying, who they are, what they're trying to get done in the world - whether they communicate that directly to me, saying, “Rob, I would like to see this thing happen,” or just talking about themselves and something that they're interested in, I need to be present to that. And that's at least a Marianist thing that I can do in a way that I can try to make the quality of my presence more important than my work on any given day. So that's how I've been trying to live that out lately is through real intentional listening.

### **20:47 - Gabby Bibeau**

You talked before about Bro. Tom Pieper and the way that he accompanied you and the rest of your cohort at the UD Summer Appalachian program. And then the importance of presence in the Marianist charism and the way that you've seen other vowed and Lay Marianists have that same sort of gift to them in the way that they accompany people. What is it about the Marianist charism that cultivates that, do you think? Like, is there an aspect of the charism that you could point to and say, “Oh, okay, this is why they're like that,” or “this is where that comes from.” Could you say a little bit about that?

### **21:37 - Rob Brodrick**

First, I would say I think if I'm thinking in terms of the pillars. Okay, so we talk about faith or faith of the heart. One of the things about that is that I think of faith - and I believe that the Marianist spirituality, whether we name it this way or not, thinks about faith - as a journey, as something that people have already, intuitively. We don't show up saying, “You, oh faithless one, must come into the fold in the true way.” That said, there is still a journey, right? We can always grow deeper. We can always have formation that is ongoing. So that's more gradual, right? That's a journey. It's not, “One day, I did not have faith. And then the next day, I did have faith.” But I feel that the Marianist charism, the Marianist spirituality really has that growth-oriented process, that journey process. So that's one element that I see there.

### **22:46 – Rob Brodrick**

So... I'm thinking about that in terms of under that pillar of faith. But also, we get that aspect from Mary in many ways, right? That was pointed out to me. Mary, of course, has a very maternal and parental way of thinking about formation. You don't form a child overnight. They're growing. They're developing. They're becoming a human person in the way that that is never done, right? When are we done becoming a full human person? Never, right? That's the thing. We're always becoming and becoming again. And nobody knows that like a good parent. You watch your child grow up. And parents have all sorts of different ways of working with this, but definitely, Mary's way of handling this is a long run operation, right? And to be there from birth right to an eventual cross - in her case - that's a long journey. And beyond a cross, really.

So, you have that constant presence with somebody. And I think that that's where we get a little bit of it. So, I would stick with those two points.

**24:03 - Patti Gehred**

Thank you again for listening. To listen to more of our podcasts or learn more about the North American Center for Marianist Studies, check out our website at [www.nacms.org](http://www.nacms.org).

**24:18 - Gabby Bibeau**

If you would like more information about the Marianist Lay Community of North America and all of the activities and news that they have as coordinators of Marianist Lay people in North America, you can go to their website [www.mlcna.org](http://www.mlcna.org). Thank you so much for listening.