

SOMS #30: MSJC's Present & Future Transcript
Feat. Sarah Gray, Maureen O'Rourke, Julia Love, and Ish Ruiz

0:00 – Ish Ruiz

And so, to me, the Marianists just really know how to stand at the crux of, perhaps, what is most life-giving of our Catholic and Christian tradition and what is most life-giving about our humanity.

0:16 – Mike Bennett

Welcome to Sharing Our Marianist Stories, a podcast produced by the North American Center for Marianist Studies in Dayton, Ohio. I'm Mike Bennett, Media Administrator for NACMS. In this episode, we continue our celebration of the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative's 25th anniversary by featuring a panel that was moderated by Sarah Gray and features three volunteers from issue teams within the MSJC. I will turn the floor over to Sarah. And you'll hear my voice again towards the end of this episode of Sharing Our Marianist Stories.

0:56 – Sarah Gray

I'm Sarah Gray. I currently live in Cincinnati, Ohio, and I'm the executive director of the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative, or MSJC, for short. And, yeah, I get to work with all the issue teams. So, we have seven active issue teams right now, and then two project teams as well. So, the seven active issue teams look at different areas of social justice, and each team kind of creates education advocacy, pastoral outreach, anything they have capacity and interest to do around advancing justice on that issue. And then, we have kind of two, internal project teams right now which are helping us with organizational anti-racism and our fundraising capacity. We have about 80 active volunteers across all nine of those teams that are doing different things, both internal to MSJC and external. [Regarding] This second podcast, we did one kind of looking at the past people who were there when we first started MSJC. And then, this one is right now – like kind of the present – and then looking forward. So, what we're just asking everyone to share is your name, where you're joining us from, and then your connections with MSJC and how you got involved.

2:01 – Ish Ruiz

I can start. My name is Ish Ruiz, and I am a part of the Marianist LGBTQ+ Initiative Team. I have been a part of this team since 2014. I was the chair of the team for several years, and now I stepped down – someone else took on that rein – and now I am just a member.

2:20 – Julia Love

I'm Julia Love. I'm in Philadelphia. I'm part of [the] Adele Social Justice Project, or ASJP. And I was invited to join in 2020, and I've been part of it ever since.

2:36 – Maureen O'Rourke

My name is Maureen O'Rourke. I'm in Dayton, Ohio, and I serve as a co-chair for the Racial Justice Issue Team and as a collaboration with the Marianist Lay [Communities] of North America, serve on the steering committee of MSJC as a rep for Lay Marianists in the US.

2:56 – Sarah Gray

The second question is why are you passionate about this work? And I think that could be why are you passionate about social justice in general? Why are you passionate about being on a volunteer organization within the Marianist Family? And it also could be why are you passionate about the specific social justice team or group you're working with? So, I'll invite whoever wants to start on that.

3:20 – Julia Love

I think my passion starts with community. And when I was reached out to for ASJP in the pandemic, it was a really opportune time to feel this larger connection, especially with not going to church and not even really seeing Marianists. That really drew me into MSJC to begin with. But I think what continues to keep me passionate about this work is the excitement in our group to keep including people and keep raising young voices in the church and that we're not walking away from something that's difficult. But, like, we're facing it head-on. So, the more people that face it head-on, the more my own passion grows. And so, that community building has really kept me in it.

4:07 – Ish Ruiz

I think the work of social justice is deeply personal. It's hard to do social justice and not bring one's own self into the conversation. My involvement with the LGBTQ+ Team comes from my own personal identity and experience as a gay man, specifically as a gay Catholic who suffered both incredible exclusion and disintegration, at the hands of the church, but also experienced incredible and boundless joy in spaces that were inclusive to LGBTQ+ people... My life is a witness to the creative energy and joy that comes about when a person, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, is fully embraced in the eyes of the community and as a person created in the image of God. And throughout this work, I've been blessed to work with people who approach the question of LGBTQ+ inclusion through many angles, and it is a common passion to bring one's own experience or the experience of our loved ones. So, for example, people who are members of our team often identify as straight and cisgender, but may have a child or a dear friend who is a member of the LGBTQ+ community and they can connect.

5:19 – Maureen O'Rourke

I think to me, justice and equity and right relationship has been a passion of mine probably because how I was raised and engaged my whole life and before I met the Marianist Family. And then I think where this all came together is once I experienced the charism and met Marianist people and realized who I am and what I am passionate about aligns I think, beautifully, with the charism and this community of people who are looking and modeling a Marian Church to our world. To a place in space and faith community and systems that we want to be part of, and that we are invested in... So, I feel called to partner and to serve with MSJC because of the greatest gift of doing that in that community.

6:15 – Sarah Gray

Mm-hmm, yeah, thank you all. Those were very moving responses, and I think really echo what Ish said, which is that you don't show up to this work unless you're pretty closely connected to it and feel even the small steps forward as being really positive in your life and the people around you, which is I think is really important. Which leads us actually right into the next question,

which is what has been one visible or tangible impact you've seen through the work of your issue team? So, you could talk about maybe a project or an event or something bigger that you really see as something we can put our hands on, that your team has had an impact on, in the last few years or since you've been working with MSJC.

6:59 – Julia Love

So, like I said, I joined in the pandemic, and it was a really big deal when we got to have our first annual retreat. Don't know if you can call it annual. It took a couple of years, but it was super exciting to be in person with everyone and to experience them in that way. I felt like I was meeting them all for the first time. And something we dedicated to doing while we were on our planning retreat was getting local young people in Dayton to this discussion event. And [there was] a lot of anxiety of will anyone come? Will anyone want to talk about these topics, these really controversial topics that maybe different generations or different groups of people are not talking about? And when we got there and were waiting, within moments the entire room that we reserved is completely filled and there's not enough chairs and some of our group is standing outside to make room for more visitors and more conversation. And that was one of the most exciting moments in ASJC, to really see that young people are craving these conversations, are showing up for them, and we want to just continue. We've been talking a lot about finding different ways to engage in our local communities because it was really exciting.

8:22 – Sarah Gray

Yeah, Julia, can you say more about what did you guys ask there again? You had questions out on the tables, right, and then people kind of broke into discussion groups?

8:31 – Julia Love

I believe some of them were, “How has your voice been heard or not heard in the Church as a young person? What are directions that you want to see the Church going in? What are your hopes for the future of the Church, and what do you think they're doing right? What do you think they're doing wrong?” I believe one of the questions was, “If you could change one thing about the way the Catholic Church is run today, what would it be?”

8:55 – Ish Ruiz

Yeah, the LGBT team has been incredibly busy. We've done yearly retreats for LGBTQ+ parents and their families. We've produced a wonderful video resource along with a discussion guide that helps Marianists live out our charism by embracing LGBTQ+ persons. And we've also produced a resource for educators at schools. But perhaps the project that I am most excited about is our Trans Initiative. And the reason I am excited about that is because in the world of LGBTQ+ Inclusion in the Catholic Church, issues of gender and trans inclusion are at the forefront of the conversation right now. This is the hot topic. This is a question that many Church institutions really don't know how to answer, and our team has been wonderful at being leaders in the conversation, proposing new ways of engaging, doing what Marianists do best, which is build community and open a space for dialogue that people can discern and journey together.

9:53 – Ish Ruiz

In an example that was seen at the latest Marianist Lay Communities of North America Assembly, MLC-NA, where the Trans subdivision of our LGBT team led a workshop that was

very well attended, very well received, and where people were able to really bring genuine questions about ministry, about obstacles and challenges, about joys. And perhaps even more importantly, we're able to listen to the testimonies of Trans Catholics who shared their experience and their own insight about what they would like to see in the Church. And the reason I mention this project – and I'm not involved in the Trans Team – but the reason I mentioned this project is because I found myself growing as a Catholic and as a minister as a result of the work of that team. And I'm a part of the LGBT initiative. I'm not involved with that particular project, but every time I attend one of their sessions, I am just blown away by what they're doing, and I really hope to see it continue because it's an important conversation.

10:56 – Maureen O'Rourke

The Racial Justice Team was founded I think in 2018 by I think about five or six of us back then who really felt passionate around this issue and in our country. And so, we've done some really fantastic things over the years. But one thing that stands out to me specifically was back in the spring of 2022, our issue team partnered with a national organization called Crossroads Anti-Racism and partnered in an effort to create a session. It was an opportunity where Crossroads facilitated training to really dive into what is systemic racism. How do we engage in it, and what can we grow and learn in, both individually but also institutionally? And [it] was a powerful opportunity to dive deeply into what systemic racism is, what we're called to do to become anti-racist, and to look at that through a lens of faith and as a Marianist Family. You know, to do the internal piece, but also the external. This internal work has to be done in us, but it's for the greater good beyond us. I really think that was maybe one of our... highlight events over the years. And one of the greatest gifts of doing that was then the follow-up became for MSJC organizationally to take on this deeper commitment to becoming anti-racist. And so, out of that comes this anti-racism ad hoc committee, and I think that will be a great witness to the Marianist Family, to our partners and collaborators. And I'm just excited for what might unravel, unfold and blossom because of that.

12:39 – Sarah Gray

Yeah, I'm actually wondering if all of you could just talk a little bit about the structure of your team and... right now, maybe, what your projects are overall? Things like that might just be helpful to give people context.

12:49 – Maureen O'Rourke

So, our issue team has about eight members. We are pretty much around the Midwest. We did have some people out in the Pacific part of our country who are with us. We do have little subcommittees that will gather for certain events or programs or initiatives. But for the most part, we tend to gather as a whole team.

13:13 – Julia Love

For Adèle Social Justice Project, we have about seven or eight [people]. We try to support other issue teams as well. But our main mission is giving a voice to young people in the Church and living out that Adèle spirit.

13:27 – Ish Ruiz

Our issue team is composed of about 12 people. It has had as many as 15 in the past, and it spans the entire nation. Given the numerous projects that we have down the pipeline at all times, we have subcommittees that are project-oriented, such as a Retreat Committee, a Trans Committee which puts on programming related to Trans inclusion, and an Education Committee which works with schools and then the education resources that we publish. And we also had an ad hoc committee to put together that video, and once we produced the video – which is about embracing all religious people according to our charism – that committee would just no longer meet. Another example of an ad hoc committee is the committee that is planning our Imago Dei Assembly, which is an assembly for LGBTQ+ Catholic Ministry to be held at Bergamo in 2024. Also, we have some subcommittees to do advocacy that don't necessarily have something tangible that they do, but rather meet to see what new initiatives should be proposed. And so, they are in conversations with the Office of Sponsorship, the leadership of Marianist universities, etcetera. Each of these committees can have anywhere between two, five people, six, seven people. But what's cool, too, is that if they're doing something local, like planning a retreat in Cincinnati or in St. Louis, they also solicit the help of local people who can join that small committee to help us plan that event. And so, the LGBT team has a formal cap at 15 members, but also welcomes in temporary assistance for our local projects, which is a great way to have a group of committed people who have some continuity, but also a group of amazing, committed people who can only contribute a particular amount of time.

15:25 – Sarah Gray

Yeah, and jumping right off that, one thing we haven't discussed either is that we like to describe MSJC as truly a great example of collaboration, obviously amongst ourselves and branching out, but also of really holding to the value of discipleship of equals. We have members of all three branches of the Marianist Family across all of our issue teams. We have a representative on our steering committee from all of the branches. And then, one other thing I want to say, too – which we only have three of our volunteers here tonight who represent three of our issue teams – but there are four other active issue teams that I just simply should probably name, too. We have the Death Penalty Abolition and Restorative Justice Team, which is our longest active team right now, and are still doing awesome stuff and have kind of shifted gears to include Restorative Justice in later years, which is great to see. [There's] Our Immigrant Justice Team. Integral Ecology, which is our newest team. It's in partnership with the Marianist Environmental Education Center, MEEC, which is in Dayton. So, that's kind of a unique collaborative team, too, that's doing a lot of work, both localized and then broader to the Marianist Family. And then, [there's] the Women and Justice Issue Team. So, those are all of our active issue teams that are coalescing around specific social justice issues.

16:39 – Sarah Gray

We know that the work of justice inherently ruffles feathers or makes people uncomfortable or can sometimes create tension. I was hoping that whoever feels comfortable or has an example of this might share how you and your team have maybe overcome a challenge in advancing justice in the last few years?

16:59 – Ish Ruiz

One of the unique challenges of advancing the work of LGBTQ+ justice in the Catholic Church is the question of magisterial doctrine. Because the Catholic Church has an established doctrine that forbids, for example, homosexual sexual activity and gender expressions that do not correspond to the male and female binary, many Catholic leaders are afraid to make even space for dialogue on conversations that might touch upon positions that are contrary to the Catholic Church. Particularly in the US, questions of justice unfortunately often disregard other issues of race, poverty, and, I argue, other, more serious violations of human dignity, and are often focused on pelvic matters of sexuality. So, on top of this Catholic doctrine, we have a Catholic culture in the US that is obsessed with policing matters of sexual morality. And that really stifles dialogue, and it really stifles the work of justice for LGBTQ+ people, because any kind of advance that we make on behalf of the dignity of LGBTQ+ people is often reinterpreted as an endorsement of a particular sexual lifestyle. I think that our Marianist Family is also susceptible to that trend, and in many ways we've had to have difficult conversations about what our work is and what some of the boundaries of the work are to really assure and express our commitment to upholding the dignity of LGBTQ+ people, to making space for them in the Church, to making sure that they know that they are loved and valued by our community, that they are loved by God, that they are made in God's image.

18:39 – Ish Ruiz

As a team, we are not advocating decisions contrary to the Church. We are simply making space for everyone, regardless of where they are in their journey with the Church and the Church's teaching, to find a place where they can build community and build a relationship with God through each other. And having to explain that to people within our Church and within our Marianist Family is sometimes frustrating, and it takes an extra step, and it takes effort that could otherwise go toward the actual space we are trying to build. And so, we have to often advocate for our right to exist and to occupy space by assuring people that we're not trying to burn down the Church or tear the fabric of society or destroy the sanctity of marriage. We simply want a place where we can *be* and be in community and experience God's grace. And it's incredible, sometimes, and frustrating that such a low bar receives so much resistance from our Church and from our Marianist Family. I'm, again, proud of the team because a couple of us, myself included, are hot heads who want to just, you know, go in there and shake someone. But we do a good job of calming each other down, using our team as a space to vent, to reassure each other, to affirm our work, but then to strategize prudent ways forward that will actually make the work effective.

19:52 – Sarah Gray

Yeah, and just to say... I do think that that is a challenge, especially for very hot topic issues. And I think the political environment in America really impacts the Church. But I do think there is this strength of the Marianist Family that when we have come to the table, especially that LGBTQ team, to stand firm to say we have a right to be here, the Marianist Family continues to meet us there. We feel so strongly about this ministry, being part of the Marianist Family, and that is such a gift. And when we commit to do things that are truly listening to everyone, everyone who has concerns, different entities in the Marianist Family that just have questions and want to make sure whatever we're doing makes sense to them and is being taken with sure-footedness, I think the results of that are always just really powerful, even though they're

sometimes slow. So, like, the video, Ish, that you mentioned has over 15,000 views, hundreds of people have found us, have never heard of the Marianist Family, but have found us because they've seen that video, and reach out and are hungry for that space, right?

20:50 – Ish Ruiz

Absolutely.

20:51 – Sarah Gray

Right, and that video took five years to make. But because of the support from everyone, once it was out, there weren't questions. Everyone was on board. "Yes, this is what we stand for, 100%," right? And so, I think that that's just important to name, too, that that challenge sometimes leads to bear a lot of fruit, too.

21:07 – Ish Ruiz

Yeah, and I'll add that after every event that members of the Family leader[ship], Marianist leadership have been a part of, after every event, they have expressed support and continued commitment to the work. And so, I agree. I agree it is both a source of frustration, but also sort of relief and encouragement. But that's the work. That's what makes LGBTQ+ Ministry unique and important.

21:31 – Maureen O'Rourke

Well, I thought less of our issue team and more of like the Church. You know, before 2020 particularly, people were like, "Why are we talking about race like? We don't need to talk about this. Why upset? Why stir up?" And it's, like, because so much occurred, right? There's been so much pain. There's been so much oppression. And the system is not just broken. The system was built this way. And so... we have to engage in uncovering this and bringing it to light, to seeking reconciliation, reparation. There's all these layers and levels. I haven't had that be a challenge for our issue team that I've encountered in a way, so it's hard to name that as a challenge for us that we've overcome. But I do find that for our issue team members in the space that we're in – but also in the many different spaces we find ourselves with local parishes, communities and groups, the larger Marianist Family – that we often hear in gatherings that people say, "Well, where are the people representing this community or this social group?" Or "where are the people of color? Why aren't they here with us? How do we invite them?" And it's interesting to try and really encourage their consideration of that, and asking instead, "Why is this a space where those people might not feel welcome? Don't feel welcome, right?" They're not choosing to be here. And so, what is the work that we need to be doing to become a space? So, a lot of that is bringing to light the pain and the hurt, the oppression, the ways in which we engage in the systems, and then to be different because of it. So, let's make our spaces different and hope that then they become spaces where we can welcome and engage and partner and cooperate. And be gifted by the expertise and friendship and partnership of so many great people. And so, being attentive to that conversation, to turning those questions around is what we need to do, and we're not going to put that on somebody else.

23:45 – Sarah Gray

What makes working for justice with MSJC worthwhile to you personally? What has impacted you in your time with MSJC about the impact it's had on you? Or why [are you] still here, and why it's important that we show up to this space?

23:58 – Julia Love

I don't think I've ever known a safe space like I know the Marianists. As I grew through the Marianists, you think you're being vulnerable, and you think you're connecting with people. And then that moment hits. And I think that moment has hit a lot for me in MSJC through the Adèle Social Justice Project, that I feel like vulnerability has been given back to me tenfold. So, I was always scared to open up more, and that's not really what I was taught the Catholic Church to be, that it was not an open place, that it was not really the safe space of understanding. And ASJP has been the complete opposite and really challenged my beliefs around that, that my voice is heard, and that we're not just a bunch of kids rattling off about things, that it's real fears and real feelings and real accomplishments and real detriment. And we share that every time we meet. "Where are you at today?" And I just have never known a group to be so dedicated to continuing to make this space safe and understanding and willing, and almost bending over backwards to understand each other. And that keeps me coming back when I feel depleted of energy.

25:14 – Ish Ruiz

For me, my thoughts went to the word *hope*. I think sometimes we do the work of justice without really – we plant seeds without really knowing what the fruit will be. Working with the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative, it's both planting the seed and also witnessing its fruit. Because some of the work that we do, obviously, is very tangible and we see the immediate results, et cetera. But also, when I look at the broader Church and I look at the incredible things that Pope Francis is doing, promoting synodality, dialogue, inclusivity, I'm here thinking, "Yeah, but the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative has been doing this for a very long time." And it's kind of neat to see that the work that we're doing, that the Church is catching up to us. And that gives me hope. That makes me think that the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative is not some sort of "snowflake" that's just floating around. But rather it makes me think that it is connected to a broader mission, and it is affecting a broader mission and it is observable. And the advances that the Church has accomplished with LGBTQ+ inclusion have been monumental in the past ten years, and the Marianists in our corner of the world have been at the forefront of those advances. And so, I am hopeful for LGBTQ+ inclusion, and thanks to the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative, I know that it is not a foolish hope.

26:34 – Maureen O'Rourke

I think in many ways I would echo what Ish shared, the piece of hope. This image that we have for who the Church can be, what the church can be at our best is, I think, what we're living in some ways with MSJC, with the Marianist Family. So, when I think about, particularly, my work with the issue team, it's really like companions on the journey. It's like ministering to the ministers... It's a space to be gathered and sent, and there's purpose to it, there's mission. We're doing some deep work together, but we're also – there's times where you need to be refreshed and replenished. It creates that space. And I think this is tough stuff. You have to have that grounding. And so, it provides grounding. It also provides that little swift kick to do something. And the piece that I really appreciate from MSJC is that it also inspires what I do locally. So, it's

the conversation nationally, it's our efforts nationally, but it also is really a purpose driven connection to why I engage in my local community, around relationships, around justice in the center city and how I live in my city, the organizations I support, and the businesses and the places I see myself in. But it really calls us to action and advocacy in our local spaces also. And I would hate for that to ever be lost, that partnership with who we are here and there.

28:12 – Sarah Gray

What I'd love to hear from you is – you know, you could talk about one hope. What do you hope to see from MSJC five years from now, ten years from now, the general future? Where do you think MSJC could be a leader in the future? What would you like to see MSJC tackling in the future?

28:28 – Ish Ruiz

I can start. Two things came to mind for me. The first is kind of, actually, related to you, Sarah. I would like to see you supported with the resources, the staff, the time, the self-care that you need to continue to support all these issue teams. Because I think that your presence and in my experience, the leadership of Jim Vogt, who was your predecessor, was simply a cornerstone for all of the teams. So, from a sustainability point, I would like to see that. As far as mission goes, I would like to see MSJC become a center of our Marianist Family. The work of justice is something that can serve to connect all of us, all of the branches, and sometimes MSJC feels like the pet that we're all racing, and I want it to be more of what's driving all of our institutions. And I wish to see Marianist institutions, schools, parishes, universities and Marianist Lay Communities really integrate with our work more.

29:27 – Julia Love

When you said resources, it made me think maybe in ten years we could have part-time people for every issue team, and kind of have that investment paired with the volunteers. That they are part-time in a financial way, but also in a way that puts it in the front of their brain. Not that volunteers aren't amazing, and we've been driving on volunteers, and I don't ever want to say that that should go away, but I think that collaborative effort of people who have that investment in addition with volunteers is just a huge resource I would love to see.

30:06 – Maureen O'Rourke

I think there's been great growth since the addition of an assistant. When Jim met the new partner, Jim and Sarah, and now Sarah and Erin, it's just immense when you can dedicate staff time to this and a great witness of the Marianist Family stepping up to that and supporting that. Because the financial piece, it's extremely important to do that. And we're at a place in this stage and in who we are as a Family to say, "We need this. We want this, and we will allocate. We're going to do this." And so, from the lens of an issue team, I know it's wonderful to be so volunteer based, to have such a fantastic engagement of all those people who are connected in MSJC on a steady monthly basis, but also the hundreds that engage in programming with MSJC throughout the year. And so, it's wonderful to be volunteer based, but the addition of staff – dedicated staff – support to the efforts of the issue teams is just so extremely helpful, enlivening, and taking on some of the tasks and opportunities in the follow-up that some volunteers just can't. It just doesn't fit within their scope. So, I would support... additional dedicated staff people to this work.

31:27 – Maureen O'Rourke

I have this massive admiration for the LGBTQ+ Initiative. Always have, always will. Something that I think that issue team does so well is engage in the local dioceses and Catholic communities in which they are hosting events. And what I love about that is the way they invite Church leaders into conversation. And I know that that's difficult, but I also know it creates so much room for experience, for relationship, for inviting some growth, and maybe even nudging it, moving it, or pushing it. But I wonder what are the opportunities long term for MSJC to really develop better parts of our Catholic truth to this country, by being in those conversations, by creating those conversations. You know, if growth allowed, is that our gift to this country, to this Church, to be the nudgers and the movers and the pushers. And where could that land all of us?

32:38 – Julia Love

I have a really abstract dream for the 25 years in the hopes of continuing to ruffle feathers. My 25-year dream is that we're a little famous, like our voices being heard on such a scale that we have people who are against us. And I think when you have debate on whether – and I'm sure we have it a little bit now – But I think when you have debate on what you're trying to achieve, you know you're headed in the right direction. And so, in 25 years, whatever little pushback we have, I hope it's larger and that we're even larger to combat it.

33:15 – Ish Ruiz

How about another 20 – Well, it's probably like a 125-year goal – hopefully that MSJC stops existing because we have accomplished the work of building the Kingdom of God on earth. How's that for a goal?

33:28 – Mike Bennet

I think that's a great goal, Ish. I have one question I'd like to interject, and that is how has the Marianist charism impacted the work of MSJC, and how might it be a guiding force for MSJC into the future?

33:43 – Ish Ruiz

I was actually thinking about this the other day, because I've had the blessing of studying with the Jesuits where I did my Graduate School, my doctoral program. I've worked in a Lasallian school. I've worked with the Vincentians, the Daughters of Charity – this is a place where I've been employed – and I've worked with the Marianists. And it's always so curious that all of these religious orders really love their charism and consider their charism to be the best expression of faith. And to me, they're all wrong. The Marianist charism by far the best expression of faith! Nah, I'm just only half kidding, but... I'm going to put on my theologian's hat by just thinking not so much of a community, but more theologically of the concept of communion. The idea that there is a bond that unites us, that that bond is bigger than us, that it encompasses us, that reflects us, but that is greater than the sum of our parts. That brings us together in tangible ways, but that also sends us forth. And I think the Marianist Family, simply put, has a balance of all the components necessary to precisely live in community, live in communion, live in the world, live fully human lives, from the technical questions of hospitality to the more relational components of how do we connect with each other to the future visions of justice and the external commitments to community via justice. And they're all informed theologically by the Virgin Mary, her life, her witness. And so, to me, the Marianists just really know how to stand at the

crux of perhaps what is most life-giving of our Catholic and Christian tradition and what is most life-giving about our humanity.

35:27 – Maureen O’Rourke

So, I was thinking the concept is “To Jesus through Mary.” So, our charism, the gift of who we are and what we give to the world is Marian. And so, if we're looking to Mary as our model and we're looking to build this Marian model of the Church, it means it's a little warmer, a little softer, but it's also fiercely just. It involves getting your hands dirty. It involves relationship. There are all these things we're called to because of the witness of this woman who changed our world. And so, I think our charism inspires what we do and how we do it through every aspect of MSJC. And our desire, our hope, is the charism that did that, that inspired us, also nurtures all that we become. Not just us, but our Church, our country, our world. So, I think that model of Mary is integral to how we operate.

36:30 – Sarah Gray

Yeah, and I'll just say one more thing, which is we have about 80 active volunteers, and I would say probably around 15 to 20 of them found us on the Internet, didn't really have Marianist connections, but were specifically looking for some sort of justice organization they could join that was doing work in the Catholic Church. And so, in the future, I think it's going to be really important, too. I think maybe MSJC hasn't done the best job of bringing those people fully into the Marianist Family, but I think that's something that we would love to be doing more of and be doing better. Moving forward, the people who are drawn to us, helping them really be a full part of our Family, and not just saddled with MSJC, but thinking of how we can do that, too. Realizing that we can be that drawing force with the justice piece, and then helping people really experience our charism more deeply once they engage with MSJC.

37:21 – Mike Bennett

Don't click that stop button yet. Before we finish with our final question, Sarah has some parting words for us.

37:27 – Sarah Gray

I want to say thank you to Mo [Maureen] and Julia and Ish for, first of all, your “yes” to participate in this conversation, but mostly your steadfastness in being volunteers with MSJC over many years and leaders in this work, and some of my favorite people to work with. [I'm] just really thankful to all of you and all of MSJC's volunteers, everyone who supports us in the Marianist Family, and a big thank you to NACMS for giving us the space to have these important conversations and celebrate 25 years of existence and hope and joy and justice.

38:01 – Mike Bennett

And a word of thanks to you, our listener, for listening to this episode of Sharing Our Marianist Stories, and for your continued support of the North American Center for Marianist Studies. Make sure to follow us wherever you listen to podcasts so that you'll be notified when we have future episodes released. And follow us on our social media accounts @ThisIsNACMS on Instagram, Facebook and YouTube so that you have access to our ongoing educational and formational content focused on our Marianist Family, history and charism. And now, to wrap up this episode of Sharing Our Marianist Stories, we return with our final question. We know that

the Marianist Founders corresponded via letter-writing. So, if you were going to write a letter to any person, dead or alive, and be guaranteed a response, who would you write to and why?

38:59 – Ish Ruiz

I would definitely choose Pope Francis. I think that his vision for the Church is prophetic and I would like for the opportunity to have a conversation with him about LGBTQ+ inclusion.

39:13 – Sarah Gray

You know, I was thinking about our beloved Brother Frank O'Donnell earlier in this, so I'm going to go with him right now. Obviously, he was such an advocate, a warrior, a pusher for MSJC, sometimes against people's will, but just cared so much about MSJC existing and being really on the forefront of stuff. [He] was a chair for MSJC for nine years and recently passed away last year. My dream, I guess, would be every year just to write him something and have him write back and check in with us on that. I think it's really nice to have. So, I'd just love to get his continued thoughts and support.

39:50 – Maureen O'Rourke

So, I started to think of Marianist folks, and I think I would go Skip Matthews, Charlie Wanda, Maurice Foley, Paul Marshall, lots of them. But what really struck me is I think my Uncle Billy, my dad's brother, who I never met, and I don't know a lot about. But there are parts of me and my passion areas that I wonder if they come from him, just that inkling that start of maybe who I am and who I've come because of who he was. I'd be curious to know.

Highlighted Keywords Throughout the Transcript (could also use Ctrl+F to find mentions)

Word	1st Mention	2nd Mention	3rd Mention
Adèle Social Justice Project, ASJP	2:26	13:13	24:34
Anti-Racism	11:21		
Charism	33:35	35:27	37:10
Church Leadership	16:59	31:50	
Collaboration	15:33		
Community	3:22	23:58	34:25
Death Penalty Abolition and Restorative Justice Issue Team	16:00		
Discipleship of Equals	15:40		
Frank O'Donnell, SM	39:13		
Hope	25:14	26:34	28:28
Immigrant Justice Team	16:14		
Jim Vogt	28:48	30:12	
LGBTQ+ Initiative	4:16	8:55	18:39
LGBTQ+ Justice	16:59	30:06	36:30
“Living Our Marianist Charism: Embracing the LGBTQ+ Community” Video	20:39		
Marianist Environmental Education Center, MEEC	16 :20		
Marianist Lay Communities of North America, MLC-NA	2:46	9:55	
Mary	35:13	35:27	
Pope Francis	25:38	39:00	
Racial Justice Issue Team	10:56	12:49	21:31
Trans Initiative	9:20		
Volunteers	29:27	30:06	36:30
Women and Justice Team	16:30		
Young Voices in the Church	3:54	8:00	24:35