

Sharing Our Marianist Stories Ep. 9 Transcript

Marianist Lessons from Rough Patches (with Linda Zappacosta and Brad Leger, Lay Assembly 2017)

00:00 - Linda Zappacosta

We're called to be Jesus, Son of Mary, to join her in that mission of bearing Jesus to the world. I mean, that's a profound charism. And for me, it has been made more real as I begin to live my life, especially in the last few months, I've dealt with some illness. And so, Mary has drawn closer to me in my heart in a very tender way. And God has drawn very close to me in very real ways. I recognize God's presence in my life but especially through community, this community journeys with me.

00:46 - Gabby Bibeau

Welcome to *Sharing Our Marianist Stories*, a podcast brought to you by the North American Center for Marianist Studies, otherwise known as NACMS. Today's podcast is based on an interview that Juliet Fromholt at WYSO Public Radio did during the 2017 Lay Marianist Assembly in Dayton, Ohio. At the Assembly, Juliet sat down and recorded a conversation that took place between two people, Linda Zappacosta and Brad Leger. Linda has been a committed Lay Marianist for over 50 years. Brad is sort of new to the Marianist Family, and his main connection to the Marianists is through the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative.

01:32 - Gabby Bibeau

Brad and Linda are very good friends, as you'll see in this episode. And mostly what you'll hear is Brad interviewing Linda about her experience as a Lay Marianist. She especially shares how she came to appreciate her Marianist charism, identity and Marianist community after experiencing a serious illness. So, we hope that you enjoy listening and hear something that inspires you. Now here's Brad and Linda.

02:11 - Linda Zappacosta

I am Linda Zappacosta. I live in Chester, Pennsylvania.

02:15 - Brad Leger

And I'm Brad Leger. I live in Estherwood, Louisiana.

02:19 - Linda Zappacosta

The Marianist story for me is basically a love story. Way back in 1968, I graduated from high school. And my brother, who was three years older than I, had already graduated from high school, obviously, and he went to St. James High School in Chester, which was a Marianist school. So, he was at that time Prefect of the Young Adult Sodality. Basically, it was a Marianist Lay Community that he was leader of. So, he said, "Linda, now that you're out of high school,

why don't you come to one of these meetings here at the Marianist Center in Chester?" So, I said, "Okay, John." So, I went. And I joined a Lay Community there that was meeting at the Marianist Center. And Bro. Walt Oberster - who was dear friend of mine who since transitioned to heaven - he greeted me. He was the first Marianist religious that I met. He greeted me at the door, so he welcomed me into the room. We sat in a circle, and I began sharing some of what my faith meant to me. And I felt affirmed in what I was sharing. I felt like I had a voice as a young woman in the Church. I felt so wonderful inside by that experience that I fell in love with the experience of small faith community from the get-go. So, I'm like, "This is a good thing." So, I stayed involved, and almost 50 years later I'm still traveling the journey of Marianist life.

03:47 - Brad Leger

My story is a little bit different from Linda's. Actually, I have no real Marianist background, so to speak, within my formative years. The closest I came to Marianists affecting my life several years ago, I went through a graduate program at Loyola University in New Orleans. And one of the faculty members who coordinated the program was a Marianist. And I would see his name. I never met him, and I saw the SM initials after his name. I said, "Hmm, that's interesting," and it just kind of stayed there.

04:22 - Brad Leger

And then several years ago, I was really at a point in my life that I was looking for a Catholic-based a group interested in social justice issues. And I did some good old Google searches, and up popped the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative, and then the rest is history. And so, I tell people that I'm not a card-carrying Lay Marianist. However, I feel that I'm part of the Family because my involvement with the LGBT initiative. And that's how I got to know Linda and so many other people, through the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative. And I think with the Marianist charism, Marianist spirit, so pervasive in the work that we're doing, that gives us that holy power, that divine spark, to do the work that we're doing and to do it with conviction.

05:09 - Linda Zappacosta

Absolutely. You know how I mentioned this is a love story? I have met such wonderful people like Brad along the way. So, he's like my brother from another mother. So, it's like when we see each other at these Marianist gatherings - He lives in New Orleans. I live in Pennsylvania, in Chester - it's like a love relationship of brother and sister where we just are just so happy to be in each other's presence. You know, continue the journey together and affirm each other along the way.

05:38 - Brad Leger

Just as you [were] speaking, Linda, I'd like to dig a little deeper. What really has kept you? What's the fuel for you to stay within the Marianist movement? And how does it help you at this point of your life?

05:53 - Linda Zappacosta

Sure. Well, it's a multifaceted answer. First and foremost, the Marianist charism, where we're called to be Jesus, Son of Mary, you know, to join her in that mission of bearing Jesus to the world. I mean, that's a profound charism. And for me it has been made more real as I begin to live my life, especially in the last few months, I've dealt with some illness. So, Mary has drawn closer to me in my heart in a very tender way, and God has drawn very close to me and very real ways I recognize God's presence in my life.

06:37 - Linda Zappacosta

But especially through community, through my local Maranatha Community - we've been meeting for 44 years - they've been there for me. The Visitation [State Marianist] Community, they have shown up for me through prayer... I'm talking about folks around the country here, but they have been there for me in prayer, through their cards, through their little gifts that they send me, through books that they send me, through phone calls, through guidance. So, this community journeys with me.

07:08 - Linda Zappacosta

Marianist life has made all the difference in terms of my healing process and challenging me and calling me to [say] "Okay, so what's next beyond this journey?" and help me recognize my call to give back. So, it's receive and then give back, and I hope to be involved. I'm a social worker by profession. I'm retired, but I've done hospice work and palliative care work. So now, it's like I've been on both sides of the bed. So, I feel called to give back in terms of being present to others going through similar journeys in the counseling relationship.

07:42 - Linda Zappacosta

The other dimension that I want to add, of course, is the religious branch of the family, the way that they have been mentors to me and have journeyed with me through this time, especially this year. The Marianist Sisters, the way they have been present in dear friendship relationships, walking with me, listening to me, sharing my tears, sharing my joy. The Marianist Brothers and Priests who have offered Mass for me, who have reached out to me in countless ways. It's a shame that sometimes you have to go through an illness or some kind of rough patch in your life before you recognize the beauty of the gifts and the way that God's love is made visible through people around you, your family, your friends. I recognize that more poignantly than ever before.

08:26 - Brad Leger

Your story always touches me, because I've always found you to be one of the most genuine [people] that I've ever met. The first time we met, we just clicked like, "Oh, here's my sister, a kindred spirit / mentor." And I'm always appreciative of how you share yourself with me in my life and the way you interact with others as well, too. And I'm still learning. I consider myself

still kind of a new kid on the block in the Marianist spirit, but I feel very much at home here. In light of the Marianist spirit that really is enveloped in your life, what have you learned about yourself for the last year or so? Anything? You've kind of answered the question already, but what surprises have you had? Pleasant surprises, challenging surprises? What have you learned more about Linda?

09:19 - Linda Zappacosta

Well, one of the big lessons at this time has been seeing with new eyes my need to control, and then learning how to let go of that and trust in God's control. God's really the one in charge. So, the more that I "let go and let God," in a way, the more I see God's actions alive and real in everyday life. So that's been a biggie, recognizing that, "Hey, I don't have to seek out and try to control all the situations." That thing is like a judging kind of thing. I have a tendency to make judgments sometimes that kind of dismiss some people in my life. So, now I'm trying to recognize that, listen to the story that they're trying to share and where they're at, because God's in control of their life, like God's in control of my life and just trust in that. So, the barriers between myself and other people that I set up have broken down significantly. So, I'm more open to people. I am more welcoming of God's movement in my life and me letting go of trying to control everything, and more attentive to the way that God moves in people's lives and in my life. They've been great gifts and graces in this past year.

10:35 - Brad Leger

It's beautiful to hear and I keep on thinking as I learn more about the Marianist charism, I'm learning about the life and the story of Father Chaminade and his associates. So, it sounds like you have a really close parallel to their lives as far as this saying "Yes" to what life has unfolded in front of you. Could you talk some more about how Chaminade in particular has touched your life and served as a model for you?

11:04 - Linda Zappacosta

Sure. Well, Chaminade, drawing from an inspiration of the Spirit or Mary's spirit in his life had this vision for rebuilding the Church of France after the shambles. Now, we talked about a rough patch. I mean, that was a rough patch after the French Revolution. You know, people had lost their lives, people were suffering poverty, really struggling to survive from day-to-day. So, he had this great insight of this simple [idea] based on scriptures, just starting community. After Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension, there's like community. They share it all in common, so it's like for him to start community and say, "All are welcome. Everyone's welcome." People started being drawn to that and then it just flourished, to the point where one of the bishops later on said, "You know, all good works can be drawn back to Father Chaminade's Sodality." So that was a big inspiration to me in terms of, "Well, community is really important. It's key."

12:06 - Linda Zappacosta

And Chaminade had that insight to start with the laity. I mean, what are the religious orders, have been established [with the laity first]? Usually, it's the religious orders that get established and then lay associates follow. But in our case, Laity existed from 1816. So, for 16 years, the Lay people were instrumental in helping to rebuild and helping to address the needs of their community. And then the Sisters are established in 1816, and then the Brothers are established because people in the Sodality felt called to a deeper level of commitment.

12:40 - Linda Zappacosta

And now, even through other rough patches and trying times, I mean, look at the fruit of that insight to today where the laity and the religious branches of the Marianist Family are flourishing and growing! Of course, there's challenges always along the way to be more inclusive, to draw in more diversity, to continue to grow in areas of justice and mission. But all this came back to Chaminade, Adèle, Mademoiselle de Lamourous' commitment to living this Marianist charism, this Marianist call in very real ways in the world. To make it real, a lived experience where Jesus has made present through the way we live our lives, to every situation, every day.

13:27 - Brad Leger

I am so appreciative that our paths have crossed and that you are a great friend and mentor to me. And then, the way that the whole Marianist Family has embraced me as well, too. And I'm very grateful that we're having this conversation today, and I hope it will continue for many years to come.

13:46 - Linda Zappacosta

Yes. Likewise, dear brother from another mother.

13:53 Gabby Bibeau

Thank you for listening to this episode of *Sharing Our Marianist Stories*. Before we go, we have a couple of very important announcements to make. First of all, we've heard from many of you how much you've appreciated the Advent meditations, so we will be doing a similar series of meditations for Lent. Come back on Ash Wednesday to see the first episode of that series. Also, sometime in the middle of March, we will be releasing an episode that's about our MSP 2.0 program from last summer. This will be a series of interviews of our program participants. They'll be sharing their reflections on the program, particularly what they've learned about the Five Silences and what resources they've created that you can use too. So, stay tuned for that.

14:45 - Gabby Bibeau

In the meantime, if you've enjoyed this podcast, please tell your friends, and also please subscribe on iTunes, Stitcher, or wherever you like to listen to podcasts. You can also listen to us on our website, www.nacms.org, or on SoundCloud. Thanks again for listening.