

Mary Snyder: What is the Role of the Marianist Family in the Future of the Church and of Society?

[*Editor's note:* Mary, from Cape May, New Jersey, wrote her essay as part of Marianists Write Now!, a NACMS-sponsored writing program held virtually from Friday, June 11 to Saturday, June 12, 2021. Each participant in this session of Marianists Write Now! wrote a personal reflection on the following question: “What is the role of the Marianist Family in the future of the Church and of society?”]

In order to decide the role of the Marianist Family in the future of the Church, I need to discuss certain issues.

I was thinking of how the Church has survived the horrendous issues of sexual abuse among priests. I recently watched the documentary *We Were the Children*, which is about the abuse of indigenous children in Canada from the end of the nineteenth century up until the beginning of the twentieth century. The children were taken from their families at a very young age and sent to schools run by nuns and priests. The children would not see their families until they were teenagers, and they were subjected to many kinds of abuse, including sexual abuse. It is hard for us to imagine such a situation. Nevertheless, it happened.

Then I think of the Marianist setting. I was introduced to the Marianist Founders through the courses of NACMS. The teachings of the Founders are always being repeated in some form or another. Books are written about their teaching, and there are even puppets of the Founders that can be used during presentations.

NACMS is just one example of the dynamic ways Marianists reach out to others. There are many organized groups within the Marianist community.

Of course, we have Marianist priests, religious brothers, and religious sisters. But we also have highly active lay Marianist groups. Here are a few examples: Heart of Mary, Marianist Visitation State Community, and the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative. Plus, there are schools and retreat centers. True, there are not as many as there once were, but we still have some.

People who aren't Marianists see what we do and want to belong. Once they belong, they want more. Community is a huge attraction to newcomers—community and the sense of being a part of that community gives newcomers a sense of belonging. This is very important in the fractured world we live in today.

We are Roman Catholic but different.

Father Quentin Hakenewerth, SM, writes: “The radical change that our Marianist vocation demands is usually gradual and progressive. It is seldom sudden, and it is never violent. It is Mary's way of forming us.”¹ This is such a powerful statement! Our Marianist vocation—radical, gradual, never violent, and Mary's way of forming us. Mary is forming us as our mother formed us when we were young. Mary wants us to be nonviolent, which means no physical or mental abuse.

Brother Stan Zubek, SM, said this morning in his allocutio at a Legion of Mary meeting, “Anything in the way we do ministry that smacks of violence nullifies Jesus' ministry.”

At the beginning of this paper, I wrote of an example of extreme violence among the religious of the Roman Catholic Church toward young children who didn't know what was happening and didn't know how to respond. They were taken advantage of in every way. Father Hakenewerth says Mary wants us to be nonviolent. I like to think that what happened to the young indigenous children would never happen in a Marianist school. There are some who say I am being naive. But I stand my ground. I believe with the teaching of our Founders always being kept alive and always finding new ways of promoting peace and becoming advocates of the poor and marginalized, and through God's help, that would never happen.

A favorite story in the Bible for Marianists is when Mary tells the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” She knew before Jesus that his time had come. A simple part of the wedding, running out of wine,

¹ Quentin Hakenewerth, SM, *A Manual of Marianist Spirituality* (Dayton, OH: 2000), 21.

was important to Mary. Mary is telling us, as Marianists or personally, that everything is important. The neighbor's dog, who is ill, may be just as important as trying to find a way to stop violence in the streets.

All feel welcome in the Marianist community—no matter how young or old.

Father Joseph Stefanelli, SM, quotes Marie Thérèse de Lamourous: "Let us limit ourselves, my good friend, to doing, each of us, what God would wish us to do." "My good friend"—the illegal immigrant trying to start a new life, the person on death row wrongfully accused, divorced people, people of color, gay people. The list goes on. "My good friend"—all mine and God's and Mary's and Joseph's and Jesus' good friends.

The role of our Marianist Family in the future of the Church is to treat everyone as "my good friend." When we find ourselves with someone we don't particularly agree with, say "my good friend" first, then talk. I believe, personally, my role in the Marianist community is to practice just this.