

The View From Here

“It Feels Like Home”

Marianist Brother José Julián Matos-Auffant shares insights from his life as a Marianist brother.

By John Schroeder

It didn't take long for Marianist Brother José Julián Matos-Auffant to feel needed in his assignment at St. Mary's University, a Marianist school in San Antonio. As soon as he arrived on campus this fall, he was “thrown into the maelstrom,” he says. Which is no surprise given that his new job at the university — campus minister for spiritual development — is more like three jobs in one: residence hall ministry, retreat ministry and Hispanic ministry.

“Starting in a new place when lots of things are in motion is complicated, but exciting,” he says. But with more than decade of experience as a high school teacher, counselor and campus minister, the Puerto Rican native is used to taking on high-energy challenges. “I feel I can serve people well here.”

Pivotal moments

Taking a step forward in trust — and finding a fit — is a pattern that has guided Brother José's personal and spiritual development since he was a high school student in the early 1990s. As a junior, he took part in a summer program sponsored by the Archdiocese of San Juan, joining 20 other high school students on a cultural immersion trip to Venezuela. “We assisted the parish priest, teaching catechism in the morning and doing home visits with the poor and elderly in the afternoon. It was a pivotal experience,” he recalls. “That's when I realized that I could do this work for life.”

After graduating from college, he took a position at the archdiocese. That post gave him opportunities to join and lead immersion trips throughout Latin America. One experience left an indelible impression: a trip to Calabozo, Venezuela, where he took a group to minister to native people who scavenged for their food from the city dump. “Though we didn't share the same language, we were amazed how they welcomed us, and how we were transformed by their smiles and gentle spirits.”

It was a gift he wanted to share when he joined the faculty at his alma mater, Colegio San José, a Marianist school in San Juan, in 1999. Along with teaching duties, he organized immersion trips for students to Marianist parishes and missions that served the poor in Puerto Rico. He also found himself being drawn more closely to religious life.

“I was one of three Colegio teachers who rented small apartments on campus,” he says. “It was an intriguing dynamic because the Marianists would invite us to join them for community prayer and daily Mass. The more I shared their daily routine, the more interested I became in discerning a vocation.”

Companions for the journey

The journey reached a significant milestone when he entered the Marianist novitiate in 2009. Already closely connected to the Marianist community at Colegio, he found a new level of spiritual growth and satisfaction by formalizing the relationship. “It has deepened my prayer life,” he says. “The community has helped me become more consistent — learning how to start with prayer, rather than trying to fit it in around my schedule.”

Brother José, who professed first vows in 2011, believes that religious life is important for the witness it provides. “I see great value in being a layperson who lives a Gospel-centered life. I also know that being a brother can inspire others. Students often ask me about my personal journey — and those conversations can help them discern their vocations.”

One thing Brother José has discovered is that good companions help him find his way. “By reflecting on the highlights of my life—the people, the places, the everyday experiences—I get a good sense of where God is leading me,” he says. “Every time I visit a different Marianist community, it feels like home.”

John Schroeder is a freelance writer from St. Louis.

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