The Marianists

FATHER MICHAEL NARTKER
Celebrating 25 years of ordination

Being a formator for 15 years, I have told my vocation story many times to the young African brothers who had joined us each year. As I reflect now on my life and service as a Marianist, I cannot help but remember how I was first called to religious life — *through and to the Marianist community*. Even now, I can see the faces of those brothers and recall some of the names of the brothers who ran the vocation "Come and See" programs more than 30 years ago. It was their community that had attracted me to the Marianist life as well as others who would follow. I believe that God called me to this life through them and continues to speak to me through our shared life together. It is also through community life that I also have served as a Marianist, calling others to live this life of community through my formation work in Africa and now as a priest in a Marianist Parish.

It has been a wonderful life in community with my brothers with its normal joys and challenges, its rhythm of prayer and schedule, its celebrations of seasons and feasts, and the interesting discussions and teasing at our community table and meetings — and much more.

Naturally, it would be impossible within this short reflection, but let me give you a taste of at least one community activity that everyone experiences — our evening meals. In many communities, where the brothers take turns cooking, what a continuous surprise it may be as each one, in his turn, tries his hand at this almost sacred time of fellowship. But it is more than just eating, it is the sharing, the listening and having someone listening to you with interest as to how your day went. And the conversation doesn't end at the table but continues with the cleanup of dishes, and pots and pans. This Marianist ritual keeps our community alive, active and energized. Maybe this is what the apostles experienced with Jesus at their suppers, maybe even the last one. Of course, more than likely, Mary and other women did the cleanup. (We wouldn't get away with that today.)

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