

BEFORE THE BELL



Students Finding Faith and Community

On Friday mornings, something remarkable happens before the first bell even rings. As the Chaminade campus slowly comes to life, hundreds of students make their way to the chapel—not for a required class or obligation, but by choice. They gather for weekly Mass or prayer services organized by Chaminade’s Marianist LIFE Community (MLC), a student-led faith group that has become one of the largest and most vibrant organizations on campus.

“I joined MLC during my freshman year,” says senior Alex Barnes ’26, *“but became a very active member during my junior year.”* At first, his participation was shaped by friendships and admiration for older students. *“The CORE members at the time were people I looked up to and wanted to be more like,”* Barnes explains.

MLC Core Members are juniors and seniors who serve as peer leaders having participated in Marianist LIFE (Living in Faith Experience), a weeklong summer retreat held in Dayton or California that connects students from Marianist schools and parishes across the United States and around the world. Throughout the year, they then continue their formation through retreats and small groups that help them guide their peers with authenticity and care.

For many students, the appeal of MLC lies in the way it creates space for faith without pressure or expectation. *“For me, it is important to have a time dedicated to faith before my day begins as a way to center myself,”* Barnes shares. *“It is a great time to slow down and reflect on the week before.”* Because attendance is completely voluntary, the atmosphere feels different from many other school activities. *“Only the people who want to be there show up,”* he says, *“and this creates a great environment of people who are enthusiastic and excited to share their faith.”*

MLC Moderator Dr. Andrew Schmitt ’95 notes that the current vitality of the program at Chaminade is exceptional. *“Our community has ebbed and flowed in size and design during the last 25 years,”* he explains. *“At this time, it is the largest in size and profile that I have witnessed.”*

The growth of MLC has been striking. This year, nearly 200 students arrive early to attend Friday morning Mass, with regular participation often exceeding 100 students.

“When other students embrace their faith and invite other students to do the same, then the formation in faith is shared—a community is formed—and bonds are created,” states Schmitt.

Those bonds extend beyond Friday mornings, too. Once a month, MLC hosts weekend gatherings, typically on Saturdays, that blend social connection, faith formation, and service as they raise funds for causes such as the Fr. Ralph Siefert Scholarship and Marianist missions in Africa and India. These events—often held at neighboring Our Lady of the Pillar parish—include activities such as cornhole tournaments, trivia nights, and themed discussions.

“The subjects were always important and interesting to discuss, but they weren’t things high school boys would generally talk about at the lunch table,” recalls former MLC member Danny Winkler ’15. The communal meal that followed those discussions was just as important. *“When you’re feeding a bunch of high school boys, typically you’d order a ton of Domino’s pizzas,”* Winkler jokes. *“Mr. Schmitt had a very strict ‘no pizza’ rule. We’d have things like Buffalo Wild Wings or Qdoba.”* While the food helped draw students in, Winkler says many stayed for deeper reasons. *“Sometimes guys just came because of the food—but eventually, a lot of them came for the right reasons.”*

The openness and table fellowship remain a defining feature of MLC today. There are no requirements, no applications, and no expectations beyond showing up. As Barnes points out, that inclusivity sets MLC apart. *“In sports or other clubs, there is a certain skill set required,”* he says. *“But everyone is called to have a relationship with Jesus, and everyone is welcome to join MLC.”*

For many students, the welcoming nature of MLC is what makes it so compelling. *“They are all welcome,”* says Dr. Schmitt. *“There is nothing to sign up for, nothing mandatory to complete. A student needs only to be a Chaminade man.”* The impact of MLC is deeply personal for him. *“My lessons on the French Revolution may not be remembered, and the victories as the C team soccer coach will likely not get me into the Hall of Fame. But my work in growing the faith and the bonds within Chaminade – this is my most significant work. The work that matters most.”*

Looking ahead, the hope for MLC is simple but profound: to continue shaping a culture of kindness, strong faith, and community. *“If we can continue to add to the role of young men who attend MLC,”* Dr. Schmitt says, *“then we will send more Chaminade men into the world with faith as their foundation.”*

For alumni Winkler, his time in MLC at Chaminade set the stage for his university days and beyond. *“I am very fortunate to have been a part of Marianist Leadership Scholars during*

my time at the University of Dayton, which connected me to more Marianists and reconnected me with some I met at LIFE week! I now have that network to lean on. I also have breakfast about once a month with Marianist Bro. Andrew Kosmowski, where we discuss ideas similar to those in MLC.”

That sense of continuity—faith carried forward through relationships—is perhaps the clearest sign of MLC’s lasting impact. What begins as an early-morning decision to arrive at school before the bell becomes, over time, a way of living.

Each Friday morning, as students quietly file into the chapel, a tradition is renewed. It is not marked by announcements or requirements, but by presence—young men choosing to begin their day together in prayer. In those moments before classes, practices, and responsibilities take hold, Chaminade students are forming something enduring. One prayer. One conversation. One community. And a faith that continues long after the bell rings.