

# CATHOLIC? LUTHERAN? MARIANIST? WHAT'S A WOMAN TO DO?

By Maggie Schaller  
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Before I was born, a decision was made on my behalf. Whether this decision would have been different if I had been born different, I don't know. But because of who I am, and when I was born, the decision was made regardless. My Mom, a lifelong Catholic, agreed with my father that I would be raised and baptized Lutheran.

My mother grew up in Reynoldsburg, Ohio just east of Columbus, in a Catholic family of 11. She, along with her six brothers and sister, went to Catholic Mass every week and attended Catholic schools throughout their childhoods. My grandmother still attends the same church my mother and her siblings were raised in and goes nearly every day to Mass. My mother in her professional life prefers to work at Catholic Higher Educational institutions, and often writes and studies their inner workings.

So why, with such a rich familial tradition, would I be raised, and still continue to be Lutheran? The answer for my mother is simple: she wanted me to be a pastor if I wanted to be.

There were other reasons: the Lutheran Church, albeit having historical flaws like any other institution, was and continues to be more LGBTQ+ friendly, and has taken increasingly progressive steps around immigration and refugee support. But primarily my mother wanted to give me a unique gift of choices in my religious and vocational future, allowing the prospects of my spiritual leadership to have a wide variety of avenues as a woman.

For years, my Mother, still a practicing and passionate Catholic, attended our Lutheran Church in Loveland, Ohio throughout my childhood. She was a youth group leader, led mission trips and retreats, and integrated herself in other prayer groups and faith communities within the church. During this time, she also attended the Marianist pilgrimage to Bordeaux and Zaragoza. She would call herself a "Lutheran Catholic" - living someplace in between the two traditions, restless and yet taking the best from each.

I thought my faith story would be simpler-but my story at the University of Dayton took similar twists and turns. There, I could not escape the call from Mary. I gravitated toward and found solace in all of the Marys around campus, namely Mary Seat of Wisdom. She was my rock in the storm, where I would go to celebrate both loss and triumph.

During study abroad opportunities, I fell in love with the Catholic thought leaders who made those places home: St. Francis in Assisi, Mother Teresa in Kolkata, Oscar Romero in San Salvador. And during my junior year, I could no longer avoid the call and became a lay Marianist in the Phoenix Community. I still love my Lutheran identity-I miss the Lutheran Church I attended in Berkeley last year something fierce. But, like my mother, I now live in the in-between. I'd call myself a "Catholic Lutheran" or even better, a "Lutheran Marianist." I am both, and having both sustain me means there is no true home. I am forever a wanderer in my

faith, knowing that I am proud of the choices I've made and the communities I've been lucky enough to learn from.

As we look into not just the next decade ahead for the Marianists, but the next several decades, I think it's important to reflect on the many gifts our faith encompasses. I am grateful to have such a deep well of tradition to use as someone who both needs and wants to radiate compassion and love in our world. I am currently in a public service role-one that is formed by both my Lutheran and Marianist identities. The beautiful gifts of the Marianist spirit can speak to anyone-including those of seemingly different backgrounds and traditions. When we listen to the call, and ultimately echo Mary's "yes"-it matters that we are in the work along with our fellow community members and friends-not what we call ourselves.

I'd like to think my mother agrees.