

Reflections on the Marianist Sisters in Honor of Adele Day
Linda Zappacosta, January 10, 2022

In 1816, the Marianist Sisters were founded by Adele, in collaboration with Fr. Chaminade, with Adele serving as Mother General for 11 years until her death at the tender age of 38. A few years after the foundation she said, “Let us multiply ourselves for the greater glory of God and may the name of the Lord be blessed from East to West, may He be known everywhere, loved by all hearts, and served by all creatures.”

Adele’s vision for her dear Daughters of Mary Immaculate was solidly realized over these 200-some-years for today her Marianist Sisters serve God’s people in 16 countries—crossing the globe, indeed, from East to West. Here in the United States, the Sisters have communities in Dayton, Ohio and San Antonio, Texas. Although their numbers are relatively small, their impact is huge on behalf of God’s people and the building of God’s church. They are committed to various ministries and serve as participants of faith communities, as educators, as campus ministers, retreat leaders, and social justice advocates. They collaborate with lay and religious branches of the Marianist Family at the North American Center for Marianist Studies, the Marianist Environmental Education Center, and the Marianist Family of Mary Council of North America among other ventures or maybe I should say “adventures”.

I just want to highlight the mention of their participation in faith communities. From pre-novitiate formation to beyond final profession, the Sisters emphasize the importance of involvement with Marianist Lay Communities. Their support and participation is considered a given dimension of living Marianist life and is very much appreciated.

All of their ministries flow from a strong foundation of faith and rootedness in the Marianist charism established by Adele, Chaminade, and Mary Terese those many years ago in France. They choose to join Mary in her mission of “taking on” Christ and bearing Jesus to our church and world. As religious they share life in community and give witness to God’s love by their vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, and stability.

From a Lay Marianist’s experience of interacting with the Marianist Sisters for over 50 years, here’s what that means to me:

I see the Marianist Sisters live poverty by their simple lifestyle which says , “Hey, the accumulation of possessions is not the be-all and end-all.” Living simply brings freedom to pay more attention to care of one’s interior life and care of God’s people rather than things. It brings availability for mission and living God’s call. It points to seeking the fullness of God’s reign as primary in one’s life.

I see the Marianist Sisters live chastity by illuminating God’s deep, enduring love for all of us as the “be-all and end-all”. It says, “Hey, married life is wonderful, single life is awesome, and so is a life lived in community with other women dedicated to daily growing in God’s love and loving others as God loves us.” It points to the love of a Triune God—a love so profound that it is made visible through Mary in Jesus and the power of his journey with us from birth to full union with God in heaven.

I see the Marianist Sisters live obedience by their receptivity to the Word of God in their lives. It says, “Hey, my will isn’t first in my life but God’s will is—acknowledging God’s love for me, loving myself,

and loving others—that's my focus." In living this vow the Marianist Sisters say, "Yes", as an echo of Mary's "yes" and call to do whatever he tells you.

I see the Marianist Sisters live stability by their willingness to join in Mary's mission. It says, "Hey, Marianist life touches my spirit and defines who I am—a Daughter of Mary." Stability points to an embrace of the Marianist charism and a vocation to live it in service to God's people. The Sisters not only actualize stability by their daily choices but also give witness to a rock-solid, enduring foundation of the importance of faith, hope, and love in our lives.

I'd also like to say a few words about the Sisters' prayer-lives. Whenever I visit with them, I so look forward to joining them for prayer—morning prayer, evening prayer, Eucharist—because when I go into their chapel, I feel and sense the difference of entering into holy space and time with them. Such a respectful, focused tone is set as we unite in prayer in the presence of our loving God. It is truly a powerful witness. What a privilege it is to pray with them.

Finally, the Marianist Sisters are women of hospitality. Of course, COVID has put a damper on the number of invitations, but under normal circumstances, they regularly host gatherings, events, meetings, and activities at their home with loving energy. Folks from all walks of life are welcome and honored. In living this key element of Marianist life, they are Marianists to the core.

Adele said, "Let us imitate the love of our heavenly Mother and, like her, let us cheerfully render to all our brothers and sisters all the services we can, both for the body and for the soul." The Marianist Sisters live that precept and more. It is a grace to have them among us. Adele's legacy lives on through them—for us.