

PROUD TO BE MARIANIST AND GAY

Brian Halderman - June 2021



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In August of 1995, I walked into Stuart Hall on the campus of the University of Dayton and was greeted at the door by Bro. Tom Pieper, SM. It was a warm welcome to the university and my first taste of Marianist hospitality. Bro. Tom invited me to participate in the campus ministry program at Stuart Hall, which I responded to with much enthusiasm. As I reflect back on my time at the university and all the personal and professional growth that occurred, I marvel and give thanks. It was during these four years that I came to terms with my sexual orientation and found a loving and supportive community in campus ministry and beyond. The simple welcome and invitation of Bro. Tom was more than an effort to engage me in campus programs during my first year at UD. It was an invitation to something much deeper, to a charism and community that has shaped and molded me over the past 26 years.

Over these years, I have been fortunate to know many Marianist lay and religious and to travel to visit the Marianist family in many places domestically and internationally. Having steeped myself in the charism, I participated in religious and lay communities, and found ways to extend a pastoral welcome, as Bro. Tom did, through various works of ministry paid and unpaid.

Since I first stepped foot on the campus at the University of Dayton, I have navigated the intersectionality of my sexuality and spirituality. I have come to know and love who I am as God's divine creation. I have learned to be open and out as a gay man in the Church and Marianist Family. I have connected with others who share similar journeys and have found a space to share Mary's warmth and welcome through the LGBT Initiative of the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative. The initiative has grown to be an impactful pastoral outreach to LGBT Catholics and their families within the Marianist Family and the broader Church. I am certain the founders would be very proud.

You might be surprised to learn that our pastoral care and concern for LGBT individuals and their families did not originate with the Initiative. In June of 1974, Fr. Norb Brockman, SM, then director of Bergamo retreat center in Dayton, Ohio, hosted a conference entitled "The Gay Christian." It has since become known as "The Bergamo Conference" and considered a watershed moment for pastoral outreach and ministry with LGBT Catholics. Significant leaders in both the faith community and the larger civil gay rights movement of the time were in attendance. A sample of the presentations included the morality of homosexuality, pastoral counseling, and Church policy. Thanks to the help of Bro. Brian Zampier, SM, at the Marianist archives, we were able to gather notes, articles, agendas, brochures and other artifacts to paste together the history of this significant moment. We learned that the conference was hosted for two additional summers through 1976 and that it led to the development, or further development,

of what grew into national ministerial efforts for LGBT Catholics and their families. The LGBT initiative team is exploring hosting an event in the summer of 2024 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of this important event in the life of the Church and LGBT movement.

As we mark another Pride Month, I am proud to be Marianist and Gay. It's here that I have experienced Mary's warm welcome and a community that celebrates me as I am. Don't ever forget the importance of an invitation, Thanks Bro. Tom!

Note - You might want to watch this short video by Fr. James Martin -

<https://fb.watch/66xqOMjUV4/> - about why it's OK for Catholics to celebrate Pride Month.