

Life of a Marist Brother: The Construction of Religious Profession

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ABSTRACT

The life of a Marist Brother has always been a mystery. The main purpose of this study was to determine the motivations, struggles, and coping mechanisms used by a Marist Brother in his religious profession. The study implored a qualitative method using a biographical qualitative design as its research design. A semi-structured interview guide following the interview protocol refinement of Montoya (2016) was used to gather the data. Cresswell's thematic analysis was used for the data analysis. The results revealed that the motivation of a Marist Brother involved heeding the calling of God. Further, the Marist Brother dealt with problems such that of temptations and a lack of career fulfillment, which can lead to moral failure and a loss of enthusiasm for their area of work. The Marist Brother's contact with children and young people, as well as their religious authority, provided coping mechanisms to continue their religious careers. To put light on its importance, the Marist Brother perfects the notion that living with a religious profession help illuminate the calling for more religious to partake in service of God and humanity.

Keywords: motivations, struggles, coping mechanism, Marist Brother, religious profession

INTRODUCTION

As religious sectors have helped shaped moral values among people, it is always taxing to put into light the experiences of these religious sectors in the making of their profession. Among the many few are the French-originated brothers of the Philippines, Marist Brothers, which was established in 1817 by St. Marcellin Champagnat with the intention of educating the youth, particularly the most neglected ones. The Marist Brothers of the Schools (FMS), also referred to as the Marist Brothers, are a group of men who have dedicated their lives to Christian education around the world through operating Catholic schools or in other ways for the upbringing and direction of young people. Marist Brothers are men who dedicate themselves to God by their vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The duties of the religious sectors are to treat people as a brother, just as Jesus did. They are a group of people who spend their lives educating children and young people in a broad spectrum of situations, with a preference for the most neglected (National Academic Press, 2010).

In a global context, round 2,500 brothers live in 79 countries across 5 continents. They work directly with about 72,000 lay individuals and serve nearly 654,000 children and young people. Hank Hammer, an international Marist Brother, is the head of the Marist High School in Chicago who served as a teacher, provincial vocation director, director of evangelization, assistant provincial, academic dean, and principal. In a memoir written by Madlener (2015) of the aforementioned Brother, it was emphasized the wonderful 40-year service of the Brother in his personal life. It was underscored as the most fulfilling and significant life-changing decision he had as he immersed himself in different vocational and religious works.

To further the light of the Marist Brothers, they have immersed greatly in rearing the young following the mantra of the founder, “In order to educate the children, we must love them first and love them equally.” The Marist Brothers in the Philippines had established a greater presence in the life of the young in the Metro Manila and Mindanao areas. The cities of Marikina in Metro Manila, and Kidapawan, Koronadal, Cotabato, General Santos, and Jolo in Mindanao cemented the presence of the Marist Brothers. They are administrators of four elementary schools, seven high schools, and five colleges and universities. It was also noted that the Marist Brothers have encouraged youngster in different regions to partake in the religious profession such that of the presence of training camps like Aspirancy in Lagao, General Santos City, the novitiate in Tamontaka, Cotabato City, and the Scholasticate in Marikina, Metro Manila.

In the local context, according to the article posted in NDMU (2008), it was 1948 when four pioneering American Brothers arrived in the area and established the Marist mission in Cotabato. An article in the book “Daring in Hope, Fifty Years of Marist Presence in the Philippines” explained how the American Brothers arrived in the Philippines and eventually established Marist schools, as well as Marist Brothers. Curious enough, the Philippine Marist Brothers commemorated their diamond jubilee (75 years) in 2023. Bro. Fernando “Pop” Armendez, FMS is the oldest of the Filipino Marist Brothers and one of the first to be sent to the United States for training. He received an award from Regional Director of Department of Education Dr. Allan Farnazo at the opening of the Marist Presence in the Philippines on June 25, 2008.

Based on the stated history, the researchers wanted to have a thorough grasp of a Marist Brother’s journey such as motivations, challenges, and coping mechanisms in their religious profession. Recognizing the biography of a Marist Brother will help in the understanding of why and how a young man chooses to devote his entire life to a career in religion. As a result, the researchers conducted this study to fully comprehend the motivations behind the individual’s choice to become Marist Brother.

Objectives

This study aimed to determine the experiences and journey of a Marist Brother in his religious profession. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the motivations of a Marist Brother in his religious profession?
2. What are the struggles of a Marist Brother in his religious profession?
3. What are the coping mechanisms of a Marist Brother in his religious profession?

Scope and Limitation

In this qualitative study, it focused on the journey and experiences of a Marist Brother in his religious profession. This investigation will take place in a private school where the Marist Brothers run. This study was conducted in the traditional or face- to-face manner. One (1) Marist Brother with at least five years of Marist Brother experience was the participant in this study. The researchers adhered to an interview protocol prior to the interviews.

METHODOLOGY

The study design employed by researchers was the biographical qualitative design. A biographical approach tailored-fit to the needed study since it narrated and described the becoming of a Marist Brother which concentrated on that specific individual’s experiences, struggles, coping mechanisms, and motivation of his religious profession process. Melville (2016) pointed out that the design combines biographical, structural, and political aspects of an individual’s course of life. Also, the design combined the use of biographical approach centered on the lived experiences of the participant.

This study was conducted at Koronadal City, South Cotabato. In accordance to the notion of proximity, the researchers selected this location to interview a Marist Brother because there is a well-established institution from which the Marist Brothers have administered for 75 years. It is a leading Catholic private institution from which the Marist Brothers have established since 1947. The participant of the study was a Marist Brother. Since the biographical approach required single participant, the study made use of purposive sampling technique in which the selection of the participant is based on an inclusion criterion. In order to select the participant for biographical research, the purposive sampling, also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling was used by the researchers. It is a type of non-probability sampling in which researchers selected the participants based on a predetermined inclusion criterion. As expressed by Alchmer (2018), the selection of the participant had undergone a strict satisfaction based on the filtration process. As a result, the participant qualified as a Marist Brother serving for more than 10 years who had professed their religious profession to the vocation of the Brotherhood.

A semi-structured interview was used to conduct the study following a key-informant interview. In a semi-structured interview, researchers asked the participant series of open-ended questions. Furthermore, the researchers conducted a semi structured interview via face-to-face. It is the most widely used technique of conducting primary research, which has the advantage of the interviewer being present, making it easier for the participant to either clarify responses or request clarifications in any questionnaire. Furthermore, Montoya's (2016) interview protocol refinement (IPR) process was used to refine the interview guide questions.

In the conduct of the study, the researchers underwent the following processes, a proposal letter was crafted to seek the approval to conduct the study. Followed by making interview guide questions and the researchers made consultations with the validators of the study. After this, the researchers searched for the possible participant who tailor-fit to the criteria. The researchers send a consent form to the participant and when confirmed, the researchers then proceeded to the actual interview. In collecting the data, the researchers considered the data to be used solely for the research study and certainly not for other purposes.

The researchers strictly followed the guidelines for developing the interview guide. The participant was in agreement to let the researchers record the interview. The researchers guaranteed that no personal or sensitive information is contained in the interview guide. The researchers also ensured that the participant's identity was protected by using code name. In this manner the identity of the participant will not be made public, and their responses to the interview questions will not be made public, displayed, or used for anything other than academic purposes. The study conformed on trustworthiness, dependability, transferability, and confirmability on the ethics of research.

In this study, the researchers employed thematic analysis. Creswell's thematic analysis was chosen by the researchers as it catered to various epistemologies, research questions, and methods for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set (Braun & Clark, 2006); Boyatzis (1998) described thematic analysis as a translator for those speaking qualitative analysis languages, allowing researchers who use different research methods to communicate with one another. Furthermore, according to Creswell (2014), it is a systematic data coding process in which specific statements are analyzed and classified into themes that represent the phenomenon of interest.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Motivations of a Marist Brother

Calling from God One major theme which emerged from the analysis is the calling from God. This theme

centered on the participant's religious faith towards his vocation as a Marist Brother. Compelled by the ideologies of Jackson (2021), "God does not seek the most talented, intellectual, or famous people by worldly criteria. He calls those who would walk in the Spirit rather than the flesh." It is believed that God's calling is a powerful strength towards spiritual wellness. Puchalski (2001) explained this as an aspect of spirituality. It is a command in one's life that frames the personhood in the image of God (Holland, 2020). This was evident when the participant said, "I strongly believe that God called me to be a Marist Brother." To underscore, calling is not only for work. God calls people to become united with themselves in every aspect of life (Theology of Work, 2010).

Emulating Service to Youth

Education is integral to the life of the Christian church, just as it has been to the Hebrew nation. Fried (2001) reiterated that more knowledgeable others such as teachers and religious are someone who are deeply enthused about concepts that are changing our world, in love with the subject matter they teach, and who is keenly interested in the potential and struggles of the young people who attend their classes every day. Wagener, et al (2003) revealed that religious involvement is directly associated with variety of positive developmental outcomes such that of the service to others. Charged with the instruction and formation of others in religious doctrine and practice, the religion teacher differs from other teachers not simply in the subject with which the teaching is concerned, but also by possession of a particular charism from God and a derivative authority in the religious assembly (Religion, Teacher of Encyclopedia.com, 2023). In addition to that, Baumfield (2015) stated that a religious education must be honest and transparent which was seconded by the response of the participant, "Leaving with the young gives me hope and truth in my religious vocation."

2. Challenges of a Marist Brother

Temptations Like other religious affiliates, Marist Brothers also face moral temptations that can lead to spiritual failure and feelings of guilt and shame (Coe, 2008). This temptation includes sexual temptations such as engaging in pornography and having sexual partners (Oldenkamp, 2018; Rockenbach, 2020), selfishness (Oakley, 2017), and trivializing the importance of disagreement (Cordella-Bontrager, 2017). Religious priests, nuns, and brothers have difficulty with the structured life in the seminary or convent and in the process. They experienced temptations to deviate from the structure. This temptation includes going out at night, drinking, struggling for independence, craving more food, laziness, and not exerting effort in studying (Napanan, Canoy, Mahinay, & Villaflor, 2022). To put emphasis, the participant accepts the notion that almost all experience this phenomenon regardless of religious or secular practices. "... experiencing temptations is not the most religious way of leaving a Marist life..."

Lost of Fulfillment in one's Vocation "Eating is to appetite just as so vocation is to Marist life." Religious formation and the process of being a Marist Brother includes a long process of discernment. The religious, as well as the Marist Brothers, reflect on the path that is really for them while in the process and the seminary. There are instances when their actions in the seminary are no longer following their vocation. At times, worldly actions do not speak of the vocation of the religious. Napanan, Canoy, Mahinay, and Villaflor (2022) noted that there are times, religious felt tired of doing their usual activities involving their community engagement. A challenge greatly expressed by the participant is the losing of religious vocation because of too worldly circumstances affecting their religious life. In a 2020 study on Recent Vocations to Religious Life by Sr. Deborah Borneman, it laid out its major finding as the endless calling and appeal to religious vocation is intergenerational-culturally attributed to lifestyles and outlooks of religious. Hence, it can be subsumed that the more immerse a religious is in the community the more they lose their vocation in one's religious life.

3. Coping Mechanism of a Marist Brother Seeking Divine Providence

The presence of fellow Marist Brothers, formators, and spiritual directors also enriches the social support of the Marist Brothers in times of crisis. Through this support, they made adjustments and found ways to address the challenges (Naparan, Canoy, Mahinay, & Villaflor, 2022). In a nutshell, it was revealed by the participant that the divine guidance of God has boosted his vocation in great state. The Catechism of Catholic Church, defines divine as “the dispositions by which God guides his creation toward this perfection” (ccc 302). Thus, it can be explained that the divine providence in a religious life has refurbished the vocational experiences of a religious. From the response of the participant, it was beflowered that the divine providence has given inspiration to the life of his prophetic well-being.

Isolation

Isolation pervades life on an intrapersonal, interpersonal, and existential level; every individual, to differing degrees, experiences this phenomenon at various stages of development. Persistent social isolation has been linked to increased mortality rates, mental health concerns, and cardiovascular issues, according to research (Psychiatr, 2021). This was evident when the participant said that he chooses to be alone, he does not speak to his brothers until 15 days, he eats too much and he does not speak on the table, as a coping mechanism to his struggles. Another effective coping strategy for seminarians while inside the seminary is their constant practice of prayer and reflection. When faced with different temptations in the seminary formation like material things and intimacy-related temptations, the seminarians were always prayerful and reflective (Bansawan et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

The conclusions of the study indicated that a life of a Marist brother is not simple since they require inspiration to maintain their vocation, strive to achieve it, and needs means of coping to deal with the difficulties and issues they face. The study’s findings were able to confirm that a life of a Marist Brother involves more than just being a Marist Brother; it also involves answering the calling of God and meeting the challenge of being obedient to God. He has encountered challenges, including temptations and lack of career fulfillment. Overcoming temptation is difficult, especially if one is engaged in religion as profession. Doing so might result in moral failure and would cause finding oneself guilty and embarrassed. Lack of motivation as a Marist brother results in lack of enthusiasm of the profession. It is common to feel as fading out or quitting, but when one is driven, it follows through that motivation is driven in a route to divine providence. Also, it is subsumed that communication with spiritual director or higher-up for guidance and isolation in addition to praying to get through their difficulties or challenges. The results of the study explained the life of the becoming of a Marist Brother in vow of his religious profession. It can be concluded that the life of Marists and other religious are almost the same with everyone though faced with challenges that are different from what is expected from them.

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