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Marianist brothers' vows a reminder of the joy of religious life

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NCR Today

This past weekend, I was reminded of the importance of joy in our life and the importance of joy in our church. My husband and I traveled to Dayton, Ohio, to attend the first vows ceremony of four new Marianist brothers: Brothers Hugo Bastida, Norman Capinpin, Michael Chiuri and Brandon Paluch. They were surrounded by their brothers in the Society of Mary, the Daughters of Mary Immaculate (Marianist sisters), members of Marianist Lay Communities, family and friends.

The ceremony reflected the international diversity of the new brothers. The blowing of the conch shell and Hawaiian chants called us all to worship. Two *kahili* (traditional feather stands of honor) lead the entrance procession. Vows were professed in English, Spanish and Kiswahili.

In the homily, Marianist Fr. Patrick Tonry spoke passionately and lovingly about the prophetic nature of religious life. Throughout history, religious congregations were founded to ensure that the church "stayed on track" or to challenge her to "get back on track".

He spoke of the positive nature of poverty and chastity. Poverty is more than not having. It means sharing all that we have. Chastity is more than giving up sex. It is making oneself available to love all. Obedience, according to 78-year-old Fr. Pat, is the one that "pinches," and pinches ever harder as one gets older and more set in their ways.

Trumpets, flutes and glorious voices soared to the rafters in joyous song. The energy of the community was heard in heartfelt responses and promises to support the new brothers in their journey.

The joy continued and grew during the celebratory dinner. Laughter abounded in speeches and toasts.

Hearts were touched as excerpts of the novice letters were read out loud. These letters, requesting permission to be formally admitted into the Society of Mary, gave us a window into the souls of four 21st-century men who are willing to give their lives to God and Mary in service of the church and the world. Wearing no distinctive garb, they will be sent where the need is the greatest.

Blessed William Joseph Chaminade spoke of rebuilding the church in post-revolutionary France by forming communities that would be a "joyful spectacle of saints" who would spread the faith by "contagion." When joy and goodness abounds, others notice and "want what they have."

This is more than a Pollyanna-type of giddy happiness. We know emotions are fickle. It is the deep joy in responding wholeheartedly to the good news of the Gospel. It is the joy in knowing and loving Jesus and wanting to show that love in action. It is the joy of being part of a community that prays with you, nurtures you, forms you and sends you out in mission to bring Jesus into a world that is hungering and thirsting for justice and peace.

Is this not what the new evangelization should be about?

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