

Which Way Religious Life? An Interview with Brother Maiki Kamauoha, ssc, in the midst of his "Pastoral Year".

By Fr. David Lupo, ssc

"Is religious life headed for oblivion? I hardly think so, not if we look beyond the surface to deeper signs of vitality. Religious life has been around for more than thirteen centuries. As long as a God who ever makes things new plants seeds of the call to radical discipleship in the hearts and minds of persons who are generous enough to respond[,] it will continue."

Sr. Anne Munley, IHM (Call to Growth/Ministry Summer 1988)

My name is Michael Kamauoha, many people call me Maiki (pronounced Mikey). I am of Hawaiian and Filipino descent. I come from a family of six, two sisters and a brother. I grew up in Hawai'i on the island of O'ahu. I began my journey with the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts in February of 2012. I have been in various parts of our province for different stages of my initial formation, currently I am in Fairhaven, Massachusetts, at St. Joseph's Parish, on what is called a pastoral year. After professing temporary vows, I began my studies at Chaminade university, HI and then Holy Name University, CA working toward a bachelor's in philosophy. Later I entered the Pacific Regional Seminary, in Suva Fiji. I professed perpetual vow in November 2016. I am currently in the 5th year of seminary studies which is the pastoral year. I arrived in Massachusetts in the last days of December 2019. Prior to the suspension of serves and ministries due to Covid 19, I was involved in most of the parish ministries from Faith formation to Bereavement; I helped Fr Stephen Banjare, ssc, on hospital and care home visits; I volunteered at St Luke hospital as an extraordinary minister of the Eucharist, while takes time to visit parishioners; I volunteered for a short time at a food pantry in New Bedford. Since some of the Covid 19 restrictions have been lifted. I assist in liturgical celebration and in the few ministries that have started again, like baptism preparation.



Q. Br. Maiki, here you are, away from Hawaii. doing ministry in the time of Coronavirus, with a religious community, the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts. Do you believe that Religious Life is headed for oblivion, destined to fail, or lose importance, in modern America?

A. I believe modern America is in dire need for people who try to live a selfless life, who live the love of God, who teach by example and call others a life of holiness. It is my hope that Religious life not be headed for oblivion or destined to fail, but on the contrary be a beacon of holiness.

Q. I second that! As you probably know, vocations to religious life do not come in the numbers that they did some years ago. Still you have hope in you. What feeds that hope?

A. Well, I see the need in society for conversion. Reason tells me I cannot be alone in recognizing the need. I have faith God will call those who also see the need, to be beacons of light and holiness in a darkening world.



Q. What was family life like? Did your parents instill the faith in you?

A. I have been blessed. I grew up in a loving home, where faith was important to my parents. I have been fortunate to be in environments where people were willing to teach me, explain to me, why we did what we did as Catholics. The religious education director at St Michael, Priscilla Tampon was especially instrumental in my early faith development.

Q. And you have continued exploring your faith in theology studies in Suva, Fiji, at the Pontifical Regional Seminary. Have these high-learning classes enhanced your faith, or is it becoming too head-oriented?

A. I think my studies have enhanced my faith; I think about faith seeking reason when trying to keep a balance

Q. So, religious life is alive and doing well in the south Pacific? Are there many communities represented at the school? The Marists?

A. Religious life is very much so alive in the Pacific. There are 7 different religious communities, with students studying at PRS along with the seminarians from 7 different dioceses. Yes, the Society of Mary (SM) is there along with the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC), the Salesians of Don Bosco (SDB), the Missionary Society of St. Columban (SSC), the Congregation of the Mission (CM), and us, the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts (SSCC). We also have a few sisters from the Sisters of Our Lady of Nazareth (SOLN). The Society of Jesus (SJ) are also a part of the school, they have no students, they are part of the faculty.

Q. Religious life is well in Hawaii, also. I was working there, on Oahu during the Year of Consecrated Life. I got to speak about it at several churches across the islands. Did you look at any religious community other than ours?

A. I did not look into any other religious community, I knew about the others, but prior to being invited to join the Sacred Hearts, I was unaware God was calling me to Religious life. I thought I would have a career in finance.

Q. Shhh, we will make you Treasurer at some point! Haha! Anyhow, have you noticed that Religious community members are hard to find? Moreso here in the eastern US than in Hawaii, Religious are hard to find. It seems we are too bound down in our rectories, apartments or convents. Have you noticed this?

A. I agree that Religious are hard to find, but I have found some, however only through mutual ministries that we are involved in. I think we need to start in our parishes, where the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few, promoting and developing disciples and evangelist who will help with the mission of the church. When parishes are alive and well, reaching out into their community, the religious who serve in the mission there are visible and recognizable.

Q. Hmm. Yes. In Hawaii, can parishioners differentiate between diocesan priests and religious priests? Our Congregation brought Catholicism to Hawaii. so maybe we are more pungent there as Sacred Hearts. It is more of a problem here.

A. I'm not sure if people in general can differentiate a diocesan priest from a Religious. The Catholics I know in Hawaii are usually very active, and I believe they know the difference. But Hawaii is probably the same as here in that the "average catholic" wouldn't probably know.

Q. It seems, then, as you say, we need to do a lot more in our parishes. First, let them know (if they don't) that we are from an apostolic religious community. It seems parish work can be a hard place to make a difference. What other ministries would you like to see us carry our charism into?

A. I read a book called Great Catholic Parishes: A Living Mosaic - How Four Essential Practices Make Them Thrive by William E. Simon, which surveyed a few hundred parishes, and found that those parishes that are thriving share four characteristics--*vibrant parishes share leadership; foster spiritual growth and plan for discipleship; provide great Sunday experiences; and face outward (evangelization)*. I think until our parishes model this, people won't be receptive to know who we are, let alone be interested in vocations. I'm not sure where we should carry our charism next, but in the meantime, we could work on making our charism known where we are.

Q. That is some line-up! We would have our work cut at St. Mary's. Are you reading anything else--spiritual or otherwise--that is also interesting?

A. I just started reading the novel Archangel by Sharon Shinn. It's a fantasy novel with angels and mortals living together.

Q. What has bolstered your spiritual life in living as a Religious? The Rosary? Centering Prayer?

A. What has bolstered my life as a religious would be a kind of centering prayer, where I try to silence the noise of life, so as to hear more clearly the needs of the world to bring to God... then trying to silence the noise of life to recharge for the mission ahead. Reflection, and meditation prayer.

Q. How has this Coronavirus pandemic impacted the ministries that you're involved in?

A. Covid-19 has greatly reduced my ministry. Potential opportunities for me to serve and learn have been postponed or canceled. I'm doing a lot less than I anticipated doing. However, I've learned through religious life, things don't always turn out how we planned. God has the final say.

Q. Well, here you have the final say. Any last words, thoughts or advice to young religious?

A. Try to surrender the self and live according to God's will for your life. It's hard, but a worthwhile and fruitful endeavor.

Thank you, Br. Maiki!

