

# MARIANIST SPIRITUALITY AND MARIANIST EDUCATION

## **Marianist Spirituality**

The characteristics of Marianist education take their distinctive form from Marianist spirituality. Blessed Chaminade spent part of the French Revolution in exile in Saragossa, Spain, where he passed many hours in prayer and contemplation at the shrine of Our Lady of the Pillar. Guided by God's spirit, he envisioned innovative missionary strategies that the signs of the time were urgently demanding.

Upon his return to Bordeaux, France, Chaminade's sense of urgency led him to form a diversity of apostolic communities inspired by Mary: first, lay communities, then two religious congregations—the Daughters of Mary Immaculate and the Society of Mary—and finally, schools, teacher formation and other educational institutions. This work took many years. It was guided by and at the same time helped to shape a deepening, distinctively Marianist spirituality. All subsequent Marianist educational work has been inspired by this spirituality with its three characteristic dimensions: a spirit of Marian faith, the building of communities of faith, and a deep sense of mission.

Marian faith, for Chaminade, was faith of the heart as well as of an intellectual assent, a faith so deep that, like Mary's, it could conceive and give birth to Jesus. Mary, in her assent, embodies the openness to and cooperation with the action of the Holy Spirit that is at the center of Christian faith. Inspired by the Spirit, Mary brings Jesus into the world, dramatically showing us that with God all things are possible.

Secondly, Chaminade knew that transforming the social order required the action not just of individuals, but of many people working together with a common mission. For Chaminade, communities of faith were the natural embodiment of a vibrant Christianity. He frequently cited the example of the first Christians who held everything in common, prayed, and broke bread together. And as Mary, first of believers, gathered in prayer with the apostles in the upper room and gave birth to the Church, so she stills stands at the center of all Marianist communities of faith.

Thirdly, Blessed Chaminade worked to infuse these communities of faith with a deep sense of mission. Faced with the devastation of the Revolution, Marianist communities of faith aimed at nothing less than rebuilding the Church. Religious and lay, men and women, wealthy and poor they came together and looked to Mary for inspiration in their great task. Mary, who formed Jesus for His mission, who despite her great faith had to ponder many things she did not fully understand, who despite an uncertain future uttered her *fiat*—this same Mary will form us, Chaminade believed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to become like Jesus for the sake of others. The person and influence of Mary is a distinguishing thread woven throughout the entire fabric of Marianist spirituality.

## **Spirituality and Education**

Marianist spirituality deeply shapes the work of those educators formed through it. The spirit of faith, for example, helps a teacher to be truly present to students not only to teach them but also love and respect them, created as they are in the image of God. When an educator is truly present to students, students are changed. An educator personally transformed through a faith of the heart teaches students to be not only competent and capable, but also faithful and compassionate. For Marianist educators, a solid grasp of subject matter and effective, creative instructional methodologies are congruent with and necessarily complemented by a living awareness of the inescapable moral and spiritual dimensions of education.

Chaminade intended the educational works he founded to be not merely functional and temporary communities, but enduring communities of faith. To bring and hold these communities together, Chaminade held up the ideal of “family spirit” of religious and lay persons, faculty and students, working together to achieve lasting relationships of friendship and trust, supporting and challenging each other in developing their mutual gifts. If a school is to be a community of faith, Chaminade saw clearly that its leaders, religious and lay, must see their work not merely as a job but as a ministry of love and service.

Marianist spirituality calls for communities of faith to exist not simply for the sake of their members, but to share in the Marianist deep commitment to mission. Marianist school communities not only commit themselves to effective education and mutual support, but encourage teachers and students alike to emulate Jesus in love and service to others. Virtue is impossible without some knowledge; but, unfortunately, even a great deal of knowledge can exist without virtue. Marianist educators aim to combine both valuable knowledge and genuine virtue.

Marianist educators define success distinctively—rejoicing when their students are faithful to the spirit of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, exemplify joy and courage in witnessing to that Gospel, form communities of faith resonant with the vibrancy of early Christianity, and use their knowledge and competence to serve and transform society.

Marianist educators impart knowledge for the sake of life and teach students to love freedom for the sake of service, sow seeds that will bear fruit for generations, and prepare the ground in which can grow a pervasive culture of life, of peace and of love. A daunting task, but our lives and school communities strive to witness to the hopes of its possibility. Education in the Marianist tradition meets the needs of our times with a deep Marian faith forged in communities with a mission that effectively manifests the Good News of God’s love, mercy, and justice.

The characteristics of a Marianist education are a gift to the Marianist educational community, but they also present us with a task. We receive the gift and undertake the task in solidarity with the whole human family.

The common elements of Marianist education calls us to work toward “the enrichment of culture and the transformation of society in accord with the message of salvation.” (Marianist, Rule of Life, 72). The call, if heard, will summon forth our best efforts and bring us eventually, the joyful and satisfying knowledge that the world is better because we have worked together. In this missionary spirit, we strive to:

- Educate for formation in faith
- Provide an integral, quality education
- Educate in family spirit
- Education for service, justice, and peace
- Educate for adaptation and change

If these characteristics of Marianist education are to be authentic blessings, locally and globally, they must be more than a momentary flash of light in the shadows of the present times. The present elaboration is not an ending but a critical moment in the journey toward our origins. The gracious promise in these characteristics will endure, we believe, because they rest on the solid foundation of Marianist spirituality: faith, community, and mission animated by Mary’s cooperation with the Spirit of God.

The orientation and dynamism of these characteristics are a complement to the competence, collaboration, and generosity of lay and religious educators in Marianist schools, universities and other centers. The testimony of gifted people united mind, heart, and action, with a long term commitment to education will make a difference for the world in which we live.

A world of hopes and dreams strongly pulls us to this costly venture of living out the promise of the Characteristics of Marianist Education. It is a venture that may require more than we may think we can or perhaps want to give. But we have a tradition of giving more. In 1839, Chaminade wrote that “we too have been called, as we believe, by Mary herself, to assist her with all our might in the struggle . . . of our times.” We, in the tradition of Marianist education throughout the world, are called by Mary to fill these times with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

(Taken from CHARACTERISTICS OF MARIANIST EDUCATION, Office of Education – General Administration. Dayton, OH: Marianist Press, 1996. Pp. 10-14).

