



## A Reflection on the Bicentenary of Marianist Education

By

*Rudy Vela, S.M., Assistant Professor of Theology at St. Mary's University, San Antonio*

This semester, I have had the privilege of teaching a Marianist Studies course to upper division undergraduate students here at St. Mary's University. I have enjoyed my students and discovered that they are thirsty for learning about Blessed Chaminade, his context and his vision for a Marian way of life in the Church. I teach this course tapping my passion for sharing the many moments and events that marked our founder's tenacious quest for creating the person that never dies. This insight has exciting Christological overtones but Chaminade's ability to gather people and instruct them in their faith is what has inspired my Marianist journey during these 47 years.

I am surprised to discover that in 1839, only 22 years after our foundation, Pope Gregory XVI granted the Society of Mary a *decretum laudis*. This is an official decree of praise acknowledging our dedication to teaching the faith. I take pride in using this information because this decree illuminates for me the historical and current privileged nature of our educational apostolate. Chaminade had the genius to recognize that teaching had to be the primary means for developing faith. The teaching ministry help refound and reform the church after a revolution and the little society dedicated its energy to educating and forming people in their faith. The Church in the time of Chaminade recognized his creativity in forming networks of teachers' schools and lay leadership to foster and direct this ambitious initiative.

Today, more than two hundred years later, our international outreach as educators continues. I feel good about what I am doing as a University professor of theology. In some simple way, I now see myself contributing and fostering our long-standing mission as educators. This is my vocation, and in some ways this is what makes me feel Marianist. I share with my students the beauty of our foundation and, at the same time, I discover the pride that is connected in doing this sharing, this teaching. I delight that students can perceive my pride and joy as I address our history and the magnificent nature of our collective global educational endeavors. I find grace in this saying of Blessed Chaminade:

“Ours is a work, a magnificent work. If it is universal, it is because we are missionaries of Mary, who has said to us, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’ Each one of us has received from the Blessed Virgin a commission to work at the salvation of our brothers and sisters in the world.”

I can own up to what our founder has said about our work being magnificent. But I would like to amend his saying by enhancing that my work is a vocation, a magnificent Marianist vocation. It is universal, because I have been and continue to be a missionary who loves Mary. The challenge for me is to continue embracing and delighting in this truth.

My hope for our future is that we take seriously our mission of being competent as intercultural educators. Not just sensitive, but practitioners of welcoming and educating our family for the development of a “global citizenship.” Our Family of Mary needs to embrace a culture that is developing competency and ability to targeted knowledge, skills and attitude, reading the signs of the times, that lead to visible behavior and

communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions. I believe this will make our work a magnificent work.

Be of joy!

Rudy