



The Marianists

Marianist Education: The Challenge of Rebuilding the Church and Society

By Bro. Raymond L. Fitz, S.M., Ph.D.

When I came the Novitiate 60 years ago, I wanted to make a difference for people that were suffering. During my formation, I had the opportunity to combine liberal arts studies with electrical engineering. During these years of formation, the Marianist charism began to grow in my heart, especially the way Fr. Chaminade responded to religious indifference at the time of the French Revolution. The lectures and studies of Fr. William Ferree provided a lens to a fuller understanding of the charism and its relation to social justice. Even as a graduate student in electrical engineering, this concern for our Marianist charism and social justice continued to grow. In August, I celebrated with deep gratitude, 50 years at the University of Dayton. These 50 years provided an exciting opportunity to bring the Marianist charism and social justice to the University of Dayton.

Fr. Chaminade saw education as an important means for rebuilding the Church in Post-Revolutionary France. Educational institutions, animated by the Marianist charism, would provide a means of nurturing the faith of students by inviting them to follow Jesus Christ, Son of Mary, and to be part of a missionary movement, the Family of Mary. My hope for the future is that we as Marianist educators grow in our capacity to educate students in the same missionary faith and invite them to become part of the Marianist Family that is a catalyst and partner in for peace, justice, and the integrity of creation.

In a society of growing inequality, our students must become agents of justice. This will demand that they are able to integrate a life of deep faith with the best of human knowledge and professional practice. In our work of education, learning in the domains of knowledge and professional practice takes place in dialogue with the Catholic intellectual tradition. This integrated learning enables our students to develop the skills of ethical and moral discernment necessary to be an agent of justice.

In a society characterized by growing isolation and alienation, our students must become builders of community. I believe the Marian dimension of our education tradition helps us see the importance of relationships and the building of community. Human agency allows us to be artisans in creating a more just and peaceful world. Yet, our capability for human agency comes from the gifts we receive in a multitude of relationships throughout our life. As we challenge our students to grow in human agency, we must also challenge them to be servant leaders, to be persons who are capable of caring relationships and the weavers of community.

Our society and Church is growing in polarization and in a culture of contempt. We shout our conclusions at one another and the most important rhetorical skill has become ways to denigrate those that are different. We have lost the ability of seeing the human dignity, the image of God, in those persons with different experience and perspectives than ourselves. Students in our Marianist education institutions must learn the skills of civil conversation. As Pope Francis encourages, our student must be skillful in creating a culture of encounter where persons with different perspectives, especially those at the margins of society, are welcomed and treated with dignity. Our student must learn to listen deeply to others, suspending their judgment temporarily, in order to understand the other. Our students must develop the capability to formulate arguments that address the question under consideration and to do it in a way that incorporates, where possible, the ideas and arguments of others. Openness to learning is critical as is a sense of humility that allows our students to admit when their arguments may be deficient or wrong.

Our graduates will make a difference in the world, if we as Marianist educators strive to integrate human knowledge and professional practice with a living faith, to be builders and weavers of community, and promoters of a culture of dialogue.

Hawai'i has many unique gifts and challenges, and I am so grateful I'm becoming a part of the lives of these loving people. The charism has much to offer us, helping direct us to understand how to be in communion with one another, and how to find more ways of bringing Christ's aloha to the world.