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**EDUCATORS
AND
MISSIONARIES
IN A
NEW KEY**

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**CIRCULAR NO. 10:
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Dear Brothers,

In the chapter on “A Community in Mission,” the Rule of Life says that “our primary objective is formation in faith”(art. 71), by a great variety of means, and that “education is a privileged means” to this end (art. 74).

Very many of you have a rich positive experience of work as educators. Education of young people is not our only work, but it has been the principal ministry of Marianists since our beginnings, and it is still the largest single ministry of Marianists around the world. Even those of you in other ministries often have some years of experience as educators and try to bring a formative, educational approach to your mission.

In recent visits, we members of the General Administration have witnessed the vitality and development of Marianist educational ministry today, among the poor and among well-to-do people, from early childhood to the threshold of adulthood. This year we have seen this development in such diverse settings as France, Eastern Africa, Central Europe, Spain, the U.S.A., Latin America and Japan, and we know of important developments elsewhere.

After a period of doubt and decline, I believe that Catholic and Marianist education is flourishing in a new way. Naturally, its future will be much different from its past, with new emphases and new accents. The last General Chapter reminded us that “I, the Lord, am doing something new which has already begun”(Is. 43, 19).

In this letter I hope to point to such newness in our educational mission and reflect on our mission as educators in today’s world. I believe this topic will interest even those who work in other ministries, because our mission as educators in faith is one key to Marianist identity.

Increasingly it seems to me that “missionary-educator” might be a good phrase to capture an important way of understanding the Marianist vocation, for many of us, whether we work in a school or not, whether we work in the land where we were born or on some other continent.

Education and Mission: An Historical Overview

Blessed Father Chaminade saw educational work as a way to go about the mission of rekindling faith in his time, a “fulcrum for the levers that move the modern world” (*Ecrits et Paroles*, I, p. 646 and 658). He was convinced that a certain type of education merited the lifetime dedication of his religious disciples. The period after the French Revolution witnessed the launching of a movement of universal education, not only in France but across all of Europe, and our Founder played an important role in this movement. He channeled the efforts of his followers into the forty schools that he founded, in collaboration with other people, in many parts of France and beyond (cf. Peter A. Resch’s study, *Father Chaminade, Founder of Schools*, Dayton, 1955).

Back at our beginnings, Christian education required a massive commitment of religious. Educated and convinced lay Christian educators were rare. Economic and social support for education was weak or non-existent. It took a missionary determination and a missionary approach to life to organize and sustain it.

For the Founder, the word “missionary” referred primarily, not to those who serve in foreign lands, but to bands of evangelizers who focus on stirring up faith and renewing it. The goal of all mission, as he understood it, was to transform society by enkindling the spirit of faith. He felt that schools were an instrument for reaching this missionary goal, in a world where atheism, agnosticism and religious indifference seemed to dominate the intellectual world and the media.

Struggling with discouraged and timorous young Marianist educators at St. Remy, he wrote in 1834 to their director, Fr. Chevaux: “You are real missionaries. The education of youth, whatever form it may take, is certainly not the end you must have proposed to yourself in consecrating yourselves entire to God under the protection of the August Mary. Teaching is but a means we make use of to fulfill our mission, to introduce everywhere, so to say, the spirit of faith and of religion and to multiply Christians” (Letter of February 7, 1834).

Pope Gregory XVI (1830-46) is a Pope now best remembered for his relaunching of Catholic world missions. When Blessed Father Chaminade petitioned him for approval of all Marianist foundations, he explained that his aim had always been “to enliven and rekindle on all sides the divine torch of faith.” Having worked for many years at establishing sodalities, he told the Pope that he came to the realization that “this means, excellent as it is...was not enough.” He felt the need to establish religious congregations for men and women who would give a striking witness to the gospel and “struggle against the propagandists of our times, who hide behind a thousand and one pretenses, for the domain of the schools, by offering instruction at every level and in every subject, particularly for the popular classes who are the most numerous and the most neglected” (Letter of September 16, 1838).

In writing to Marianist religious after obtaining this papal approval, he emphasized that they were to be men on a mission in their schools, educators in faith, not just “workers in the educational factories of our times” (*industriels de l’enseignement* - Letter of August 24, 1839).

The temptation to narrow the sense of mission, to focus only on techniques and practices (“workers in educational factories”?), running schools but not being real missionaries, has remained with us since that time. Yet the missionary dimension has always motivated our best efforts.

Where illiteracy is generalized and social change is chaotic, simply founding a school that functions efficiently and regularly, that shows a personal interest in every student and strives to form each one in basic human and spiritual values, sustaining human community and faith - such an effort is unmistakably a missionary endeavor.

This missionary dimension of education is especially true for schools in places away from the great cities and among poor people. It was here, among “the most numerous and the most neglected,” that the first generations of Marianists made most of their foundations. After 1870, legislation made the presence of religious in such schools almost impossible in France. The earlier pattern of

Marianist educational foundations continued longer in the United States and Switzerland. Until the state took up the concern for the non-profitable work of educating people in rural areas and in urban slums, not many people had the interest, and fewer still had the capacity, to undertake such a missionary endeavor. This endeavor clearly justified a life of poverty, chastity, obedience and stability. So it is that early Marianists were educator-missionaries

Marianist schools sprang up around the world with a similar understanding of education as mission. In the late nineteenth century, founding a Christian school for newly arrived immigrants in the United States, or in newly settled or non-Christian environments like the plains of Manitoba, the Hawaiian Islands, North Africa, or Japan was obviously a missionary endeavor, in every sense of the word. The same was true through much of the twentieth century in new foundations in China, Korea, Africa and Latin America.

This pioneering, missionary role of the Christian, Marianist school is still obvious today in places where education is at a premium. Here are some interesting statistics coming from UNESCO: in 23 countries around the world, less than 50% of the population is literate. Still today, 125 million children never attend primary school - 74 million girls and 51 million boys. In sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, between one quarter and one half of all children are in this situation. There are still 854 million illiterate adults in the world. The “digital divide” is even more striking: while 14% of the world’s population regularly uses the internet, a billion other people have never even made a telephone call! Obviously, fundamental education still is lacking in many places.

During the past generation, most new Marianist educational foundations, formal and non-formal, have been in the villages, slums and isolated areas of our world. New Marianist educational missions have begun in Togo, Colombia, Malawi, indigenous areas of Mexico and India; the degraded slums of great cities like Bogotá, Lima, Nairobi, Baltimore and Bangalore; and poor cities on all continents like Brazzaville, Lusaka, Mombasa, Latacunga, Callao, East Saint Louis, Almería, Ranchi and Patna. In such circumstances our educational work is obviously a missionary outreach requiring an extraordinary life commitment. Without the dedication of the religious, young people in these places would often have no access to any education worthy of the name. I personally have witnessed this vivid missionary nature of the simple and basic schools we founded in India. I have seen the same pattern in other countries where educational standards are low, where the very existence of a good school obviously fulfills a real “mission.”

Can we still be Missionary-Educators Today?

Our rich history in the educational mission should be a springboard for the future. Our educational mission as religious today needs creativity, new emphases and new accents. In particular, we need to enhance our awareness of the missionary dimension of our work in education.

In the past, if you wanted to teach in a Catholic school, it often seemed best to join religious life. But it is now clear throughout the Church that you do not need to be a religious to dedicate your life to work as a Christian educator.

Everywhere today, education is still a profession that requires idealism, commitment to people, and a degree of self-abnegation. No one enters this profession in order to become rich and famous. Yet, in developed countries, where schooling has been fully integrated into the life of society,

where government schools often attain outstanding levels of quality and reach nearly all the children in a given country, where private schools often serve a social and economic elite, the missionary dimension of education may be less obvious than formerly.

We have realized the apostolic role of lay people in the realm of education faster and more extensively than in any other ministry of the Church. Close to 95% of all teachers in Marianist schools around the world are lay people. Many of these lay teachers and administrators are outstanding examples of the Marianist educational style. Significant documents of the Holy See bear witness to this new awareness of the role of laity. We rejoice in this development, to which we have made a significant contribution in the past and present.

Sometimes we are challenged by our own success. After long and sustained efforts at the spiritual, social and economic advancement of our publics, we have succeeded. They no longer need our missionary efforts in quite the same way as before. We must face this challenge squarely. As religious, we will want to underline the missionary dimension in the roles we undertake as educators. Our educational thrust must be expressed in new ways if we want to remain “missionary educators.”

Can educational work still validate a life commitment in poverty, chastity, obedience, and stability? Is it possible for us to recapture the missionary thrust in education today?

In the “frontier” Third World situations mentioned above, the answer is obviously yes.

In other situations, the answer to this important question requires more reflection, perhaps more nuancing. In search of a good answer, I would like first to reflect on our characteristic spirituality, then give an empirical overview of Marianists trying to live out a mission as educators today. I will conclude with five ways in which I think we can continue the charism of being “missionary educators” in our time.

Some Traits of a Spirituality for Missionary Educators

Educational work is a mission when it wells up from deep spiritual sources. Here are a few dimensions of the link between our spirituality and the call to be missionary-educators:

- Mary, our model, is a supreme educator. She “cooperates with a mother’s love” in forming people in the image of her first Son Jesus. Her way of being present is transformative of persons, motivational and dynamic, as we see in the Founder’s beloved text about the wedding feast at Cana (John 2). Every day when we renew our consecration, we recall that she is sending us into mission. We understand our mission as an alliance with her, assistance in her mission of “forming in faith a multitude of brothers [and sisters] for her first-born Son” (*Rule of Life* 6). She helps us love the task of formation in faith. She teaches us virtues essential to every educator and formator: a “warmth of welcome,” patience with slow human processes, faith and perseverance in a long-term effort, willingness “to sow and not to reap,” the ability “not to reject as bad what is not absolutely good” (*Constitutions of 1839*, 261-262).

- The spirit of faith and prayer predisposes us to believe in God's work in each person, to entrust the end results of our educational efforts to God. As Marianists we seek to contemplate and ponder God's ways in each person we meet, to entrust the unique growth of each person to Him. Through a contemplative stance, we acquire the insight and courage to take creative initiatives for formation in faith. Our educational mission is not a molding in some pre-set form, some abstract uniform ideal, but a collaboration in the ever-new creative action of God in the lives of persons.
- The virtues of preparation, purification and consummation teach us to listen in depth, to enter into dialogue with persons, to give each one a personalized attention, to respect the unique grace given to each one, to be content with slow results. These virtues help us in working with the young and also in collaborating with others as partners in a shared mission.
- Our spirit of community and family spirit help us to collaborate with others, colleagues and students. They motivate us to respect each one in his or her special role, to treat each one with respect and affection, not to give up even on those who are more difficult and troublesome. We must begin within our own religious communities, which "should foster an atmosphere of charity and unity, with 'one heart and one soul'" (*Sent by the Spirit*, no. 33h). In the local community as well as in our educational mission, we try to find a place for everyone, to help each one develop his or her grace and gift. Our model is the family, in which people are accepted and welcomed, "something you somehow haven't to deserve," in the words of the American poet Robert Frost ("The Death of the Hired Man"). We work together to develop a sense of communion and solidarity with all in the educational community.
- Recent Marianist thinking emphasizes the social dimensions. Mary teaches us to be "people of the Magnificat" (*Sent by the Spirit*, 26). A heartfelt concern for justice, peace, and integrity of creation will overflow to young people, help form a social conscience in them. Many students come from privileged classes and need help to open their eyes to the social realities of today's world. Others are marked by the social and psychological wounds they suffer because of poverty or because no one has time for them or interest in them. Our efforts to apply the gospel to social life today can be of service in helping each person open out to the service of others. During the Iraqi war this year, while I was visiting Japan, I was struck by the eagerness of students to talk about peace-making in a conflictual environment, and to recognize the connection of peace with justice and solidarity.
- Despite our many weaknesses and failings, we have an experience of mixed composition, a non-clericalist approach to Church and a participative style of governance in community. These graces inculcate attitudes that help us work together with others on a more equal basis and to form young people in exercising leadership as service to others. It gives us a spirituality of inclusion, in which everyone has a respected and influential role. This spirituality enhances the familial and freeing, developmental atmosphere we cherish in the work of education.

Panorama of the Marianist Educational Mission Today

Surely these links between spirituality and our educational mission are a source of inspiration to more than 500 of our men - about 70% of our active work-force - who work as educators in a great variety of contexts. In addition to these 500, many others, officially retired, still offer a highly appreciated religious witness and generously volunteer their services in Marianist education.

In educational institutions of different kinds, we reach about 110,000 young people (a conservative estimate) in 27 countries and work at the side of around 7000 lay colleagues.

Primary and secondary schools - slightly more than 100 of them - are the principal ministry of more than 400 of our active men. They serve students from the age of three until nineteen. In about three-fourths of these schools, we have the primary responsibility for sponsorship and management, although in many cases the Principals and other administrative leaders are lay people. In these schools we work with more than 5000 lay colleagues and with them reach out to about 80,000 students.

We also have a significant presence in higher education. Our three American Universities (Dayton, St. Mary's in San Antonio, Chaminade in Honolulu) employ more than 60 Marianists full-time, along with 1200 lay colleagues, to educate 17,000 students. A number of our men from these three universities exert significant leadership in Catholic higher education across the United States. Through student residences and chaplaincies, about 20 other Marianists also have a pastoral presence among students in other universities, in Spain, Austria, Chile, France, Poland, Italy, Canada and other parts of the United States.

For the past decade, responding to evident needs around the world, some of our men have also been devoting themselves to trade schools and job-training centers, economic development programs, schools adapted to specialized groups like gypsies or indigenous peoples, alternative educational centers to help young people who have dropped out of the usual school system, and programs for street-children. In an extraordinary example of this kind of educational mission, Fr. William Christensen and his coworkers in Bangladesh have founded several hundred rural schools reaching about 12,000 children. These village schools, run by trained village women, make it possible for the children to enter into regular state schools.

The General Chapter of 2001 took note of the development of this kind of creativity in our mission, under the rubric of "non-formal education." From very little presence in this kind of education, we have now founded about 30 such centers, reaching about 10,000 young people, and employing 65 of our men full-time. Other Marianists, of course, volunteer part-time assistance in similar programs under other auspices. Naturally, most of our "non-formal" centers are in developing countries, but we also find a few of them in the United States and in Europe.

Another important facet of our educational ministry is represented by the Marianist publishing house in Spain, the "Grupo S.M." Sponsored and directed by the two Provinces of Spain, this firm is now the largest publisher of school textbooks in Spain and is a leader in the publication of literature for children and adolescents, in several languages, and in religious literature and periodical publication. The work of this editorial consortium is rapidly growing in Latin America, especially in Mexico, Chile and Argentina. A large proportion of its profits is channeled to the

Santa María Foundation, which creates and funds a variety of programs to enhance the quality and the religious dimension of education and to meet the social problems of young people in Spain and Latin America. Close to 1000 lay people work with a group of seven or eight Marianist religious in this highly significant educational enterprise.

Even small Marianist Units accomplish wonderful things in the educational domain: I think, for example of the four very large Marianist schools educating more than 7,000 students in Japan. Or of the 18 Marianist schools with 17,000 students in Latin America.

We average five active religious per Marianist school, but sometimes a thriving Marianist school is sustained by one or two religious, supported by a well organized Office of Education at the Regional or Provincial level (as, for example, in Peru and Argentina). A minimal presence of religious is certainly not the ideal. Still, in some cases, the limitations of our own personnel spur us on to creative efforts. Often our limitations have stimulated the development of a unified direction and leadership of all Marianist schools in a country. Consciousness of the characteristics of Marianist education and of our rich pedagogical heritage is sometimes very strong, commitment highly intentional, in places where the religious are few. In these situations lay colleagues and parents are often eager to learn and internalize the educational tradition that we offer, and they feel a greater need to do so, to study and explicitate our spirit.

Even in those better circumstances where there are larger numbers of our men in each school, I urge all Units of the Society to develop an active Office of Education with an adequate staff, to maintain contact among the schools of the Unit, to organize seminars and formation programs for teachers and administrators, to coordinate finances, and to set goals and objectives for implementing the characteristics of Marianist education. In many countries (e.g. France, Spain, Germany, Chile, Argentina, Peru, the United States) foundations or other corporate structures have been established to carry out this work in our schools and also to assure an adequate management of financial and legal issues.

The project on the *Characteristics of Marianist Education* has stimulated interest in Marianist education everywhere. What may seem obvious and evident to us, a tradition that we have imbibed for generations and that we have assumed by osmosis, is perceived by many others as fresh and stimulating, a rallying point for identity and commitment. Educators and parents everywhere appreciate family spirit, a personalist orientation, an approach to the whole person, a concern for social commitment, for adaptation to changing times, and a clear but non-coercive approach to beliefs and values. They find such an educational project in these *Characteristics*. In some cases other Marianist ministries, like parishes and retreat houses, have begun to articulate their own set of "Characteristics."

I would like to express a special thanks to all those who have collaborated in developing the statement of these *Characteristics* and in popularizing them in the various Units of the Society. They have made a great contribution to the revitalization of our major apostolate in our time and thus to the renewal of Marianist life throughout the world.

Even non-Catholics and non-Christians appreciate the candor of our statement of values and principles and generally find that they can identify with our educational project. I think, for example, of the positive evaluations of Marianist educational principles that we heard from non-

Christian colleagues in places like Tunisia and Japan. Some of them even join us in seeing the figure of Mary as an inspiration for a style of education.

In the past seven years (since I have been in the General Administration), we have been obliged to withdraw communities from more than a dozen schools, but with only one exception these schools are continuing as Catholic institutions at the service of their local area. Several of them still benefit from the work of a Office of Education in the Marianist Province or Region and cultivate a conscious commitment to the Marianist educational charism. In the same seven-year period, we have opened about twenty new educational works, many of them in “non-formal education.”

Five Ways of Being Marianist Missionary-Educators in Our Time

Having reflected on spirituality and shared an overview of the Marianist educational mission around the world today, we can see that the concept of “missionary educator” is still meaningful, as it was in Blessed Father Chaminade’s day. But how can we realize this ideal in practice, in the changed circumstances of our time? I would like to conclude by sharing with you five ways in which I think Marianists today can continue the charism of being “missionary educators.”

1. By collaboration and partnership with lay educators, sponsoring and animating schools with a strong Christian and Marianist style.

Today, it is clear that our educational ministry is a partnership. When I began teaching forty-five years ago, I was part of a secondary-school faculty that included 35 religious and one layman! Many of you had a similar experience.

We religious continue to have a major role to play as missionary educators, but normally today lay educators provide the greater number of partners, in a striking illustration of the potential of lay people to take on significant leadership in the Church’s mission. Our work in education must be pursued within the “spirituality of communion” of which Pope John Paul II speaks so eloquently in his directives for our time (*Novo Millennio Ineunte* 42-46). Everywhere, our most important roles will include the development and enhancement of lay leadership and responsibility, the sharing of the Marianist educational tradition with our colleagues.

We need to work together with these lay colleagues to make Christian, Marianist education possible for as many as possible long into the future. Our primary aim in many cases will be analogous to the missionary focus of Blessed Father Chaminade when he dreamed of founding teacher-training schools throughout France: to help lay educators form new generations of people who live from a perspective of faith and are committed to the improvement of society.

I already mentioned some ways in which our men are trying to meet this challenge, by sharing the Marianist spirit, setting up foundations and boards to guide educational works, motivating and forming new generations of teachers. In this way a religious educator can make a significant difference in the quality schools we maintain, having the “multiplying influence” of which our Founder spoke.

Even in places where quality secular education is generally available, the religious dimension is absent in many schools. Secularized schools miss what has at most times and places been the heart of all education - the realm of spiritual and transcendental values, beliefs and motivations. Our task in education, following the insight of our Founder, is not simply to maintain schools but to make sure that they are effective instruments for formation in faith today. Developing schools and training teachers who feel free and capable of integrating a Catholic, religious thrust into education is a great objective in which we religious can pour out our life-energy.

In fact, there are a number of interesting initiatives, large and small, towards imparting a Marianist style in the initial or ongoing training of teachers. We find such initiatives, for example, at the local level in many of our schools, and on a broader level through our universities in the United States, through the Santa María Foundation in Spain, through province leadership in France, through our Regional Departments of Education in Latin America.

Everywhere we should aim to foster, in a profession that is notoriously individualistic, teams of educators in mission - people who work together harmoniously in a shared enterprise for the human and Christian formation of their students. Teamwork and partnership have to become still more characteristic of our educational mission. Working at the heart of a group of fellow educators to create this spirit and style can be a missionary work that gives a rich nuance of meaning to a lifetime of poverty, chastity, obedience and stability.

2. By outreach to those who normally do not have access to education of quality and values.

There are still today endless needs for creative projects reaching out to those who usually have no access to an education of quality and values. In our Founder's day, this group included almost everyone outside of the middle and upper classes in the great European urban centers. In our time, there are still many people who have no access. To reach them we may have to move into inner cities, neglected rural areas or developing countries.

I believe this movement, which we are calling "non-formal education," holds much promise for our future. Such education may not be imparted in the standard academic formats to which we are accustomed, but this does not mean that it does not require a high degree of expertise and specialization. It is obvious that this kind of educational mission requires a demanding personal commitment.

During the past year I was edified to discover these qualities, especially the personal commitment, in visits to such places as our agricultural training centers in San Clemente (Colombia), Sotouboua (Togo), Voka (Congo) and Sainte-Maure (France); the Instituto Técnico Chaminade in Callao, Peru; the center for rural students and development in Uxpanapa, Mexico; the REDS projects for street children in Bangalore and Ranchi, India; the Chaminade Training Center in Nairobi; the MIRACLE job-training program in Malawi....and in many other places.

Several Provinces or Regions in more developed countries have taken up new projects to reach those who are normally without access to education of quality and values. Would it not be wonderful if every Unit could take up some project of this type? Would this not be one way of realizing Pope John Paul's encouragement at Blessed Father Chaminade's beatification: "to reach

out to those who are far from the Church and do not enjoy the usual means of knowing Christ”? (Sadly, spiritual and human deprivation often go hand in hand.)

3. By developing a style of youth ministry, within schools, parishes and dioceses, that speaks to youth and young adults today.

Religious and spiritual education is a particular need of our time. Many young people have grown up without any conscious religious heritage. Even though some of them seem to be almost indifferent, many feel a gap and a need, a longing for spiritual moorings and a great interest in anything that fills the gap. Sometimes they turn to exotic spiritualities or cheap substitutes for true religion (from fundamentalism to witchcraft, superstition and drugs). Perhaps it is partly our fault as religious educators: we have been too centered on our projects and organizations, not enough on the life-giving waters of spiritual experience. Naturally, we can communicate spirituality to young people only if we live it intensely ourselves!

Even in our schools, with their explicit Catholic identity and their formal religion courses, sometimes our students may not receive very much. An hour of perfunctory religious instruction per week is no answer to a genuine spiritual longing.

Still, I have been impressed by the efforts at youth ministry I have seen springing up around the Society, in schools, parishes, and spiritual centers. Here are some selected examples: Our two Spanish provinces provide rich and well organized province-wide Marianist programs for spiritual ministry and faith development for students and young parishioners during the academic year and during the summer vacations.

- In the U.S.A., the LIFE movement (Marianist summer camps for youth and young adults, focusing on spirituality and ministry) has long been a vital source of spiritual experience for thousands of adolescents. The “alumni” of this movement often continue to cultivate Marianist spirituality. Our U.S. parishes often have a “youth minister,” religious or lay, with a rich and varied program.
- In the Czech Republic, deprived for two generations of any kind of explicit spiritual heritage, university students close to Bro. Larry Cada at Salvátor Church show a vital and surprising interest in Christian faith communities.
- In France, the Faustino movement fosters spiritual experience among many younger students, while groups of adolescents and young adults (*les Jeunes 15-30*) have a rich experience of pilgrimages, retreats, community life and prayer.
- In countries where numerous young people are interested in religious life (India, Mexico, Kenya, Zambia, Ivory Coast, Congo), our religious organize “Come and See” Programs that are real moments of faith development, the experience of Christian prayer and community. Whatever the result in religious vocations, these programs are often a point of reference in the faith-life of young people.

These are just a few of the examples of youth ministry that have impressed me. Such programs

constitute a genuine mission of education in faith, whether or not they are connected with a school. The General Chapter asked all Units and Zones of the Society to give more thought to youth ministry. In April of 2004, the Conference of European Marianists plans to sponsor a meeting for Marianists on this topic. I believe that other Zones of the Society are looking to similar events later.

It is certain that a Marianist committed to developing such ministry will find in it a powerful sustenance and motivation for his life as a religious.

4. By giving effective emphasis to justice, peace, and responsible stewardship of creation.

Missionary consciousness is especially characteristic of those educators who focus on solidarity. Such an emphasis can really make a difference in any educational institution.

Solidarity should be a keynote of Christian education. In our educational programs solidarity means giving high priority to awakening critical consciousness and fostering habits of empathy, dialogue, respect and tolerance for those who are different. It means helping people recognize that all life is a gift, and that each one is responsible for the stewardship of the material and human gifts he or she has received, for the good of other people.

Educating for solidarity means helping people know the reality of today's world and understand the causes of problems that make life difficult for millions of human beings. Educating for solidarity also means raising awareness of our responsibility, as individuals, as nations, and as followers of Jesus, to work to better the situation.

We can enhance the atmosphere for solidarity and peace-making in educational ministries by encouraging diversity in our institutions, by finding creative ways to make fine education available even to those who need financial help or those who are not highly gifted. The goal is to help create a world in which each one can realize the fullness of the potential he or she has received from the Lord, and put that potential to the service of others.

Experiences of service are an integral part of an education for solidarity. Volunteer projects, twinning with other educational works, experiences of encounter with different cultures can be decisive aids in achieving this goal. Let me give you some examples:

- In some of our schools in the United States, volunteer experiences in service to the poor and marginalized, locally or abroad, are part of the requirement for graduation.
- In Europe a number of our institutions have twinned with schools in other countries, often in Africa, Asia or Latin America. Such twinning benefits the poorer schools, but also the richer one, opening up new horizons, stimulating exchanges of ideas, correspondence and visits.
- Italian young people close to the Marianists sustain and staff several programs for poor children in Albania.
- In Latin America Marianist students regularly volunteer a part of their summer to reach out

to poor and neglected youth in remote rural areas.

- The “Lalanne program” for young educators prepares students at the University of Dayton for service in schools that serve poor youth in the United States and accompanies them in a year or two of volunteer service in this environment.
- Volunteer programs in mission are growing, whether within one’s own country or abroad. The International Marianist Volunteer program is coordinating efforts to reach out beyond the boundaries of a single nation.

Such efforts for solidarity need to be multiplied in all our educational work. They help give a missionary focus to Marianist education.

5. By focusing on the new synthesis of faith and culture needed for our time.

Pope John Paul II often speaks of the “new areopagi,” those emerging forums of contemporary culture where the Church needs to be especially present with the good news of the Gospel. For many of our men who work in universities, in research and publications, or in communications, this mission is an ever-present reality. Those working at the primary and secondary levels of education share in this mission by constantly adapting their methods and styles for the interpenetration of gospel and culture.

Not many Marianists have been intellectuals, researchers and writers. But we have always had some notable exceptions, whose work has enriched us all. Today we need such people more than ever, because contemporary culture is often constructed in the complete absence of any transcendent horizon.

The results of their intellectual apostolate, which may often appear to be scant and very indirect, require a special commitment of faith and perseverance. Work in this arena is a special grace for a group of missionary educators.

Conclusion

Early in this letter I asked if we can still be missionary educators today. The answer is clearly yes, provided we go about this mission in a way that makes us much more than “workers in educational factories,” responding to today’s needs and opportunities, with a special closeness to the millions of young people who are poor and deprived.

The mission of education is close to the heart of most of us. We think of ourselves as educators not only by profession but also by mission. We can have a great future as educators, in the Society and the Marianist Family, if we develop this self-understanding as “missionary educators.”

Marianists usually have a great deal to say on the theme of education. I have been able only to touch a few aspects in this letter. Perhaps I have missed some things you consider of prime importance, or placed the accents differently than you would. I invite you to keep thinking and praying about our vocation as missionary educators and to share your insights with other

Marianists. In this way, even from our diverse viewpoints, we can all contribute to the new flourishing of the mission of Marianist education that seems to be beginning in our time.

As we have seen, Mary is our first model as educator. Even though her Son was divine, she still labored to evoke wisdom and grace, discerning when to wait and be patient (as when her Son was lost in the temple), when to urge forward (as at Cana). Let us all pray together that we may be educators in mission in the spirit of Mary and Blessed Father Chaminade for our time.

Fraternally,

David Joseph Fleming, S.M.
Superior General