

Men and Women on a Mission: Catholic Education in the Marianist Tradition

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Community and Family Spirit

This charism has its roots in the theme and characteristic of community. The years of exile convinced Blessed Chaminade more than ever of the importance of community. Women and men have one gracious Creator, a Father and Mother, making them brothers and sisters, and by their human qualities, images of "Godself." And in human history the tribes and nations were called by God to be a people, the people of God, a community of worshippers. Through the redemption of Jesus Christ all are redeemed, one and all, and are called brothers and sisters in the life of Christ. In the visions of the Hebrew Scriptures and the prayerful vision of Jesus, all are dignified with the love of God and called to unity as one beloved people. As a Christian, Chaminade lived with the conviction of this unity, and the French Revolution was fired with a grasp of human unity, *fraternité*, when its spirit swept the country.

Though this revolutionary spirit of fraternity was often drowned in blood and lost in dictatorship, some of its spirit lasted. One of the first things Chaminade did upon returning to France was to organize a meeting to start a community. There was a meeting within days, and then there was a community. The Marianist Lay Community celebrated the 200th anniversary of its first consecration in 2001. Chaminade was committed to rebuild Christianity in France. By nature humans seek a community, and by grace they become a community, even if their actions often belie this deep reality. So, Chaminade took the route of community. For him, community was humanity's vocation, a call to unity, strength, support, encouragement, and deepening conviction.

And this community of faith—called a Sodality—was meant for everyone, so everyone was welcome. These were groups of married men, married women, young men, and young women. There was outreach to the very poor. The groups met separately, and they met as one community. There was union without confusion. Each group had its own identity and its overall unity. The archbishop of Bordeaux acknowledged soon thereafter that all of the good being done in the archdiocese could be traced back to the members of Chaminade's groups.

In essence, these active communities of lay people were the origin of the religious Marianists, the vowed brothers, sisters, and priests of the Marianist Family. In most groups it is the religious order that founds the lay group. In our case, the lay groups were the origin of the religious congregations. All these groups are at the service of the Marianist goal and characteristic of community, sometimes called family spirit. And so community is central to Marianist education.