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Global Connections and the Marianists

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II. Global Connections and the Marianists

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For the past ten or fifteen years, I have been waging a one-person stealth campaign—I guess I am going to uncloak it today. That campaign is to change the university’s motto from *Pro Deo et Patria* (For God and Country) to *Pro Deo et Mundo* (For God and the World). “For God and Country,” adopted in 1920, reflected the sense among many American Catholics right after the First World War that they were, in a new way, fully American. “For God and the World” reflects our deepening sense today that our commitments and our awareness need to extend beyond national borders, because our human connections already do.

We sometimes speak (and therefore think?) as though the University’s Catholic and Marianist character are somehow distinct from the many things we mean when we say “diversity.” But, speaking from personal experience, I know that much of my awareness of the rest of the world stems from the global focus that is inherent in contemporary Catholicism.

Today, we are painfully aware that the gospel imperative—to “go out to all the world and tell the Good News”—helped to cause, or at least did very little to stem, some grave and lasting abuses for which we are (or should be) still seeking ways to repent and make reparations. We should not turn our eyes away from this history, either as scholars or as believers, since neither have any reason to be afraid of the truth. But today I am very glad that the symposium’s organizers decided to include this topic as part of their opening welcome. I’m glad because I believe our global religious connections, specifically religious congregations like the Marianists, offer a resource on which I hope we draw more and more fully as we seek to deepen and extend international awareness on our campus.

When I think back to my first days and weeks on UD’s campus as a student, forty years ago this fall, I recall very vividly some early experiences of global diversity, especially the significant populations of Puerto Rican and Lebanese students. (I am very aware that Puerto Rican students are not “international,” but I grew up in an area in which there was a wide variety of fairly recent European immigrants, some of whom retained their native languages. So at that point it was still a new experience for me to become friends with a native Spanish speaker.) I realized at some point, and am very aware now, that the presence of these students at UD was not

random, but reflected historic Marianist connections in these places, especially their schools. Those ties are even more extensive today than they were then.

There is a lot more to say about all this than can be said in ten minutes, of course. I will make two points very briefly: one about religious orders or congregations generally, and one about the Marianists specifically. In one of his detective novels set in Louisiana, writer James Lee Burke observes (or rather his narrator observes), “One of the advantages of being Catholic is that you belong to the western world’s largest private club.” We might wish for a better analogy, but I think this observation captures something concrete about how Catholicism functions structurally. When we use the word “parochial,” it tends not to be a compliment. Literally, it means, “of the parish.” And when it’s used more broadly, it tends to refer to having very limited horizons and therefore a very local view. (A not unjustified usage, to be sure.) But considered rightly, any local Catholic parish anywhere is connected in immediate ways to every other Catholic parish across the globe. And that connection, again, considered rightly, is both spiritual and material—we are responsible for each other, and those who have more have an obligation to share with those who have less.

If this connectedness is true of the Roman Catholic Church broadly, it is even more immediately true of religious orders. They are a genuinely distinctive form of social organization—dedicated to spiritual purposes, but with long and deep insight about the practicality of living in community. Some of them have been around for nearly 1,500 years, suggesting they have something to teach us about resiliency and adaptability. Many of them are also international, and not just in the general sense that all Catholics belong to the global church. Many congregations, the Marianists among them, have communities in a number of different countries on multiple continents. There is, and has been for a very long time, constant movement among these communities, in which people from different cultures, speaking different languages, learn to live and work, study and worship together. They have a model of governance in which representative members meet face-to-face every few years to make decisions about the well-being of the group. In these and many other ways, religious orders represent a worldwide network on which Catholic universities generally can draw to help expand the global horizons of our faculty and students.

The Marianists share these characteristics with many other religious orders and congregations. They have a distinctive feature, though, with which many of you are likely

familiar. The Marianists began as communities of laypeople, ordinary believers in the world who do not take vows or live apart, but who consciously commit themselves to participating in Mary's mission of bringing Christ to the world. So when we use the word "Marianist" at UD, we don't just refer to the Society of Mary (the priests and brothers who were the university's founders); we also include the Daughters of Mary Immaculate, the Marianist sisters, along with the global network of Marianist Lay Communities, which is growing in numbers and activity and locations, including on our campus.

The Marianists' learned experience, drawn from two centuries of collaboration among vowed and lay believers, is an incredible reservoir of wisdom about how to live—to share a community and a planet—with those like us in their infinite dignity and different from us in their languages and cultures and traditions. The community's mission begins with God, and it does require love and care for our *patriae*, our native places, but it also sends us out beyond all borders. It's a bold prospect, this desire to foster global interconnectedness not for exploitation but for the good of the other. But we know it can be done, because we have among us people who have been doing it for a very long time.