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NEWS RELEASE

DAYTON CONTINGENT TO HEAD TO ROME FOR "HOLY ROAD TRIP," BEATIFICATION OF WILLIAM JOSEPH CHAMINADE

DAYTON, Ohio — It's a holy road trip, of sorts.

That's how the Rev. Joseph Lackner, S.M., assistant provincial for the Cincinnati Province of the Society of Mary, describes a local group's Aug. 31-Sept. 6 pilgrimage to Rome for the beatification of the Rev. William Joseph Chaminade, S.M., founder of the Marianist Family. Beatification is the final step before sainthood.

"Holy road trips, religious pilgrimages, exist because religion responds to what God has planted deepest in humanity. They are found in every religious tradition," Lackner said. "It's a universal call to journey in spirit and truth to God. The beatification is a recognition of Chaminade's holiness and the legacy he has bequeathed to history. It assures us who draw inspiration from his life and work that we are on the right track."

Approximately 260 "pilgrims" from the Cincinnati Province (Dayton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Memphis and Kalamazoo) are traveling to Rome to celebrate Chaminade's Sept. 3 beatification in St. Peter's Square, presided over by Pope John Paul II. From Dayton, the 125-member contingent includes an 83-year-old Marianist brother, Montgomery County's auditor, a non-Catholic African-American family and more than two dozen students from the University of Dayton and Chaminade-Julienne High School. Some are going for the adventure. Others are inspired by their faith. All look at the journey as a "once in a lifetime" occasion.

In all, approximately 100,000 people from around the world are expected to attend the beatification ceremonies, according to Brother Donald Boccardi, S.M., director of the office for spiritual renewal in the Cincinnati Province of the Society of Mary and part of an international committee preparing for the beatification. Chaminade will be beatified along with Pope Pius IX, Pope John XXIII, Archbishop Tommaso Reggio of Genoa, Italy, and Benedictine Abbot Joseph Columba Marmion. The estimated 5,000 pilgrims in the Chaminade contingent will be noticeable by their attire: All will wear a large blue scarf adorned with a yellow Chaminade logo with the words, "Do whatever He tells you," surrounded by the flags from 34 countries.

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A.J. Wagner, Montgomery County's auditor, in the midst of a campaign for Montgomery County Common Pleas Court judge, says he couldn't pass up the opportunity to take part in the pilgrimage. His wife, Joan McGuinness Wagner, is director of Marianist activities at UD, and the couple helped found Cana, a prayer group. As lay Marianists, they are members of the Marianists Conversation group. He graduated from UD's School of Law in 1977.

"When you have an opportunity to meet your biggest hero, you jump all over it," he said. "If your biggest hero is the president and someone said you could shake hands with him, you'd do it. In our case, our hero is Chaminade, and we get to be as close as possible to him and his ideals through this occasion."

Wagner, who's read several books about Chaminade's life, said he's impressed by the French priest's spirit of collaboration, his ability to bring together people from all walks of life — aristocrats and chimney sweeps, men and women, laity and religious — into a religious community of equals. "If he were living today, he'd be as ordinary as they come," he said. "Yet the ideas he'd be expressing would be extraordinary. His commitment to education is not only what built UD, but a whole network of schools throughout the world."

Brother John Lucier, S.M., who at 83 may be the oldest local pilgrim on the journey, agrees with Wagner's assessment. "He's not someone you'd see on billboards. He was a very quiet man, not a highly obtrusive person, but the things he did are durable," said Lucier, who taught chemistry for 47 years at the University of Dayton. "We were the first order in the Catholic Church to have brothers and priests living together on the same basis. He was revolutionary, even in education. He believed in total education, in educating the whole person. Education is not just intellectual, it's spiritual, it's physical."

For Lucier, the pilgrimage is an answered prayer. "I'm excited, I'm exhilarated," he said. "All my Marianist life we've been praying for the beatification of Father Chaminade, and here it has come to pass. I never thought it would be done in my lifetime."

Kathleen Henderson is a member of the AME (African Methodist Episcopal) church, but much of her life has been influenced by the Marianists. After graduating from the University of Dayton in 1981, she's spent the last 19 years on campus in various administrative positions, currently as director of the office of diverse student populations. As a child, she remembers tagging along with her grandmother, who worked as a cook for the Marianist priests and brothers at High Acres, former site of the provincial administration for the Marianists. When she received the invitation to join the pilgrimage, she felt surprised but honored.

"My mom said, 'Rome, Georgia?' No, Rome! It's an opportunity of a lifetime. It's a good feeling to be recognized for your contributions (to the Marianist character) of campus," said Henderson, who's bringing her mother Gay, a secretary at McNary Elementary School.

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"Rome was never on my radar screen of places to go, but this is one of the experiences God is providing for me because there's something I am to learn, someone I am to touch — or to be touched by — and then to do. It's tied into the 'Do whatever He tells you' lessons all Christians learn through scripture."

UD seniors Justin Bayer and Adam Molina, graduates of Moeller High School in Cincinnati, will chaperone students from their alma mater. "That makes me feel incredibly old," laughed Molina, a 22-year-old finance major. "It's just sunk in that this is a pilgrimage, a holy pilgrimage for our faith. This is not like friends traveling to Europe, like the first swing in a wild gallivant through Europe."

Bayer echoed similar sentiments. "To be part of a Mass with the pope will probably be something I'll never experience again. Just to be in St. Peter's Square and be part of the huge crowd that will be there, that's exciting."

Besides the beatification ceremony, the festivities also include sightseeing tours of Rome, a prayer vigil and festival, an audience with the pope, a special Mass in memory of Chaminade at St. Paul's Basilica Outside the Walls and an excursion to Assisi, birthplace of St. Francis.

Chaminade, a persecuted French priest who escaped arrest, imprisonment and probable death at the guillotine during the French Revolution, founded lay communities from which the Daughters of Mary came in 1816 and the Society of Mary (Marianists) in 1817. The Society of Mary was established in the United States in Dayton in 1849.

The Marianists draw their inspiration from Mary, the mother of Jesus, and believe strongly in service to youth and the poor. Today, 1,500 brothers and priests and 800 sisters work in 34 countries on six continents with ministries in secondary and primary schools, universities and technical schools, parishes, renewal centers, missions and social justice enterprises. Another 10,000 lay Marianists have formed small faith groups. In the United States, the Marianists founded three universities, the University of Dayton (Dayton, Ohio), St. Mary's University (San Antonio, Texas) and Chaminade University (Honolulu, Hawaii).

With beatification, the highest spiritual honor next to sainthood that the Catholic Church can bestow on an individual, Chaminade will receive the title "Blessed." Beatification requires proof of the practice of heroic virtue and one miracle. In October, the Ordinary Congregation of Cardinals and Archbishops of the Congregation of Saints at the Vatican unanimously approved a miraculous healing in Argentina attributed to Chaminade. When Elena Otero learned she had a walnut-sized tumor on her thyroid glands in January 1991, she prayed for Chaminade's intercession. Within two weeks, without any medication, the tumor

disappeared and has never returned. Doctors verified the cure on Nov. 19, 1998.

A series of special projects are being undertaken to recognize Chaminade's beatification. In Dayton, Chaminade Park has been created at the Marianist provincialate at Mount St. John. The Marianists will celebrate the beatification on Labor Day at a 10:30 a.m. Mass at the Queen of Apostles Chapel at Mount St. John, followed by a picnic lunch in Chaminade Park. Actor Martin Sheen, a Dayton native who attended Chaminade High School, will narrate a short video documentary. In addition, local celebrations are being planned in more than 100 cities where the Marianists work.

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For interviews, contact **Bro. Don Boccardi, S.M.**, and **Father Joe Lackner, S.M.**, at (937) 429-0794; **A.J. Wagner** at (937) 225-5604; **Bro. John Lucier, S.M.**, at (937) 229-4680; **Kathleen Henderson** at (937) 229-3634; **Adam Molina** at (513) 253-8707; and **Justin Bayer** at (937) 627-8763. **Bro. Victor Forlani, S.M.**, lecturer in UD's management and marketing department, is tour leader for adults on the pilgrimage. He can be reached at (937) 229-3556. **Bro. Ron Luksic, S.M.**, assistant principal at Moeller High School, is tour leader for students. He can be reached at (513) 871-6725. **The Rev. Gene Contadino, S.M.**, is rector at the University of Dayton. He can be reached at (937) 229-4122. See <http://www.marianist.org>