

## *Teaching as a Vocation at Marianist Universities*

Embedded in every crisis is an opportunity, and perhaps embedded in the recent public criticisms of American higher education, particularly in regards to diminished faculty teaching responsibilities, is the opportunity to revisit the question of teaching as a vocation. Teaching as a vocation is the craft of teaching understood not simply as one among many obligations of one's employment contract, but as a calling, as having rich and compelling meaning in itself.

The Marianist tradition of education has long informed the exploration of teaching as a vocation. Among the brand plurality within Catholic higher education, the Marianists have long been recognized as strong pedagogues, educationists emphasizing person-centered education, educating both the head and the heart. The *Characteristics of Marianist Universities* document name those pedagogic values.

Blessed Chaminade noted that the essential is the interior, and it is at the interior where the understanding of teaching as a vocation resides. It is about the inner reflection and spiritual understanding of the how and why we do what we do when we teach, and why we have committed our lives to this particular craft. It is about making meaning of our work lives and the contribution our craft makes to the lives of our students and to society.

Person-centered teaching in the Marianist tradition creates a type of social-dynamic relationship, happening at the intersection of a teacher's intellectual passion, a student's interests and aspirations, and the richness of the subject matter. For students, who we are as people and professionals, how we treat them as people, is as memorable – sometimes more memorable - than the subject matter we profess.

Nurturing teaching as a vocation on our campuses requires encouragement from colleagues as well as resources and rewards from administrators. Quality teaching must *really* matter. I once asked an administrator at a small Catholic university a forced choice question: if they had the choice to recommend for tenure either a professor recognized by colleagues as a high-performing teacher but a low-performing researcher, or a professor recognized by colleagues as a low-performing teacher but a high-performing researcher which would they recommend? “How low-performing a teacher is the researcher?” was the response.

*First tier* research is to be highly valued and highly rewarded. Within the institutional framework at Marianist universities though, there needs to be made space for the nurturing and reward of *first tier* teaching, pedagogic excellence unmitigated by research record, as a necessary and valued contribution to the Marianist educational brand.

Marianist education has as its core competency high quality, person-centered teaching. Perhaps now is the time, in the midst of public scrutiny as well as structural changes in the higher education industry, to have campus conversations and explorations about an old and rich part of our Marianist heritage, teaching as a vocation.

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