



Circolare
del Superiore Generale

SOCIETA DI MARIA - MARIANISTI

**WITH BLESSED FATHER
CHAMINADE
TOWARD OUR FUTURE**

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Missionary Apostolic

Rome, September 3, 2000
Day of the Beatification of our Founder

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DAVID JOSEPH FLEMING, S.M.
Superior General of the Society of Mary,
Missionary Apostolic, to all his fellow
Marianists throughout the world.

WITH BLESSED FATHER CHAMINADE TOWARD OUR FUTURE

Dear Brothers,

The beatification of Father Chaminade is an important milestone in Marianist life. Coming in the two-hundredth year of our existence as a Marianist Family, it prompts us to look back in gratitude, sometimes in repentance, and also to look ahead with hope. It invites us to reflect on our personal relationship with our Founder and on the place of our charism in the Church of our time.

Never before has the Church in any one year granted so much official recognition to our Marianist Family:

- § As the Jubilee Year 2000 began, the Holy Father officially accepted the attribution of a miracle to Father Chaminade and set the date for his beatification.
- § On March 25, the Pontifical Council for the Laity recognized Marianist Lay Communities as an international Private Association of the Faithful, one of only fifty-some official lay movements in the Church.
- § Now we are celebrating our Founder's beatification, in the company of two Popes particularly significant in the history of the modern Church, a great teacher of incarnational spirituality (Dom Columba Marmion), and another founder (Archbishop Tommaso Reggion).

The events of this year underline our mission and role as Father Chaminade's disciples within the worldwide community of the Church.

1. WHO IS FATHER CHAMINADE FOR YOU?

Over the past century, as the cause for our Founder's beatification has slowly and methodically progressed, amid advances and disappointments, Marianist research has revealed a great deal about him. Until the publication of Father Simler's biography in 1901, he was very little known, even within his Marianist Family. In 1909 the cause for his beatification was initiated. Succeeding years in the first half of the century saw the publication of a synthesis of his teaching, *The Spirit of Our Foundation*, and five volumes of his letters. In the ensuing decades, significant interpretations of his teaching were published by Fr. Emil Neubert, Fr. William Ferree and others. The mid-century saw a series of theses on different aspects of the founder's theology, spirituality, and social thought. Since then we have witnessed ground-

breaking editions and studies by such men as Joseph Verrier, Vincent Vasey, Jean-Baptiste Armbruster, Ambrogio Albano, Joseph Stefanelli, Eduardo Benlloch, Enrique Torres, and others.

Today we can say that we know more than ever before about Father Chaminade, in some ways more than even his contemporaries knew. We know that he was a truly great Founder, purified by trials, with a comprehensive vision of spirituality and mission, inspired with a charisma meant to be shared by people from all states of life and all backgrounds.

The gift given to our Founder was a grace, not for himself alone, but for the good of the whole Church. Its recognition and reception in the Church and world of today depends to a considerable extent on what we do with it.

So the question becomes all the more critical: who is Father Chaminade for you? His beatification is an invitation and stimulus for each of us, to discover our personal answer to that question.

I am going to share some of my answers. I will sometimes speak of him as a Saint,[@] not out of any desire to anticipate the Holy See's eventual decision about his canonization, but out of my personal conviction that he is truly a great saint with a message and example particularly appropriate for the People of God today.

A Model of Ecclesial Life

For me, Father Chaminade is a saint with a dynamic vision of the Church and its life.

He was convinced that all people are invited to enter the Kingdom of God. The conscious goal of his whole life was to renew the thirst for that Kingdom and its dynamic power in the world of his time. He understood that this meant, not only renewing institutional structures of the Church such as dioceses, parishes, and seminaries, but above all enhancing the attractive force of the gospel in the life of ordinary people.

Through the Marianist Family, he invited everyone to enter into the dynamic of the Gospel, which could still be lived in the full force of its letter and spirit,[@] as much in modern times as in the primitive Church. In this invitation he included all sorts of people, from every class of society, every state of life, every background and education. He thought that all could live a style of Christian community modeled on the first community of Jerusalem, with one heart and one soul.[@]

Exactly two hundred years ago, towards the end of the year 1800, Father Chaminade concluded his time of exile in Saragossa and returned to Bordeaux. Without delaying even a month, he set about to create the movement we now call the Marianist Family. He began with a group of laypeople, especially young people. For many years he made this youthful lay movement the central focus of his ministry.

The more traditional-minded among Catholic clergy and laity thought Father Chaminade was wasting his time. Worse still, many judged that he was dividing the corporate energies of a Church that was just being reborn, amid great difficulties, after the storm of the Revolution. They thought that all ecclesial energies should be devoted to the restoration of the old methods and customs, the old privileges of the Church. Above all, they thought that first the clergy, hierarchy, and parish life should be restored, without losing too much time in innovative lay movements.

In a memorable text written in 1824, Fr. Chaminade answered them. Though he respected the institutional needs of the Church, he was convinced that in his time, *the levers that move the moral*

world somehow need a new fulcrum.@ I quote this text quite often, because I believe it provides an important key to understanding our Founder.

The dynamic role of laypeople, both men and women - their universal call to holiness and to active participation, intense and creative involvement in the Church's mission - is a vision we are still assimilating. Father Chaminade was a great precursor. He had insights about ecclesial life that were uncommon in his own time. His vision was sustained by the Second Vatican Council, but it still remains to be fully realized. We, who are his heirs scattered in various places throughout the world, are still looking for the new *Afulcrum*@ for the moral world of our time. And we continue to find this fulcrum in the dynamism of laypeople and in the inclusion of all groups of people in communities focused on God's Kingdom. This is a never-ending but always-fruitful mission.

Thus Blessed Father Chaminade is a great patron saint for all those who work today to develop lay leadership, lay ministry, and lay spirituality. He has a special appeal to those who work with youth and those who aim to develop collaboration and partnership in Church life. Such patron-saints are not numerous in history. In him I believe that the Lord has given the world a great saint, one who still speaks in stimulating and original ways to the Church and world of our time.

A Man of Hope

Our Founder is also a saintly model of hope and resilience.

Father Chaminade spent his whole adult life battling against all-engulfing forces of indifference and hostility to religion. His education in the traditions of the *ancien régime* in no way prepared him for such a battle. In the 1790's he knew the dangers of clandestine mission and could easily have become a martyr of the guillotine. Later he had to face an oppressive atmosphere of distrust and suspicion in Napoleon's police state. Even during the *Agolden years*@of the restoration (1815-30), he experienced misunderstanding and resistance from people who wanted only to restore the past, with its aristocratic and classist attitudes, without assimilating the lessons of a quarter-century of revolutionary change. During the 1830's he saw the ruin of many of his plans in a context of ecclesiastical polarization and an aggressively anti-clerical government. During his final decade, he knew the most painful misunderstanding and rejection of all, by his own closest disciples.

Yet he never seems to have lost that theological hope which is based, not on an optimistic reading of events, but on unshakable faith in the Lord of history. Again and again, in the face of every setback, he maintained toward all a kindly and forgiving attitude of listening and dialogue. He moved persistently ahead, trusting in the basic good will of the limited people around him and above all in the power of grace to win out in the end. In everything that happened, he discovered what he liked to call *Athe indications of Providence*.@ He summed up his hope in the great letter to the retreat-masters of August 24, 1839, expressing his conviction that, despite all the forces of evil, to Mary *Ais reserved a great victory in our day*.@

In our day, many people speak of the *Aresilience*@ that is necessary for those who struggle over years and decades to counter creeping secularism, mindless consumerism, violent hostility, and rampant injustice. Most of you know, from personal experience, quite a bit about such struggles. Our struggles are long, against powerful odds, and it is obvious that we will not succeed in the near future: secularism, consumerism, violence and injustice show no signs of disappearing overnight. Meanwhile many people close to us have to survive in the midst of inhuman situations, and we ourselves struggle on without experiencing great success. We may try to listen and dialogue, but we do not find it easy. It is much easier to lose hope.

Bro. John Johnston, former Superior General of the De La Salle Christian Brothers, wrote recently that poor and struggling people have to learn that they can deny external circumstances the power to destroy their lives. With God's help they can live as human persons despite their situation. For this purpose they need *resilience*. They need faith in God and in themselves. They need love, hope, strength, and courage. @

Most of us do not have to live in desperate situations. But we too need such *resilience*. We regularly face difficult situations as persons, as communities, and in our ministries. Instead of turning in on ourselves in depression or lethargy, we too must deny difficult external circumstances the power to weaken our faith. Like our Founder, we must cultivate a stance of patient listening, and search in all things for the indications of Providence. Our vow of stability is fundamentally about such resilience in the service of Mary.

Our Founder is a great patron for all of us who struggle, in the face of the constantly changing challenges of secular culture, to develop a Christian life that speaks to the people of our times.

A Servant Leader

Blessed Father Chaminade possessed great authority, as Founder and as spiritual guide. He lived out this authority in a way that was demanding for himself and for others. He led by his example. He emphasized listening, dialogue, and participation, as we see so clearly in his painstaking organizational plans for the Sodality, in his hundreds of letters of direction, and in the recollections of those who knew him. He looked for the signs of Providence and knew how to wait for them before rushing into decisions. He knew how to invite people to reflect, as individuals and as communities. But he also knew how to make decisions when the time was ripe, and to hold firm, even in the face of opposition, to what his conscience told him was right.

He had a deep belief in the importance of good guidance and formation. He wanted to leave his followers a sense of direction @ built on deep theological and spiritual foundations, and at the same time to foster regular practices of reflection, evaluation and fraternal correction. These concerns were the top priority of the last twenty years of his life.

The concern for an authority that is understood not as domination, but as a service that helps people grow, is a key challenge today, certainly in the Church, but also in education, politics, and business. More than ever before, people in all these domains recognize the need for developing a praxis of reflection and a spirituality for constant change and growth. Our Founder is an inspiration to people who are called to take up religious and societal responsibilities today.

An Apostle of Mary

Father Chaminade was a great devotee of Mary. His rich teaching about Mary is an aspect of his originality still relevant in today's Church, 200 years later.

In Mary, Father Chaminade saw much more than an object of conventional piety. He was convinced that Mary is the way that leads to her Son. He saw in her the source of a dynamism that allows us fully to take part, through our Alliance with her, in all the mysteries of her Son, especially in his saving mission. For Father Chaminade, devotion to Mary is quintessentially Christocentric. It develops in us a formative, community-centered way of acting in the world and fosters a missionary commitment.

Today's Church is again characterized by great devotion to Mary. But sometimes it is a rather individualistic, private kind of devotion, without much dynamism. Sometimes Marian devotion rests on

weak foundations, on childish sentimentality or on private revelations. (Father Chaminade also received private revelations, but he did not take them as the basis for the Marian devotion he taught to others.) He points the way to a devotion that recognizes Mary's central role, at the side of her Son, in the mystery of salvation, and spurs us on to dedication and commitment to the men and women of our time.

Last year's Survey of the Marian attitudes of today's Marianists reveals that Mary remains very important to us. But we have a hard time finding satisfactory expressions for our devotion today. Is our devotion too private and reticent? Father Chaminade's example guides and motivates us in the important task of giving voice to Mary's role in our time.

Once again, in Father Chaminade, the Lord has given the world a patron for a type of ecclesial life that is particularly timely. He is a patron for all those who try to develop a profound and solid approach to Mary, one that motivates Christians to live out their commitment in a way that speaks to the hearts of people.

2. OUR FOUNDER'S MESSAGE AT THIS MOMENT IN MARIANIST HISTORY

Our Recent Past: Years of Tribulation and Purification

The past four decades since the time of the Great Council have been for us, as a religious community and often as individuals, a time of tribulation and purification. The beatification of our Founder bears a unique meaning for us as we look back on these challenging years.

St. Paul was able to boast in his sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us@ (Romans 5:3-6). Father Chaminade knew the same process by hard personal experience. Is this process of purification and seasoning a way of understanding what God has been doing among us over these years? I would like to suggest some parallels between our Founder's tribulations and ours.

The number of clergy and religious dropped vertiginously in Chaminade's day, more even than in ours. In the first years of my religious life, I remember that we felt a pride, which then seemed quite justifiable, in the large numbers of young men who were joining us, as well as in the excellent intellectual formation of our members. On the human level, we appeared to be poised for great expansion and success. Today, we are painfully, perhaps humbly, conscious of a great loss in numbers (from about 3250 in 1965 to barely 1500 today). Like Chaminade in his time, we are called in ours to look ahead and emphasize quality more than numbers.

We older Marianists have seen quite a number of foundations and implantations of our charism in new countries and areas of the world. From about eight per cent in 1976, the proportion of our men in Africa, Asia, and Latin America has now risen to almost twenty-five percent. But even this sign of new life involves the suffering and endurance that builds character, of which St. Paul spoke. Most of our new implantations involve hard beginnings, heartbreaks and disappointments. We have known our failures and have had our martyrs, in such countries as Nigeria, Brazil, and Colombia. Father Chaminade's day of many new foundations saw no known Marianist martyrs, but lots of pain and struggle. Our Founder is a special patron for those who seek to lay new Marianist foundations.

Many experience in an acute way the inexorable aging process. The average age in our Units ranges from 35 for India to 70 for France, and the average age for the total Society is 60. Those of us who worry about aging should remember that Father Chaminade founded the Society at the age of 56 and the Third Order Regular of Marianist Sisters at the age of 75! We should pray that we may be gifted, as he was, with the

courage to undertake new missions long after mid-life, hoping firmly in God's blessing on the labors of old age.

A great source of regret and anxiety for most Marianists is the steady number of men who withdraw from the Society. The numbers of withdrawals at the present are not great, but sadly they continue. Hardly any Unit of the Society has failed to experience some very painful departures, often including mature and seasoned men in whom we had placed a lot of hope. Most of those who leave continue to feel a certain closeness to some members of the Society and continue to identify with many aspects of our charism. Yet the pattern of withdrawals sometimes leaves us feeling a certain lack of corporate solidity in commitment. Our Founder had a similar experience, especially in the 1830's, when a number of his first and most gifted disciples left the Society.

Throughout his adult life, Father Chaminade felt pangs of regret for the seemingly solid pre-revolutionary Church he had known in his youth. Yet he looked forward instead of pining for the past. Similarly, we have been obliged to withdraw our services from many institutions, including some with a long and glorious history. I notice each year, as I write letters to the jubilarians, that many of them spent long years in works that are no longer in the hands of the Society. For these jubilarians, to think of the glories of our past can sometimes be a bittersweet pill. Yet more and more they are recognizing that God has used and preserved all the goodness and effort they have expended for the building of His Kingdom, even if the institutional forms have changed.

Like Chaminade, we are called to embrace new methods for new times. During the past few years, we have been involved in a large-scale restructuring of the Units of the Society itself. We hope that this restructuring represents a courageous and forward-looking response to new situations in our times, an invitation to greater partnership with others and the best use of our limited resources. But such restructuring is not easy, for the Units of the Society are not simply administrative arrangements but also communities of life which have built up long and rich histories. Naturally we mourn what we lose, even as we try to equip ourselves for the future. Blessed Father Chaminade knew similar feelings, mixtures of loss, insecurity, hope and trust.

Perhaps all this purification is seasoning our Acharacter@ (to use St. Paul's word), teaching us patience and confidence in God rather than in ourselves. I don't think any human explanation, historical, sociological or psychological, can adequately explain our situation otherwise. We have to learn, as Father Chaminade did, that our success depends on God's grace and not on our human resources and capacities. The Lord has led us for a long time now through a period of purification, like the chosen people wandering for forty years through the desert. Does He perhaps want us to see our Founder's beatification as a reminder that the Promised Land is still in our future?

Signs of Hope

Even in desert years, the Lord grants us signs of hope. For us Marianists, the Church's affirmation through the beatification of Father Chaminade and the official recognition of Marianist Lay Communities are a certain culmination of these glimmers of hope.

No doubt **the Marianist laity** is the greatest sign of hope for us today. Even though our number as religious has declined, never before have so many people in all continents of the world found spiritual motivation and guidance in the charism of Father Chaminade. In addition to the members of the Marianist Lay Communities, we are surrounded everywhere by people who consciously share in the charism: friends, colleagues, volunteers, students, parishioners. Surely at least ten thousand people in today's world find their predominant spiritual motivation in the Marianist charism. I recently saw a beatification banner from one of our schools in Latin America, which sums it all up: AFather Chaminade,

thank you for giving us the Marianists.@ And this was from a school which no longer enjoys the regular services of a Marianist religious community!

Efforts for renewal and revitalization over the years, even if they have usually not had dramatic results, have enriched us with many signs of hope. Among them, I would single out ten:

- \$ The new flourishing of **Marianist religious vocations** during the past ten years in Africa and India, and the solid results of vocation ministry in Latin America and Korea.
- \$ A **renewal of prayer and spirituality** among many Marianists, a richer and closer sense of God's presence and openness to His will than before.
- \$ The renewal of **our educational work**, which is almost everywhere carried out today in close partnership with committed laypeople who show great interest in the Marianist educational heritage.
- \$ The growing desire for **collaboration and partnership** in all our ministries.
- \$ The willingness of many people to offer **voluntary services** with us, particularly when we are clearly in solidarity with poor and marginalized people.
- \$ The new style of **formation** in the Society, summed up in the *Guide for Formation*, which is beginning to show excellent results.
- \$ More interest and better insertion in the concerns and corporate life of the **local and national Church**.
- \$ The growing **internationalization and inculturation** of Marianist life around the globe.
- \$ The signs of spiritual thirst and **openness of today's youth** in many countries: after a certain period of rejection and disorientation, many of them now seem to be searching for a compelling religious identity. This openness is at once a sign of hope and a challenge to respond, to come closer to today's youth.
- \$ A dawning renewal of **pastoral work**, in youth ministry, campus chaplaincies, parishes, shrines, and centers for retreat and renewal. If we can build on this renewal and draw closer to people today, especially young people, this renewal could be very promising for the future of our Marianist Family.

For me personally, another particularly important sign of hope is the steady growth among us of a commitment to and **solidarity with poor and marginalized people**. Nearly all the new works undertaken by the Society around the world aim at evident and tangible solidarity with the poor. Nearly all our long-lasting works have revised their objectives and created new programs with a similar aim. A better global consciousness is developing among Marianists. We are becoming more creative in discovering means of networking, twinning and linking our efforts for social change across the world. Such solidarity with the poor is clearly recognized as the most convincing sign of the authenticity of religious people today. In developing this solidarity, I am convinced that we are tapping into a key dimension of Father Chaminade's charism which has not been sufficiently emphasized in the past.

I would like to mention a final sign of hope, one that has remained unchanged throughout these 200 years for all Marianists: **Mary**, whom our traditional Constitutions, quoting St. Bernard, identified as our *maxima fiducia, tota ratio spei nostrae* (Agreatest confidence, the comprehensive reason for our hope@ -

Constitutions of 1891, art. 295). I was struck, in reading the correspondence from the Marianist founders in Japan, a pioneering great Amission@ beyond the Christian world, how much they trusted that Mary would be their guiding Star amid difficulties and trials. The same is experientially true for many today, as the recent Survey of our Marian Attitudes suggests. In her, the Woman of Hope, Marianists characteristically find, in accord with the teaching of our Founder, a secure source for trust and hope for the future.

These signs of hope seem to go some distance toward that Arefounding@ which so many commentators see as essential for religious congregations that are to have a future. No doubt God and Mary are not yet finished with the conversions they want of us. We have no other founder than Father Chaminade, who is now recognized as a sign and model for the universal Church. Yet in our day it seems to me clear that we are being granted the grace of taking part in a true refounding, a new flowering of the tree of the Marianist Family that the Founder planted two hundred years ago.

3. MARIANISTS IN THE CHURCH TODAY

This moment of the beatification is a good occasion to meditate on our ecclesial nature. Fr. Chaminade, even though prophetic in his own way, was unambiguously a man of the Church of his time, an honorary Canon of the local cathedral and an intimate of the local Bishop. The recognition our charism is now receiving from the Holy See invites us to think about what we receive from the universal community of the Church, and what charismatic gifts we have to offer to the life of that Church.

What we Receive from the Church

We, the People of God, are the Church. In a way, we can say that we receive everything from our participation in the life of the Church. Its multi-faceted faith, heritage, and spiritual traditions sustain us. We know the rich tradition of a faith-community that is now celebrating the beginning of its third millennium. Our charism draws upon the wealth of the Church's heritage, in particular, upon the insights of the French School of spirituality that originated two hundred years before Father Chaminade. To use the long-traditional comparison, we stand like dwarves on the shoulders of the spiritual giants who have gone before us: whatever new prospects we can see are possible only because of that solid foundation.

In daily life, we continue to receive spiritual and pastoral guidance in the communion of ecclesial life. The sacraments, very particularly the Eucharist, mediate God's presence to us. Our interaction with other ecclesial charisms - the worshipful life of the Benedictines, the spontaneity and simplicity of the Franciscans, the learning and wisdom of the Dominicans, the dynamic apostolic spirituality of the Jesuits, the vibrancy and enthusiasm of new movements - stimulates us and hones our sense of identity. The other men who will be beatified with Father Chaminade remind us of this exchange of gifts which we experience within the communion of the Church.

It is important for us not to stand apart from ecclesial life, isolated, in a world closed in on ourselves. We have much to receive from others.

What Our Charism Offers in the Church

We also have much to give. The Marianist way of being in the communion of the Church can offer an enrichment to all local Churches.

Our emphasis on community and on family spirit contributes a much-needed style to ecclesial relationships, which otherwise can become authoritarian and stilted.

The formative style that we bring, even as males, to our ministries is an important counterbalance to elitism and alienating rigor: Not all of us receive the same measure of grace, and...it suffices for every one to be as God wills him to be@ (Constitutions of 1839, art. 262, Constitutions of 1891, art. 267).

The incarnational spirituality that fascinated Father Chaminade continues to inform our work at its best, helping us to find God in the simple, concrete experiences of people every day. It opens us out to the much needed task of inculturating the Christian message wherever we are, as opposed to simply importing a foreign mentality and style.

From our Founder we have inherited a missionary dynamism that calls for creativity in communicating the word of the Lord, and an emphasis on the development of lay leadership, on collaboration and dialogue.

His example prompts us to seek ways of including all kinds of people, rich and poor, intellectuals and workers, clergy and lay, men and women, urban and rural, from all sorts of backgrounds and educations, in a common thrust.

In a word, we can say that the charism we have received from our Founder predisposes us to live out a Marian model of Church. Others in the Church may have greater gifts for authority and good order, or for stupendous individual feats in the service of the Gospel. For us, as for our Founder, the Church is above all a family of disciples, gathered together, with respect for each one's gift and each one's needs, around the Mother of God. Our best realizations are invariably the result of teamwork and partnership with others. We tend to extend the gifts of equality and inclusiveness as far as possible. Like Mary, we emphasize the role of nurturing life, forming, affirming, and creating unity, much more than judging and condemning.

In order to realize our unique contribution to the life of the Church, it is important that we Marianist religious reflect on what we are doing to live out the charism of our Founder. We should ask not only who he is for us, but who we are for him. Does he recognize us as his disciples today?

We need to be visible. People need to know who we are and why we do what we do. We should emphasize direct contact with people, especially young people. We should be in direct contact with poor and marginalized people, and our publics should feel challenged by our unambiguous solidarity with these outcasts. Positions of direct religious ministry are especially appropriate for us. When qualified religious are available, it is good that some of them serve in administrative leadership, because great good can be accomplished in this way. But in all cases, we need to be about the direct communication of the message of Jesus. We need to live out our charism in a way that speaks simply and unambiguously to people. The people around us should know about our Marian charism and about our Founder.

We are not the only ones who offer special Marian gifts in the Church. As Father Chaminade said, when we discover that others share many aspects of our Marian charism, it should be a motive for rejoicing rather than jealousy: Awe ought to compliment them, bless them, and invite them to vie with us in zeal and love (letter to the retreat-preachers of August 24, 1839). But by fidelity to the unique blend of attributes that makes up the charism he handed on to us, we discover a rich identity and make a valuable contribution to ecclesial life.

CONCLUSION: A NEW MOMENT FOR THE MARIANIST CHARISM

This year devoted to the Great Jubilee and to the remembrance of Father Chaminade is a good time for all of us to pray for a new infusion of Marianist life.

In the splendid hymn that begins the Letter to the Ephesians, we read of God's goodness in making the first believers also the first helpers - *tous proelpikoutas en to Christo* (Eph. 1: 12). At this cardinal moment in our corporate history, we need to be people of hope, who rejoice in seeing signs of new life around us.

We are called to be open to the Lord, avoiding any temptations to imposing our own ideas, or to pessimism and fatalism, letting God answer, in the ways He knows best, our prayers and longings about the future. We should realize that His ways may surprise us, may not exactly correspond to our limited imaginations.

We are invited to be open to implanting our charism in new parts of the world and also in new kinds of communities and ministries wherever we are. Perhaps these may include temporary commitments, new kinds of lay or religious communities, and new associations with partners who are not vowed religious.

Perpetuating the good of our past is excellent, but creating new responses to the present and future is even more urgent.

We are called to be humble. We must not act like smug experts who think we know everything about the charism. We need to be willing and eager to learn, even from newcomers.

We are encouraged to trust in God and Mary and abandon ourselves confidently to their plans, because we know that they are plans of love and mercy.

During this year of grace, I urge you all to meditate on the life and charism of Blessed Father Chaminade, to develop a more personal relationship with him, and to open yourself to his great vision for our role in the world and Church we will meet during the third century of our existence as a Family.

Fraternally,

David Joseph Fleming, S.M.
Superior General