

## **Program for Christian Leadership: Chaminade Scholars Focus Group Report**

A focus group was held Monday April 3<sup>rd</sup> with 7 Chaminade scholars on the eve of their graduation from University of Dayton. The goal of the focus group was to understand the role the Chaminade Scholars program had played in their life at the University and its role in forming their sense of vocation. In what follows, the discussion proceeds somewhat in the order of the discussion itself, although some remarks are cited out of sequence to illustrate particular subject matter.

The discussion suggests that the participants had absorbed a message of John Paul II: “One becomes fully adult when his concern is no longer to be served, but to serve, to give of himself, to grow, and to help others to grow.”<sup>1</sup> Their post graduate plans were all articulated within a concept of a vocation that is based in faith and influences not just what they do in their work but their whole life experience. Their experience of the Chaminade Scholars program was all encompassing because the friendships and connections made in the early part of that program were the drivers for so many of their other involvements over their 4 years on campus.

## **II. Detailed Results**

### **A. Post Graduate Plans and Influence of the Chaminade Scholars Program**

1. *I'm sure you're all looking forward to graduation, so let's talk about your plans. What will you be doing after graduation? What has influenced your choice? How did you decide what to do? What impact, if any, did Chaminade Scholars programs have on your decision?*
  - a. *Did you consider graduate programs? Which ones and why?*

The discussion of plans for post-graduation illustrated almost immediately that ideas of service developed at UD had greatly impacted post graduation decisions. Chaminade scholar meetings and the Marianist Practicum were specifically mentioned as sources of influence.

“I came to UD in engineering. After graduation I'm going to grad school for mathematics as a professor at the university level. At one of the Chaminade meetings, someone told me that I could try classes outside of my major and I found I liked them.”

“I thought about going to grad school. I'm going to teach next year and I do love teaching and I find it rewarding.” “In the course of going to UD I took a Marianist practicum, and I really want to go into family counseling.”

“I would like to teach in some form. Also, I might do a year of service and then teach after that.”

---

<sup>1</sup> At the Villa Nazareth in Rome, 1986

“I will be starting law school in the fall. I have been considering it since I came to UD. I have become increasingly interested in social problems and I think a career in law would be a good way to help those issues.”

At the same time, there were those who noted simply that they were going to persist in plans they had made before college. “I am probably going to go work as an engineer.” “I’m going to law school in the fall. I wanted to be a lawyer since I was a kid.”

After these initial responses, the discussion evolved into a more focused conversation about the drivers that helped them make these decisions. In general, the responses suggested the Chaminade Scholars Program was a component in making these decisions, but that the students’ had difficulty separating the program elements from their entire UD experience. They were very comfortable articulating the relationship between their faith and what they were doing.

“It may seem simple, but for me it comes from the Gospel. Christ calls us everyday to serves those that are least fortunate.”

“I enjoy what I have learned about engineering, but I enjoy it more in its relation to faith and a human person. I like that I’ve had this experience and I would like to have something solid in making judgments from.”

“I am being pretty selective in the schools I want to teach in. I want to be where I can serve. I am limiting myself to Catholic schools because I want to talk about my faith and forming young people’s morals. I want a diverse school. I want to work in a school who will let anyone in and serve everybody no matter what.”

“Teaching so much, especially in an urban setting, serving them as a teacher is like serving them in the community center or serving them by helping their parents. Spending time before and after class of your time to help your kids and buys extra things for the classroom.”

“I’ve been struggling to match this love of math with my desire to impact the lives of other people and I think that eventually being a university professor will give me the opportunity to impact people in the classroom and on campus. It will give me a chance to live a life that is not dominated by the 9 to 5.”

“A religious call to service, the notion that to those that have much given to them much is expected. This summer, I traveled with employees of Wal-mart to Bangladash and I got to tour some factories and see the labor. It showed me how privileged I am by my place of birth. The specific issues I was dealing with made me think of who the world is interconnected. In my lifetime there is going to be a change in how business is going to be internationally and as a lawyer I could greatly impact how that happens.”

“I had never been able to articulate something other than a career or job and I was dissatisfied with that. I really think that the Chaminade Scholars Program gave me the vocabulary of vocation with what I wanted to do with my life.”

Where “my gifts and talents are needed? It can happen through your job.”

They discussed the importance of the informal relationships developed with Marianists on campus that would not have occurred without meeting them through the Chaminade program. There was a definite sense in the responses that having a group with which they could be comfortable talking about issues of faith had made it easier for them to continue to pursue actively what it means to live your faith and to think more deeply about the idea of a vocation.

“It put me in contact with a lot of people. My freshman year the Trinity house still had discussions once a month. It has been that whole thing of what my life’s supposed to do.

It’s probably been more in an impact in what doors still to look at but what doors are already closed. It’s made me think about things I didn’t want to or wouldn’t bother to.” “When we came here as freshman, it was nice to have a group where we would have time to talk about faith with other students. I think the opening up of this group as a sounding board and being able to discuss my faith and vocations of my faith.”

“It was the informal aspects of the program like introducing us to the Marianists where it opened up us new opportunities. I wouldn’t have as much contact with them if it weren’t for the program. I met people and saw their vocations.”

The notion of vocation was articulated again and again:

“I came in having a definition of vocation, this program has really helped me take a look at what my vocation is because hearing the word vocation over and over again it is impossible to forget about it. Talking to people helped me stepped outside of myself.”

“The overwhelming mention of vocation. I really think I would have never put any thought into it if I didn’t have the Chamindaes Scholars.” “A lot of people are looking at the pay, while we are looking at what we would be doing for others.”

*Did you think of pursuing the ministry? Why or why not?*

Several of the participants had thought seriously about taking religious vows and had consciously decided it was not the life for them. They voiced the idea that ministry in the broader sense was compatible with family life and that they wanted a family.

“I got to know the Marianist community and spent a decent amount of time in the seminary in Cincinnati and I got to know about myself and how it fit. I saw it as an option of my life and to see if it was for me. I realized it’s not for me, but I’m glad I know more about this kind of life.”

“The flow of my life and how my life was going my spiritual director and I came to a point where we decided this vowed religious life is not for me.”

“I certainly considered a vowed religious life. We had a Chaminade retreat what appealed to me about it in some levels, but in a larger sense I felt a stronger call to participating in a family. Also, especially as my roommate got really formally linked onto it felt uncomfortable handing over so much control of my life over to a hierarchy.”

“Vowed religious life is still something I’m open to. It is a very valuable way of life, but ministry is something you can do in family life. I see myself eventually working in the church. Being a youth minister is very appealing to me.”

“I guess I’m totally devoted to, not religious life, but in a context of a family. I feel a strong call to work in the church, but also pastoral counseling, Christian family counseling. Visiting the sisters on campus and I realized that some of the things they were doing I could do with a family and it wasn’t either or.”

“I can’t see my life without some kind of broader sense of ministry in it.”

## **B. Participants’ General Views of the Chaminade Scholar Program**

*If you were asked to describe to me the Chaminade Scholars program, what would you tell me? Suppose you were trying to convince me to apply the program, what would you say to me?*

Students felt that the most important aspect of the program was the network of contacts they developed as a result of being in the program. “Network” as used by these students however has a very specific set of meanings. “Networking” meant developing the list of friends, counselors and trusted mentors that empowered you to act on the things that were important to you. It did not mean simply friendship in the traditional sense (although the friendships were central). The students felt the relationships they developed with other students, Marianists, and faculty they met through the program had an additional element of shared purpose and identity.

“It is an excellent scholarship. The Chaminade Scholars Program is a group of students who get together and seriously discuss their vocation in groups and classes. “

“I might recommend a first year student get involved because it is an elite group and got my name out there as a networking thing. It put me in so many places with the Marianists.”

“I would recommend it despite the scholarship for the interaction with people I met on this campus. You have a great group of people to help support you.”

“It is nice to have this built in group on UD.”

“I liked that we are all over the place...People that we wouldn't normally be friends with because we wouldn't be in the same class...the diversity of the group.”

“The people you meet are the first selling point. I think by nature the people who are selected obviously have taken some initiative to get to that point. They are more likely to achieve leadership positions. It is good for networking. It is a good entry way to meet the Marianists who are a terrific aspect of this university.”

“It would be a lot easier [without the program]. If you don't like dealing with bigger things of life than it wouldn't be for you.”

*Now, suppose you were trying to convince me not to apply to the program, what would you say?*

Asked about the negative aspects of the program, they suggested particular classes had not been as useful as others. “I don't think the focus of our classes has been vocationally centered.” “Well, I think I would say that I have been frustrated with the program. There is so much potential that is not being filled with programming and retreats. Two of the courses we had to take sucked.” “The classes might be scheduled at a time that you would rather take a different class.”

### **C. Most Meaningful Aspects of the Program**

*Thinking of all those things we just talked about, what were the best, or most meaningful to you and why? What changed you the most?*

Two specific events stood out with the group, the two bookends of the program, their required last class: Christianity, Citizenship, and Society and the initial summer workshop before they started their first year.

With respect to the summer Program for Christian Leadership Workshop before their first year:

“They made me go to the PCL retreat before freshman year, which I would not have gone on before which would not have gotten hooked up with the Wagners. If I weren't a Chaminade Scholar I'm not sure if I would have gotten the connection with the Marianists and Lay Marianists.”

“[In reference to the summer workshop] I liked the retreats. I wished we could have had more. We could have had more, but it was more up to us planning them.”

With respect to the class, Christianity, Citizenship, and Society:

“The last class we took was the best of the classes.”

“ASI 358. It was about how we live in this secular world and also live out our Christian vocation. How to mesh being a Christian and a global citizen.”

“It inspired very deep thought.”

“We had a very excellent professor who was very engaging.”

“It was the most applicable about what is coming next in our lives because of the questions it made us ask. It summarized what we have been doing in the program about vocation. “

#### **D. General Education Cluster Courses**

*What about the General Education Cluster? What are the positives? The negatives? What is your opinion of the specific courses? ASI 356 Christian Tradition of Prayer? ASI 357 Vocation and the Arts? ASI 358 Christianity, Citizenship, and Society?*

When the group discussed the 3 classes, Christian Tradition of Prayer, Vocation and Arts, and Christianity, Citizenship, and Society, there were some criticisms of the first two classes and tremendous excitement about the last. There was a general consensus from the group that there should be a more specific set of guidelines and more continuity between the classes. Some of the criticism reflected an expectation of more active spiritual involvement in the course process. At the same time, some participants valued aspects of the courses.

Comments on Christianity, Citizenship, and Society (repeated from above):

“The last class we took was the best of the classes.”

“ASI 358. It was about how we live in this secular world and also live out our Christian vocation. How to mesh being a Christian and a global citizen.”

“It inspired very deep thought.”

“We had a very excellent professor who was very engaging.”

“It was the most applicable about what is coming next in our lives because of the questions it made us ask. It summarized what we have been doing in the program about vocation. “

Comments on Christian Tradition of Prayer:

“Some of the books themselves, praying the Our Father book...I liked some of the reading they assigned.”

“To be frank, it was one of the least fruitful classes I’ve taken here at the University of Dayton. I guess I would improve the course by focusing it on the student and the students’ prayer life [rather] than ‘look here are seven different prayers of history.’”

- “For a prayer class, we never prayed in class.”
- “I feel like a prayer class needs to be more active.”
- “There was not a very well develop syllabus for the class.”
- “I never knew what was going on. What am I even supposed to be doing here.”

#### Comments on Vocation and Arts:

- “It is a literature course.”
- “The title is deceiving...if you didn't like literature...”
- “We looked at one piece of art and talked about music for two days.”
- “I think it should be team taught with an art/music professor.”
- “I think Florence not Paris for the trip.”
- “There was nothing in the class that related to this trip.”
- “First, the professor was really good but I think the professors need more guidelines. We are just reading books that he likes because again I'm slightly confused about what we are doing. I think there should be some more continuity between the courses. Secondly, we have a very western, male, white perspective for everything we are reading.”

#### **E. Mentors and Portfolios**

When asked to discuss their portfolios or mentor no one really knew what those were. They remembered some discussion about these topics during their freshman year but did not have a sense that anything had come from these discussions.

- “Portfolio?”
- “I don't have a mentor”
- “At the very beginning we were paired with someone a year ahead of us.”
- “We were told we were going to have a mentor, but nothing ever came of it.”

#### **F. Understanding of vocation**

*When you reflect on your understanding of vocation when you were a first year student compared with your understanding now, how is it different? What does vocation mean to you now?*

Participants had difficulty articulating how they came to develop their sense of vocation although the discussion made clear that develop a sense of vocation they had.

- “I think what it did for me was develop what my vocation for me personally is where God is calling me to be.”

- “I had a very narrowed sense of vocation that has expanded a lot since then. I have a more well rounded picture of it. I thought it was career focused. It really is about how you interact with your surrounds, your society as a person.”

“I think what drew me into the program initially I already had this idea of vocation. There was support of other people rather than an increased knowledge.”

“It differs very little. Our sophomore and junior year classes, if they were intended to increase our understanding of our vocation they failed. The final class did help us understand our own vocation.”

### **G. Discussion of Specific Program Objectives**

*Now I'm going to ask you to react to some very specific issues. These issues are directly related to the goals of the Christian Leadership. We have talked about some of them already, but I want to really focus on them now.*

*Do you feel, as a result of the program, that you understand and value what it means to be committed to living in a way that is consistent with your faith?*

The answers reflect the degree to which boundaries between program aspects and other aspects of UD were vague in students' minds. But the answers also reflect the depth of the understanding of vocation they had achieved.

“I can't avoid doing ministry in my life...it is whether I do it well or do it poorly. It has to be integrated.”

“I don't know if the program did that for me. If somebody asked me I would go to people: family, Marianists, friends, prayer, and people I met on service trips and job opportunities outside of the program. It would be my UD experience [of] which Chaminade Scholars was a component.”

“I feel that the program has increased my understanding on how to live in accordance of my faith, but I would not say that Chaminade Scholar made me value it anymore that I did coming into the program.”

*Do you, as a result of the program, better understand your life in a theologically informed way? Has your sense of Christian vocation changed? To what extent are you willing to make choices based on these understandings? Do you feel prepared to assume leadership roles in the community, the church, and your profession?*

The participants were very clear that they were making choices directly tied to a sense of vocation they had developed. They also felt that they had already started assuming leadership roles in what they had done on campus and were confident that they would continue to operate as leaders (defined as Marianists would define leaders).

“We are already so involved with leadership already. We know it might not go well but we've experienced it.”



“When you have the Chaminade Scholar behind my name makes me feel a little more responsible to giving back to the campus.”

“If you tell a group of people you are going to be leaders, then they are going to be.”

“I think an important part of leadership is knowing what is important to you and taking the next step because someone has to do it.”

“I went to Bangladesh because a group of us were upset that the president of Wal Mart was coming to UD’s campus and we did something about it.”

The Marianist have influenced us...that leadership is quiet and collaborative. It is being a voice to get other people to help join a cause.”

“I love that the faculty of UD allow students to be involved with the campus life.”

“As a campus ministry intern, I created a position for myself which the faculty pushed me to do. All the clubs on campus are student run.”

“I personally am inspired by the Wagners [Lay Marianists met through the Chaminade Scholars program]. If you look at leadership as the participatory role in community, just by participating in the community.” [Several nods around the table about the importance of the Wagners]

“I think a large part of it is that I’m confident who I am. I can’t say I won’t do it right, but I’m willing to jump in.”

*What is your understanding of how your religious convictions relate to your life’s work?*

Participants saw religious conviction as the well spring of their life’s work

“I think it is impossible to separate the two. I think my faith guides my life’s work.

“I think it [religious conviction] is a strong motivator to want to make the world a better place which is leading us all to do what we want to do.”

“To live intentionally is based on my religious convictions.”

“Christianity is a demanding faith. It does not leave a lot uncommitted.”

## **H. Impact of Chaminade Scholars on the UD Community**

*What, in your opinion, has been the impact of Chaminade Scholars on the UD community? What, if anything, has made a difference? Influence on the quality of campus liturgies?*

There was a moment of dead silence in the room linked to each person’s unwillingness to speak of their own leadership roles. Since almost every participant had been heavily

involved in leadership roles while at UD, the moderator asked them to speak about each other. As a consequence, many of the quotes below are speaking of what they know about what another person in the room or another Chaminade Scholar had done in their time at the University. The participants focused both on the role Chaminade Scholars played in the broader campus community and in the faith community.

“Social justice issues... I know more about them and am more aware of them...I learned more about Native Americans in this country and the problems they face today from you than anyone else.” [Participant speaking of the impact of another participant who had initiated several Human Rights Weeks forums]

“A witness to real simple living.” [Participant speaking of the impact of another participant who had helped formed an intentional community on the student ghetto that emphasized low impact communal eating]

“I just want to say that she is an example of what unconditional love really is.”

“I am floored by the whole Bangladesh thing. I just watched as he did this leap and went out there...He took it and did something about [it] and is a leader on service groups on campus and inspires people to inspire people about these things....It was not an experience that was limited to you, you used it to educate the campus.” [Participant speaking of the actions one participant had taken with the President of Wal-Mart which resulted in an invitation to tour factories in Bangladesh]

The way you use your intellect is amazing. You are going to law school to help the greater good.

“As the Chaminade Scholars, I don’t think campus knows what that is. They know us as individuals. They don’t know the group.”

“All the engineering faculty who were on the mentor list...anytime they had something with human focus they went to me. Otherwise, my classmates had no idea that we were Chaminade Scholars.”