

Cathedral Latin School Alumni Association Merit Award Remarks

Bro. Tom Giardino, SM 26 April 2026

My dear friends, family, and especially my fellow Latin Alums. It is good for us to be here together. I believe that each year when we honor a “Man of the Year,” we really honor each of us sitting here today... and the myriads of others who have contributed to and benefitted from the Catholic and Marianist tradition of education as it was embodied in our Cathedral Latin School moment in history. Thank you all for allowing me to be here today.

Each one of us, with our different gifts, and probably with varying levels of intentionality while we were at Latin, walked through those famous doors on 107th Street and were transformed within the halls, on the fields, on the courts, in the speech and debate teams, and so many other activities. I found that these activities and relationships were transformative in ways I didn't realize till later in many cases. Maybe you experienced it the same way.

But these relationships were not only with each other as students but also with those precious lay and vowed religious Marianist educators -- so that we passed out of the doors to make a difference in our families, church, civic, and global societies.

I think that's what we celebrate today. Joe Nista and I are simply this year's symbols of our Latin brotherhood in all its God-given diversity and fruitfulness, strengths, and weaknesses. For sure, we weren't perfect and neither were the teachers and staff for that matter!

But I knew from that first day when we sat as freshmen in the big auditorium -- and I am pretty sure it was Bro. Pat Tonry who was up front calling out names, I guess for homerooms, well... he pronounced my name correctly. No mean feat for an Irishman. From that moment I knew that what Fr. Lalanne, one of the first Marianist educators, said about all Marianist schools, that this would be my second home. And that was my experience.

Like yourselves, I formed friendships that have lasted me to this day. For example, Bob Valerian, who is here today, and I'm privileged to be godfather for one of his sons. Also, Jerry Wochna, who couldn't make it from Florida, but who helped my dad in time of need. What gifts these friends have been in my life.

And there were some friendships that formed in those four years that didn't continue. But what was great was I got to know, for example, Jerry Pragg, who was from Parma. I didn't know anybody from Parma before I got to Latin! I was an “Eastsider.” But we went fishing that first year when we went to Euclid Beach on the class outing and it made all the difference. The diversity that we had in our class was striking and formative.

From another angle, I was a first-generation student, like many others in our class. My father was born in Naples, Italy, my mom was from Sicily. And of course, some of our fellow students had recently emigrated to Cleveland, like our Latin Hall of Fame athlete from our class, Steve Zahony from Hungary --who wrote me that he wanted to come but had a family emergency -- and then others like Augustine Idzelis, who had his locker next to mine as a freshman. And Szilard Szabo...he was so smart!

I'm not naïve, yes, there were probably groups, but let me tell you a story from my experience visiting one of our Marianist schools in India that characterizes Marianist education. It is a story about Fr. Quentin Hakenewerth, Superior General, and I visiting a then new Marianist school for "low caste" Christians in northern India. When Fr. Quentin shook hands with one of the students, some of the villagers, whom the brothers had invited to a celebration that day, began to murmur. I was sitting to the side next to the local parish priest. He asked me, "Do you know what is happening?" I said, "No." Then he said, "Those local villagers don't like it that an important man from Rome is touching a Dalit [considered a low-caste person]. But the students know that when they come on this campus, *caste doesn't count*." I was so proud of those Brothers.

When we were at our best at Cathedral Latin, it didn't make any difference if you were from the East side or the West side, or whether your name ended in a vowel or whatever academic track we had in those days. We were still Men of Latin and at a deep level we were united. Especially at football and basketball games! In fact, the theme of our 1960 Yearbook was, "No man is an island."

And that kind of unity in diversity was a basis for my being able to lead the development of the *Characteristics of Marianist Education* when I was on our Marianist International Leadership Team as Director of Education. This effort became the framework for thought and action in 125 schools of the Society of Mary in about 30 countries. But I didn't learn this just from studying books. I learned it from my experience at Cathedral Latin, and so one of those Characteristics is Family Spirit. The kind of community we had at our best and at our depth. And it was fostered by those Marianist educators, lay and religious, who had a deep respect for us as persons, persons with free will who had to take some ownership and agency for in our education. That's what Marianist education has always been about. Last night at a dinner for the awardees, Terry Roncalgli, chair of the nominating committee, said to me about his experience at Latin, "The moment I entered Latin, they treated me like a man, not a boy. It made a huge difference in my life."

Those four years were, of course, the seedbed of my vocation as a Marianist Brother, even though I didn't know it until one moment in my senior year when Bro. Don Boccardi talked to me about the church and different roles in the Church, and I ended up saying "Well, I guess I am going to be a brother." Surprised me and my parents, to be sure!

As some of you know, my parents weren't excited about this since I'm an only child in an Italian family, and they said 'no.' So, I spent a year at University of Pennsylvania but then entered the Marianists. And here I am, 64 years later. I have lived and worked together with three other Merit Award Winners: Marianist Brothers Victor Forlani, may he rest in peace, Joe Kamis, and Tim Phillip who are with us here. Thank you for your witness.

As I was reflecting on this day, what we call Marianist modesty for me recognizes that Joe Nista and I will be on the stage for a few precious and grateful moments. And then each of us, together with you all, return to our homes and churches and work and society to resume contributing to the common good of those communities. And I know that many of us can say that those graces began, surely in our families, but also formed at Cathedral Latin. I am eternally grateful to my parents who paid that \$25. per quarter for tuition and for my extended family, many of whom are here, my cousins who have supported me over the years. Thank you all for being here.

I also want to thank my classmates, Fr. Ted Marszal and Deacon John Burke, for presiding at our Eucharist and all the others who helped the liturgy to be a grace-filled event. Ted and I lived in Rome at the same time for a while.

I have to tell you that if you walked into my bedroom, you would find this picture [an original photo of Cathedral Latin School from the 1950's] on my wall. I found it on the roof of our house in Rome with several other photos of Marianist schools around the world. It's always before me because Latin transformed my life and that is what Catholic Marianist education does. It did that for me at Latin and then at the University of Dayton. And these transformative dynamics continue at Notre Dame-Cathedral Latin and these days at not only at UD, but the other Marianist universities -- St. Mary's University in San Antonio and Chaminade University of Honolulu. You can send your grand kids to any of them!!!

Bro. Pat Tonry, now Fr. Pat, was my senior religion class teacher and taught us about social justice and that we were called to organize at each level of our competence for the common good. I learned that there and tried to act on that when I was at my best, because Cathedral Latin -- since 1916 -- offered us those graces. That's also why one of the Characteristics of Marianist Education is "Service, Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation."

These days I am working at the North American Center for Marianist Studies in Dayton doing writing, research, and editing of documents in Marianist themes and history. I recently came across several sentences in Volume III of The General History of the Society of Mary that struck me and that I wanted to share with you. It was a section talking about high schools around the Marianist world.

"A characteristic case of the excellent academic results and vocational effectiveness of the high schools, in spite of their significant economic problems, [*some things don't change!*] was Cathedral Latin School of Cleveland. It started in 1916 and was entrusted fully to the Marianists in 1922. The school enjoyed immense prestige. In the school year of 1924, 300 youth applied of whom 220 were admitted."

And I also learned that alumni associations began in Marianist high schools in the latter part of the 19th century because young men in those days also experienced what we experienced and those associations sprung up in Rome, Italy; in Paris and Bordeaux, France; and in San Sebastian, Spain. We continue this legacy by supporting the Latin Alumni Association.

And so that brings us back to us here and now. And I want to say thank you to the Trustees of the Alumni Association, the nominating committee, all those who helped to make this a fine event, those who helped to make and serve our brunch, and again, my family for being here.

I hope all of us Latin alums here will continue to support NDCL as I do. I had the privilege of working with the Sisters of Notre Dame at the time of the merger in terms of integrating dimensions of the Marianist Educational Tradition with the new entity. And it has happened. Thank you President Hoynes for your leadership of NDCL in this noble cause of Catholic education.

And thank you all for being here and may God bless you and your households. AMEN