

Incorporating art throughout campus to inspire spiritual growth in a Catholic School Environment

Art, Spirituality, & “The Way”

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Letter to the Administration of Marist School, Atlanta, GA

Dear Father Harhager and Father Konzen,

As you know I am currently pursuing my master's degree in Art Education. At this time I am taking a class in Contemporary Issues in Art Education. We have been assigned a project called Critical Intervention/ Personal Action Plan. As directed by this assignment, I have been asked to address a cultural issue that is meaningful to me. In considering my cause, I have decided to use Marist, a community that I have spent a large amount of time with and that I care deeply about.

Over the years, I have observed and taken part in the culture at Marist, attending spiritual retreats, masses, mission trips, and worked along side of the students in extra curricular activities. I have watched our students hard at work in the classrooms developing and expanding their knowledge through academic excellence and creative expression in the fine arts. In this time, I have learned the traditions of The Marist Way and have marveled over the commitment the Marist priests have for our students and their educational endeavors. Through my observations and my growing understanding of the culture of our school, I have learned to appreciate the traditions and the values in which we stand for through the Mission of our school.

However, through my observations, there is one area in the culture of the school that I am perplexed by. As I have walked the campus, I have noticed a lack of student artwork on display. I have observed the occasional showcase of student works in the library, the art hallway, and in the main office. Though, these works of art are temporary. I have wondered why this is so, and have asked this question on several occasions. If our school embraces the arts, why are we unable to experience our students' great works and God given talents on a daily basis? Why is it that the hallways lack aesthetic experiences, such as visual imagery of historical events of our school, artwork that is reminiscent of Catholic teachings and traditions, and a continuation of the words of the Marist Way - as seen on the walls of the Centennial Center? As we witness in Cathedrals around the world, they are adorned with Catholic symbolism through handsome artistry. It is to my dismay, that Marist School lacks the significant visual traditions of the Church as we see in other religious settings. With a campus of our size, and the talents of our student body, I believe we can improve these inconsistencies of the Catholic traditions, through the use of student artwork based on the Marist ideologies.

Today, I would like to propose a plan that will bring the values and beauty of art alive in our school. My plan will involve our students' participation and will promote the virtues of the Marist way of life. Art educator, John Dewey (1961) once said, "there is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication. Men [and women] live in a community in virtue of the things, which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in

common.” I believe that we can develop a common way of communicating these values of The Marist Way through the use of student art. Through classroom direction, students can emulate the traditional art forms of the Catholic Church to be hung throughout campus.

In addressing this issue, I turned to the teachings of the Marist Way for assistance in addressing my cultural cause. I was able to talk with Mike Coveny, lead teacher of *Mary and The Marist Way* to discuss some ideas that I have for the school. Through our conversation, he invited me to speak with his class. I was thrilled with the opportunity; because I felt this step is crucial to the success of my plan. With the students being such a huge piece to my proposal, this opportunity would grant me some vital information about the perceptions and ideas of the students. After thirty minutes of sharing my proposal with the students and collecting their ideas, I felt confident to continue with my proposal. In this process, I learned three things; 1. the upper classmen are respective to the inclusion of spiritual art throughout campus, 2. they would like to become more involved in the appearance of the school, and 3. they would like to leave the school with a lasting legacy of Catholic art around our school’s campus. This message is powerful and I now know more than ever that this plan will benefit not only our students but the Marist community as a whole.

Attached you will find a copy of my Action Plan. I hope you will consider the ideas that the students, fellow faculty and staff, and myself have come up with. My goal of promoting art in our educational institution is best described by George Lowell Austin (1871), “I cannot emphasize too strongly the necessity of placing pictures in our higher schools, - pictures that shall have a storied meaning as well as artistic expression.” This meaning in itself is the values and mission of the Marist Way; the spiritual guidance through our daily lives here at our school, and the continued reminder of our faith in our heavenly father. I would like to thank you for your time and consideration of my proposal.

Best,
Tiffany Searcy

Addressing: Art, Spirituality, & “The Way”

Research Brief:

The Visual Imagery and Narrative Message

Throughout history, religious and political orders have utilized visual imagery as a way to communicate to the masses. Pictorial imagery has become a widespread form of communication since it does not rely on literacy or a commonality of language. This visual language is the common thread which connects people of different faiths, ethnic groups, and diverse languages. These narrative messages use symbolic images and representations to express meaning and ideologies. Symbolic images have supported story telling of historical events and spiritual ideals throughout time. According to Jenner (1910), “the earliest Christian symbolisms [were] for the most part constructed so that it should be understood fully by the initiated.” These symbolic images provide a connective message to its followers; Jenner goes on to infer, that these symbols will forever be a common property for initiated members of the Christian faith, as it is a universal understanding of common meaning. Through these portrayed stories, people can learn to relate the visual message to the contents of daily life. “The earliest [Christian] art was a combination of conventional ideographs with types and figurative teachings” (Jenner, 1910). It is through these figurative teachings that followers gain an understanding of the symbolic meaning of the foundation of the Church and how it represents traditions of the religious order.

Spirituality

Religious practices, such as Catholicism, are noted to use artworks that promote the messages of the sacraments and represent stories from the bible. Throughout history the Church’s emphasis has been on spiritual growth: an “intuitive receptivity and an existential posture one that engages the total self, i.e., intellect, heart, and will” (as cited in Campbell, 2005). The Church has utilized art to promote spirituality as a means of establishing connections to a higher power. Campbell accentuates the importance of the holistic values of spirituality in teaching and learning.

Reflective practice can be approached as a spiritual enterprise because being aware of the spiritual is being aware of our realities within the context of our cultural and social lives. We can learn to recognize the various dimensions of the self, along with a detachment from the self in order to see others, thus framing and constructing our worldview. We must first understand our personal narratives, which have always been deeply embedded in our teaching and our research; it is necessary to teach our students the relevance of these narratives and how they shape our action in the world (p. 67).

By including art throughout Catholic institutions, it reinforces spirituality and cultural understanding of religious themes and teachings of the sacraments.

Art in Places

As referenced by Mattern (1999), John Dewey, art educator and advocate for art in public places, believed

that art, if closely tied to people's everyday lives, is a form of communication through which people learn about each other's similarities and differences, break through some of the barriers to understanding and awareness, and develop some of the commonalities that define community (pp. 54-55).

It is this communication that links people to a common place, a place which one calls home. Austin (1871) suggests, like a student's home, schools should be extensions of the place that student's feel the most comfortable; a place that nurtures and strengthens personal identity and self-motivation, as well as provides deeper spiritual connections to the revelations of sacred moments to inspire the love of God (p.11). "Dewey saw art as potentially contributing to the development of community by creating and reinforcing commonalities through shared experience" (Mattern, p. 62).

These shared experiences help to strengthen the culture of a place, capitalizing on common themes which embrace the core values of society. Placing art in a communal place confirms the values and traditions of a community. As pluralism increases in society, Cardinal Garrone (1977) recommends Christian institutions maintain a "presence in the academic world" since they contain an "enriching power of...faith as the answer to the enormous problems which afflict mankind." In accordance with these enriching powers, Cardinal Garrone encourages schools to develop a clear

mission for the school that “is a critical, systematic transmission of culture in the light of faith and [that brings] forth ... the power of Christian virtue by the integration of culture with faith and of faith with living (http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_19770319_catholic-school_en.html#topw.microsoft.com). To Barrett (2003) the use of visual “images and objects present opinions as if they [are] truth, reinforce attitudes, and confirm or deny beliefs and values” (p.12), making the inclusion of art in schools a crucial part of the community’s culture. In doing so, the school places a strong emphasis on the essential principles of the mission and a spiritual focus on the virtues in which they set forth to follow.

Student Benefits

Barrett (2003) further expresses concern for the learner, stating that “learners of all ages can successfully decipher the many messages circulating in the images and objects of visual culture if given the [opportunity]” (p. 12). Art can serve as a way to relay information about common values of a community. “There is a language hid beneath the surface [of a place] that should speak and exert a moral influence” through the use of art (Austin, 1871, p.11). “Knowledge of the culture in which we live and how it functions is” (Barrett, 2003) the benefit of knowing the core values of an institution. Art provides unity in a community and a sense of balance. Its inclusion helps to inspire others with innovative ideas and deepens the aesthetic and connective nature of the people.

In terms of the student, learning in a community that embraces the arts helps students to connect to their surroundings in a more meaningful way. In addition to viewing the arts that uphold the teachings and values of its institutions, students have the ability and opportunity to participate in a collaborative effort to beautify the campus in which they learn. Through the focused studies of Catholic teachings, students gain an understanding of the virtues of the school’s mission. The visual culture of the school reinforces the religious practices in which the school is founded. Through active participation of the school’s mission, students reaffirm their commitment to faith, and show their willingness to connect to the community to build lasting experiences and

traditions. Finally, the inclusion of student religious art in an educational institution promotes creative and spiritual growth as well as promotes unity and school pride.

Location:

- Marist School, Atlanta, GA

School Description:

Marist School is a medium sized Catholic high school in Atlanta, GA. The Ashford Dunwoody campus was founded in the early 1960s as a military boy's school. In 1976, the school was converted to a co-educational school - after the move to the Perimeter area from downtown. The architecture of the campus is primarily brick with white trimmings. The campus is very traditional in style and resembles a college campus. The lower level of the main building (the Chanel Building - named after the founder of the Marist Order) is an open air space and is known as the Arcade. This is the area that the boys use to march in to avoid the heat of the summer. Today, this area serves its purpose as the student bag drop area and a place for social gathering. The long corridor is lined with white square pillars against concrete slabs and white ceilings. Above the arcade sits the student classrooms. On either ends of the arcade houses the cafeteria and the main office. Behind the Chanel Building and up a small hill is the home of the Marist Priests. This is also the location of the newly renovated Chapel and school garden. To the right of the garden sits two additional buildings for classes. The campus contains multiple buildings which house the student athletics: 3 gyms, a pool, the athletic offices, and weight room. Surrounding the buildings are multiple fields for athletic events. You can also access the other side of the campus by crossing over the pedestrian bridge to get to student parking and additional practice fields. Surrounding the entire campus is a 3 mile cross county trail.

The Marist Way:

- Hidden and unknown
- Being instruments of mercy
- Discipleship
- Trust in God
- "Tasting God"
- Doing "the wok of Mary"

- Saying no to greed, pride, and power
- The spirit of Nazareth and Pentecost
- Being called by "gracious choice"
- Ardent love of neighbor
- Union with God
- Self-denial
- Humility
- Hospitality
- Inclusiveness
- Serve

Goals for action plan:

- To incorporate student artwork throughout campus, to inspire spiritual growth in a Catholic school environment.
- Art students and the students of the Mary and The Marist Way will collaborate ideas on executing this initiative.
- Students will continue in the conversation about the mission of the school through the active teachings of The Marist Way and the Catholic traditional uses of art in public spaces.
- Students will gain school pride, self-confidence, and a sense of community through the inclusion of student artwork around campus.
- Students will graduate from Marist with the satisfaction of leaving a lasting legacy with the school, while also knowing they have embraced the Marist values through the depictions of spiritual stories and icons around campus.

Plan of action:

- Address areas around campus that could benefit from the inclusion of spiritual art and typography.
- Come up with a plan of execution and a timeline to complete the efforts.

Suggested art forms/icons to be included around campus:

- Drawings, Paintings, Photographs, Archival Documents or Images
- Imagery/statues of Catholic icons, crosses, religious symbols
- Mosaics, Mandalas, Murals, Stained Glass

- Prayer Stepping Stones, rocks
- Stations of the Cross
- Typography - Words of The Marist Way, Prayers, Signs

Suggested locations for artistic development:

- Arcade - pillars
- Cross Country Trail
- Father Brennan Room - Lower cafeteria wall
- Lower Library wall
- Meditation garden near the Chapel
- Meditation garden near the tennis courts
- Pedestrian bridge
- Stone walls (on the trail behind the rectory and near the ELC) or brick walls (in the Arcade)
- Modular Buildings
- The new Kuhrt building and entrance way
- Hallways in the Chanel building
- Stairwells
- Bridge connecting the Gunn Building to the Chanel Building
- End of the hallways of the Chanel building (open window areas)

Examples of Spaces Infused With Spiritual Art:

- **The Arcade** - the pillars in the arcade are reminiscent of the history of the school and of the faith on which the school stands on. The arcade should demonstrate the values in which the school was founded. I would like to see the words that we see in the athletic facility spread into the heart of the school – down the corridor of the arcade.
 - The pillars will stand as a place for a rotating message throughout the year so that the students will be able to connect with each virtue of the Way.
 - Banners will be hung that contain The Marist Way typography.
 - Student works of art and writings should mirror these words on the

adjacent pillars to demonstrate each meaning in visual or written form to further communicate the message.

- Each week of the school year should represent one of the 16 virtues of The Marist Way.
- **Classroom Hallways** - I would like to see the hallways as a more inviting atmosphere for our students and our families. Stained glass is very important to the Catholic faith and is seen in churches and chapels all over the world. I would like to bring this colorful and traditional aspect into the halls of the school.
 - Our classrooms are lined with windows along the tops of the classrooms. My idea is to use the windows above the doors to display student Mandalas or stain glass designs.
 - Students will have to come up with the themes of each hallway to represent Christ, Mary, and the mission of the school.
 - I would like the students to come up with these themes and create their designs on paper to be chosen by the administration team.
 - Once chosen I would like the students to create stained glass fixtures to hang or be adhered to the windows.
 - At the end of the hallways of the Chanel building there are large arches overlooking the back of the campus. This would also be a great place for stained glass to emphasize the traditional architectural characteristics of the school.
- **The Meditation Gardens** - I would like to see a place for an outdoor chapel, a place that welcomes prayer, and allows students to connect to their natural environment. In part of the garden I would like to see wooden benches made from trees, lined as if they were pews. At the front of the 4 to 5 rows I would like to see a large cross. We do not have a visible out door cross on campus and I think it will send a powerful message to the students.
 - Throughout the garden I would like to see prayer stepping-stones made from mosaics, and would like the garden filled with flowers.
 - Currently we have a few picnic tables in the space. I would like to see these tables remain. What I would like to change about them is to allow

students to write messages of faith. I would like the community to view these tables as a place for students to express their love of God and to record inspirational messages for those who read them.

- Our students use these tables to study, socialize with friends, and to eat their lunches. I would like this space to remain open for the students to visit. (This can happen in another location as well.)
- **The Pedestrian Bridge** - This Bridge is what connects the Cross Creek Property to the main campus. Our juniors and sophomores park on the Cross Creek Property. Every day they walk across the bridge to come to school.
 - As they walk across the bridge I would like them to read the prayers in which we recite at mass. I would like these prayers laid into the cement that they walk upon. So as they enter each day they can see the words that mean so much to the faith of the Church and to the school.
- **The Cross Country Trail** - in addition to the rigorous cross-country trail I would like to see the trail as a place for meditative walking.
 - Throughout the trail I would like to see the Stations of the Cross, statues, benches, and artistic symbols of the Church.
 - Each place will serve as a prayer station and will have some type of student art present: such as recycled windows made into stained glass - hung from the trees, student made crosses, statues that are symbolic of Catholic saints, and more.

View Example Lesson Plans at:

<http://tiffanydesrosierssearcy.weebly.com/lesson-plan-for-the-way.html>

Lesson 1:

In lesson one, the juniors and seniors participating in the Mary and the Marist Way class will explore the context in which the Catholic Church uses art. In addition to engaging in conversations about Catholic art, students will be responsible for researching the topic on their own, while also utilizing Pinterest to create a Catholic Art Pinboard. Students will share their findings with their classmates and will further discuss the types of art used in Catholic institutions, they will explore the meaning of the art forms, and how they are significant to the Catholic faith.

Lesson 2:

In lesson two, the students will investigate the Stations of the Cross through a short documentary by Catholic Focus. They will collaborate to come up with designs and symbols for each station. There are fourteen total stations which will be placed along the cross country trail surrounding the campus. Each group will create large mosaic stepping stones. Mosaics are symbolic art forms in Catholic churches. The students will also use the words of the Marist Way to create mosaic signs to hang on the trees throughout the trails. This lesson will have students actively working together to create a community based project that outlines traditional devotions of the Catholic faith, as well as, displays the words of the Marist Way.

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