

GENERAL CURIA

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Dear Joe,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your heart now and forever!

It gives me great pleasure to share with you some of my reflections with regard to Niagara University as it celebrates its 150th anniversary during the 2006-2007 academic year. I present my thoughts as an alumnus of Niagara, as well as a former member of the faculty and campus ministry staff, and now as Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission.

First and foremost, this celebration of the 150 years is the opportunity to give thanks to God for all the good that God has done through the presence of Niagara University and for how God has touched the lives of so many young people through the academic and other human services that Niagara University provides for all its members.

Secondly, I would like to say that it is an honor and a joy to be a part of what Niagara University is all about. I am happy to see that there continues to be dynamic life within the university, noting that the full-time undergrad population, as well as the full- and part-time undergrad enrollment have increased steadily since 2000 and that the grad school, full- and part-time, has also increased tremendously, by 55%. There must be a number of different factors, accounting for this increase in enrollment, that continue to make Niagara University attractive to students. I know what it is that

makes Niagara attractive to me and that is what I would like to share with you at this time.

1. Niagara University, as an academic institution, desires to give a holistic preparation to young people, both in the Catholic and the Vincentian tradition.
2. It is a university that goes beyond the borders of the United States. I think the good relationship that exists between Niagara University and many of the citizens of Canada, who have benefited from the university's programs and education, has always been considered a very positive sign. That is just one of many examples where people from other countries have come and made Niagara University their place of study.
3. Another attractive aspect of the university is its nationally recognized service-learning program. What a wonderful commentary it is that Niagara University students annually contribute nearly 50,000 hours of vital service to the local community.
4. The relationship that the university has with the local community, that is, the Niagara Falls' area, has always been special. More than ever, I think that the university is called to play a significant role in supporting the development of Niagara Falls.

We, as a Congregation, have recognized the importance of the university in the role it plays in its relationship with the local community of Niagara Falls. For this reason, we awarded you our Systemic Change Award for the project that you developed to benefit the local community. You contend that leaders in the faith community know how to effectively serve the poor. For this reason, you conceived a project whose overarching goal is to develop a model of public ministry in the spirit of St. Vincent that addresses urgent community needs by empowering individuals to think and act creatively to help themselves and their communities. Its specific goals are: 1) to build the capacity of the faith-based institutions serving the disenfranchised and poor areas in the city of Niagara Falls; 2) to provide training and development opportunities for members of the local faith community; and 3) to provide a forum for the discussion and dissemination of issues and topics critical to serving the urban poor in our community.

Poverty has been evident in the city of Niagara Falls at least since my time as a student. This situation has only worsened in the past 30 years. So the challenge remains for Niagara University, through its administration, staff and students, to act

in solidarity with those who suffer from poverty and are marginalized in the city. As a Vincentian institution, Niagara is in the right place at the right time. The city calls you to give your best to put into practice what is learned in the academic environment of Niagara University. It is our heritage as Vincentians, both priests, brothers and laity, to show our deep concern for the rights and dignity of the human person, especially the poor, the suffering, the handicapped, and the outcast. That deep concern, if it is to be authentic, has to begin at home.

5. While acting locally, the university also challenges all its members to think globally. I have always noted that faculty, staff and students are dedicated to building a better world community. Our Founder, St. Vincent de Paul, invites us to make love infinitely creative. My prayer is that Niagara University, as it celebrates its 150th anniversary, will continue to show creativity in the way it lives out its mission of love and to instill in all its members — faculty, staff and students — a passion for learning and, even beyond that, a passion for life.
6. One of the things that makes Niagara University special is, in a sense, its smallness. This offers the opportunity for more personal relationships, enabling students to develop their human potential and to give the best of themselves to better their own life situations, while also learning that the best way to improve their life situation is by giving themselves to others. In continuing our Vincentian tradition, I know that Niagara seeks to inspire its students to serve all members of society, especially the poor and the oppressed. As I have stated previously, that is done locally, as well as in the larger world.
7. I encourage you to continue to unleash creativity among all the members of the Niagara community. Perhaps those involved in the theater department might consider one of its missions or objectives to work toward helping develop the creativity of all the members of the Niagara community.
8. A final point that I would like to mention before concluding, Joe, is the tremendous work that is done on all levels of the university to maintain, in an integral way, dynamism in the students' learning experience. I am particularly impressed with the efforts made, through the chaplaincy of Niagara University and campus ministry, to help the university's young people, as well as members of the faculty and staff, deepen their own faith by relating the academic experience with the service of the poor, being motivated by the love God has for all of us, his children.

I ask that the Lord pour out his love and care in a special way over Niagara University as it celebrates its 150 years of presence, service and love to the beneficiaries of the wonderful, integral education that it has provided. God bless you all.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General