



Photo by Kevin Hainsworth

Mother of God School Appoints First President

by Rus Wester

When Mother of God School opened its doors for students in 1987, there could not have possibly been any thoughts that one day, twenty years later, this private K-8 Catholic elementary school in Gaithersburg, Maryland would be setting a precedent that could easily become a new private and parochial school standard.

This week, the school's Board of Directors announced the appointment of its very first School President...not replacing its Principal, Eileen Smith, but adding a new dimension to this traditional leadership position by growing its staff to include a nationally noted psychologist, trainer, speaker and well-published writer: Fernando Andre Leyva, PhD.

"We are so pleased to welcome our new School President, Dr. Leyva", said Board Chair, Alice Garvey. "He's a man of strong faith, engaging enthusiasm and brings his vast leadership skills, teaching and training experience to our school. We're eager to help him get started in charting a course that reflects our mission and vision for the future."

Dr. Leyva resides in Montgomery Village, Maryland. He is the father of six children and has gained much personal and clinical experience in successfully nurturing the learning process. "I have always been an advocate of children," said Leyva.

"Our goal at Mother of God School is rather simple: develop and maintain an academic curriculum that teaches children how to think, choose, and love so they can be successful in their personal and professional lives."

Dr. Mary Healy, Chair of the Mother of God Community Council, the school's sponsor, said she foresees a trend in learning institutions. "I believe more and more schools, even elementary schools like ours, will begin to adopt this [President/Principal] structure or something similar", said Dr. Healy. "The demands on a school administrator today go far beyond what was asked of a school Principal five or ten years ago."

A specialist in multicultural issues, President Leyva will work in tandem with Principal Smith as they guide the diverse population of the school--- the Principal caring for the daily operation of the school, the President handling a number of public functions on and off campus, including development activities.

By sharing leadership duties, this new team concept of School President and School Principal at Mother of God School is expected to bring great rewards. Mrs. Smith summed it up by saying, "Whenever you can bring in a collaborator with Dr. Leyva's experience in support of faculty, parents, individual students and their families, everyone benefits."