

# Great Expectations

*The Marianist Urban Students Program at a school in San Antonio helps students reach beyond their expectations.*

BY JOHN SCHROEDER

**“What surprised me is how much I can do. You never realize what you’re capable of until someone shows you. I like that feeling — seeing I could do more than I expected from myself.”**

— Andrew Vallarreal

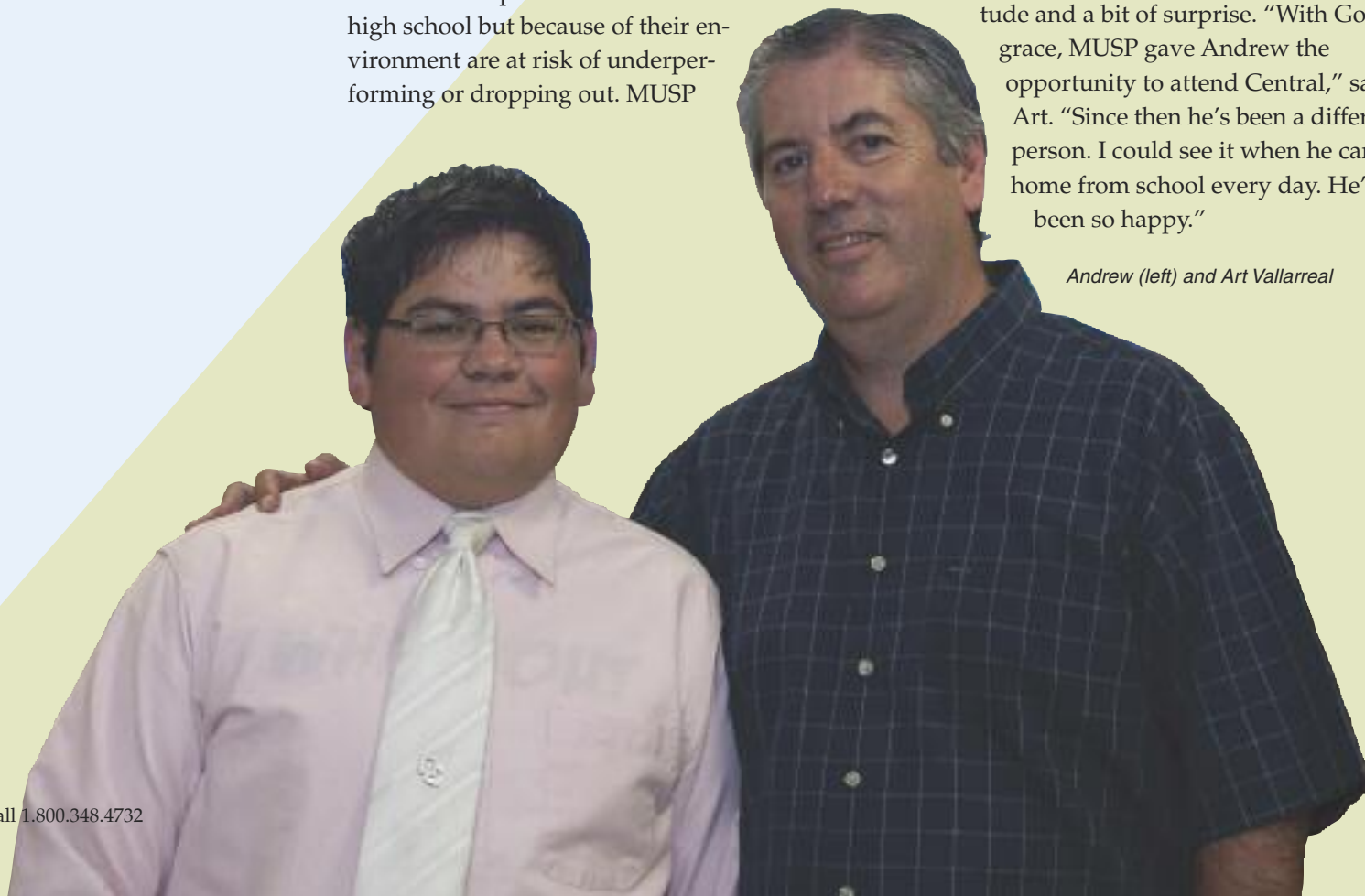
**Four years ago,** Art Vallarreal was worried about his son, Andrew, a bright but shy student at Holy Cross middle school in San Antonio. Andrew didn’t seem interested in school nor was learning a priority for him, says the 50-year-old father of two.

That’s before Art stumbled upon the Marianist Urban Students Program (MUSP), an initiative started by the Marianists at Central Catholic High School in 2007 to help “at risk students” who have the potential to do well in high school but because of their environment are at risk of underperforming or dropping out. MUSP

was originally launched by the Marianists in 1992 to provide financial support and mentoring to students and their families at a Marianist high school in Cincinnati. Since its inception, the program has helped hundreds of students graduate from high school, pursue a college degree and engage in meaningful ways to give back to their communities.

Having just completed his senior year at Central Catholic, both Andrew and his father look back with a profound sense of gratitude and a bit of surprise. “With God’s grace, MUSP gave Andrew the opportunity to attend Central,” says Art. “Since then he’s been a different person. I could see it when he came home from school every day. He’s been so happy.”

*Andrew (left) and Art Vallarreal*



“What surprised me is how much I can do,” Andrew says. “You never realize what you’re capable of until someone shows you. I like that feeling — seeing I could do more than I expected from myself.”

Alex Montoya, a MUSP classmate who completed the program this year with Andrew, shares a similar experience. As a freshman, he says, “I wasn’t sure how I fit in, or whether I was smart or strong enough. Being a student at Central Catholic opened me to what I have to offer, all my assets, which I hadn’t recognized before.”

## Expanding horizons

MUSP operates programs at Purcell Marian High School in Cincinnati, Villa Angela-St. Joseph High School in Cleveland and Central Catholic. The program works the same at each school, according to Marianist Brother Gene Meyerpeter, program coordinator.

“Qualifying students receive scholarships that pay for two-thirds of their high school tuition,” he says. “In exchange, the students are expected to get good grades, adhere to their schools’ conduct policies and participate in a set of enrichment activities.”

It’s the enrichment activities that make a huge difference, according to Marianist Brother Richard Thompson, MUSP director at Central Catholic.

“We challenge our students to develop an interest in leadership and community service,” he says. “That starts by linking our Latino youth with Latino leaders who are good role models.”

Central Catholic serves a largely Latino population. Nationwide, studies show that black and Latino youth are more likely to drop out of high school than their Caucasian counterparts. According to a 2009 report by the College Board, only 20 percent of Latino adults hold an associate’s degree compared with 40 percent of all adults, and college completion rates for Latinos have improved only by two percent since 1975. The MUSP program in San Antonio was designed to counter these trends and help Latino youth succeed.

For these reasons, many of the activities provided by Central take place through programs offered by the National Hispanic Institute (NHI). Brother Richard requires his MUSP scholars to apply for NHI programs targeted at each grade level. These include programs such as “Great Debate,” gatherings that help freshmen develop their communications skills, and the Lorenzo de Zavala Youth Legislative Session, a lesson in civics that brings older students together to form a model legislature where they interact with participants from other schools.

Immersion experiences also are a part of the program. During their freshman year, Central Catholic’s initial class of MUSP scholars spent a week in El Paso,



Texas, and Juarez, Mexico, learning firsthand about a range of immigration issues.

This year, Brother Richard arranged to have some MUSP scholars shadow Texas state legislators for a day. Three of the legislators are graduates of Central Catholic, and the fourth is the mother of several alumni.

These are lessons not lost on Alex Montoya. Initially reluctant to take part in NHI programs that required public speaking, he signed up anyway and discovered his leadership skills. That experience came in handy during his junior year when he chose to continue JROTC classes, and was named Brigade Command Sergeant Major — the program’s second highest rank — for the 2010 - 2011 school year. “A lot of my responsibilities in JROTC involve communication,” he says. “I’ve learned ways to connect with people to solve problems — skills I can use in every aspect of life.”

*MUSP scholars Alex Montoya and Andrew Vallarreal*

Come, let us sing  
joyfully to the LORD;  
cry out to the rock of  
our salvation.

— Psalm 95:1

# Daily Bread

*Marianist Father Bertrand Buby shares spiritual nourishment  
through daily Scriptural reflections.*

BY JAN D. DIXON



Father Bert Buby, SM

Some start their day with coffee, a good breakfast and a handful of vitamins. Marianist Father Bertrand Buby recommends some added “food for the soul” — a daily dose of Scripture reading and reflection.

For those operating in the cyber world, Father Bert has been preparing a spiritual banquet of ideas for the past five years, writing a 500-word Scriptural meditation each day and emailing it to hundreds of people who have signed up for his morning infusion. He also posts his writings on a blog site that has greatly extended his reach. “I have noticed people visiting the site from Germany, Italy, India, Korea and Australia,” he says. “The global audience has made me think more about my writing. I’m always looking for ways to improve.”

## A firm foundation

Although Father Bert has been sharing his daily meditations since 2006, the inspiration for his postings began 12 years ago when a friend gave him a calendar with space to write a daily reflection. “I decided to follow the Church year and write my reflections

based on the lectionary. So this has been about 10 years in the making.”

It’s safe to say this Marianist scholar has been in training nearly all of his life, teaching Scripture in the religion department at the University of Dayton for 40 years and spending thousands of hours in biblical study. “My background gives me the confidence that I can write these reflections without tampering with them. What should shine through is not me, but the Word itself, as though God is speaking,” says the 77-year-old who retired from full-time teaching and now serves on the faculty of the Marian Library at UD.

## A daily regimen

Father Bert believes that when he shows up each day to write, the Holy Spirit shows up, too. “I follow a daily training session of the mind and heart,” he says, noting that he starts each day with a prayer of thankfulness, dedicating his service to God. This is followed by prayers of the Divine Office and a reading of the lectionary for the day.

“But I read Psalm 95 before I do anything. It’s like my first cup of coffee in the morning,” he says.

He slowly reads all the Scriptures for the day: Old Testament, a Psalm, Paul’s epistle and the Gospel. “I look for a theme and am conscious of the need for the Holy Spirit to guide me. Then I handwrite my thoughts in a journal. If I get the first sentence down, it always seems to unfold,” he says.

How do insights from his morning reflection show up in his day? He says it’s mostly an attitude, a demeanor. “When I start my day in submission to the Holy Spirit, it makes me more peaceful, more attuned to the people I meet and attentive to the phone calls I take. He adds: “It keeps the spirit of the season alive in me.” ■

## How to sign up

If you would like to receive Father Bert’s daily Scriptural meditations, email him at [Bertrand.Buby@notes.udayton.edu](mailto:Bertrand.Buby@notes.udayton.edu) or subscribe to his blog, “Spiritual Reflections,” at [www.scripmed.blogspot.com](http://www.scripmed.blogspot.com)