



TO BE OF SERVICE VOLUNTEERING AND SERVICE-LEARNING



MESSAGE FROM MARIST
INTERNATIONAL
MISSION COMMISSION





1. UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUE

1.1. In the footsteps of Pope Francis

Pope Francis has on several occasions underlined the value of service and volunteering in a number of different contexts. He desires an open rather than a closed Church, because “the nature of the Church” is not that of “a closed fortress”, but “a tent”, which is capable of “expanding to welcome everyone: it is a Church going out”. It is in this context that the dimension of service and the commitment of Marist volunteers can be situated:

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis, referring to young people, recognises that there is a growing “awareness that the whole community evangelizes and educates them, and the urgency for them to play a greater role. It must be recognised that, in the present context of a crisis of commitment and community ties, many young people are showing solidarity in the face of the evils of the world and embarking on various forms of militancy and voluntary work. Some take part in the life of the Church, join service groups and various missionary initiatives in their own dioceses or elsewhere. How good it is for young people to be “street people of faith”, happy to bring Jesus Christ to every street corner, every square, every corner of the earth!” (EG, 106).

Referring to serving others, Francis, in his Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, n. 115, underlines that “solidarity is expressed concretely in service, which can take on very different forms of taking care of others. Service is “to a large extent, caring for fragility. To serve means to care for the fragile in our families, in our society, in our people”. In this task, each one is capable of “putting aside his or her own quests, worries, desires for power faced by the concrete gaze of the most fragile. [...] Service always looks at the face of the brother or sister, touches their flesh, feels their proximity and even in some cases “suffers” with them. This is why service is never ideological, since it does not serve ideas, but people”.

The Holy Father has affirmed the importance of volunteering and service for the Church and society:-

- “Volunteering communicates values, behaviours and lifestyles that have at their core the leaven of giving. This is how the humanisation of care is also realised”. (XXVII World Day of the Sick, 2019)
- “Volunteers do not carry out a substitution work in the social network but contribute to giving a human and Christian face to our society.” He also added that the “culture of solidarity and gratuitousness qualifies volunteering and contributes concretely to the construction of a fraternal society, at the centre of which is the human person” (To the volunteers of the Italian island of Sardinia, 2018).
- The credibility of the Church passes convincingly through your service with abandoned children, the sick, the poor without food and work, the elderly, the homeless, prisoners, refugees and migrants, people affected by natural disasters... in short, wherever there is a request for help, there your active and selfless witness arrives”. (Jubilee of Volunteers and Mercy Workers, St. Peter’s Square, Vatican, 3.9.2016).

1.2. In the Marist perspective

From the very beginnings of the Institute, Marcellin Champagnat desired that the Brothers were open to go to all the dioceses of the world, being present especially to the poorest and those without access to education and to the knowledge of God.

Today, like Mary at the Visitation (Lk 1:39-56), we feel called to go in haste to the mountainous region where the poor live and where God manifests himself. And God manifests himself in a special way in them; in those who need our presence and our service. Going to the mountains like Mary means going out of one’s comfort zone, taking risks and accepting the novelty of being in a new or different environment. At the Wedding at Cana (Jn 2:1-12), together with Mary, we are asked to be sensitive and attentive to the needs of others; to have



the capacity to take the initiative in solving problems; to respond to needs and to have confidence in the presence and action of the Son. Following Jesus gives us courage and encourages us not to stand by with our arms folded but to be of service to our sisters and brothers in need.

The XXII General Chapter (2017) made this statement: “The future of the charism will be based on a communion of fully committed Marists, brothers and lay people”. We are, and want to be, a “global charismatic family”, beacons of hope in this troubled world and builders of bridges. We accompany children and young people on the margins of life, responding boldly to emerging needs.

The fourth call of the of the Chapter invites us to “walk with the children and young people on the margins of life: We look for you Jesus, like Mary, in the caravans of life and in the tumult of our cities (Lk 2: 41-49), in the multitude of displaced people seeking a better future for their children”. It is a call which urges us to:

- Open the eyes of our hearts and listen to the cries of children and young people, especially those who are voiceless and homeless.
- Be creative in responding decisively to their needs.
- Shun paternalistic approaches and empower the voiceless.
- Increase a meaningful presence among children and young people on the margins of the world.

The General Administration’s Strategic Plan 2017-2025 has two projects which seek to strengthen our response to service and volunteering.

PROJECT 6 (2.4) proposes, “Institute formation initiatives to promote global availability, develop cooperative-collaborative work capacities, and improve social skills.”

Initiative: Global availability. Foster a “heart-set” in Brothers and Lay Marists and the human capacities needed to better live and serve in a global Institute through formation, short-term experiences and exchanges, social media, training programs, experiences of volunteering and solidarity.

PROJECT 7 (3.1) proposes to, “Accompany and strengthen existing networks and their interconnection.

Initiative: Interconnection. Promote interconnection between Marist networks, (spirituality, mission, centers of spirituality, universities, publishing houses, schools, evangelization/youth ministry, solidarity, volunteering, child rights...) to share learnings, create synergies, maximize resources and improve the discernment and corporate sense of our mission of evangelization and education.”





As Marists, we are invited to open our minds and hearts to develop the culture of solidarity in all areas of mission. **Volunteering** and **Service-Learning** are concrete ways of collaborating in the Marist mission to build this culture of solidarity.

1.3. Service-learning¹

Service-learning is an educational methodology or philosophy that promotes the value of solidarity activities in the service of the community. Its purpose is to link the objectives of a particular subject with social action, which provides a solution to the real problems of the community in which the student is immersed, attending to those most in need. For Furco (1996)², **service-learning** is a teaching pedagogy in which students acquire a better understanding of the content of the subject by applying competences for the benefit of society.

Service-learning proposes learning with an emphasis on student action. Students reflect on the problems of the community, diagnosing situations and an-

¹ We have made the choice for Service-Learning. Other methodologies are possible, such as Collaborative Learning. <https://teaching.cornell.edu/teaching-resources/active-collaborative-learning/collaborative-learning> or Participatory Learning

https://sfyouth.eu/images/toolkit/global_citizenship_education/ParticipatoryLearningMethods.pdf

² Furco, A. (1996). Service-learning: A balanced approach to experiential education. *Expanding Boundaries: Serving and Learning*, (1) 1-6.



alyzing the needs of society in the company of their teacher. As a Marist, we want students to be socially committed, ecological agents, committed to the promotion of justice and the defense of human rights, agents of transformation, solidarity and participation.

In her book *Solidarity as Pedagogy*, Nieves Tapia (2001)³ highlights the impact of the Service-Learning methodology:

- For teachers: greater development of pedagogical tools, possibility of generating greater closeness with students, increased personal motivation and generation of new spaces for research.
- For students: increased school retention, improvement of higher order skills, development of civic commitment, vocation for solidarity service and sense of institutional belonging.
- For community partners: acquisition of new knowledge and tools to become agents of their own connectedness; permanent link with the school, generating a network of reciprocal support; possibility of recruiting young volunteers and resolving needs at low cost.
- For the school: reduction of school drop-out and repetition rates, strengthening of the school mission and openness, links and commitment to the community.

³ Tapia, M.N. (2001). *Solidaridad como pedagogía*. Ciudad Nueva.

1.4. Volunteering

The challenge of internationality goes back to our origins; it is in our DNA. Our mission - beyond borders - has sometimes been brought about by historical circumstances or by institutional or ecclesial challenges, in which Marists of Champagnat were invited to look beyond personal and institutional walls. Marist voluntary service, as we understand it today, is more recent. The missionary sense is still relevant, both for Brothers and lay people. Being a missionary and being a volunteer can be complementary. However, they can be confused, for both require availability and service. Every missionary is a volunteer and every volunteer, in a certain way, is called to be a missionary.

By fostering the development of the culture of solidarity, volunteering is an effective instrument for building the culture of encounter and establishing connections between nations and between cultures. It is also a powerful tool for sharing knowledge, skills and values, contributing significantly to the alleviation of poverty. It favours the development of collaborative work and an “inter” culture: *INTER-national*, *INTER-generational*, *INTER-cultural*, *INTER-congregational* and *INTER-institutional*. The common good, above individuality, is the hallmark of volunteerism.

As Marists of Champagnat, we are invited to be open, simple and available locally or globally, going beyond geographical or cultural boundaries. We feel the call to know in depth our changing world and to face today’s challenges. We are called to abandon the culture of egos and promote the culture of echoes, diminishing the scandal of indifference and inequalities. Finally, we are called to convert our hearts and to make our structures more flexible, without fear of taking risks, in order to reach out to the peripheries, in defense of the poorest and most vulnerable.

In this sense, volunteering is situated in the perspective of availability for free and generous service, following the example of Jesus of Nazareth: “I am in your midst as one who serves” (Lk 22:27). Jesus situates service as a commitment to the promotion and defense of life. He himself told us: “The Son of Man did not come to be served. He came to serve and to give his life for many” (Mk 10:45).

2. WE ARE MAKING HISTORY...

2.1. Through volunteerism

With the creation of the CMI (Department of Collaboration for International Mission), in collaboration with the PCVs (Provincial Volunteer Coordinators),



volunteering at the global level has been aligned and guidelines have been established. The network of PCVs is gradually consolidating and thus strengthening volunteering. Despite the pandemic, progress has made on a number of objectives and priorities. The meetings with each AU, with the CPV Network Management Council and with the Regions are well appreciated and help to create identity and synergy.

In several AUs, awareness raising, training and accompaniment already exist with defined processes for both provincial and inter-provincial volunteering. The exchange of experiences between the AUs is important in order to learn from each other and how to work together.

Creativity and innovation were very much present in this time of pandemic. On the one hand, internal processes and plans have been reviewed, both at AU and Institute level. On the other hand, creative responses were needed to address the issues raised by COVID-19. In addition to solidarity and humanitarian aid campaigns, some tools for virtual volunteering were developed at all levels.

Volunteering at the local or provincial level enables volunteers to get to know and be in direct contact with people from different realities. In this way they, the volunteer contributes to better living conditions (food, education, leisure, group interaction, non-violence culture) and collaborates to ensure that the rights of children and young people are respected. In addition, a volunteer has the possibility of having a closer relationship with other Marists, brothers and laypeople, and of getting to know and identify more deeply with the charism.

Interprovincial volunteering is a way of building bridges and of promoting global availability. Through international volunteering, institutional and provincial initiatives such as the Lavalla200+ Communities⁴, the Fratelli Project,⁵ Solidarity with South Sudan⁶, the Marist District of Asia⁷ and others are being strengthened.

Volunteering develops service to others, dedicating time and personal skills to those on the margins of society. The volunteer learns from this. He benefits and is benefited.

Marist of Champagnat also underline the importance of working in harmony and in collaboration with other organizations, Marist or not, that work with volunteers. The recent articulation of the Network of PCVs with the Network of Marist Universities, for example, will make it possible to better structure volunteering in the field of Higher Education.

⁴ <https://champagnat.org/en/marist-mission/international-communities/>

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/FratelliProject/> y <https://champagnat.org/en/marist-mission/project-fratelli/>

⁶ <https://solidarityssudan.org/>

⁷ <https://champagnat.org/en/marist-mission/marist-district-of-asia-mda/>



2.2. In service learning

It has been noted that some universities have adopted the Service-Learning as a pedagogical and methodological option. It is already integrated into their educational curricula, both in schools and universities⁸. Knowledge and solidarity through service are closely linked.

Similarly, some universities share the path developed in Service-Learning, as well as the online experiences of exchanging learning. The training and awareness-raising of teachers and educators is fundamental so that they can be part of the solution to the problems, together with the participation of children and young people, awakening in them a spirit of solidarity and transformation. By becoming sensitive to situations of poverty, abandonment and marginalization, educators and students alike could discover and explore possible responses to the challenges in the local realities.

Service Learning, both for students and graduates, is a gateway for the development of the culture of solidarity, for Marist Youth Ministry and for volunteering. It is being an open door for the development of the culture of encounter

⁸ <https://www.engagestudents.eu/es-service-learning-methodology-toolkit/>

between different social classes, between different religious confessions, etc.

3. CONTINUING THE JOURNEY

In order to collaborate in the construction of a culture of solidarity as global citizens, acting locally or being available globally, we need to acquire the competencies and skills which will nurture this ideal. In order to achieve this, it is important to have an integrated training process. These are some practical suggestions:

- Offer quality formative experiences for the Marists of Champagnat in the area of Volunteering and Service-Learning, promoting experiences of Christian life and service, especially to the most vulnerable, understanding the causes of exclusion and inequalities in view of the youth active roll and transformation of these realities. For this, it is always important to start from and have as a point of reference the reality of people and communities.
- Create conditions, in all the AUs, for the promotion and implementation of volunteering at both local and interprovincial levels. This implies an openness to sending and receiving volunteers. The preparation of host communities for volunteers is fundamental to help them integrate into the local reality and to accompany them on their journey.
- Favor global availability for overcoming geographical and mental borders, and for openness of mind and heart. This helps to move and to serve, and expresses personal donation and facilitates social transformation. The Marist charism transcends borders and embraces cultures and peoples, fostering a **culture of encounter**.
- Develop and strengthen networking, connecting concerns, sensitivities, projects and experiences. Socialization and the sharing of good practices help to learn and to make progress in communion with others.
- Develop competences such as self-knowledge, cultural self-awareness, cultural sensitivity, respect and flexibility, resilience, collaborative work, linguistic mastery and interpersonal communication. It is also important to emphasise the creation of spaces which value cultural diversity and global engagement, integration in exchange experiences, facilitation of intercultural conversations, and the development of local and global partnerships.
- Communicate best practices developed at all levels of the Institute, emphasising the experiences of real people dedicated to the service of others.
- Encourage the integration of service-learning into the school or university curricular in order to link with the surrounding communities and

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- generate significant changes for the community and for the volunteer.
 - Address frontier or emerging situations.

In addition to this, in Service-Learning - which integrates options for innovation, educational quality and social commitment - it is suggested that training begins with forming leaders in the characteristics of *servant leadership*⁹ (*fundamental orientation towards service, listening, healing, pre-vision, empathy, persuasion, sense of community...*). It is desirable that this training be at all levels, taking advantage of the facilities provided by new technologies.

The development of appropriate materials, as well as the sharing of resources, initiatives, projects and experiences at provincial, regional or Institute level, is fundamental for making this methodology known and disseminating it.

The adjustment of the curricula of schools and universities from a merely academic formation to an education with social meaning and relevance (“good Christians and virtuous citizens”) is urgent and necessary today as a response to our current reality. To this end, it is good to continue to clarify and promote service learning and to implement it as an institutional option. Adapting it, the same applies to the programs and initiatives developed in the Social Centers and other non-formal education spaces.

9 https://globalwikionline.com/detial/en/Servant_leader



CONCLUSION

Despite the effects and consequences of the pandemic, we are not paralysed. We continue to creatively discern the best ways to respond to the needs of children and young people.

To that end, today, more than ever before, we feel invited:

- To continue and reaffirm our option for poor and marginalized children and young people.
- To prepare Champagnat Marists to live and develop their mission, inter-connectedly and collaboratively, in a spirit of service.
- To empower and empower children and young people. We are with them and for them.
- To create concrete opportunities for training and accompaniment for volunteers in all the AUs.
- To strengthen the networks of life and mission by creating a sense of body and identity.
- To serve; as Jesus of Nazareth did.

Global availability and the building of a Global Charismatic Family is within our reach. It is possible and is being realized every day where we are and where we act. Volunteers, and all those who act in a spirit of service, contribute to the creation of a better world, filled with possibility to be more inclusive, more human and more solidary:

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