



LEADERSHIP AND OUR MARIST MISSION





Every day we celebrate a new opportunity in mission. From the most diverse places in the world, we Marists open the doors of our communities, homes, schools and colleges, social and pastoral centers, boarding schools, houses of spirituality, hospitals, publishing houses and universities. We make it possible for many children and young people, as well as adults, to meet their diverse needs (education, evangelization...), and achieve their dreams.

Our history is made up of a multitude of small stories of people who are highly committed to our ideals and the Marist charism. They are people who have learned to be Marists by relating to other Marists: seeing their way of doing things, their style, reflecting and deepening together, building community, learning the keys to our spirituality and our way of serving. Brothers and Lay people have grown in this dialogue with others who have preceded us. We have done so in mission, at different levels and speeds, but animated by the desire to continue to give ourselves fully and to serve, if possible, “in all the dioceses of the world” and “loving all, equally”.

We have learned a leadership that emanates from a priest of the people, energetic, enterprising, firm and believing. Champagnat was a leader. He was capable of convincing and inspiring a whole generation of Brothers. We know many characteristics, many dimensions of him. The admiration he provoked in the Brothers is reflected in the initial description given by Brother Jean-Baptiste:

Father Champagnat was tall, erect and majestic; he had a broad forehead, well-defined facial features and a dark complexion. His grave, modest and calm appearance instilled respect, and even, at first sight, fear. But these feelings changed into confidence and affection as soon as he was treated a little, because under this somewhat dour and apparently severe cloak, hid the most jovial person. He had an upright conscience, an accurate and profound judgment, a kind and sensitive heart, noble and elevated feelings. His character was cheerful, open, sincere, firm, enthusiastic, ardent, tenacious and always equable. (Furet, J. B., *Life*, 2nd part, pp. 273-274. *Life*, 1st part, p. 39).

Champagnat took care of the Brothers with exquisite dedication so that they could carry out their life and mission in the best way possible. The Hermitage was the place of initial and ongoing formation, of spiritual development, and catechetical and educational growth, where the first Marists learned to do “by doing”. When they returned to their communities and schools, they brought back all that they received and experienced. From Champagnat and many generations of Brothers and lay people comes a legacy of leadership and

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These stories are repeated, in one way or another, thousands of times in places where Marists live and minister. It is this capacity that has allowed us to faithfully retrace the past, to situate ourselves in the present and to look with hope to the future. All this is the parable of leadership.

LEADERSHIP IS CRITICAL FOR THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE OF THE MISSION

It is important to reflect deeply on leadership, its formation and accompaniment, as well as its role in the mission of the Institute, the Regions, the AU's and the local presences. It is key to reaffirm that a continuous focus on leadership is essential in all areas. Likewise, the emphasis on the formation of lay people and Marist Brothers becomes critical to achieve a present and a hopeful future.

A PATH OFTEN TRAVELLED

The history of the Institute contains many stories full of pioneering spirit, of fortitude, of risk and daring, and of fidelity to the mission. We are heirs

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to a very valuable tradition of Marist leadership, which we have received, cultivated and wish to pass on to the next generations.

Over the past years, the Institute has done well in developing and promoting Marist leadership:

1. **Vision and direction.** The intention and decision, both of the General Government and of the Provincial and local governments, to improve the leadership qualities of those responsible for the mission have been very clear and have been done in a constructive, proactive and comprehensive manner.

2. **Brothers and lay people, empowered and with shared leadership.**

The partnership, mutual learning, empowerment and mentoring that takes place between the Brothers and lay Marists involved in the mission is an evident richness. There is an intentional cultivation of healthy, deep and stable relationships for the benefit of apostolic life. These relationships transmit our Marist style and our “ways of doing” things and facilitate the transfer of our legacy from one generation to the next. We recognize the importance of these experiences for leadership development, which takes on a richer level when it expresses intergenerational co-responsibility.

The immediate or distant future is posed to us as a permanent question. To answer it, we need to equip ourselves with sufficient capacities, with adequate formation and with a wise intuition and deep sense of faith.

3. **Formation programs at provincial, regional, national and international levels.** The Institute, with different rhythms and perspectives, has facilitated the formation of its leaders through concrete experiences and by creating competency, conceptual and attitudinal frameworks. We have developed local, provincial, regional, and international programs which have allowed the exchange of experiences, good practices, points of view and solutions, and have contributed to the awareness of networking and the global charismatic family.

4. **Collaboration for internal and external mission.** We have built very interesting projects when we have collaborated with others, both within our AU's or regions, as well as with other external institutions. We have grown by making alliances that ensure a leadership educated in today's world: a leadership that dialogues with the present time and emerging needs.

WITH PROPER LEADERSHIP, WE CAN CROSS THE BRIDGE; WITHOUT IT, WE MIGHT NOT HAVE A BRIDGE AT ALL

In just a few months, many things have changed in this world. Some changes are related to the pandemic and others are the result of the cultural, political and social upheavals of the so-called “fourth industrial revolution” and the “digital age”. Some things will never be the same again. This disruption has taken hold in the midst of our societies and is doing so with impressive force.

In the Marist mission, all these phenomena are felt on the front line. We see how they affect local realities, our apostolates, the marginalized, and in particular, children and young people.

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There are aspects that we have been able to anticipate and others that were simply impossible to imagine. The immediate or distant future

is posed to us as a permanent question. To answer it, we need to equip ourselves with sufficient capacities, with adequate formation and with a wise intuition and deep sense of faith. This will help us to make the right decisions, to make courageous and generous choices, and to live everything from a place of prophetic service.

In this scenario of profound and epochal changes, an intuition is confirmed: governance and leadership will be critical aspects in the continuity and recreation of the charism at the local, national and provincial levels and will require defined processes of formation and accompaniment.

With these perspectives, we can intuit some strategies at the local, provincial, regional and global levels.

1. **Communicating life.** It is very easy to communicate concepts and procedures, but Marist leadership is based primarily on *a foundational experience*, which is, in turn, key to the continuity of the mission. To care for, cultivate, communicate, experience, share and recreate this foundational experience, this “vital marrow”, is a priority step to develop the necessary leadership that will help us to navigate as a global family in these emerging and challenging times.
2. **Serving with prophecy.** We received this orientation from the XXII General Chapter. Servant leadership has its own characteristics and specific traits that it is advisable to study, deepen, practice and share. It is a model inspired in Jesus-servant, in Jesus-brother. It is communitarian, horizontal, collaborative, and participative. It evokes many characteristics of Father Champagnat. We are invited to understand it and make it part of our daily practice, helping others to be servants of others and to announce good news that offers life in full.

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3. **Creating a common vision on leadership formation at the provincial, regional, and Institute levels.** When we create a framework for our

vision, we facilitate the understanding of what we seek and help others to join in this effort. The vision allows us to establish consistent and clear guidelines which are built by “reading” and listening to the local and global realities with a strong sense of purpose. Generative dialogues, human, spiritual, professional, and social sensitivity strengthen our proposals.

4. **Growing in consistency and quality in the formation of leaders at the local, provincial, and regional levels.** If we wish to be a source of leaders now and in the future, it is important that we join forces, share initiatives and common frameworks. “The quality of formation and its concrete adaptation to the emerging realities will be a very important aspect in facing the great dilemmas and challenges of today’s world. To achieve this, we believe it is wise to develop appropriate frameworks and standards for professional and Marist formation. These frameworks are concretized in formation plans that help to maintain motivation,

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identity, and professional standards. Along with this and from a generational foresight perspective, we include the possibility of succession planning: Are we forming the next generation to assume the present and future of the mission with responsibility, vision and Marist identity?

To help in all of this, the personal contact that mentoring provides is an extraordinary intergenerational service. A group of mentors can enhance and enrich the experience of new leaders and give wise advice on decision-making.

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- 5. Establishing and working in networks.** By working in interprovincial or regional networks, we enhance the exchange of experiences, and help strengthen local formation programs. In addition, we develop a global connection that allows us to share learnings and best practices. By getting involved in common initiatives (by provinces, regions or networks -understood as platforms of service, exchange and growth-) we have more formative options, greater richness and greater diversity.
 - 6. Promoting autonomy and sustainability** in all leadership processes. With proper implementation, the initiatives must be managed with autonomy and be sustainable in each AU's or Region. It is also important that these principles of autonomy and sustainability be integrated into all processes as a part of the formation itself.

A PATH WITH SEVERAL TRAILS

If we ask ourselves which are the areas of the Marist mission where it is most necessary to strengthen leadership, we can identify several, but here it seems appropriate to suggest the following:

- 1. In the youngest missions and countries or in the most fragile environments.** Forming servant and visionary leaders is key to strengthening, caring for and even rescuing the Marist mission when there are many limitations and adverse situations or where we have a recent or very weak presence. The Institute and the AU's must take care, especially in those areas where resources are most limited.
- 2. In the new generations of leaders.** Much is learned through contact, tutoring, mentoring and the transmission of accumulated wisdom. To make this a reality, we must carefully design the selection, training and accompaniment of the next generation of leaders. The current generations have a very important role to play here, which is combined with a policy of active care for all.

3. In complex social environments. Leadership becomes more important in contexts where the challenges are greater. The Institute is present in conflict zones, lives in Christian or Catholic minority cultural environments, has a presence in highly competitive areas or in deeply secularized societies. In all of these, leaders play a key role in knowing how to dialogue, seek connections, create communities, and advance change and innovation.

4. In accompanying leadership and governance teams. Governance and leadership teams need formation strategies appropriate to their needs. Induction and accompaniment, updated formation and other experiences contribute to model good practices in the exercise of their responsibilities. “Train the trainers” in turn has a multiplier effect.

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5. In the diversity of the mission. The different works, missions and presences require an adequate search for persons and a specific leadership formation in education, pastoral accompaniment, solidarity, ecology, advocacy, administration, universities, social centers, or vocation ministry, etc. In each of them, it is convenient to deal with change, innovation, and cultural, educational and religious trends. The dialogue between charism and contemporary culture helps us to respond openly to the needs of children and young people, with their languages, their concerns and their values.

6. In accompaniment and mentoring. Certainly, forming leaders for accompaniment and mentoring is very relevant in the transmission of our Marist style, of our spirituality and of the wisdom accumulated in

the management of the mission. Lay people and Brothers capable of doing so are needed.

CARING FOR THE SOUL OF LEADERSHIP¹

The soul of Marist leadership is a gift called “charism”. Without the charism, the mission of the Institute may be very noble, but it will be devoid of its fundamental aspiration: “to make Jesus Christ known and loved”, in the style of Mary, among children and young people. To live the mission, it is not enough to have a mind and arms that are willing and professionally trained; one must have a soul that is vocationally committed to the charism.

We are a community of faith, with different levels of collaborative devotion. The care for the Marist vocational dimension is a key piece that allows all the others to mesh and gives consistency and a sense of the future to all approaches to leadership and mission.

We trust that a “prophetic and servant leadership” will be a beacon of hope for all of us who are passionate about the Marist mission in the world.

¹ We invite each A.U. and ministry/work to address these questions that have served as a guide for the Commission: (1) What are we really doing well in the exercise and development of Marist leadership? (2) From a systemic perspective, what strategies do you think will strengthen the development of servant and prophetic leadership in the agents of mission? What effective and cost-sustainable initiatives would you recommend to implement? (3) Where is it most necessary to strengthen leadership for mission? (4) How do we train and support the next generation of lay and brother leaders? (apostolic, local, provincial leadership).

CONCLUSION

The challenge of leadership is proportional to the challenge of the mission. The greater the mission, the greater the importance of leadership. The greater the cultural, social, religious or educational challenges, the greater the real influence of each of the leaders. We are convinced that this is a fundamental, intergenerational urgency that the Institute takes seriously and invites each AU and each local presence to do the same. We trust that a “prophetic and servant leadership” will be a beacon of hope for all of us who are passionate about the Marist mission in the world.

Br. Luis Carlos Gutiérrez

for the International Mission Commission

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