



PLANNING THE MISSION: INTELLIGENCE AND SOUL



**MESSAGE FROM THE
MARIST INTERNATIONAL
MISSION COMMISSION**

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As we know, planning is the process of setting goals and defining the actions required to achieve the goals.

All planning begins with goals, and for us Marists our goals are derived from the vision and mission of Saint Marcellin Champagnat in *“making Jesus Christ known and loved, through the Christian education of youth, especially those who are least favored”*. But this statement describes what we want to achieve, not necessarily what we can achieve. Our mission is affected both by conditions in its external environment—local government rules and regulations, laws, availability of resources, etc.—and its internal conditions—the skills and experience of those involved in the mission, succession planning, and the availability of resources. Planning helps us to critically assess our goals, to facilitate decision making and to set a time frame by predicting when we can achieve our goals. It also defines how to assess what we are doing and, if necessary, to reset a course of action.

Over the past years, Marists of Champagnat who are actively involved in mission have taken steps to ensure that our Marist mission continues to be vital and viable in its service to children and young people. This has been done through planning.

WHAT WE HAVE BEEN DOING WELL:

THE BENEFITS OF PLANNING

In today’s chaotic environment, planning for the future of our Marist mission more than a few months in advance may seem futile. Progress, however, is rarely made through random activity. Planning has provided benefits that facilitate progress even when faced with uncertainty and a constantly changing environment. Why is planning for our Marist mission so important?



PLANNING PROVIDES A GUIDE FOR ACTION

Plans direct everyone’s actions toward desired outcomes. It has been quite common to have strategic plans at the different levels of Marist governance and



management: in our ministries, by countries, in Provinces/Districts, in regions, and in the Institute. For example, the General Administration's Strategic Plan (2017-2025) continues to provide a blueprint of steps that are coordinated and focused on specific desired outcomes and have proven to be effective and far-reaching. The creation of *Champagnat Global*, our Marist network of schools, the *Stand Up, Speak Up and Act* initiative which has been developed as a platform in our ministries and wherever we are working for listening to children and young people firsthand and empowering them as agents of transformation, the efforts of both our *Secretariat of Solidarity* and *FMSI* in providing formation and action steps in the area of *child rights*, and the creation of *global legal structures* designed to hold the mission in areas that lack personnel and financial resources are but a few examples of the benefits of planning which have helped us in building up of our identity as a “**Global Marist Family**”.

PLANNING IMPROVES THE UTILIZATION OF RESOURCES

We know there are a variety of needs throughout our world---from basics like food and shelter, to equity in educational access. Resources are always scarce, and we need to make sure the resources we have are used effectively. Planning helps us determine where resources are most needed so they can be allocated to provide the most benefit. Our *New Horizons Project for Leadership Formation*, the Office of the Economato's *Sustainability Project*, and the efforts of *FMSI* have helped some parts of our Institute make extraordinary gains in helping Administrative Units live the mission.

PLANS PROVIDE STRATEGIC ORIENTATION, MOTIVATION, AND COMMITMENT

People are not motivated when they do not have clear goals and do not know what is expected of them. Planning reduces uncertainty and indicates what everyone is expected to accomplish. People are more likely to work toward a goal they know, understand, and believe in. The initiatives which have led to the publication of *Marist Voices: Essays on Prophetic and Servant Leadership*, the development of *the Marist Leadership Program out of the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul (Porto Alegre, Brazil)*, the on-going call to *global availability* through our *LaValla 200 communities*, *the Fratelli Project in Lebanon and Colombia*, and the efforts of *our volunteering initiatives* through *CMI* have each created interest and mobilized involvement of the many stakeholders of our Marist mission. *The International Forum on the Lay Marist Vocation* and *The Year of Marist Vocations* have become opportunities for all Marists to reflect on, further appreciate, celebrate, nourish, and share about their vocation, whether as brothers or as lay men and women. Each of these initiatives, which impact both Marist life and mission, could not be accomplished without solid planning.

PLANNING ALLOWS FLEXIBILITY

Through goal-setting reflection and process, Marists have been able to identify key resources needed to effect change as well as critical external factors that need to be monitored. In short, like Marcellin before us, we are called to constantly



“read the signs of the times.” When changes occur, we are more likely to detect them and know how to deploy resources to respond. The creation and use of the *Global Marist*

**GLOBAL
MARIST
FAMILY
FUND**



Family Fund for Humanitarian Emergencies has been one way that we as an Institute have responded to the challenges brought on by humanitarian disasters. Through this project, the General Administration is answering to the call of the of the XXII General Chapter by asking us to grow in **solidarity awareness** as a **global family**, and to be involved in humanitarian projects, by means of fundraising for **humanitarian emergencies** of our time for basic needs including food, potable water, health/sanitation, and shelter. This type of initiative has allowed for flexible responses to unanticipated challenges.

WHAT FURTHER STEPS CAN WE TAKE?

To plan our Marist mission is to think about the future. So, how then can we improve and develop our planning and its implementation to strengthen the future of the Marist mission? What would be some important steps to take?

BE ADAPTABLE

Now more than ever before, Marists all over the world are facing change and complexity — the coronavirus pandemic and its impact has presented us all with new challenges, new circumstances, and new uncertainties. *Adaptability* is



a soft skill that means being able to rapidly learn new skills and behaviors in response to changing circumstances. As Marists involved in mission, we must be able to *incorporate different thinking strategies and mental frameworks* into our planning, decision-making, and day to day management of our works. *We should be curious; wonder, explore, and consider before we judge and decide.* We should not get too attached to a single plan or strategy but have a “Plan B” (and C!) at the ready.



DEVELOP GUIDELINES FOR LEADERSHIP FORMATION PROGRAMS

Our responsibility is *to develop leaders for mission* who are not simply concerned with maintaining what exists or adapting it to the changing contexts of an ever-changing world, but who can be forerunners, visionaries, and who “look beyond” their everyday lives or their immediate context to see a future of how our mission will respond to emerging realities. Deepen formation for mission.



Why is the development of guidelines important? Because they outline the needed content of a program or academic course, provide a practical, ethical, and Marist framework for decision making, and instill a sense of responsibility and accountability. An updated formation program needs to consider current trends (and even future trends) in theology, sociology, spirituality, psychology, and pedagogy. For the sake of the mission, we need to develop *common guidelines for local, regional, and Institute-level leadership formation programs*. Leadership in the mission is key and formation “a must” to ensure that the vision and the mission are expanded and nurtured.

Succession planning is also important for the future health of our mission. It ensures every critical position is occupied by someone with the right skills and experience and aims to ensure continuity by identifying and preparing suitable candidates. In this way, positions aren't left vacant. It is important for us to initiate strategic leadership succession plans for ministries as well as for Province leadership. For those AUs, regions or ministries that don't have the capacity, we may need to expand the efforts that is being done with the New Horizons program or develop some other type of global plan that addresses this significant issue.

FACILITATE COORDINATION

Coordination helps to improve the efficiency of our Marist endeavors by avoiding overlapping efforts and duplication of work. *Integration and balancing of our efforts* on a local, province, regional, or Institute level can provide a clear, smooth, and harmonious approach to challenges and opportunities facing our mission. At its best, coordination is a creative force which makes possible a total result which is greater than the sum of individual achievements. This is the “synergetic effect” of coordination which can enable us to rake optimum use of the resources at our disposal. One step which could help us is the integration of the various mission plans between the different levels of governance and management of the Institute – in our ministries, by countries, Provinces/Districts, Regions, and within the Institute itself. This integration and coordination could have a cascading effect, igniting both innovation and complementarities for our common, global mission.

PROMOTE SUSTAINABILITY

What is sustainability? Sustainability means meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainability also facilitates the best use of resources which brings economy and efficiency into our ministries. Viability indicates a ministry’s stability, sustainability, and strength in terms of finances, property, and administrative functions (such as leadership capacity) that enable it to carry out its mission. These characteristics point to the ability for a ministry to survive. These characteristics are those elements that are considered basic and essential to ongoing existence, and hopefully, growth. We know that in addition to economic resources, we also need human resources to effectively “do” the mission of serving children and young people, especially those on the margins of life.

We must ensure that economic and human resources are available through deeper collaboration among AU’s or regions, prioritizing those which are most fragile.



ENCOURAGE INNOVATION

Innovation is often necessary for any organization to adapt and overcome the challenges of change. It fosters growth. As an Institute, we are blessed with schools of higher education which could be a further resource in our quest to become more innovative. Another possibility would be to *establish national, provincial, regional, and international “think tanks”* that permanently analyze the realities and contexts of our Marist mission, from social, cultural, religious, and economic perspectives. The efforts of these think tanks could contribute to the definition of the strategic objectives of our mission and favor the creation and development of agile and effective responses to the needs of our times.

Planning is basically a decision-making function which involves *creative thinking and imagination* that ultimately leads to innovation of methods and operations for growth and prosperity of our Marist mission. We need to continually find ways to *access innovation*, especially as we strive to strengthen the viability and vitality of our mission in various parts of the Institute. The sharing and collaboration of

our networks as well as the Third Marist International Mission Assembly may help us with this.



STRENGTHEN EXISTING NETWORKS AND BUILD NEW ONES

The General Administration's Strategic Plan asks us to *promote interconnection between Marist networks*. This also was one of the intuitive threads that was highlighted by many of the Provincials/District Leaders at the

recent General Conference. As an Institute, we should seek common spaces for dialogue and shared ideas and our regional and global networks should/could act as that space. We need to use the existing networks and create new ones to strengthen connections and relationships, share planning initiatives, gain fresh ideas, access new information, and share innovation regarding our Marist mission. In turn, this will increase our understanding as a global family and continue to build a truly global Marist mission.

ASSESS REGULARLY

Assessment is an integral part of any planning, as it determines whether the goals are being met or that actions taken are aligned with the vision and the mission. *Assessment* affects decisions, therefore assessing how projects or initiatives are progressing is vital. If a course change is needed, it can be done effectively and timely. Regular assessment and evaluation should be a part of any planning.

TO GUARANTEE A FUTURE

In short, to help guarantee the vitality, viability, and sustainability of our mission, we need to

- Be clear about our mission and vision and to articulate it regularly;
- Discern and conceive definite attainable objectives, base planning on relevant information, look for workable systems and initiatives, learn from other people, read the signs of the times, foresee a desired future, have plan B and other alternatives,
- Assess and recognize our strengths and weaknesses, accept our difficulties with hope for a better future, place our faith in God, and never give up.

Marcellin and those Marists who came before us provided a framework for us in how to live the mission entrusted to us. We have been called to create what's next for our Marist mission. Mission is where our spirituality meets our ministries...but it assumes or maybe even presumes something: That all Marists have a special role in God's ongoing work of creation as 'created co-creators.' Our spiritual lives can help us discern how God wants each one of us to take part in God's



labor in the world if we only remain faithful and attentive to God's ways and promptings in our lives. As Marists, we should deepen the idea that our planning should also be prophetic. Yes, "looking beyond" but also reinforcing the idea that our planning is able to respond to what God is asking us "to be" and "to do" both now and in the future.

As Brother Ernesto told us when presenting the General Administration's Strategic Plan to the Institute in 2017, "...it is important to remember that in the process of accomplishing any project, plan or initiative, good planning and organization are not enough. Each one of us has an indispensable and key role. The message of the XXII General Chapter reminds us that '*...plans and strategies are not sufficient. We are called to conversion, both personal and collective. As Marists, we must be true disciples, and our communities must be beacons of light and the Marian face of the Church in the midst of the world*'. Let us take up this call as we discern the future for our mission with Jesus, Mary and Marcellin as our guides and inspiration!

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If you wish to share your ideas, reflections or experiences with the Commission as a result of these messages, you can write to the email fms.cimm@fms.it

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