

Prophetic servant and transformational leadership in the service of the marginalized

+ Lilongwe, Malawi, May 26, 2023

The Representative of the District Commissioner for Lilongwe; Mr Blessings Makhiringa

The Representative of the Education Division Manager for Central West Education Division; Mr Siwale

Marist Brothers and Postulants

The Director of FMSI; Andrea Rossi

The Director of the Secretariat of Education and Evangelization; Bro. José Sánchez

The New Horizons Project Manager; Bro. Mark Omede

The New Horizons Regional Coordinator; Bro. Francis Jumbe

Traditional Leaders

The Hosting Headteacher Bro. Boniface Chirambo

Headteachers and Staff from Marist and Non-Marist Schools

Students

Friends of the Media

Dear All:

Today, we are here to celebrate the completion of the "New Horizons 2" program. It is a happy occasion to thank the extraordinary effort made during this time with the active participation of several countries and numerous facilitators and students.

I take this opportunity to extend to you the greetings of Br. Ernesto Sánchez, SG, of the entire General Council, and my own, and our congratulations for having reached this moment and having achieved the results of this program.

The 21 Marist schools across the six countries involved in the **Program serve as beacons of hope**, providing opportunities for children and girls who would otherwise be denied access to quality education. These schools, bolstered by the expertise of local experts trained in the New Horizons 2 program, have the potential to become centers of excellence, nurturing young minds and cultivating the leaders of tomorrow.

The defense of the rights of children, adolescents and young people, and their protection are at the center of the Marist mission and is expressed in an active and continuous action of formation, promotion and supervision in all our mission areas. In the same way, there is at the center an authentic commitment to offer them educational opportunities that allow them to excel, reach the fullness of their lives and become good citizens and good Christians or believers. We understand that education is the most important way to overcome the limitations and obstacles

of poverty and marginalization. We firmly believe in the value of the life of each of the young people. We believe in the value of girls and young ladies. **For all of that, we need leaders.**

Number 59 of the Constitutions of the Marist Brothers Institute states:

“The sensitivity of Marcellin Champagnat to the needs and suffering of the children of his day inspires us to respond to the emerging challenges facing humanity today. For this reason, we promote and defend the rights of children and young people in all the settings of our Institute. Along with other organisations, we defend these rights in international bodies, States and other public and private institutions that impact on the dignity and well-being of children and young people. In addition, we ensure that all our houses, educational centres and social works are places where children, young people and vulnerable adults always feel safe and respected.”

Today, we celebrate the union of numerous people and institutions for this purpose, from the Marist Brothers Institute and General Administration, Misesan Cara NGO, F.M.S.I NGO, the province of Southern Africa, the representatives of the different countries, the public education sector, the traditional leaders and the representatives of the different countries, schools and communities.

Today, we celebrate key achievements in four different project outcomes:

1. Increased access to quality education for children and girls from poor and marginalised families in 21 Marist schools in the 6 countries involved, involving local experts already trained in New Horizons 1
2. Strengthened capacity of Marist Schools to uproot violence and discrimination against children in school and community environments so to ensure children well-being.
3. Increased capacity of school leaders and teachers to drive improvement towards quality standards of education and sustainability.
4. Reinforced the Education system at institutional level in terms of its capacity to advocate children rights.

In New Horizons, everything has been achieved in an excellent way and seeking to satisfy the deepest interests of the participants, improving access to quality education and assuring the rights for boys and girls in situations of poverty and marginalization. We are better able to provide children with a better understanding of violence and discrimination. We have improved the ability of leaders and teachers to improve quality standards. I thank everyone for the extraordinary effort to make this whole journey of education and improvement, transformation and service a reality.

Servant and transformational leadership

Today, I want to highlight one of the fundamental choices of the Marist Institute. In 2017, during the General Chapter, the Institute made a conscious choice to promote Servant leadership, a transformational leadership that would be at the service of marginalized youth and children. The image of Jesus Christ, in the washing of feet, presides the Chapter Hall in Colombia.

That image inspires us all, all Marists of the world, have committed ourselves to making a reality this form of leadership and this way of care for those most in need.

In a world marred by inequality, injustice, and the marginalization of certain groups, it is imperative that we delve deeper into this option and explore how it can pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable society.

New Horizons 2 promotes a servant, transformative leadership in all facilitators and leaders, as well as in all participants.

For New Horizons, the **Marist servant and transformational leader** is an individual -or an institution or a faculty or a community- who not only possesses leadership qualities but also exemplifies a deep sense of empathy, compassion, and commitment to the well-being of all members of society, especially the marginalized. This form of leadership draws inspiration from the prophets and messengers throughout history who advocated for justice, equality, and the upliftment of the downtrodden.

With the example of our Founder, and in the face of adversity, Saint Marcellin Champagnat displayed **remarkable determination**. He saw beyond the obstacles and understood that education was the key to breaking the cycle of poverty and empowering young minds. With unwavering resolve, he established the Marist Brothers to providing quality education, moral guidance, spiritual direction and nurturing environments to children and young adults.

In our New Horizons program, one cannot talk about **the servant and transformational leader** similar to Champagnat without acknowledging **the profound impact on society**. This leadership style is rooted in humility and a genuine desire to serve others, transcending personal ambitions and self-interest. Like Champagnat, leaders lead by example, instilling a sense of purpose, motivation, and moral integrity in those they serve. By embodying the values they espouse, they inspire others to follow suit, creating a ripple effect of positive change.

Marcellin Champagnat's life was a testament to his belief that **every individual has the ability to transcend their circumstances**. He demonstrated that one's background does not define their future, and that with the right support and guidance, anyone can rise above their disadvantages and achieve greatness. He exemplified the power of personal transformation and the impact that a dedicated individual can have on the lives of others. For New Horizons, the Marist servant and transformational leader recognizes **the plight of the marginalized** and seeks to alleviate their suffering. They are acutely aware of the systemic barriers that hinder progress and actively work to dismantle them. They prioritize social justice, ensuring that every member of society is afforded equal opportunities and access to resources, regardless of their social, economic, or cultural background.

The Marist Servant and transformational leadership emphasize **the importance of inspiring and empowering others to become leaders themselves**. This leadership style encourages collaboration, fosters creativity, and promotes a shared vision for a better future. By nurturing the potential within individuals and communities, transformational leaders create a network of change agents dedicated to uplifting the marginalized and working towards a more equitable society. As Marcellin Champagnat, we deeply love the poor and marginalized, and we want to offer them new possibilities of change and new conditions of life.

The Marist servant leader and transformational leadership is a formidable **force against marginalization**. By education, they challenge the status quo, confront any abuses and discrimination, and drive meaningful transformation. By prioritizing the needs and rights of the marginalized, they give voice to those who have long been silenced, amplifying their concerns,

and ensuring they are heard at the highest levels of decision-making. And this is specially relevant, for the voices of the girls and women in the society.

To harness the power of servant and transformational leadership, the Marist, all teachers, all Brothers, all students, we must cultivate these qualities within ourselves and our communities. We must embrace **empathy, compassion, and humility**, recognizing that the well-being of the marginalized is intrinsically tied to the well-being of society as a whole. We must actively seek out opportunities to serve and advocate for the rights of those who have been pushed to the margins. By doing so, we create a more inclusive, just, and harmonious world.

To develop this leadership, teachers and leaders of the program are not enough, but we expect the participants themselves to **become authentic servant and transformative leaders** of their communities, families and populations. Being a Servant leader is a smart and wise choice to change the world. It is a personal choice to serve God and to serve others. It is a Marist option.

Servant leadership, at its core, is a guiding philosophy that places the needs of others above one's own **as Champagnat, Mary and Jesus did**. It involves leading with empathy, compassion, and a genuine desire to serve and uplift those around us. Instead of wielding authority and control, the servant leader strives to support, guide, and enable others to reach their full potential.

Today, **we recognize the power to transform lives and shape a brighter future** for the young people, for the girls in our communities, for our own work. In a world brimming with challenges and opportunities, it is essential to improve the leadership to empower the next generation to thrive, excel, and make a positive impact.

Now, Marist servant and transformative leadership can contribute to the growth and development of young people in many ways. First and foremost, it encourages **mentorship and guidance**. A Marist servant leader recognizes the importance of nurturing the talents and abilities of the younger generation. They create a nurturing environment where young people feel safe to explore their interests, ask questions, and seek guidance. By providing mentorship, Marist servant leaders offer invaluable wisdom, support, and encouragement, which fosters personal growth and self-confidence in young individuals.

Furthermore, all of us, teachers, administrators and students can be servant and transformational leaders **cultivating a sense of responsibility and ownership among young people and ourselves**. When young people see their leaders leading by example and actively engaging in service to others, it inspires them to do the same. Servant leaders empower young individuals to take on leadership roles and contribute to their communities. By entrusting them with responsibilities, they foster a sense of ownership, accountability, and the confidence to make a difference.

Marist Servant leadership promotes the development of **essential life skills in young people**. Through their servant leadership approach, leaders encourage teamwork, effective communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking. These skills are not only crucial for personal growth but also enable young individuals to navigate the complexities of the modern world successfully.

All these characteristics make Servant and transformative leadership an **valid option to decrease in turn the levels of violence and any discrimination, the levels of any segregation**. Likewise,

this leadership helps to create environments that protect the rights of children, and to generate spaces of safety and care at all levels of society.

In this way, the Marist prophetic servant and transformational leadership is essential for addressing the needs of the marginalized and ushering in a society that values and uplifts every individual.

Women's leadership

I want now to remark on the importance of this Program and women's leadership, as a marginalized group in the society. Throughout history, women have faced numerous challenges and barriers to achieve. However, their resilience, determination, and unique perspectives have shaped societies and left an indelible mark. Women leaders bring a different set of skills, qualities, and experiences to our communities and societies.

When we combine servant leadership and women's leadership, **we unlock tremendous potential for positive change**. By leading with empathy and compassion, Marist women and girls' leaders foster a sense of belonging, trust, and cooperation within their schools, communities and teams. Marist women leaders who embrace servant leadership also challenge traditional power structures and create space for diverse voices to be heard. They are more likely to champion inclusivity, diversity, and gender equality, breaking down barriers that have historically limited the opportunities available to girls and women. Servant leadership combined with women's leadership provides a strong foundation for addressing societal issues. Women become advocates for change, driving initiatives that address gender disparities, promote social justice, and uplift communities.

Educational Leaders and Teachers

Finally, I want to tell a word about education and teachers as Servant and Transformational leaders. When applied to the field of education, servant and transformational leadership takes on a new dimension. It calls upon educators to prioritize the growth, well-being, and success of their students above all else. It recognizes that education is not just about imparting knowledge but also about nurturing the whole person and preparing students to become responsible, compassionate, and engaged members of society.

So, how does **Marist servant and transformational leadership manifest in the realm of education**? First and foremost, Marist servant leaders prioritize the needs and aspirations of their students. They recognize that each student is unique, with their own set of strengths, challenges, and dreams. By understanding and valuing the individuality of each student, servant leaders create an inclusive and supportive learning environment where all students feel seen, heard, and empowered to thrive.

Marist servant teachers and administrators **foster meaningful relationships with their students**. They listen attentively, show genuine care and empathy, and build trust and rapport. By establishing strong connections with their students, servant leaders create a safe space for students to express themselves, share their thoughts and concerns, and actively engage in the learning process. These relationships become the foundation for effective teaching and learning, enabling students to grow academically, emotionally, and socially.

Marist servant teachers and administrators also emphasize **the importance of mentorship and guidance**. Educators who embrace servant leadership take on the role of mentors and guides, supporting their students' personal and academic development. They provide guidance,

encouragement, and feedback, helping students set goals, overcome challenges, and reach their full potential. By serving as mentors, servant leaders instill a sense of belief and self-confidence in their students, empowering them to take ownership of their learning journey.

Moreover, Marist servant leadership in education promotes quality education with a **student-centered approach**. It prioritizes the well-being and growth of students, focusing on their holistic development rather than just academic outcomes.

Marist servant teachers and administrators foster a **culture of collaboration, shared responsibility, and continuous improvement** among educators, administrators, and staff. By creating a safe, supportive, non-violent and inclusive environment, Marist servant teachers and administrators empower their colleagues to thrive and contribute their unique talents and perspectives. This collaborative approach enhances the overall educational experience and creates a positive and caring school culture that benefits everyone.

To fully embrace Marist servant leadership in education, it is essential to provide ongoing professional development and support for educators. By equipping educators with the knowledge, skills, and tools necessary for servant leadership, **we can create a generation** of teachers and administrators who are committed to serving their students and transforming education from within.

Remember, it is through our own superation, our own perseverance, that we can become **beacons of hope and catalysts for change**. Let us carry Saint Marcellin Champagnat's spirit of dedication, compassion, and unwavering determination within us as we step into the world and face the challenges that lie ahead.

As Champagnat, we can ask ourselves as Leaders this examination:

"The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served.

The best test, and difficult to administer, is:

Do those served grow as persons?

Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?

And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?" (Greenleaf, R.)

Dear friends, as we celebrate our achievements today, let us also acknowledge the responsibility we carry to continue the legacy of Saint Marcellin Champagnat. Let us be champions of education, advocates for the disadvantaged, and leaders who empower others to realize their full potential.

Thank you again to everyone and congratulations to all participants!

God bless you all!

Bro. Luis Carlos Gutiérrez, fms, Vicar General