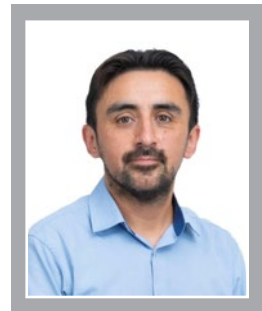

Keys to the prophetic imagination

“The current period of transition that we are experiencing globally at all levels – society, Church, Institute – needs people who courageously assume leadership and commit to creating the necessary conditions within themselves so that foresight, and prophetic intuition can emerge in the service of others”

(Br. Emili Turú)

Álvaro Sepúlveda, fms
Psychologist
Prov. of Santa María de los Andes
Chile



I am Brother Álvaro Sepúlveda, proudly representing Chile and belonging to the Province of Santa María de los Andes. Currently, I hold the positions of a practicing psychologist and serve as the president of the foundation responsible for the administration of the Marist School of La Serena, located in the northern region of our country. In addition, I actively collaborate with the network of Marist schools in the realm of Integral Ecology. As a member of the Provincial Council, I assume the role of coordinating a dedicated team focused on exploring alternative approaches to ensure the sustainability of Marist life and mission in Bolivia, Peru, and Chile.

A perspective that embraces new horizons and possesses an intuitive vision of the future is crucial for remaining faithful to the spirit of Champagnat, a trailblazer unafraid to explore and forge uncharted paths. This becomes evident in the foreword to the *Conduct of Schools* (1853), as referenced by Br. François Rivat, wherein the Founder’s pioneering efforts to outlaw corporal punishment in educational institutions are highlighted. It is worth noting that this practice remains deeply ingrained in several countries, presenting an ongoing challenge to overcome.

The enduring challenge of possessing a prophetic imagination and embodying the role of “sentinels of the dawn” remains ever-present. Reflecting upon this chapter of “Marist Voices” evokes memories of situations that have served as profound lessons in understanding the essence of foresight. As Brother Emili Turu, former Superior General, aptly states, each of us possesses an innate capacity for foresight, and it is within our power to nurture its growth or impede its progress.



Within my journey, I have encountered seven keys that unlock the realm of prophetic intuition, each revealed through specific situations that have heightened my awareness of their significance:

1. **Staying connected and engaged with reality.** The lesson of staying connected to reality and remaining engaged in community work became apparent through experiences in insertion communities situated in peripheral or marginalized areas. In September 2009, a tragic incident involving the murder of a child in my neighborhood coincided with the XXI General Chapter's call to *"become experts in the defense of children's rights."* In response, a project was initiated alongside fellow Marist volunteers, aimed at preventing violence and fostering youth participation. This ongoing initiative serves as a testament to the commitment required when confronted with harsh realities, urging us to seek innovative solutions and remain forward-looking.
2. **Being Open to Networking.** During my involvement in the realm of children's human rights and international solidarity within my Province and the Institute, I gained invaluable experiences collaborating with the United Nations system and connecting with various Marist organizations and Provinces. This period of engagement emphasized the importance of thinking beyond conventional boundaries, embracing diverse perspectives. It taught me that there are countless approaches to overcoming challenges and that valuable lessons can be gleaned from individuals with different cultures, beliefs, and ways of operating.
3. **Connecting with interiority.** Embracing the practice of meditation, particularly after a meaningful sojourn in the Cave of Manresa (Catalonia), has been a transformative experience for me. Through contemplation, the ego finds its rightful place, mitigating the risk of self-centered prophetic tendencies. Embracing silence allows for a deepened connection with one's inner self, fostering heightened awareness of emotions, values, behaviors, and prejudices. Ultimately, this practice enables a profound immersion in the present moment, unveiling the ways in which the Divine unfolds within history, even when one's own

self seems inconsequential. Cultivating an attitude of detachment facilitates the release of cherished projects and places, allowing for a more receptive and open-hearted embrace of the novelty that awaits.

4. Listening to diverse voices and fostering democratic and fraternal participation.

Within the ongoing processes that we are actively promoting in the Province of Santa María de los Andes, the opportunity to learn from the experiences of other Provinces grappling with similar inquiries has been immensely enriching. Moreover, as a Province, we strive to ensure that our reflections include the insights and perspectives of both the Brothers and Lay Marists who are deeply interconnected with our life and mission. Discernment becomes even more enriching when we recognize that wisdom is a collective endeavor. Despite potentially slower progress, moving forward together allows us to journey further and achieve greater impact in the task at hand.

5. Overcoming denial. Another crucial aspect of this process involves finding ways to address and overcome denial. At times, the stark realities that mirror the truth can be disheartening, leaving us feeling vulnerable and prompting the defensive response of denial. Instead of mustering the courage to confront these facts, we may postpone the quest for answers. It is therefore essential to offer gentle support and guidance, encouraging individuals and communities to confront reality head-on, no matter how bitter it may be. By assisting them in discovering new meanings that empower them to take ownership of the present and forge connections to the future and to hope, we can help them navigate through challenging circumstances.

6. Respecting personal and community rhythms. During the late 2000s, we initiated endeavors to foster shared communities between Brothers and Lay people. In certain instances, we engage in shared moments of prayer, formation, and communal living as part of a collective undertaking. In other cases, we have made the deliberate choice to reside together in the same household, recognizing the inherent implications that accompany such a commitment. We have always held the firm belief that this interplay between Brothers





and Lay people is a source of great richness. However, it is crucial to remain attuned to the pulse of each moment, discerning when to advance and when to pause. Maturity calls for recognizing when it becomes necessary to allow certain cycles to naturally reach their conclusion and gracefully embrace closure when further progress is no longer viable.

7. Learning from mistakes and the awareness that it is always possible to be wrong.

One of the hardest moments I have gone through in my 26 years of religious life was the crisis we experienced in Chile because of the allegations of sexual abuse of children against priests and religious, several of whom were known to me. The realisation that I was never able to foresee or prevent everything that happened alerts me to the arrogance of believing that I can be right or have the solution. The uncertainty that comes from the awareness of one's own blindness is a valuable tool to free oneself from messianic fanaticism.

In conclusion, I am reminded of the scene depicted in the *Book of Numbers* (chapters 13 and 14) when Yahweh instructs Moses to summon twelve leaders of Israel to explore the land of Canaan. They were to assess the land and its inhabitants, noting their strength, number, and the fertility of the land. Similarly, being “sentinels of the dawn” entails a similar responsibility: to feel accountable for the future of others, to forge ahead, to survey the horizon from the mountaintop, and to provide reasons for others to shed their fears and move forward. It is a role that calls for leadership, vision, and inspiring others to embrace a future brimming with hope and possibilities.



The opinions expressed in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Marist Institute.

If you would like to share your ideas, reflections, or experiences about servant and prophetic leadership with the Commission as a result of these reflections, write to fms.cimm@fms.it