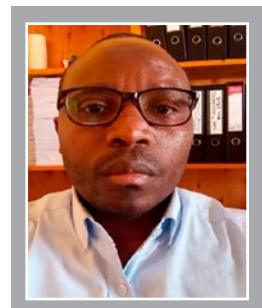

A Servant Leadership and Mission

“Empathy, then, means to believe to the people.
At the same time, it involves listening to and guiding the other,
especially taking into account the weaknesses of that person”

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Leadership is not taken for granted; it is primarily a service, a gift from God. Once chosen as a leader, you should first of all reflect on some of the encouraging questions such as: “why me?”, “what should I do then?” Leadership is about a service in a determined mission, which requires self-awareness, self-commitment, openness, and cooperation. A servant leader knows his/her type of personality, how to control emotions and reactions. He/she is ready to listen, understand and respect the one’s opinions and avoids prejudice. He/she freely expresses ideas, shares experiences, and provides constructive hints to other members. He/she keeps cooperation and shows an affection to others. Indeed, the servant leader is a trainer and model to others; “do as I do”. People will come to know you through your deeds and your achievements; therefore, a good leader does not load others with heavy burdens. He/she becomes an eye to the world around him/her, thinking, observing, and acting not for him/herself but for others. Father Champagnat did the same to his brothers. He did not intend to command his brothers what to do, rather, he encouraged them to do by imitation and commit themselves to serve the needy.

Furthermore, the servant leader has ability to delegate to others and to empower them. This quality requires trust and confidence. The servant leader builds the trust with others by being open, humble, and honest through the interactions. So, a leader needs to understand and res-

pect the people he/she is leading to strengthen their unity and harmony.

He/she struggles to equip the members with the necessary skills and capacity to perform their tasks and encourages collaboration among the members. He/she sets aside a particular time to coach others with the purpose of strengthening their self-confidence, trust, and commitment. Therefore, the servant leader does all the best to meet the members individually to understand their needs and help them to realise their dreams. In that case, we can consider such person as a transformational leader, a model of integrity and fairness in the institution. He/she sets the goals, which are clear and achievable, with high expectations. He/she stirs the emotions of the members, provides motivational support. He/she also helps them to look beyond their self-interests and focus on the common interest based on their mission. A servant leader does not doubt about the ability of others. He/she provides any opportunity to others to try with trust and he/she is there as a coach, a facilitator. However, some leaders keep their self-personality by saying that in their absence things will get worse. Their perception is that “nobody else can do as I do”; they prefer accumulating responsibilities to themselves.



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The physical presence of a leader at the service is another important quality. When a leader is present, he/she meets the members frequently, listens to them, and accompanies them with compassion. On the other side, the members of the team feel the warmth and support from their caring leader. Though he/she is the head of the institution, the servant leader does not think and decide alone; he/she prefers to share the opinions with other members. Contrary, the physical presence of some leaders may become a threat to the members; their presence makes those members to work under fear and pressure to the point they use extra energy. They take such leaders as supervisors or judges. The leaders of this type cannot be servant leaders that we need today. Their leadership ends up by declining due to lack of team unity; they find themselves enclosed. Besides, the servant leader in any institution should be preoccupied by the achievement of the

mission. He/she keeps in mind that every member thinks the same way with the same target. They altogether struggle to get there, to achieve the mission. But this can never happen if there is no strong teamwork, putting ideas together, sharing responsibilities according to each one's ability and experience. Here a good leader should be open to others and committed to share his/her experiences.

Besides, the servant leader should have the sense of community life. Some years back I lived in a community with an elder brother, who was the school leader. Anytime he met brothers in the community, he could share his daily experience in that school. I found this as a quality of a servant leader. Once you are open to others, you get constructive ideas from them.

In Marist global family, presence plays an important role in our mission. Any Marist leader should be identified by that virtue, eager to be present in any service assigned to him/her. The presence of a leader gives moral support to other members. It makes him/her to feel that he/she is really a servant, not a leading authority. He/she comes to know better other members, hence helping them to become more mature in their mission. In other words, by being present, he/she will come to identify the position of each member in the team and finds out the way forward to balance their abilities with the aim of fulfilling the mission.

A good leader is not an observer or the judge but the participant, empathic and compassionate. The empathy leads him/her to the discovery of other people's needs; he/she becomes concerned and committed to serve them to the maximum capacity with compassion. The servant leader leaves aside the gaps of generations, cultures, and races among the members. He/she does the best to put all these on the same table and at the same service with the family spirit. Therefore, servant leadership is dynamic, exciting, and inspiring; it sets up the direction, builds a clear vision and adapts according to the circumstances. It always focuses on the achievement of the set goals of a mission. The servant leader understands the reality of the current situation and connects that reality to the service; hence, the adaptation to the changes. He/she is proactive, eager to solve problems, looking ahead to develop and not being satisfied with things as they are now.





Any institution needs good leadership and a well-led institution becomes productive, competitive and ready to adapt to changes. Therefore, a committed leader works well with other members, demonstrates flexibility in the service. He/she is always flexible to changes, ready to break the routine of his/her culture as long as he/she is working in an intercultural institution. A leader should not stick on his/her culture; he/she adapts to the variety of cultures and doesn't say "this is the way we do, no other way else". He/she learns fast how to listen and understand people of different cultures for the sake of building one common culture with specific mission. As Marist fami-

ly, we are called as missionaries to spread Good News to the whole world, regardless our origins, and cultures. Therefore, the servant leader considers the intercultural communities as different but complementary.



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