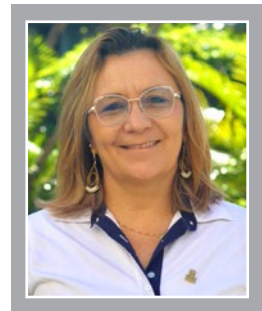

Leadership open to continuous learning

“We will be able to face current problems and anticipate future challenges by sharing and drawing on the knowledge and experience we have accumulated in our personal and community history.”

Br. Chano Guzmán, Marist Voices

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Each and every one of us can be a servant leader if we open ourselves up to it. Faced with the challenges and complexities of a world that no longer offers stable or predictable paths, we need to be open every day to developing skills that allow us to learn in partnership, to read contexts sensitively and, above all, to empathise with the other person walking alongside us.

I'm Luciana Winck Corrêa, born in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, in the southern region of Brazil. In Rio Grande do Sul, I was an educational counsellor and then a manager (Deputy Director and General Director) at Colégio Marista Graças, in Viamão, in the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre. For the last two years, I've been living in Brasília, in the Federal District, in the central region of the country, where I work as Deputy Director of Education at the Colégio Marista João Paulo II, in Asa Norte.

From an early age, I learned about living together as a family with my parents and siblings; I later came to experience this again when I joined the Marist family, one of the main areas of my identification with the aims of the Institute.

I started on the path of education at the age of 17, studying and preparing myself for teaching. I've always been curious, intense in my thoughts and feelings, attentive to learning and socialising. Being with people enchants me, because of the possibilities for relationships and because we can be channels of transformation for one another. At a certain point in my career, having already graduated in Psychology from PUCRS (Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul), I felt uncertain about the subject of management, especially of people who are part of educational teams.

Further knowledge about these areas came from specialising and a Master's degree in Education (PUCRS). Some of these experiences were in institutions that provided the opportunity to look beyond the philosophy of education. But it was mainly through working with individuals and teams that I found myself on the challenging and enchanting journey of permanently managing leadership.

My personal vision of leadership has always been to serve, never, on the contrary, to put myself above anyone else. Even though I take responsibility for processes, I try to think about partnership with others in the experience of the Marist Mission. Right from the start this enchanted and captivated me, particularly the aspect of care and welcome.

In the group we develop significant learning opportunities and make more assertive choices. If these choices came from just one person, one leader, they probably would not promote the engagement that can be seen when processes are built-up by several hands. To be part of a team, you have to feel part of it, taking on an attitude of learning that leads you to becoming competent in your work. In this sense, the experience of being a mentor on the journey of some colleagues in management was an exercise of great richness and sensitivity, which brought growth to both parties. Being with the other person and sharing with them is a way of seeing yourself through the looking glass and thus promoting the development of both parties.

In my mentoring journey, one moving experience was that of mentoring a young apprentice who had been a student at a Marist Social School in Porto Alegre. It was a few months of a great deal of learning and the feeling that God places us in spaces of mission in varied and subtle ways, gently showing us possible paths in our development as a person. This experience has deepened my understanding of the necessary relationship between spirituality, sensitivity and faith. It is a concrete path that leads us to see Jesus in others, in their choices and in the beautiful way young people show us their different visions and, at the same time, their need for support and to feel they are with someone who believes in their potential.

Learning in this way leads us to see other perspectives. I'm aware that the scope of certain decisions is in the hands of groups of managers, but listening to and walking with the people who live with and can adhere to the outcome of these decisions leads us to more effective and coherent choices that promote real engagement.

This can be seen in Brother Chano's chapter (Formation and Ongoing Formation for an Emerging World) when he emphasises the sense of community: being part of something bigger than ourselves (Br. Chano Guzmán, *Marist Voices*, 2022, p. 403 pub.VILLANUEVA, 2019). What we experience is there because we are instruments. And how beautiful it is when you realise this with sensitivity and go through the experiences with people.

In fact, feeling is just as important, if not more so, than knowing. And sensitivity only develops when we have the support of the experience of spirituality, both in contemplation and in the encounter with others. Brother Chano's chapter leads us to reflect on something that is fundamental in education: the importance of experience. We don't need to and shouldn't store or reproduce information, otherwise our minds run the risk of being under-utilised in their capacity for sensitivity and creation. Rather, we can open ourselves up to living and creating paths, new ideas, among the many possibilities that can contribute to education. In the integration of paths of knowledge, 70 per cent is due to experience, as stated in the same text quoted above. In other words, it is in everyday life and in perceiving what is in our environment that we can become leaders who integrate, who contribute through their way of being in the world and not by commanding the world.



Since taking on responsibility as a manager, I have realised, through the opportunity of living with others, the importance of carefully observing each situation, listening to people, valuing and promoting the idea that things are built up to a large extent through collective construction. During the pandemic, with social isolation (2020), when the school had to operate online, we experienced one of the most challenging times in terms of exercising group leadership. At the same time, it was these moments that transformed us the most in such a short and intense period of change. As an account of this learning experience, I remember that we used to meet as a large team every Friday evening via the online platform. People joined by invitation, it was the time when most of us

showed up to reflect, pray, share experiences and, with this, reduce the fear and anguish of that time of uncertainty, far from the school walls. We learned together and gave each other strength by sharing what we were experiencing, even though we were also looking for times of theoretical and specialised training. What was most valuable was meeting up, even if it was virtually.

From these experiences I became aware of the development of and contribution made by something that is fundamental in terms of servant leadership: the promotion of Collective Intelligence, experienced through cooperation and participation in the service of growth, transformation and serving the context with love and commitment. It's taking advantage of what we have accumulated in our personal and community history. How many stories make up our lives! It's possible to close one's eyes and remember scenes, faces, smiles, tears, situations that have shaped the way I perceive myself today among the people I live with and who define permanent openness to learning and contributing as their main way of being.

These memories bring to mind another point of great importance for leaders who serve: the ability to adapt to change. Nowadays, there is a need to see times when we need to adopt an attitude of flexibility, opening ourselves up to constant adaptation to contexts and the reality of the various situations arising in our journey as leaders. As we often say: at school, no day is the same as the next.

In order to commit yourself, you have to individually take on what you have in mind, because no one can learn and unlearn for someone else (Br. Chano Guzmán, *Marist Voices*, 2022, p. 405, pub. MARCET, 2019). In this sense, helping others means respecting their processes; you cannot format other people or lead them in an inflexible way with partial or personal views. This is a path of empathy towards others, if we want to help them on their leadership journey too. It's a challenge, because in the rush of rapid change and the daily demands of our teams, families





and students, our natural tendency is sometimes to do. But first and foremost we need to be, and this happens through listening.

In the day-to-day running of the school, my purpose is to support the leaders who work directly with teachers, children, young people and their families. The educational area coordinators fall under the scope of this leadership. I see them as colleagues, partners in the mission, with whom I have moments of sharing, of necessary listening, of studying and learning together, and also of good humour, laughter and cultural, artistic and sporting experiences that we have together (the broadening of our outlook also comes from the experience of looking outside our daily lives).

On this journey, we hold weekly meetings for one-to-one encounters, or fortnightly meetings for groups. These have also been opportunities to experience spirituality in the light of Champagnat's charism, which keeps us connected to the essence of what this journey is all about, without forgetting the necessary updating of educational work in close connection with caring, welcoming and solidarity. The quest in this group is to live the family spirit, overflowing this value to the teams that the members directly coordinate.

The experience as a group leads us to practise what Brother Chano suggests: attracting and promoting talent – the best talent is that which lives with the humility to always learn (Br. Chano Guzmán, *Marist Voices*, 2022, p. 404, apud MARCET, 2019). Learning and unlearning, because nothing is eternal, even if values are ephemeral.

Marcellin has demonstrated a powerful ability to help others grow and become leaders, because he himself was not eternal in his earthly role. But he lives on in the possibility of this culture of continuous learning and the harnessing of diverse talents, which promotes the continuity of this legacy. I relate all this to the restlessness and internal fire (fire of the Spirit) of wanting to be on a mission that promotes what is most potent within each person. And that is why it is worthwhile to be a leader who serves, to be a Marist leader, inspired by Champagnat and certain that the world is transformed to the extent that each of us changes internally, through formation and sensitivity to the opportunities that God places in our path. Let us be the torch-bearers of this legacy of service that our beloved St Marcellin invites us to be, in the most diverse spaces of mission!



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