
Marist leaders and the mission

“To serve is to come down and this does not go well with someone who aspires to ascend. Serving is not a way to project oneself in order to get to the desired position; it is the position itself...”

(Soteras, 2022)

Br. Umoh Benedict

Educator, Deputy Provincial, Child Rights,
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I have been a Marist Brother for the past twenty-two years. I am one of the Provincial Councilors and a Deputy Provincial. I serve as the Chairman of Marist Service Committee and a link Councilor to Marist Schools Management Board. I am a member of Child's Right Committee and a Coordinator of Province Volunteering. I represent African region at the management team Council of CPV network. I hold Ph.D degree in Educational Administration and Planning from Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria.



I am the current Principal of Marist College Yangoji, Abuja. I teach Religious and Moral Education. Working with young people from diverse ethnic, religious, economic and social background has been a great opportunity for learning and to be actively present to the different realities of young people. The journey with young people has made me to develop two values: passion for God and compassion for people. These values enabled me to be committed, considerate and attentive in serving young people, co-workers and confreres. I am daily challenged to

look out for young people with learning difficulties; young people from broken homes with low self-esteem; young people with bullying tendencies; young people from low economic background who lack confidence in themselves; young people from polygamous and abusive homes who are scared and deviant towards adult's guidance. The experience with these categories of young people has taught me to be patient, attentive and compassionate in the mission.



At the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, Luke 4: 18 recounts that, *he went to the synagogue and a scroll was handed to him and he opened to where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free.* This passage which is the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1. This sets the tone for Jesus' leadership style – the servant leader, and revealed a paradigm shift in mission focus. Jesus' life and teachings as revealed in the gospels buttressed his mission. Specifically, in Mathew 20:25, Jesus declared '*...you know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their superiors exercise authority over them. **It shall not be this way among you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant***'. Jesus revealed that those who aspire for greatness must necessarily serve others. In other words, a leader's role is to put others, first and help them realize their potentials. As Marist leaders, to develop a mission is to empower young people to discover themselves in a unique way. A leader must be interested in people's growth (welfare) and with the people identify causes that mitigate against their progress and create various pathways of addressing the painful realities of human condition. Such empowerment must be holistic and transformative in approach.

Similarly, leaders must necessarily consider the needs of the community they serve. The need of the community can be identified through needs assessment process which helps the leader to prioritize its mission. However, we see some leaders who singlehandedly carryout project(s) for and in the name of the community without involving the people. These leaders think that those we serve have nothing to contribute to the mission. Sometimes also, when we fail to involve young people in decisions that would affect them, because we feel that they are passive recipient of our 'generosity and goodness', we are far from being servant leaders.

To develop a mission, a leader must consider the culture of the people. Culture describes people's way of life (Warui and Marbach, 2022). For leaders to succeed in the mission, they

must take time to understand the culture of the people they serve. Leaders who ignore the culture of the people will definitely face herculean challenge. Marist leaders need to possess thorough knowledge of the culture and the milieu they are working. They also need to respect the local culture where they work. Doing so will ensure their mission respond to the needs of the community.



To develop a mission requires that the leader establishes a relationship based on trust, love and equity with the team. A relationship that encourages people to be at their best. Mission will be unrealistic if the leader does not have cordial relationship with the team. If people are not respected, recognized and rewarded, the mission may likely experience disintegration due to dissatisfaction of members. Hence to develop a mission, the leader must repose trust and confidence on his team, and strive to foster synergy and communion among them.

In conclusion, Marist leaders should imbibe the values of passion for God and compassion for the people as they work and administer to the people. Marist mission would develop if Marist leaders realize their positions as servants than masters. It is only by being servants to those we serve that we would realize the true meaning of our vocation as brothers.

Questions

1. Do those we serve grow in the mission?
2. How does the mission serve the people?

Reference

1. Soterias, J. M (2022). Biblical Pointers on Fraternity for Leadership Oriented Towards Service. In Marist Voices (2022). Essays on Servant and Prophetic leadership (pp. 267). Rome
2. Warui, E and Marbach, P (2022). Culture and its influence on NGO project design and implementation. <https://www.arqaam.org/2022/05/11/culture-and-ngo-project-design-and-implementation/>



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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