
Prophetic and servant leadership in Lebanon

“Only a mature guide, who is aware of his or her own limits and fragility,
will be able to exercise this compassionate leadership”
(Br. Óscar Martín - Marist Voices - Chapter 4)

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I am a Colombian Marist Brother and former student of the Marist Brothers in my hometown Medellin, as a child I was part of the Marist youth groups since the beginning of the REMAR Movement. I am 63 years old and since 2015 I belong to the Province of Mediterránea. Until 2003 I worked in Colombia and then I was in “Mission ad Gentes” in Monrovia - Liberia from 2003 to 2008. For the last 15 years I have been working in Lebanon, as a teacher of Italian, Spanish and karate, community superior, accompanier of the laity, spiritual accompanier of the scout group and for the last 7 years Coordinator of the Animation Team Lebanon - Syria (EALS).



From the General House, the Marist International Mission Commission has asked me to share my experience of “Prophetic and Servant Leadership”, so I have written some simple reflections arising from my experience and work in Lebanon: Difficult periods ensued due to the Pandemic, the explosion of the Port of Beirut, the economic and political crisis. I am grateful for the opportunity to share something of Marist life in the Middle East, where we share the Marist charism with very valuable people who live the Spirituality and Charism of Marcellin Champagnat to the full.

For me, Leadership at the service of others - to be prophetic - has to be a Leadership of Presence and Joy, especially in times of crisis. Our apostolic presence must transmit the joy of the Christian, who is convinced that in difficulty there are always possibilities for the future and that after the storm comes the calm, or as Brother Basilio Rueda used to say: “If God gives the cold, he also gives the blanket”.

To be a leader in the service of others is also to be committed to forming servant leaders who follow the example of Jesus Christ who “came not to be served but to serve” (Mt. 20:27), and asked his disciples to be ready to wash the feet of others. Education in the Middle East serves to create an atmosphere of understanding and teamwork between people of different religions. In Lebanon, the population is distributed in three more or less balanced groups: Sunnis, Shiites and Christians (most of the Christians are Maronite Catholics). The Catholic school also welcomes Muslims and is highly appreciated for the values it conveys.

An important aspect of our leadership is the presence close to the people. It is fundamental to share with them our time, our daily joys and difficulties. Without this contact, it is difficult to be a credible leader, because in the end it is actions that carry more weight than words. A very important example of this close presence was Frère André Delalande who died at the age of 103 in 2021 and who throughout his life in Lebanon was a witness of kindness, listening and joy. Until his last days, he was always welcoming students and teachers at the clean entrance of the school, thanks to his devotion of sweeping it every morning at 4:30 am. Families and former students remember him fondly and his presence was prophetic precisely because of his ability to help everyone and a joy that communicated hope. I like it very much when Pope Francis insists on the importance of the joyful religious, a challenge amid difficulties.

Part of our service Leadership is imparted by a welcome in community. As a mixed community of Brothers and lay people, we strive to ensure that our community lives the Family Spirit



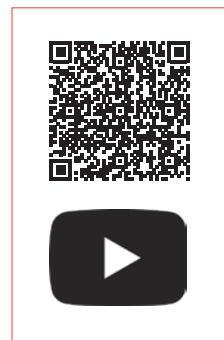
and that our doors and hearts are open to listen and accompany. As superior, the challenge is to welcome and accept “each one with his own individuality”, as Miguel de Unamuno said. Our Rule of Life points out that: “We welcome each other as we are, different and complementary” (RL 51). (RL 51) and it is precisely the diversity of each one that enriches us. Although sometimes it is not easy to accept differences, patience and closeness are key.

In our community, brothers and lay people prepare the meals and take care of the cleaning of the house. These household chores are simple but require effort and time. As models of servant leadership, we are willing to do small services. I remember Br. Seán Sammon who as Superior General, accompanied us on a retreat and, when dinner ended, he was one of the first to wash dishes. We welcome in our community students and alumni whom we value very much. Simple chores in community life are shared in a humble way.

The message of Jesus can be transmitted in many ways. In Lebanon I have had the opportunity to coordinate EALS, to be the director of Jbail College, to be a community superior, as well as a teacher of Italian, Spanish and karate, from where I was able to share the Gospel and its values. Last weekend we had Summer Camp with 50 karatekas. Apart from training and helping to organize the activities, I created a small “souvenir” for each participant: for the Christians, a denarius and for the Muslims, a “masbaha”, a version of the Muslim rosary. And speaking of values, one of the points of the Dojo Kun in Karate is: “Hitotsu! Reigi o omonzuru koto!” “First, Respect others!”.

As I mentioned at the beginning, I also work as a Spiritual Chaperone for the Scouts. Here the scout movement is very important. In Champville College, the scout group has about 1,000 participants and in Jbail College about 600. Through contact with nature and working in small teams, the scouts are trained in service and leadership. We encourage them not to lose hope in the midst of crises... as the eighth point of the Scout Law says: “The Scout smiles and sings in his difficulties”.

In conclusion, I am convinced that our simple lifestyle and our Marist presence at the service of others is a prophetic act of fraternity in a country with great religious and political diversity. Our challenge as Brothers and Lay Marists, if we want to live Prophetic and Servant Leadership in Lebanon, is to announce the message of Jesus with joy. Live out our charism in the style of Mary who was always attentive to the needs of others and was ready to listen and welcome everyone. Our presence and servant leadership is a testament to Champagnat who said: “All the dioceses of the world enter into our vision”.



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