
Marist vision requires a wide focus

We do not offer final suggestions for action, and cannot do so, because our acting must always include learning, open to encounter with others and open to the truths we learn from Earth and from God
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I hadn't yet met a Marist Brother when I began my discernment about whether to become one. I was simply an American layman living abroad who was in the process of returning to the Catholic faith of my childhood, who was already drawn to intercultural experiences, and who was passionate about the work of education. I also already had a heart for the poor and a curiosity about a possible call to religious life. When I came across the Marist Brothers on-line, this openness turned into genuine enthusiasm that only grew over time. After some initial correspondence and telephone conversations with the vocation director, I only had a chance to visit the Marists twice before arriving a third time to begin postulancy back in September 2008. Since entering the Province of the USA, I have served as a teacher and campus minister, and currently serve as vocation director. I made my final vows in 2016.

It was during my time of initial discernment that I first read *Water from the Rock*, and I immediately perceived that the Marist approach to discipleship presented a genuine way of reading and living the Gospel that made intuitive sense to me. Our Institute's ongoing exploration of the charism that we have received continues to draw me in, as we further our discovery of what it means to be Marist together in this world.

The recent emphasis in our Institute on servant leadership asks us to increase our awareness of the ways in which many of us are leaders regardless of our place in any organizational chart. Our choices and attitudes influence others regardless of whether we intend to do so. As



Fr. Champagnat wrote in his letter to Bro. Barthélemy regarding the pupils under his care: “*Their whole life will be the echo of what you will have taught them*” (no.19). Educators, mentors, guides and companions of all kinds well know that we teach far more by our example, good or bad, than by any mere imparting of knowledge.

The mandate given to all Marists by Fr. Champagnat to love Jesus and to make him known and loved requires us first to grow in our ability to recognize his presence in those around us and to better attend to that presence of Christ reflected in so many human faces. Saying that this is the whole purpose of our Marist Institute does not subordinate social works to catechism but rather reminds us to lead with love, no matter our occupation. Like many Marists, I was deeply impressed by Fr. Champagnat’s insight that “to teach children, you must first love them and love them all equally.” In recent years though, I have come to believe that if Champagnat were involved in healthcare, he would have said the same about treating patients, and if he were a farmer, he would have said the same about growing food. To do any worthy thing in a truly Christian manner requires us to approach our tasks in a loving way—in providing loving service to others, we are invited to see how we are serving Christ. As Marists, we learn from Mary how to do this.

Mary teaches us to begin with a listening heart. Even before becoming a Marist Brother, I learned that listening to my students outside of the class period would make them more likely to listen to me in the classroom. In my vocation ministry, I greatly prefer to begin an initial conversation with an inquirer by inviting him to tell me his story on his terms rather than addressing him first with a list of targeted questions or a discourse on the Marist Institute and charism. There is information that I will eventually need to gather and share, but first I must do my best to rec-

ognize him in his personhood. If I am representing our Marist family to him, I must respond to him as Mary would.

Mary also teaches us how to respond to confusing challenges. Although, I was always drawn to vocation ministry, when I was formally offered this responsibility, I felt like I was being given a wonderful opportunity but at the wrong time. Like Mary, I shared my apprehensions with my Provincial and others who helped me to discern. When my own doubts were insufficient to dissuade those who were trusting in me however, I ultimately said “yes,” knowing that all things are possible with God.

Certainly, Mary of the Visitation, Mary at Cana, and Mary at the foot of the Cross each teach us different ways of responding to the needs of God’s people. Mary’s example also helps us to find our place in community, both at Cana where we are challenged to address human needs external to our narrowly defined mission, and also in the Upper Room where gathered together we open ourselves up to the inbreaking of the Holy Spirit. She did not have to approve of or understand a person’s choices to genuinely love them, as underlined by her struggle to understand Jesus’ dangerous ministerial choices. Don’t each of these scriptural examples provide us with compelling challenges regarding the implications of Marist presence?

For a person who made such an incredible impact however, most of Mary’s activity was too insignificant to be recorded. She was the Mary who changed diapers, told bedtime stories, cleaned, cooked, and found simple and creative ways to economize within a modest household. Her greatest contributions would never have shown up in a performance review or in an impact report, and yet we know her by her fruit.

I have learned that an exclusive focus on any given objective—in my case vocation ministry—can be detrimental to its actual achievement. For example, to build up necessary trust with young people, I need to place their dignity before any agenda I might have; I



need to make time for those who I know are not called to our life, and I also need to put the fruits of authentic discernment ahead of my own preferences. This seems to me a key distinction between ministry and a mere job: Although we all have our processes and strategies, we leave room for the movement of the living Spirit. We plan responsibly for desirable outcomes while also recognizing that God is ultimately in control. Our Marist Project will continue to flourish as long as we serve Christ's purposes rather than our own.

We have much to celebrate as Marists. Not only do we have a rich patrimony and many achievements, but more importantly we have a spirituality that reminds us to not only reverence but also to enjoy God's presence among us. May we always remember the sacred nature of both

our mission and our community, both our common work and our recreation together. As servants to one another as well as those entrusted to our care, let us lead each other ever closer into the heart of Jesus.



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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