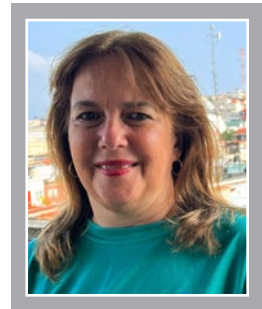

It is by serving that we know each other

“The leader who puts himself at the service is also called to be an empathetic leader, given that his role is centred on the group and the individuals he accompanies and serves”.

(Br. Óscar Martín – Marist Voices, Chapter 4)

Nanette Hurst

Province of Central America – Puerto Rico
Teacher and accompanier



My name is Nanette Hurst and I am a third grade teacher at the primary school of Colegio Marista in Guaynabo, Puerto Rico, which is part of the Province of Central America. In addition to my teaching duties, I have been in charge for several years now of our solidarity trips where we give high school students experience of voluntary work.

I have been working in the school for 23 years, but it was not until 2009 that I had a transformative formation experience. Through it, I came to question my vocation and find the reason for what I had gone through. A few months later, I received a special invitation and began to realise what God wanted from me.

I was invited to be part of the group of companions on the “Solidarity Trip” to Condega (Nicaragua) in 2010. I knew that I wanted to continue having new experiences as a Marist, but I had no clear idea of what I was going to face. When I arrived, I felt fear and uncertainty because I didn’t know what I was doing there, but that didn’t last long. Those feelings quickly gave way to feelings of fulfilment and complete happiness during the week. I was accompanying a group of boys whom I knew only from when they were little at school. We were living together as a family-experience, something that none of us had ever done before. We empathised, we cried and laughed. What we experienced would bind us together from then on forever. That left its mark on me.

We were there to help, to collaborate in whatever way we could with other Marists like



ourselves. Mostly, we were there to bring our company and our presence, rather than money. We were there because of the people and for the people. We had a phrase written in our hearts: I care about you! Because of that alone the people were happy. We gave them love and let ourselves be loved. We lived their lives for a week and became locals. We realised that we don't necessarily need all our possessions to be happy.

With just one trip I realised that this is what I wanted to do. I wanted to be there for the children of Condega and also for my own children who were in similar need. I realised the importance of a mission that was capable of changing lives. Without hesitation, I asked to be part of the permanent team accompanying the students of our school on the *Solidarity Journey*.

For some years I was a chaperone, enjoying every moment and watching everything with my eyes wide open. I believed in what I was doing. Over time I took on more responsibility in the group, while some of the people in charge went off in other directions. What I was doing was fascinating and I was passionate about it. Over the years I saw more and more the importance of our visits for the whole community of Condega and the transformation that the students of my school went through. I saw my students waking up to life, demonstrating their abilities and becoming leaders with minds of their own.

I agreed to take responsibility for a valuable legacy for the people who had brought life to the project, for the community of Condega and for the youth of Guaynabo. It was so important for everyone that it continue.

I never thought I would be able to lead a project such as this. I had never seen myself as a leader. I was doing my job as a teacher quietly, without being in the limelight. I learned to let go of my fears and accept challenges. If it has to be done, it has to be done. With trust in God.

We encountered problems along the way. The social situation in some of the countries of our Province, the pandemic and the precariousness of everything interrupted the journey for some years. The passion I feel for this impels me not to let something of such importance come to an end. We must not give up.

As soon as we felt more secure and the conditions were right, we took up the project again. This year we were able to take twenty-three young people on a volunteer- experience to Guatemala. It was an intensive week, with the expected results. They carried out their mission, they worked hard, they shared in community with the people of Guatemala and with the Brothers. They felt happy and were proud to belong to the Marist community. I saw how qualities surfaced of which they themselves were unaware.

One day we arrived at one of the schools and all the students were on the field waiting for us with balloons, happy to see us. One of our boys took the microphone to thank them for this special welcome. When his speech of thanks was finished, we were all amazed when he began to encourage the children to play different games. At the end, we all congratulated him and asked him what made him act like that. His answer was that he didn't know and that he had never done anything like that before.

I have continued to develop in what I love. We continue with the sponsorship of students in Condega, I am part of the Solidarity Commission of the Province and of the volunteer -formation team. Soon I hope to be able to join as a committed lay Marist.

I believe in what I do, it has given life and sparkle to my work as a teacher. This call to solidarity has given me a purpose and another way of contributing to the formation of more empathetic and simple human beings who give of their time and love to others with joy, who are living examples of their values and are always fighting for them.

By finding their own passion, they live happier lives and make others happy. In bad times, this accumulation of goodness will give them the strength not to let themselves be defeated.





As a Marist leader, I heartily commend the following to you:

Give a new project a chance in your life. Volunteer and find ways to help others. Make your work or home environment a positive one by setting an example every day. Live with your eyes open to the needs of others. Give what you can. Your presence alone is enough. Do as I did one day: step out of your comfort-zone and dare to do something different. You will never know what you will find there and what may change your life forever.

If we do this, we will be building servant-leadership.



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