
Hope in fragility: Thoughts on Marist leadership

“Arguably, there is no more difficult task for a leader than leading a group effectively and cohesively through significant change and alleviating entrenched constraints while still holding everyone to the essentials.”

(Br. Michael Green – Marist Voices, chapter 19)

Juan Sebastián Herrera Salazar, fms

Province of Norandina – Ecuador
Educational and youth ministry



I was born in Manizales (Colombia) in 1988 and graduated from high school at Colegio de Cristo, the Marist institution in my city. I am the son of Onel and Liliana and older brother of Valentina. I made my first vows in Medellín 2013 and my perpetual vows in Pasto 2022. I belong to the Marist Province of Norandina.

At present I am a member of the community of Quevedo (Ecuador) where I am a teacher of Religious Education in the senior years of high school in the Unidad Educativa América, a Marist school in the city. I am part of the “Casas Familia” project which receives children in vulnerable situations and provides them with a home, study, food and accompaniment; in addition, I am part of the vocations team in Ecuador.

In chapter 19 of the book Marist Voices, entitled “The Marist Style of Prophetic and Servant Leadership: Some Examples in our Tradition”, Brother Michael Green explains, in a very personal way, how several of the Superiors General of our Institute had to lead the Congregation in times of war and social, ecclesial, and cultural fragility. It is striking to imagine Brother Théophile, an octogenarian, leading the solemn procession of the 1903 General Chapter at Saint-Genis-Laval, as they were about to leave France for exile in Italy after being expelled from their homeland.

I became aware, as I read and pictured in my mind the situations described by Br Michael, that in reality every leader, generally speaking, frequently has to confront fragility in carrying



out his role. Thus, Br Basilio Rueda gave us an example of enormous hope and strength when, despite the decline in the number of the Institute's brothers, he led the congregation for almost 20 years with the recognition, accompaniment, presence and prophecy of a man who listened to the voice of God in his heart.

As Marists today we find ourselves, in a way, contemplating fragility in our exercise of leadership as we have to make decisions with the consequent uncertainty that this brings. For example, doubts may arise about personal and institutional capacity to carry out a task. As leadership is often exercised with authority over people, it is possible that the decisions we take may harm others, may generate insecurity, pain or uncertainty; in other words, they may make them feel fragile.

We are all fragile: Jesus felt fragile when he asked the Father to spare him the bitter pill of death (Lk 22, 42). Mary felt fragile at the foot of Jesus' cross when she saw her son about to die (Jn 19, 25). Marcellin felt fragile when he returned home with the failure of not having obtained the legal approval of the Institute. Diogene, as Chapter 19 of Marist Voices tells us, felt fragile when he had to live with the German occupation during the war in his native France.

It is thus very important for all of us to find within ourselves the element of fragility that we cannot avoid and that is included in our lives, in the lives of others, in humanity and in the planet. Death, physical pain in the face of illness or accident and mourning the loss of a human being make us feel fragile; also when we do not feel recognised, loved or stimulated, or when efforts to achieve something do not have the expected result.

Humanity has consequently developed multiple ways of protecting itself from these fragilities. Many of these ways help us, making us feel very strong. However, none of them has been able to completely eliminate our frailties; that is an unrealistic task. Therefore, both for leadership and for life, I believe that it is very important to simply learn to recognise them and integrate them as a permanent reality in our existence. It is, therefore, essential that Marist servant and prophetic leadership has large doses of humility, realism, empathy and assertiveness. This helps it accept and protect the other person, with their frailties, generating hope in their mission and life.

Empathy, which can be associated with someone who is capable of walking in the other person's shoes, has the quality of validating the other person's feelings. This is a compassion that, far from attitudes of pity, is capable of living with the other person's feelings and from that place, sometimes painful and even shameful, provides tools and accompaniment - empowerment - to overcome the problem. When a student in my class asked to talk to me about the break-up of a relationship, I listened to her attentively and validated her feelings of helplessness, astonishment and even guilt, so that I could then offer her some clues that would allow her to move towards healing, as well as the certainty of confidentiality and respect for her feelings. Some time later she shared with me that the key thing about that conversation for her was that she never felt judged, but felt welcomed and encouraged.

Assertiveness is the ability we human beings have to express ourselves in tense situations without judging the other person - or group - but rather sharing our own emotions and feelings





produced by the situation. For example, a teacher has the opportunity to be assertive when she is able to make her student understand that taking things that are not her own is a dishonest practice, without having to label her a thief; a Brother Principal is assertive when he privately draws the attention of the brother teacher who had a disagreement with a parent to the difficulty he caused and offers options for improvement.

Empathy and assertiveness are of course not new, but since they are everyday attitudes, they may also be completely absent in people who exercise authority over others in our schools, social centres, universities, or provinces. Such a lack often cultivates tense, false, highly toxic, and extremely sterile environments for Marist life and mission. By being empathetic and assertive we can nurture and generate Marist life in our communities, fraternities, schools, institutions, and administrative units to be sowers of hope in this troubled world.



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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