
Living the Marist Mission Every Day

Presence and Leadership

«Work for those who work for you! [...] You must not simply be at the service of your colleague. You must be their best servant»
(Steven B. Sample)

Brother Balume Shamabale Désiré
Educator, Prefect of Studies
Province of East Central Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo



I carry out my apostolic mission at the Complexe Scolaire Marcellin MOBATELI (CSMM), one of two Marist secondary schools in Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). I am currently the Prefect of Studies.

The most notable image that comes to mind is Jesus Christ. He demonstrated prophetic and servant leadership through his ability to be fully present in the moment, attentive and engaged in his interactions with those around him. Presence is essential for effective Christ-like leadership.

These two aspects of Jesus' life - presence and prophetic, servant leadership - are exemplified in the washing of his disciples' feet (John 13:14-15), the healing of the sick (Mark 2:11) and the feeding of the hungry (Luke 9:10-20). Hence the call to every Marist leader to care for the people in his or her charge, putting their needs before his or her own, doing everything with Christ-like dedication and compassion. It is only by being fully and humbly present in his interactions that he will be better able to understand the needs of his team, generate commitment and cultivate a positive working environment.

Servant and prophetic leadership is linked to humility, which is sadly lacking in our world today. In the school environment, we are called to act differently. This means :

- Putting the needs of the educational team, the pupils and all stakeholders before our own; listening to them and learning from them, experiencing successes and failures together in a spirit of faith.
- Building relationships of trust with your team. Admitting mistakes and weaknesses, being aware that the leader is not infallible and that he can be understood and supported by his colleagues. The result of this humility will be to strengthen the trust, support, and cooperation of the whole team.

- Avoid the temptation to become complacent, and constantly challenge yourself by recognizing the shortcomings of your team and taking steps to correct them, together with everyone else, to achieve common goals.

The invitation in number 92 of our Rule of Life to us Brothers responsible for works is a constant call to deepen our attitudes:

“When you exercise the service of authority in a work or in a mission, inside or outside the Institute, encourage the Marist characteristics and values, which are the true expression of our charism. Ensure a healthy and safe environment that fosters trust and collaboration. Give preference to those who are never preferred. Pay special attention to young people so that they can participate actively and develop their leadership skills”.

In this sense, servant and prophetic leadership becomes a way of life and a line of conduct, not a slogan. It is from this perspective that I would like to highlight the following ideas, drawn from my own experience:

- I am called to be more of a leader than a manager. In carrying out my duties, it is not enough to do things properly (which is what a manager does), but to do things well, to do things differently.
- African wisdom says it best: “a man is respected by the spear he still holds, not by the one he has already thrown”. This means that it is current merits that show the value of a person (a leader). It is an invitation to every Marist leader to discover this spear that we still hold if we want to envisage a better future and the expected results for our works. This spear can be attention, compassion, team spirit, listening, flexibility, the ability to communicate, empathy towards the whole educational team and the young people in general.
- As much as I can generate new ideas, they can also come from others. A good decision is often the fruit of teamwork. Refusing to be egocentric and favoring “WE” is an attitude to be valued and embodied, while avoiding permissiveness and complacency. A true leader draws on the talents and skills of the members of his team, who in turn give of their best. To illustrate this conviction, at the beginning of this school year in September 2022, worried about the departure of a very good member of staff, and while we were preparing to recruit his replacement, a teacher turned to me and said: “Brother, do you know that Mr. so-and-so (giving his name), who is already working with us, is just as qualified and competent as the one who has





left? And that's how I found a solution to my concern, while avoiding additional costs to the institution.

- Usually, the spontaneous sharing of life experiences by the educational team at the start of our pedagogical or administrative meetings always generates commitment and active participation from everyone.
- These kinds of regular exchanges, whether formal or informal, increasingly create a genuine relationship within the educational team. They also encourage members of the school community to open up to others when needed.

In conclusion, servant and prophetic leadership is a path that every Marist should follow, modelled on Christ, prophet and servant par excellence. Servant and prophetic leadership reminds us of our mission to be truly present, and a model for those with whom and to whom we work to better inspire and lead them to follow the vision of our institutions.

We must not ask of others what we cannot produce ourselves. If employees notice that we are devoting as much time and effort to the mission as they are, they will do more. At the same time, they are likely to come late to service if we do too.

We can only encourage all Marists to live this dimension of leadership, which is very important in the exercise of our mission--this is to deepen a climate of trust that allows each other to make decisions in the best interests of our apostolic works and all those involved, especially young people.



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