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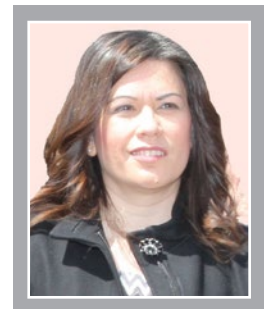
## Marist leadership: a realistic proposal for a better future

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Leadership must not only serve the present and be faithful to the past, but it must be a vehicle to move towards the future of the project to which it is committed. It is not necessary that those in leadership have to come up with the idea, but they must be able to welcome those who do, discern with them what is essential and what is not, and provide the means to achieve the goal at a convenient pace

(Br. Josep Maria Soteras - Marist Voices, Chapter 16)

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**M**y relationship with the Marists stems from my school years, when my parents chose “Leonteios Atenas” School, a Marist school in Greece, for my education. The relationship with the school and with the Brothers did not end when I left school as the Marist way always seemed to me a very attractive way of living Gospel values. So, with much joy and enthusiasm I began working as an educator at “Leonteios Atenas”, in 2006, 13 years after I had left the school. Today, in addition to my educational duties, I am involved in various aspects of Marist life and mission, being responsible for pastoral ministry and formation in my school, but also in the Province of L’Hermitage with the laity. Moreover, I am a member of the Administrative Council of the “Marist Organisation”, that is to say the body which is dedicated to the management and co-ordination of the Marist mission in Greece.

So, recalling individuals and significant experiences, I think with gratitude of Brothers and lay people who are an example for me. An example because they are distinguished by the coherence between their words and their deeds, they radiate light and truth, they are humble, profound and indispensable and because their lives are inspired by Christian and Marist values. Their model of life and works is that of Jesus Christ, who did not come on earth “to be served, but to serve” (Mk 10,45). The people who are reference-points in my life lead by selfless dedication to others, in solidarity and service, by means of discreet accompaniment. This way of acting can sometimes seem strange in today’s society, where the exercise of leadership is almost synonymous with power and imposition. When someone has experienced such a different example of leadership, they feel responsible for passing it on, because deep down they believe that it is a model that can help us



live a better life. It can help us create an environment where people live with Christian and universal values and where human dignity is respected. In this way, we can build a world that is more just for everyone, especially the most vulnerable: a world based more on the essence and less on the surface of things, a world that will not prioritise the acquisition of goods, but concern for the well-being of people. In this world, people will find fulfilment, happiness, harmony.

How do I personally perceive this style of leadership? First, I believe that servant leadership is directly related to caring for people, the soul of our mission. The leader must be simple and approachable, accompanying people in a paternal/maternal and fraternal way. He/she must express love and interest and convince mainly by his/her actions. Always keep in mind the idea that caring for people is directly linked to the viability and vitality of our mission, since none of us is eternal, but must prepare a new generation of Marist leaders who will take over after us. We feel a deep sense of responsibility for passing on to younger people the great inheritance, the charisma we have received, because this gift has a universal and timeless value.

A servant leader always wants to be innovative, creative and sensitive to the problems of his/her time. Just as Marcellin wanted to bring solutions to the problems of young people in the France of the 19th century, the Marist leader of today listens to the needs of those around him/her, and acts. If there is one thing that always moves and excites me in the Marist environment in which I live, it is the willingness to find solutions where others see problems; the desire for radical changes that will lead us into a new era. However, the changes must be decided after a process of discernment, with the criterion of serving people taking priority, especially young people, the recipients of our mission. I believe that the capacity of Marist leadership to dream, to envision and to open new paths is related to the belief that we must not remain tied to a biased view of things or to an effort to preserve at all costs what has already been acquired. It is important to always keep our eyes on the future, to prepare for what comes after us. We know very well that for something new, meaningful, and substantial to be born, the old - whatever is worn out and no



longer serves modern needs – must die. On the other hand, the seed that is buried in the ground gives new life in abundance. The same is true of our mission! I have experienced leaders who have made difficult decisions, but in doing so have laid the foundations for a future full of hope. It is always important that all decisions are made with the good of the mission, and not individual interest, in mind. We know that leadership and decision-making cannot always be pleasant. The leader is likely to come up against people’s passions. He or she may have to face adversity with firmness and fairness. A good leader is not one who avoids inevitable difficulties or conflicts, but one who feels it is his or her duty to put the good of the community before individual interests (his or her own or those of others). It is clear that this is not easy. Important gifts for a leader are foresight, long-term planning, and the ability to make decisions based on reason rather than on the impulse of the moment.

All Marist educators exercise leadership, as each of us accompanies the students and contributes to the forming of their personalities in the classroom, through our example, attitude and behaviour. Likewise, in my various activities in the field of Marist life and mission, I feel I must have in mind the active listening to, the empathising with, and the understanding of the other. I feel that the Marist leader must inspire. That is why it is important to always understand the other person, even if he/she makes a mistake. Only in this way can we accompany, help, and motivate him/her towards a different path. Another important element is the search for the greatest possible consensus, which creates solidarity and family spirit. However, this tension towards consensus must be balanced with firmness in making the decisions that are essential for the future of the mission.





All the above-mentioned gifts shape for me the profile of the ideal Marist leader and are primarily a guide that I am called to follow. It is certainly very difficult for any one person to have all these characteristics. It is more of a continuous journey towards an ideal. To meet these high standards, we must first cultivate our inner world, because only a balanced, deep, complete and confident personality can cope with these demands and be an example to others. But this effort is worthwhile and our purpose is especially noble: to strive every day to evangelise and bring hope into the lives of others, to create communities “that care for life and generate new life”, to pass on the baton to future generations and to feel that we are doing our part in the continuation of the Marist mission. On this journey, it is always worth remembering the important words of a Christian leader who has given his life for Gospel values:

*“We are masons, not site managers, ministers, not the Messiah. We are prophets of a future that is not ours” (Monsignor Óscar Romero)*



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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](mailto:fms.cimm@fms.it)