
Servant Leadership

A Joyful Expression of God's Love for Humanity

“And now faith, hope and love remain, these three,
and the greatest of these is love.”

1 Corinthians 13:13)

“The authority by which the Christian leader leads not power but love, not force
but example, not coercion but reasoned persuasion.”

(‘Christian Leadership’ - John Stott)

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For the past fifteen years, I have served as a teacher and administrator in various Marist institutions. Currently, I am a member of the Provincial Council and serve as the Director of Marcellin Trust which provides care and support for vulnerable children. Being a Marist Brother and dedicating my life to the education and care of young people as part of the Global Marist Family brings me great joy.

The Joy of Being a Servant Leader

Servant leadership is a popular leadership philosophy that is interpreted in various ways. However, for us, it must be understood through the teachings of Jesus and approached in the way of Mary. As a way of living, servant leadership reflects our relationship with God, others, and ourselves. God created us out of love and calls us to share that love with others.

A servant leader cultivates virtues such as *empathy, humility, communion, bridge-building, inner silence, gratitude, integrity, and empowerment*. They serve others' needs while inspiring them to see beyond the ordinary and go deeper in their mission as Marists and disciples of Jesus. This also enables us to embrace and celebrate the uniqueness of each person without judgment, envy, or prejudice.

Servant leadership also involves recognizing the harmony between power and service. The Marist Brother's Rule of Life describes leadership as *a humble and generous service to humanity* (# 83). To become a servant leader, one must embrace humility and generosity in serving others. As

Marists, we become servant leaders by showing compassion and fostering communion among people of different cultures, personalities, beliefs, and values. Our goal is to create a welcoming community where individuals can connect through shared experiences and live with dignity and freedom.

A servant leader has a vision and effectively communicates it to others. Without vision, a leader is blind to the future and what God reveals through everyday life. To understand where we are being called and what we are being called to do, we must change our perspective and reimagine ourselves in emerging realities. A servant leader is rooted in the present while looking towards the future with hope. It is also equally important to acknowledge, celebrate, support, and empower the servant leaders among us.

A servant leader may face temptations such as becoming passive or sticking to traditions. Jesus faced rejection as a servant leader but did not give in to criticism. He challenged the status quo by dining with tax collectors and sinners, speaking with a Samaritan woman, forgiving sinners, advocating for the vulnerable, washing his disciples' feet, and dying on the cross. From Jesus, we learn that servant leadership is not easy but requires enduring hardships 'to love to the end'. The future may be uncertain, but we remain hopeful for the possibilities it holds. Jesus has assured us of his constant presence until the end of time (Mt 28:20).

Mary serves as both a model and inspiration for servant leaders through her discipleship. Despite her initial confusion, she humbly accepted her role as God's handmaid. As Jesus' mother, Mary surrendered to God's will and relinquished the privileges of power. She built a family with Joseph and Jesus, teaching us to live with faith and freedom. Mary may not have understood everything that transpired, but she pondered them in her heart. We can learn from her to be still and





embrace the mysteries of our lives and those of others. As a disciple of Jesus, Mary stood by her son at the foot of the cross and offered him comfort through her presence. We can learn from her to remain steadfast and faithful. As a woman of hope, Mary prayed with the disciples in the upper room. Servant leaders are called to follow her example as beacons of hope and bridge-builders.

Our mission isn't about fame or selfish gain. We work together with joy and fulfillment to empower others and build community. Let's take a closer look at our leaders. What do they believe in? What do they stand for? Who do they care about? Despite the good happening around us and the tireless efforts of many to create peace and harmony, we're often overwhelmed by the harsh realities of exploitation, child labor, trafficking, abuse, extremism, corruption, poverty, malnutrition, injustice, war, and violence. How do we respond to these realities? What difference do we make as servant leaders in our community, ministry, and society?

When Jesus wanted to feed the starving crowd in the desert, his disciples were worried. "How can we feed so many with so little?" they asked. But Jesus was grateful and content with what they had. He had compassion in his heart and knew that was enough. As leaders, we often worry about what we lack. We focus on what we don't have and what we can't do. But Jesus teaches us that to serve others, all we need is a heart full of compassion. With just seven loaves of bread and a heart full of compassion, Jesus fed the crowd. And so can we if we truly believe that it is not just the bread alone but the heart we embrace.

St. Marcellin had a generous and compassionate heart. His love for his brothers, children, and young people was tender and unconditional. He at the same time challenged and motivated his brothers to live their lives with courage and determination in the service of others. He walked with them in their joys and sorrows, and in good and hard times.



As a brother and leader, I have cherished the diversity of faiths and cultures in my life, and I always love to offer my support to those who face economic hardship and social exclusion. A few years ago, we launched a project called the “La Valla Evening Study Centre” to help rural village children study after school. I remember visiting one of the centres in a refugee camp with my companion. As we entered, the children greeted us warmly. The teacher introduced me as the Project Manager of the project, and the children looked at me with respect, but were hesitant to talk to me. Despite the cramped space, we sat down with the children and had a friendly chat, laughing and having fun. The joy and smiles on their faces were infectious. They were surprised by our visit and thanked us for reaching out to them, as they often felt forgotten because they were refugees. It was a privilege to spend time with them and witness the impact of our service. Service is truly a joyful experience, one that brings happiness not only to those we serve, but also to ourselves. It is a reminder that even small acts of kindness can make a big difference in someone’s life.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta once said: *“Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love”* Servant leadership is, therefore, a joyful experience of serving humanity and caring for our common home with compassion and communion. It is a vivid expression of God’s love for humanity.



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