
Marist leadership: awareness and self-awareness

“For those of us who exercise leadership in ministry, our primary responsibility is to work within the reality in which it is framed”.

(Marist Voices, cap.6 - Br. Ken McDonald)

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I am responsible for leading the animation and government of the Marist works in my country. Our mission includes a university, ten schools, a retreat house and a house of welcome. All diverse and different realities which, since 1909, we have been educating and evangelizing in the Marist way.

What is conscience or awareness?

Awareness is a quality of the servant leader that creates a framework for all the other components. Awareness allows for a better knowledge of reality than that provided by simple perception. Greenleaf (1988) points out that “when one is aware, one is more alert than usual, there is more intense contact with the immediate situation, and one produces intuitive inspirations when necessary” (p. 21). Thus, **awareness, self-awareness or consciousness is the quality by which the Marist servant and prophetic leader is permanently attentive to self, others, reality and God.**

This attentiveness implies an openness of the senses, as well as an openness of mind and heart to be able to assimilate the reality we grasp. The importance of this quality is that it is the trigger for action. Awareness produces knowledge that “shakes and awakens”, generates change, wealth and transformation in stewardship. For this reason, I would like to share three ideas:

The Marist leader knows the people with whom he or she shares life and mission. When one becomes “aware of others”, one favors the establishment of bonds of fraternity and effective collaboration, as well as harmonious working relationships.

In 2017, as director of Champagnat School in Lima, we began a process of generating new leadership and structures with the board of directors. With an external advisory team, actions were implemented to consolidate collaborative work, **based on the awareness of the people** at different levels. The leaders had requested spaces to “get to know each other better”. Thus, workshops were held, and the common denominator in the evaluations was “having discovered unknown facets of people with whom we share a lot of time in the mission”. This led to new dynamics in communication, coordination and decision-making.

People’s awareness, as in this case, **is important** because it allows us to control or eliminate prejudices in different work contexts. It allows us to detect barriers we put up in the face of personal differences and helps us to better understand the complexity of our own relationships.

Knowing the people with whom we share life and mission, knowing their circumstances, is a fundamental Marist trait. If not, **let us remember that this was one of the reasons Father Champagnat moved to live with the brothers at La Valla.**

The Marist leader promotes conscious and self-aware leadership.

A leader has the responsibility to form and accompany leadership, especially when a service is sectoral, provincial, regional or Institute-wide. In this case, accompaniment and leadership formation should help all leaders **to be attentive to themselves, to others, to reality and to God.** We will have leaders who are not only more objective, but also creative and flexible to change, capable of stepping out of their comfort zones into which time occasionally seduces us.

In Peru, we have a plan for accompanying stewardship leadership, which aims to contribute to their personal and professional development. This plan includes, in some cases, a personal-





ized coaching process. Based on the individual accompaniment that each caregiver has with the Mission Delegate, personal coaching sessions are proposed with a professional who accompanies the caregiver. The topics of accompaniment arise from the dialogue between the Delegate and the caregiver. They are not necessarily areas for improvement; rather, most of the time, they are qualities to be enhanced. This experience allows the caregiver to develop his self-awareness with an external view that allows a more objective vision of himself, his view of the world and his mission.

This strategy provides everyone, especially the Mission Delegate, with the tools to be attentive to local diversity and what is needed to invigorate and govern the sectoral works while maintaining the essential commonality and respecting the richness of diversity.

Without God-consciousness, there is no Marist servant and prophetic leadership. The Marist leader understands and develops his mission as a vocational response to God. In that sense, **the exercise of the presence of God**, as Father Champagnat called it, is fundamental to the role of Marist leadership. We are called to be aware of God's action and presence in each of us, in others and in the world, and of his calls; living an apostolic and Marian spirituality makes us truly Marist.

In the office of animation and sectorial government in Peru, we feel that we share the purpose of forming good Christians and virtuous citizens. This challenges us to grow, above all, **as good Christians**. To this end, we have a weekly space for "prayer and catechesis" for all the people in the office. In this space, we aim to lay the foundations for a personal encounter with God, namely, that each employee has the opportunity to experience this awareness of God. These sessions are complemented by other spaces for interiority and prayer.



To summarize, every Marist leader must exercise awareness, conscience and self-awareness, as well as favoring it in the people he or she accompanies and in new leaders. To this end, it is vital to bear in mind the following points:

- In our works, resources (people, time, money) must be invested in awareness-raising actions and strategies.
- Actions to accompany and train leaders must have personalized spaces that allow for bold and creative awareness-raising.
- The change, transformation, and sustainability of the Marist mission in the world requires leaders to have this global awareness that moves them towards the future.
- All co-workers are called by God to live a Marist spirituality that permeates our performance and relationships.

May our Good Mother motivate and bless us as prophets, with the qualities described by Nahum Ward-Lev, quoted by McDonald (2022):

- Let us allow ourselves to be encountered by God and feel the world as our mission center.
- Let us have the courage to identify their demands, their needs and their expectations; and
- Let us develop collaborative and creative responses to build an alternative future full of hope.



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