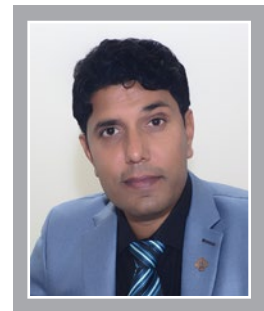

Prophetic and Servant Leadership in Marist Educational Context

“Leaders who use coercion are interested in their own goals and seldom are interested in the wants and needs of followers”

(Marist Voices cap, 7 – Br. Vincent de Paul Kouassi)

Br. Farancis Rahmat

Educator, School Principal, Asia Marist Mission Commission
Province of South Asia, Pakistan



Serving as a leader in Sargodha Catholic High School (SCHS) for boys in Pakistan for the last three years. From the administrative point of view, the Marist mission in Pakistan falls under the jurisdiction of the South Asian Marist Province.

In the context of educational leadership, the role of leaders, especially in education, is central to the development and prosperity of schools and wider society. However, the modern-day paradox is that, despite the abundance of instant information, complex technologies, evidence-informed practices and a wide range of leadership theories, the world seems to be more turbulent, chaotic, unpredictable and fragmented (Branson, 2009, p.157). Correspondingly, education at large is extremely influenced by constantly changing circumstances at local and international levels (Fullan, 2016, p. 4). Clay (2010), rightly asserts that effective and ethical leadership that can potentially fulfil a shared vision, serve others and invest in their interests is a desperate need of our time (p. 3). This element of service with a prophetic vision for a better future for children and the parents' community is the key to the contemporary required leadership in the Marist educational institutions in Pakistan and elsewhere.

Servant Leadership

Although the philosophical foundation of servant and prophetic leadership existed thousands of years ago yet the concept of servant leadership in its evolved sense was introduced by Greenleaf (1970). In the present-day challenging world, servant leadership is a promising leadership style (Aboramadan et al., 2022, p. 124) because, in all kinds of private organizations, it performs above

the conventions (Clay, 2010, p. 7). Clay (2010) continues to define it as a unique style of leadership ideology which flows against the grain of self-interest ingrained in human behaviour (p. 2). Similarly, Aboramadan et al., (2022) assert that servant leadership is based on the foundation of not to direct but to serve (p. 110).

The concept of service in relation to leader-follower interaction in educational institutions is wide-ranging and complex (Duren, 2017, p. 235) and limiting it to just the daily acts of service can be fatal. Empirical research reveals that servant leaders commit themselves to remain value-driven (Crowther, 2018, p.26), to provide opportunities for the followers to deepen their knowledge and build new skills besides assisting them to accomplish their personal and professional goals through their intellectual capacities and talents (Zhou et al., 2022, p. 2). Hence, by providing opportunities for teachers to attend training workshops on creative and innovative teaching and learning, as well as on work-related behaviours, a servant and prophetic leader not only can have a positive impact on followers and bring the best out of them but also can positively contribute to the growth of the organisation (Aboramadan, 2022; Brutus & Vanhove, 2017).

Servant and Prophetic Marist Leadership

Awareness of self (Spears, 2010, p. 27) and awareness of the organisational sacred history, dynamics and challenges, of current realities and vision for the future, and more importantly, awareness of respect for the human resources is what underpins-servant and prophetic leadership in a Marist institution. According to Ingram (2016), servant leadership identifies awareness as a core mechanism for leading others (p. 24). Furthermore, a better understanding of servant leadership and a deeper knowledge of the people one is called to lead can serve as the first step towards an authentic practice of servant leadership (Ingram, 2016, p. 25). In the context of the Marist





aspect of servant and prophetic leadership, winning followers' hearts is a prerequisite to gaining their genuine support (Clay, 2010, p. 3), trust and respect. Marist servant leaders, Kouassi (2022) believes, need to be gentle persuaders among the followers just like Christ, remaining gentle and selfless in persuading no matter how strong might be the resistance (p.127). Awareness, understanding and respect for human dignity coupled with constant but gentle persuasion make a Marist educational leader both a servant and prophet.

Genuine humility is another aspect of Marist servant and prophetic leadership in the educational sector. According to Blanchard (2007), servant leaders are "humble people who don't think less of themselves, they just think about themselves less" (p. 263). In other words, they are people-centred and not self-centred. This entails servant and prophetic leadership in a school system, as a people-centred approach, enhances personal resources, job opportunities and work engagement of the entire staff (Aboramadan, 2022, p. 122). By providing a favourable environment for the staff and students to do their best, a genuinely humble school leader develops mutual trust and significantly improves work engagement (Zhou et al., 2022, p. 5), academic results, financial conditions and whole-school accountability. Furthermore, a humble servant school leader joyfully celebrates the achievements of colleagues, naturally empathises amidst griefs, patiently waits for academic and professional growth and always remains a keen learner, just as Jesus continued to grow, strengthened and filled with wisdom (Lk 2:40).

Based on the Gospel, on Marist and the school's core values, a vision for a better future for the children and the school distinguishes a Marist servant leader from other educational leaders. This involves a leader's ability to foresee the challenges (Greenleaf, 2008; Spears, 2010) and enables him/her to provide a timely, effective and forward-thinking response that is owned by all the stakeholders. However, servant and prophetic school leadership require one to remain focused on the future vision on the one hand and, on the other hand, to gain knowledge through listening (Clay, 2010, p. 4): true listening builds strength (Greenleaf, 2008, p. 8) in teachers and students to

assist them to respond automatically to emerging problems. Thus, a servant leader, by consistently and explicitly articulating vision and goals (Duren, 2017, p. 250), as well as by active listening, not only provides purpose and certainty (Greenleaf, 2008, p. 7) but also keeps followers highly focused on quality performance and organisational development.

Key Aspects of living servant leadership in Marist Context

Leading a Catholic high school for boys in a predominantly Muslim and male society has been a challenging yet enriching experience for one personally and professionally. However, through awareness, focusing on vision and a genuine sense of humility, one could successfully steer the school through a critical period of pandemic and associated financial crises. Similarly, with much-needed trust, support and collaboration from staff and parents, financial accountability has been maintained despite having no functioning bank accounts.

According to Duren (2017), servant leadership as a new paradigm can potentially impact organisation positively (p. 226). Awareness of current realities and challenges as well as focusing on the future has enabled one to lead the process of shifting SCHS, traditionally a boys' school, to co-education in order to provide learning opportunities for less advantaged Muslim and Christian girls. This entails a keen understanding of local realities and human character (Clay, 2010, p. 4) and a humble approach of leadership to dialogue with all the stakeholders – diocesan and government authorities, school leadership teams and teachers, student and parent communities, and other schools.

All Marist educational leaders are called to develop awareness and trust, remain humble and focused on organisational vision just as Jesus was always focused on spreading the Good News of God's kingdom on earth (Crowther, 2018, p.165) and Champagnat focussed on making Jesus and Mary known and loved through quality education.



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