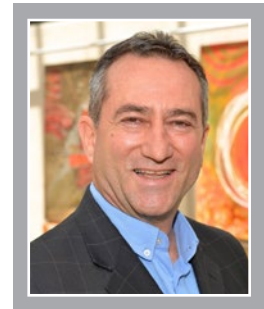

Reflections of a lay marist in South Africa about servant leadership

“Serving people means growing their capacity
and implies that everyone can contribute.”

(Juana Bordas)

Dr. Mark Bussin
Marist Schools Council Director
Province of Southern Africa, South Africa



Br. John Bwanali is the Provincial Councilor for South Africa and Br Emmanuel Mwanalirenji is the Provincial of Southern Africa which includes Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Angola, Mozambique, and South Africa. I am a Lay Marist, I co-ordinate the 6 Marist Schools in South Africa. My main focus is the sustainability of our schools, finance, marketing, Marist ethos and providing advice and support to our 6 Board of Governors, Heads of School / Principals and Bursars / Business Managers. I report into Br John, Provincial Councilor.

Br. John and all the brothers in Southern Africa provide both prophetic and servant leadership to the Lay Marists who run their schools for them. We work very well together and learn from each other. I am from a business background which is sometimes very harsh, and I have learnt so much from the Brothers. I have learnt patience and learnt to reflect on complex issues rather than diving straight in like a business problem needs to be resolved.

When we have complex and emotional school issues to deal with and we need input and advice from the Brothers, they are always calm and reassuring. I leave meetings feeling calm and in control of the situation – we have much to learn from this approach. It builds confidence and one feels supported.

We have a mutual respect – Brothers and Lay Marists. This means that we can “hear” each other’s point of view. We never compete with each other and as a Lay Marist, I know where the boundary is. The Marist Institute and Brothers own everything. I serve at the behest and request of the Brothers. The vision is a very compelling one and easy to buy into. That is why I think we have so many Lay Marists wanting to get involved and help. Mostly for free! No compensation.



The vision is to provide education to the marginalized and to love them all equally. My personal vision is to prepare our children for any future.

I feel very supported by the Brothers. This gives me the energy to support the school Board of Governors, Principals and Bursars of all our schools. I practice servant leadership every day and they all know that I am there to support them doing their work. I provide a psychologically safe place for them to ask questions and be vulnerable. Not everyone understands what servant leadership is. Of course, one can look it up on the internet, but living it is different. I learnt it by being a Karate Instructor (Sensei) for over 20 years. You teach a white belt all the way to black belt and when they do their final black belt grading, the Sensei is not on center stage, but the student. The Sensei is behind the curtains, and the audience often does not even get to see the Sensei. The servant leader puts others on stage and does not gloat in glory but is happy for others. It is the ability to put a 2-dollar coin in a parking meter of a stranger's car and not leave a note. It is unconditional.

My invitation and challenge to all Maristas is this – can you reflect on your week and say in a sentence or two how you supported others to become their best, without asking for praise. Are you able to assist others who may have made some mistakes, without saying – “I told you so”. Are you able to recite an example of where you have seen a brother and a Lay Marist work side by side seamlessly? If so, then we are all on the same page and path of prophetic and servant leadership which in my view is the most powerful form of leadership that will take us to great heights.



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