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## Servant Leadership in Marist Higher Education

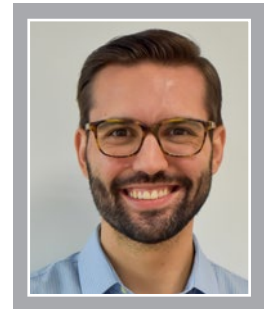
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“Through service and creative work, we must provide our students, as well as the entire academic community, examples of hope, solidarity, responsibility, freedom, justice, critical awareness, interiority conscience, reconciliation and peace, which contribute to the search for the meaning of life.”

(Marist Voices, chap.22 – Br. Evilázio Teixeira and Br. Manuir Mentges)

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I am the executive secretary of the Marist International Network of Higher Education and provincial coordinator of the University Volunteers. I experience the important exercise of servant leadership daily in these roles.

When I was an undergraduate student, I became familiar with the Marist charism precisely at the university where I work today. I remember the curiosity aroused by the pictures of Saint Marcellin Champagnat in the classrooms, by the presence of the Marist Brothers who ran the university, and by the mosaic of Christ the Master in the beautiful University Church, which, in addition to Champagnat and the Good Mother, had encrusted the motto “Ad Jesum per Mariam”.

Little by little, the bonds were strengthened, and at the end of the significant year of the Marist Institute’s bicentenary (2017), I was invited to join the university’s pastoral team. It was a profound mission: to promote evangelization through reflection, living the faith and a culture of solidarity, and collaborating with the integral formation of the university community.

The challenge is institutionally demanding, as I have written on another occasion: to be substantively a university, and to be identifiably Marist – (fett, 2023). The context is not at all simple either, as Pope Francis pointed out in 2019: “[The] strong pressure felt in the various spheres of socio-economic, political and cultural life challenges the very vocation of the university, in particular the task of professors to teach and do research and to prepare the new generations to become not only qualified professionals in the various disciplines, but also protagonists of the common good, creative and responsible leaders of social and civil life, with a correct vision of man and the world.”

In leading the university's Pastoral and Solidarity Center, I endeavor to put into practice the following guideline: "Connect first with where people are, before taking them where you want them to go."

I tend to think of my leadership as following the methodology of Jesus Christ on the Road to Emmaus: getting close, listening, understanding, sharing, and bearing witness. When I meet students on campus, when I connect with them via social media, and when I hear them tell me how happy they are to have met Pastoral, how important it has been in their journeys during their years of study, how they have come away changed, I see that the methodology has worked. The roots of the term 'pastoral' refer precisely to the verbs care, heal and lead. These are the pillars of the servant leadership that I try to live.

The Marist Institute is, in fact, a global charismatic family. I can say that I experience this first-hand in the Marist International Network for Higher Education and in the Network of Provincial Volunteer Coordinators. In both structures, I share my mission with brothers, laymen and laywomen from all over the world, united by Champagnat's dream and the educational tradition he launched.

The Marist International Network for Higher Education, which brings together more than 20 institutions, entails an understanding of the "Marist Mission in Higher Education" (2010), the apostolate that we exercise at the head of universities, with teaching, research, extension and innovation, striving for excellence in all our activities. As Brothers Evilázio Teixeira and Manuir Mentges (2022) point out in chapter 22 of the book *MaristVoices* (Marist higher education from the perspective of service): "The Catholic university knows what its mission is. It has clear ideals, expressed in its documents. It is a service to humanity and to the Church in the cause of truth."

As Provincial Volunteer Coordinator, my servant leadership aims to carry out the great com-





mitment of living interculturality and global availability. I share the mission of providing meaningful experiences of interprovincial volunteering.

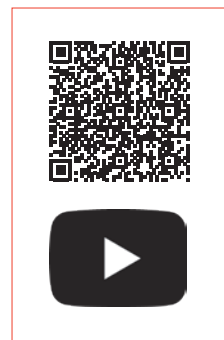
My challenge is to bring this proposal to the students and collaborators of our university, and to collaborate so that other Marist universities also commit themselves to achieving this goal. Commitment to this reality constitutes our institution: “In view of

our human condition, where can we speak of social responsibility in the university? Empathy for others, for their problems, their pain, their vulnerabilities.” (teixeira & mentges, 2022)

How can we live servant leadership within the university? One way to do this is through research, namely, a study that examines a phenomenon or challenges to understand it and thus contributes to intellectual and social progress. A Marist university conducts scientific research with excellence and, equally, with ethics and social responsibility.

Another way of living servant leadership at the university is to help ensure that its structures serve the other collaborators of the Marist mission and its areas of activity, whether in the formation of teachers and leaders for our schools, or in the training of brothers and laypeople in the exercise of leadership. In this sense, the following appeal is clear: “It is up to each one of us and to the university, as an institution of Higher Education, to create and strengthen communities, forming people who are committed to building an ever more effective society through respect for life and all that is human. (teixeira & mentges, 2022)”

I very much hope that our attitudes of servant leadership will be as strong and fruitful as those of Saint Marcellin Champagnat when he began his mission. Whether in a humble school in the small village of La Valla or in a large university, may we serve and lead in Mary’s way!



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

