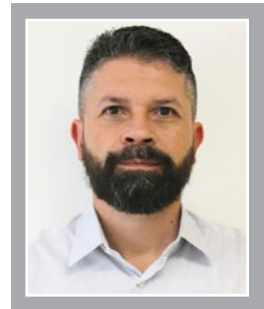

Prophetic and servant leadership A call to marist life

“I tell the story, instead, to illustrate three characteristics that I believe must be present in genuine leaders: confidence; care and compassion; a spirit of service.”

(Marist Voices, chap.3 - Br. Seán Sammon)

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On 17 March 2014, I began my journey in Marist life. At that time, I was working as a graduate teacher in Higher Education in an Institution located in Brasília (Brazil) and I knew little about the Marist reality in my country. Focused on my academic life, I was immersed in my doctoral studies, when I made contact with some Marist Brothers who were also pursuing their degree. In sharing some areas of interest and experiences with the brothers, I ended up being introduced and becoming acquainted with the Marist charism in a very simple and fraternal way.

At the end of a semester of studies, I was invited to participate in a selection process for an executive position in an association that represented Marist interests in Brazil, called UMBRASIL (Marist Union of Brazil). From that moment on, my own conception of life and leadership was transformed over time, and I was fortunate to live with brothers and lay people who inspired me deeply.

Working in UMBRASIL provided me a great learning opportunity: to act in interprovincial projects that allowed the three great Provinces of Brazil (the Marist Provinces of Centro-Norte, Centro-Sul and Sul-Amazônia) to work together. When I was asked which Province I was from, I always answered with immense joy: “I am from the three Provinces of Brazil”. This experience bore fruit and today I am Executive Secretary of UMBRASIL and Executive Secretary of the Marist Region of South America.

Today, I can say with immense pleasure that I am also from the Province of Cruz del Sur and the Province of Santa María de Los Andes. And from this vantage point surfaces my introduction to leadership: we must feel that we belong to the reality in which we are acting. How can we be prophetic leaders and servants if we do not recognize ourselves as part of this family? Care comes from love, and love comes from belonging.

Working on interprovincial projects has also taught me powerful lessons. Although Provinces have the same spirit and charism as St. Marcellin, and although they are guided and inspired by the Institute, they have different cultures, times, and intensities. The passion for mission and service will always be the same, but the journey of experiencing that passion can have significant differences and peculiar characteristics. And it is with these peculiar characteristics that I have learned that sensitive listening is essential to becoming prophetic leaders and servants. The desire to listen without judging or evaluating, the search for understanding of the other, and the acceptance of their pains and successes in search of consensus is part of a leadership that cares for and promotes life. Whoever loves also listens, and whoever listens will always have more tools to deal with life's problems.

And in that day-to-day life, where we face the most diverse challenges and where we live with brothers and lay people from different backgrounds, different cultures and different spheres of action, the coherence between the leader's discourse and practice is consolidated as a kind of fabric that generates harmony and connection in their spheres of influence. In complex and sensitive environments, as Brother Seán (2022, p.59) has already mentioned, the only real authority that exists is moral authority.

Amid so many technically and academically competent people in our institutions, prophetic and servant leadership is consolidated by a daily witness of moral values and principles. Leading by example has a strong moral appeal and engenders respect and confidence in the leadership at the helm. And that is an important concept: being at the forefront. Ricardo Mariz, in one of the videos that have already been published, commented that Pope Francis understood the leader as the one who "takes the lead", the one who takes the first step.

Taking the first step, "committing oneself", as Pope Francis proposes, is no easy task. A great deal of trust, care, compassion, and a spirit of service need to be brought together in this process. As Br.





Seán (2022, p. 57) affirms. If I may add a simple addition to these characteristics, I have learned that the awakening of detachment also strengthens the heart of the prophetic leader and servant in this action of “engaging”.

As I have heard several times from my director-general, Brother José Augusto Júnior - “the creature cannot be greater than the creator” - i.e., the individual space, the sector or the project cannot be greater than the mission. To let go is also to be open to change, to the new, to the unfamiliar, even if you must leave your “comfort zone”, your safe space. To go forward is also an act of courage. Those who love also have courage.

Finally, it is interesting to think about how we build ourselves as people, fathers, mothers, religious, citizens and leaders in our life journey. In the case of leadership, there are various books, plays, courses and training that can show us ways to build it. However, just as loving mothers and fathers only become loving by experiencing that love in their daily lives, good leaders only become good leaders by seeking to experience the practice of prophecy and service in every small action they take. It is not enough to be a cognitively understandable idea or concept. It must be a stance, a quest, an intrinsic part of their constitution, an action that is part of their sense of life. Engagement is also an act of love.

And when failure comes, we learn from it! As Br. Seán (2022, p. 66) reminds us: “Don’t let failure discourage you”. Take heart, for prophetic leaders and servants never forget that their role is to keep alive the vision that guides the group.



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

