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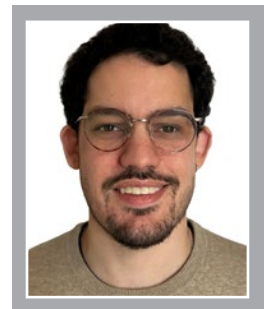
## Dialogues in motion: Meaningful listening on the path to servant leadership

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“ Communicating means sharing and sharing  
demands listening and acceptance.”

(Marist Voices, chap.8 – Br. Norbert Mwila)

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**T**he CIAO Centre (Intercultural Centre for Help and Orientation) and the “Alloggi per l’Autonomia” emancipation home project are the two organizations that aid migrants arriving in this Italian city.

I coordinate the administrative-legal assistance offered by the center. I acquaint them with public services and the residential project for young adults. Along with the members of my community, we make ourselves available to the people who knock at our door.

I would like to share a reflection with you on leadership that listens. My time in the MYM of the province has allowed me to deepen, since I was a teenager, the significance of listening. Listening to what one is experiencing, listening to what is happening around one and listening to what God is revealing to us. This has allowed me to get to know myself more and more, so fundamental to a life of service to others.

Soon after, when I became a catechist, a volunteer, and a companion, I discovered how important it is to cultivate listening to appreciate the dignity and value of the person I meet. It is also a great help in letting go of prejudices and other types of unhealthy lifestyle behaviors.

Sometimes it is difficult to listen because the finite moment asks you to respond without hesitation. This is where I find the importance of listening “with” others.

I experienced this when I arrived in Siracusa when I started to get closer to the lives of those around me. At first, I wanted to respond to as many situations as possible and provide quick



solutions. Little by little. I have learned that it is not so much a question of doing, but of being available in a fraternal presence.

I experienced this change when children arrived with difficult situations (legal, documents, family, work, health...). Sometimes, in these moments, I have been left with no answers to offer—I learned to simply be present in the moment. I highlight here accompaniment which, in these situations, helped to remove barriers and provided me the opportunity to listen to them. This is a personal disposition of restlessness—a desire to walk alongside someone else.

When I think of these special moments, the Emmaus story comes to mind, which allows me to recognize the presence of Jesus, who reminds me that I must decrease, and He must increase in accompaniment.

In this same sense, I always try to approach in a warm manner the people who knock at our door—greet them in a caring way and with eagerness to help: Listening allows me to recognize the dignity of the person I meet—when listening is meaningful, seeking to understand the feelings and needs of others through empathy, it makes me feel like a true brother. I try to ensure that the service I offer does not make the other person feel indebted or inferior, but instead see that I am someone like them, who wants to listen to them, to accompany them, who sees them as someone important.

Thanks to this way of looking at this cornerstone of life, I have been able to experience moments that could be unpleasant for the other person (such as recalling or reliving one's own migration history), can become a moment in which the person feels comfortable and respected.



I remember one of the young people I accompanied telling me, “This is the first time that I haven’t felt like I was in an interrogation room”, and I continued with “I feel at home at the CIAO”.

This is a pleasant memory in which one feels comforted by the mission one is carrying out. But undoubtedly, this is not always the case--there are times when the truth hurts. Conversations with the young people who were housed in our project come to mind where I had to be clear, to look beyond the possible reaction of the other person, and to think of what was at stake. I have noticed in their reactions, in their expressions or in how that relationship has evolved, that what I have said has not gone down well. But I firmly believe that these moments are necessary, and that I had to put the good of the other person and his personal growth before comfort or conflict avoidance.

This is important not only with the persons we deal with, but also with my colleagues, the community-at-large and family life. Sometimes it is even more difficult in these contexts, but much more necessary, especially when the mission I live out is shared with the whole community.

The balance between truth-dealing and fraternal correction, difficult as it may be, can overlook some issues, so that the other does not feel slighted.

Amid difficult situations, one must allow oneself to feel confused. Recognizing oneself as vulnerable is a fundamental part of exercising this leadership. You may need to make some course corrections enlightened by those who look up to you and accompany you.

The point of reference and anchor is prayer, both personal and communal. To exercise leadership as a listener, it is important to have the listening channel to the God the Father open. When discouragement comes, prayer has helped me to remain focused and find reasons at the end of the day to thank God.





Being connected to prayer helps me to remember that the mission, with its successes and failures, is not mine or of the community, but God's calling. My contribution, however small, will be to the mission. That is why I find it essential that this format of leadership carries with it an attitude of affirmation, trust, and empowerment. This format has been a blessing and something I intend to build on.

When I arrived in Syracuse, I relied on the work of others, and it is nice to see how I can be a support and reference for the new members who come to the community while at the same time, encouraging them to gain autonomy as well.

Through these experiences, I have recognized the significance of listening as servant leadership.

I invite you to go deeper into your life, asking how you live out your life as a listener, especially with the people in your care. And I leave you with one last thought: in the book *Marist*

Voices we are told of Mary's receptivity to what is new. Her receptivity and availability are the clarion call to a Marist experience.

Let us remain attentive, open-hearted, and available to what the Lord is asking of us through the people we have at our side.



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)