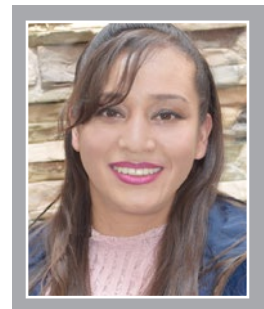

Transformational leadership serving the community

“Unity in diversity does not blur the differences
but harmonizes them when based on a shared project”

(Marist Voices, chap.11 – Br. Gabriel Villa-Real and Br. Pere Ferré)

María Thelma Motolinia Ontiveros
Miravalles Educational Project Coordinator
Province of Mexico Central



I would like to begin with a reflection that came to my mind a few days ago, as I know that it is a transversal axis of community work in Miravalles and that we cannot fail to point out: we are faced with a reality where personal interests generate inequality and oppression for the most disadvantaged. Service and collaborative work are the alternative for the collective construction of a society that will promote the common good.

In the following, I would like to develop this concept based on my journey as a Marist in Miravalles.

A few days ago, some young people came up to me and asked me: what does it mean to me to be a Marist? I thought I could list qualities that a member of a Marist work should show, but I decided instead to share my experience. I feel that the essential quality can be summed up in one simple word: service. For me, service means making available the gifts that God has given me so that, in collaboration with the team and its values, I can announce the Good News to all the students and families who are part of this project. It is to be able to serve as a conduit to give them a liberating message in which we can build a better world for all.

At Miravalles, those of us who make up the educational community play different roles. Each of them is equally important in fulfilling our mission project. They all represent the possibility of service. From our organizational scheme, each member adds his or her experience to serve the children and young people most in need, conscious that we are all agents of transformation and, therefore, we all learn together.

We recognized that the role of coordinator in Miravalles is put into effect by five primary functions to fully accomplish our mission:

- **To coordinate** is to intentionally favor personal and group processes to generate collective constructions that allow us to fulfil our mission.
- **To ensure the spirit of the project** is to care for each of the members of the educational community, considering that the students and parents belong to everyone; that we teachers are people with needs, which must be always considered, and that together we are one big family.
- **To convene** is to bring together or assemble colleagues in the various assemblies to dialogue for the purpose of decision-making.
- **To encourage** is to give life. To motivate in a spirit of maintaining hope in a complex and contradictory situation called reality. In other words, it means “to inspire in order to transform”.
- **To accompany** is to intentionally follow the personal and group processes of the praxis of each member of the educational community. I believe that the most efficient way to accompany our beneficiaries is by example.

As coordinator, I am the first to serve as witness to the values promoted by the project.¹

Having been with the Miravalles project for almost 22 years, where I have worked as Coordinator of the K'intum Secondary and Special Education Section, I have come to realize that I have been able to carry out these functions with greater insight.

They represent a great challenge for me, as a person, because they make me question whether the task I have undertaken has really been mine or the fruit of a group of people who have always supported me and have made me who I am today.



This is where my reflection leads me to a sense of community. In it, not only do I recognize all the people who collaborate to make this undertaking happen, but I begin to see the unique qualities in each one. Thanks to them, the work has been greatly enriched. This is how I see the importance of all of us relating to each other in a fraternal way. I understand, and I would like to bring this understanding to my teammates, that through this brotherhood, which reveals the mystery of each one of us, we can achieve the potential of fundamental values and the lived-out mission of our project.

Moreover, in this fraternal way, I think it is very important to generate a sense of belonging. I recognize that we are all valuable people in the process of becoming. I seek to generate connections with colleagues and to make them feel comfortable to come to me and support them in their work or personal issues. Similarly, this is the pattern with which I would like my colleagues to support both parents and learners. It creates networks of fraternal support. Of course, if at some point it is necessary to make an assessment, it will be done with prudence and objectivity to help develop areas of opportunity. It is about developing together the best version of each other. I firmly believe that this sense of belonging is the result of the interaction that I create with those who make up the educational community.

Finally, I was elected to my current role by the educational community. Therefore, my purpose is to serve the community that entrusted me with this role. Otherwise, it would be unbecoming of me to exercise autocratic or egocentric leadership. I have always understood that if there is something that needs to be done, I must be at the forefront. As a popular saying goes: “Model the behavior you want to see in others”.

The role of coordinator has not always been easy. At times, difficult decisions must be made, always with the common good in mind, with an objective view and a conscious dialogue. I recognize that it is very easy to lose ourselves in the illusion of power or emotions generated by the situations that occur in carrying out the project. For this reason, it is necessary to count on the support of the members of the *Coordination Commission* and/or colleagues who enlighten us by listening to us. I cannot deny that I have frequently also needed to be listened to, to be accompanied and, at times, to be affirmed.





Finally, I can share that, as a former student, I have experienced firsthand this zeal for service. At the time, Toño Chávez, Brother Tito and Brother Chuche were great exemplars for me. In them, I recognized the dedication, vocation and love with which they accompanied the children and young people of Miravalles during classes, breaks and, on occasions, outside school hours. Later, in my adult life, I met Brother Jorge Carbajal, Sister Chabelita and Sister María Luisa. These people have always been ready to listen attentively and aided me in my growth process. Each one of them touched my life so deeply that today they are the ones who inspired my journey in the Miravalles project. Like them, I hope one day to be the one who touches someone's life so that together we can build a better world for all.



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