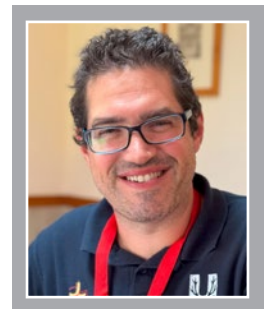

Prophetic and Servant Leadership in Unusual Conditions

“In everyday life, we tend to act by integrating different perspectives with greater emphasis on one of them. Dilemmas will always lead us to have to prioritize between possible creative solutions. It’s about choosing well, combining moral intelligence with the necessary perspicacity.”

(Marist Voices, chap. 20 - Br Luis Carlos Gutiérrez)

Diogo Luiz Santana Galline
Provincial Vocational Animation Team Coordinator
Province of Brasil Centro-Sul



I was born in 1984 and since 1991 I have been a Champagnat Marist. That year, I began my studies at the Marist College in Maringá, a city in the state of Paraná. As a student, I was actively involved in youth ministry. During university studies, I continued to volunteer in youth groups. It was so fulfilling that, in 2006, I became a Marist collaborator in pastoral work at the same school where I had the joy of studying.

Eighteen years later, I am still working at Marist. However, life has led me down other paths and I am now part of the Identity, Mission and Vocation.

Shortly before that, however, I took part in a very significant experience: Marist international volunteering, through the La Valla 200> Project. For two years (2019–2020), my wife, who is also a Marist collaborator, and I co-opted with a mixed community, working in the township of Atlantis, South Africa.

We shared life and mission with three brothers and a Marist volunteer. We were from five countries, belonging to four continents, so different in their cultures, but all united by the same sentiment: to be a Marist presence among people suffering in an area of social vulnerability.

And what vulnerability! Although it was officially closed at the beginning of the 1990s, the consequences of the Apartheid political system were still present in the South Africa fabric of life more than thirty years later. Our apostolate comprised children and teenagers. Our apostolate took place after-school hours at different schools, with women at risk, and with the local parish in its various initiatives.

The challenge was great. We felt like a small drop in a vast ocean, as Mother Teresa of Calcutta reflected. However, we did not lack examples of prophetic and servant leadership to inspire us

to keep going. In fact, these two adjectives, prophetic and servant, are totally in keeping with the local territory. No wonder South Africa has four Nobel Peace Prize winners!

I would like to highlight one of them: Nelson Mandela. One of his most famous phrases could be pinned to the chest of every Marist as a driving force--"courage is not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The courageous person is not the one who does not feel fear, but the one who conquers that fear".

In the recent publication *MaristVoices*, in chapter 20, Brother Luis Carlos Gutiérrez brilliantly presents some of the characteristics of an authentic Marist leader: ethical and spiritual wisdom, greatness of mind, noble sentiments, a sensitive heart, a sense of teamwork, a practical and critical sense, among others.

To illustrate this, he presents Nelson Mandela himself as one of the examples to be followed. The account he transcribes from an interview with Brother Joe Walton (*Marist Voices*, p. 381) about Mandela's human behavior is very moving. I also came across this version when my wife and I were visiting Sacred Heart College in Johannesburg. At the time, we heard from Brother Mario Colucci (in memoriam) about this great leader and his simple, fraternal presence among the people.

Before highlighting some of Mandela's virtues that connect with a prophetic and servant mode of living, I would like to use a term from physical chemistry to facilitate understanding. In my old days as a university pharmacy student, it was common to carry out scientific calculations under the premise of 'Normal Conditions of Temperature and Pressure' (CNTP). By this, we knew that the thermal (0°C) and baric (1 atm) variables were stable to such an extent that chemical reactions did not suffer any kind of external interference. In a quick transposition: the conditions are so controlled that what is calculated in theory happens 100 per cent in practice.

Life is dynamic, unstable and fluid. If we dare to change Zygmunt Bauman's famous expression, we could say that modernity is no longer liquid, but gas, because of the constant novelties.





This means that we are a long way from controlled variables, in other words, from being in normal conditions of temperature and pressure.

It was in a challenging and adverse scenario that Nelson Mandela's leadership took place. He did not wait for stability to put his learning into practice but assumed the necessary leadership amid chaos and with much work to be done. His was the courage of a leader.

Faced with countless variables, he made the audacious move of meeting the other, being-with-the-other, an arduous task of dialogue and collaboration. As a result, people were mobilized to confront and overcome the status quo of injustice that prevailed at the time.

The way he led the country to peace despite spending almost 30 years in prison is an example of greatness for all generations, an action that time will never be able to erase. Mandela realized that the greatest service he could offer his nation was reconciliation, the healing of a divided nation. When his comrades might, consciously or unconsciously, have hoped for revenge, he knew how to turn the other cheek. His weapon was dialogue. He managed to surprise and use his wit to lower barriers and bring people together. Even Rugby, a traditionally elite sport, became an opportunity for integration (which led, incidentally, to the Springboks' first world title). Instead of the oppressed becoming the oppressor, Mandela chose to lead the unification of the country through peace and reconciliation. He passed away in 2013, but the fruits of his legacy are still being experienced today. And they serve as an inspiration for Marist leadership.

I believe that the service and prophetic aspect of Marist leadership are born and developed through courageous attitudes amid a turbulent world, according to one of the calls of the XXII General Chapter. In theory, it seems to me that we already know what needs to be done. We have great documents, all with excellent fundamental truths that address the Marist way of being and acting. However, the dynamism of life constantly puts our concepts to the test.

We know that the hustle and bustle of everyday life is not always favorable for prophetic action or service on behalf of the community. Quality time is scarce, everything is urgent, there are many external pressures, and there can be countless justifications for putting aside the courage to act prophetically and in favor of the common good. Under these conditions, which are complete-

ly unfavorable and far from any possibility of CNTP, truly prophetic and servant leadership still bears fruit.

A few years ago, we went through a turbulent and challenging period: the coronavirus pandemic. These were times when leaders emerged in the Institute amid adversity. I remember two situations in which the Marist way of leadership was put to the test, both in the same predicament. In one area, the leadership of reference made the choice to maintain its entire workforce, even though the pandemic situation required sudden budget cuts. The decision was made to temporarily reduce the salaries of senior managers rather than lay off part of the team. It was an act of courage, given the economic and canonical pressures the leadership was under.

On the other hand, in another area, a leader took advantage of the global crisis to carry out unpopular measures – which had probably been in his heart since before – of personal reduction and structural change. In an analogy to the parable of the Sower, Jesus might have asked: “Which of these acted as a prophetic leader and servant to his neighbor?”

The Marist Institute itself, during the Apartheid period, had a prophetic and servant attitude when it decided to confront the system and accept everyone, without exception, in its educational works (MaristVoices, p. 381–382). Here it is impossible not to return once again to Nelson Mandela, with one of his favorite poems entitled “Invictus” (the same name as the excellent film – I recommend it!), written by William Ernest Henley and fundamental for him to endure the long years he was imprisoned: “No matter how narrow the gate, how full of punishments the parchment, I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul”.

Champagnat, Nelson Mandela and so many Champagnat Marists have a prophetic commonality: they are servants in unusual conditions of temperature and pressure who continue to inspire so many people. May we be impacted by these models of life in mission!



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