

---

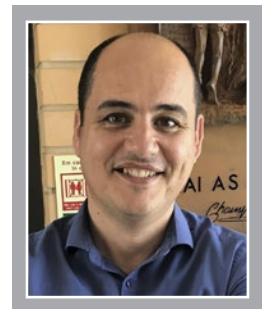
## Leading from our own humanity

---

“God touched some of us and gave us a Marist heart.  
Certainly, more than our decision, it was God’s initiative”.

(Around the same table, chap.1)

**Paulo Jorge Carvalho Pacheco**  
Director of the Lar Marista de Ermesinde  
Province of Compostela, Portugal



**I** work in a home for children and young people at risk, abandoned, or coming from broken families or facing very difficult situations. Additionally, I am responsible for supporting those with severe disabilities and chronic illnesses. I also participate in the provincial social works team, the social mission team in my region, and the board of the Champagnat Foundation.

### **The Marist Home in Ermesinde**

The educational mission of the Lar Marista de Ermesinde is centred on caring for young vocations; it means accompanying teams and young people in their growth and development; it means having the passion necessary to give ourselves to the service of others; it is recognizing that the option for the most vulnerable children gives reason to our daily efforts and professional dedication; it means creating a family spirit where everyone feels valued, welcomed and accepted; it is having simplicity and humility as distinctive qualities that define us and mark our educational approach. It means educating, taking inspiration from Mary, welcoming and serving, with commitment and fidelity.

### **“A leadership of service and prophecy - this is our Marist vision of being leaders”**

This personal, but collaborative and team process is the hallmark of my reflection—a reflection that I have been making since we specialized, although it has many points in common with many other forms of service, and it is simply my personal reflection.

I understand that leading a Marist social work, a provincial or regional team, or any other service or mission entrusted to us in the Institute must be lived as a service to our neighbor and

a vision of the future (prophetic), as the XXII General Chapter suggests.

In the preamble to *Marist Voices*, Brother Ernesto emphasizes that this prophetic and servant leadership must closely accompany Marist life and mission. For us lay Marists and leaders, the service and prophetic dimension commit us not only as leaders, but as Christians.

Serving is the easiest thing to understand but, I believe, the hardest to live. We look to the example of Jesus, who made known to us that he came to serve and not to be served--and his life displayed it!

Marcellin Champagnat also, following Jesus' example, is recognized by everyone as someone who led by serving others, especially the brothers and the children.

If Jesus called for service and Marcellin practiced it, our choice can only be a conscious one of service to our neighbor.

But serving others, from the perspective of leading change, generates challenges that bring us doubts, uncertainties, fears... this is natural and human. I had my share during the almost three-year area of study; and there are challenges that I still face today.

Brother Ernesto, in *Homes of Light*, tells us about his reflections on the Covid-19 pandemic, which I think we can share here. His reflection puts forward for our consideration three steps that I unconsciously took in the process of transforming the Home and which makes perfect sense to me today:

“We feel doubt and fear, and we ask God: How? Why all this?”

“We feel that we are small in God’s hands and we trust him. Let it be done!”

“We get down to work to collaborate in any way we can, serving others.”

In other words, in the face of uncertainty, fear and doubts that plague us, it is normal to question ourselves, but faith, trust in our Good Mother and in God’s love for us, are the key to overcoming these very human feelings that any person or any leader feels.

### **What are the fundamental keys to Marist servant leadership?**

From my experience, I consider it fundamental for a Marist servant leader, when working on processes of healing and caring for others, to focus his or her leadership on the following keys to action:

#### **1. The Three Violets**

St. Marcellin left us three virtues he wanted to see in his brothers: modesty, simplicity and humility.

In our case, the humility of accepting our fears; the fact that we do not always have all the answers, let alone being right in what we think or decide. The simplicity to accept that there is always room to learn and even fall flat on our face, and the modesty to base our leadership on a dimension of openness and acceptance of others, prioritizing the needs of those we lead.





## 2. Family spirit

It is understood as a gift that is based on some “small Marist virtues”: patience, kindness, tolerance, honesty, attentive listening and attention to others, availability and service. In my day-to-day life, given the needs and weaknesses of the children I accompany, and the needs of the people I lead, I endeavor to live these virtues, but I confess it is not always easy!

A leader must have an open heart, be available and willing to serve without measure. They must be able to create conditions that care for others and heal their weaknesses.

In the Home, we look after each other and the children; we rejoice and make allowances for our mistakes; we live each day and each hour with the intensity that the children impose on us, but I believe that despite the problems, the fear and the fatigue we sometimes experience, we are all happy!

## 3. A global citizenship that takes us to the periphery that is now the center of the Marist world

The realization that we belong to a common humanity and that this belonging is more important than any other is another of our incentives to action. The XXII General Chapter in 2017 challenges us to globality; to a transformation based on Jesus; to be “a beacon of hope in this turbulent world”; “to walk with children and young people who are marginalized from life”, and to “respond boldly to emerging needs”.

Since then, we have been talking about serving on “new frontiers”. I understand this service not as doing more things, but a new way of thinking, a thinking “outside the box”, leading by example in service to others and finding new structures and new ways of doing it.

In short, commitment to local realities, but looking beyond new situations on the periphery and going where others do not go. These “new frontiers”, in the words of Brother Emili Turu, are “today the center of the Marist world”. He had already presented this idea in 2016, at the international meeting on consecrated life organized by the Vatican when he said that being Marist is “being where there are open wounds in people and on the peripheries”.

This message which originally came from Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*, 20, challenges



us to “get out of our comfort zone and have the courage to reach out to all the peripheries that need the light of the Gospel”. More specifically, “the option for the least, for those whom society discards and throws away”.

Brother Ernesto, Superior General of the Marist Brothers, also echoes in Homes of Light this paradigm when he reminds us that “we carry out our educational and evangelizing mission by offering more direct attention to children and young people living in poverty and in peripheral situations”. In other words, attention to the peripheries, to the “new frontiers” is the basis of our Marist mission today. In fact, in “New Frontiers Emerging Realities: The International Marist Mission Commission tells us that it is fundamental to change lives, to attend to the needs of children and young people, especially those most in need, the vulnerable and those on the peripheries, those on the margins of society. And we do not have to go extremely far to find them... because “there are those who are on existential frontiers, suffering from various mental health problems, living a meaningless life, alone, isolated and segregated”.

This was the inspiration for the specialization of the Home. As the XXII General Chapter suggests, we try to attend to children and young people who “live on the margins of life”; we go out of our comfort zones daily;” and we act by “identifying new situations of vulnerability and risk for children and young people”.

In other words, we look at, analyze and dialogue with the present, based on our knowledge of and loyalty to our past, but always attentive to the rapidly changing world.

Identifying emerging needs and therefore, as Marists, exploring and recognizing these “new frontiers” where vulnerable children and young people are today.

This is what we experience daily at the Home. We serve these children, most of whom are dependent on our most basic care as we face the immense challenges that they and society pose to us and think “outside the box”.

We live in the hustle and bustle of education, activities and therapies. Rushing between the home and the hospital, often at “inconvenient” times, standing by the bedside of someone on the point of death, or in intensive care accompanying a child who is hospitalized and remembering that that child is now, for us, the young Montagne.

### **An inherited and learned charisma**

Finally, I mention what I consider to be fundamental: our charism, our vocation as Marist leaders. “God touched some of us and gave us a Marist heart. Certainly, more than our decision, it was God’s initiative”. Do we really believe this?

As Marist leaders, do we feel that “we are Christians who have responded to God’s call to live Champagnat’s charism”? The International Mission Commission gives us the answer, in “Leadership and our Marist Mission”, when it says that to be a Marist leader we have to be committed to Marist ideals and charism, animated by the desire to give ourselves totally, to serve “in all the dioceses of the world” and “to love everyone equally”.

Thus, the soul of Marist leadership is the gift of “charism”. In this way, as Marist leaders, with a keen sense of vocation, a charism and a deep sense of faith, we will be able to make difficult but sensible decisions and fearless choices. But to lead from the heart, from a human and service perspective.

### **Leading by embracing our own humanity**

Leadership, for me, thus becomes sharing life and mission with others and being recognized by our actions.

At the Home, the challenges posed by this vision are met head-on by those who work tirelessly in this house that has become their home and who, day in, day out, always give their best.

On the other hand, it is our children who give us the encouragement we so often need. They do so from their frailties, weaknesses, needs and different abilities, but above all by what surprises us, motivates us and makes our struggles worthwhile: their innocent and spontaneous smile, their shy and genuine hugs and their inspiring look.

Jean Vanier in “Acoger nuestra humanidad” tells us that “by sharing the lives of the weak and marginalized, I began to learn something more, something that touches the essential, the depths of our being, that secret and mysterious part of us that is the human heart. (...) It is people with mental disabilities who have taught me what it means to be human. (...) It is with them and through them that I have discovered the joy of celebration, of shared work, of mutual respect and the joys and sorrows of life together through laughter and suffering.”

I believe that despite the countless difficulties, uncertainties, fears and obstacles, these ideas make perfect sense; the change we undertook at the Home was prophetic, a correct intuition and that the dream lives on in us to this day!

### **Four questions for our reflection:**

- In the face of uncertainty, fear and doubt, can we trust in our Good Mother and in God’s love, and is this trust the key to overcoming the feelings of uncertainty, fear and doubt?
- What are the fundamental keys to my Marist servant leadership?
- “God touched some of us and gave us a Marist heart. Certainly, more than our decision, it was God’s initiative”. How does it touch my Marist life and mission?
- Do I live my Marist charism by welcoming and accepting my own humanity?



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)

