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## Be, serve and smile

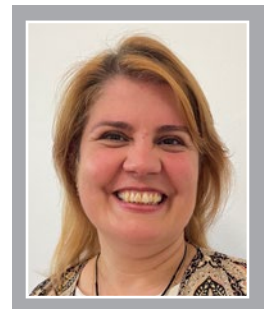
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“The leader in these times knows that the ministry to which he has to respond is in the heart of each person. The leader is directing the mission towards communion.”

(Marist Voices, chap.12 - Br Hipólito Pérez)

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I think I've been Marist without knowing it since I decided I wanted to be a teacher. At least, that's what I felt when, during the interviews to start work at the school, the pillars of Marist education were explained to me: example, love of work, solidarity, the pedagogy of presence, educating with love... I thought: "This is what it means to me to be a teacher". I felt at home. And that's how I feel to this day.

My academic background is in biology and geology. I chose to become a teacher because I dreamed of changing the world and I realised that the best (if not the only) way to do this is through education. I love learning, I have several postgraduate qualifications and I'm a fan of technology. I've held various managerial positions, from Solidarity to the MarCha Youth Movement, as well as in pastoral work and as a member of the school board. Currently, I continue to be a teacher and catechist and conduct sessions on Marist life for young people and adults. I am also responsible for communications.

*I fell asleep and dreamt that life was joy;*

*I woke up and realised that life was about service;*

*I served and saw that the service was joy.*

(Rabindranath Tagore)

In a world where values such as the pursuit of power, prestige, competition and arrogance are often valued, servant, prophetic, leadership emerges as a beacon of hope, leading us down a path of humility, compassion, empathy and dedication to our neighbours, the prime example of these for us Christians being Jesus.

Based on my personal experience, inspired by the above quote by R. Tagore (which I like very

much!), I have looked for clues to attitudes that I consider fundamental in servant leadership, drawing a parallel, suggested by Brother Hipólito Pérez in chapter 12 of *Marist Voices*, between the episode of the multiplication of the loaves (Mark 8), and that of the Last Supper and institution of the Eucharist (Luke 22:14–20).

### **BEING... with an attentive and compassionate gaze**

In the multiplication of the loaves, Jesus responds to a physical need, the hunger of the crowd that follows him. At the Last Supper, Jesus offers himself as eternal food to sustain the spiritual life of his disciples and, consequently, of humanity.

A servant leader attempts to rouse him/her self, reach out to the needy and vulnerable and become aware of the needs of the people. He/she doesn't stand apart. He/she is supportive and generous.

To be like this, we need to have a willing heart that is moved by our neighbour's weaknesses and needs, in order to accept them and experience them as our own, in a true attitude of compassion.

This is only possible from within, with an attentive and empathetic gaze, active and meaningful listening promoting inclusion.

As educators, by exemplifying this way of being and acting, we help children and young people live from within and we create spaces where everyone feels accepted, listened to and loved for who they are.

### **SERVING... walking together, building synodal communities**

In both episodes, Jesus is in the midst of his disciples. In the desert, he involves them in sharing bread with the crowd, and in the Upper Room, Jesus breaks bread, distributes it to the disciples and instructs them to continue celebrating the Eucharist.

Here we can see the importance of teamwork, of delegating and accompanying. A servant, prophetic, leader must be able to dialogue and reach communal decisions, so that everyone has a voice and all contributions are valued in the building of real communities. He/she understands the diversity and originality of each person as a source of richness and strength, creates spaces for everyone to develop their full potential and puts him/her self in the background.



Synodality, or walking together, reflects collective wisdom and experience. This model of leadership strengthens community ties and fosters a sense of belonging and shared mission, in which everyone is involved and is at the service of all.

For us Marist educators who live and work with young people, the mission is clear: help them believe in themselves; help them to be open to sharing with each other, in a true family spirit, so that they can affect others and be a light in the world.

SMILE... gratitude as a path to joy and hope

“He took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it” (Luke 22:19). Jesus’ words and gestures are repeated on both occasions, making clear to the disciples the need for gratitude.

By cultivating a sense of gratitude, servant leaders create welcoming environments, with authentic, solid relationships, favouring humility, motivating and inspiring everyone. They promote a culture of care which is contagious and growing. Gratitude is a path of trust and optimism that has great transformative power, both for the leader and for the team’s dynamic.

Communication becomes more fluid and open, relationships become more genuine and real “homes of light” (Br Ernesto Sánchez) are created in an atmosphere of joy and hope, safe harbours and spaces for growth for everyone, especially our children and young people.



### **BE, SERVE AND SMILE...**

Inspired by Jesus and Marcellin Champagnat, we move from doing to being, guided by principles of empathy, active listening, dialogue and openness to the transcendent. We are available to serve, always with joy and hope, living as leaders who bring about real change in the world. We are challenged to lead with heart and soul – with passion and full of compassion – putting service to others at the centre of our lives and where each person is valued and loved for who they are.

As Marist educators who believe in the power of example and witness, servant leadership is a transformative approach that empowers young people and ourselves to be agents of change in the world. By facing challenges with fraternity, compassion and a commitment to serving others, young people can navigate the complexities of their own lives and inspire and lead others, creating a community that is more fraternal, compassionate... and full of smiles!



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)

