

# Marianist Studies: Leadership

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## "Marianist Leadership: Some Spiritual Aspects," *Marianist Soundings* 6

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Eugene Cullen Kennedy, in "Healing the Wound—The Sacraments and Human Sexuality," concentrates a part of his work on the bishops' response to the present crises in the Church. Kennedy points out that the bishops have focused on administrative solutions. He writes that the spiritual dimension is not addressed in facing the sexual issue or on the issue of the disappearance of the Eucharist. Again, the solutions offered are administrative.

Recently, *Marianist Soundings* published an excellent issue (Spring 2003) in which three articles dealt with leadership. The articles ranged from Anthony Fucci's "My Search for Marianist Leadership" to one on the characteristics of servant-leadership. They are excellent articles. After reading them, however, I thought that an element of leadership for a Marianist person was missing. And in a similar way as Kennedy pointed out, the spiritual element of leadership seems to be the one missing. In my judgment, a well-integrated leader would be known for not only administrative skill but also for an evident, mature, and well-developed spirituality that is truly Marianist.

I would suggest that the following areas are most important for a person to claim to be a Marianist leader and to practice Marianist leadership.

A. Faith. Each of the three Founders of the Marianist Family was a person of faith. Even a superficial examination of the life, actions, and writings of William Joseph, Marie Thérèse, and Adèle show them to be extraordinary examples of faith and prayer. Their turbulent times might have easily brought about pessimism, depression and defeat, but faith led them to see and believe that God's grace working through their efforts could change not only the lives around them but also France and the entire world.

A Marianist leader, then, would be a person of faith who has a strong and well-developed prayer life. Because of this very life of prayer, he or she would have a very good sense of just what role to play. A leader of faith sees beyond his or her own efforts, understands the role of grace

and the action of God, and seeks to discern the will of God and the action of the Holy Spirit. A leader of faith is not self-centered and is always open to hearing from others. Mary is the model for such a leader.

Citations might be made from the letters of Adèle or Chaminade to point out how faith changes one's perspective—I cite an example that is a favorite of mine. Only a leader strong in faith and prayer would truly and fully understand the comments from Blessed Chaminade in a letter to Father Leo Meyer, SM, who was the novice master at Courtefontaine: "Courage, my dear son! Afflictions, tribulations, contradictions in the Lord's works are a good omen. The enemy of Jesus and Mary seeks to shake the Society of Mary ... and it is this shaking that will purify and consolidate it."

Such a leader would be a person strong in faith, prayer, and hope. At this time in the history of the Society of Mary, hope in the leaders will lead to a future filled with renewed energy and vision. Faith is the key to it all. Marianist leaders are strong in faith, but especially in what Chaminade has identified as "faith of the heart."

B. Mary. A Marianist leader has a special relationship with Mary. A Marianist leader understands and participates in Mary's mission because she or he understands that the Marianist Family was founded to be an active participant in this very mission. Mary is the first disciple, and Marianist leaders continue to participate in her discipleship. Mary is part of every effort, process, project, and prayer. Mary is the model not only of action but also of behavior. Marianist leaders choose methods that are Marian. A Marianist leader studies Mary—her place in the Church, her place in salvation, her special relationship to the Holy Spirit, and her virtues—to better understand and imitate her. It is most important for a Marianist leader to understand her relationship to the Holy Spirit and to follow her path in that relationship. Every Marianist leader needs the gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially wisdom. Mary will help the leader to become as charismatic as she is.

C. Marianist Virtues. A Marianist leader studies and continually attempts to apply the System of Virtues to the life and work at hand. It is understood that the System was designed for use in a communal setting and not simply for personal spiritual development. A Marianist leader encourages all who are part of a community to know and practice the method given the Marianist Family by Father Chaminade. A Marianist leader understands that the community/organization has for its primary goal not to be successful or efficient, but to be a nation of saints, a spectacle that shows forth the presence of Jesus, son of Mary.

D. Direction. A Marianist leader seeks direction and consultation. Chaminade was an excellent spiritual director, and he made great efforts to impress upon members of the Marianist Family that direction was essential for the development of the Family. Direction would ensure that the Family would be faithful to the vision and mission and provide guidance necessary for the members. Consultation was incorporated into every level where important decisions were to be made . . . from expelling a student to beginning a new work. The interplay of the Three Offices might also be seen as satisfying the need for direction and consultation.

E. Charism Centered. A Marianist leader steepens the "self" in the charism by always being both a student of the gift and an explorer of its application to the present moment. There is much to learn from reading

the letters of Adèle and Chaminade. There is much to learn from reading the lives of Marie Thérèse, Chaminade, and Adèle. There is much to learn not only from writers of the past but also the works of recent years and those to come. There is much to learn from listening. A Marianist leader is open to the perspectives of others in and about the Marianist Family. A Marianist leader will always be a student of Marianist history, spirituality, and life.

The following are not in the order of importance or priority: they are listed as they occurred to the author. A Marianist leader understands Mary's mission and his or her role in it and

- believes in the discipleship of equals;
- does not take himself or herself too seriously;
- leaves room for God in all planning and activities;
- is humble;
- respects others;
- prays;
- listens to and considers the ideas of others;
- is a team player;
- is a person of hope, faith, and charity.

Being a Marianist leader is a challenge, but having such a call from a community is to receive grace from that call. God will work together all things for the good of that community if the leader will be faithful, Marian, and prayerful. God does keep promises, and Mary will never abandon her children.

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