



## Welcome to Module 3A

### Ministry – A Marian Approach



#### Opening Prayer

Let us pause and call to mind  
God's presence within and among us,  
today and always.

*Brief pause*

God of mercy and infinite love,  
we place ourselves before You.  
Help us to be open to Your Word,  
responsive to Your Spirit,  
and alert to Your call.  
May Your peace be with us.

We make this prayer through  
Christ our Lord.

Amen.



## Introduction

In this module we will explore our Champagnat Marist approach to ministry. We will consider the Marian approach to our work and life, describe and express what it means to be a Marian leader, and to recognise that our wider mission is connected to the universal principles of Catholic Social Teaching.

*The marial aspect of our spirituality is expressed, above all, in our identifying with her attitudes towards others and to God. She invites us, in her song of praise, the Magnificat, to give witness to God's solidarity with people in their needs and sufferings. (In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat, # 121)*

Our **objectives** for this module are:

- To explore the Marian approach to our work and life.
- To describe and express what it means to be 'Marian'.
- To recognise our wider mission is connected to the universal Church through its Social Teaching.



## Holy is God's Name

The Magnificat is a familiar text and is found in the first chapter of Luke's Gospel (1:46-55). It has been sung since the Middle Ages and the Church prays it daily during evening prayer. The words of the Magnificat have the potential to stir the deepest part of our inner beings. They invite the reader to go deeper, experiencing the fullest extent of the words. The text also has the ability to stir and confront the reader, as it conjures up responses that provoke and challenge our pre-dispositions. Praying and meditating upon this piece of Scripture, we engage in a prayer of praise: one that reminds us about the essential link between humility and holiness, and of sincere gratefulness. (Sell, 2001).

Read the Magnificat:

### **Luke 1:46-56: The Magnificat**

*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,  
for God has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.  
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is God's name.  
God's mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.  
God has shown strength with his arm;  
God has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.  
God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;  
Filling the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.  
God has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,  
according to the promise made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever here.*



All the great biblical masters of the ages have affirmed that there are four parts to the Magnificat. In the first part, Mary expresses her gratitude to God; in the second, she praises God for His power, His holiness and His mercy; in the third, she compares how differently God deals with the proud and the humble; in the fourth, she recalls that all the ancient prophecies to the Jews are now being fulfilled in the Messiah, who was at that moment present in her womb. (Olusola, 2018, p. 7).

The Magnificat is a revolutionary document of passionate conflict and vindication, calling all believers to a journey of solidarity with all oppressed peoples. Mary's Song is the great new

Canticle of Liberation, praising a God who has promised "com-unity" with those who suffer from personal and systemic injustice, and more importantly, have been "faith-full" to those sustaining promises. (Olusola, 2018).

Mary's Magnificat is an invitation to love - to love each person as fully human and gifted, made in the image and likeness of God. Mary's voice transcended gender, race, ethnicity, and economic status. All people, women and men, all races and ethnic groups, are bearers of the divine and are capable of revealing it. Mary's Magnificat proclaims justice for all, insisting that all persons, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, would be brought to dignity. (Sell, 2001).

Lastly, the song also affirms our human responsibility in terms of being morally upright. Mary in the song makes God her subject and need to be proclaimed. She noted that her greatness consists in the fact that she wants to magnify God, not herself. She is lowly, her only desire is to be the handmaid of the Lord (Luke 1:38, 48). She knows that she will only contribute to the salvation of the world rather than carrying out her own projects, she places herself completely at the disposal of God's initiatives. (Olusola, 2018, p. 18).



### Reflection

What difference does looking to Mary as a model make in the life and work of our ministry?

What are some of the "great things" that have been accomplished (that you have seen or experienced) in this ministry?



## A Marian Approach to Our Work and Life

*The Marial aspect of our spirituality is expressed, above all, in our identifying with her attitudes towards others and to God... She urges us to do whatever Jesus tells us. (In the Footsteps, # 121)*

### A Marian Style of Leadership

Mary is a model to all believers. She is far from being a timidly submissive woman but is rather a woman of strength and conviction. Mary was receptive, she listened, she proclaimed, she led by example. Yes, Mary was an influential disciple, an engaged member of her community. Mary was the first disciple as she embodied the totality of what it means to be a disciple: promoter of justice and advocate for the poor. (Sell, 2001). It is from these attributes and prophetic nature we witness a particular style of leadership; a leadership that is not only expected but valued.

Br Michael Green describes Marian leadership in the following quote.

“What does it mean to be a Marian leader? There are various ways that Marian theology and tradition would allow us to frame responses to that question. We could go to the Lucan imagery of Mary in the Gospel and Acts, especially the Annunciation, the Visitation, and Pentecost; we could draw on the symbolism of the Johannine image of Mary as ‘mother of Jesus’ at Cana and Calvary; we could approach it from one or more of the perspectives offered by the array of titles and imagery that dogma, tradition, culture, art, and popular piety each give us. We could draw on the Marian theology of the early theologians or that of contemporary ones. It is an immense storehouse of insight and wisdom, built over centuries of experience of Christian discipleship, scholarship, and religious imagination. Each would have its own validity, offering us a perspective on what it is to be Marian.

“To be Marian in leadership is to be someone whose authority is derived spirituality, and for whom the spiritual leadership of a community of mission precedes, underpins, and influences all other aspects of leadership. It is to have a self-awareness, in all humility, of being Theotokos\*. It is not to be Marian in an idealized sense, let alone a devotional one. It is, rather, to be someone who can live and lead joyfully and prophetically in the spirit of Mary’s Magnificat, singing it with her as a sister in faith, and doing so with such transparency that the faithfulness, mercy and justice of God are, in fact, magnified. It is fidelity, mercy and justice of a distributed leadership through the school which gives life, and which incarnates missio Dei\*. The result is that Marian leaders will not only be people who lead authoritatively, but they will also lead inspirationally. Literally. They will be infused with God’s Spirit, inspired. And the more they are, the more inspiring they will be for others.” (Green, *Now with enthusiasm*)

\**Theotokos* = God bearer, usually applied to Mary. \**missio Dei* = mission of God



## Reflection

What aspects of a 'Marian leadership style' are resonating with you? Reflect on how your leadership aligns with that of Mary's.



## Marist Mission is Connected to the Universal Church

From Mary's model which was built upon Christ's, we exist to serve the marginalised, the poor, the suffering, oppressed.

*In the same way that Marcellin was thinking especially of the **least favoured of young people** in founding the Marist Brothers, our preference is to be with those who are excluded from the mainstream of society, and those whose material poverty leads them to be deprived also in relation to health, family life, schooling, and education in values. (In the Footsteps, #53)*

*Just as you did it one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me ... (Matthew 25:40)*

We see these values align with the Church's Social Teaching.

## THE PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR AND VULNERABLE



In the Gospel of Matthew (25:31–46), Jesus describes the last judgment, saying that we will be judged based on how we treat the poorest and most vulnerable members of society. Throughout the Scriptures, Jesus spends time with the sick and outcast, revealing a special love for those most in need. The Catholic Social Teaching principle 'Option for the Poor and Vulnerable' encourages us to imitate Christ's love for the poor by working to create a society where the needs of the poor are always considered first.

The Church teaches that, "those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a preferential love on the part of the Church which, since her origin and in spite of the failings

of many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defense and liberation through numerous works of charity which remain indispensable always and everywhere.”  
(*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, # 2448)

Pope Francis reminds us that:

The dignity of each human person and the pursuit of the common good are concerns which ought to shape all economic policies. At times, however, they seem to be a mere addendum imported from without in order to fill out a political discourse lacking in perspectives or plans for true and integral development. How many words prove irksome to this system! It is irksome when the question of ethics is raised, when global solidarity is invoked, when the distribution of goods is mentioned, when reference is made to protecting labour and defending the dignity of the powerless, when allusion is made to a God who demands a commitment to justice. (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n.203)

We are invited to be a part of a long tradition that continues to live out a love for the poor through works of mercy.



#### Reflection

How is our work “loving and reaching out to the poor”?

Who are the “poor” that our ministry engages with?



## Visual Reflection

### *Mary: The Mother of God of the Sweet Embrace*

**View the image below. What do you notice?**

**What does this image evoke in you? What does it say about Mary?**

Words from the author of the Icon: Michael Galovic.

“At the heart of the original Marist vision was that the Marists would share in what they called the ‘work of Mary’. This ‘work’ is no less or more than that of the Theotokos: to be the bearer of God. To be Marist is to be Mary. The work captures this Marist essence while following the traditional structure and colours of this particular Eastern icon. The Greek letters of this icon name Mary that way, as Mother of God, a “spiritual motherhood” in which Marists feel called to share (*Marist Brothers Constitutions*, #84). The colour of her cloak signifies this. Mary’s eyes look not at the child she is cradling but have mystical inward gaze, signifying her



contemplation of the God she carries, and the Cross to which he is called, as are all of us. Subtly, her eyes also invite the viewer into the same contemplative attitude.

The colour of her in a garment signifies the humanity we share with her. Jesus, in white, gold and red carries the scroll of the Word of God; it is he who is Teacher and Saviour. Mary's hands provide both the throne and loving, and an ever so respectful carry, of the son of God. His feet signify his humanness. This humanity is amplified in his left hand gently touching Mary's chin, inviting the viewer also to love and trust her".

Mary is in our midst, a symbol of unity and mission, as she was for the apostles on the day of Pentecost. Like Marcellin, we look to Mary as our Good Mother and Ordinary Resource and express our devotion to her in ways that are personal, family-based, simple, and that follow the practices of the Church and of local traditions. *The Virgin of Tenderness/The Mother of Sweet Embrace* is an icon that speaks to all Marists. (*In the Footsteps*, #. 121)

*The Mother of God of Sweet Embrace, 1996, Egg tempera and gold leaf on gessoed board, 62 x 50 cm, Marist Brothers' Provincial House, Sydney NSW by Michael Galovic.*



## References

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IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT

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