



# The Marianists

## **Mountaintops and Deep Waters: Continuing Marianist Leadership Formation during a Pandemic**

**By Savio Franco, Ph.D.**

Mountaintops and deep waters — our Lord Jesus formed his disciples on both. At the provincial Office of Education and in Marianist-sponsored ministries, we follow this example in our leadership formation initiative called Mary's Lead — an ecosystem of retreats, resources and relationships specially designed for Marianist educator-leaders.

Our first cohort of Mary's Lead began its summer leadership retreat-in-daily-life on June 22 – 25, 2020. Like Fr. Chaminade's sheltered-in experience at Saragossa, members of this group also sheltered in place, seeking and praying across long distances, but still in communion with each other. On this retreat, we reflected on the leadership formation of the disciples. Here is an example.

Consider Peter. Think about some of his formative experiences on and around mountaintops. Perhaps you are envisioning the Mount of Beatitudes, picturing Peter listening to the greatest discourse ever spoken. Or maybe the hills around which Jesus multiplied those loaves and fishes — imagining an excited Peter distributing them to the thousands present. Or perhaps you visualizing the Mount of Transfiguration, with a dumbfounded Peter wanting to pitch tents and stay there. Or in contrast, Mount Calvary, and Peter's painful absence, and later, the Mount of Ascension on which Peter gazed upon the risen Lord ascending into heaven.

It is fair to say that Peter got a lot of his leadership formation through a wonderful mountaintop experience while on retreat, similar to what our Marianist formation programs offer year-round.

In contrast, think about our Lord's other favorite training ground for Peter — well actually, not ground but water! I mean, the many lessons Peter received in and around the waters of the Sea of Galilee. You could probably conjure up a flood of images, such as Jesus' first encounter with an astounded Peter watching his nets bursting with fish, minutes after he — the expert — was convinced there were none around. Or perhaps you are thinking of the boat ride amidst a storm wherein a frightened Peter shouted out to our sleeping Lord to wake up and save them! And who can forget our Lord practicing experiential learning with a drowning Peter, teaching him to trust and follow, no matter how turbulent and deep the waters seem.

It is also fair to say that Peter got a lot of his leadership formation at his place of work, the Sea of Galilee, with all its complications — similar to what our Marianist formation programs are adapting to during this pandemic.

The Office of Education offers several Marianist formation programs through brief, but beautiful, retreats — uplifting mountaintop experiences. If you have been on one such mountaintop, you understand the feeling of wishing the delightful experience could continue for a little bit longer before you return to the busy waters of your day-to-day life.

The pandemic has required us, I believe providentially, to practice some good old Marianist adaptation and change, with a sprinkling of Marianist imagination, as we move to a virtual, sheltered-in learning format for the foreseeable future.

In reality, the Sea of Galilee is not extremely deep — but that is of little consolation to those who could drown in those waters in the midst of a storm! The pandemic has unsettled the waters in our educational communities, but our educator-leaders are navigating the storm with faith and trust, supported by Marianist formators and resource persons across the province.

I invite you to pray with all involved in Mary's Lead: "Lord Jesus, thank you for both our mountaintops and deep waters. Your presence is what forms us, and you are all we really need." \*

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\* Please feel free to share your reflections on this article @ [francos1@udayton.edu](mailto:francos1@udayton.edu). If you are willing, your reflection can be posted on the private Mary's Lead web portal, which is accessed by all participating members of the Mary's Lead ecosystem.