

Sharing Our Marianist Stories, Episode #54 Transcript - One Heart, One Mind: Relational Leadership Lessons from Adèle and Marie Thérèse with Sr. Laura Leming, FMI and Jess Gonzalez Uhlig

00:00 – Mike Bennett

Leadership is often defined by grand visions, but it's sustained by the grit of daily life. How do we move from a big idea to a lasting community? In this episode of *Sharing Our Marianist Stories*, we're diving back into the lives of Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon and Marie Thérèse de Lamourous. Joining us again are Sr. Laura Leming and Jessica González Uhlig to explore how these two women didn't just manage; they innovated. Their boots-on-the-ground leadership approach offers a masterclass in resourcefulness, radical accompaniment, and the power of a simple email (or its 19th century equivalent). Whether you are navigating a boardroom or a community project, their relational leadership provides a timeless model for our world today. Let's listen.

00:54 – Jessica González Uhlig

I had the opportunity to teach a leadership class at St. Mary's [University of San Antonio]. It's made me think about these women as leaders. And not only as leaders in their time but certainly examples for leadership today. These two women had these attributes and behaviors and personalities that would be considered leaders of any type of structure or institution. Marie Thérèse, in particular for me, [embodied] leadership as steadfast courage in times of crisis. She chose not to retreat, but to engage. There were no priests allowed to say Mass. "I'm going to minister to the people. There is certainly danger in that, but I am still going to do that." Whatever hesitations or self-doubt that she felt, somehow she stepped up. And what a great trait in leadership in looking at the signs of the times and whatever challenges we're going through! To really look at, "Well, what can I do?" And then, deciding and coming to a point where you can say, "There is always something I can do." And it doesn't have to be lofty or grandiose. It can be so practical.

02:05 – Jessica González Uhlig

I found this great quote. "Sometimes people think that many things are needed to begin a house of the Miséricorde. What is really needed?" You need "a house with four rooms; namely a chapel, a dormitory, a refectory, and a workroom. At first, the kitchen [can be in] the refectory. What else is needed? Bread in one day; work for [one week] the next day."

02:27 – Mike Bennett

Miséricorde refers to the house of repentant prostitutes, which Marie Thérèse ran in Bordeaux.

02:33 – Jessica González Uhlig

It's comments to a clergyman when they were thinking about doing something similar. So again, that practicality of yes, there are needs, but we can always find a way to make something happen, especially when there is a challenge or situation that may otherwise frighten some folks that they don't want to even get into.

02:52 – Sr. Laura Leming, FMI

Yeah, it's like, "Let's do what we can do with the meager resources we have." And I think, right now, in a time when people are so concerned about affordability and how we have to look at the resources available to our institutions, yes, we have to be good stewards. But we also have to say, "We have some gifts here. We have a space. We have buildings. Let's use

them and see what happens.” I think that was Marie Thérèse's real forte. I think about leadership as collaboration. If you can pool your gifts, talents, and resources so that you have the vision of a young person and the wisdom of an older person, and cross generations and disciplines. To be able to see things from a business perspective, or see things from a humanities perspective, global awareness, all of that. Our collaboration and the collaboration that we see among these women is something that is leadership in itself.

04:00 – Sr. Laura Leming, FMI

When I think of Adèle in terms of leadership, I think especially that she pursued her ideas by gathering people, making friends with people, saying, “Hey, let's do this together.” It's better in community, and Chaminade's doing the same thing in Bordeaux. That was what drew the two of them together, using her gift of networking. She's 13, and she makes a Confirmation retreat, and she sees these other people. When they had the opportunity to be together, there was something magical about that, something that they could do together that she wouldn't do by herself. So, inviting people in, finding ways to encourage them. I think [of] leadership as encouragement, and challenge is something to think about, how each one of them did this. It's the encouragement of living through daily life. The letters that go back and forth include a lot of spiritual wisdom, but they also include things like, “Can you get me a bolt of cloth?” Or “Can you find the lace for the curtains?” It's daily life. How do we work together and encourage one another through the challenges of daily life. That is leadership.

05:25 – Jessica González Uhlig

A few years ago, you said that Adèle would be the patron saint of email and using the technology to just connect with people. It's taking that step, taking that initiative, to want to invite others and not keep this... secret to yourself. It's to be one in community and share it with others.

05:45 – Sr. Laura Leming, FMI

And that's the reason why we have these 700-plus letters that she's writing to all of these people, to particular people and acknowledging their particular gifts. And we know that she wrote a lot more letters than we have because the ones that she wrote to Father Chaminade have largely been lost. We have a few of those. Many that we had initially got lost during the secularization in France and as we get to the turn of the century. The way of writing letters to encourage people to use their gifts for good, and we need to ask ourselves, “What is the equivalent today? Is it the emails that we send? Is it the texts that we send?” Really think of how we use technology to encourage or to challenge people to be their best selves.

06:38 – Jessica González Uhlig

Well, just to connect! Because nowadays, the sense of isolation that I know a lot of folks feel, the drive to connect is so necessary. And having someone like Adèle be that leader, be that person to step forward and take the initiative to build this network, and that means community - again, support and challenge, both - because not everything is always ideal and perfect. And that connects to one of the things about today's world and the differences of opinion and polarization. And there's just so much that has to do with how we treat other people that speaks to me through Marie Thérèse. And in an age where women were commonly abandoned or condemned, she chose accompaniment versus judgment. She offered shelter, dignity, purpose, the possibility of transformation, so that leadership is firm, yet compassionate. She set the high expectations for moral and spiritual renewal but maintained that belief in each of these women. So, what a lesson for all of us to take that step back and look at the differences, the need for dialogue. What better example! I keep going

back to how we can support young adults, young people, young college students who may just not feel that they are being supported?

08:05 – Sr. Laura Leming, FMI

Or maybe they don't recognize how they can respond to whatever urgent needs exist in their circle of influence. One of the things that they did was innovatively respond to a need that they saw. So, Adèle – before the sisters ever begin – she and members of the Association are trying to recognize that the Church is in shambles, and the priests are not around.

08:35 – Mike Bennett

The Association is the name Adèle used when inviting the first group of girls to be united in prayer and good works, supported through letters Adèle wrote. The group grew throughout the countryside around Agen to a large number of girls, women, and some priests and seminarians, which eventually would become attached to Father Chaminade's Bordeaux Sodality.

08:58 – Sr. Laura Leming, FMI

“We have young men who would like to be seminarians, who would like to study, but they don't have the financial backing.” So, her idea was, “What if we raise pigs and sell them so that we can raise money for seminary education, help people follow their vocation.” It's a really silly example, and the pigs didn't do that well. Her father [Baron Charles de Batz de Trenquelléon] actually had pity on her and bought the pigs from her. And so, they did raise the money, but they didn't continue to do that. Marie Thérèse looks at the needs for these women to have an occupation as well as to earn money. She says, “We have access to really fine tobacco products. Let's make cigars.” Who would have thought to find an innovative way of something that have to respond to an urgent, critical need? I think it's something.

09:57 – Sr. Laura Leming, FMI

Them doing that, and they're willing to try things. They fail at some of them, but they look at the world around them and say, “There is something I can do here, even if it's a small thing.”

10:10 – Jessica González Uhlig

What a great leadership trait to be resourceful! Those are two perfect examples of [what] is around us that we can creatively work to our advantage.

10:22 – Sr. Laura Leming, FMI

Something that, I have always been inspired by with Marie Thérèse in thinking, again, about these women who were pretty much condemned by the society, had fallen into difficult circumstances, and needed a place to be, sometimes with their children. She always had a vision that they could be so much more. In the Church in those times, you have France and Bordeaux, where missionaries would come back from all around the world, and Marie Thérèse would invite the missionaries to come and give talks at the Miséricorde, so that women whose lives probably felt very compressed – But Marie Thérèse saw that these women could have a much broader vision, and she found ways to help them see a bigger world. So that their problems, their circumstances didn't make them so closed in that they couldn't interact with other people. And that was a wonderful training, even for them. How do you be if you've living on the street and if you come from poverty? Maybe you don't have much access to people with higher educations. So, it was making the linkages for people, and I think in the Marianist Family, that's something that we do.

11:45 – Jessica González Uhlig

In Adèle, we encounter a woman that led with joy, purpose and unwavering hope. Her legacy challenges us to imagine leadership not as command and control, but as calling and co-creation. And I think that those examples of being innovative, her faith expansive, her mission clear, and her leadership a quiet revolution of love. And I keep going back to the heart, because to me, she's just the heart of it all.

12:12 – Sr. Laura Leming, FMI

Adèle and the early sisters faced some really difficult challenges with how much illness was around them. Now, this is a time when tuberculosis is rampant. We think that Adèle's early death comes because of probably tuberculosis, ultimately. She had this amazing capacity to keep her focus not on herself, but on the people around her and what they needed. And so, she was able to be selfless. Now, I don't want to say that she didn't take proper care of herself, because she would talk about how, "I have to drink milk, and I have to rest more than I would like." And she certainly wrote to her good friend Thérèse Yannasch [Clémentine Yannasch; Soeur Thérèse de Jésus, FMI] a whole letter about self-care. And if you read between the lines from a perspective of today, she's actually telling her to take at least one day a month to be reflective, to practice mindfulness, use your prayers, but also to sort of journal. She wouldn't have called it journaling, but she talks about doing an account of how you are spending your time. So, how do we stand back from our own engagement, our own activity as leaders and take the opportunity to pause so that we reflect on what's been good. It's also a practice of Examen that the Jesuits are big on.

13:48 – Mike Bennett

The Examen being a technique of prayer reflection in the events of the day, often associated with Jesuit spirituality.

13:55 – Sr. Laura Leming, FMI

What's been good, what's been troublesome, and what kind of a resolve do I want to make to change? What do I need to do tomorrow that might be a little different? She writes this long letter to Thérèse Yannasch, who is the director of the first community that goes out beyond the sisters. And I find that very striking and telling about how she wants her to be careful of her own leadership and her energy.

14:25 – Jessica González Uhlig

I go back to Adèle's undying faith or belief in her purpose, her mission, her vision for the congregation, in acceptance. And we're talking about the illness and ultimately her dying very young. There must have been a moment of acceptance and, "If this is how or when my life is going to end, then so be it." But with this sense of fulfillment and belief that she did the best that she could. For her to get to a point of acceptance, that speaks to me.

15:06 – Sr. Laura Leming, FMI

And when Adèle gets to that point, one of the last things that she says in her life – and she's only 38 years old at this point – she says, "What is most important to me is that the sisters be of one heart and one mind, that preserve the community from discord." And I think that's a question of what are you putting into the world? Are you putting discord into the world, or are you putting things that build the community up? St. Paul says that. "Say only the good things that people need to hear."

15:41 – Jessica González Uhlig

Relational leadership is what they represent. It centers on trust, humility, mutual relation, and responsibility. I think both these women listened more than they told others what to do. They formed people more than they managed outcomes. It's that relational aspect of being familial and being together. And it speaks volumes to the need of connectivity and networking and being together and building community that we often speak of so much in the Marianist Family.

16:16 – Mike Bennett

Thanks for listening to this episode of *Sharing Our Marianist Stories*, a production of the North American Center for Marianist Studies in Dayton, Ohio. Make sure to subscribe wherever you listen to podcasts and follow us on social media @ThisIsNACMS. I'm Mike Bennett, media administrator for NACMS.