

# Louise de Marillac

## Servant Leader

Louise de Marillac gives us a great example of how to be a servant leader. Louise's own life experience formed her to be a leader who was compassionate and understanding; she knew much suffering in her life and therefore understood others' suffering. She was also a person gifted with organisational skills. She wrote detailed rules for the sisters to follow in their service, for example *they will take great care to see that the sick poor have what is necessary: meals at the scheduled times, something to drink when they need it, and occasionally a few little sweets.*

She wrote quite a bit about how to lead others by "gentle persuasion rather than by constraint". She also described the sister in charge as "the beast of burden" of the community. This view of leadership is based on the scriptural idea of leadership as service. It is based on the example of Jesus when he washed the disciples' feet. She also wrote about the superior;

*...She must try to be easy to approach, so that her sisters may speak to her with confidence, but she must also be discreet so as to give them no reason to lose respect for her.*

*...She shall confer often with her Sister Officers in general, and sometimes with them individually. In this way, she gains knowledge of what is taking place in the Company, and she is able to notify her Officers of needs or make comments on things which have been brought to her attention. This she must do with great cordiality and gentleness, considering her Officers as part of herself.*

A young woman who was employed to type up the translation of Louise's writings describes her this way...*She's the most caring person I have ever known. She cares about everyone and everything. She does not just care how holy the sisters are, though she pushes them to holiness. She does not just care about their work, though she wants it done well. She cares about them, about who they are and how they are. And where in the world does she find time to learn about their families and to write to tell them how they are doing?*

**What kind of leader am I and what can I learn from St Louise?**

