

*An Anthology of Precious Blood Spirituality*



# THE WINE CELLAR

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## Leadership



*The heart of Jesus  
is the wine cellar  
of the blood of Christ.*

— Gaspar del Bufalo —

**THE WINE CELLAR**  
*An Anthology of Precious Blood Spirituality*

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## Don't Throw in the Towel

**A**t a diocesan convocation several years ago, the bishop passed out dish towels to the priests and pastoral ministers of the diocese. The leaders of the parishes in the diocese were instructed that at some later date they would be invited to bring the towels back with a story of how they used them in the service of their people. It wasn't long before the joke circulated among the clergy as to how many of the priests would even know where their dish towels were when the day of reckoning arrived.

The pastoral minister who told me this story said she enshrined the dish towel on her prayer table for many months after the convocation. "It continues to shout to me about service from its current home in the dish towel drawer," she said.

A towel is a good symbol of service since we associate it with what Jesus did on that night before he died when he rose from Passover supper with his friends, "took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist" (John 13, 4-5). We remember how Peter initially resisted Jesus' invitation to wash his feet because this is the role of the servant, not the leader.

Peter was still too full of himself, too full of his own ideas and ideology about who should serve and who should be served, who should take the highest place and who claims the lowest place. Jesus makes this one of those teachable moments, and is very clear about the teaching and the meaning behind the symbol: "Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me 'teacher' and 'master' and rightly so, for indeed I am. I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done, you should also do" (John 13, 12-15). It should not have come as a surprise to Peter and the other disciples. After all, Jesus had been teaching them through sermons on mounts and plains and with parables of all sorts that the last will be first and the first will be last; that if you want to be a leader, serve the rest.



In his book, *The Scandal of Service*, Jean Vanier writes, “To have one’s feet washed by Jesus is not something optional, but a vital, necessary part of discipleship. It means entering into a whole new world.” Perhaps today more than ever the world equates those in power with privilege.

The more clout one has the more that one expects to be served. Which is why, Vanier writes, “We have difficulty recognizing this kingdom of God. We human beings are so attracted by power and glory that frequently we do not see it or want to see it. In order to show the radical newness of life in his kingdom, Jesus washes the feet of his disciples. This shocks and scandalizes them.... But it is as if Jesus is trying to say, ‘Yes, this is the way to love in my kingdom.’”

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*Servant leaders in the faith community do not sit at the head table but at the foot. From head to toe, servant leadership in the body of Christ begins on one’s knees washing the feet of others.*

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Servant leaders in the faith community do not sit at the head of the table but at the foot. From head to toe, servant leadership in the body of Christ begins on one’s knees washing the feet of others. Unfortunately, many in the church today are ready to throw in the towel, because like Peter’s initial resistance to wash the feet of others, too many in leadership today and the structures they protect tend to be so hierarchical and top heavy that they are close to toppling under the weight of their own arrogance.

## Subsidiarity and Solitude

Two recent speeches in two very different places focused on this crisis of leadership that exists the world’s institutions today. In a widely-circulated speech last summer to a group of church leaders in South Africa, Bishop Kevin Dowling of Rustenburg said the moral authority in the church today “has never been weaker. It is, therefore, important...that church leadership, instead of giving an impression of its power, privilege, and prestige, should rather be experienced as a humble, searching ministry together with its people in order to discern the most appropriate or viable responses which can be made to complex moral and ethical questions—a leadership, therefore, which does not presume to have all the answers all the time.”

In the second speech, given to the plebe class at the United States Military Academy at West Point in October 2009 and published in *The American Scholar* (Spring, 2010), Professor William Deresiewicz challenged the cadets to make friends with solitude as they study and train to become



the next generation of American leaders because “solitude is one of the most important necessities of true leadership.” The crisis in leadership today, according to Professor Deresiewicz, is “because our overwhelming power and wealth, earned under earlier generations of leaders, made us complacent, and for too long we have been training leaders who only know how to keep the routine going. Who can answer questions, but don’t know how to ask them. Who can fulfill goals, but don’t know how to set them. Who think about *how* to get things done, but not whether they’re worth doing in the first place.” After serving for several years on the faculty at Yale University and on the admissions board, Professor Deresiewicz said he saw “great kids who had been trained to be world-class hoop jumpers.”

In addressing this crisis of leadership, Bishop Dowling draws on Catholic Social Teaching. “If the church, and its leadership, professes to follow the values of the gospel and the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, then its internal life, its methods of governing, and its use of authority will be scrutinized on the basis of what we profess.” He draws upon the principle of subsidiarity which “holds that those things which can be done or decided at a lower level of society should not be taken over by a higher level. As such, it reaffirms our right and our capacity to decide for ourselves how to organize our relationships and how to enter into agreements with others.”

When we apply this principle to the present crisis in leadership in the church, subsidiarity requires of its leaders “to actively promote and encourage participation, personal responsibility and effective engagement by everyone in terms of their particular calling and ministry in the church and world according to their opportunities and gifts.” But what is happening in the church today is that not only does the centralization of the Roman bureaucracy undermine the principle of subsidiarity, but, Dowling asserts one of the key teachings of Vatican II—collegiality in decision-making—“is virtually nonexistent.”

This has reached such a point, Dowling said, “any hint of critique or questioning of [the pope’s] policies, his way of thinking, his exercise of authority etc. is equated with disloyalty.” The pressure to conform compels even the most prophetic of bishops to keep silent for fear of the perception of “breaking ranks” with the hierarchy. In Dowling’s view, “What we should have...is a church where the leadership recognizes and empowers decision-making at the appropriate levels in the local church, where local leadership

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listens to and discerns with the people of God of that area what ‘the Spirit is saying to the church’ and then articulates that as a consensus of the believing, praying, serving community.” This demands “faith in God and trust in the people of God to take what may seem to some or many as a risk,” Dowling said.

But as Professor Deresiewicz points out, many are afraid to take such risks because our leaders today are often middle managers who have risen to the top of the ladder because they have followed the rules—“kissing up to the people above you, kicking down to the people below you”—rather than being engaged in creative, imaginative thinking that will cause the company, the institution, the church, to change. “Excellence isn’t what gets you up the greasy pole,” the professor told the plebes at West Point. “Pleasing your teachers, pleasing your superiors, picking powerful mentors and riding their coattails...jumping through hoops, getting along by going along”—these are the activities, attitudes, and inclinations that are rewarded by promotion or election. If you want to be a leader in any institution today, Deresiewicz writes, do not take “stupid risks like trying to change how things are done or question why they are done.”

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This is where solitude becomes essential for the servant leader. “Solitude can mean introspection,” Deresiewicz says, “it can mean the concentration of focused work, and it can mean sustained reading.” For the person of faith, it also means taking time in silence and prayer to discern God’s desire for the leader and the people the leader is called to serve. In this sacred space of solitude, the Spirit helps the leader think in new ways, imagine new possibilities, and surface new questions to old problems. “It’s only by

concentrating,” Deresiewicz told the cadets, “sticking to the question, being patient, letting all the parts of my mind come into play, that I arrive at an original idea.”

## Leadership: Relationship in the Blood of Christ

This issue of *The Wine Cellar* addresses the crisis in leadership today from the perspective of Precious Blood spirituality by drawing upon the experiences and insights of servant leaders in the church and religious



life. Each of our contributors writes of servant leadership as being rooted in relationship. Addressing the polarization that often exists in the church today, Bishop Joseph Charron writes how “the powerful Precious Blood image of healing reconciliation has helped me cope” with the chasms that exist. Reflecting on his many years as provincial and ordinary of a diocese, Bishop Charron focuses on humility, the ability to listen, and the capacity to hope as key characteristics of good leadership.

Sister Jan Renz is currently the regional leader of the United States Region of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ. As both principal and provincial, Sister Jan reflects on how one’s leadership style evolves through experience, and emphasizes the principle of subsidiarity as key to living as a servant leader today. Her congregation has “made a conscious decision to live out the concept of shared governance and responsibility,” she writes, “to emphasize the importance of relationships over structures with the intent that this will continually call us to fidelity to our mission.”

For twelve years, the mission of Father Angelo Anthony was to serve as provincial of the Cincinnati Province of the Missionaries of the Blood. Drawing upon the example of servant leaders in Scripture, the inspiration of the founder of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, St. Gaspar del Bufalo, and his own experience as provincial, Father Angelo underscores how “true leadership is an act of charity; a call to put love into action.”

The fullness of that love—laying down one’s life for one’s friends—forms the basis of Precious Blood Sister Mary Whited’s reflection on servant leadership. With Jesus as the model for servant leadership, Sister Mary writes, “I have come to see that the spiritual basis for authentic Christian leadership is the paschal mystery.”

Her own experience as leader of her congregation, as president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), and her past and present embrace of the paschal mystery in her personal life have certainly molded Sister Mary into an extraordinary servant leader. Another member of her congregation who held similar positions both in her community and nationally, Sister Andree Freis, was well-known for her abilities as a servant leader. In an excerpt from a speech to religious leaders that she gave in 1995, Sister Andree offers six challenges for “transformative leadership” that are still timely today.

While all the other contributors to this issue of *The Wine Cellar* have either served or are presently serving in leadership positions in their religious communities, John Robert McCray offers a reflection from the perspective of aspiring to be a leader and yet spending the majority of his life “as a follower.” And yet, his experience as an educator, husband,



and father offers valuable insight to the call of servant leadership in all of our relationships in life, stressing “character and common sense” as two primary values.

Finally, one of the current leaders of the worldwide Congregation of Missionaries of the Precious Blood, Father William Nordenbrock, offers a model of “appreciative discernment” for the election of servant leaders. Fr. Bill stresses the “need to recalibrate our thinking—to think in a new way—about community leadership.” In developing and facilitating the process for the recent election of leadership in the Cincinnati Province, Fr. Bill stresses “two key considerations: first, leadership always happens in context; and secondly, leadership is more a relationship than a set of tasks.”

It is in the context of the Last Supper, on the very night he was betrayed by those with whom he had developed a deep and intimate relationship, that Jesus teaches his friends about servant leadership and gives us a model for all to follow. As religious congregations shaped by a spirituality of the blood of Christ that reflects reconciliation and renewal, we have a unique role to fill in our church and our world today. As Bishop Kevin Dowling raised the question in his provocative speech last summer, “How do you reconcile such very different visions of church, or models of church?”, so this issue of *The Wine Cellar* seeks to contribute to the ongoing dialogue about leadership.

While Bishop Dowling acknowledged he doesn’t have the answer to that question, he challenged people of faith to “find an attitude of respect and reverence for difference and diversity as we search for a *living* unity in the church.” He concluded his reflection by quoting a young theologian at the Second Vatican Council, Father Josef Ratzinger, who wrote: “Over the pope as expression of the binding claim of ecclesiastical authority there stands one’s own conscience which must be obeyed before all else, even if necessary against the requirement of ecclesiastical authority.” Inspired by the wisdom of that young theologian who became Pope Benedict XVI, may we not throw in the towel but stand by the courage of our convictions to offer our church and world a living witness of servant leadership.

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## Contributors

✠ Precious Blood Bishop **Joseph Charron** is a member of the Kansas City Province. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1967, studied in Rome and received a doctoral degree in moral theology. Bishop Charron taught at St. John's School of Theology in Collegeville, Minnesota and served as Assistant and Associate General Secretary of National Conference of Catholic Bishops before being elected provincial of the Kansas City Province in 1979. He served two terms before he became Auxiliary Bishop of St. Paul/Minneapolis in 1990 and Bishop of Des Moines in 1994. Due to ill health he retired in 2007, and since that time has enjoyed doing retreats and missions. He lives in West Des Moines, Iowa.

✠ Adorer of the Blood of Christ **Jan Renz** joined the Congregation in 1972. She received her M.A. and Ph.D. from St. Louis University in Education with emphasis on Administration. Prior to being asked to be on the U.S. Region Leadership Team in 2006, Sister Jan served as Principal or Superintendent of various schools for 29 years. In addition to her work in education, Sr. Jan served over 15 years as a volunteer Emergency Medical Technician with area ambulance companies and as a member of a Critical Incident Stress Management Team for Southern Illinois.

✠ Precious Blood Father **Angelo Anthony** has recently completed his third term as the Provincial Director of the Cincinnati Province of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood. Ordained in 1989, Fr. Anthony has served in parish ministry (1989-1993) and Director of Vocation (1993-1998) before being elected Provincial Director in May 1998. When time allows he welcomes the opportunity to offer retreats and days of recollection. Originally from Wapakoneta, Ohio, he earned his Bachelor of Arts Degree in Philosophy from Saint Joseph's College in 1984 and a Master of Divinity Degree with a specialization in Liturgy



from Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Illinois in 1989. Before entering the priesthood, Fr. Anthony worked as a florist in his hometown of Wapakoneta.

✠ Sister of the Most Precious Blood **Mary Whited** is a former general superior of her religious congregation based in O'Fallon, Missouri. She is also a past president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. Sister Mary is involved in giving presentations, retreat ministry, spiritual direction, and facilitation.

✠ Precious Blood Sister **Andree Fries** was superior general of the O'Fallon Precious Blood congregation twice, 1980-86 and 1992-1998. She also served as president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious from 1993-1996. At the time of her death at the age of 65 on July 14, 2007, Sister Andree oversaw the Retirement Fund for Religious.

✠ **John Robert McCray** holds a doctorate from the University of Missouri at Kansas City. He and his wife Lynda have been Catholics for ten years after encountering Father Walter Pilecki who, in Bob's words, "put the pieces together for us and led us into the Church." Now retired and battling symptoms of Parkinson Disease for the past five years, Bob continues to write poetry and a monthly article for the Secular Franciscan Fraternity newsletter.

✠ Precious Blood Father **William Nordenbrock** is a member of the Cincinnati Province of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood. He currently serves his congregation in leadership as a non-resident member of the General Council, with the positions of Vice Moderator General and General Treasurer. From his home in Chicago, he serves as the Provincial Director of Formation for the Cincinnati Province and is a staff member of the Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation. In February 2011, his book, *Beyond Accompaniment: Guiding a Fractured Community to Wholeness*, will be released by Liturgical Press.





# Leadership in the Church

## An Education in the School of Hard Knocks

by Joseph Charron, C.P.P.S.

As I look at the forty years plus since my ordination to the priesthood, I realize that three quarters of those years were spent in some kind of leadership position, whether in the community, at the university, with the Bishops' Conference, or in a diocese. It has been a learning experience the whole way, sometimes joyful and sometimes painful, but always filled with opportunities for growth. Writing these words make me recall a conversation with parents who told me that about the time they got good at parenting, they were finished doing it! I have that same feeling about leadership.

One thing is for certain: a person does not walk the road of leadership alone. Even though many times it may feel lonely, leadership is by nature other-related. Relationships are the basis of any kind of leadership. I was always grateful, for example, that I was elected to community leadership before I was chosen for episcopal leadership. As provincial, I lived among those for whom I exercised authority. I ate with them. I prayed with them. I recreated with them. In a sense I had to live with my decisions. This had an influence on how I later exercised leadership as a bishop. I believe it tempered how I exercised authority in difficult situations.

There has been much written about the use of authority. Specifically, there is the well-known dictum that "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." I am not sure if that is totally correct, but I received some valuable advice early on in my tenure as provincial that stuck with me throughout the years. The advice was that I needed to attend to and foster



the deeper loves in my life, because there is always a danger that one who does not find love in life might replace that essential lack with striving to attain and use power as a substitute for truly loving.

## The Ministry of Foot Washing

**M**ore by instinct than insight, I chose the Washing of the Feet from St. John's Gospel as the inspiration and direction for my leadership ministry as a bishop. At my episcopal ordination, I felt its impact keenly as I reflected that having received all the wonderful signs and symbols of that order, I needed a bowl, a pitcher, and a towel to fulfill the role to which Jesus was calling me.

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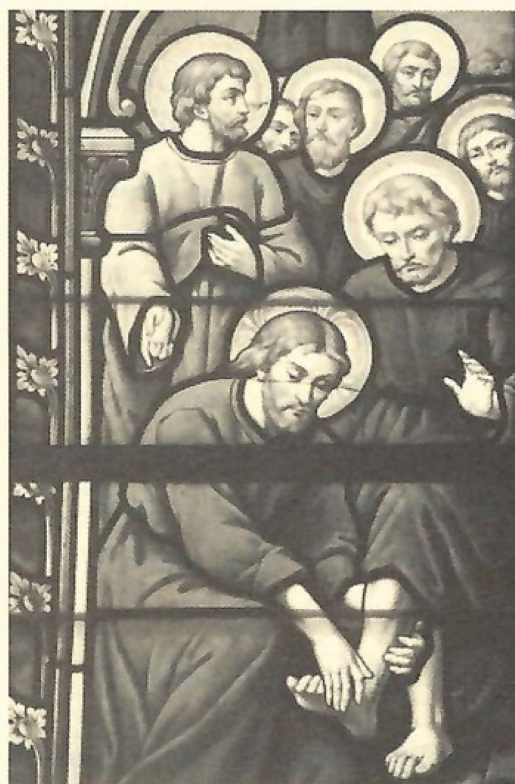
*Relationships are the basis of any kind of leadership.*

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Jesus' own servant example is so powerful and so on target. As the years rolled on, I learned more about this Last Supper happening and gained insight into how closely servant leadership is connected with Eucharist. Thus it was not a far step to say that if the Eucharist is the "source and summit of the life and mission of the church," then humble service must somehow be at the heart of church leadership.

There was a good bit of reflection and discussion throughout my years of leadership on the value of collaboration versus competition. For sure, one in leadership would want to be collaborative and resist being competitive, but that is not always an easy task, especially when one senses resistive competition to a desired goal. In other words, it is easy for collaboration to invite collaboration and competition to breed competition. This becomes increasingly sensitive in the atmosphere of polarization that is evident in our world and church today. Personally, I always tried to hold some "middle ground"—but then found opposition from both extremes. Ultimately, that stance warranted an accusation from both of "straddling the fence," even though I was truly trying to hold things together amid strong differences.

Any sensitive leader knows that life has its moments of disappointment. For example, someone does not like an assignment and is





disappointed with the leader who made it. Sometimes the leader is hurt by the personal opposition to a decision, particularly when that opposition is personal and hurtful. After these many years of leadership, I still struggle to let be people's disappointments of me and let go peoples' disappointments in me. This is so very difficult. I know it is so for me and have talked to other leaders about their struggles with those resentful disappointments. No doubt, the powerful Precious Blood image of healing reconciliation has

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helped me cope with this. And, I honestly admit, it is an ongoing struggle.

When I finished two terms as provincial, someone asked me, "How did these last eight years change you?" I was surprised how quickly I responded, "My hope has become theological!" I meant that I learned from experience that I could not do it on my own. I had to rely on God for help. Strange as it may sound, I had it backwards. My usual approach was to throw myself into the demands of leadership and when things got rocky—as they often did—I would go to prayer. Backwards! I was beginning to learn to go to God first and foremost. Then indeed my hope would be theological, because it was based primarily upon divine assistance and not my own resources.

When I finished my years of active leadership as ordinary, someone asked me another question: "Do you have any regrets about your years as bishop and what would you do differently if you could?" Again I was surprised when I responded rather quickly that if I had to do over I would try to make my leadership more intentional. This response came from experience of how a leader literally gets bombarded with letters, calls, emails, etc., and if not careful ends up spending most available time reacting. Some of those reactions or responses are important; others take up time and energy that would be better used in promoting and keeping alive a vision for the group. For Proverbs reminds us, "Without a vision, the people perish." I have learned through the years that a leader has limited energies and needs to use them wisely, not neglecting those who need attention but placing a check on those who tend to "eat you up."

## The Listening Leader

As you know, the word *obedience* comes from the Latin word *obedire*, which means to listen. One needs first to hear if one is to obey. However, obedience calls for an honest dialogue. In this exchange, not only does the subject need to hear, but the leader needs to listen as well. A leader



who is first a good listener is one who best supports sound obedience. I truly regret all the times that I was busy and distracted formulating an answer while someone was explaining to me what they were thinking and why or why not they wanted to respond positively to what I was asking of them. Someone once said about prayer that God gave us two ears and one mouth and we should use them proportionately. That maxim applies to leaders quite well!

As I bring this reflection to a conclusion, I believe one of the major responsibilities of a leader is to be a “bearer of hope” for the group. Now this

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hope is not just wishful thinking or simplistic optimism. This hope is the theological hope I referred to earlier. It is theological hope that bases itself upon the power of God’s promises and God’s fidelity to those promises. When things got extraordinarily tough, I tried to remind myself that the Kingdom is God’s Kingdom and not my Kingdom, and it will come not in my preferred time frame but in God’s good time.

When I was writing my doctoral thesis in the first years after ordination, I chose Gabriel Marcel’s philosophy as the background. While reading his writings I came across his description of hope which has stayed with me all these years, especially through the years of leadership. Marcel described hope as “*j’espere en toi pour nous*” (I hope in you for us). Hope is a community virtue. Our hope is a shared hope! That is why when a leader is a bearer of hope that leader gives hope to the entire community.

Finally, the sister of hope is joy. Joy, as St. Paul writes, is a sure indication of the presence of the Spirit. Thus a leader who brings hope also brings joy! In this arduous task it helps tremendously to have a good sense of humor. I cannot tell you how many times an injection of good humor helped me through the most difficult of times!

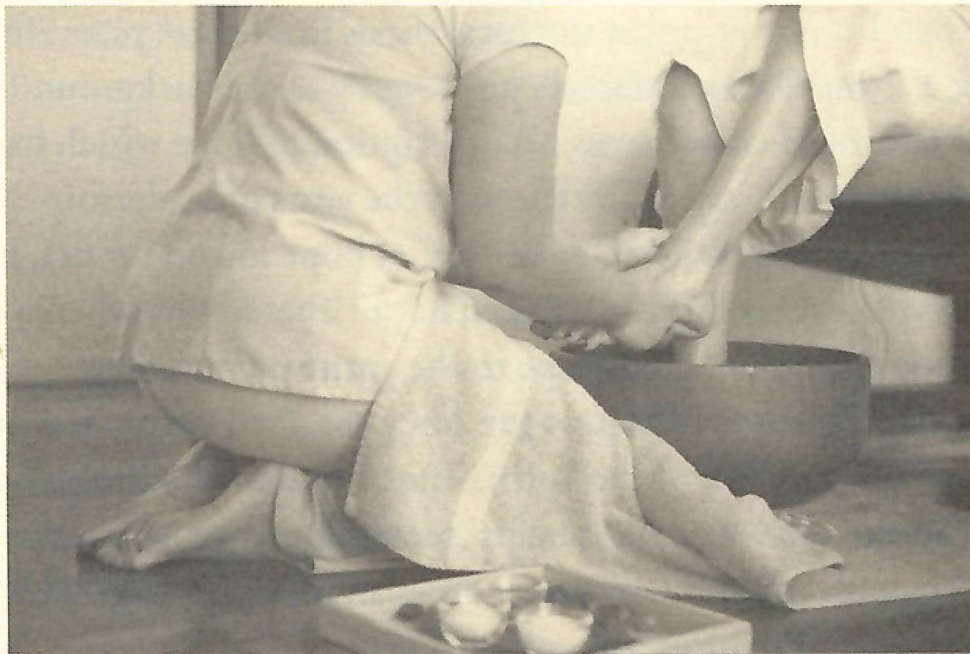
Church leadership has been for me an experience of the precious school of hard knocks. If one attends that school openly, there will be growth. I gratefully believe my many years in leadership have helped me to grow.





## For Reflection

- How do I view leadership? Do I have positive thoughts about leadership and would I see it as a chance for growth if I were elected to do it?
- What would be my major personal goals as a leader? How would I go about being a loving listener who can make tough decisions?
- How would I deal with the inevitable disappointments that come with leadership? Am I able to let go of others' disappointments in me? Likewise, am I able to let go of my disappointments in others?
- If I am chosen for leadership, what would I desire people to say about my leadership when it has been completed?
- Do I give those in leadership the benefit of the doubt?





# Evolving Leadership

## Creating an Environment For Shared Responsibility

by Jan Renz, A.S.C.

As a temporarily professed sister more than thirty years ago, I was informed by the provincial that I was being given a different assignment. That wasn't unusual. In our province at the time, the expectation was that a young sister would normally have at least two different experiences in local community and ministry before making perpetual profession. However, what didn't seem normal to me was the fact that I was being assigned to be principal of a special education school. After all, I was only 23, had just finished my undergraduate degree two years earlier and certainly had no administrative experience. But my novice director had strongly communicated the message to me: you have a vow of obedience and when the community asks something of you, unless you have a compelling reason to say no, you do what the community needs.

Even though I had a special education background, I started that new assignment with great trepidation. What did I know of administration? I had only taught two years, had never had to fill out a school calendar for the state or worked on the myriad of reports that needed to go to the diocese or the regional Board of Education. Added to that, the only person younger than me on the staff was my secretary. It made for an interesting first year—and yes, I certainly had on the job training. At times I wondered why the provincial had thought I was capable of taking on this role as principal. At other times, I was grateful that she had done this because I found myself thoroughly enjoying the ability to not only work with the students but to shape the philosophy and direction of a whole program.



Our school was for students with severe behavior problems, and they were referred to us by public schools who felt their programs could not handle the severe behaviors. When some of the Special Education directors came to our school and had to meet with someone like me to get

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their student in our program, they were skeptical. As one director bluntly told me, “You are young, you are a nun and you’re dumb. Why should I listen to you?” At that time, most of the Special Education directors were men, and there was definitely a “good old boys club.” I certainly did not fit their profile. While I freely acknowledge that I was young and a woman religious, hopefully I was not “dumb.” I recall pointing out to the

gentleman that I was still the principal and it was my decision as to which students were taken into our program, not his. It was one of my first lessons in understanding that being a leader is not always popular and a certain amount of self-confidence and resilience is necessary if a person is to survive the battering that sometimes occurs when a position or decision is not favorably received. The phrase that some people use is “intestinal fortitude.”

## Finding One’s Leadership Style

**D**uring my time as principal at that school, our province leadership allowed me to return to school and get training in education administration. It certainly helped me to understand the theories behind administration, but I found there is a big difference between administration and leadership. A person can be a good administrator but not necessarily a good leader. The converse is also true. However, the best leaders and administrators seem to be those who can blend the two.

I was privileged to minister as a school administrator for 29 years in various schools before being asked to serve on our Region’s Leadership Team. During those years, I observed fellow administrators and came to realize that there were many styles of leadership and that there was no “one right way” to guide a school, a student body, or a staff. Some principals were cheerleaders—everything was positive and they were always encouraging the students and staff. Others were coaches—always planning and guiding. Some were benevolent dictators—an iron fist in a velvet glove. Still others were paper pushers who got bogged down in details and seemed never to see the big picture. We administrators came in all sizes, shapes and styles.



I found that I liked being in a leadership role in schools. I enjoyed the ability to mentor not only students but also staff. I appreciated the chance to not only write lesson plans but to help develop a school's philosophy and to put into practice the great-sounding words that we so often put onto paper.

My present leadership style has certainly been shaped by my religious congregation. Our ASC Constitution stresses collegiality, subsidiarity and accountability as guiding principles. Through the years, I have learned that when these principles are truly honored, both staff and students seem to feel a greater ownership in the organization itself and in its programs.

While being a dictator of sorts is definitely more time efficient, it does not engender the in-depth support and commitment from others that is needed to build a vibrant and forward-thinking organization. Collective wisdom moves us forward. The monocratic bureaucracy of the early to mid-1900s has given way,

even in large corporations, to a pluralistic collegiality where we understand that together we shape the future, not in isolated units but through active listening and dialogue, healthy communication and good peer interaction.

Not everyone understands this in the same way, however. When I became principal of a diocesan high school in 1990, for example, we moved to more participative faculty meetings and inclusion of all staff (as opposed to just the faculty) in appropriate decision-making. After the first few months of these meetings, one of the secretaries asked me, "But if you allow everyone to be a part of the decision, how will anyone know who is the boss?" We tried through the years to change the concept of "boss" to leader, guide and mentor. By the time I left that school in 2006, I think most people knew clearly what my role was in the program. But I hope they also knew how they contributed to the school and what value they brought.

However, some people still resisted the opportunity to participate in decision-making activities. One person in our development office, for example, resigned because, as she said, I was asking her to think and give her opinions, rather than just providing me with information. To me that was a sad commentary on the type of leadership some people expect.

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*While being a dictator of sorts is definitely more time efficient, it does not engender the in-depth support and commitment from others that is needed to build a vibrant and forward-thinking organization.*

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## Leadership as Relational not Structural

When I was asked in 2006 to be a part of our Region's Leadership Team, I found myself again starting a new assignment with trepidation, questioning whether or not I had the ability to do what

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was being asked of me. I soon realized, however, that many of the leadership principles remain the same. I believe that we as a Region of Adorers have made a conscious decision to live out the concept of shared governance and responsibility, to emphasize the importance of relationships over structures with the intent that this will continually call us to fidelity to our mission and to consecrated life

(Governance Plan, I). Part of my role as a leader is to facilitate the kind of processes and dialogue that help this to happen.

This commitment is also modeled at our international level. In September 2006, the General Administration and Regional Leaders of the Adorers gathered in Madrid, Spain for an Extended Council meeting. During this meeting, a document entitled "Elements of Spirituality of ASC Leadership" was developed. The document says in part:

As Adorers called to (the ministry of) leadership, we are given numerous opportunities to **promote life** (LC 7, 8) involving everyone in active participation and sharing of responsibility (LC 41).

We are aided in this task through:

- **an attitude of discernment** which implies openness and obedience to the Holy Spirit and to the signs of the times, an understanding of the ASC charism and documents, and willingness to involve those who are touched by our actions and decisions;
- **an attitude of respect for the dignity of each person.** This calls us to enter into healthy relationships with each other and encourages open communication and active listening;
- **an attitude that fosters unity and communion** in the spirit of collegiality, subsidiarity, and accountability;



- **an attitude of reconciliation** is at the heart of the vitality of our mission;
- **an attitude that communicates a passion for our ASC mission** and a vision that gives direction in joy and hope (LC 22) to carrying out this mission.

This all sounds good and is certainly something to which we aspire. But the question arises as to how we balance this desire as a congregation with the need to work in systems that are still hierarchical in nature, where an understanding of “collective wisdom” is not the norm and fostering unity and communion means that the views of the “boss” or the “superior” prevail.

## Vatican Visitation

A perfect example of this occurred these past two years as women religious in the United States grappled with the Apostolic Visitation. While we recognized that the church has a right to initiate such action, we also felt that the manner in which this action was promulgated did not seem to be built on open communication, active listening or dialogue—all important values which we try to promote in our congregation today. These feelings intensified as more information made its way into the media and through information given to our congregations. It was easy to feel as if we were under attack and being asked to defend a way of life that had already been approved by the church through its acceptance and approval of our constitutions.

How could we address this Visitation and still remain true to our charism and core values? We received advice from numerous canon and civil lawyers. Some advice was similar; some conflicting. We were not sure what to do because we didn't really know what criteria was being used to evaluate us. The questions contained within the *Instrumentum Laboris* (the document of inquiry sent to each religious congregation) were complicated and multi-faceted, sometimes confusing and sometimes very pointed. It was not hard to imagine a hidden agenda behind the questions.





After much prayer, discussion and discernment, we decided to respond to the questions as openly and honestly as possible, using our constitution as the basis. We held meetings with the sisters in our Region, sharing with them what we could of both the process of and our responses.

When we received word in March 2010 that we were one of the “chosen few” to have an actual on-site visit, we tried to address this next challenge with the same attitude of fidelity to our ASC values. For a variety of reasons, we chose the Wichita Center for the site of our visit. At that point, we also began to cultivate a

relationship with the sister who would be our Visiting Team Leader, and we encouraged our sisters to welcome the team with the same sense of hospitality that we show other guests to our houses.

The actual visit went amazingly well. The two visiting sisters were very enjoyable and responded well to our openness and hospitality. Their conversations with us did not take on the tone of inquisition and we had as

much dialogue and sharing as was allowed within the framework of the guidelines they were given by the Apostolic Visitation Office. One of the visitors commented that she had learned a number of things from us that she was going to take back to her own community. When the sisters left us, we said goodbye to friends, not visitors.

We don't know what the aftermath of the Apostolic Visitation will bring, but my sense is that our sisters will face this with the same calmness and peace with which we addressed the document of inquiry and the on-site visit. In our Region, the *Providence of God* prayer is well-beloved and well-used. The prayer says in part, “Providence that has provided, still provides and always will provide, provide also for us, Most Holy Triune God, in all our common and private necessities. So I believe, so I hope, so it shall always be. May your holy will be done in everything.” We trust in the Providence of God, not with naïveté but out of an understanding of and faith in God's goodness and love. It is this trust that allows us to go forward with some tranquility, knowing that God will provide the strength we need to address the challenges that face us.

I don't know why our Leadership Team was called to serve in this time and this place in our U.S. Region of Adorers but I know that we feel blessed to have been given this opportunity to serve in the ministry

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of community leadership. We walk together with the members of our Region in integrity and faithfulness to our charism, our history and our common values.



## For Reflection

- How would you describe your leadership style? Who are the people who have influenced you the most in developing your leadership skills?
- How do you understand leadership as more relational than structural? How do you seek to balance a desire to live and lead relationally in systems that are by their nature still hierarchical?
- How are your core values, charism, and the spirituality of your congregation expressed in your servant leadership?
- What are the challenges you see today in seeking to be a servant leaders in the world today?



# Leadership as a Model of Charity

by Angelo Anthony, C.P.P.S.

Growing up in a family of eight children we often played games in the woods behind our house. One of the games that I remember playing was *Follow the Leader*. In this game one person is chosen the leader and the rest of the group must do everything that the leader does. As the sixth child in our family, I was often in the role of follower as my older siblings gave the orders. On the rare occasion that I was allowed to lead, I recall a feeling of excitement and empowerment that came with this new role.

As an adult I have come to see that following the leader is not simply a matter of the members of a group mimicking the leader. All of us can recall historical events when this kind of activity led to disastrous consequences on the world scene. Healthy leadership is much more than this. Peter Northouse defines leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.”<sup>1</sup> In this article, I will offer some reflections on leadership from my own experience as seen through the eyes of faith.

## Servant Leaders in Scripture

In the bible we see all kinds of leaders surface in the spiritual journey of God's people. Many of the leaders that are called by God to shepherd God's people offer plenty of excuses as to why they cannot be chosen for leadership. Moses was not a good speaker. Jeremiah was too young. Ruth was a foreigner. Amos was a dresser of sycamores. Mary was a virgin. It is precisely in their weakness that God is able to use them for the role of leadership and chooses them to be servant leaders of God. As someone once said, “God does not call the qualified, God qualifies the called.”

Jesus, the Word Made Flesh, came to teach us the meaning of servant leadership. The call to discipleship is a call to leadership. Using



the image of a basin we can identify two very different forms of leadership that come from the life of Jesus. When presented with the opportunity to release Jesus after his arrest, Pilate asked for a basin and washed his hands of the whole affair. When preparing his disciples for his passion and death, Jesus asked for a basin and taught them what it means to be a servant leader.

At various times we are presented with a basin, a call to be involved in the life of the community. What will you do with the basin that comes to you?

Yet the teaching doesn't end here. From his place on the cross Jesus pours out his life blood embracing the world in a generous and unconditional witness of love. True leadership is an act of charity; a call to put love into action.

Several years ago I was on retreat and came across a poster that captured my imagination. It read: "All life first began in the heart of God." Listening to the voice of the Spirit at work in our world we come to know that everything is created by God as an act of love. St. John puts it simply:



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*True leadership is an act of charity; a call to put love into action.*

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"God is love" (1 John 4:7). This message of love was emphasized during the farewell discourse of Jesus when he prayed, "May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me" (John 17:21). We share in

the same intimate love that Jesus has with the Father and the Father with the Son. This vision of unity is for Jesus the common goal that he gave to his followers, his chosen leaders.

St. Francis de Sales emphasized this truth when he wrote, "Let us love one another from the bottom of our hearts. To inspire us to have this holy love, we have a powerful motive. Our Lord poured out His blood on the cross, to the last drop. He wished, as it were, to make a sacred chalice which would hold, unite, bind and bring together all the members of His Church; namely, all Christians. He willed their union to be so strong that no division among them would ever be possible."<sup>2</sup>



## Living with Authentic Charity

All of us are called to serve in some kind of leadership role by reason of our baptism; to follow the example of Jesus who embraced the world and poured out his life blood as the authentic witness of charity. I have come to see that the call to leadership is a call to model the virtue of charity. During my tenure as provincial director this was put into practice by the simple acts of taking time to stop and listen to others, the sharing of notes and phone calls, visits to the hospital and infirmary, and accepting the call to be a minister to the ministers. A leader must be in tune with the other members of the community, building healthy and respectful relationships through which they can know that they are loved.

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St. Gaspar del Bufalo, the founder of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, condensed the spirit of the evangelical vows into the simple phrase: live the bond of charity. As a Society of Apostolic Life, this is the glue that holds us together. It is natural that our rule of life flows out of Gaspar's devotion to the Blood of Christ because the Precious Blood of Jesus is the perfect act of charity.

In choosing to place our congregation under the bond of charity rather than vows, Gaspar was drawing upon the wisdom of Jesus who simplified the many laws of Israel into the great commandment: "Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind...and love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39). Along with St. Francis de Sales, another of Gaspar's heroes must have been St. Vincent de Paul who said, "Charity is certainly greater than any rule. Moreover, all rules must lead to charity."

In his encyclical letter, *The Gospel of Life*, Pope John Paul II wrote: "By contemplating the precious blood of Christ, the sign of his self-giving love (*cf. John 13:1*) the believer learns to recognize and appreciate the almost divine dignity of every human being..."<sup>3</sup> The Holy Father added, "In our service of charity, we must be inspired and distinguished by a specific attitude: we must care for the other as a person for whom God has made us responsible" (Luke 10:29-37).<sup>4</sup>

As an international community called to model the bond of charity—love in action—we have an opportunity as leaders to speak a language that goes beyond words, a language that invites others to risk



moving beyond their places of safety and comfort for the sake of the common good. The charism of the Blood of Christ is a natural fit for modeling this gift of unity that can be found in diversity. We don't look upon others different than ourselves as suspect, because we have seen that the blood of Christ binds us together as one people, each person bringing gifts and talents for the good of the whole.

One sunny afternoon a father took his child out for a sailboat ride on the open waters of the San Francisco Bay. As they sailed along the little girl squealed with delight and said: "Daddy, Daddy, I can see farther than my eyes can look!" This parable speaks to me of what faith and leadership is all about. Because of the life we share in the Risen Lord we can see farther than our eyes can look. We know that love is stronger than sin or death, and now we hold a very different script in our hands.

The role of leadership is fostered and nurtured by our ability to see farther than our eyes can look. In the midst of the polarization that

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*A leader must be a person of hope who reaches into their memories for stories of God's faithfulness and who uses their imagination to envision a world living in unity.*

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we are experiencing in our world, cities, families, political system and church it is vital that we take time to see farther than our eyes can look; to place before our eyes over and over again the vision and dream of Jesus and his call for unity. C.S. Lewis once noted "It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this one." Leaders must be people of hope who reach into their memories for stories

of God's faithfulness and who use their imagination to envision a world living in unity.

## Birthing a New Unity

Religious life has experienced the impact of polarization that is found in secular society. There are those who are insiders and outsiders, conservatives and liberals. In spite of this, a leader is to harvest the talents and gifts of all the members of the community using them for the sake of the common good. In our case this common goal is found in the vision of St. Gaspar who bound us in charity to be fellow apostles of the Blood of Christ. This unique gift is a treasure that we are called to share to further God's dream for unity.

Bringing this vision to light involves an appreciation for the birthing process. As such, it is important to recognize that there are times during



the birthing process when it is necessary to push and at other times all that the mother should do is breathe. Working toward the common goal of the community it is important for the leader to be in sync with the rhythmic thought and life of the group. I recognized this rhythm as our province discerned what we were going to do with our former seminary building. There were times in the process when it was necessary to push forward with ideas to get them on the table and other times when it was necessary to sit through hours of meetings to listen for the consensus of the group, to simply breathe.

Because our lives are so beautifully connected to mystery, it is wise for a leader to follow the example of Mary developing an ability to “ponder.” At various times in her life Mary pondered. She held things in her heart, like the words of Simeon who told her that a sword would pierce her heart (Luke 2:35). She took a loving, courageous stance at the foot of the cross (Jn 19:25). We who are strongly influenced by western thought look upon pondering as something that is a function of the mind as we try to figure out the mysteries of life. To ponder biblically is to patiently hold in one’s heart whatever is going on in life, complete with its tension and uncertainty, believing that God is bringing all things to the good.

When confronted with challenges, all too often human nature is ready to fight or to take flight. Leaders are called to nurture the gift of patience and model a third way, the call to stand in the middle and to hold with active attention all that life presents. I used to think of patience as passive waiting which speaks of powerlessness. But true patience is the opposite of passive waiting. Patience means to enter actively into the thick of life with open ears, open eyes, an open mind and an open heart.

This realization gave me something to hang on to as our province was challenged to respond to the wounds of the sexual abuse crisis. Listening with open ears, eyes, heart and mind, holding the stories of victims and perpetrators, not being able to change the past, the Precious Blood of Jesus became a strong and steady anchor in the midst of the storm. When we ponder, the heart becomes the wine cellar of the Precious Blood, that place of transformation, maturation, wisdom, and peace in the midst of the storm.

As someone who enjoys gardening I would also say that the heart can be likened to a compost pile. Gathering the failures, mistakes and lost dreams of life we bring them to the heart of prayer and allow them to be transformed and reconciled by God’s love. Perhaps this is one of the reasons

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that St. Gaspar encouraged people to read the book of the crucifix. The cross, an instrument of death, is also the symbol of triumph and new life! All of life is a school for learning how to love.

Life in community has been characterized by some as experiencing God's people in extraordinary variety. Unlike the business world where a problem employee can be fired and forgotten about, the members of the congregation are our brothers or sisters. When personnel problems arise, the first impulse may be to get rid of the person, and yet the bond of charity calls us to try and work with those who are problematic. Using resources such as counseling, peer mentoring or inpatient treatment programs can help to get at the source of the problem and lead to a new beginning. It is time consuming and sometimes very frustrating, and yet leaders are called to recognize the face of Christ in each person we meet.

## Practical Implications for Servant Leaders

**O**n a practical level, a leader needs to recognize that leadership also involves effective management. There are practical aspects of any organization that must be maintained. The shadow side of management is the need to control. Leadership calls us to let go of control and to be

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*It is essential that anyone in leadership know themselves inwardly so as not to feel threatened by the strengths and talents of other people.*

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attentive to the presence of God in the life of the group. This is difficult in our instant world of email, cyberspace and telecommunication. People expect life's problems to be solved in an instant, but it just doesn't happen that way. It is more like the farmer who prepares the soil, plants the seed, waters it and waits in hope. This is especially important when managing

a crisis situation. A leader takes the necessary time to assess, reflect and respond. Or as someone once advised me: "See everything, correct a little, and forget the rest."

It is essential that anyone in leadership know themselves inwardly so as not to feel threatened by the strengths and talents of other people. It is important to recognize our limitations and our fears so that we can be open to receive the help others can offer. A leader does not expect the group to simply mimic the thoughts and actions of the leader. If we are going to have a healthy future we need to respect the voice of the entire group. When we rely upon ourselves for all the answers then our vision is necessarily limited.

We are in a time of radical change within the history of religious life that calls us to reverence the traditions of the past, celebrate the gifts



found in the present and look ahead to the future with hope. Like mud that clings to our feet as we walk through a wet field, the reality of death, loss and change over the last number of years has a way of weighing us down. How do we get back to the focus of mission in the midst of these challenges?

Sensing this heaviness as I prepared for our 2006 Provincial Assembly, I used the Emmaus story from Luke's gospel as a way to identify the grief and loss and pain that has marked our story as a province. Making references to scriptural passages is a wonderful way for a leader to anchor our story to the larger story of God's covenantal love. With this in mind then, through a power point presentation using pictures, scripture and narrative...

...we identified the loss and pain experienced by the sexual abuse crisis, the renovation of St. Charles and the closing of the farm and dairy, the leaving of parishes and the closing of the Province of the Pacific;

...we talked about the strangers who walked with us giving us hope such as the lay associates we call Companions, the infirmary staff, our lay college presidents and the members of other provinces who were present to us at regional meetings and assemblies;

...we heard the invitation to share communion in the bond of charity by celebrating St. Gaspar's 50<sup>th</sup> jubilee of canonization, held symposiums on parish life and C.P.P.S. brotherhood, welcomed new members, participated in the Precious Blood Leadership Conference, district meetings, Province Assemblies, Amici reunions; and finally,

...we responded to the call to mission by seeking reconciliation for those abused, opened a new ministry of reconciliation in Chicago, sent a delegation to Bogota, launched our first major fundraising campaign in 40 years, implemented parish clustering plans and strengthened relationships within and outside the province.

The Emmaus story is our story. Instead of this being the end, it is simply the beginning of another chapter in God's dream for us. Out of the chaos we find new life for mission. A leader is called to be that word of hope to others, a hope that is born out of God's covenantal love sealed in the Precious Blood of Jesus. As Pope John Paul II notes, "It is precisely this blood that is the most powerful source of hope, indeed it is the foundation of the absolute certitude that in God's plan life will be victorious." <sup>5</sup> Indeed, we can see farther than our eyes can look.

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*Out of the chaos we find  
new life for mission.*

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During the last twelve years as provincial, I had the opportunity to share a view of religious life that has at times drawn me to my knees in prayer while at other times has found me celebrating with joy all that God is doing in and through our congregation. This experience of holding the extremes is not anything new, but rather typifies the experience of leadership that is found in the smallest base community or family unit all the way to the hallways of the Vatican which serves some one billion believers. Each of us has received the call to servant leadership, to be living icons of charity, love in action. With hearts stained by the Precious Blood of Jesus, may the witness of our lives further God's vision of unity for us and all creation.



## For Reflection

- Name some of the ways that God has chosen you to be a servant leader. How have you modeled charity in your leadership role?
- Realizing God's dream for unity, how does the spirituality of the Precious Blood influence the way you offer service as a leader?
- Identify some of the things you ponder in life. Is it time to push or to simply breathe?

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2. St. Francis de Sales, *Spiritual Treatises IV*; O. VI, p. 65
3. Pope John Paul II, *The Gospel of Life*, Random House, New York, 1995, pg. 45
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5. Ibid., pg. 46.



# The Leadership of Jesus

## Laying Down One's Life for One's Friends

by Mary Whited, C.P.P.S.

One phone call can change a life! When I unlocked the door and entered my apartment, the phone was still ringing. I had returned from a class on the Gospel of John at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, California. I quickly set my books on the desk, picked up the receiver and answered, "Hello." I recognized a familiar voice and wondered, "Why would the leader from my religious congregation call me on the Wednesday in Holy Week?"

After chatting about the weather and how my classes were going, Susan moved to the purpose of her call. A council member had resigned. Would I consider returning home and joining the Leadership Team for the next three years? Susan needed my answer by Monday morning.

I had eagerly looked forward to continuing my studies for another year. Surely this new twist would interrupt my plans. And not completing my studies would obviously affect any future ministry. Why would "they" ask me to do this now when I had just received permission to pursue the degree?

As I entered into the spirit of Holy Thursday, I struggled to sort out the implications of saying "yes" or "no." The mysteries of the Holy Days provided me with a context for grappling with this call to serve. I knew that a wise decision would not emerge if I weighed "pros" and "cons" for me alone. Jesus' words to his disciples after washing their feet kept welling up within me, "No one has greater love than this than to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). I began to see the connections between this call to lead and the words of Jesus inviting his disciples into the mystery of suffering, death, and rising.



By Easter Monday I was ready to say “yes.” That “yes” began a journey that I had not anticipated when I agreed to discontinue my studies at Berkeley. Most of the time, we are clueless as to how a single “yes” may open us up to a series of “yeses.” As those three years went by, my “yes” unfolded as I agreed to further leadership in my community and eventually to serving other leaders of women religious across the United States as president of the Leadership Conference for Women Religious (LCWR).

The following thoughts come from one who has been both stretched and challenged by the privilege of leading. Still a learner, what am I learning today about the service of leadership? As I offer these insights, I invite your reflection on how you, too, are learning to lead.

## Rooted in the Paschal Mystery

**A**s I reflect on my experience of leading, many images and thoughts cross my mind. I am immediately drawn to Jesus’ washing the feet of his disciples and inviting them to “lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” I have come to see that the spiritual basis for authentic Christian leadership is the paschal mystery, that is, the suffering, dying and rising of Jesus. Washing the feet of his disciples on the night before he died was Jesus’ invitation to his followers to do the same, namely, to lead by laying down one’s life for one’s friends.

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*I have come to see that the spiritual basis for authentic Christian leadership is the paschal mystery.*

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I recall that, in John’s gospel, Jesus’ gesture of washing the feet of his disciples, along with the words he speaks, represents the ultimate act of service which goes beyond his real and acknowledged superiority as teacher and Lord. Service between friends demands no return, and domination of friends is totally foreign. By serving his disciples, Jesus deliberately reverses social positions and roles. He models what it means to be equals as friends. The desire to be first or last has no place in friendship and, therefore, superiority has no place in leading.

It is interesting to note that at first Peter refuses to let Jesus wash his feet. Yet when Peter comes to understand that a different sort of leadership is at the heart of the reign of God, he asks that not only his feet but also his whole body be bathed. Thus Peter comes to see that leadership is not about making demands or seeking to gain control of a situation that is really not able to be controlled. Shifting the context of authority to service, Jesus invites a generous response to living God’s reign through suffering, dying and rising.



## Acting Prophetically

The gesture of Jesus' washing his disciples' feet, along with the words he spoke, was not simply a humble action. It was the kind of prophetic action to which leaders are called. True leaders that they are, prophets usually speak and act when all is not well. They focus on the future; not so much the distant future, but the future that is breaking into life today. Seeing the hidden and neglected needs that result in human suffering, they give voice to the groans of the people.

Prophets envision a different reality, one seen from the perspective of God. They break through the numbness and urge us to awaken. They seek hope in the midst of despair. Even as they remind us of what is terribly wrong, they also alert us to the something new God is doing in us. "Can we not see it" (Isaiah 43:19)? Though reluctant at first, when the dust finally settles prophets are willing to lay down their lives for their friends, whatever the personal costs.

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*Prophets envision  
a different reality,  
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I am aware of how prophecy is highlighted in many world religions—including Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Another example of something else we all have in common. Prophets seek to resolve the tensions that are so apparent in the name of religion. This often takes the form of lamenting—lamenting divisions and mourning violence in the name of religion—while acknowledging that there are different paths we walk toward the Sacred Presence we call "God."

Like the prophets of old, leaders today whose actions are rooted in faith and who desire to nurture the faith of others are invited to "connect



the dots" around the different experiences and expressions of the Sacred. Obviously, we cannot take on everything. To take on too much dilutes energies and resources. Yet the prophetic nature of our vocation calls us as leaders to pave the way and to see with new eyes the

changing realities in our church and the world. We are urged to reinterpret the Christian story in light of the richness of other stories of the Sacred and



in terms of new understandings of who God is and how our story fits into a global community and a universe that continues to expand.

The spring 2010 gathering of the International Union of Superior Generals in Rome (UISG) highlighted the mystic and prophetic dimensions of religious life. Eight hundred leaders of congregations of women religious from many races and cultures gathered from far and wide. We told our stories of leading and listened carefully as others told their stories. I was deeply moved as African women spoke about standing up to the murder, plunder, rape and devastation of tribes and land. Leaders from the United States spoke about our efforts to remain faithful to what we have come to know, even as we feel deeply hurt by the two investigations by church officials. In prayer and worship we lamented the divisions in our church and set our painful realities in the broader context of Jesus' suffering, dying and rising.

I left the meeting feeling the powerful solidarity that was present and the joyful hope that had grown among us as the result of sharing our struggles and hopes. My feet were washed and I was able to wash the feet of others. As I reflect back on this experience, I see how the gathering itself was a prophetic witness to the solidarity of women religious across the globe and the commitment to which we have given our lives.

Attending to the mystical and prophetic aspects of this life are core to the identity of who we are as disciples of Jesus. Since the gathering, the tangible

desire to lead more purposefully has only deepened in me. Any action that is prophetic requires friendship with God. Contemplation opens us to see from the perspective of God. Leaders know well that a frequent and faithful entering into the heart to listen and discern God's word is necessary for prophetic action. Moments of aloneness, time for making sense of what is happening, and time to test the authenticity of one's experience and the depth of one's conviction are prerequisites to engaging in prophetic action.

Obviously there are moments when we become weary and hope grows thin. Any leader who has taken a prophetic stance knows what it is like to be deluged by harsh e-mails, critical judgments by those closest to us, and phone calls from those who see the situation differently. Personal attacks can cause us to step back and want to disappear in an effort to heal. Yet leaders who speak their truth from the place of deep caring cannot retreat for long. Their suffering is a part of the cost of challenging systems, structures and styles of leadership that oppress especially the vulnerable.

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Even more than speaking our truths, there is greater cost in keeping silent. If we wish to lead as Jesus led, we must nudge forward Jesus' leadership model of serving as friend in whatever ways we can, because relationship is at the heart of the prophetic work of laying down our lives for our friends.

## With a Reconciling Stance

**A**t the 2010 Precious Blood Convocation I attended a breakout session on reconciliation in the church. The room was packed, indicating the topic was of much interest to the participants. As the leader opened the session, he simply asked each of us to consider two questions: "What brought you here? What is one thing you are doing to bring about reconciliation in the church?" In the honest sharing that followed, persons named their pain and listened carefully to the pain of others. In articulating our strivings to make a difference there was a sense that something new was happening. Fresh insights emerged, and the heavy tone of the conversation shifted. New life was rising from the suffering and the dying. Hope pierced the darkness.

During the years I was president of LCWR, we met yearly with officials at the Vatican. What I brought was the desire to stay at the table, especially during the difficult conversations that were part of our visits. It was important to maintain integrity as representatives of leaders of women religious. As we also listened to the concerns of Vatican officials, we struggled with how to span the gaps that still threaten to divide. We did not hesitate to speak the truths we have come to know about ourselves as women and as religious who have a significant place in the mission of the church.

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*Hierarchy relies primarily on loyalty rather than on the service and friendship reflected in the gospel of John.*

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Through conversations at the Vatican, I have come to appreciate how the hierarchy can facilitate the work of an institution like the church in times of rampant change and complexity such as we are living through now. However, hierarchy is not the only way—nor even the best way—of exercising leadership. Hierarchy relies primarily on loyalty, rather than on the service and friendship reflected in the gospel of John. So it does not serve us well to relegate the church to hierarchy alone, because the church is also who we are.

Reconciliation calls us to engage rather than move away from that which is feared or different. Today leaders are calling communities to risk



the difficult conversations that can facilitate the deeper connections and can help us to recognize how we can deal with impasse. In the midst of difficult dialogues, leaders can invite us to a deeper and more respectful relationship with those who differ with us. Leaders can create the structures and the experiences that bring people together to identify and solve their own issues. While leaders tend to what is dying, even more they need to nurture the places where hope is sparked and new life is stirring.

At our General Chapter this past summer, we Sisters of the Most Precious Blood committed ourselves to a deeper understanding and living of our charism of reconciliation. Although we have previously had many conversations about our charism, this was the first time we named aspects of the shadow side of reconciliation, such as compromising at any cost, avoiding situations in which we need to be engaged, and refusing to admit when we have reached an impasse or when open-minded dialogue is no longer possible. As we continue to work with the gaps we see between the church and the reign of God, as we seek to help ourselves and others come to terms with hurts from the past, and as we move beyond the unspoken agreement not to talk about anything that could cause dissension, we are seeking to live our charism in profoundly new ways. What matters now is that we move forward, building on the past and especially reclaiming our mission in new and perhaps even startling ways.

## Standing Together

**T**he investigations of US women religious and their leaders by two offices of the Vatican initiated a period of intense suffering for many

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*The very call to leadership has strong social implications for Precious Blood people who seek to live and lead others into the mystery of Jesus' passion, death and rising.*

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of us women religious who give our lives daily in service to the Church. Throughout the process we have surely felt the support of our Precious Blood brothers and so many other people whose lives are connected to ours. As women religious and leaders, we have come to experience a deep unity among us, especially across congregational lines. Solidarity continues to grow on

an international scale. In our struggles, standing together has only helped to increase the vitality, the determination and the hopes that stir within and among us.

What does standing together mean for us who try to meet the challenges of each day in an increasingly complex world and church? What



does standing together mean at a time when what seemed secure in the past continues to unravel? The future is unpredictable. We live in an era of intense conflict and violence in society, and unfortunately in our church as well. At times, this conflict even seeps into our living spaces. It is a time when persons and groups are polarized over the burning of sacred books and the placement of a sacred structure too close to a painful memorial. Differences abound and feelings explode around health care for all, economic stability, politicizing preservation of life, and immigration reform.

This is a time of tremendous upheaval in a church that struggles to address abuse of power and still fails to recognize that leadership based on an outdated patriarchy no longer speaks to the needs of this time in many parts of the world. Within congregations something profound is dying and making way for the new that is painfully being born.

In such a climate, the model of Jesus' laying down his life for his friends gives us a powerful witness of what it means to lead. It is a given that we lead personally in the ministries or works in which we are involved. Yet perhaps even more significant than our personal leadership is how we focus our energies collectively and lead together in ways that can make a difference. Why else do we connect with communities whose spirituality is linked to the Precious Blood? The very call to leadership has strong social implications for Precious Blood people who seek to live and lead others into the mystery of Jesus' passion, death and rising.

As leaders whose spirituality is focused in the Precious Blood, we seek to foster genuine encounters with Jesus and to nurture communities of faith who live, die and rise together. We tap into the collective capacity that we have gained from learning to live and work hand in hand. Each of us can make a difference. Each of us does lead. Yet for the kind of leadership that Jesus modeled to become a reality in our church and world, we must move beyond individual efforts. It will take focused efforts and collective responses to address the pressing issues of our times. This will require us to become more conscious of the genuine power that comes from the connections that already exist among us and which we seek to deepen among us as Precious Blood people.

## Continuing the "Yes"

Leadership is ultimately about placing one's own story—as well as the stories of our communities—within the context of the suffering, dying and rising of Jesus. As I write this article, I am dealing with the recent news that my cancer has recurred. The news is daunting. So how will I lead given this new reality? What will I learn about leadership in the days ahead in



light of this unsettling information? Even though my doctor assures me that the chemo will diminish the small tumor, I do not know what lies ahead for me. But then, neither did Jesus when he said “yes” to leading. I hope that in these current circumstances of my life I am able to still say “yes” to the challenges that will unfold.

Life has a way of cycling us back to the places where we began. I began this article with the story of saying “yes” to leading, not knowing the other “yeses” that might follow. Today I am aware that I live with far less certainty and a much greater vulnerability than I had when I said that initial “yes.” As frightened as I am, there is also a profound peace about the future. As I engage with the treatment, I draw from the peace that served me so well in leadership all along the way. Hopefully I have been learning the lessons about leading that will facilitate this toughest lesson of my life—laying down one’s life for my friends.

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*Today I am aware  
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## For Reflection

- For me, what “yes” has resulted in many other “yeses”?
- As one who leads, how am I being called to lay down my life for my friends?
- At this phase of my life, what am I learning about leading?
- As a leader whose spirituality is rooted in the Precious Blood, what keeps me going when the leading gets tough?
- Is there prophetic action to which I feel drawn to say “yes”?
- In what situations am I taking a reconciling stance?



# Transformative Leadership

by **Sister Andree Fries, C.P.P.S.**

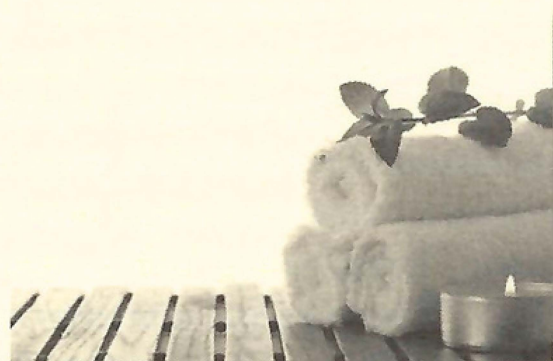
*[EDITOR'S NOTE: One of the great leaders in the Precious Blood family of congregations of the last twenty-five years was Andree Fries, a member of the O'Fallon Sisters of the Most Precious Blood. She served as President of her Congregation and in numerous leadership roles for her community and nationally and internationally for the church. In 1995, Sister Andree addressed the joint meeting of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. The title of her talk was "Transformative Leadership—Keys to Viability." In her address, she offered these challenges for servant leaders today.]*

## A leader is challenged...

1. To be a learner, a person centered enough to listen, to hear, to read, to ponder, to dream, to make connections, to dialogue, to change, to hold fast.
2. To be a communicator, clearly conveying a sense of meaningfulness, connecting the present with the past and future, and building enthusiasm for blazing new trails.
3. To be a unifier, a symphony conductor who artistically draws forth the music of each person, blends the tones, keeps the rhythm and orchestrates the crescendos and diminuendos.
4. To lead, making decisions that courageously balance the purpose of the institute with the goal of the individual member, all for the sake of mission. A leader takes risks and keeps asking the deeper questions.



5. To be enthusiastic about the ministry of leadership during this time of transformation so as to encourage others to be available for leadership.
6. To do as Jesus did on the way to Emmaus, be visible, supporting, listening, questioning, exploring implications, sharing information, making connections and breaking bread with companions on the journey.





# Follow the Leader

by John Robert McCray

**W**ho is the leader? For some, leaders are those who control the decision-making processes for the organization, making all or most of the important decisions. In this model, leadership translates into accumulating sufficient power to accomplish one's agenda and look good doing it. In such an organization, you cross the leader at your own peril, but helping the leaders look good may be to your advantage.

Another model of leadership describes the leader as the facilitator or animator of a group. This model requires maturity on everyone's part. One reckless adolescent-type can bring a previously strong, cohesive group to its knees if there is no group discipline.

Though not something I readily talked about, I wanted to be a leader growing up. Aspirations percolated just beneath the surface from fifth grade onward. My opportunity to lead just had to come, like the fulfillment of some Divine Providence. Then I graduated from college and life happened in unexpected ways. The inevitable was not so inevitable after all. No one seemed nearly as enthralled with my leadership skills as I had thought they would be. My first marriage disintegrated as a final repudiation of my skill set. A paraphrase of the Tribunal's findings when I received an annulment might be summarized in two words: "young" and "stupid." Being "young" is short-term; "stupid" can go on forever.

When you find yourselves in situations like this, God sometimes gets your attention. But I fought off any divine intervention for some time.

As I grew older, most would have judged me a loyal employee. I did what those in charge wanted done each day, and then went home fascinated by how these leaders led. My armchair observations of their leadership skills continued through the years. Sometimes they invited me to their parties, and I was reasonably good in these settings. But these situations taught me that I was much more egocentric or self-centered than I first imagined.



That was disappointing. The idea of following the lead of the Holy Spirit never crossed my mind until much later. God took care of my soul at weekly church services; the rest of the week was my responsibility. Rarely were the two mingled together.

## Another Chance at Life

The focus of my life was doing what seemed prudent. In other words: do not take risks and don't make enemies. During this time, one thing did go very right: I met my wife, Lynda. We met several months after my divorce and got married the following spring. Her sons were 16, 13, and 11 when we married.

Growing up, Lynda usually chose the church closest to her home to attend and walked there every Sunday morning by herself. She started this at age seven. Her mother moved regularly and had not participated in any church for years. Lynda spent third grade in Sugar Creek, MO. The public school she attended was next door to Saint Cyril's Catholic Church. On her walk home, she would look up the front steps at the doors of that church and felt a desire to go inside.

But she didn't. At that time, her mother would not have supported her desire to become Catholic. Though Lynda had attended a Catholic kindergarten in New Orleans, her mother was not interested in having Lynda become a Catholic. Curiously, her mother's opinion was totally different fifty years later when Lynda finally joined the Catholic Church.

When her family did start attending church, Lynda was in her mid-teens. They became Methodists. After we married and began to settle into the prospect of spending the rest of our lives together, a brush for Lynda with what the doctor said was cancer got our attention. Though not reverting to the Baptist faith of my youth, I recommitted my life according to the Baptist standards I knew and began to get more serious about God. I toyed with the prospect that I had never been saved in the Baptist understanding of that term. And I re-opened the question whether or not I was supposed to be a pastor.

I was scared I might lose Lynda. As I look back now, confession was what I needed to handle the problems—a general clearing of the air. But I did not know it at the time.

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It was Lynda who realized that God wanted something out of this. God was leading us. We studied the Bible through a Baptist College. It gave us a Biblical literacy for which we will always be grateful, even though our point of view has altered some. We were led to one inner-city Assembly of God church of several thousand. I was on the volunteer staff as a pastoral counselor; Lynda was a one of the leaders of the Senior Saints. We started a Singles Ministry.

There were spiritual people in each church we explored. But there also was just something that didn't quite fit for us. We kept seeking a group that had very clear notions of right and wrong and could answer our questions. We were looking for a group that was very clearly Bible-based, that saw redemption as very much due to Jesus dying for our sins, and seriously committed to grace.

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*We kept asking,  
seeking, and  
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the door opened.*

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We kept asking, seeking, and knocking. Finally, the door opened. We became involved leading nondenominational Bible studies at the local Clay County Detention Center. We did it for fourteen years. Lynda was there on Sunday mornings and Monday nights. I was there on Monday and Tuesday nights. For most of those years there was a Catholic and a Protestant on each Sunday team. Lynda was the Protestant, and the Catholic was a man named Joe. She kept asking him questions about Catholicism between group sessions with the inmates.

## Discovering Catholicism

There is a lot of grace in the Catholic Church that can be attractive to a Protestant, particularly when one's been stuck in an ecclesiastical thicket that sometimes confuses holiness with legalism. Joe bought Lynda a *Catechism*. We devoured it. We heard about a series of tapes explaining the *Catechism* and purchased it. Lynda realized that we had to look further; I was more oblivious.

But my goals were altered. I experienced what some might call a conversion. I began describing myself as a *Roman Baptical*. We had found a leader in the Holy Spirit, but now where were we being led? We found that we had two logical choices: one was to go to the RCIA in our home parish; the other was to take lessons from a priest who was giving them individually at a parish, St. Cyril's in Sugar Creek, just south of where we lived. The priest's name was Fr. Walter Pilecki. We felt going to St. Cyril's was what we had to do. It completed that unfinished circle that began when Lynda was in third grade and stood by those church steps every day.



I have met few people like Fr. Pilecki. He was a force of nature. He had our heart by the end of the first session. After three or four sessions we talked about moving to Sugar Creek. Mostly, he just loved us. One of the things I was always struck by was he had no doubts about what was truth and what was false. He wasn't angry or prideful about it. He did not put down our past. He simply wanted us to know the truth of God and his church. He loved being a priest. A great storyteller, he used the stories to communicate how a Catholic lives, thinks, behaves, and ultimately feels.

Fr. Pilecki gave us a steady stream of books to read and videos to view. We called him when we had questions, and our questions moved easily from catechetical to suggestions about dealing with difficult people in our lives. He always had an idea that was straight to the point. He pulled no punches. In a world where nuances are spread about liberally trying at all costs to be pleasing to everyone, he was refreshing. His consistency, his predictability, and his willingness to stand and be counted fascinated me. He seemed to know who he was and he was happy about it. He was joyful. I wanted what he had.

He influenced everything. Related to leadership, this meant a consistent movement toward being more other-centered or Christ-centered. This is what I valued most about his leadership

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*Related to leadership, this meant a consistent movement toward being more other-centered or Christ-centered. This is what I valued most about his leadership style.*

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style. Before meeting Fr. Pilecki, I had been pretty happy with enlightened self-interest. It was a concoction of Jack Walsh tip-toeing between my rudimentary notions of Schopenhauer on one side and Machiavelli on the other. Fr. Pilecki lived out what it means to be both a Christian and a leader. His life taught me that Christian leaders can be as strong as anyone else. They just have a different focus.

I had always assumed Christians who were leaders in business probably had to turn off their Christianity a great deal of the time. But one can be a performance-based leader who is a Christian—you just want to do it Christ's way more than you want to do it the way you used to do it.

## Being a Leader: Husband, Father, Teacher

**B**eing a husband and a father also challenged my leadership skills—and still does. I soon began to discover everything I didn't know. One crisis with one son gave me reason to take down my diplomas and go back to the



drawing board. I prayed to God for ideas—something brand new for me. Until then, I was not much different from my secularist friends.

The difference now is that I am regularly trying to bring myself back to a Christ-centered approach that places God in control. It is harder than I imagined it would ever be. Others may have been doing this far more naturally and successfully than me. I am just aware that I am operating with a different set of rules for engagement than I consciously had been using. So I began to consider other options, options having genuine concern for others rather than the raw simplicity of promoting me first. I consciously tried to place God first, others second, and me last.

This way of thinking changed my assumptions about leadership dramatically. I became aware that the leader is one who was to support those he or she is called to serve in getting their needs met. As a husband, this was simple: I was to help Lynda in getting her needs met. As an employee, it was to get my employer's needs met. As a Christian, it was to get God's needs met. This is, of course, still a work in progress. What I am actually doing is a shabby imitation of what I want to do.

For almost forty years, I worked with people between pre-school and graduate school as a teacher or counselor. Much of what I did had to do with evaluating students for special education programs. I also worked with curriculum. Along the way, I was a part-time therapist working primarily with depression and anxiety problems. Meetings were constant. Often no one was designated to be in charge and this led to meetings that seemed to go on forever. This was equally true with groups I worked with in schools, churches, and in my own family. Being a child of God, being a husband, raising sons, or being the foreman of a maintenance team in a public park during the summer all demanded certain leadership skills. The differences were more in vocabulary and mission.

Taking charge at a given meeting was a good way to find out how much my ego wanted to get fed. I learned how a meeting can be conducted in a short time, with a fair amount of accuracy.

But I also learned how the group you thought were leading can suddenly be chasing you out of town. Whether one is planning a retirement luncheon or a coup, a similar skill set is needed. The leader must mingle character with common sense.

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*The leader must  
mingle character  
with common sense.*

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What do I mean by character? For those who claim Christian as their name, character involves a complex of attitudes that develop into daily habits gleaned from sources such as the Scripture, Catechism, lives



of the saints, and the magisterium. But as my grandfather often told me, good leaders also have a large dose of common sense. They see potential but they also see the actual. And in making decisions, good leaders use past experiences to guide them in wrestling with present issues.

Regardless of the label we apply to describe a leader, whether they are a secular humanist or a saint, the boss or a servant, a trusted leader will help others get their needs met. The leader understands what his organization needs and wants by scheduling time with those who are part of the organization. He watches, listens, and learns.

I once heard a story in a homily that reflected this way of leadership. It was about Soichiro Honda, the man who developed the huge multinational company that sells so many cars and engines. Apparently, he regularly put on a pair of coveralls and went to his assembly plants to talk with those who assembled the cars. When there were problems, he sought their advice. This became a common operating procedure for the company. It wasn't meant as a public relations ploy but as a way to let everyone know they are part of the team and it likely contributed to the company's phenomenal success.

If I as a leader am other-centered or Christ-centered, my needs come last. In a company or corporation, I am always focused on the employee. In a school, I am focused on the students, teachers, and staff. As a husband, I am focused on my wife; as a father, on my children. And as a Christian, I am focused on the Christ I see in those I seek to serve.



## For Reflection

- How does one know when to stop watching others lead and take the reins somewhere, anywhere?
- Are Christian (or Catholic Christian) leaders any better on bottom line issues than competent secularists?
- Does successful leading really have anything to do with being *nice*, *kind*, or *compassionate*? Aren't these characteristics actually weaknesses in real world settings? Don't we need more application of hard-nosed reality and less efforts to get everyone feeling good about everything? If no, why not? If yes, how so?



# Model of Discernment for the Election of Leadership

by William Nordenbrock, C.P.P.S.

The choosing of leadership is an important event in the life of any religious congregation. The selection of the superior and his/her council has profound and lasting effect in the life of the community. For international congregations, this is true for the election of the superior general and his/her council, but perhaps more so, at the level of the individual units it is a decision that critically impacts us. How are we to think about the “leadership” and “discernment”? To guide our thinking, it is appropriate that we look to Scripture and Tradition, but for a religious congregation we must also look to our constitution, our rule or other foundational documents.

In this article, I write from the location of a particular congregation, the Missionaries of the Precious Blood. My reflections have arisen from the real concerns that I have for my congregation, and specifically my province. While I will make specific references to our *Normative Texts* (Constitution and General Statutes), my hope is that my reflections might inform your thinking as you consider the importance of discernment for the election of leadership within your congregation.

Our *Normative Texts* of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood offers some guidance for the discernment and selection of leadership, but leaves much room for interpretation and for creating a process that meets the unique situation of the individual unit. Our Constitution reminds us that the one elected superior is to be at the service of the congregation (C46). Specifically, that ministry of service is to be “characterized by humility, simplicity, brotherliness and the absence of a domineering spirit” (C48). In the selection of superiors we are advised that “greatest attention



is given to their human and supernatural qualities of prudence, good will, judgment and wisdom” (C51). As to the process for selecting leaders, the Constitution protects the participation of all members in choosing their superior (C51). Other articles of the Constitution and Statutes define who has authority to make certain decisions, address issues of resignation and the replacement of elected leaders, and the manner of conducting the elections.

What is missing in the *Normative Texts* is guidance on the process of **discernment** that the members might use to prepare for exercising their right of choosing their superior. This article seeks to address that shortcoming by first offering some reflection on the nature of leadership within our congregation, expanding on what the Constitution offers us. Secondly, it will suggest one model of discernment that can assist the members to make faithful decisions in choosing their leaders, by placing the election process within a broader process of discerning the signs of the times and defining a vision and mission for the community.

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## Leadership within the Missionaries of the Precious Blood

**W**e need to recalibrate our thinking—to think in a new way—about community leadership. This is an important preliminary step in the discernment of electing leadership. I want to stress two key considerations: first, leadership always happens in context; and secondly, leadership is more a relationship than a set of tasks.

A typical practice when we want to elect leadership is to begin by generating a list of leadership qualities. As noted above, we have such a list in our Constitution. The assumption is that there is such a thing as an “ideal leader,” which is defined by these qualities. That assumption belies the fact that leadership is always ‘leadership for something’ and ‘leadership within a specific group.’ Someone may be a great leader of a corporation, but not at all be suitable to lead a faith community. Someone may be a good provincial of monastic community, but not a good leader of a missionary community. While someone may have had the necessary skills to lead the community well ten years ago, a person with those same skills or qualities may not be able to lead the same community ten years from now. As context changes, leadership needs to change as well.

An example of this was illustrated in the recent election process of the Cincinnati Province. Leading into the process, in casual conversations



I often heard the opinion that as the province diminishes in size, the size of our provincial administration can also decrease. The fallacy of that assumption was revealed as we looked at the current context of the province. In the past, there was a canonical requirement that a major superior visit each member of the province during his four year term; today, while the canonical requirement has not changed, because of new accountability requirements since the sexual abuse crisis, there is a requirement that members of the province be visited by provincial leadership every year.

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*Before we can answer the “Who should we elect?” question, we need to answer the “leadership for who and for what?” questions.*

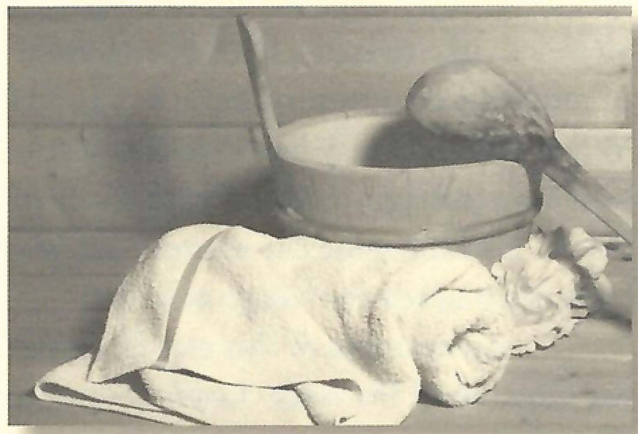
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The province may be smaller, but this demand on the time of leadership to visit the members is now much larger. This is just one example that can be offered to describe the way that the role and responsibilities of congregational leadership changes as the world in which we live changes. We will not be able to faithfully discern the selection of leadership, without placing that discernment squarely inside a reading of the signs of the times. Before we can answer the “Who should we elect?” question, we need to answer the “leadership for who and for what?” questions.

Secondly, leadership is a relationship—it is not something that someone does for us. It is like the old question: Is someone a leader if no one is following? To understand leadership as a relationship requires putting aside passivity and accepting responsibility for the shared tasks of leadership. This includes managing the affairs of the community and defining a vision for the future which becomes the work of all. With this understanding, it is not enough to say, “I am obedient to my superior.” Rather we want to be able to say, “Together with my superior we are faithful and obedient to God.”

A good discernment process not only arrives at the selection of elected leaders, but helps all the members to commit themselves to sharing in the leadership of the community. For the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, the responsibility to share in leadership is found in our Constitution: *The ministry of service and leadership is not limited to those that hold administrative offices. Every member is to show a responsible initiative in promoting the welfare of the Congregation (C49).*





This sharing of responsibility for leadership reinforces our congregation's view of authority. As in many other congregations, our supreme authority is not the Superior General, but is exercised by a General Assembly, when one is in session. This does not diminish or deny that authority is also granted to individuals through their election, but it places the role of elected leadership squarely within the broader and higher authority of the community. The leadership and the proper exercising of authority of the superior must be situated within the relationship that the superior has with the members of the community, a body that also has authority and responsibility for leadership. On a practical level, this means that the ministry of service given to an elected leader includes the implementation of decisions made by the assembly; but first the assembly must be faithful in exercising their authority and leadership in the matters of the community.

In simple and familiar terms, leadership must be a sincere form of service. Elected leaders have a servant relationship to the community. We are all familiar with the scriptural foundation of this idea in which Jesus says: "You know how those that exercise authority among the gentiles lord it over them; their great ones make their importance felt. It cannot be like that for you. Anyone among you who aspires to greatest must serve the rest, and whoever ranks first among you must serve the needs of all" (Mt.20:25-27).

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*Elected leaders have a servant relationship to the community.*

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## Defining the Context of Leadership through Appreciative Discernment

**B**efore we can discern and elect leaders, we must discern faithfulness as a community. If we think of faithfulness as living our lives in harmony with the will of God, expressed to us through the life and example of Jesus, then discernment is the lifelong activity of faithful people. Throughout our lives—individually and communally—we foster an awareness of the presence and guidance of God. Discernment is listening with an open heart to the one who "is with us always, until the end of the world" (Mt. 28:20) and responding with a courageous conviction.

As a community we need to live with an attitude or orientation of discernment. We pray that we can read the signs of the times and know how to respond. This discernment is never abstract or hypothetical. Rather, it is always specific and concrete. Our prayerful question is, "In this 'here and



now' of my/our life, what is faithful?" There are many ways to approach this discernment and this article offers one such model for discerning our answer to that question.

## Appreciative Discernment Process

**A**ppreciative Discernment is a "baptized" version of the change theory of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). As a theory of organizational dynamics, AI began at Case Western Reserve University (Cleveland, OH) in the late 1980s. While this article does not allow for a full description of the theory, it offers a radical different way of understanding organizations. When "baptized" and used as a process of discernment, it is rooted in several important beliefs.

The first is that we are to participate in the plan of God and be co-creators of the Reign of God. We are not passive recipients of the Good News of the Reign of God—we are called to create it. Discerning our faithfulness, individually and as a community, is to recognize that we have a particular vocation or mission in that plan of God. Secondly, God will always be faithful to us; God will not leave us orphaned. In terms of the discernment of our future, what this means is that God will give us the gifts that we need to fulfill our mission. Faithfulness is not that we do everything, but that we use our gifts or charism to the fullest. When we have identified our charism, we have identified our mission.

The process of Appreciative Discernment is illustrated in the diagram on the next page. The process begins with **Discovery**. In this phase of the process, which is focused and revolves around a positive topic such as *A Faithful Future with Good Leadership*, we look to the past and the present to discover the ways that God has blessed us. What gifts has God given us that we are to use to build the Reign of God? We discover our positive core or charism—what do we look like at our best? We do this through the soliciting of stories of our best experiences of community and ministry.

The second phase is to engage our imagination and to **Dream**. Through sharing and dialogue as a community we arrive at a shared vision for a hopeful future that stretches us beyond the good that is already present in the community. A guiding question is, "If we take all the gifts/ blessings that God gives to us and use those gifts to the fullest, what would be possible?" It is in this phase of the process that we define the community context in which we must elect leadership. Here we answer the question, "Leadership for what?"

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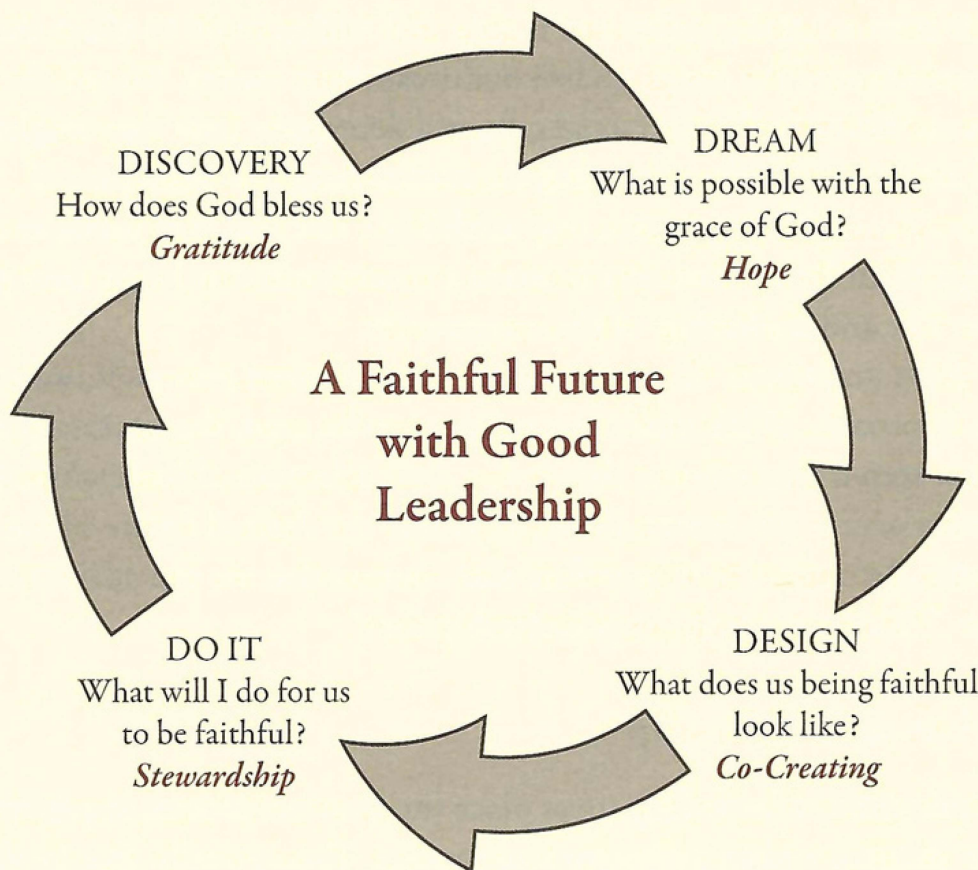
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*As a community we need to live with an attitude or orientation of discernment.*

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When we have defined a dream or vision of our faithful future, we must then **Design** the way to live our dream into reality. What has to happen for the dream to be realized? Are there changes that we need to make to our structures, policies, procedures, practices so that the dream can be realized? Here we begin to acknowledge the ways in which the leadership relationship is lived out and the various faithful ways that individuals

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share in the responsibility. This is about accepting the responsibility to be the co-creators of our community. We are able to construct/create the community that God calls us to be.

It is here that we start to ask, "What kind of leadership is needed for the community to live towards the dream that we have chosen?" More than a list of qualities that we hope the superior will

have, it is also about how all the members of the community can fulfill their shared leadership responsibility. In the design process we must plan concretely for the future. Through specific plans of action, with assigned responsibility and accountability, we set our course for the future.

Finally, we know that having a plan is of no benefit unless we implement that plan and start to **Do** it. In this phase of the process the



emphasis is on what the individual is able and willing to do to effect the implementation of the design to live our dream into reality. We ask the members to identify their personal gifts and determine how they might be used most beneficially in helping the community. For what part of the action plans will they accept responsibility? The task is to invite and encourage all in the community to make a commitment to bring their gifts to the service and leadership of the community.

As stated above, the Appreciative Discernment process is only one possible approach. While other approaches can be used, the necessary and important step is that prior to discerning their selection of leadership, the community accept the responsibility to define the desired future of the community, because it is only within that context that we can answer the question, “What are we electing leadership for?”

## Selection of Leadership

The selection of leadership must place the election process required by our Statutes within a discernment process. Theoretically, that is what we have been doing. While we elect through a process of secret balloting, it is our assumption and hope that the members will cast their votes after prayerful reflection. We ask members to discern individually before casting their ballot. While there is much informal dialogue and discussion of the members about the “candidates” leading into the Electoral Assembly, seldom is there an organized, communal and prayerful way for the members to bring their individual

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*The task is to invite and encourage all in the community to make a commitment to bring their gifts to the service and leadership of the community.*

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discernment into a process of communal discernment for selecting our leaders. The selection of leadership needs to be discerned communally—which requires a process that brings us into prayerful dialogue with one another about the election. Without some sort of honest dialogue within the community, the election process is not a communal discernment.

Again, there are many ways that this might be facilitated and I offer here a description of the recent process in the Cincinnati Province, not to propose that it be adopted by all, but as one example of a communal process of selection that was faithful to the requirements of the Statutes with regard to elections and which sought to bring together individual discernments into the communal forum.

In the Cincinnati Province we accepted the two premises that I stated above: leadership always happens in context and leadership is more



a relationship than a set of tasks. With this understanding we followed a discernment process that had these steps:

1. In October 2009 (seven months before the Electoral Assembly) we convened a special assembly to look to the future. We gathered for a three day Appreciative Discernment process. We emerged from this assembly with a written statement that articulated our belief in what our faithful future would be. As described above, we emphasized that the ministry of service and leadership was a shared responsibility. One of the strongest statements articulated by the assembly was that we wanted to elect leadership that would help us to realize the vision that we had discerned—not elect a provincial with some other independent vision for the future.
2. In January we had a round of district meetings in which the members gathered to review and discuss the work from the Appreciative Discernment assembly. By focusing on the Vision Statement and the action plans which we had developed, we reinforced their importance as defining the context for our upcoming election. Additionally, it was a chance to inform members who had not been present at the assembly of the work and to solicit their commitment to the work of the assembly.
3. With the discussions from the district meetings fresh in our minds, we conducted the nominating process by mail, as required by our Statutes. However, in addition to the required nomination of persons for provincial, we asked the members to raise names of possible provincial councilors. In our Statutes we do not have a process for nominating councilors, but by asking names to be raised we encouraged dialogue among the members about these important positions and reinforced the idea that leadership is a shared responsibility within our congregation.

*Through honest and respectful dialogue, members were able to explore their self assessment of their own gifts and weakness and to consider what it might mean for them to be on a leadership team.*
4. Following the nomination ballot, all who received nominations for provincial and those members who were named most frequently as



possible councilors were invited to gather for two days of communal prayer and discernment. The purpose of this retreat was not for this small group of members to discern who should be elected; clearly that would have been improper. Rather, it was to allow them to bring their individual discernment about their willingness to accept a position of elected leadership and to place that within a communal process. Through honest and respectful dialogue, members were able to explore their self assessment of their own gifts and weakness and to consider what it might mean for them to be on a leadership team. While this was a new experience for the province, universally the participants affirmed the importance of this communal process to them and their decision about willingness to serve in leadership.

5. In May 2010 we met for a four day Electoral Assembly. The planning of the assembly was again guided by C49. The first day of this assembly was used to return to the vision that we had discerned and to affirm that this was our answer to the question, "Leadership for what?" Special attention was given to refining the action plans that we would implement to help us realize our vision. While some members would be asked by the assembly to accept positions of elected leadership all those present were going to be asked to accept their responsibility to share in leadership and service. The elections for provincial and councilors was conducted over a two day period, deliberately slowed down by introducing time for the members to share in small groups their thought and personal discernment about the vote being taken. After all the elected positions had been decided, the final part of the selection process was

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*Each member was asked to compose a covenant in which they promised, in concrete and specific terms, how they would share with elected leadership the responsibility of leading the community.*

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to create time for the community to gather in prayerful reflection to discern their commitment to the work of realizing the vision. Each member was asked to compose a covenant in which they promised, in concrete and specific terms, how they would share with elected leadership the responsibility of leading the community. These written covenants were presented as gifts with the bread and wine at the Eucharistic celebration and they are now being used by the



elected leadership to invite our members into greater involvement and faithfulness as members of the province.

## Conclusion

The selection of leadership is an important communal decision that has lasting impact on the community. While our *Normative Texts* offers some guidance for this process, we are able to enhance and improve our selection of leadership if we effectively facilitate the ways that the community exercises their responsibility in this matter. While there are various effective methods for that facilitation, most important for us is to have an understanding of the function of elected leadership that is faithful to the role and authority given to the whole community.

Leadership is a shared relationship in which some members are asked to serve the community as superior or councilor. Additionally, our discernment for the selection of leadership must follow (or be part of) the discernment of the community as it reads the signs of the times and defines the context of leadership. With this shared understanding and commitment to a vision of a faithful future, we are able to inspire the commitment of our members to share in community leadership and we can select the “right” members to serve in elected positions.



## For Reflection

- How are you being faithful to the leadership relationship? In what ways are you able to share in the leadership of your community and be a co-creator of your community’s faithful future?
- Many of us hold leadership positions and exercise authority in our apostolic work. How would the idea that the “community” has the highest authority affect the way you exercise your authority?
- Three symbols of Precious Blood Spirituality are the cup, the cross and the covenant. From your understanding of what these symbols represent, how do you see these symbols influencing and creating a Precious Blood model of leadership?