



Leadership - Introduction



In the following section we reflect upon leadership. Effective Leadership underpins communities where people flourish. It is attuned to the people in the community, grows in awareness of the variety of gifts that rest within the people, creates communities of dialogue where, if trust is there, people of diverse views and experience can create the future. Einstein said: *Today's problems cannot be solved with the same thinking that created them.* So good leadership encourages new ways of thinking, allows risk taking even if it leads to failure. And after failure the question becomes: What did we learn?



How do we nurture trust? It is nurtured in the daily interactions. Being interested in each other. Support when someone is going through a difficult personal time. Being aware that the vitality of the community rests on the vitality of each person. Being engaged. Affirming success and effort. Noticing an initiative a colleague is taking. Affirming courage.

More formally we can do it in the way the staff are engaged in shaping the future. Genuine dialogue at staff meetings that focuses upon the task of the community – providing a fruitful education for the students entrusted to us. The way we come together as a faith community; how at ease we are at engaging in sharing faith and prayer.



The following reflections are to assist in reflection, prayer and dialogue around the theme of leadership. Every day each of us exercises leadership regardless of whether we are in a position of formal leadership or not. Francis often refers to himself as Bishop of Rome. I'm wondering if he is trying to remind us that his position is one of collegiality – a member of the college of bishops with the added responsibility of leadership of them. In a short time he has modelled a very different style of leadership and is encouraging us to do the same. And his success as leader depends upon our engagement and contribution.

I have included a summary of an article by Regina Bechtle, *Spirit-Led Leadership* which appeared in *Human Development* in 2008. In this she articulates the various elements that together create good leaders and effective leadership. This could be a stimulus for people to have some personal reflection on leadership and some conversation with colleagues. Hopefully then the prayer reflections develop the themes Regina explores.



In the reflections in the *Encounters* section there are numerous examples of Jesus as leader. He had no formal authority but exercised life giving personal authority. You might like to intersperse the leadership prayers with some from that section.

SPIRIT-LED LEADERSHIP

Regina Bechtle in *Human Development* Vol 19, 2008

The Inner Journey

Leaders need to be connected to their inner selves; they need to pay attention to the Spirit at the core of their spirits. They need to be persons with deep spiritual foundations, at home with their spirituality.

In these times of profound change, those who accept the spiritual dimensions of leadership, whether lay, religious or clergy, call their organisations to remember who they are and what their mission is, just as the prophets did of old. They strive to see and interpret events within a larger context of meaning.

Keepers of the Story

You exercise leadership in the context of a tradition that you have received. The collective history of your school is a source of great strength from which you will repeatedly drink as from a deep well. You inspire your members to cherish the stories of those who have gone before you. You do this, not as an exercise of nostalgia, but rather as a confirmation that your group has a life larger than individuals, and its mission has a dynamism that has carried it through good times and bad times, with the help of God.

You also remind the group that its story is not all sweetness and light. It is shot through with human tragedies, mistakes and sins. Retelling this shadow side of your collective story can release the power of forgiveness, and free individuals to make their personal peace with the past.

As leader, you hold in trust the deep story. You hold up this story like a mirror. You invite the group to claim it as the pattern of its most genuine identity. You invite each person to look deeply and to discover his or her own part in it. And as you move through communal time of clarity, peace and joy, or grief, turmoil and doubt, the wisdom of the deep story can nourish you again and again, healing, encouraging and centring you.

But the school's history is ongoing; its deep story continues to be written in the lives of today's members.

Relationships

With contemporary writers on organisation, you understand that group life, as well as **the practice of leadership, is all about relationships**. Listen to the poet David Whyte: "Whether it is the Berlin wall, apartheid, the old coercive Soviet system, or our old coercive business systems, it seems that any foundations not now built on the realities of human relationships are being swept away by the forces of our time.

What have I learned about spiritual leadership? I sum up my learning in **three statements which are my foundational premises**:

1. **Leadership is more about spirituality than about skills.** It always calls us to go deeper into the mystery of conversion and transformation.
2. **The journeys of transformation – personal, communal and societal – are interwoven.** The efforts of leaders to transform their world and to guide their communities through the process of change are deeply interwoven with, and often mirror the story of their own inner, personal transformation. And vice versa. Spirit inhabits both inner and outer landscapes, and leaders need to attend to both.
3. **The journey of one who would be a spiritual leader is a perennial work in progress.** What Ernest Hemingway said of writers is also true of leaders: 'We are all apprentices in a craft where no one ever becomes a master'.

Articulating the Questions

The spiritual leader constantly asks not only "What is happening, in me and in the school that I am called to lead?" but also the deeper questions, "What is *really* going on? What message is the Spirit writing in my journey, and in the ups and downs of the school's story?" These questions are asked in times of crisis and diminishment, challenge and self-doubt, as well as in times of success and growth. As the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer wrote: "The task is not so much to see what no one yet has seen, but to think what nobody yet has thought about that which everybody sees."

Making connections

Spiritual leaders are able to connect the richness of the inner world with the significant challenges and movements of a given time. They give priority to developing and animating relational skills in themselves and others. And they are able to recognise a group's culture and climate and create learning organisations. All these skills are Spirit-led; all of them flow from and contribute to the leader's spirituality.

As a spiritual leader following the example of Jesus, you seek to create and foster an atmosphere built on the power of love. Listen to the organisational theorist Margaret Wheatley: *What gives power its charge, positive or negative, is the quality of the relationships. Those who relate through coercion, or from disregard of the other person, create negative energy. Those who relate to other and see other in their fullness create positive energy. Love in organisations, then, is the most potent source of power we have available.*