Further Reflections on Religious Leadership: Humility, Collaboration, Mentoring, and Personal Support

Janet K. Ruffing, Tucson, January 29, 2012

Narcissistic Leaders

• Are incapable of altruistic, servant leadership
• Great harm occurs to others in ministries and communities when seriously narcissistic people gain positions of power.
• This danger is magnified in hierarchical organizations because one only reports to those above.
**Spiritual Leadership**

- Requires a relatively healthy personality as a starting point as well as the ability to grow into and through the challenges of leadership.

**Most Former Leaders**

- Describe their time in leadership
  - As a time of growth spiritually, relationally, organizationally, and as an opportunity to develop gifts they did not know they had.
  - They are grateful for what they accomplished or contributed to the life of their communities
  - They experienced a deepening commitment of the charism of their own congregations
  - They often sought out positions of leadership in ministry in their own or other communities to which they contributed developed skills and passion for contributing to a mission beyond themselves.
Doohan

“Spirituality [of leadership] includes a sense of humility.”

The genuinely humble leader is “always learning through prayer, through sharing with peers, in ongoing study, in the varied forms of openness to the many doesr, thinkers, or teachers among us.”

Delbecq

Reports that specific spiritual practices have the effect on managers of helping them move from hubris to humility.

“There is strong evidence that contemplative and meditative practices offset many of the distortions of narcissism and hubris that undermine effective decision-making. Further, building contemplative rhythms into complex decision-making protocols can interrupt distorting interpersonal patterns.”
Reflection

• Honest self-examination, reflecting on when and how God was present and acting
  – in yourself,
  – in other men on your council,
  – in the members at a community meeting

  results in a greater capacity to respond to these leadings of God’s Spirit whether in your self or others.

Benefits

• Prevents “group think” bias when more are included in the reflection
• Helps team deliberations, especially when there may be disagreements
• Participants move to a deeper place when they can pause to reflect on what they are experiencing (body sense, feelings, thoughts, and inspirations.)
Collaboration as Opportunity

“When the church is weak, opportunity opens for lay initiation and collaboration.” Seamus Enright

Today

Collaboration has become a necessity
• between men and women,
• between various organizations,
• and between lay and religious in all of our ministries, including administrative centers.
Transformational Leadership only partially realized

Often a congenial fit for many although not all women.
Includes a substantial amount of teaching, coaching, mentoring as well as supervisory oversight

Collaboration between men and women in ecclesial settings

• Requires continued attention to gender issues related to leadership
Leadership Studies

Recommend that both men and women in leadership need to move back and forth between directive (agentic) modes and collaborative ones depending on the situation.

New Metaphor

for women’s difficulties in rising to management/leadership positions in society.

Instead of the glass ceiling, they advocate the labyrinth.
Labyrinth or maze

Ecclesial settings

- Continue to exclude women from leadership except
  - In their congregations
  - Women-initiated projects
  - And institutions.
A Creative Major focus for Men’s Communities?

• Requires a certain critical and prophetic distance from the seduction of the clerical system
• Need to develop the skills for collaboration
• Most likely already engaged
• Important to reflect on how and where the opportunity ends

An Imbalance of Power

Usually Remains
**Mentoring**

- Increasingly important
- Promotes learning on the job
- Accepts a person for who they are and encourages realizing potential
- Supports and encourages
- Challenge and honor potential to grow and change
- A safe space to explore
- Inspire
- Accountable

**New Congregational Leaders**

- Can benefit from a mentoring relationship with someone whose leadership style they admire, most helpfully from outside one’s own community or province.
Congregational leaders

- Need to be alert to mentoring the next generation of leaders in the preliminary experiences that may lead to congregational leadership.
- Appointment to committees and project
- Encouraging experiments in leadership within their existing ministries

Personal Support

- In addition, to mentoring, spiritual direction and supervision can be very helpful to those in leadership.
Spiritual Direction

• Supports on-going discernment of call from God and the congregation
• Creates a space for exploring internal and external ‘data’ one might not want to put out into a group
• The ability to revisit the initial unfolding of call grounds one in present challenges
• Helps discover the spiritual gifts and opportunities that come with leadership

Spiritual Direction

• Supports fidelity to prayer and spiritual reflection
• A safe place in which one’s leadership role is not the most important part of life
• A place to be yourself without the projections that become second nature after a while.
• Increases attentiveness to what God is doing
Supervision

- Invaluable for reflecting on and learning from the inevitable transference and counter transference that is going on.
- Positive transferences are usually less problematic, but can contribute to inflation and loss of freedom if one feels too indebted to or attached to those who think you are terrific.

Negative Transferences

- Can be really rough to carry without responding in a harmful way.
- Can be a rich source of helpful information about the other person as well as yourself.
- Supervision increases the potential for learning from difficult transferences and Counter transferences in terms of self-knowledge and your own inner growth.
- And enhance your skills in dealing with difficult people and minimize being seduced by the flattery or other behaviors of those wanting something from you or inappropriately.
Supervision and Ego Ideal

• Supervision carries some threat which is why many avoid it.
• Why threatening?
  – A threat to sense of self.
  – “The gap between one’s ego ideals and perception of one’s actual self and actual performance tests self-esteem”
  – Beginner’s mistakes feel humiliating when one is highly experienced in another role.

Supervision and Self-Exposure

• Without sufficient humility, some find it difficult to allow another to see mistakes. The need to project authority and mastery may make the self-exposure of making a mistake difficult to tolerate.
• The supervisee also shifts back and forth from being the “knowing” one or the “authority” outside supervision and the “unknowing” one in supervision.
• Navigating these two senses of self may add a level a vulnerability
Uncovering Parallel Process

• In supervisory relationships, the supervisee often unconsciously recreates the dynamic between the self and the other under discussion.
• There is some threat to self-exposure around something going on inside you that you have know idea about.
• Supervision is a process in which one learns from mistakes--

Toleration of Discomfort

• Everyone comes to the supervisory experience with their personal histories of ability or inability to tolerate external criticism from authorities, peers, or their members and still maintain sufficient self-esteem and resilience to benefit from supervision and apply it to the leadership role.
• “The degree of integration the supervisee has achieved over loving and hostile representations will influence his or her ability to withstand external criticism or antagonism from [members], colleagues or supervisors while preserving some stability of self-esteem.”
Supervision

• Promotes deep learning in the face of vulnerability and challenge.
• Offers an opportunity for spiritual growth as a result of the need to turn to God as well as to the supervisor for guidance and support
• The objective self-monitoring that occurs in supervision prevents repeating the same mistake.
• Tremendous learning about oneself and others results

Remaining attentive to the spirituality dimensions

• of leadership and faithful to practices that make you the best spiritual leaders you can be is likely to inspire and animate your congregations, the people of God you serve, as well as the universal church.