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Embracing Discord:

Preparing Ministers for Healthy Conflict



As a child, one of my favorite sections of the Bible was the opening of the book of Acts. I loved hearing the story about the thousands of people drawn in by the preaching of the apostles, who handed their possessions over to the nascent Christian community, and lived “happily ever after.” Hearing my father speak of his struggles in the business world, I considered how ideal it would be to work in the church with people motivated only by good and holy intentions in an environment void of conflict—the church as painted in the book of Acts.

My first high school job as evening parish receptionist was quite an eye-opening experience as I watched four priests of varying generations and ecclesiologies wrangle with one another and a strong-willed housekeeper to exercise pastoral leadership in a bustling, boisterous Catholic community. It turns out that sometimes keys get lost, the gym gets double-booked, sisters yell, priests cuss and no one remembers to empty the dishwasher. Not everyday, but enough to leave an impression: the Catholic Church is

not a place where people live “happily ever after.”

One of the great gifts of graduate studies in theology was the opportunity to discover the letters of Paul. Written decades before the Gospels and the book of Acts were put onto parchment, Paul’s epistles reveal a church riddled with discord even from its earliest days. Only a few years after the tomb was found empty, Jesus’ disciples were already debating how to handle money, what kinds of public behaviors were appropriate for Christians, and what to

do about economic disparity in their midst. They had differing views on the role of women, how to handle interreligious marriage, and wages for their ministers. Many of the challenges that we know today, they knew as well. It turns out that there was never a time in which the church was without conflict, and yet, two thousand years later, the church goes on.

The story I tell of my own journey is not unique. It mirrors the journey of almost every minister in the Church—a pattern of attraction and disillusionment, hope and coming to terms with reality. What distinguishes ministers who are able to live meaningfully within the church as it is from those frustrated in their attempts to live “happily ever after” is the ability to live and function within a church in discord. Indeed, I would argue that the single most determinative factor in whether or not a religious, priest, or lay minister fresh from studies will thrive or flail in their early years of ministry has to do with their comfort, capacity and skill-level surrounding conflict.

Given the prominent place that conflict plays in ministerial success, it makes sense that ministerial formation programs will want to consider how they can prepare candidates well for the realities of life lived in communion with others. In this essay, I want to introduce four components of a holistic model for conflict education and suggest possible means for integrating these components into a formation program.

ARTICULATE A HEALTHY, POSITIVE THEOLOGY OF CONFLICT FROM THE START

Often, the most foundational shift any ministry candidate has to make toward a healthy relationship with conflict is a paradigmatic one. Conflict, in much of Christian thought, is understood as a consequence of sin: God had intended for the world to live in harmony but sin caused discord.

As a result, Christians tend to see the presence of conflict in their community as a sign of sin, a sign that something has gone terribly wrong and needs fixing. Because sin is by definition a chosen evil—something we could have resisted but did not—it implies that some party must be to blame for the conflict.

Many persons drawn into ministry hold this understanding of conflict. Because they have committed themselves vocationally to strive for holiness, it is important to them to separate themselves from sin and, hence, from conflict. For those who tend to absorb responsibility in any given situation, the presence of conflict will set off internal triggers, “What did I do wrong? I must not be a very good person or this would not be happening.” For those who have a propensity to shift responsibility, the presence of conflict will set off another set of questions, “Who is to blame? How can we clarify what went wrong here and call those at fault back to the right path?”

The Christian tradition, however, can offer a wider, more nuanced theology of conflict. While sin certainly escalates much of the conflict in our world—raising it to the level of violence, bitterness and even war—the roots of conflict seem inherently structured into the design of creation itself. God created the world with a tremendous amount of diversity, and indeed, seems to glory in it. Diversity implies not just diversity of species and skin color, but also diversity of cultures, opinions and perspectives. Exposure to diversity, with its resulting experience of discomfort, surprise and disagreement, appears to be the way that God grows creation, bringing it forward toward the Parousia.

Conflict in scripture is not synonymous with an absence of divine presence. Jesus’ disciples argued with one another, even as he was in their midst. In his teaching, he indicates that his followers would continue to have problems amongst themselves and gave them strong advice about forgiveness and talking to one another face-to-face before talking to others about the matter. Conflict is simply a part of life as a Christian; the more significant issue is how to respond constructively to it.

Studies of Christian communities indicate that those reporting little or no conflict are more likely comatose than models of robust discipleship. People only argue about issues they find important; communities want members who feel passionately about their mission and vision. Psychologist John Gottman’s parallel research on healthy marriages discovered that couples that had one negative encounter per every five positive encounters experienced the

most stable, enduring marriages. More negativity placed couples at a greater risk of divorce, but curiously, less negativity often indicated an even greater risk. Couples who reported very little conflict often had opted out of the relationship emotionally and mentally.

Ministry formation programs will want to establish a “theology of conflict” to undergird their efforts. Alongside the articulated mission and outcome statements for the ministry program should be an intentional statement about how conflict will be understood in the formation process. In the ministry program I oversee, we have taken to having the students read a text on difficult conversations as part of the orientation to the program. “We are going to be spending a lot of time with each other as a group over the next four years,” I say. “And we’re going to be talking about things about which we feel very deeply. It is inevitable that at some time in the coming years we are going to disagree with each other, hurt one another, irritate one another. It would be very sad if we never admitted such things, because we would have missed a great opportunity for growth. So, before we ever have the chance to disagree, let’s think about how we want to handle conflict when it happens.” Giving candidates vocabulary and tools for conflict before they need them is easier than introducing them in the midst of a conflict. It lets them know conflict is normal; it is part of the spiritual journey rather than foreign to it; and, we have ways of transforming it for the sake of growth in holiness.

Exercises

- Have each candidate write a story about a conflict he witnessed in his own family as a child and the lesson about conflict he took away from it. Explore within the formation community how our experiences of conflict in family have shaped differing perspectives on the meaning and value of conflict. Is it to be avoided or welcomed? Can relationships survive conflict or does it inevitably end them? Is it possible conflict can deepen a relationship?
- Have members of the formation community create a



“Conflict Charter” at the beginning of their time with one another in which they decide on guidelines for how they want to handle disagreements with one another in the future. To what are they willing to hold themselves accountable in times of discord?

CULTIVATE CAPACITIES NEEDED TO REMAIN IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT

Few people upon finding themselves in the midst of a conflict think, “Oh, excellent, I have been awaiting just such a growth opportunity!” Rather, most find conflict a very uncomfortable state in which to dwell and express their discomfort in a variety of ways ranging from total avoidance of the neuralgic topic to wanting immediate conversation and resolution. One of the greatest helps we can offer ministry candidates in our programs is to cultivate the capacities needed to remain within the conflict without ignoring or rushing it.

The choice of the term “capacity” is intentional. Often, conflict management is taught as a set of quaint phrases or techniques to be employed in times of disagreement (e.g. “Use ‘I feel’ state-

ments.”) But, unless these phrases and techniques are undergirded by a set of attitudes, they bear little fruit, and indeed become the source of ridicule. Healthy conflict requires not just a change of language but also a real conversion of mind. Capacities required for healthy conflict include:

Curiosity: While rarely listed as a virtue, curiosity is perhaps one of the most important habits to be cultivated in the spiritual life. Without curiosity, a person is unable to learn or to change, for without curiosity, a person lacks the inner fire that drives the desire to understand more. In a difficult conversation, the person without curiosity assumes she already understands the situation at hand and already knows where she stands. On the other hand, the person who is able to remain curious, even in conflict, has the capacity to turn the conversation into a learning conversation in which new insight can be gleaned, including information about how the other perceives the matter and how the other feels. The curious person can remain open enough to receive additional data that might change how she looks at the situation.

Sense of Self-Worth: A solid sense of self-worth implies knowledge of one-self—both one’s strengths and one’s

shortcomings. It also implies an acceptance and love of self, even if not perfect. A sense of self-worth makes it possible for persons to receive new information, even feedback about their own role in the situation, becoming neither defensive nor defeated. Persons possessing a sense of self-worth know themselves well enough to realize that they likely did contribute something to the conflict. At the same time, they know that their perspective is still worth sharing. Difficult conversations done well require curious listening, but they also require assertion. Without a sense of self-worth, persons have a hard time valuing their own dignity and inserting their own voice into the conversation.

Comfort with Emotions: A common misconception about conflict assumes that conflicts are best solved when people “stick to the facts” and “leave personal feelings out of the matter.” In reality, the conversation would not be a difficult conversation if feelings were not involved, and rather than ignore their role in the conflict, it would be better to bring them out into the open. Willingness to address emotions, however, implies the capacity to first be aware of emotions, to name them and to accept their presence. For ministry candidates, this can be particularly difficult.

We can be intentional about constructing a formation environment in which wondering aloud is encouraged, questions honored, emotions taken seriously and each person encouraged to speak.

Many have been socialized to believe that certain emotions—especially those emotions most commonly present in conflict such as anger, impatience and frustration—are unholy. And, again, if one’s pursuit of a ministerial vocation is part of a larger quest for holiness, the presence of these emotions seems contradictory to one’s vocation. The person who is able to acknowledge his or her own feelings, and to distinguish having these feelings from acting on them, will be able to better acknowledge and receive the expression of others’ emotions as well.

Capacities, unlike skills, are generally easier “caught” than “taught.” Lectures on curiosity or self worth are likely to do little toward the overall outcomes of our formation programs. But, we can be intentional about constructing a formation environment in which wondering aloud is encouraged, questions honored, emotions taken seriously and each person encouraged to speak. Although these practices are not exclusively conflict practices, they nurture the capacities that will be needed in times of conflict.

Exercises

- Ask candidates to bring to mind a time when they were really angry with another person and to roll through the entire episode in their imagination. Then ask them to write an account of the event from the point of view of the person with whom they were so angry. Explore the candidates’ reactions to the writing exercise. What parts of the story did they begin to realize they did not know? About what did they become curious in the course of writing?
- In pairs, have one person tell the story of a significant event in his life, pausing every thirty seconds. During the pause the other person simply names the feelings he heard radiating from the storyteller. The storyteller is free to acknowledge or nuance with greater accuracy the feelings before going on with the story.

INTRODUCE SKILLS FOR MOVING BEYOND CONFLICT

Being able to remain in conflict is important, yet no one wishes to set up a permanent abode there. Capacities for conflict must be complemented by skills that enable one to move beyond the conflict. Specific skills can be taught and should be integrated into the curriculum of a formation program, including:

Listening Skills: Many ministry candidates genuinely care for others and want to listen deeply to them, but have a difficult time conveying what they intend. They are curious, but they aren’t able to communicate effectively their interest. Simple techniques like good eye contact, leaning in toward the person speaking and non-verbal acknowledgements like nodding are easy to develop. They can make a real difference in ordinary conversation, and even more so in difficult conversation. Candidates should also be introduced to rudimentary practices associated with active listening (e.g. ability to paraphrase what the other has said or attentive silence). If these are practiced outside of real-life conflict, they can become second nature in the midst of actual conflict, allowing the other party to feel better heard.

Problem Solving Approaches: Often conflicts seem irresolvable because the parties are each locked into their respective positions and see the other party as the problem. Progress, however, can be made when we separate the problem from the opposing party and view the opposing party as a potential ally in solving a shared problem. The question then becomes: How can we work through this together? What are some creative options? Are there other possibilities to meet our respective interests beyond the positions with which we came? Frequently opposing parties share many of the same interests, but merely hold differing opinions about the best way of realizing those interests. Candidates benefit tremendously from learning the difference between positions and interests, as well as strategies for creating new options.

Conflict Discernment Skills: Triangulation features prominently in many ministerial conflicts. Persons often prefer to talk about the conflict with others rather than directly to the person with whom they have the prob-

lem. They also may find themselves wrapped into conflicts which are not really their own, but rather a fellow community member's. As a result, many ministry settings become toxic with misdirected frustration that hangs in the environment like an intangible fog. As one of my colleagues once advised me about my own proclivities in this direction, "You want your anger to be a like a coursing river rather than a finely diffused mist." Ministry candidates benefit from a mental rubric they can run through in considering a conflict to help them decide whether or not they should initiate a conversation, and, if so, with whom and toward what end. I have found the handouts from Triad Consulting Group (available at <http://diffcon.com/HelpYourself>) to be especially useful in assisting candidates to think through a potential conversation before it happens. Frequently in the process, a candidate will realize that the conflict is predominantly within him and that the difficult conversation is an internal one. By changing one's own contribution to the situation, the dynamic can automatically shift.

Exercises

- Ask each candidate to call to mind a "hot button" political or ecclesial issue about which she has strong feelings. Then have each candidate choose a partner in the group who could argue the other side of the issue. Have this partner try to persuade the candidate of the opposing position. The candidate's role is to try to engage her active listening skills in the conversation, even as she hears a position with which she disagrees. She is to attempt to restate accurately what the other person is saying and to ask open-ended, curious questions, while conveying with her posture and eyes that she wants to understand the other better.
- Using either a prepared case study (or a story of conflict shared by one of the candidates), have the formation group identify the two opposing positions present in the case on the far corners of a blackboard. Then list what each party's interests are under-

neath its position. Finally, in the middle of the board, brainstorm other ways that the parties' interests might be met beyond their positions.

MODEL A COMMUNITY MADE STRONGER BY ITS CONFLICTS

It seems obvious: formation communities that want emerging ministers to develop healthy conflict practices should model those practices themselves in community. People learn how to do conflict well by seeing conflict done well. They overcome their fears about conflict fracturing a community by experiencing a community that repeatedly not only survives conflict, but grows stronger through it.

Equally obvious: this is much easier said than done.

As a formation team, it is useful to periodically review: Are we modeling the behavior we espouse? Are we aware of the way our life with one another is formative, distinct from whatever our planned curriculum might be? If the ministry candidates were to absorb our preferred way of dealing with conflict, what would they be taking away with them?

The formation community is a place for candidates to try out new approaches to conflict and test new ways of responding. Some of these are going to feel awkward and unnatural at first. Occasionally there will be grand failures. So, the team will also want to ask itself: Is this environment a safe place to make mistakes? Can we be encouraging of those who are trying to let go of old patterns of behavior, but have not yet arrived at something new?

Exercises

- Invite pairs of religious, married couples, or ministry staff to tell the story of a time in their life with one another when conflict done well strengthened their relationship rather than ended it. What enabled the conflict to be a positive experience in the long haul rather than negative? What did they learn from the experience that they still rely on now in conflict?
- When a conflict arises in the formation community, treat it

as an opportunity for learning and practicing good conflict skills. Take time for each person to prepare for the discussion using some of the discernment tools described above. Before the discussion recall together the listening and problem solving skills that have been part of the learning during the year. Afterwards, process together, "What did we do well here? What really seemed to work? What did we not do well in addressing this conflict together? Where do we need more work?"

CONCLUSIONS

In the Gospel of John, Jesus' final dinner with the ministers he had been forming was marked by a long closing discourse in which he relayed all that he most wanted them to remember before he departed. At the center of his teaching that night was a parable in which he described himself as the True Vine and his disciples as the branches. Repeatedly, he used one verb to express what he wanted them to be able to do in the time ahead, difficult though it may be: he wanted them to "remain."

Intentional, holistic preparation for dealing with the perennial conflicts of church life is one of the greatest gifts we have to offer new ministers in our formation programs. For, when we nurture the vision, capacities and skills for conflict done well, we are proffering a pathway for "remaining" in the ministry and in the Vine. We are giving the means for living not a life "happily ever after" but life "in abundance," the life Jesus does promise us, even in the midst of our bustling, boisterous communities.



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Dynamics of Transform

I have yet to come across a business, religious community or parish that is not interested in transformation. That is to say, I have never heard leaders or members of an organization say, “You know, we’d like things around here to stay pretty much the way they are,” nor have I heard a newly appointed leader say, “I commit to you today that my presidency will be marked by a vigilant maintenance of the status quo.” Leaders inevitably cast their organizational vision in terms of some type of transformation, whether they are responding to rapidly changing social, political and economic realities or proactively committing to a new future. What constitutes a truly transformational leader and what enables a leader to facilitate genuine organizational transformation are less apparent, however, than the desire or presumption of change. Even rarer in organizations that desire transformation is awareness of the dynamic interplay among three dimensions of transformation: 1) transformational goals and outcomes, 2) competencies for leading transformation and 3) ongoing personal transformation. Transformational leadership depends on the interrelated

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International Leadership





dynamics of vision, action and being—one compelling the next in a continuing spiral that reveals the spiritual path of transformational leadership.

TRANSFORMATIONAL VISION

Transformational leadership depends on a vision that is genuinely transformational. While this may seem obvious, casting a transformational vision is not easy. Most of what is done in the name of transformation in organizations is about change, and often it is merely incremental change, not bold or innovative change that marks transformation. James MacGregor Burns, who coined the term transformational leadership in 1978, makes a sharp distinction between change and transformation:

To change is to substitute one thing for another, to give and take, to exchange places . . . but to transform . . . is to cause a metamorphosis in form or structure, a change in the very condition or nature of a thing, a change into another substance, a radical change in outward form and inward character, as when a frog is transformed into a prince or a carriage maker into an auto factory.¹

Some communities and organizations that recognize the need for transformation struggle to name transformational outcomes because that task requires both vision and imagination. The first challenge of articulating a transformational vision is to see beyond what is currently visible. The ingredients of a transformational vision include both a picture of what could be and trust in what can be neither seen nor predicted. Transformational leaders face the paradox of creating a vision that they are simultaneously being given; that is, simultaneously taking action and surrendering. Innovation expert Soren Kaplan calls this process “harnessing the power of surprise,” which allows organizations to break through to entirely new realities.²

Leaders who are able to speak from the creative tension of that paradox face a second challenge: motivating and engaging their employees or community members to co-create a new reality from a vision that is at best only partially in focus. Consider some examples of transformational visions: the religious congregation that sets out to redefine what its sponsorship of institutions will mean; the school that commits to an increasingly impoverished neighbor-

hood; the healthcare system that envisions 100 percent access to care in each community it serves. In each case intent is clear, but the vision is ill-defined. How could such obscure visions ever come to fruition? As perplexing as that question may be, it is not the fog around the vision that most troubles organizations. It is the risk involved in letting go of what is currently seen, known and secure—the necessary path to transformation. Leaders who can articulate a transformational vision are leaders that have been captured by those visions. Even in their ill-defined form, transformational visions are powerful enough to compel leaders to develop the competencies needed to enable their organizations to create a new reality together. Vision compels action.

COMPETENCIES FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Burns distinguishes transformational leadership from a persistent mode of “transactional leadership” in which the leader is primarily negotiating an exchange of something valued by the follower for something—an action or service—that the leader desires. His

examples are fairly obvious: a paycheck for work; political promises for votes.³ The competencies associated with transactional leadership have to do with navigating organizational politics, negotiation and maintaining structures and positions, and they include making operational decisions, driving for results, developing teams, delegation, planning/finance, monitoring and influencing through incentives.⁴ “Transformational leadership, while more complex, is more potent.”⁵ The competencies needed for transformational leadership are relational and person-centered: inspiration, contextual analysis, strategic agility, innovation and developing and empowering others. One must demonstrate these competencies by exercising superior skills in collaboration and communication including holding difficult conversations, facing confrontations and managing conflict.

The shift from transactional to transformational leadership involves a significantly different set of competencies to consider, but in both cases there are clear competencies. Considering leadership through the lens of competencies is the arena in which corporations tend to be most comfortable. Competencies that can be observed and measured are staples of leadership development, and often leadership development in businesses is focused on building and assessing skills. The massive resource titled *FYI-For Your Improvement* produced by Lominger International, which features “67 Leadership Architect® Competencies, 19 Career Stallers and Stoppers and 7 Global Focus Areas,”⁶ is a great example of a competency-based development focus.

The reality that there are specific competencies for leadership at all has a significant implication for many organizations and for leaders who seek transformation. While many businesses devote significant resources to develop senior leaders and to provide opportunities for new leaders to explore their strengths and areas for growth as they develop competencies, many other organizations—that need and want excellence in transformational leader-

ship—do not. Leaders of religious communities, churches, schools and social agencies often have received little guidance in developing the skills and competencies for leadership, even as they are navigating tremendous changes or opportunities facing their organizations. The abundant examples are almost clichés: the excellent teacher who becomes president or headmaster with no administrative experience; the rotating responsibility for serving as provincial among community members with no leadership training; the appointments of pastors from a limited pool of priests in which competencies for presiding and pastoral care may far outweigh skills for leadership. Leaders who do not have the opportunity to explore, test and develop essential skills for leadership cannot become truly transformational leaders.

Recent business literature as well as leadership development workshops and programs abound with resources to develop all of the competencies named above. Leaders who desire to effect transformational change will be able to fulfill that desire only if they realize the competencies that are demanded and take steps to build those skills. The importance of building competencies cannot be overstated. Too often leaders of faith-based and not-for-profit organizations, who have a genuinely transformational vision, are unable to make a difference because they have failed to recognize, admit or seek out needed skills. Leaders who do not have formal preparation for leadership, and who are in organizations that do not have development programs in place, need to seek out ways to assess, learn, practice and hone their skills. A good starting point for any leader is a simple leadership assessment survey completed by one’s supervisor, colleagues, employees whom one supervises, board members and other stakeholders.

ATTENDING TO BEING

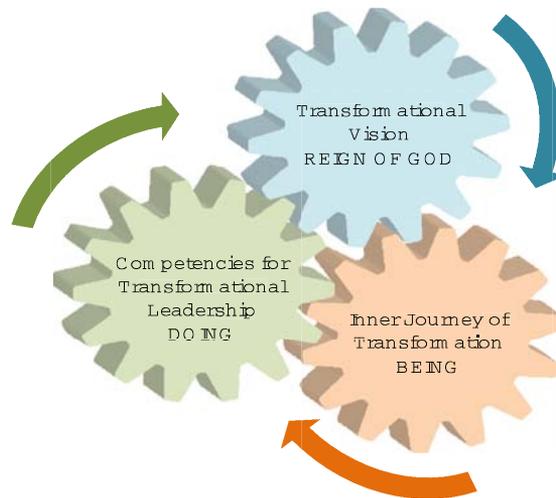
Behavior-based skill development is necessary, but not sufficient, to form transformational leaders. The impact of transformational leadership described by multiple authors reflects a more

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INNER DISPOSITIONS FOR SERVICE AND VIRTUE FUEL AND ARE REFINED BY SPECIFIC LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

- Inspiring
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Conflict Management
- Contextual Analysis
- Innovation
- Strategic Agility
- Developing others

DOING



DEVELOPING A NEW IMAGINATION AND POSSIBILITY FOR ONE'S ORGANIZATION THAT IS FURTHER EXPANDED BY CONNECTION TO THE VISION OF GOD'S REIGN

- Magnanimity—imagining bold and noble outcomes
- Preserving Human Dignity
- Advancing the Common Good

VISION

COOPERATING WITH THE ACTION OF GOD IN US TO DEEPEN PERSONAL AND SPIRITUAL MATURITY AND INTEGRITY, AND CULTIVATING SPECIFIC DISPOSITIONS NECESSARY FOR LEADERSHIP

- Connectedness
- Attitude of servant
- Virtue as second nature
- Living out of out communion

BEING

Engaging in ongoing personal and communal reflection on one's leadership practice drives the dynamic of transformational leadership: Vision compels action; Reflecting on actions illuminates aspects of our being; Reflecting on virtues and dispositions needed to fuel transformation illuminates the Spirit as power for transformation and source of our Vision.

inward focus than most leadership development programs allow: transformational leaders appeal to values and aspirations shared by both followers and leaders, resulting in greater impact on followers and higher motivation overall.⁷ Transformational leadership “elevates the follower’s level of maturity and ideals as well as concerns for achievement, self-actualization, and the well-being of others, the organization and society.”⁸ “The essence of transformational leadership is the inspiration and moral uplifting of followers . . . [involving] deep change in followers’ values, attitudes and behaviors.”⁹ Transformational leadership “is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents.”¹⁰

In spite of the necessary work to build stronger competencies for leadership, one’s attitudes, dispositions and character will also always show up in one’s leadership. Skills for collaboration and strategic agility can be undermined

by a hidden need for control. Attempts at creative innovation can be thwarted by an unexamined fear of failure. The capacity to engage conflict is not a necessary outcome of learning the skills for managing conflict; it demands honest and thoughtful reflection on how willing one is to engage conflict. The feelings that may be triggered when one receives feedback call for a look inside, and the thrill that may accompany bold vision cannot be manifest as Servant Leadership without attention to one’s virtue and character. Even resistance may be an indicator of one’s need to look inward; imagining that one does not need training or leadership development to function well in a leadership role, for example, is a type of hubris that cannot be cured without reflection on one’s fears and motivations.

New skills may result in changed behavior, but changed behavior cannot be sustained without inner transformation. The distinction noted above between organizational change and transformation holds for persons as well.

There is a difference between change and transformation. “Change is when something old dies and something new begins. . . . But mere change might or might not be accompanied by authentic inner transformation. If change does not include personal transformation, we do not actually grow, we just grudgingly adjust.”¹

As leaders come to understand the nature of the competencies required for transformational leadership, they can sense the need for a deeper preparation. Skills of inspiring, analyzing context, strategizing, innovating, empowering others, communicating, collaborating and managing conflict will all limp if not carried out with humility, faith, hope and love. They are best fueled by the power of prudence, justice, courage and temperance. Transformational leadership requires leaders to be transformed from the inside out.

Some leaders, especially in faith-based organizations, may be familiar with the spiritual path of building character and attending to being. For other leaders that path of inner transformation may be uncharted territory. Neither group is likely to be familiar with practices that integrate competency development and the cultivation of virtues for transformational leadership. Three simple elements can build a practice that facilitates inner transformation:

- intentional and ongoing reflection on one's leadership actions,
- a community of inquiry and support, in which members help each other to see and explore the dispositions that are motivating the actions and that are expressed in the actions, and
- individual commitment to spiritual practices—prayer, meditation, mindfulness, solidarity with those who suffer—that increase awareness and vulnerability.

Spiritual traditions across the globe affirm consistent fruits in those who regularly engage that practice of reflection: deeper capacity to make meaningful connections, awareness of the communion one shares with other humans and all creation, capacity to be other-centered in vision and in service and virtue as “second-nature.” The path of personal transformation enables leaders to come face to face with their shadows, vices and destructive dispositions that will, if not addressed, impede their leadership. They become open to their own need for transformation, the awareness of which is itself the mechanism of transformation. Gazing in that mirror, leaders are enabled to access, nurture and embrace more fully the inner core of virtue and character that fuels their actions as transformational leaders. As leaders reflectively explore their actions in community, their journey echoes the path to a transformational vision: risking surrender of what is seen, known and secure to embrace what lies in shadow, and trusting a vision—a promised possibility.

THE SPIRAL WIDENS AND DEEPENS

The path of openness and vulnerability that enables true reflection on one's inner life leads inevitably to encounter with the Source of all Being—the divine spirit creating and being expressed in the human spirit. On the inner journey as persons-in-community, leaders meet the Spirit of God already at work transforming them in being and action, and they discover that the Spirit is the source of their power for transformation and their power for leadership. They meet the Spirit of God already at work transforming their organizations and the world, and they discover that the Spirit is the source of a vision of transformation that orders one's leadership toward service of human dignity and the common good. Genuinely transformational leaders are co-creators of God's Reign.

As leaders come to recognize the Reign of God as the horizon of their transformational vision they can imagine broader transformational possibilities for the communities and organizations they lead. Their expanded vision compels bolder and more faithful actions that demand deeper levels of leadership competency, which in turn compel a deeper personal transformation—until, at last, God shall be all in all.

⁶<http://store.lominger.com/> See M. Lombardo & R. W. Eichinger, *FYI For Your Improvement: A Guide for Development and Coaching* 5th Edition. Lominger International: A Korn/Ferry Company, 2009.

⁷Burns, 1978, 26.

⁸Bass, B. “Two Decades of Research and Development in Transformational Leadership” *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 1999, 8 (1), 11. [9–32].

⁹McCloskey, M. “The 4-R Model of Leadership,” *Journal of Business and Educational Leadership* (2:1), 134. [133–147].

¹⁰Burns, 1978, 4.

¹¹Rohr, R. *Radical Grace: Daily Meditations*, John Feister, Ed. Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1995, 292.

ENDNOTES

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³Burns, J.M. *Leadership*. New York: Harper & Row, 1978, 4.

⁴Cragg, R. and P. Spurgeon. “Competencies of a good leader” in *How to Succeed as a Leader*. Edited by Ruth Chambers, et. al. Oxford, UK: Radcliffe Publishing, 2007, 35.

⁵Burns, 1978, 4.



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