

Leadership Part I

by Rev. Joseph Connolly

“Jesus sat down, called the Twelve together, and said, ‘Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and at the service of all.’” — Mark 9:35.

I have often mentioned this before. I was a member of an Episcopal Church on the Upper West Side in New York City. I joined just as the church had called The Rev. Carol Anderson, the first woman in the Manhattan Diocese to be a Rector, Rector being the fancy title Episcopalians use for pastor.

About two years into her tenure one parishioner who happened to be the son of a producer of *Man of La Mancha*— and yes, I did have a habit of hanging out with theater people— one parishioner suggested to Carol that the church start a soup kitchen program on Sunday afternoons. She did not blink. She said, “Go for it! Get it done!”

The first week several people gathered to help with the operation and they fed a grand total of four. The second week there were 25 guests, the third about seventy-five.

Within a couple months the operation fed some 200 weekly, an amount which strained the physical limitations, the space available at the church. This effort continued for a number of years.

At that time I was a licensed lay reader and chalice bearer, the leader of the group who did the lay reader ministry at the church. But I also became known as the bread guy.

About 8:00 a.m. on a Sunday I would grab a dolly and go around the corner to the world famous Zabar’s Deli on Broadway. They donated their day old bread to the cause, usually about seven to ten big boxes of bread. That’s what you need to help feed 200.

Something we heard from those who came to eat was quite blunt. There’s better food at other soup kitchens in the city, they said. But our soup kitchen, the soup kitchen at this church, had the nicest people.

I would suggest that positive word was based on one thing and one thing only. We tried to make sure at least one parishioner sat at every table.

Why? We thought it would be helpful for someone who was a member of the church community to just be there. We thought to have someone there to engage in conversation, to simply be present to these guests and perhaps help when one of us could would be a good idea.

To be clear, some of the people who came were destitute, homeless, living on the streets, lonely. They needed to eat in a place that had some safety and quiet.

But some were elderly, living alone, lonely. The fact that we offered this ministry gave those folks a chance to get out of their apartments, have human contact, socialize.

I think just being friendly helped people feel welcomed, safe, secure. Perhaps some of them then felt like they were a part of a bigger family, part of community.

They might have never seen the other people in that room before and might never see them again. But that did not preclude a sense of community. (Slight pause.)

Community— now there's an interesting term. What is community? Is the community made up of anyone who gathers here on a Sunday? Or is it more broad than that? (Slight pause.)

No matter what church we talk about, it's not the same folks who gather every week on Sunday. Each week the specific individuals who gather are different. The make up of the gathering changes. So the nature of the worshiping community changes each week.

This is what I say about that. I hope you agree. Anyone in our midst who comes to worship with us brings their own talents, prayers, concerns, joys, hopes and sense of the Spirit, the Spirit Who is both working in them and working in the community. Thereby we, the congregation, become a new and different creation by and through the presence of any one individual each and every week.

I hope through the grace of God that we, as individuals and collectively, strive to affirm that God works in each of us. I also hope through the grace of God we strive together to move the community of faith toward a more full understanding of the Spirit at work in this place, strive to listen for the places to which God calls us within the context of this community. (Slight pause.)

Well, if by definition the community known as the church changes Sunday to Sunday and probably even day to day, what does it mean to be a leader in that context? If community is that fluid what does it mean to offer leadership in that constantly changing, thereby seemingly less than cohesive community? (Slight pause.)

These words are found in Mark: "Jesus sat down, called the Twelve together, and said, 'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and at the service of all.'" (Slight pause.)

There is a lot going on in this reading. For a moment I want to take us to the section where Jesus speaks about death and resurrection. The words clearly state Jesus addresses the disciples.

Later however, it's clear Jesus addresses the Twelve. Many people don't realize this: broadly at least, the disciples are a larger group than the Twelve.

Scholars say the disciples could have numbered anywhere from fifty to the hundreds. These are the many followers of Jesus. That number goes beyond the Twelve.

So in using the term "Twelve," the writer of Mark clearly indicates the Apostles are being addressed. And Jesus has gathered this smaller group together.

For lack of a better label we can think of them as the inner circle of those who follow Jesus. I think it's appropriate to call this group the leadership.

Now, the distinction I just outlined also addresses the real make up of any community. It reinforces the idea that community constantly changes.

In fact, when the texts of the Gospels are carefully examined even the Apostles, this inner circle, is somewhat fluid. Sometimes all are present; sometimes only one or two. It seems like they come and go. And, of course, when Jesus is at that greatest hour of need... they are not to be found.

That brings me back to those important questions about and for leadership. If the community of church constantly changes, what does it mean to be a leader? If community is that fluid what does it mean to offer leadership in an apparently less than cohesive community? (Slight pause.)

One of my mentors in ministry advocated for quiet leadership. Here are several descriptions. First, it's not what you say that makes for real leadership. It's what you do.

Second, it *is* how you behave, how you treat other people that displays real leadership. Third, real leadership is not about self-aggrandizement.

Fourth, real leadership is about sharing, about empowering others to realize who they are by allowing for and encouraging their leadership. The goal of the true leader is to make yourself unnecessary.

All that also explains one of the problems with leadership. Real leaders do not need people who are willing to work.

Real leaders need people willing to lead others. Real leaders need no followers. Real leaders need others who are willing to lead. (Slight pause.)

Remember the story I told earlier about the Soup Kitchen at my New York City Church? I was known as the bread guy. That was minor leadership on my part but it was leadership.

Yes, it's not what I said, it's what I did that counted. But more importantly I filled a slot that needed filling in part because I could see the overall picture, the leadership picture, of what needed to be done.

And then there's what Carol, the Rector at the church, said. "Go for it! Get it done!" Someone once said to me, "Well, why did she not do more? Why did she not start it? Why did she not organize it. That's what a real leader would have done."

No. Her job as a leader was to recognize a ministry was needed and recognize someone was willing to do it. Her job as a leader was to empower that person and get out of the way. (Slight pause.)

After this service we will gather for a celebration and some soup and bread. [1] I did not lead this, only in the sense that I got out of the way. Someone had the idea and then many hands helped, the Deacons with organization and other people helped. Many were empowered.

And it's likely many people will come who are not here at the service of worship. And therefore, the community will change but it will still be community. (Slight pause.)

So, what is leadership? Leadership is something we all need to do and leaders are who we all need to be. Why? We are Congregationalists. The very name says we are all leaders.

And yes, I do think structure is a human necessity. I say that's why there *are* the disciples and why there *are* the Twelve— structure. However, unless we are leaders together, unless leadership is communal, the community becomes diminished.

And let us also remember, Jesus explained leadership this way: "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and at the service of all." Amen.

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ENDPIECE: It is the practice of the Pastor to speak after the Closing Hymn, but before the Choral Response and

Benediction. This is an précis of what was said: “I want to call your attention to the list of *Thoughts on Leadership* found in today’s bulletin. [2] Some are from theological sources but most of them are not. Let me point to just one from Peter Drucker, who has been described as the founder of modern management. ‘Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.’ Too often we, in the church, simply manage but do not lead. For those who complain the church has lost its ability to be a positive influence in society we need to look no further than that statement.”

BENEDICTION: Let us go forth in the Spirit of Christ. Let us seek the will of God. Let us put aside ambition and conceit for the greater good. Let us serve in joyous obedience. This is the prayer recited by Melanesian Islanders: May Jesus be the canoe that holds us up in the sea called life; may Jesus be the rudder that keeps us on a straight path on this watery road where waves and storms can inhabit and confuse our experience of the Divine; indeed, may Jesus be the outrigger that supports us in times of temptation; May the Spirit of Jesus be our sail that carries us through each day. Amen.

[1] A 100th Birthday Anniversary Celebration for a parishioner, Doris Graves.

[2] 0. **THOUGHTS ON LEADERSHIP**

“If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, you are a leader.” — John Quincy Adams

“In Aristotelian terms, the good leader must have ethos, pathos and logos. The ethos is moral character, the source of an ability to persuade. Pathos is an ability to touch feelings, to move people emotionally. Logos is an ability to give solid reasons for an action, to move people intellectually.” — Mortimer J. Adler

“A leader is a dealer in hope.” — Napoleon Bonaparte

“A prime function of the leader is to keep hope alive.” — John W. Gardner

“A leader’s role is to raise people’s aspirations for what they can become and to release their energies so they will try to get there.” — David Gergen

“The true leader is always led.” — Carl Jung

“Leaders don’t create followers, they create more leaders.” — Tom Peters

“A good leader needs to stand behind those who follow as often standing in front of them.” — Marilyn vos Savant

“Outstanding leaders boost the self-esteem of others. If people believe in themselves, it’s amazing what they can accomplish.” — Sam Walton

“Transformational leaders are known in two primary ways: they bring out the best in their followers and the worst in their enemies.” — Dr. Mardy Grothe

“I must follow the people. Am I not their leader?” — Benjamin Disraeli

“The final test of a leader is to leave behind in others the conviction and the will to carry on.” — Walter Lippmann

“A sense of humor is part of the art of leadership, of getting along with people, of getting things done.” — Dwight D. Eisenhower

“The task of leadership is not to put greatness into humanity, but to elicit it, for the greatness is already there.” — John Buchan (1875-1940)

“Leadership is communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly that they come to see it in themselves.” — Stephen R. Covey

“Jesus models a new kind of authority, a servant-leadership that ministers to the members rather than waits to be served by them. Jesus did what, in that culture, slaves did: wash the feet of the community.” — Joan Chittister, *The Liturgical Year*

“Leadership is lifting a person’s vision to higher sights, the raising of a person’s performance to a higher standard, the building of a personality beyond its normal limitations.” — Peter Drucker

“The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the two, the

leader must become a servant.” — Max DuPree

“True leadership must be for the benefit of the followers, not to enrich the leader.” — John C. Maxwell

“Leadership is a potent combination of strategy and character. But if you must be without one, be without the strategy.” — Norman Schwarzkopf

“Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.” — Peter Drucker

“Not even a great leader can get very far without great people to lead.” — Ashleigh Brilliant

“Mimicking the successful strategies of others is enticing to some leaders because it eliminates the need to think.” — Henry T. & Richard Blackaby, in *Spiritual Leadership*.

“...whenever a people reduces all its problems to a conspiracy by someone else, it absolves itself and its leaders of any responsibility for its predicament— and any need for self-examination.” — Thomas Freidman, *NY Times* 02/10/2002

“There is no valid leadership acknowledged in the Bible, whether it be of people or of institutions, that does not fulfill itself in servanthood.” — E. V. Mathew YMCA leader in Bangalore, India

“Do not wait for leaders; do it alone, person to person.” — Mother Teresa