

Faithful Servant Leadership

As a Vicar General, one of the most important responsibilities is strengthening your direct reports so they become better leaders. Leadership in Catholic context is not primarily about taking initiative or being in charge. Instead, being a faithful servant is about discerning God's will and acting upon it as quickly as possible. Knowing where we are, knowing where God is calling us, and having the skills and experience to get everyone there together is at the heart of true leadership.

On this page, you will find four outlines of exercises you can complete with your staff. These exercises can be used at the beginning of a regular staff meeting or over lunch. Since each asks the participants to share about their faith life, a more relaxed setting is appropriate.

Each exercise provides an objective for the conversation, includes Scripture references, draws upon the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and includes notes to help you prepare and discussion prompts to facilitate conversations. The opening and closing prayer is left to the group so it remains in accord with how they normally pray.

The topics of the conversations are:

Faithful Servant: *Evangelization and Ministry*

This exercise is foundational in that it helps leaders reflect upon their role as evangelists and how this can be incorporated into their work including non-pastoral ministries

Faithful Servant: Searching, Following, and Leading

This exercise furthers the concept of evangelization by focusing on the fact that each of is searching for God, following God, and leading for God at the same time.

Faithful Servant: *Am I really in charge?*

Leaders, even in the Church, are often tempted to believe they are in charge and forget that God is in charge. This point is important since leaders can unintentionally squelch movements of the Spirit.

Faithful Servant: *Holy Indifference*

Discerning God's will calls leaders to not start with themselves but instead to listen with the people of God to become the best Church the Church calls us to be.

#1: Faithful Servant Leadership: Evangelization and Ministry

1. **Objective:** Evangelization and Ministry is designed to help diocesan leaders reflect upon their role in evangelization and supporting the staff. At times, when working in a central administrative office the notion of each of us being a leader and an evangelist can get lost. In light of today's challenges it is unlikely that "we are going back to the way it was before COVID". Therefore, we all are part of building something new from what was, and will always be, true. To do that diocesan leaders must be faithful servant leaders.

A. Scripture Reading 1Peter3:14-17 and Catechism

"Do not be afraid or terrified with fear of them, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that be the will of God, than for doing evil."

CCC Quote: 850 – *The origin and purpose of mission*. The Lord's missionary mandate is ultimately grounded in the eternal love of the Most Holy Trinity. "The Church on earth is by her nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, she has as her origin the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The ultimate purpose of mission is none other than to make men share in the communion between the Father and the Son in their Spirit of love."

B. Notes for Discussion

1. People are not always evangelized and have not made a conscious decision to follow Jesus. Leaders need to publicly witness to what they have seen and heard (1 John 1)
2. As leaders I want us to feel close enough to Jesus that we are willing to tell others about him in meetings and while sitting at lunch...
3. While we are evangelizing our staff, we are also evangelizing ourselves and those around us. When we heal others, we heal ourselves.
4. We may want to discuss how we engage our non-Catholic co-workers both by sharing the faith and respecting where they are on their faith journey.
5. We need to support one another as leaders.

C. Discussion prompts

1. Can you name a few small ways you can see God working in the lives of your co-workers?
2. How can we help to evangelize each other as leaders at work?
3. How can we as leaders help to convey the faith? Would it be helpful for us to practice different forms of prayer that we can use with our staff – so each of us is comfortable enough to lead those prayers?

D. Closing Prayer

#2: Faithful Servant Leader: Searching, Following, and Leading

1. Searching, Following, and Leading

Objective: This conversation relates to how each person is searching, following, and leading others to God. Often people, including those who work for the Church, believe they are not worthy of sharing the Gospel with others. The point of this exercise is to help leaders understand that none of us is worthy but all of us have a story to share with others about God in our lives. Potential reasons for their hesitancy are a self-perceived lack of knowledge, unresolved guilt, etc.

2. Scripture Reading 2 Corinthians 5:17-20 and Catechism

“So whoever in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold new things have come. And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors of Christ, as if God were appealing through us.”

#1285: Baptism, the Eucharist, and the sacrament of Confirmation together constitute the “sacraments of initiation,” whose unity must be safeguarded. It must be explained to the faithful that the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace. For by the sacrament of Confirmation, the baptized are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence, they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed.

3. Notes for Discussion

1. Throughout the scriptures, both old and new, we see stories replayed of a person first seeking for God, and then following him, and then pursuing others for him.
2. We can see this in Eli guiding Samuel and Barnabas and Paul.
3. Both Samuel and Paul grew into leaders within the Christian community and both had mentors.
4. It is important for us to be gentle with ourselves and remember the spiritual life does not move in a linear fashion.
5. In fact we are all seeking, following, and leading at the same time.
6. In *Evangelii nuntiandi* Pope Paul VI taught us that people are more likely to listen to witnesses than teachers. Leaders should not be afraid to share their own faith struggles as appropriate.

4. Discussion Prompts

1. Can you relate to this notion of being a seeker, follower, and one who goes out to find others all at the same time?
2. What does it mean to be entrusted with the message of reconciliation? How do we live that out?
 - a. As leaders we are also mentors to the staff – how do we witness to Christ in key moments?

5. Closing Prayer

#3: Faithful Servant Leader: Am I really in Charge?

Objective:

There is a considerable movement to bring corporate practices into the management of the Church. There are many aspects of this work that makes considerable sense. However, a downside of this effort is that the notion of “who is in charge” can be lost. To that end, this exercise will help remind diocesan leaders that it is the Lord who is in charge and leaders are really followers – of Jesus Christ.

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 29: 11-14 and Catechism

For I know well the plans I have in mind for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare, not for your woe! Plans to give you a future of hope. When you call me, when you go to pray to me, I will listen to you. When you look for me, you will find me. Yes, when you seek me with all your heart, you will find me with you, says the Lord.

"Let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice."⁵ Although man can forget God or reject him, He never ceases to call every man to seek him, so as to find life and happiness. But this search for God demands of man every effort of intellect, a sound will, "an upright heart", as well as the witness of others who teach him to seek God.

You are great, O Lord, and greatly to be praised: great is your power and your wisdom is without measure. And man, so small a part of your creation, wants to praise you: this man, though clothed with mortality and bearing the evidence of sin and the proof that you withstand the proud. Despite everything, man, though but a small part of your creation, wants to praise you. You yourself encourage him to delight in your praise, for you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you. (St. Augustine, *Conf.* 1,1,1:PL 32,659-661)

Notes for Discussion

1. It is critical that we pray throughout the day so we do not forget whose work we are doing.
2. We need to remember that John 15 calls us to rely on God – God does not rely on us to do good!
3. There are times when we feel far from God but he is always calling us back to him.
4. Might our restlessness at work be related to our relationship with God?

Discussion Prompts

1. From a “secular business” perspective one of the most important traits is casting a vision and taking charge. To be efficient and definitive are important traits in the business world – to be a leader. To be a leader means to strike out on one’s own.
2. From a faith perspective we are called to seek out God’s vision and plan – and then we follow.
3. The role of a diocesan leader is to be a faithful servant, follow God and lead others to do the same.
4. As leaders what can we do to help our staff see that our work is a response to God’s call?

Closing Prayer

#4 Faithful Servant Leader: Holy Indifference & Discerning God's Will

Objective

A key component of discernment is accepting that God may reveal to us something we had not anticipated. This can be hard to accept and also may set the stage for our thinking we have truly discerned God's will when it may be our own instead. A good safeguard is to remember that discernment in a diocesan setting is focused on becoming the best Church the Church calls us to be. For this to happen we need to learn how to place our passions to the side and to be "indifferent" as is found in the Ignatian Exercises and seek unity and humility.

Scripture Reading: Philippians 2: 1-5 and Catechism

If there is any encouragement in Christ, any solace in love, any participation in the Spirit, any compassion and mercy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing. Do nothing out of selfishness, out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but everyone for those of others.

Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus.

CCC 2549: It remains for the holy people to struggle, with grace from on high, to obtain the good things God promises. In order to possess and contemplate God, Christ's faithful mortify their cravings and, with the grace of God, prevail over the seductions of pleasure and power.

Notes for Discussion

1. Working for the Church is not a goal it is a call.
2. Do we take enough time as a team to reflect and listen for our calling?
3. Considering the stress many of our colleagues are under, who are concerned they will lose their job, what can we do to be more compassionate during this awkward time?
4. Thinking of the reading we just heard what are attributes I need to incorporate into my life

Discussion Prompts

1. If we seek power or position how does that impact our unity?
2. How can we know, as a group, that we are discerning God's will versus our own?
3. How can we pray for one another when discerning God's will for the diocese and our work?
4. Who else do we need to invite into our prayers of discernment?

Closing Prayer