

# PARISH LEADERSHIP



*Principles and Perspectives*



William J. Byron, S.J.



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# Introduction

This book is intended primarily, but not exclusively, for Catholic pastors—i.e., for ordained men whose discipleship puts them on the path of sacramental service to a defined faith community. These are words of encouragement, not criticism, offered in admiration with an intention of being helpful. Not all ordained pastors measure up to the leadership responsibilities that are theirs; this book will help them recognize their missed leadership opportunities and encourage them to overcome their omissions. It will also, I hope, help them recognize the potential for revolutionary change that lies within their reach. To lead is to change, as the last chapter in this book explains. The what, when, where, and how of pastoral change is covered in these pages.

This book is also very much intended for non-ordained lay men and women whose vocation puts them on the path of pastoral service to the Catholic faith community. Parish leadership must be shared; otherwise it will surely fail. Here again the leadership challenge associated with this vocation is sometimes met and sometimes missed; the principles outlined in these pages can serve both to energize and renew parish life and pastoral service.

“Principle” is a word that registers on the ear with the exact same tone as the word “principal,” but when these words meet the eye, they convey altogether distinct meanings. A principle—“ple”—l-e-a-d-s to something; it puts “legs” under one’s values. Principles prompt action

or serve to promote inaction in situations where to act would be to do something morally wrong. A “principled” person knows where he or she is coming from and where he or she is likely to end up. Principled and purposeful are twin characteristics of a mature person of character leading a responsible life.

Principles of parish leadership will be listed and explained throughout this book. They will be set forth clearly and succinctly for easy assimilation and understanding. The hope here is to bring providers of parish service—men and women, ordained and not ordained—together on a common ground of shared convictions capable of shaping a parish culture. That’s what a culture is—a set of shared meanings and values. The meanings and values will be expressed here in principle form. Once understood and internalized by the parish team, the principles will energize the parish.

Interestingly enough, a team of individuals who, say, are the mainstays of a law firm or a financial services company are often called “principals.” They are key leaders with separate responsibilities, but they all share the same principles. They are sometimes called partners, but, again, are united by shared principles. The partnership works best when the principals communicate among themselves and work together seamlessly. And so it goes at the leadership level of successful parishes.

Another way to view this book is to see it as a construction project. Chapter 1 provides a foundation for all that follows. I like to think of the first chapter as an infrastructure, a spirituality in which all the principles are grounded. The elements that constitute the infrastructure have to be shared by all members of the parish team if that team is to function effectively. And that raises the question of compatibility. Do all the members of the team belong there? If not, the team member who does not fit will have to change or move on. It is the pastor’s job to form the team, to “massage” the members at the level of principle to make sure that compatibility reinforces the infrastructure. This will become clearer once I list the elements of the

infrastructure; let me remark here, however, that they are all lifted from Scripture and thus should be available and congenial to all.

Although most of my working life has been spent in higher education, I had experience as a full-time pastor from 2000 to 2003 at Holy Trinity Catholic Church in the Georgetown section of Washington, DC. And for the past ten years I have been a weekend assistant at Annunciation Parish in Havertown, PA, a suburb of Philadelphia. Holy Trinity had 9,500 registered parishioners when I was there; about half of them came from Northern Virginia. We had a parish elementary school that was one of the best in the city, a parish council, a finance council, an active religious education program for youngsters enrolled in non-Catholic schools, an RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) program, and a year-round marriage preparation program offered in segments of six successive Thursday evening sessions several times a year. Let your Internet search engine take you to “Holy Trinity Catholic Church, Washington, DC” for an up-to-the-moment description of what is happening there.

Table imagery is helpful in gaining perspective on parish leadership. The Table of the Eucharist is at the center of it all; the regular weekly gatherings of parish staff around a meeting table in the parish center provide direction and momentum for parish life. We will be returning to these tables throughout the rest of this book.

I have a pen-and-pencil holder on my desk that has “The Essence of Leadership” inscribed on its side. Here are the words attributed to Douglas MacArthur: “A true leader has the confidence to stand alone, the courage to make tough decisions, and the compassion to listen to the needs of others. He or she does not set out to be a leader, but becomes one by the quality of his or her actions and the integrity of his or her intent. In the end, leaders are much like eagles, they don’t flock; you find them one at a time.”

As this exploration begins, let the reader note in that inscription the words *confidence*, *courage*, *decisions*, *listen*, *actions*, *integrity*, and

*intent*. I plant them here as seeds; you will find them sprouting up throughout this book. Let me also warn, ever so gently, the pastor who prefers solo flights and displays lone-ranger tendencies that he can be aloof without realizing it, and unresponsive to the wisdom and will of those he is there to lead.

Leadership can more easily be described than defined. It is worth the effort, however, here at the outset, to attempt a definition.

Let me first take a moment to mention the often-expressed notion that “we are all leaders.” To a certain and not unimportant extent, this is true. The expression provides a necessary corrective to the command-and-control, “somebody-has-to-be-in-charge” understanding of leadership. But if everyone is in charge, can we clearly identify a locus of leadership? Can we locate the decision point? Will we know when and where to move? In any given situation—whether it be a crisis or just a good time for change—if everyone is a leader, is leadership in fact there? It can be, but where?

In my view, the way out of this thicket lies in a distinction between taking charge and exerting influence. “Influencer” is an unfamiliar, perhaps misleading, and surely awkward term. “Leader” is so much more familiar; it is easier on the ear and smoother on the tongue. Let me suggest, therefore, that you think of the leader as an influencer who has been shaped by countless other influences and influencers. Together, leader and led constitute a rising tide of influence or a prevailing influential wind because of which change occurs, progress happens. Leaders do indeed influence others, but there is more to leadership than influence.

Think of the really successful, generally outstanding parish. One, several, or a relatively few persons are out there on the point, but all are responsible for the leadership that has taken place. This is the meaning I attach to the saying, “We are all leaders.” We are; but I would want to add, “Some more than others.” And in a Catholic parish, it is the pastor’s job to bring those few together, to keep

them talking to one another, and to support them with praise and encouragement. “Spray the place with praise” was the advice given by a veteran pastor to a new young pastor many years ago. Hard to improve on that!

“Followership” is the ultimate test of leadership. That seems fairly obvious. If you are going to lead, someone has to follow. Hence, my personal definition of leadership is “the art of inducing others to follow.” A variant on that would be, “the art of inducing change,” because change is really the name of the leadership game.

Leadership is, from any point of view and by any measure, an art, the art of inducing others to follow. Leaders have to maximize their power to persuade; without persuasion, leadership simply does not happen.

Leadership is, moreover, modeled behavior. The leader shows others the way and they can see the way because they observe it in the leader. To be a leader is to lead by example. Followers follow what they see in their leader. Any organization can be thought of as a big machine; all its moveable parts are people. The leadership challenge is to get those people moving! Persuasion releases the brake and ignites forward progress.

Leadership is not a science (although there are indeed theories of leadership), nor is it a craft (although leaders “make” things happen by “carving out” solutions, “hammering down” loose ends, and “fixing” broken policies). Just as politics is often called “the art of the possible,” leadership is the art of getting things done willingly (if not always cheerfully) by the coordinated efforts of others. Why not think of the leader as an artist, if leadership is, in fact, an art? I think we should. And the image of an artist can serve as a helpful corrective to the king-of-the-hill, leader-as-hero image that many uncritically assume to be an accurate portrayal of real leadership.

Time now to move on to a reflection on parish leadership, but first I want to mention that Chapter 6 (“The Servant Leader”) draws upon material that first appeared in print as Chapter 13 in my book



*Next-Generation Leadership* (University of Scranton Press, 2010), and that portions of Chapter 10 (“Change Is at the Heart of Leadership”) come from that same book. Chapter 8 (“Facing Up to the Clergy Sex Abuse Scandal”) is based on an article of mine that appeared under the title of “Structural Adjustments for a Church Working Its Way through Crisis,” *Church* magazine (Winter 2004, pp.11–16).

# CHAPTER One

## Shared Spirituality for Parish Leadership

It is natural to think of spirituality when one thinks of parish life and a parish leadership team. And it is important to open this narrative with a reflection on spirituality by way of preamble to all administrative considerations.

According to theologian Doris Donnelly, spirituality is prayer elevated to a lifestyle. That's one compelling definition of the reality that in these stressful times is prompting countless persons in, out of, and around the church to stretch their souls toward God. Affairs are now "soul size," as playwright Christopher Fry phrased it in *A Sleep of Prisoners*, and "the enterprize is exploration into God."<sup>1</sup> If it is happening in the broader culture, it should certainly be happening at the top of any effective parish organization. Prayerful people should be in charge.

Shared spirituality is the foundation for effective parish leadership. This assumes that the leadership responsibility is shared. It is not command-and-control, top-down, Father-knows-best.

The cultural question "What is spirituality?" gives rise to another question: What are the roots of our current growing interest in spiritual issues in and out of religious circles?

More than sixty years ago in the U.S., *Time* magazine ran a cover story about an event that shook the world, an event that wounded many

so profoundly that it has remained to trouble many of us, mind and soul, ever since. The incident, which was reported in the August 20, 1945, issue of the magazine, marked both an end and a beginning.

This report was published, as were all *Time* stories in those days, without attribution of authorship. I learned years later that a young (and then relatively unknown) *Time* staffer by the name of James Agee wrote the piece under a very tight deadline. The overarching headline was “Victory.” The first subhead was “The Peace.” The second subhead was “The Bomb.”

*Time* was covering a big story that week, perhaps the biggest of the century. Agee, who later became famous as a writer, saw the “controlled splitting of the atom” that produced the bomb that was used to attack Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and thus bring to an end the greatest conflict in human history, as an event so enormous that in comparison “the war itself shrank to minor significance.” To Agee’s eye, “[H]umanity, already profoundly perplexed and disunified, was brought inescapably into a new age in which all thoughts and things were split—and far from controlled.”<sup>2</sup>

*Time*’s readers, still dizzy with the thrill of victory, could hardly have seen, as Agee did, the potential for both good and evil that the atomic bomb represented.

The promise of good and evil bordered alike on the infinite—with this further, terrible split in the fact: that upon a people already so nearly drowned in materialism even in peacetime, the good uses of this power might easily bring disaster as prodigious as the evil.... When the bomb split open the universe...it also revealed the oldest, simplest, commonest, most neglected and most important of facts: that each man is eternally and above all else responsible for his own soul, and in the terrible words of the Psalmist, that no man may deliver his brother, nor make agreement unto God for him.<sup>3</sup>

Then Agee made a shattering observation that rings every bit as true today as it did that memorable August many years ago. Here are the words he wrote—words that were available to any reader of America’s most popular newsmagazine in 1945 and that have gone largely unheeded in the decades since:

Man’s fate has forever been shaped between the hands of reason and spirit, now in collaboration, again in conflict. Now reason and spirit meet on final ground. If either or anything is to survive, they must find a way to create an indissoluble partnership.<sup>4</sup>

These powerful words were perceptive and prophetic. They appeared just before the so-called “baby boomers” were born. They explain the cause of the “split” that has been troubling humanity for well over half a century. We have not yet forged the “indissoluble partnership” between reason and spirit (reason, which produced the bomb; spirit, which must manage its control); we are even more adrift now than we were then on a sea of materialism. We may, however, be beginning to notice what Agee saw when the bomb split open the universe, namely, that each of us is responsible for his or her own soul.

Men and women in the world of work who are restless and wondering about the relevance of their Sunday faith to their Monday responsibilities are, I believe, being nudged now by the Spirit—the Holy Spirit—to begin an exploration into God. Their parishes should be helping them to do this.

“Spirituality” is not to be confused with the everyday sense of the word “spirit”—as in “school spirit,” “pioneer spirit,” the “spirit of capitalism,” or the “spirited” response someone might make to some external stimulus. To be *spirited* in such contexts is to react to something completely human, something finite. That which is truly *spiritual* is immaterial and cannot be fully grasped by our limited human minds; it cannot be measured, counted, weighed, or touched. It is seen only in its effects.

Spirit in a faith-based spirituality rooted in the Christian tradition is identified with the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the triune God, present and active in the human soul. As scripture puts it: “This is how we know that we remain in [God] and he in us, that he has given us of his Spirit” (1 Jn 4:13).

In his Letter to the Galatians, Paul addresses people who are converts from paganism. He instructs them in the exercise of their newfound freedom in the Holy Spirit and urges them to “live by the Spirit” in their normal secular surroundings. This is precisely what serious Christians at work in the world today are concerned about doing. This is also what should be preoccupying those at the leadership level in parishes today.

How can one know that he or she is “guided by the Spirit?” Take a look at The Pauline Criteria.

St. Paul offers in Galatians 5:22–23 what I call the Pauline Criteria for judging the consistency of one’s own (or anyone else’s) behavior with the presence of the Spirit in a human life. They constitute what Paul calls the “fruit of the Spirit.” Note the singular fruit; these are not the gifts of the Holy Spirit; they are a set of Pauline principles. There are nine of them. Paul lists them in this order:

1. Love
2. Joy
3. Peace
4. Patience
5. Kindness
6. Generosity
7. Faithfulness
8. Gentleness
9. Self-Control

Examine what you do at home or in the workplace—particularly if that workplace happens to be a pastoral center—against these criteria. Judge another’s oppositional or supportive behavior in that

same workplace in the light of these norms. These are non-market values that can humanize every marketplace and workplace, not to mention the special place associated with parish work and worship.

Notice that Paul has not outlined unattainable goals. All nine of these Pauline characteristics are within your reach; they are attainable by normal people leading ordinary lives.

In contrast to these ingredients of a faith-based spirituality rooted in Christian revelation, Paul mentions the “works of the flesh,” i.e., human activity only, activity not informed by God’s indwelling Spirit. The works of the flesh are what we are left with when we reject the Spirit and set out blindly on our own. These rebel elements are “obvious,” Paul notes, and he identifies them as follows: “immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies, and the like” (Gal 5:19–21). At the end of this catalogue, Paul puts it bluntly: “I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal 5:21).

After examining Paul’s second list, you might be forgiven for thinking to yourself, “Well, except for the orgies, that’s actually a pretty fair description of the workplace as I know it.” An exaggeration, of course, but all the more reason to focus closely on the first list of positive Pauline values.

If spirituality is to mean anything at all for you in the workplace, the Pauline Criteria signaling the presence of the Spirit must become the very infrastructure you carry with you into the world of work. And this is especially the case in the parish workplace. They should be guiding principles, pillars that support your working life. The Pauline Criteria can transform you, and with them you can transform the workplace. If you hope to change the world around you, first change yourself!

Sober reflection on the absence in your surroundings (and perhaps even in yourself) of these positive criteria can be unsettling. So can

the realization of the occasional presence of what Paul listed as negatives. These experiences should be unsettling. Welcome the discomfort. It can serve an eviction notice on the complacency that can stifle the Spirit and the spirituality waiting to energize you from within your soul. Let's look now in detail at each of the nine Pauline values.

## **LOVE**

The word means many things to many people. Popular culture debases love in song and story, forever confusing it with physical passion. Great literature and great lives through the centuries display the profound beauty of truly selfless love.

At bottom, love is service and sacrifice. It is the willingness to lay down one's life—literally or figuratively—for another. When you think about love, you should be thinking about your willingness to offer up your own true self for the benefit of another.

## **JOY**

Joy is another profound reality that is not to be misunderstood. It is not to be confused with pleasure or hilarity. Those who replace the "pursuit of happiness" with the pursuit of *pleasure* will find lasting joy always eluding them. Joy is an inner assurance that your will is aligned with God's will, that you are favored, graced, and gifted beyond anything that you could merit on your own. Joy is balance, an abiding contentment.

## **PEACE**

Often mistaken for whatever follows a truce, peace is actually tranquility. St. Thomas Aquinas described it as the "tranquility of right order." Those who "bury the hatchet" and retain their grudges are not at peace. Those who retain their emotional balance and agree to disagree, can live in harmony.

## **PATIENCE**

This word literally means “suffering.” The agent acts; the “patient” receives the action. How the person receives the action—especially the unwelcome action—is the test of patience. Tests of patience arise from countless sources: a dentist’s drill; a honking horn; a fist pounding on the table; a spoken contradiction; an unmerited rebuke. The question is: How do you respond?

## **KINDNESS**

Many have remarked that apparent kindnesses can, in fact, be acts of cruelty. This means that weakness or timidity can slip into virtue’s clothing, and provide cover for an escape from responsibility or right action. Many a selfish or hypocritical act has been justified by a bad motive that is wrapped in counterfeit kindness.

Kindness does not depend on the perceptions of others. True kindness is respect for human dignity in *every* circumstance of life; it is both courtesy and personally courageous attentiveness displayed toward another person.

## **GENEROSITY**

The opposite of all that is small, closed, petty, un giving, and *unforgiving*, generosity points to largeness of soul. Generosity does not come naturally to human nature. But generosity can be learned by observation and acquired by practice. Whenever practiced, true generosity demonstrates the truth of the dictum that virtue is its own reward.

## **FAITHFULNESS**

Dependability and reliability are the prerequisites of friendship. Keeping commitments—commonly thought of as “promises” and theologically understood as “covenants”—is the “stuff” of faith.



For the believer, faith is the habit of entrusting oneself to God. In the workplace, faithfulness is friendship, trust, and the security derived from commitments kept. These two varieties of “promises kept” may seem separate, but they actually reflect a single ongoing reality in the life of the believer.

## **GENTLENESS**

Automobile executive Lee Iacocca, when at the height of his business career as chairman of the Chrysler Corporation, was referred to by a speaker at a black-tie dinner in New York City as a “gentle” man (aren’t all who attend such functions “ladies and gentlemen”?). The flamboyant entrepreneur Donald Trump followed the speaker to present an award to Iacocca and ridiculed the suggestion that there was anything at all “gentle” about him.

Does being a “gentle” man (or woman) imply refinement? withdrawal? a retiring personality? What *does* it mean to be gentle? Gentleness is so often confused with timidity that we are caught in a cultural confusion over the very meaning of the word, and of the place of gentleness in the workplace.

In actuality, gentleness is strength. The gentle person is neither insecure nor arrogant; he or she is self-possessed, in quiet control of self and the surrounding situation.

## **SELF CONTROL**

This test of personal integrity involves the practice of saying no to the self. A young mother once held up her infant son in the presence of the legendary American Civil War general Robert E. Lee and asked for his blessing on the child. Lee offered an apt but rare and unusual blessing: “Teach him he must deny himself,” Lee said.

A person “out of control” in matters large or small is a diminished person. To have “lost it” in any circumstance of life, is to have abdi-

cated that which makes one human; it is to have invited a curse and rejected a blessing.

### **WELCOMING THE SPIRIT—EVERY DAY**

Anyone seriously concerned with the challenge of changing workplace negatives (especially in a parish workplace) into faith-based positives, or with welcoming the Spirit to dwell within his or her own soul, might well begin with Paul's nine-point checklist, making it an instrument of personal and private daily self-examination. These nine pillars can support an ongoing commitment to the development of a personal spirituality.

A practical spirituality for life and work can become a personal part of you if you simply follow these suggestions:

- Write these spiritual guidelines down as a nine-point checklist in score-card style.
- Reflect on them prayerfully for a few moments in the morning as you ask God's blessing on your day.
- Then, in the evening, again in a few moments of reflective prayer, review your checklist and mark your slippage or progress on each point as you give thanks to God for all the gifts that are yours at the close of another day.

Such a routine is quite simple: A morning and evening expression of gratitude accompanied by a checklist review. As simple as it is, however, this approach to spirituality—or any approach vaguely resembling it—is all too rare in modern life. What a difference it would make for any home or workplace if everyone who interacted there attended to Paul's checklist at the beginning and end of every day! And it goes without saying that this could be transformative for a parish workplace.

## A PERSONAL CHECKLIST

Before your working day begins and at the end of the day before going to bed, compose yourself for a few moments of stocktaking in prayer. You may want to use the following as a starting point for developing your own routine, but avoid the rote repetition of empty words and phrases. Be sure to allow for your own formulation of questions and selection of points for emphasis.

- Recall that you are in God's presence, and thank God for the gift of life and any other gifts that come to mind.
- Ask for light to see yourself as God sees you, to see your day in the light of eternity.

Review your role in the day just unfolding, or just ending, against these norms:

### *Love*

Morning: Am I prepared to share, serve, sacrifice for others today?

Evening: Did I open up toward others? Where did I hurt anyone or hold back?

### *Joy*

Morning: Is my will aligned with God's? Do I cherish the graces, the gifts of God to me? Do I recognize the difference between pleasure and happiness? Am I in balance?

Evening: Where did I turn in on myself today? When and why did sadness touch me today? Did I lose balance?

### *Peace*

Morning: What image of tranquility can I carry with me into this new day?

Evening: Why was I upset? What grudges am I carrying?  
Did I disturb the peace of others? Did I make  
anyone angry?

*Patience*

Morning: Am I prepared to suffer today, if God wills it or is  
willing to permit it?

Evening: When and why did I “lose it” today? Did I over-  
react? Did I lose my temper because I was about  
to lose face? Do I really believe that everything  
depends on me?

*Kindness*

Morning: Am I prepared to be considerate today? Will  
courtesy and civility accompany me through the  
day, and will attentiveness mark my relationship  
to others?

Evening: Did I contribute any rudeness, abrupt demands,  
or insults to the rubble of this day?

*Generosity*

Morning: What will I be today, a giver or a taker?

Evening: Was I petty, ungiving, or unforgiving in any  
way today? Did meanness enter the world today  
through me? Did I make anyone smile? Did I  
listen generously?

*Faithfulness*

Morning: If God is God, he cannot be anything but faith-  
ful to me today and always. I resolve to remain  
faithful to God today and, with God’s help, to  
keep all my commitments in faith and friendship,  
in dependability and reliability.

Evening: Was anyone let down by me today? Did I lose any faith in God or in myself? Did I violate any trusts?

*Gentleness*

Morning: I am capable of being rude, rough, and domineering. I want to be gentle. I hope the source of all gentleness will work through me today.

Evening: Was I harsh toward anyone today? Did I hurt anyone in any way?

*Self Control*

Morning: I may have to say no to myself today; am I ready?

Evening: Did I leave any space for others today? Was I selfish or indulgent in ways that diminished the world's supply of human dignity?

Again, give thanks and, as needed, express not just regret but resolve to make amends.

Consider developing a daily sheet for monitoring your activity in each of the nine areas. Blank spaces on that sheet will allow you to monitor your own personal progress with regard to each of the Pauline values.

One item or another on the list of nine may call for special attention at a given stage in your life; you can highlight any category you like. You can also add other criteria that suit your purposes. Remember: The point of any exercise involving the Pauline Criteria is to heighten your awareness of God's presence in your life, and your responses to or rejections of God's promptings to you in the course of any day.

If these Pauline Criteria for the presence of the Spirit in a human life are internalized, if they become part of who you are regardless of what you do for a living, you will carry them with you to your place of employment and it will become so much the better place for your presence there. But this raises the question of why you are there in the

first place, and that is a question of vocation. What is your calling? Everyone has one. What is yours?

As a youngster growing up in Philadelphia, I frequently heard the word “vocation” used in either of two ways: a “vocational school,” like Dobbins, where students uninterested or unqualified for enrollment elsewhere on an “academic track” took carpentry, printing, or other “vocational” courses so that they could “get a job.” Or the word referred to some form of religious ministry. In a religious context, Protestant ministers were “called” to serve a particular congregation; young Catholics were urged to consider a “vocation” to priesthood or religious life as something special that was given by God; the “call” was not to be taken lightly. If accepted, a vocation was, in the pious imagination, carried around much like a piece of air-travel luggage that could be “lost” at almost any point on the journey. Anyone who refused or lost this “higher calling” was thought to be running no small degree of personal, spiritual risk.

This misleading vocabulary has fallen out of fashion now. Young people are encouraged to think not in terms of having or losing a vocation, but of *being* a vocation. You *are* a vocation, is the theologically correct perspective to take on this question. You are responding to a call from the God who formed you in your mother’s womb, called you then, and never stops calling. It is not as if God placed a call to you, left a message on your answering machine, and then hung up. No, you are being called, person-to-person, at every moment of your life. Do not, however, expect to hear a voice. You can hear this call in the circumstances of your life, in your temperament and talents, in your physical and intellectual capacities, in your aspirations and desires. All of these are gifts to you from God. Faith instructs you to use them according to God’s will for your salvation, for his glory, and for the service of your fellow human beings. That is what you are “called” by God to be and to do. And because God calls you to do it, the work—whatever it is—has dignity. Martin Luther King once said, “If a man is called to be a streetsweeper, he should sweep

streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, here lived a great streetsweeper who did his job well.”<sup>5</sup>

There is, I want to emphasize, a genuine vocation to what anyone in any organization is doing, to where you find yourself, top or bottom, in the world of work. You are not a random fluctuation in some complex system of occupational distribution. You are a person who is known and cherished by a creator-God who has something special for you in mind. Even if prayer was the furthest thing from your mind when you prepared yourself for a particular way of life—taking this job or that, selecting one profession over another, living here or there—God was not disinterested or disengaged from the process. God’s providence was there at least permitting and perhaps promoting the outcome of your unreflective choices. Regardless of the presence or absence of prayerful reflection on your part as you moved through life to where you are at this present moment (and, remember, you are a vocation), you can decide now to begin listening more attentively to the God who calls; you can attempt to read more carefully the will of God in the circumstances where you find yourself right now.

I’ve always liked this reflection-prayer of John Henry Cardinal Newman. It is one of the “ponderables” that belongs in any workplace spirituality. It is an assertion of purpose and vocation even when you are tempted to believe that your compass is gone and your life is devoid of meaning.

God has created me to do Him some definite service;  
He has committed some work to me which He has not  
committed to another. I have my mission—I may never  
know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next....

I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between  
persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do  
good; I shall do His work; I shall be an angel of peace, a

preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it, if I do but keep His commandments and serve in His calling.

Therefore, I will trust Him. Whatever, wherever, I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve him; in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him; if I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him....He does nothing in vain.... He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends, He may throw me among strangers, He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide the future from me—still He knows what He is about.<sup>6</sup>

So, here you are at this moment with these thoughts offered to assist you in connecting your religious faith to your workplace life. This chapter is intended especially for those whose workplace will be a parish setting. The point of this integration is to enable you to deal productively not only with the wounds and reversals that are part of any life anywhere, but with the challenges that are yours in the workplace to make God present in this world, to make life better for others, to do something with your life that aligns your life with God's will for you. The integration of religious faith and workplace responsibilities will bring balance to your life. And if you are called to a leadership position there, you can create a workplace culture within which those you direct can themselves lead a balanced life.

Spirit-driven leaders will facilitate this process in a quiet, almost imperceptible way. The result will be

Spirit-driven followers or associates whose presence in a workplace will witness to a workplace transformed.

For this to happen, much will depend on your willingness to let these spiritual truths sink into your soul as moisture seeps into the earth.



It will not happen right away or all at once. Let these lines from Robert Frost's poem *Snow* set the pace for the process of your personal assimilation of the wisdom principles that will keep you on track in stressful times:

Our very life depends on everything's  
Recurring till we answer from within.  
The thousandth time may prove the charm.<sup>7</sup>

Answers “from within” are wisdom principles; they rise from the depths of a personal faith-based spirituality. They can push themselves up through emotion, confusion, anger, pride—through any of the negatives that will appear from time to time on your screen during the recommended review sketched out for you above. It won't happen automatically or right away. It might take awhile—“the thousandth time may prove the charm.” But when it happens you have a spirituality up and running, ready to keep you on track and happy in your transit through life.

And, as you may have noticed, if this catches on in you and those around you at work, you have the makings of a truly collaborative workplace. Who can say where that will lead? A Spirit-driven leader might have an answer to that question. Moreover a Spirit-driven leader is a living answer to the skeptic or honest inquirer who wonders aloud about the relevance of all this to the real world. Is the spirituality outlined here viable in the push-and-shove, give-and-take, win-and-lose workplace world? As Jesus said in another context, “Come, and you will see” (Jn 1:39). I answer that question by saying: just take a look at any Spirit-driven leader at work in the world—and there are lots of them—and you will see for yourself. Then go and do likewise!

For those who insist that they have to be tough in order to lead, to “give as good as they get” in those “in-your-face,” real-world exchanges, I say: think about that for a moment. Do you really want

to stand at the door before going into what will surely be a difficult negotiating session or demanding meeting, and say, “Okay, Holy Spirit, you have to wait outside. I’ve got work to do. I’m leaving love, joy, peace, patience and all that other stuff out here so that I can go in there and get something done!”? No; of course not.

Instead, wrap yourself in an imaginary coat of mail made up of those nine strands that I’ve been calling the Pauline Criteria. If they’re not there, neither is the Holy Spirit. You decide.

As I suggested earlier, it is the responsibility of the pastor, first to assimilate these principles in himself and then to foster their growth in every member of the pastoral service team. I don’t promise that it will be easy. I do promise that it will be transformative. Try bringing them to the table for meetings of the parish staff and notice the difference that follows.

## About the Author

Jesuit Father William J. Byron is University Professor of Business and Society at St. Joseph's University, Philadelphia, PA. He is past president of the University of Scranton (1975–82), The Catholic University of America (1982–92), Loyola University of New Orleans (2003–04), and served as interim president of St. Joseph's Preparatory School in Philadelphia in 2006–2008. He was director of Georgetown University's Center for the Advanced Study of Ethics (1994–97) and taught courses on the social responsibilities of business in the McDonough School of Business at Georgetown. He was pastor of Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Georgetown from 2000 to 2003 and now engages in weekend parish ministry in suburban Philadelphia.

Born in 1927, Fr. Byron received his early parochial school education in Philadelphia, graduated from St. Joseph's Preparatory School, served as an army paratrooper at the end of World War II, attended St. Joseph's College (now University) on the G.I. Bill of Rights, joined the Jesuits in 1950, studied philosophy and economics at St. Louis University, received advance degrees in theology at Woodstock College in Maryland, where he was ordained to the priesthood in 1961, and later earned a doctorate in economics at the University of Maryland. He is the author of twenty books and editor of two, and the recipient of thirty honorary degrees. He writes a bi-weekly general interest column called "Looking Around" for the Catholic News Service Syndicate.