

A Report on the Two Sessions of Servant Leadership at CIF

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In the summers of 2006 and 2008 CIF conducted two workshops entitled "Servant Leadership." The one in 2006 was for Superiors and the one in 2008 was for Visitors and other leaders in the provinces. Judging from the evaluations of the core team and the participants, both sessions were successful in meeting and addressing the needs of the superiors and Visitors. The confreres responded enthusiastically to this contemporary theme and it is clear that subsequent Servant Leadership sessions, either international, regional or provincial will be welcome.

The two sessions had different origins. The workshop for Superiors (and other Local Leaders) was motivated by the encouragement of the Superior General and the General Council to expand the outreach of CIF by responding to the needs of the confreres. An evident need was to encourage and enable confreres to accept willingly and carry out energetically the role of Superior. There had been mounting evidence that it was difficult to find confreres willing and able to be Superiors.¹ Local leadership is especially important because the daily life of the Congregation is lived at the local level.

On the other hand, Father Greg Gay's invitation to the Visitors was an outcome of the 2007 meeting of Visitors in Mexico City where the theme was continuing education. Inviting the Visitors

¹ Reasons for the practical difficulty of finding confreres willing to become superiors may be because they do not feel able or adequately prepared or because the responsibility is perceived to be difficult, thankless or unimportant. There is also the deeper issue of the change in the role and identity of the superior in light of the Constitutions, which speak of individual responsibility, subsidiarity, co-responsibility and collaboration. In addition, there is also the impact of contemporary society, particularly in the importance given to autonomy, self-fulfillment and personhood. Finally, there is the dissonance between the expectations of superiors in a world of superiors-subjects and the expectations of a superior in a world of shared responsibility, self-direction and corporate responsibility.

themselves to engage in ongoing formation turned out to be a double benefit, first to the Visitors themselves and secondly to the members of the Congregation through the leading example of the Visitors. The Visitors were asked to invite another member of their province, if possible and convenient, to accompany them, not only for the shared learning experience during the workshop but also for sharing the insights back home.

Servant Leadership for Superiors

Our goal was to unite our Vincentian themes (Vincent, our history and Constitutions) with contemporary practices of leadership and organizational development. Though CIF is well versed in the Vincentian themes, it was clear CIF needed a partner with knowledge and experience in contemporary practices of leadership and organizational development. De Paul University in Chicago became our partner through its Vincentian Leadership Institute (Vincent on Leadership – the Hay Project) which had already been promoting and advancing Vincentian Leadership at the university for a number of years. Father Dennis Holtschneider, C.M., the President of De Paul University, and Doctor Jack Lane, Ph.D., joined our program and revealed the possibilities of Vincentian leadership through their teaching style and the sharing of their rich experience. Father Tom Lane, C.M., came from the Province of Ireland and gave a very moving account of the Servanthood of Jesus revealed in the Gospels and the letters of Paul.

Dr. Jack Lane was a member of the core team (with Fathers Juan Julian Diaz Catalan and Hugh O'Donnell) for the whole four weeks. He is an affiliate of the Congregation, deeply rooted in our tradition and history, and, at the same time, a consultant to business, educational and religious organizations for leadership and organizational development. His great gift of personal presence to everyone was deeply appreciated by the confreres. He guided the participants in the use and understanding of the *Vincentian Leadership Self Assessment* instrument developed by the De Paul/Hay Leadership Project (<http://www.leadership.depaul.edu>) as a basis for self-understanding and writing a personal leadership plan for growth and development. By the end of the program, the instrument had become a point of reference for the participants.

Father Dennis Holtschneider, President of De Paul University, opened the “how to” weeks, with two days on “How to Promote Organizational Change.” He presented “four frames” which have a bearing on leadership and the development of an organization or community: the **structural frame** (nothing can be done without

structures of some kind), the **human resources frame** (the talents of the people and their relationships are the key to change), the **political frame** (the various sources of power and the proper use of power) and the **symbolic frame** (the expressed and unexpressed meanings in our communication and in our way of acting). These presentations underlined the importance of understanding how any organized community works and how to respond with an appropriate strategy. Father Dennis' methodology of stories, examples and participant involvement was a powerful "symbolic" message in itself. Rather than feeling overwhelmed, addressing the complexity of ordinary situations turned out to be freeing and empowering for the participants.

The four weeks were organized to integrate the Vincentian themes with the best practices of contemporary leadership. The first week was **Foundations** (Jesus as Servant, Vincent's journey and Way, Juan Julian Diaz Catalan on Vincent's leadership as revealed in his correspondence with Superiors, and the introduction of the Vincentian Leadership Project). The second week was **Vincentian Community** (the way of Vincent, community in the Scriptures, a systems analysis of community, community in the Constitutions, priestly community). The third week was **Leadership I** (Dennis Holtschneider on change; Jack Lane on the art of leading / listening / dialogue and decision-making). Father Elmer Bauer III gave a very insightful day on Stewardship and Patrimony. The fourth week was **Leadership II** (dealing with special problem situations and confreres; also developing house plans).

At the end each participant made a personal presentation before the group, responding to two questions: what did I learn and how will I use my insights and experience in the future? The presentations showed assimilation of the content of the four weeks, personal engagement, and serious efforts at planning for the future. Each participant had the beginnings of his own personal leadership plan for the future. The team offered to remain available to the participants by internet.

Though the number of participants was small (12), they represented the reach of the whole Congregation. They represented nine provinces and vice-provinces from Asia, Africa, America, Europe and the former Soviet Union: Ethiopia, Eritrea, Nigeria, Indonesia (2), the Philippines, the Eastern Province USA (2), Ireland and Cyril and Methodius (3). As usual, perhaps the most notable feature of the session was the way the confreres became a community. Their feedback gives a sense of the benefits of the session.

Servant Leadership for Visitors

CIF held its second workshop on Servant Leadership at the Motherhouse in Paris 29 June - 19 July, 2008. This session was for provincial leaders and other confreres with provincial leadership responsibilities.

Thirty-five confreres from 16 provinces on five continents attended: Africa (10); Asia (4); Europe (5); Latin America (10); and North America (5). Two members of the General Curia came as participants. Thirteen Visitors participated, each of whom was asked to invite another confrere with leadership responsibilities in his province to come with him, in order to share the experience in Paris and collaborate back home. The result was that a significant number of younger confreres joined with the Visitors to create an engaged experience of brotherhood and corporate responsibility. The participants spoke Spanish, French, Portuguese and English and the simultaneous translations were in French, Spanish and English.

The program was designed and carried out by the CIF team (Fathers Hugh O'Donnell, C.M., Juan Julian Diaz Catalan, C.M., José Carlos Fonsatti, C.M.) and De Paul University's Vincentian Hay Leadership Project (Father Patrick Murphy, C.M., and Sister Patricia Bombard, BVM). Father Dan Borlik, the Visitor of the Southern Province USA, was also involved in the planning and joined both the CIF team and De Paul Hay Leadership team to connect the various presentations and guide the overall process.

Father Borlik's role in facilitating the continuity of the three unified the experience and was appreciated by all. The use of questions was effective in engaging the participants personally and guiding the process from week to week. *What kind of Vincentian leader do I want to be? What are the human, Christian, Vincentian and personal foundations of my leadership? How would I describe Saint Vincent's leadership style? What aspect of Vincentian leadership is most needed today?*

The first week was on the spiritual foundations of leadership, namely, Jesus as Servant, Vincent as Servant Leader and one's own call to be a leader in the footsteps of Jesus and Vincent. Father Gregory Gay spent two days with the group, sharing his vision of leadership and his hopes for the future. He also invited the participants to share their own hopes and dreams. To orient the style of Jesus' servant leadership, Father José Carlos Fonsatti spoke on "Jesus and Power." Father Jean-Pierre Renouard gave a reflective presentation entitled, "The Heart of Vincentian Spirituality," showing the heart of Vincent as the source of his faithful and creative leadership. Father Juan Julian Diaz Catalan detailed Vincent's style

of leadership as found in Abelly, Coste and Vincent's interview with Father Antoine Durand, when he was missioned to Agde as Superior. Father Claude Lautissier spoke on "Devotion to Our Lady of Chartres" as a preparation for our pilgrimage to Chartres on Saturday.

The second week, led by the De Paul team, focused on practices and insights of contemporary leadership, for example, re-framing organizational leadership, Servant Leadership (Robert Greenleaf), Welcoming Diversity and Managing Polarities, and the Five Practices of Effective Leadership (Kouzes and Posner). At the end of the second week each participant received De Paul University's Certificate in Values-Centered Leadership.

The third week was given to integrating the first two weeks and writing one's own personal leadership plan. It focused on integrating Vincentian spirituality and leadership, motivating confreres, overcoming divisions, balancing firmness and flexibility, and assisting confreres to articulate a shared vision of life and mission.

At the end of the three weeks each participant was invited to share with the whole group a significant learning from the session that he was incorporating into his leadership plan. The presentations were brief, but personal and often profound and moving. One theme that recurred in the sharing was the importance of finding one's own voice as a leader.

The evaluations, besides offering suggestions for improving the planning and presentations, opened up a number of valuable possibilities for the future. Clearly the sense was to continue the CIF Leadership program in some sense. Servant Leadership could be offered to specific groups, for example, young confreres, pastors, seminary staff or missionaries ad gentes. Leadership in social justice was also proposed. The program could also be brought to other countries or conferences.

A CD of the experience was given to each participant.