

FROM THE SERVANT GENERAL

ON SERVANT LEADERSHIP

(Part 6)

TENDING THE FLOCK

What is the work of servant leaders? Here is the instruction of the first pope.

“So I exhort the presbyters among you, as a fellow presbyter and witness to the sufferings of Christ and one who has a share in the glory to be revealed. Tend the flock of God in your midst, overseeing not by constraint but willingly, as God would have it, not for shameful profit but eagerly. Do not lord it over those assigned to you, but be examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd is revealed, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.” (1 Pt 5:1-4)

Here in a nutshell are the marching orders for servant leaders. What does it mean?

Presbyters

Peter is addressing presbyters. Presbyters are the officially appointed leaders and teachers of the Christian community. They were appointed for each church that was set up by the apostles (Acts 14:23), and later for each church in every town set up by others mandated by the apostles (Ti 1:5). The presbyters shared with the apostles in the governance of the whole Church (Acts 15:6,22,23).

Presbyters (*presbyteros*) were also called bishops (*episkopos*) (Ti 1:5,7; Acts 20:17,28). The Greek term *episkopos* means “one who oversees” or “one who supervises.”

In Christian communities such as CFC-FFL, the overseer of the particular community in the diocese is the District Head, supported by the Chapter Heads for the local communities in the parishes. However, there are also many other functions that are categorized as overseers, or “elders,” or “seniors” (in current CFC-FFL usage). Further, there are also other positions of servant leadership.

As a Catholic movement that is fully a part of the Roman Catholic Church, CFC-FFL’s seniors and members are subject to the overall authority of the Church hierarchy.

The people of God

In our work of leading people, one of the most important aspects is to realize that we are taking care of the flock *of God*. God’s people belong to Him, not to us. This has certain ramifications.

First, it is such a great privilege. We do the very work of God! We care for God’s own people! God puts us in His place with regard to the well-being of His people. God takes a chance on us, entrusting to us the people He loves and whom Jesus died for. We become instruments of His grace and blessings to others.

Second, it is such a great responsibility. God went to extreme lengths to win salvation for all, sending His very own Son Jesus to the cross. God wants all to be saved and to make it home to heaven. But first they have to travel the narrow path in a world that is in darkness. That is a great challenge, and many people lose their way. Jesus now enlists us to help his flock along that path. Though every person needs to take responsibility for his own response to Jesus, God intends His servant leaders to play a big role as well.

Third, we are not free to care for people the way *we* want to or the way *we* believe is best. We care for them according to how God would have cared for them. That necessitates that we know God and His ways more and more. We shed off our secular minds and put on the mind of Christ. We eschew worldly wisdom and take on godly wisdom, which many times can lead us to be fools for Christ.

The flock of God

Jesus is the chief Shepherd and we are delegated co-workers. The people of God are the flock. This speaks about the kind of care that we are to give. It is pastoral care. What does this mean?

Let us consider the role of a shepherd. Since Jesus is the chief Shepherd, we look to his definition. Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (Jn 10:11). Jesus pins down the most basic requirement for a shepherd, and that is, to be willing to lay down one's life for the flock. This is the call to unilateral, unconditional and self-sacrificial love. We are to be ready to give our all, without holding anything back, even our very lives.

Practically speaking, how do we give pastoral care to those under us? Peter gives some particulars.

First, we do it not by constraint but willingly. Servant leadership is something we volunteer to do, because we want to serve Jesus and God's people. We are not just ordered to take on this service, we are not compelled, but rather we are requested to do so. We are not just forced into it by circumstances, though at times circumstances conspire to bring out what is good in us with regard to serving. We do not grudgingly accept to serve, while repressing our negative feelings, but rather we joyfully take on the challenge.

Second, we do it not for shameful profit. It is not a job, it is not a secular undertaking, it is not to carry out our own agenda. Our only profit should be our reward in heaven, and on earth the satisfaction that we have served. Any focus on our own personal benefit, whether material or otherwise, would be a shame. Thus we never look to personal advantage, whether making money, having power and influence, building turf, being acclaimed, or the like.

Third, we do it eagerly. This means enthusiasm, zeal, intense interest, strong and urgent desire, quick responsiveness. The task is important. We are standing in for Jesus himself. Our efforts can have eternal consequences. It is one of the best things we can do in our lives. It is worth investing our time and effort.

Fourth, we do not lord it over those under us. Though we have God's authority, it is given so we can serve. Though we are authoritative, we are not authoritarian. Though we issue directives, we are not dictators. Though we pastor, we do not run the lives of people. Though subordinates are to obey their leaders, we do not seek blind obedience.

Though we correct, we are open to correction, even from subordinates. Though we are leaders, we are servants. Though we are first, we are the least of all.

Fifth, we are to be examples to the flock. We live what we teach. We model how to follow Jesus. Though we face personal challenges in responding to God, we are on our walk towards holiness.

We see that in all of these, Peter stresses the proper attitude or posture. He is not after the technicalities of doing a job, that is, what tasks to perform, though those would be important as well, but rather he is concerned about the condition of the servant's heart. If the heart is right, then everything else would fall into place.

The reward

Servant leadership is hard and challenging work. Many times it seems unrewarding, as even the people we serve would not appreciate what we do for them. Thus Peter even mentions his being "witness to the sufferings of Christ." Jesus is the chief Shepherd and so is our model. He is the suffering servant (Is 53:3-11). He was spurned, stricken, afflicted, crushed, oppressed and condemned. But precisely through his suffering, he justified many (Is 53:11b). We walk the way of Jesus. As such, we open ourselves to affliction for the sake of others.

But God is never outdone in generosity. In His love and justice, He also rewards those who serve. As such, Peter counts himself as "one who has a share in the glory to be revealed."

We do spiritual work so we receive spiritual wages. We look forward to the unfading crown of glory, to be given by the chief Shepherd himself. This is a great treasure, far surpassing any material rewards. This is wonderful recognition, not by worldly acclaim, but by God Himself. This is satisfaction not only for the moment, but for all eternity.

Just like Peter, as your co-servant, I thus exhort the servant leaders among you: go tend to the flock in your midst.

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