



ICCRS LEADERSHIP BULLETIN

Formation for current and new leaders in CCR

VOLUME XXII, NUMBER 5

OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2016

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Regarding leadership, we usually ask ourselves the question: how do I discern whether God really wants me to undertake this ministry?

Asked to minister as leaders, many people feel strong resistance, anxiety, fear, and doubt as to whether they are suited to the task or even able to do it. When responding to this calling to leadership, experienced people can trust that God is with them in ministry. All things are possible with Him.

With leadership can come the temptation of power. The role of ministry leadership can prop up one’s self-esteem and fuel self-importance. No longer do leaders place their trust in the Lord, but rather in their own ability. They might believe that with practice and effort, they can learn to do anything. This type of leader feels that they are the only suitable person for the role and that they are therefore irreplaceable.

Many Christian communities have protected themselves against such temptations by incorporating a term of office. The leader is elected for a predetermined number of years, after which another election is held. Also, the number of possible following terms is defined. In this way, the same person cannot be elected over and over. Many Charismatic Renewal prayer groups and communities benefit from this process.

One advantage is that the elected person knows in advance for how long they are appointed. However, there are situations when God does not limit His will to such rules and even during

the ministry, He gives signs that there is a need to step down and pass the responsibility to someone else. After a term of office is completed, the community may propose an extension of service. Discernment is needed to know whether this is a call from God, or just human sympathy and courtesy.

God’s will can be interpreted by external events and internal motions. We should remember that the light of reason, which is the gift of God through which He

speaks to us, is an important tool of discernment. Common sense enlightened by God’s grace is an extremely valuable tool in decision-making, including choosing leadership ministry.

God can and does call His elected to lead a community. He also urges some people to step down when necessary. Recall the example of Saul whom God chose as the first king of Israel. Saul lost God’s approval for being the king. The reason for this rejection was Saul’s sin of infidelity. A leader who repeatedly disobeys God and executes their own will cannot lead the people of God. Every sin has a collective dimension, and even the most hidden one can poison the community to which we belong. It does not however mean that leadership is only for sinless people for “All have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). If, however, like Saul, the leader stubbornly persists in sin and does not repent, they cannot lead the community.

Leaders are, more or less, attached to their own opinions and beliefs. Unfortunately, the ministry of leadership can strengthen the person’s sense of self-righteousness and equity of beliefs especially when community members confirm his or her opinions without even daring to seek God’s will. The reason for community members taking this course of action is either trying to please the leader or fearing his/her disapproval and negative evaluation. If, as a leader, you notice that you mindlessly reject different suggestions and ideas, or that you duplicate old “proven” solutions for the sake of your own sense of security, it may be a sign that God is calling you to pass the responsibility on to someone else.

There are words to a song we sing: “there is no one like Jesus, there is no one like him.” Sadly, in practice, it can happen that a leader repeats in his heart, “there is no one like me.” He or she does not see anyone worthy, appropriate or responsible enough to take over his or her ministry. God tries to remind such leaders that their experience was gained gradually, usually by following the example of others. The Holy Spirit will try to convince such a leader to trust that He will assist someone else in guiding the community.

Unfortunately, power hungry leaders seek to maintain their undisputed positions, rather than fulfil the will of God. They can actively employ

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various pretexts to remove potential “competition” or people endowed with charisma, organisational skills, and leadership qualities. Such behaviour has nothing to do with the fulfilment of God’s will. In this context, there may appear a kind of “spiritual manipulation” or abuse of spiritual authority for the elimination of inconvenient people. The fundamental problem of such practices is that these leaders do not want to hear from God if it does not confirm their beliefs and ideas. This is a situation similar to the one described in the Book of Chronicles (2 Chron 18). Ahab, the king of Israel wanted to listen to only those prophets who confirmed his plans for military expeditions, and reject the prophet Micah who proclaimed the word of God to warn the king about defeat and death. Regrettably, even today, manipulating the word of God and abusing the charisms for personal purposes, and particularly for confirmation of power, lead to personal and communal damage.

A signal indicating that the Lord calls for resignation may be a situation in which the leader seems to forget that the entrusted community is a part of the Church of Christ and begins to treat it as their own person property having a tendency to control everything, even people’s private affairs. Instead of leading everyone in joint listening to the Lord and fulfilling His will, the leader becomes similar to the farmers of the Gospel parable who tried to usurp the entrusted vineyard. If the leader somehow covets “the vineyard of the Lord” and wants to appropriate everything, he or she should step down for their own good and for the good of the community.

God wants to give His people the shepherds and guides according to His own heart (Jer 3:15). Not only can these words refer to the priests and bishops but all Christ’s disciples who undertake leadership ministry and responsibility.

The Lord lets the leaders know in different ways when He calls them to resign. Among other things, they are allowed to see how closed they have become to new initiatives, solutions, and ideas, and at the same time how strongly they have clung to old patterns and operating methods. If their personal sense of security becomes more important than fidelity to the call of God, the leader should resign.

The same happens when discouragement and reluctance to act are noticed. Should there be an attitude of “I have the job, and that’s enough”, it is worth remembering the words written by St. Ambrose when commenting on the haste with which Mary went to St. Elizabeth: “The Holy Spirit is unfamiliar with slowness and procrastination.” Should a leader become irritated by active people who are willing to work and want change, it may be a sign that the Lord’s calling them to resign.

God’s call to step down from leadership may involve a lifestyle

change, especially if new circumstances require devoting more time and energy to professional, family, health, and other issues not associated with the group. The ministry of leadership requires certain availability, so if the objective circumstances do not allow you to sacrifice the appropriate amount of time, energy, and attention, it could mean the need for resignation.

As a term of office ends, mature leaders fulfilling the will of God should identify the people within the group prepared for leadership ministry. Mature leaders will take care of the continuing spiritual growth of the community through the delegation of responsibilities and preparation of those who may take over leadership roles in the future. It is important to put obedience to God’s will above all personal likes and dislikes (Sam 16:7).

Sometimes a leader can feel a call to resignation without knowing why. They are faithful leaders serving the Lord with integrity and selflessness, yet there is a movement within them to resign from their position. This ‘movement’ needs discernment and a practical method of discerning God’s call regarding resignation is writing down, after prayerful reflection, both the reasons for continuing the ministry and the motives for resignation. A spiritual director could help serve in further discernment. He will protect you from subjectivity and help recognise the voice of God in the particular circumstances of your life. He will also guide you in how to distinguish the voice of God from your own fears and ambitions, and help you identify the temptations of the evil spirit.

God can call the leader to step down through the decisions of the pastors of the Church. They have been given the task to discern the authenticity of charisms and their proper use in the Church. Should the bishop or pastors ask for a leader’s resignation, then generally the spirit of humility calls for obedience to the request. This is particularly challenging, but a spirit of humility is required in such situations, as well as trust in the Lord.

God never ceases to care about the community as well as its leaders. The call to resign from a ministry is not God’s manifestation of rejection, but a call to conversion. God wants to bring leaders to new freedom if they use their ministry as a tool for building self-esteem and position, rather than for the good of the community.

It is important for each leader to skilfully combine generosity and dedication in performing their ministry with a readiness to surrender at any time to the disposal of the Lord. He called the leader to serve the community and with His Grace can call for that person’s resignation from the ministry at the right time. Anyone who has experienced God’s blessing in following the ministry of the leader will experience the new blessing in answering the Lord’s call to resign from it. 🏠

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In addition, the *ICCRS Leadership Bulletin* can be e-mailed for an annual subscription of € 15.

The *ICCRS Leadership Bulletin* is published along with the *ICCRS Newsletter*. Its purpose is to publicise formation on decisive topics in CCR.

After leadership – Where to from here?

■ Allan Panozza



My wife Carmel and I were led into the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in February 1978. We had been invited to attend the prayer meeting held weekly at a Carmelite Monastery in the Melbourne suburb of Donvale, and it also happened to be the first night of an introductory course of eight weeks known as a Life in the Spirit Seminar. That seminar was the beginning of a new phase in my life, beginning with the moment that a small group of people laid hands on me—and prayed that I would receive what they called Baptism in the Holy Spirit. In their prayers, I heard them asking God to pour out His Holy Spirit upon me as happened when St. Paul encountered the risen Christ on his journey to Damascus. As they continued to pray and lay hands on me, I also encountered the person of Jesus in a new experience of His presence, and I remember silently saying to God—and really meaning it—“I give you my life.” At that moment, I found myself praying aloud and praising God in what they called “the gift of tongues.” From that day forward my life began to change. I found a new relationship with Jesus, in that previously I would have said that I knew about Him, but now I could say with absolute conviction that “I knew Him.”

In dealing with the role of leadership, I should first highlight what it meant to me during my almost thirty years of active participation in leadership in my local, national, and international experience.

At the time when we joined a Charismatic prayer group I held an important position in a multinational company, and to my surprise in 1985 I was invited by the local coordinators to work in a full time capacity for the Renewal in Melbourne, with the role of Executive Director. After praying to the Lord for guidance, I accepted this role on the condition that the Archbishop would sanction the appointment, and the wider body of the Renewal would accept me in this important responsibility. In preparation for this work, I used to visit a chapel in the local Catholic School to pray earnestly before the Blessed Sacrament, asking Jesus for two gifts, which I felt would be necessary for me in this new and important work for the Lord. The two gifts that I sought were first, wisdom so that I might speak and teach in the power of the Holy Spirit rather than in my own power. The second was the gift of humility so that in my ministry it would be Jesus who would be praised and honoured. One evening at dusk, as I was about to leave the chapel, I had an extraordinary experience. In the silence, I clearly heard Jesus speaking to me in these words: “Allan, do not ask me for those gifts. Ask Me rather that I would draw you daily into a deeper relationship with Me, and then I will give you the gifts that you need...” This, then, became the pattern of my prayer, relying increasingly on Jesus being the source of my ministry.

Over the years, I have witnessed miracles as a result of praying for different needs, but always through the presence of Jesus directing me from within. I found that, from time to time within different prayer groups, I would be approached by a leader or leaders who would complain that they were not being supported by the other leaders, or that they were not affirmed in what they

believed was their own particular ministry. It is essential for individuals in leadership, and also leadership groups as a whole, to pray earnestly for the grace of the Lord to be poured out upon them in order to maintain unity without division. I think that the greatest enemy we face as leaders is disunity, which can penetrate the prayer group or community like ink through blotting paper. If every leadership group exercised its authority in love and mutual harmony, then good fruit will be seen in abundance. If a leader chooses not to judge others but to affirm them and see the good in them, the power of the Holy Spirit will be poured out in abundance. The success or failure of a leader will ultimately be measured by the example of their lives. What are the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:23), which are evident whether they are still serving as a leader within CCR, or have retired from that position? Good leadership looks to the future, and the need to allow “fresh water” to flow through the group bringing all of the Gifts with which Jesus will bless its ministry. If a leader grimly sticks to his/her role, refusing to accept the discernment of the body that their time has now passed, the bitter fruit of their ministry will soon be obvious. A good axiom is: “don’t just do what I say—do what I do.” I believe that the example of my life should now be the best form of my witness, and will continue to be thus for those still in leadership, or even for those who no longer attend the prayer meetings or events. My final word of advice to leaders in CCR is to never forget that we are all members of the Body of Christ—the Church. When writing to the Ephesians on the sanctity of marriage, St Paul uses as a graphic example the relationship between Christ and the Church. “A man never hates his own body, but he feeds it and looks after it and that is the way that Christ treats the Church, because it is his body – and we are its living parts...” (Eph 5:29,30).

As a person specially chosen by Jesus to be deeply involved in his work of renewing the Church, a leader in Catholic Charismatic Renewal should have a desire to grow in love for the Church, and deepen his / her relationship with it. Since 2011 when I retired from my active leadership roles in the Renewal, I have been drawn by the Lord into other forms of ministry by giving witness of my relationship with Jesus through my active involvement in Parish life. That includes such other ministries as bringing Holy Communion to the sick and infirm, participating in our local Church as a lector, and on occasion conducting a Communion Service when a priest is not available. Also, I have made myself available to pray for others in their needs and to extend comfort to them. I am happy in these activities because I am aware of the solid leadership that is presently in place for the Renewal in Australia, and for the advice I can offer when requested. I feel that I can sum up my almost 35 years as a leader in the Renewal in the words of St Paul: “During my stay with you, the only knowledge I claimed to have was about Jesus, and only about him as the Crucified Christ. Far from relying on any power of my own, I came among you in great ‘fear and trembling’ and in my speeches and the sermons I gave, there were none of the arguments that belong to philosophy – only a demonstration of the Power of the Spirit...” (1 Cor 2:24). 🍷



QUESTIONS TO THE ICCRS DOCTRINAL COMMISSION

The ICCRS Doctrinal Commission, currently headed by Dr. Mary Healy, is in consultation with theologians and experts from around the world.

If you have a question about the CCR, please send it to newsletter@iccrs.org

Is it legitimate to “claim” healings?

Among some Christians, there is a practice of “claiming” particular blessings from God in faith: “I claim this healing” or “I claim that I will get this job.” What are Catholics to understand about the “name it and claim it” approach to the gifts of God?

The answer depends on what one is claiming. If we are claiming a blessing that flows from our identity and inheritance in Christ—for instance, claiming that our sins have been forgiven (Col 1:14), or that God will fully provide for our needs (Mt 6:30-33), or claiming our authority as sons and daughters of God (Lk 10:19)—then it is right to claim these things. After all, they belong to us in Christ. In contrast, if we claim a specific blessing from God that has not yet been given, such as a physical healing or a financial gift, then we can run into problems.

Consider the example of praying over someone for healing. We can boldly expect that Jesus will manifest his power through us, as he promised: “These signs will accompany those who believe:...they will lay their hands on the sick, who will recover” (Mk 16:17,18). But how and when a particular healing may occur in someone’s life depends on many factors, including timing, the faith of the prayer minister, the faith of the recipient, the removal of interior obstacles, and God’s mysterious will. We should pray with boundless confidence, but without thinking that we can somehow force God’s hand by claiming a particular answer to our prayer.

There is an essential difference between boldly leaning into the Lord for a particular grace and dangerously presuming on the Lord for that grace in a way that disregards the mystery of his sovereign will. Presumptuousness is dangerous because it replaces a genuine trusting relationship with God with a superficial and superstitious faith that uses impersonal formulas to get what we want. Instead of pursuing the heart of the Lord by asking, seeking, and knocking (Lk 11:9,10), we are attempting to manipulate God. Instead of putting faith in the Lord, we are

putting faith in our own faith. It is evident that such misguided faith is present when people lose faith in God because they were not granted what they claimed.

Promises given through a prophetic word

What about a situation where God has promised a specific blessing or healing through a prophetic word? It is right to have a confident expectation and even to thank God ahead of time for what he has promised. If the prophetic word was genuine,

the blessing will be given, often precisely when we respond with faith. This is particularly true if we have the charism of faith (1 Cor 12:9), which produces a supernatural certainty that God is about to act in a powerful way. The results of exercising this gift are often miraculous.

However, we have to humbly admit that our prophecy and knowledge in this world are imperfect (1 Cor 13:8,9). Sometimes, we are mistaken about prophetic words and/or their interpretation. If our faith is truly in God and not in ourselves, he will greatly reward our faith, even if what we receive is not exactly what we were expecting.



Healings that have already occurred

What about a healing that has already occurred? Should we claim that healing if we feel the symptoms start to come back? Often, the evil one will try to steal back from us ground that the Lord has won, or convince us to doubt a healing or miracle the Lord has worked. In this case, it is right to claim the healing in faith, because we are not manipulating God but standing in faith on what God has already done.

To sum up: we can pray expectantly for specific blessings from God, keeping a posture of thankful receptivity for God’s gifts. However, we should be careful of claiming anything other than what God has already done for us in Christ. Our faith must always leave room for the mysterious action of God’s love that is greater than we can imagine, and for the sovereign activity of the Holy Spirit who blows where he wills (Jn 3:8). 🏠