

of Fruitful Pastoral Leaders

Peter Drucker, one of the most sought-after management gurus of the 20th Century, famously said that “Culture eats strategy for breakfast.” In other words, the most researched and “on-target” strategic plan will not make an impact on an organization if the culture of that organization doesn’t also change. The same holds true for parishes and dioceses.

The best pastoral plans and the most popular programs will not bear lasting fruit if we don’t also work intentionally to change the culture of our communities in a way that creates a healthy environment for that strategy to take root and grow.

The good news is that authentic, intentional, and fruitful leadership can break the power of cultural inertia and lead to real and lasting transformation. Here are 7 qualities that the most effective pastoral leaders share:

Discipled:

First and foremost, a fruitful pastoral leader must be a disciple—one who has had an encounter with Jesus and intentionally chooses to follow Him in the midst of His Church. The discipleship process can not be understood “from the outside.” Fruitful pastoral leaders understand the spiritual journey toward discipleship and know how to help others entrust their lives to Jesus.

Relational:

Fruitful pastoral leaders understand that, ultimately, their role is to foster their own relationship with Jesus as well as the relationship of others with Jesus, and they create cultures that prioritize those relationships. One of the key ways they do this is by accompanying others relationally. Even if their role has a large administrative component, they never lose sight of the reality that it is all about Jesus and the people they serve. This extends to their colleagues and other staff members; effective pastoral leaders build a web of authentic relationships and choose to work collaboratively rather than in silos.

Accountable:

Pastoral leaders who bear sustained fruit in their ministry prioritize accountability. They hold themselves responsible for delivering on their objectives and expect others to do so, too. Working in teams, these leaders do not hesitate to hold their team members accountable, and when difficulties arise, they do not scapegoat or shift blame; they step up, take responsibility, and look for solutions. Accountable pastoral leaders do not hesitate to have difficult conversations with team members, peers, and their own leaders to bring clarity, reinforce healthy boundaries, and address issues.

Invested:

Effective pastoral leaders invest intentionally in the mission of the community or organization. They are present and proactive in the process of helping their community live out that mission. In addition to this “mission alignment,” authentic leaders invest in the people they serve, seeking to build them up—even when it isn’t convenient.

Discerning:

In order to bear the most fruit, effective pastoral leaders intentionally discern the direction and will of God for themselves, their community, their ministry, and in relation to the people they serve. This begins with prayer and attentiveness to the movement of God, coupled with a growing detachment to their own plans and visions. Discerning leaders prioritize prayer as a leadership team and seek the will of God together.

Surrendered:

Effective pastoral leadership begins with the deep understanding that nothing can truly grow and move forward on our own power; all depends upon the power and presence of God. Fruitful leaders intentionally invite the Holy Spirit to move in their ministries, expect that He will show up, and leave room for His direction and supernatural action.

Empowering:

Fruitful pastoral leaders know that they do not have all the gifts necessary to move and transform a community or organization. Therefore, they seek out, nurture, and support others with the gifts that are necessary. These leaders are not threatened by the giftedness of others—even when these gifts exist to a greater degree than their own—and they actively work to grow others into leadership roles.



For Reflection...

The work of raising up a generation of fruitful pastoral leaders begins with us. Therefore, it is important that we take an honest look at our own development as ministers and leaders in a pastoral context. Spend some time prayerfully reviewing the following reflection questions. You might find it useful to return to these questions on a regular basis:

1. How would I rate myself in terms of each of the 7 Qualities? In what quality am I the strongest? Where am I in most need of improvement?
2. Which people in my life can I ask to give me an honest and forthright assessment of my development in each of the 7 Qualities? Who can I ask to hold me accountable to that development?
3. When I think about “acting out of” or “growing in” these 7 Qualities, do any make me nervous or uncomfortable? Why?
4. What do I perceive is the biggest obstacle that keeps me from growing in any of the 7 Qualities? What resources or assistance will I need in overcoming those obstacles?
5. Given my current pastoral situation, which of the 7 Qualities is most needed? What is one thing I can commit to in the next week to grow in that quality? What is one thing I can commit to over the next six months so that I can grow in that quality?