

USE THIS REFLECTION SHEET WITH LEADERSHIP TEAMS

OR WITH THOSE ASPIRING TO LEADERSHIP.

Leadership Lessons in the Words of St Francis

In his book *Through the Year with St Francis of Assisi*, Murray Bodo OFM uses quotes from the writings of St Francis as tools for reflection. Here is a selection of these quotes which offer principles and guidance for Franciscan leadership pathways.

YOU COULD ASK:

Is this principle still relevant for leaders? How does this principle impact leadership practice? Which of these principles guides your leadership practice?

You could also give a leadership group one or two of the quotes and ask them to share a challenge and a blessing in this wisdom from Francis.

DON'T BLAME OTHERS

There are some who, when they sin or suffer some injury, immediately blame their enemies or their neighbours. But that is not the way it is (Admonitions 10).

DON'T DOMINATE CONVERSATIONS

Blessed are those servants who do not talk in order to gain something and who do not reveal everything about themselves and are not quick to speak, but wisely consider what they are going to say and how they are going to answer (Admonitions 21).

ACCEPT ADVICE

Blessed are those servants who bear correction, accusation and reproof from another as patiently as if it came from themselves (Admonition 20).

WORK HARD

I want all my friars to work and to humbly occupy themselves with good works, so that we might be less of a burden to people and not stray toward laziness of heart and tongue (Mirror of Perfection 75).

AVOID INSINCERITY

Blessed is the servant who would love and respect a brother or sister as much when they are far away as when they are present and would not say anything behind their back that couldn't be said with charity face to face (Admonitions 25).

RECOGNISE THE GIFTS OF OTHERS

Blessed are you who are no more puffed up by the good which the Lord says and does through you than you are by what the Lord says and does through others (Admonition 17).

PRACTISE SOLIDARITY

Blessed is that servant who would a love brother or sister just as much when they are sick and cannot do anything in return, as when they are well and can (Admonition 24).

DON'T BE A HYPOCRITE

Beware of all pride and vain glory. Keep yourselves from the wisdom of this world and the prudence of the flesh. For the spirit of the flesh is desirous and very eager for words but does little to carry them out (Rule of 1221 Chapter XVII).

DON'T GET ANGRY

No matter how someone else sins, if you let yourself be upset or angered over it, except for charity's sake, you store up for yourself – like a treasure – the sin of the other (Admonition 11).

KEEP THE GOSPEL IN FOCUS AT ALL TIMES

Do not let your cares and preoccupations with the world make you forget the Lord or turn aside from his commandments (Letter to the Rulers of the People).

HONOUR OUR ANCESTORS IN FAITH

The saints and their remembrance were for Francis like a burning coal, which enkindled in him a divine fire. He venerated with most fervent devotion all of the Apostles and especially Peter and Paul because of their love for Christ (St Bonaventure, Major Life 9:3).

BELIEVE IN ANGELS

Francis was united with an unbreakable bond of love to the angelic spirits who burn with a marvellous fire and who inflame the hearts of the faithful ...

(St Bonaventure Major Life 9:3).

BE HOSPITABLE

Anyone who comes to the brothers, friend or enemy, thief or robber, is to be received with kindness... and they are to be careful not to look outwardly sad, like gloomy hypocrites, but they are to show themselves happy in the Lord and cheerful and truly gracious (Rule of 1221 Chapter VII).

TREAT EVERYONE WITH RESPECT

... when you travel through the world you do not quarrel or argue or judge others; rather, be meek, peaceful and modest, courteous and humble, speaking honourably to everyone (Rule of 1223 Chapter III).



TAKE TIME FOR REFLECTION

Where there is quiet and meditation, there is neither preoccupation nor dissipation (Admonition 27).

AVOID ARGUMENTS

... let them seek to keep silent whenever God gives them the grace to do so. And they are not to argue among themselves, nor with others, but they are to strive to respond with humility ... (Rule of 1221 Chapter XI).

BE COURAGEOUS

Have no fear of being thought insignificant or unbalanced but preach repentance with courage and simplicity ... you will encounter some who are faithful, meek, and well disposed; they will joyfully receive you and your words. But there will be more who are sceptical, proud, and blasphemous, and who will insult you and resist your message. Prepare yourselves, therefore, to bear everything with patience and humility (Legend of the Three Companions 36).

CARE FOR THE LEAST

He turned with marvellous tenderness and compassion toward anyone afflicted with physical suffering; and when he noticed deprivation or need in anyone, he saw in that person the suffering Christ... (St Bonaventure Major Life 8:5).

BE A MIRROR

For the Lord has ... placed us as examples and mirrors for others (The Testament of St Clare 6).

DON'T JUDGE

I admonish and encourage them not to look down upon or judge ill of those people they see wearing soft and colourful clothes and enjoying the choicest food and drink. Instead let each brother criticise and judge himself (Rule of 1223 Chapter II).

RESPOND WITH LOVE

One day Francis said to Brother Riccerio, who was deeply troubled interiorly, ...Don't let your thoughts depress you for you are very dear to me. Know that you are among those especially dear to me and worthy of my affection... Come to me confidently whenever you wish, and don't be afraid to talk to me with utmost familiarity (Celano, First Life 50).

BE A SERVANT LEADER

Those brothers who are placed in authority over the others are to glory in their office as much as if they were appointed to wash the feet of the brothers ... (Admonitions 4).

BUILD AFFIRMING COMMUNITIES

Be confident in making your needs known to one another. For each of you, to the extent that God gives you the grace, should love and nourish one another as a mother loves and nourishes her child (Rule of 1221 Chapter IX).

PRACTISE FORGIVENESS

If discord caused by word or deed should occur among them, they should immediately and humbly ask forgiveness of one another even before offering their gift of prayer ... (Rule of 1221 7:24).

THIS SET OF REFLECTION QUESTIONS IS DESIGNED FOR USE BY LEADERS IN A RETREAT OR PRAYER SPACE. ALLOW TIME FOR PARTICIPANTS TO SIT WITH THE QUESTIONS BEFORE SHARING WITH A COLLEAGUE OR SPIRITUAL MENTOR.

Franciscan Leadership

Reflection 1

HUMILITY AND SERVICE

Do you model them? What does humility look like in your leadership? Francis personally served the poor, cared for lepers, gave aid to beggars and shared whatever he had with those in need. How are you a servant leader?

HARD WORK AND SELF-SACRIFICE

Leadership is hard work. Francis and Clare denied their own comforts and the social and physical comforts of wealth to work with the vulnerable. Clare washed the feet of the serving Sisters and undertook manual labour. What does hard work look like from your leadership perspective? Do you find that Franciscan leadership demands self-sacrifice?

POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Do you maintain a positive attitude? Both Francis and Clare are described as serving God with joyfulness and filled with hope. How do you stay positive in your leadership role? Where do you see hope in the world today?

COURAGE AGAINST OPPOSITION

Have you shown courage when facing challenges? Francis was vilified, abused and jeered by the people of Assisi who mocked his choice to live in poverty and with those who were outcast. When have you faced unfair accusations? What advice would you give a colleague facing this sort of opposition?

WELCOME AND INCLUSIVITY

Do you practise welcome and inclusivity? Where is this seen in your leadership? Francis and Clare accepted everyone without judgement or favour. Would a colleague say the same about you?

PRAYER AND CONTEMPLATION

Do you take time for prayer and reflection? Francis and Clare spent hours in prayer. They practised what we would call contemplative action. When are you able to pray and reflect on your leadership?

GOSPEL CENTRED

How can you live the Gospel in the radical way that Francis and Clare did? Where does the message of the Gospel find a voice in your leadership? Can you truly see the face of Christ in all of those you encounter in the everyday?

PRESENCE

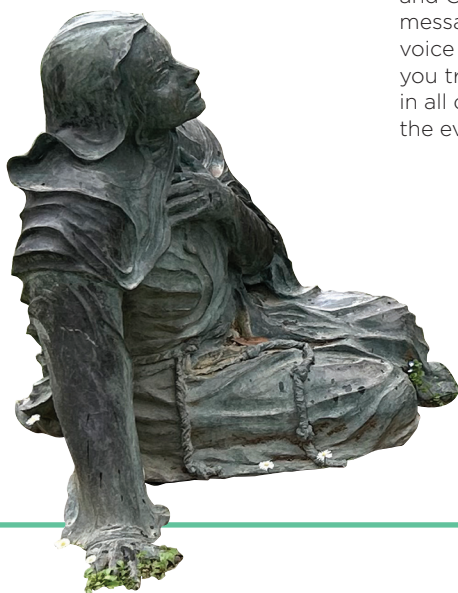
As a leader, do you try to give attention to every individual? On whom do you need to focus more? How well do you listen? Francis spent time with people; he called his brothers together in the evenings to listen to their experiences, he greeted everyone he encountered with cheerfulness and an open heart. What could you do to personalise your leadership?

PERSEVERANCE AND PATIENCE

Do you practise it? Francis understood that the human journey is often slow. He gave people the benefit of the doubt and believed in them. Who needs your perseverance and patience?

KINDNESS

Are you kind in the encounters of your day? Do you look for ways to show kindness to others? Francis and Clare built cultures of kindness through their example; their words of encouragement, their capacity to forgive and their genuine interest in everyone who journeyed with them.



THIS REFLECTION IS DESIGNED AS A REFLECTION TOOL FOR LEADERS PREPARING FOR REVIEW OR PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL. IT FOCUSES ON ACTIONS WHICH EXPRESS FRANCISCAN LEADERSHIP.

Franciscan Leadership

Reflection 2

Leaders could be encouraged to provide evidence for each of the Franciscan leadership indicators in this list.

Consider: what is missing from this list?

HOW WELL DO I...

- clearly articulate and enact the Franciscan charism and mission of the ministry?
- ensure outreach programs exist for those in need?
- actively advocate for those who are marginalised and vulnerable?
- inspire staff members to provide compassionate and responsive service?
- put mission at the heart of strategic planning and development?
- have strategies in place for mission accountability?
- recognise the gifts and contributions of each staff member?
- create communities where staff members feel comfortable, welcome and valued?
- act against behaviours which are not consistent with Franciscan values?
- analyse failures for lessons learned?
- listen attentively to the concerns of colleagues?
- encourage joy and celebration in the community?
- make open and transparent decisions based on Gospel values and Catholic Social Teaching?
- make difficult decisions using discernment, reflection, and deep listening?
- take responsibility for community building?
- model an inclusive, hospitable, and non-judgmental approach to community life?
- advocate for and support dialogue and collaborative effort?
- ensure sustained formation programs for all staff?
- facilitate opportunities for nurturing the spiritual life of staff members?
- maintain links with wider Church bodies?
- provide regular mentoring and feedback for staff?
- confidently embrace new approaches and explore new ideas or perspectives?
- show a profound respect for people and for all of creation?
- lead prayer and reflection?
- cultivate organisational practices in which Gospel values are evident?
- personally mentor others and plan for leadership succession?
- encourage relationships of trust and integrity among staff members?
- ensure accountability of all staff members to ministry values, vision, and mission?
- accept the role of heritage-bearer, keeping alive the Franciscan charism?
- cultivate presence and regard each encounter as sacred?
- assume the good intentions of others and lead with empathy?
- use the language of mission and values, not corporate jargon?
- model hope in difficult times?
- practice collaborative leadership?
- connect with the wider Franciscan world and seek partnerships and networks?
- articulate a clear understanding of mission and purpose for the ministry?



USE THE FOLLOWING LEADERSHIP REFLECTION WITH LEADERSHIP TEAMS
OR ASPIRING LEADERS.

Franciscan Leadership Reflection 3

**What made Francis and Clare's leadership so remarkable?
What can the Franciscan founders offer leaders in a very different and complex world?**

Francis and Clare did not lead an international company or a high-powered board, yet their impact transcended their own lifetime leaving a leadership path for us to follow. While it is certain that neither Francis nor Clare put great emphasis on themselves as leaders, they nevertheless successfully established religious congregations whose impact changed the course of Christian life and service.

LEADERSHIP AS ENTHUSIASING OTHERS

I'm sure we can all remember leaders whose natural enthusiasm and genuine enjoyment of life was infectious. These are the leaders who invite those with whom they work to celebrate the positives and to face challenges with open hearts and minds. There are many occasions when Francis and Clare encouraged others to engage in creative and imaginative ways to walk the Gospel path. One of these occasions showed Francis' love of Christmas. As Stets (2022) observes, *Francis transformed one of the natural caves of the mountain into a chapel, and in that little space, he created a manger filled with straw. At midnight a priest came forward to celebrate the Christmas mass beside the manger, and Francis, who was a deacon, sang the Nativity Gospel. At this first Nativity scene, Francis created in a beautiful poetic tableau a vision of the incarnation that touched the hearts of people as never before and gave to the world the beautiful tradition of the Christmas Creche* (p.37)

CONSIDER ENTHUSIASING OTHERS AS AN ELEMENT OF YOUR LEADERSHIP

- Describe a time when your enthusiasm made a difference to another.
- What is calling out for your creativity at this time?
- How can you ensure those you lead get enjoyment from their work?
- How can you encourage those you lead to face challenges with hope?
- How do you build community through cheerfulness and fun?

LEADERSHIP AS INCLUSIVE WELCOME

Over the course of Francis's life, more than five thousand people came to follow the Franciscan way; the movement grew from one to five thousand in less than twenty years. Both Francis and Clare welcomed all comers. Costello (2000) tells us that ... *when somebody arrived at Mary's of the Portiuncula to ask if he could stay there, Francis welcomed him like an unexpected pleasure* (p.55).

CONSIDER INCLUSIVE WELCOME AS AN ELEMENT OF YOUR LEADERSHIP

- How do you welcome all comers into the life of your ministry?
- How do you build a culture of inclusion?
- What prevents inclusive welcome in your place?

**The Franciscan tradition is much greater than ... one individual man from Assisi.
The way of the Franciscans is composed of a richly diverse community of women and
men who have contributed distinctive insights and models of prayer throughout
the centuries** (Horan, 2021, p.3).

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Franciscan Leadership

Reflection 3

LEADERSHIP AS GREAT COMMUNICATION

By modern communication standards, (Francis) could be described as a man who made exemplary use of different media, each converging to deliver a clear, concise and compelling set of messages in a manner that best suited the audiences he carefully targeted to change attitudes and behaviours. This was achieved, not to deceive or manipulate, as is often the case with publicists and advertisers of our age, but to proclaim the Gospel in order to bring people to believe and live freely according to this good news (Boileau, 2009, p.131).

CONSIDER COMMUNICATION AS AN ELEMENT OF YOUR LEADERSHIP

- What means does your ministry employ to share the Franciscan message?
- Where is the Gospel in the heart of your communication as a leader?
- Describe a time when you made exemplary use of media to inspire your community to embrace the Franciscan way.

LEADERSHIP AS COMPASSIONATE ACTION

Compassion and patience are absolutely unique characteristics of true spiritual authority, and without any doubt are the way both Francis and Clare led their communities. They led not from above, and not even from below, but mostly from within, by walking with their brothers and sisters, or smelling like the sheep, as Pope Francis puts it. A spiritual leader who lacks basic human compassion has almost no power to change other people ... such leaders have to rely on role, laws, and enforcement powers to effect any change in others, such change does not go deep, nor does it last (Rohr, 2015, p.28).

CONSIDER COMPASSION AS AN ELEMENT OF YOUR LEADERSHIP

- Share a time when have you been called upon to exercise compassion in your leadership.
- What wisdom have you gained from mentors and colleagues about compassionate leadership?
- What does leadership from within look like in your ministry?

LEADERSHIP AS SERVICE

At San Damiano, Clare established a community that was not governed by an abbess but by the consent of the members under a leader who was elected to act as their servant. Because no dowry was permitted, women from all the classes were able to join and live with one another in mutual love ... (Armstrong & Peterson, 2010, p.80).

CONSIDER SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN YOUR MINISTRY

- How do you understand servant leadership in your ministry?
- When do you see yourself as a servant to those in your community?
- Why do you think servant leadership has such an impact on communities today?

This is the Franciscan challenge in our own time: contemplative seeing, affective response, practical help, and sustained assistance as a way of restoring God's house which is falling into ruins (Bodo, 2018, p.50).

CONTINUED

Franciscan Leadership

Reflection 3

LEADERSHIP AS OTHER CENTREDNESS

Francis and Clare left the world a better place through their selfless living, their devotion to others and their commitment to living the message of the Gospel: love, mercy, care for the poor and forgiveness. Stets (2022) suggests that all leaders need to ... *take an active part in renewing and supporting our troubled societies. Today we have a great opportunity to express our innate sense of fraternity, to be Good Samaritans who bear the pain of other people's troubles rather than fomenting greater hatred and resentment. Like the chance traveller in the parable, we need only have a pure and simple desire to be a people, a community, constant and tireless in the effort to include, integrate and lift up the fallen. We may often find ourselves succumbing to the mentality of the violent, the blindly ambitious, those who spread mistrust and lies. Others may continue to view politics or the economy as an arena for their own power plays. For our part, let us foster what is good and place ourselves at its service* (p.25).

CONSIDER LEADERSHIP FOR THE COMMON GOOD IN YOUR MINISTRY

- How can you foster what is good in your everyday leadership?
- When can your ministry renew and support troubled communities?
- How can your leadership avoid power plays, politics and selfish ambition?

LEADERSHIP WITH CLEAR PURPOSE AND DIRECTION

Neither Francis or Clare undertook leadership training or courses in management. Yet their leadership was underpinned by a clear sense of purpose and understanding of God's call to bring mercy, peace and compassion to the world. Thomas of Celano notes that ... *when Blessed Francis saw that the Lord God was daily adding to their number, he wrote himself and his brothers, present and to come, simply and with few words, a form of life and rule, using for the most part the words of the holy Gospel, for the perfection of which alone he had yearned. But he did insert a few other things that were necessary to provide for a holy way of life* (Thomas of Celano. *First Life*. 32).

CONSIDER LEADERSHIP WITH CLEAR PURPOSE IN YOUR MINISTRY

- How do you communicate a clear sense of mission in your leadership?
- What opportunities exist for collaborative reflection on the direction of your leadership team?
- Where do you seek guidance as a Franciscan leader?

