

Spirituality as an Asset in Leadership Development

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In today's fast-paced and often fragmented world, leadership development programs tend to prioritize competencies such as strategic thinking, communication, and data-driven decision-making. While these are undoubtedly important, they are incomplete without grounding in a deeper sense of purpose and ethical direction. With more than twenty years of experience in Marianist education and formation, I have come to believe that spirituality is not only a vital support for leadership but also a powerful asset.

Leadership Begins with the Inner Life: *The Essential Is the Interior*

Spirituality offers a framework for self-awareness, discernment, and moral clarity. In leadership development, this translates into leaders who are reflective, resilient, and grounded in purpose. They make decisions not only with their minds but also with their consciences. A leader who cultivates an inner life is more likely to demonstrate emotional intelligence, moral clarity, and resilience. Spirituality enhances leadership by offering space to reflect on questions like:

- Who am I, and what do I value?
- For what purpose am I leading?
- How do I remain grounded amid challenge and change?

In Marianist circles, we learn that leadership is not just a role; it is a vocation. Founders such as Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, Venerable Marie Thérèse de Lamourous, and Blessed Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon modeled leadership that was rooted in deep prayer, community, and a vision larger than themselves. They show us that true leadership begins with the inner life—with cultivating virtues such as humility, courage, and fidelity to one's values. Where one was a visionary and strategist (Chaminade); another a faith-filled and empathetic servant to the poor (Adèle); and a third, resilient, practical, and a “do-er” (Marie Thérèse); the sum of all three provides a beautiful balance of thought, feeling, and action.

This form of introspection—whether through journaling, mindfulness, prayer, or retreat—is not a luxury. It is a *discipline of sustainability*. Leaders who invest in their

inner life are more effective in managing stress, navigating ambiguity, and making ethical decisions.

Community-Centered Leadership

Marianist education emphasizes *community as a way of life*. This insight can transform how we approach leadership. Instead of seeing leaders as heroic individuals, we come to see them as facilitators of collaboration, inclusion, and mutual responsibility. Spiritual leadership, in this view, is inherently relational. It values empathy, active listening, and accompaniment.

In leadership development programs, this community-centered spirituality can shape cultures of belonging and trust, where people are valued not only for what they do but also for who they are. The strongest leaders are those who lead with others, not over them. Spirituality deepens this approach by fostering humility, empathy, and a commitment to the common good.

This is especially relevant in today's workplace cultures, which increasingly prioritize inclusion and psychological safety. Spirituality invites leaders to see others not merely as assets or team members, but as people with dignity, voices, and potential. In practical terms, it encourages:

- Servant leadership over top-down management,
- Collaboration over competition,
- Deep listening over transactional communication.

Leading with Faith and Adaptability

The Marianist charism was born in post-revolutionary France—a time of upheaval, uncertainty, and rebuilding. Chaminade's response was not to retreat from the world, but to form leaders who could respond creatively to change, guided by faith and mission.

Spirituality, then, becomes a source of courage in crisis, a lens for interpreting complexity, and a compass for action.

Today's leaders need this same capacity for faith-filled adaptability. Whether in education, healthcare, or business, those formed in a spiritual tradition, such as the Marianist one, are often better equipped to lead with hope, even when the way forward is unclear.

Courage, Purpose, and Resilience

Spiritual traditions, especially in the Marianist context, emerge from times of crisis and transformation. The founders of the Marianist movement led through political, cultural, and social upheaval with a remarkable combination of courage and adaptability. These are traits desperately needed in today's leaders.

Spirituality strengthens leaders by connecting them to a *greater purpose*, helping them remain faithful to core values even when outcomes are uncertain. It also offers resources for meaning-making, which is especially important in moments of disruption or loss.

Practical Implications for Leadership Programs

Incorporating spirituality into leadership development doesn't require turning every session into a theological exercise. Rather, it can include the following:

- Regular time for reflection or *examen*,
- Conversations about vocation, values, and ethical dilemmas,
- Integrating service learning or social justice components,
- Offering mentorship grounded in faith and accompaniment,
- Cultivating shared rituals and communal prayer.

These practices form leaders who are not only competent but also compassionate and not only strategic but also spiritually wise.

Conclusion

Spirituality is not an optional add-on to leadership—it is a wellspring of purpose, integrity, and resilience. In the Marianist tradition, we are called to form leaders who educate for service, justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. By drawing from our spiritual foundations, we can shape a generation of leaders who are whole, grounded, and deeply committed to the common good.

In this way, Marianist spirituality is not just a background influence: It is a living, breathing asset to leadership development.