

# CONFERENCE OF NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSISTANTS, OFS - OCEANIA

**St Francis Friary**  
96 Catherine St  
Leichhardt NSW AUSTRALIA 2040

Friary Phone: (61-2) 9569 1880  
Mobile Phone: 0412 162 946  
E-mail: [johncap@ozemail.com.au](mailto:johncap@ozemail.com.au)

---

*Monthly Spiritual Message August 2013*

## **Franciscan Leadership – the Way of Humility**

(Part 3)

Let's take again a further look at what Sister r Clare Condon had to say about the hidden power of **Servant Leadership**, because Sr Clare has really given us some fine insights into the Way of Humility:

At face value servant leadership can appear to be weak and lacking in power. But for me, it's the exact opposite. To be a source of empowerment so that others can assume their own role of **leadership requires considerable strength of character**. One needs a healthy self-esteem, a self-identity that does not rely on affirmation and status. One needs emotional stability that has been forged by deep self-knowledge and reflection. Above all, there needs to be transparency between one's words, actions and life. That is, servant leadership demands integrity of life. People are quick to see through falsehood.

**Servant leadership is strong leadership**. As a consequence, it can bring its own conflicts. It has a prophetic edge to it and runs contrary to the norm. To bring about God's mission, **leadership needs to be driven by a vision** that is aligned to furthering the reign of God. Its source of inspiration is the Gospel, listened to in prayer, in liturgy and in relationships. Other factors, like the 'bottom line' in financial terms, find their rightful place as enablers of mission not the mission itself.

Servant leadership can reduce the distance between 'governors' and the 'governed'. It draws out the potential in others. **Servant leadership is team-oriented** rather than hierarchical. The servant leader is not necessarily the highest paid or the one with the distinguished title. Servant leaders break through competitive environments and build co-operative and trusting relationships. Servant leadership seeks to look beyond short-term satisfaction and immediate gratification towards the medium to long-term place of rightness and justice.

To reveal the presence of God, modelled on the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Church needs to embrace **a leadership style compatible with the same Gospel**. I ask myself, what would the Church look like today and how would it respond in a secular society like ours in Australia if its leadership style and structure were re-structured in such a radical manner?<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Clare Condon SGS is the Congregational Leader of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of St Benedict.

Sister Clare Condon articulates well the idea of servant leader, and it is important that the dialogue between it and hierarchal leadership continues. Jesus has given us, in washing of the feet of the disciples, a style of leadership that not only exercises responsibility, but also trains others to be leaders. At the heart of this process is the virtue of humility. This virtue allows a flourishing of excellent attitudes. We need to understand that there can be no authenticity without humility, because no one has all the answers – no one except God is omniscient (all-knowing). We need to be able to admit this so that we are open and willing to ask questions so as to get the information necessary to carry out our responsibilities. I have always had a special respect for the following Chinese proverb attributed to Confucius: *The one who asks a question is a fool for only five minutes, but the one who never asks a question is a fool for life.* Admitting that we do not have all the answers at our finger tips and are willing to seek input from others requires some degree of humility and an attitude of being open and willing to learn. It also encourages **cooperation** (my favorite word). It seeks collaboration, co-responsibility, solidarity, transparency, communication and fraternity. It seeks to animate and include others in searching out a vision and thus inspires others and includes them in the conversation that brings new insights.

Another attitude of a leader who practices humility is the way they treat others. Such a leader treats everyone with a great deal of respect regardless of position or whether they are young, old or feeble minded. Indeed, the sign of a gentleman or a lady has always been how they treat those who can be of absolutely no use to them at all. It used to be called courtesy, which tends to be a lost social art in Australia. This is perhaps because we “dinky dye” (save me from Aussie slang!) Australians, tend to think of it as being a little superficial. Still it is important to remember that you cannot usually see your own face and your expression is your silent signal to others as to how you feel about them. Unlike a dog you have no tail to wag when you meet someone to show how happy you are to see them - you do however have a face and it is a lot more expressive than a tail. So it's important to have a welcoming and friendly face and to be ready to be amused by your own stupidity and - smile.

Something wonderful happens when we approach situations from a perspective of humility. It opens us up to new possibilities. It brightens our mind. We are not just muddling along, we have a purpose and a way of doing things. As we choose open-mindedness, curiosity and interest over protecting our point of view, and our image, we become more childlike and trusting of others. We spend more time in that wonderful space of the beginner's mind that is filled with awe. We are willing to learn from what others have to offer and that we need to be ready to be surprised. We move away from pushing others to do something, into allowing others to participate and even to be creative in what they wish to do. We move from being insecure to an attitude of security, from wanting and seeking approval, to seeking enlightenment and vision. We forget about being perfect and we enjoy being in the moment – that's where God lives – in the NOW. It's a good place to be!

There are many good things that flow from practicing humility, it improves relationships on all levels, it reduces anxiety, it encourages more openness and paradoxically, it enhances one's self-confidence. It opens a window for the Holy Spirit to flood us with grace. It transforms us into Christ, whom the Father not only loves, but in whom the Father delights. The Way of Humility is the way of cooperating with grace. It is the way of love, the way of compassion, the way of dying to self. It is the way of perfect joy. It is the most beautiful way.

Br John Cooper OFM Cap (*Capuchin National Spiritual Assistant*)

**Regional Assistants are requested to distribute this Monthly Spiritual Message  
to all local Assistants of our Order in the Regional Fraternity**