

## CHAPTER I

# The Roadmap

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### » Our Day and Age

We live in an after-council age, a time of massive change, flux, and adjustment in the Catholic Church. Ours is an era when, among the good people on any side of a given question, some think the pendulum swings in their direction and some think it swings against them. All sides are probably correct and mistaken. Decades on since council's end, we remain blinking still from the dust Vatican II kicked up when good Pope John XXIII opened the windows of the Catholic Church to the Holy Spirit's wind and fire.

A former colleague of mine did a doctoral dissertation on the implementation of the great Counter-Reformation Council of Trent (1545-1563). He concluded that it took seventy-five years for Trent's dust to settle. The people who "won" were those who worked hard, stayed the course, and refused to give up. Looking back to that post-conciliar age, we in our own post-conciliar age have no reason to assume that the full implementation of Vatican II will take any less time or grit. Controversy about the council's true interpretation continues to swirl, and

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will for a good long time to come, vastly complicated by the immense cultural breadth of today's globe-embracing church and the ongoing social upheaval across the nations of the world.

This book offers a model for "on-the-ground" parish pastoral leadership that hopes to help pastoral leaders in the post-conciliar Catholic Church in the U.S. coordinate the work of our hands, left and right. Much of the hand coordination weakness we experience as a church today arises from how lay and ordained people understand their respective roles in the church.

We in the U.S. have the most educated, most affluent, most confident laity ever known in the Catholic Church throughout the world and across the ages. The parochial school system established in the nineteenth century Age of Immigration did its job, and it set values, priorities, and aspirations among U.S. Catholics that have brought Catholic men and women to thriving leadership in American society and the global community. Our era is reshaping expectations regarding the laity's role in pastoral leadership.

The differing expectations of right and left, of lay and ordained, however, require us to look straightforwardly, even bluntly, at the reality in which we live day-to-day, especially in the parish, so we might consider how we can best join together collaboratively and collegially in Good News pastoral leadership.

### » The World: Created Good

God created the world good, very good. We broke it. Jesus came eating and drinking with sinners. He showed us how to recreate the world good. We broke his body and his blood was poured out. Jesus then showed us the absolute fullness of God's goodness. Giving us everything we need to live within it, he

invited us to share a memorial meal where heaven and earth meet in our eating and drinking together so we can taste and see the Lord's goodness and then, nourished by it, spread that goodness to the world. The breakage goes on. Why?

## » **The Root of the Breakage**

Power. Power looks different depending on who exercises it. Some impose their notion of perfection, or what it is to be helpful, or what achievement is; some impress on others their understanding of what authentic self-expression is, or their insistence on being right, or their sense of what's responsible; some push others because of their need to avoid pain, be strong, or keep peace. Power's exercise can be active or passive. It looks different in men than in women, it varies across generations, national boundaries, and cultures. Power most certainly can be wielded for good, yet just as certainly it is the root cause of the world's breakage in the face of God's overwhelming goodness. A friend puts the essence of the problem most tragically when he remarks, "I want someone to love me, hold me and be close, but I want it when I want it and how I want it, and then I want to be left alone." We really do demand that it be our way.

## » **Power Structures Relationships**

God fashioned us in his image and likeness, and gave us the world. We want the world fashioned in our image and likeness. The church burst forth from the wind and fire of the Holy Spirit to be Jesus' presence in the world. We festoon it in finery, make it our presence, and proclaim that. Jesus told us to remember him in Eucharist so all would become him, become Eucharist in the midst of the world. We restrict who eats and drinks and who ought not, and we fuss over the banquet particulars. Thus we remember ourselves in Eucharist, and people like us, there-

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by leaving the world hungry and thirsty for something more and someone other than just us. All of it is about power.

We human beings struggle all our lives with questions of power. Who is in charge? Who says so? Who does she think she is? Who gave them permission? Why listen to him? We know, too, that power takes many forms as power competes with power. Knowledge is power. Money is power. Education is power. Role is power. Access is power. Talent is power. Beauty is power. Physical prowess is power. Temper is power. Ask a child on any playground and he or she will tell you all about power in relationships: who can play with whom and who can't, who is "in" today and who is "out," who everyone wants to hang with and who no one wants to play with at all. Before the playground comes to be, from the moment the family pecking order rises in our consciousness, we learn that some people have power and some don't, we have power over some things and not over others, some people have control over our lives and some don't. Life is shaped by how power is distributed in human relationships.

### » Leadership Distributes Power

"Leader" is the word we use for those who have power, for good or for ill. The Indo-European root word *to lead* is the same as the root word *to load*. The root word carries with it the sense of movement. To load implies carrying the burden loaded. To lead is to show the way or direct the course, and implies being on the move. Leadership takes us somewhere. As he or she shows, guides, commands, or directs, a leader bears the burden of moving others by distributing power—the leader's power and the power of the group.

Think of the early part of the Exodus story from the Egyptian perspective. Pharaoh wants his supply cities built. Pithom and Raamses probably serve the whole people, but they most surely

immortalize Pharaoh, who is content not merely to subjugate, but to enslave a people to get what he wants. When Moses and Aaron approach Pharaoh to let God's people go, Pharaoh increases their work, directing the taskmasters and foremen to increase the brick quota and make the slaves get their own straw. The Nile turns to blood, polluting the nation's drinking and irrigation water, but Pharaoh commands the slaves to continue building his monuments. The Egyptians suffer frogs, gnats, flies, pestilence, boils, hail, locusts, and darkness—still Pharaoh demands that Israel work on. The Egyptian people lose their firstborn; only then does Pharaoh relent. Yet, he soon changes his mind and pursues Israel into the desert. Stubbornly, as if in the stranglehold of madness, Pharaoh sends his whole army, all of his chariots and charioteers, down onto the floor of a wondrously split Red Sea so he can get his slave labor back. The flower of Egyptian manhood—fathers, sons, brothers, and friends—drowns and Egypt's national security dies, all because Pharaoh wanted to have his supply cities and personal monuments built. Archaeologists tell us that Pharaoh Ramses II lived on after all this to a ripe old age...while Egypt wept.

Leadership distributes power to move others; it burdens those who guide, direct and show the way. The Exodus story proclaims loudly that leadership's power distribution burdens everyone. Yes, leadership takes us somewhere.

## » Humans Want Power Distribution Structured

A household refrigerator offers a case study in leadership power distribution. As I write, I live with my parents. Mom cooks and oversees food storage. Joe, my stepfather, makes soups, prepares daily breakfast fruit, orange juice, and salads, and stores half-eaten sandwiches and half-full glasses of milk or juice in the refrigerator after almost every meal. I prepare my

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own breakfast daily and occasionally cook pasta dishes, make salsa, or put together a sandwich.

One recent morning I went to the refrigerator to find egg salad for an open-faced breakfast sandwich. I expected it to be on the top shelf, right hand side. I found chicken salad there and some dried beef, a half-empty juice glass, and some old gravy, but no egg salad. I pulled and pushed this and that down all the shelves, then finally found the egg salad on the bottom shelf, left hand side, behind the pickles. I was only mildly inconvenienced. Nonetheless, I told Mom the story later that morning.

“The refrigerator is hopeless!” she blurted. Then she reported that she never knows if the milk will be on the door or not, and that while the vegetables are supposed to be in one humidifier drawer and the meat in the other, inevitably she finds the meat among the vegetables and vegetables in with the meat. “If you can’t keep that straight, what can you rely on?!” she quipped.

At that moment, Joe walked into the dinette. “We’re telling refrigerator stories,” I informed him.

“The refrigerator is hopeless!” he blurted. “You can’t find anything you want in there!” We all laughed, then told more stories.

None of us can easily find anything in the refrigerator. Each of us is somewhat frustrated, yet no one is willing to exercise leadership enough or respect someone else’s power distribution in such a way that we *can* easily find things in the refrigerator. Mom wants to lead but has given up. Joe stores food however he pleases, thus asserting a form of leadership, but gets frustrated when it’s not exactly where he puts it, all the while refusing to respect Mom’s sense of order. I simply guess where things ought to be and often put them there, but stay out of the fray because... well...I presume I have no power over their refrigerator.

How wonderful life would be if one of us would lead regarding refrigerator food storage and the rest would respect his or her distribution of power! Unfortunately, none of us sees the importance of refrigerator order enough, wants to exercise leadership enough, or is willing to accept another's leadership enough to do that. So we all live with the mess and whine about it. Could it be that if we agreed to let Mom set the order, respected her order, and took the occasional reprimand for a goof, then we could all find things? Imagine! Sometimes leadership takes us to a dead stop, and we stoop to rearguard action so we survive.

Whether it be the family refrigerator or Egypt, we human beings look for someone to lead, to distribute power among us, and so bring order to life. Sometimes we resist because we don't care enough, trust someone enough, or want things our way, so we accommodate and live with the messy refrigerator. Sometimes we follow the in-place structure no matter what—blindly or because we feel coerced—and people fall or drown left and right. There are times, of course, when leadership takes us forward in such harmony that the refrigerator stays orderly for months on end and Pharaoh governs his people conscientiously with a wise justice. Whatever happens, leadership (or its failure) directs life's events and movement; leadership power distribution (or its failure) determines the outcome.

Throughout history, therefore, human beings have structured leadership by setting expectations and making rules for its exercise so power will be distributed effectively. Ancient Greece and Rome did that, and so did eighteenth-century American colonists. Ancient Israel did that, and so did Islam and the Mormons. Children do that on the playground, and so do young people on the dance floor, men pouring a foundation, and women organizing a neighborhood garage sale. The church does that, too.

## » Church Leadership and Power Distribution

The purpose of church leadership, its leaders' distribution of power, is to transform the world according to the pattern of life Jesus has shown us. As the church's base community, the parish's mission is to proclaim God's goodness to the world, be God's goodness in the midst of the world, and spread God's goodness to the ends of the world. Yet, very often even in the parish, leaders exercise power not for the common mission but for themselves, and so the refrigerator remains a mess. Very often even in the parish, the distribution of power erects monuments to the "me" who leads, leaving expectations unmet, rules broken, and the field piled high with casualties.

### *A CASE IN POINT*

Fr. Joe pastors four little parishes: St. Michael, St. Gabriel, St. Raphael, and Guardian Angels—commonly referred to as the All Holy Angels Catholic Community (AHACC)—scattered across territory the size of Rhode Island. He came to the parishes with twenty years experience of being a pastor in one small parish, at an age when most Americans retire, and in a position of major responsibility in his religious order.

After becoming pastor, Fr. Joe soon realized that the secretary, Dierdre, controls the office and all parish communications, nurtures a wide array of relationships across all four little communities, and holds strong opinions about what the pastor ought and ought not do. A simple man, yet wise and wily, Fr. Joe decided to move his office out of the parish center and into the rectory so he could avoid conflict and preserve his power. He has succeeded. Parishioners, however, think him inaccessible and unavailable because when you call the office, all

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I must distinguish carefully between two aspects of the role the Lord has given me, a role that demands a rigorous accountability, a role based on the Lord's greatness rather than my own merit. The first aspect is that I am a Christian; the second, that I am a leader. I am a Christian for my own sake, whereas I am a leader for your [the people's] sake; the fact that I am a Christian is to my own advantage, but I am a leader for your advantage.

» ST. AUGUSTINE, SERMON 46

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messages, even on the answering machine, go through Dierdre.

Because of Fr. Joe's commitments to his religious order and the enormous time they take away from his being at the parishes, he requested that the multi-parish pastoral council expand to include the heads of all parish clubs, organizations, and committees. Council meeting time is now given over to hearing reports so the pastor gets basic information about the parish. The structure leaves those who come to the meeting swirling in a mix of facts and opinions, unsure about the relative importance of any given ministry because all get the same treatment. Does the AHACC have ministry priorities or not? The council has precious little time to do any work beyond reports. This move, too, preserved Fr. Joe's power.

All acknowledge that Fr. Joe is indeed the AHACC pastor. He has preserved his power. No clear ministry di-

rection, however, emanates from the too busy and well-insulated pastor or from the flabbily structured council. Volunteer ministers in each of the little parishes work hard to hold the individual communities together and do the best they can. Parish-wide gospel ministry, however, fails to cohere, and forward movement in the parish is stymied. A messy refrigerator!

### *A SECOND CASE IN POINT*

Eight years into his pastorate, after five years debt free and consistent efforts to build community trust, Fr. Jordan and the parish leadership agreed to erect a 32,000-square foot addition onto the school building. Fr. Jordan agreed with the finance council that there would be no change orders. He kept the building committee small, however, so he could control construction details. He also privately asked parishioners to donate significant sums to fund religious art throughout the new building.

As the addition neared completion, a trustee learned about a thirteen percent increase in expenses because of change orders and the unexpected religious art. Piqued, he went public with it at a parish meeting that ended in near catcalls directed toward the pastor. The trustee lost his post, council members departed, rumors flew, the new building dedication was a bust, trust was broken, and the momentum of Fr. Jordan's pastorate stopped dead, though he remained on his horse, like El Cid, for three more years. Egypt was piled high with casualties.

Leadership takes us somewhere, but when Fr. Joe refuses to lead or stiff-arms the folks in order to preserve his power, can the refrigerator still be brought to order? When Fr. Jor-

dan undercuts his leadership and squanders his power, can the dead get buried, the wounded be healed, and the Egyptian people be revived? Can parish leadership be shaped in such a way—can parish power distribution be structured in such a way—that failures like these are blunted or, better, rendered nigh impossible?

## » Guidelines, Tools, and Ideas

This book aims to answer those questions in the affirmative by offering guidelines, tools, and ideas for shaping pastoral leadership and structuring power distribution so the parish can enjoy, be, mirror, proclaim, and bring to the world the transforming goodness of God. Indeed, the first principle this work aims to set forth is that the effectiveness of the parish's ministry and the church's mission to the world depends very significantly on how the parish structures its leadership relationships. Effective pastoral leadership and power distribution in the parish finds its motive in the church's mission, its principles in sound theology, its focusing images across our tradition, its practices in common sense, its energy in people working together in common cause, and its ground in the goodness of God revealed to us by the transforming pattern of life that Jesus has shown us.

## » The Road We Travel

Chapter 2 discusses the elephant in the room of church life for pastoral leadership: the hierarchical clerical culture. It will explore the ethos of the clerical culture, a fundamental context that needs to be considered by all pastoral leaders, as well as the unassailable power that the priest pastor has in the parish. The chapter reflects on that power, some of its limits, and its implications for the parish staff and community. It will also open up the

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question of how to limit that power for the sake of inviting wide participation in pastoral leadership among all in the parish.

The anxious and alienated human person in our contemporary American culture longs for meaning and connection with others, and fumbles with how to do it even in his or her own family. In parish life this longing shows itself in people's search for "welcome" and "a sense of belonging." The third chapter will make the case that hospitality is the fundamental ministry of the American parish. Grounded in Jesus' ministry of reconciling meals, in his memorial meal, Eucharist, and in his revelation of our God as Trinity—which offer venerable and compelling focus-images—hospitality transforms people, parish community life, and the world. In our time, rising well above clerical culture concerns, hospitality is the church's primary mission. The chapter will define hospitality and explore the three theological grounding-points and images from our tradition that proclaim table fellowship as our primary ministry, thus helping us to bring together contemporary need with our ancient tradition in a meaningful way. The chapter also lists the eight gospel ministries that organize parish community life. It will clarify the options for organizing the parish's ministries and leadership relationships so they mirror the gospel and fulfill the church's mission.

A pastoral leader gathers people together in groups so they can accept real responsibility for a parish's ministry. Chapter 4 defines the word *pastor* as the church understands it, then discusses what is necessary for the pastor's mindset to shift from that of a Lone Ranger to a maestro and from being Herr Pastor to being a coach. It also discusses the attitudes that expand the pastor's effective ministry leadership: moving from thinking of oneself as the parish bulwark to accepting that a pastor is passing through, from thinking of oneself as field

marshal to understanding that the effective pastor is a ministry generalist.

Chapter 5 reviews the basics of a parish's leadership structure and reflects on what an empowering posture looks like for the pastor in relationship to parishioner and staff leadership groups. It ends with the point that the heart of effective pastoring is building trust.

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A leader is best when people barely know  
he exists; when his work is done, his aim  
fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves.

» LAO TZU

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Chapter 6 addresses council pastoral leadership in the parish. The task of parish leadership groups is to plan, to sort through the gifts and demands of the parish's relationship with God and to focus, guide, and monitor parish ministry life. Therefore the chapter describes the role of the pastoral council and the administrative council in the parish. Pastoral leadership grounds itself in spiritual discipline. All concerns in parish decision making are governed by the umbrella question: what is it that God wants of us? The chapter reflects on discernment as a major task of the councils, and on what consensus decision making needs to look like. It also discusses the place of confidentiality among pastoral leaders.

Chapter 7 reflects on the role of the pastoral staff and administrative staff in the parish. It discusses what it means to say that the pastoral staff members co-pastor the parish, and suggests

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what the points of contact should be among pastor and staff members. The chapter reviews what works regarding pastoral staff meetings. Since pastoral staff members themselves have advisory pastoral leadership groups, the chapter considers the function of these groups and what they ought to look like. The chapter ends with a consideration of varied parish contexts and how staff relationships might best be structured within them.

One of the places in the parish where heaven and earth meet in the wind and fire of the Holy Spirit is around the pastoral leadership meeting table. Chapter 8 offers perspective on the central importance of the low table leadership meeting, its content and process. It offers rules for meeting conduct. Effective pastoral leadership requires highly refined listening skills, mental agility that brings ideas together, and the humility to let go of one's own biases, so the chapter describes the qualities of the astute meeting chair and offers some thoughts on effective meeting mechanics, including prayer.

Parish life in the United States invariably includes three cultural conflicts. American society's expectations often clash with church values in the areas of decision making and employment. Chapter 9 discusses where the conflicts are and how to strike a workable balance between American and traditional church values in leadership structures and decision making. It also clarifies employment limits and the value of following employment law carefully while keeping employment relationships collaborative, healthy, and trusting. Chapter 10 explores the creative tension that arises in the cultural conflict of a parish's having a school ministry, and it offers a perspective on how to live well within it.

A fundamental question that all of us ask is: will this work? Chapter 11 suggests the possibilities and limits of what a parishioner pastoral council member, a pastoral associate, or a pastor can do to shape Good News pastoral leadership in the parish.

Chapter 12 offers a particular case study—the clustered community of All Holy Angels Catholic Community—so the reader or a pastoral leadership group might apply their own sense of the possibilities and limits of what a parishioner pastoral council member, a pastoral associate, or a pastor can do to shape Good News pastoral leadership in the AHACC. The chapter also offers one perspective on how a pastoral council member, pastoral associate, or pastor might approach leadership in the AHACC.

Four appendices are offered at the end of the book as a kind of toolbox. The reader or a pastoral leadership group will find there useful tools to help clarify and implement Good News pastoral leadership. Guidelines and ideas are scattered throughout the book as well.

## » Good News Pastoral Leadership

The Catholic Church in the United States is limping these days. The sexual abuse scandals here and abroad have shaken us. The bishops, content that the situation is fixed and presuming everything is back to normal, have neglected to take meaningful responsibility as a group, continue to gloss over the consequences of ongoing news about hundreds of millions of dollars of payout, have allowed church credibility and trust to crumble, and so have let us down. Leadership has indeed taken us somewhere. Dioceses and parishes bear some of the burden of where we have gone.

These days only one third of our people see Sunday Mass as a high value; seventy-five percent did in 1957. There is no single definition of what *regular* Mass attendance means. The young, who seek inspiration and “a charge” in our worship, grow increasingly indifferent to what they experience in church and refuse to buy whole areas of church teaching. For many, faith is uncoupled from church life, participation in church has

become not life's core but a lifestyle option, and religious literacy among Catholics weakens. We American Catholics suffer because of bad news pastoral leadership. Yet we are a Good News people. Goodness is integral to our identity as a people of faith.

Goodness is a primary attribute of God: God is supreme beauty, truth, and goodness. The earth, in Genesis, is created good because only good could come to birth out of the word of God. Goodness is also an essential quality of the Christian life. In Jesus, we are recreated good, coming to birth again in the risen life of the Lord. In Eucharist we are nourished in goodness, and so the goodness of God pulsates within and among us as a people.

Human goodness is grounded in the goodness of God. When we say that a person is good, for instance, we mean that that person is grounded in God, that his or her words and actions in large measure flow from of God, that his or her life expresses the goodness of God and that his or her life bears its fruit in the risen Lord. Moral goodness—the goodness of our actions day in and day out—is but one aspect of God's goodness. To say that a person is good is to say simply, accurately, and most profoundly, that that person is “friend of God”—the greatest of gifts in our tradition, the gift that activates all the other gifts of the Holy Spirit.

God has created us good. Jesus has recreated us good. Eucharist nourishes us in goodness. The Good News calls us to say “yes” to God's goodness and our own, and to spread it within the parish, and from there to the neighborhood, other parishes, the ecumenical community, the civic community, and the world. As we examine pastoral leadership in the parish, a key foundational element for the success of that mission, we have every reason to hope as a community of faith that we can

all share in wholesome and healthy pastoral leadership, build and keep trust, and thereby exercise Good News leadership for the sake of the Good News, the church, and the world.

What follows are guidelines, tools, and ideas aimed to equip us all for continuing Jesus' mission to the world, for going where Jesus has shown us...where we really and truly already are, if we will but accept it.

— PROCESS EXERCISE —

*Reflect together on the leadership system in your parish's life and on its many pieces: for example, pastoral leadership, consultation groups, the parish office, councils, committees...*

1. If you take it simply at face value, what does the structure of your parish's leadership system teach you is the pattern of life Jesus showed us?
2. Taken at face value, what does the shape of the whole relationship system in the parish, and its pieces, teach you about leadership and power distribution in your parish community? What's power for?
3. How does parish leadership establish and hold "the vision" for your parish community? Where is the weakness of that? the strength?