

# Memo

To: Participants, Cohort 8 -- Core Course 1

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Date: 11/28/01

Re: Personal preparation before we meet February 18-22

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Colleagues:

There are two major ways to begin to prepare for our time together in February, 2002.

1. Complete the required readings as listed in the syllabus. If you have read a particular book, choose one beyond the required lists.

There is much reading, but relax. In your reading get an overview of what the author is sharing with you. You don't have to read like you're memorizing for an exam. Stop and reflect (take notes if helpful) more personally upon the ideas that catch your attention because you can fully agree with the author, you disagree, or you are not sure about the meaning of an idea or its application.

2. Attached are scripture readings and reflection questions for your own journaling enjoyment that are designed for one month before we meet. You actually have two months for these reflections, or you may think of a personal retreat during a more concentrated time by yourself.

## **READINGS, REFLECTION BEFORE CLASS:**

When I think of my own need to retreat this winter, I think of St. Mark's account after "The apostles gathered around Jesus to report all they had done and taught. He said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat."

Like the early disciples you probably skipped a few meals yourselves. Retreats are also an opportunity to rest and reflect a while. Sometimes that is enough—just to rest. Retreats also provide the opportunity to reflect in ways that will help us engage in our ministries and work more

effectively. Parker Palmer describes better than anyone for me the role of contemplation and action [or engagement].

One of the great threats to full aliveness is the sleight of hand practiced by our egos and our culture to keep us from seeing things as they are [or could be]. **Contemplation** happens any time that we catch the magician deceiving us and we get a glimpse of the truth behind the trick. Whether it is a happy truth or a hard one, that truth will always quicken our lives....

...**action** is more than movement; it is movement that involves expression, discovery, re-formation of ourselves and our world [and organizations]. I understand action to be any way that we co-create reality with others and with the Spirit. Through action we both express and learn something of who we are, of the kind of world we have or want. Action, like sacrament, is the visible form of an invisible spirit, an outward manifestation of an inward power. But as we act, we not only express what is in us and help give shape to the world; we also receive what is outside us, and we reshape our inner selves. When we act, the world acts back, and we and the world are co-created.<sup>1</sup>

As you take the necessary time to read the following scriptures, pray and journal around questions, remember that these disciplines are a means of grace and not mere duty. This preparation is meant to help us integrate our own spirituality with an awareness of Christ's presence in all the dimensions of our ministry, relationships and life. Think of this preparation as "wasting time" with God and yourself.

Out of this can come new ways of looking at reoccurring "stuck" patterns and the seeds of vision for a compelling future. Who knows what may come out of a retreat together? It's no wonder that retreats are part and parcel of the Christian tradition.

The following are themes, scripture reading and journal questions for each of four weeks before our time together. Use your personal journal, purchase a spiral notebook or use the space below and back of paper to jot down your answers to the questions. You may also wish to write prayers, poetry, requests, or express yourself in other entries especially related to your ministry setting.

### **First Week: Examen of Consciousness**

Integral to a spirituality of leadership is the daily exercise of discernment in a person's life. How am I experiencing the drawing of God through God's love and presence? How is my human nature tempting me, luring me away from an awareness of God's presence? Inside each of us are interior movements, some good and some not so good; some are part of our consciousness and some are not. These motivations, conscious and unconscious, influence and determine our actions. The examen of consciousness is a time of prayer and reflection that is concerned with what happens in our consciousness prior to our actions, events or conditions.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *The Active Life: A Spirituality of Work, Creativity, and Caring*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> One of the best articles for Ignatian *examen of consciousness* is George A. Aschenbrenner, "Consciousness Examen," *Review for Religious* 31 (1972): 14-21. John Wesley advised morning and evening hours for such a review. It need not be long, perhaps 15 minutes once or twice daily. This is not discerning the morality of good or bad actions; rather it is noticing how God is moving and affecting us.

Scripture reading:

Psalm 139; John 15:1-17; Rom 7:14-25

Journal questions

1. When I think of this past year, for what am I most grateful? ...for what am I least grateful?
2. When think of this past year and most recently, for when did I feel most alive? ...when did I most feel life draining from me?
3. When I think of being on my particular ministry team, when did I have the greatest sense of belonging? ...the least sense of belonging?
4. When did I give and receive the most love this week? The least love this week?
5. What was this week's high point? ...low point?
6. For St. Ignatius, affective prayer was an important ingredient in integrating life's experiences with Christ. What feelings have you experienced recently that you would express in a prayer?<sup>3</sup>

### **Second Week: Calling and Vocation**

The call of leaders is often filled with paradox. The One who calls often tests us, sometimes severely, and often to those who are most faithful. It is no wonder that there is resistance on our part. But without resistance there may not be full acceptance. Therefore, we must learn to embrace the resistance, internal or external, because without resistance, our ministries may remain weak, diffuse and unsure. God's call is more than performance and activity, however gifted we are and however grand our accomplishments may be. The call by God encompasses all that we have and all that we are—nothing more, nothing less.

Scripture reading

Psalm 62; I Sam 3:1-21 and 4:1; Is 6:1-8; Luke 5:1-11; Acts 9:1-22; I Cor 1:26-31

Journal questions

1. When was I first aware of God in my life?
2. What were the circumstances, events, persons around which I experienced a call to follow Christ? ... to serve Christ in my vocation?
3. Specifically, how has my call been strengthened in my current vocation/appointment in ministry?
4. Specifically, how has my call been tested?
5. Presently, what words would I use to describe my call?
6. What new awareness of myself, of God, of ministry am I learning through my journey of being called?
7. Am I fully satisfied in my call? ...in the present circumstances of my call? If not, what stands in the way of my satisfaction?

### **Third Week: Personal Mission and "Goodness of Fit"**

O Lord, I am not weary of your pace.  
nor weary of my own patience.  
I provoke you not with a prayer,

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<sup>3</sup> These questions were modified from a very simple book on *examen*, Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn and Matthew Linn, *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life*. Mahwah, NY: Paulist Press, 1995, pp. 6-7.

not with a wish,  
not with a hope  
to more haste that consists with your purpose.  
Nor do I prefer that any other thing  
should enter your purpose but your glory.  
To hear your steps coming toward me  
is the same comfort  
as to see your face present with me.  
Whether you do the work of thousand years in a day,  
or extend the work of a day  
to a thousand years,  
as long as you work  
it is light and comfort.

(based on "Pilgrim's Prayer" by John Donne)

#### Scripture reading

Psalm 25; Is 61; Jn 13:1-20; Mk 6:1-13; James 1:2-18; I Pet 4:12-19

#### Journal questions

1. What am I presently doing that feeds and fulfills my own sense of mission and purpose? What am I not doing that I should be doing...? What am I doing that I should not be doing...?
2. At times we may be gifted in areas that do not bring fulfillment but are need in the organization. Is this your situation? What does our congregation/religious organization need most that I am able to offer? What does our congregation/religious organization need that I am not able to offer? What stands in the way of my being most effective in my present role?
3. It has been said, "You are perfectly designed for the results you are getting." What changes need to happen our congregation/religious organization to change the results? OR What adjustments do we need to make in our congregation/religious organization that would help us be more effective in our service to others?
4. After being part of our congregation/religious organization, what have I learned about our mission? Are there key words or phrases that capture the essence of our unique identity and purpose?

### **Fourth Week: Dreaming the Future**

There is such a thing as a "visible future." The seedlings of the twenty-first-century life are sprouting all around us if we have the wit to identify them. Most significant changes are preceded by a long train of premonitory events. Sometimes the events are readily observable.<sup>4</sup>

#### Scripture reading

Psalm 104; Habakkuk 2:2-3; Romans 8:31-39; Rev 22:1-7

#### Journal questions

1. What do I value most about being part of our congregation/religious organization? Tell a story when this congregation/religious organization was most alive for me, or when I was most proud to be part of it.
2. Is my soul expanding or shrinking here? Explain.
3. Is the soul of our congregation/religious organization expanding or shrinking? Explain.

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<sup>4</sup> John W. Gardner, *On Leadership* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), p. 131.

4. Is the future knowable? Can you create your own future? Explain.
5. What kind of congregation/religious organization do we need to be to really soar? ...to make an indelible impact in the next ten years?
6. What seems impossible to do but if it could be done would fundamentally change us for the better?<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> A Joel Barker question from his video, *The Power of Vision: Discovering the Future*, distributed by Charthouse.