

Administration as a Spiritual Adventure



SPRING 2016

Growing in the Vineyard

The newsletter for Catholic Lay Ministry Formation Students

Like most lay ministers upon graduating from theological studies, I imagined that I would be spending my time in direct service of God's people. My coursework and internships had prepared me to sit at the bedside of those who were sick or dying, to engage youth in retreats and the classroom, to lead prayer services and preach reflections. But even from the earliest days of employment in the church, it was not the case. Instead I found myself for long stretches of time each day sitting in an office handling registrations for religious education, making Excel spreadsheets and tables, replying to emails, unjamming the copy machine. In the past fifteen years, that has not changed much. Now it also includes conference calls and virtual meetings, budgeting and project management, but still, let's not kid ourselves... there is A LOT of administrative work in the field of ministry.

For a number of years, I found this facet of the work discouraging. As a true "Co-worker in the Vineyard," shouldn't I be directly engaging in the joys and struggles of God's people? Yes, of course. But this other dimension of our work is also very important and often undervalued. Administration, as implied by the two Latin roots that form the word, is the work we do that moves our institutions "to" or "toward" the "ministry" for which

they were founded. It consists of all of the background activities that make direct service possible. And it is a way that we can participate in the ministry of God the Creator.

At the dawn of creation, God carefully fashioned a vibrant, living environment in which life could flourish. When all goes well in God's world, those of us dwelling within it hardly notice. We take for granted the air we breathe, the rising of the sun, and the patterns of the tide. We are free to explore and live fully. Likewise in administration, much of our work is about creating an environment in which ministry can flourish and others can be free to exercise their vocations. When we do that well, our efforts are largely hidden. No one thinks to say "thank you" that the copy machine is working or that the class lists for parish religious education are so well balanced in terms of the number and gender of the students. But ministry is able to happen in a way that it could not have otherwise, and we are able to enter into an understanding of God's reality in a way that we could not have otherwise. Engaging administrative tasks with intentionality and a reflective spirit can gradually transform the heart of the one engaged in those tasks to more closely resemble the heart of our Creator God.

The particular administrative duties each of us is charged with differ, but in my own conversations with other ministers—both lay and ordained—I have found that there are a few virtues that consistently resurface as fruits of embracing (rather than resisting) the administrative dimensions of our work: Trust. Humility. Courage. Humor. Ministers tell me that administration is the part of their job that has most taught them forgiveness. That has illumined for them the paschal journey of letting go, and rising up again.

In your own formation for ministry, be attentive to opportunities for developing the administrative capacities that will be so called upon in your future—things like computer skills and time management and organizational development. Take advantage of every workshop offered on website creation and grant writing. These will be valuable skills to bring into any ministry setting. But, moreover, be open to the spiritual dimension of this work, and the way it offers opportunities for the practice of virtue in hidden way. Be attentive to the invitation to holiness present in the everyday tasks of administration.

Ann Garrido is associate professor of homiletics at Aquinas Institute of Theology and author of the book Redeeming Administration: 12 Spiritual Habits for Catholic Leaders. She can be reached at Garrido@ai.edu



YEAR OF MERCY APP

Our Sunday Visitor's 365 Days to Mercy app is designed to accompany you on a spiritual journey during the Jubilee Year of Mercy

proclaimed by Pope Francis. The theme for the year is "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful," reflected in the elements of the app which draw upon resources from Our Sunday Visitor:

- An explanation of the Year of Mercy
- Daily Mercy reflections
- Everyday Scripture reflections

- Book excerpts
- Year of Mercy resources
- Daily Pope tweets
- Year of Mercy news stories
- Chaplet & Novena of Divine Mercy

The app is free and is available in the iTunes and Google Play app .stores.

Prayer Keeps the Boat Afloat

A Ministry Formation Student's Perspective

Having been in ministry for more than 20 years, I know that administration is a large part of my ministry. Having said that, I must also say that administration and organization are not two of my best skills. When I decided to leave my old job to work for the Church as a Director of Religious Education, I had illusions of grandeur. Imagine my surprise, when, along with a welcome at the parish, I received a large binder filled with all the rules and required paperwork I was going to have to follow and keep up with as part of my ministry. Undaunted, I still believed that all would be well.

As time went on the postal service was replaced with email; but rather than ease the paperwork it seemed to increase. Didn't anyone understand that I was doing God's work and I didn't have time for this? I found out that fellow DREs had the same problem, each of us were in the same boat. That boat was filled with questionnaires, surveys, unpaid bills, and accident reports; it was supposed to be filled with children singing, "This Little Light of Mine", as they happily embraced their faith.

I found the way to deal with this ever-growing issue was through prayer. I prayed to God to help me in what I was lacking and give me the strength to continue. I realized that I needed spiritual ammunition for this battle. I enrolled in the diocesan lay formation program to gain a better grasp of ministry, and to give me the tools necessary to be effective. I began to attend evenings of reflection and retreats offered by the diocese. My ministry, and my effectiveness at the administrative duties improved as I worked on ministering to myself.

Sara Nespoli is a Director of Faith Formation for a parish in the Diocese of Brooklyn. She has been involved in ministry for 24 years. After completing the Diocesan Lay Formation Program, she decided to further her knowledge and understanding of the faith. She is currently studying at St Joseph's Seminary for her Master's in Theology.





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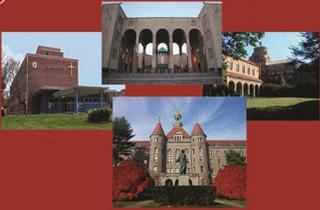
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