

Circular Models of Leadership: Birthing a New Way of Being

Ted Dunn, Ph.D.

Many religious communities are exploring new models of leadership in light of current realities, future trends and a fundamental shift in values. In the face of diminishing numbers and advancing age, for instance, many are wondering if the traditional models are best suited for them. Communities embracing new values, such as “co-responsibility” and “mutual accountability” experience that existing hierarchical models of governance are woefully inadequate. They wish to create more circular models of leadership that promote greater ownership and partnership in their community’s life and mission.

Traditional hierarchical models of leadership are inbred both in our society and in our psyche. Nearly every organization in which we live and work, governments, businesses, militaries and churches alike, are set up in a hierarchical fashion. A leader sits at the top who delegates authority and responsibility to the next level of management, who in turn delegates in a similar manner to those below them. We are all accustomed to this top-down, command and control world order.

However, some religious communities have been quietly breaking the mold and branching out into new models of leadership. “Teams” have replaced councils, “leadership” has replaced administration and, in some cases, there is no one person who sits at the top. Instead, the traditional responsibilities of leadership have been distributed to a wider circle of members who choose to share the burden, power and privilege of leadership in a more egalitarian manner.

New circular structures and concomitant values of mutuality, shared ownership and co-responsibility are challenging the old top-down paradigm.

While these movements are taking place there is a relative dearth of written material that can help guide communities seeking to create such models. This article is an effort to share the experience of communities that have begun the transformative journey of creating new models and birthing a new way of being. We will explore what is compelling these communities to change, some guiding principles for embarking on such change and departure points for creating new models.

INVITATIONS TO CHANGE

Demographic Shifts

Religious communities, as a whole, are experiencing fewer or no new vocations, an advancing average age and diminishing total numbers. The simple truth is that these trends result in fewer members available for leadership. This "shrinking pool" of leadership means that many communities end up "recycling" the same members in leadership, often taking those who would otherwise be in the prime of their ministry years. This not only reduces income for communities, but also deprives these men and women of their remaining good years of ministry. The longer they serve in leadership, the older they are when they get out and the harder it is for them to return to ministries for which they were initially educated and trained.

Fifty years ago, when memberships were at a peak, only a small percentage of community members served in elected leadership while the vast majority were free to serve in "outside" ministries. Now, because of decreased numbers, a greater proportion of membership is involved in leadership as well as other internal ministries (e.g., finances, health care and other administrative responsibilities). Fewer members are free to pursue external ministries without feeling at least some obligation to care for their community's internal needs. Though communities are diminishing, the demands for maintaining them have not diminished proportionally. Communities are increasingly preoccupied with "maintenance" rather than "mission," leaving many disheartened and asking, "Is this all that we are about?"

The burden of leadership and other internal responsibilities under such changing demographics is forcing many communities to question how to *choose life* in the midst of it all: "How can we share the burden of leadership so that no one is overburdened and

In the face of such changing and challenging demographics communities are facing a crossroads and are making different choices.

everyone pitches in as we are able?" "Ought we have fewer in leadership and free others for outside ministry?" "Could we do leadership part-time and also have a part-time outside ministry?" "How can we focus more on our mission, rather than remain preoccupied with taking care of our own needs?"

In the face of such changing and challenging demographics communities are facing a crossroads and are making different choices. Some choose not to change, to live out their days pretty much as they have in the past and die a natural death. Others seek new life for their congregation by changing the constitutions allowing for part-time or fewer members in leadership in an effort to release others for outside ministries. Alternatively, they might try to re-invigorate their efforts to get new vocations or explore new forms of membership in the hopes of stemming the tide of decreasing numbers.

Yet other communities are seeking more radical and systemic solutions to choose life. Some look outside themselves toward reconfiguration (e.g., mergers) in order to consolidate administrative and financial resources and expand the pool of leaders and members. And some are choosing new life by re-founding, birthing a new way of being and radically transforming how they organize themselves. They are creating new kinds of partnerships between leaders and members in order to care for their collective responsibilities of maintenance and mission.

Urgings from Within

Certainly the cultural and ecclesial changes that took place fifty years ago had a profound affect on religious life. Members were given greater freedom and independence in their choices and no longer accepted blind obedience to those in authority. Open Chapters opened the doors for all members, not just the "privi-

Mutuality has become the clarion call of many religious communities and they are searching for models of leadership that honor this call, rather than contest it.

leged few" (i.e., elected delegates) to participate in the major decisions and governance of their community. In these open Chapters, Robert's Rules were replaced by dialogic processes that emphasized consensus building, discernment and direction-setting rather than debate, majority rule and proposal submission.

Members were no longer passive recipients of decisions handed down from on high, but were becoming active agents in the process of decision-making. They were given more and more personal freedom, voice and responsibility to make choices regarding their education and ministry pursuits, living arrangements and finances. Adding to the impetus for change, especially for women, were those who decried the power abuses of the traditional "male-dominated hierarchy." Blind obedience to a command and control leadership was increasingly challenged in both the Church and secular society.

Having moved from dependent or deferential orientations toward authority (pre-Vatican II), to more independent or oppositional orientations toward authority (post-Vatican II), the pendulum has been swinging back. Community members are moving toward *interdependence*. *Mutuality* has become the clarion call of many religious communities and they are searching for models of leadership that honor this call, rather than contest it. Members of religious communities, when given half a chance, want to take responsibility for their own life as well as the life of their community.

They want to live authentically as *partners* in a shared mission and vision. Members are seeking to *share ownership* for the life of their communities. They resist being relegated to something less than owners, as bystanders watching as others shape their future. Members want to *co-author decisions* regarding the life and mission of community. They do not want to rubber stamp what others

have decided for them. They want an active voice.

They recognize, perhaps because of their diminishment, that the exercise of power and choice that each member makes inevitably impacts the lives and choices of others. They are more sensitive to the potential abuses of position power. As a result, they wish to be more *mutually accountable* to one another and to find ways to share power more mutually. Members want to be *co-responsible*, rather than hand over the responsibility of their own lives to leadership or be left to do their own thing. These are the urgings from within that are impelling communities to explore new models of leadership and birth a new way of being.

Indicators of System Failure

Beyond demographic forces and urgings from within there is a third set of reasons that motivate some communities to explore new ways to organize. These communities know what they are doing is no longer working. It is axiomatic that change does not occur unless something is wrong and there is enough pain to motivate a change. There are many telltale signs that can suggest to a community that how it is currently organizing itself is failing to bring out the best in its members and the best for its mission. Among communities exploring new models, here are seven of the most compelling indicators that told them it was time for a change.

1. Recycling leadership and reluctance to serve

Members are reluctant to let their name stand for elected leadership for a variety of reasons. Many view it as a thankless job, or worse, they fear being blamed, criticized or becoming isolated from the rest of community. They are afraid of getting "stuck" in leadership, losing a life on the outside and having to let go of their preferred ministry. As a result, whether or not they are the most *able*, the same people who are *willing* tend to be recycled in leadership. Members are reluctant to take on other internal ministry responsibilities (e.g., formation, health care, development, committee work) for similar reasons.

2. Leadership over-functions while membership under-functions

Leadership takes on the lion's share of responsibility for carrying out chapter decisions and other community endeavors. Unwittingly leadership over-functions, stepping in and rescuing members who fail to step up to the plate and volunteer for committees or other respon-

sibilities. This fosters what psychologists refer to as a "hostile-dependent" relationship between members and leaders. In other words, leaders are upset with members who do not take more responsibility, and members are upset with leaders they perceive as not letting them. This is not a planned conspiracy, but a reciprocal unconscious dysfunctional dance that is common among systems where accountability is lacking.

3. Individualism and little accountability

Individualism may have become an entrenched norm. Individuals seek to do their own thing and eschew the hassles of accountability to the larger whole. There is little accountability, leader to member, member to leader, or member to member. Members and leaders resist being told what to do or having to subject their decisions to the scrutiny and challenge of others. The good of the individual supersedes the good of the whole. "Doing your own thing" becomes the norm and rallying around a common mission or communal endeavor becomes an onerous undertaking.

4. Minimal partnership, ownership and involvement

Members experience little ownership, partnership or involvement with the primary directional endeavors or internal responsibilities of the community. There is little trust or collaboration between and among leaders and members. Leaders make most decisions, while members have little perceived say-so other than to "rubber stamp" what leadership has already decided ("It's a done deal"). Having little ownership members easily divorce themselves from the responsibility for carrying out such decisions ("It wasn't my idea").

5. Incongruence between core documents and real life

The constitutions, policy and procedural manuals have little to do with how life *really* is and the chosen behaviors among leaders and members. Words like "collaboration," "communal discernment" and "subsidiarity" are not translated into normative patterns of behavior. To the consternation of some, most have grown indifferent because of failed efforts to close the gap between espoused values and chosen behaviors. They are indifferent, that is, until attention is drawn again to matters of formation, common prayer and community life. When such subjects are raised, but left unresolved and these gaps persist, there is a pernicious effect upon integrity of members. Members become uneasy inviting new members because, in their eyes, "We are not who we say we are."

Leaders and members alike often feel demoralized because their higher calling to be visionary and prophetic inevitably is overshadowed by the maintenance chores that grind away at their time and energy.

6. High denial

There is high denial with regard to current and projected needs of the community. Despite repeated power point presentations on diminishing financial resources, future health care needs and challenging actuarials, it does not appear to penetrate or make a difference. Drastic changes seem unwarranted given a future that seems either too distant or unreal. There is more often a complacent response to these projections by the vast majority of members, even though leadership may be quite alarmed. It is similar to going to the doctor who repeatedly suggests we lose weight or risk developing high blood pressure – in one ear, out the other.

7. Maintenance overshadows mission

Leadership is bogged down taking care of the maintenance needs of the community. While there may be a desire to be prophetic, visionary and to rally around their mission, this invariably takes a back seat to the ever-burdening maintenance responsibilities of caring for the elders, managing properties and finances, arranging funerals, participating on boards and so on. Leaders and members alike often feel demoralized because their higher calling to be visionary and prophetic inevitably is overshadowed by the maintenance chores that grind away at their time and energy.

These are not personal failures of either members or leaders. Rather, these are indicators of systemic failure. In other words, when these behavior patterns emerge, it is very likely that the ways in which members and leaders are organizing life in community is no longer working. Either the formal structures and policies are no longer viable or norms have been cultivated that erode their integrity. Either way, if many of these indicators exist in your community, the time may be ripe to challenge such norms and explore new possibilities.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

What does it mean to explore new models of leadership or organize differently? What does it mean to birth a new way of being? Because hierarchical models are ubiquitous and alternatives are rarified exceptions, there are no turn-key packages that you can pull off the shelf and apply as is. You will have to construct a new model from the ground up and tailor it to fit your own particular needs and circumstances.

While there is no one-size-fits-all model, there are some important learnings that can be gleaned from other communities that have been down this path. Having walked with communities who have forayed into this uncharted territory, I would like to offer seven important guidelines for birthing a new way of being. While these guidelines are outlined in a step-wise fashion, there is nothing linear about the process of reorganizing. Several of these efforts will need to be made more than once, each time tweaking, better integrating and re-informing subsequent efforts.

Denial-busting

Creating new models ought not be an intellectual exercise. For transformative change to occur there must be compelling reasons, ones that stir passions. In order to unearth these passions it is helpful to obviate the trouble by facing it head on, getting beyond the surface and breaking through the denial that encourages complacency. One way to do this is to gather all of the "younger" members together (using an age cutoff of your choosing) and say, "You're it! You are the members who will be responsible for the community for its remaining days." Gather them in the same room and say, "Now, considering that you are it, how would you like to do it?"

Other provocative denial-busting processes could work just as well. It might be better to gather the entire community rather than only the younger members. One way to bring reality into a Chapter setting is to arrange concentric circles by age groups ten years from today. Everyone who is 50 and younger in the inner circle, 51 to 60 in the next circle, 71 to 80 in the next and 81 and older on the outermost circle (whatever age groupings make sense). Then have them share their hopes and fears as they imagine their community 10 years from now. The power of this image of reality in ten years is compelling and evokes strong feelings and intimate exchanges for and against change.

The point is to push people past complacency with a

heavy dose of reality and help them recognize what is at stake if they persist in ignoring the handwriting on the wall. Members need to *experience* (not just hear about) the same concerns and pressures that leaders face on behalf of the whole community. They must be helped to recognize that the future is in *their* hands, that the whole and their part are inextricably bound, and then be offered the opportunity to *choose life anew* by doing life differently.

Once members are invited to share responsibilities according to their gifts and talents, new possibilities are sparked, and they are on their way to new beginnings. Once they realize that they are not stuck, if only they can claim their truth and choose a future informed by their truth (rather than wishful thinking), then new doors will open. When given a chance to create a future of their own choosing—to find new ways to create a life together, care for their internal needs, continue their preferred ministries and ensure the future of their mission—members jump at the opportunity.

Keep Your Eyes on the Prize

If a community chooses to explore new models of leadership, it is important to know *why* and to keep returning to this question. Why look at new models in the first place? What would warrant such a huge undertaking? What is the problem you are trying to solve? What do you believe a new way of organizing will concretely do for you? Why might God be calling your community to look at this? These are the kinds of questions it would be helpful to explore and revisit on a regular basis, not just at the beginning.

It is easy to lose the forest for the trees when exploring new models and forget the real reasons for changing. It is so easy to get caught up in the *process* and the options for *models* that you forget to ask "why" one option versus another. It is easy to latch on to one community's model, or another, or look for quick fixes when growing impatient with the process. If this were to happen, it would effectively abort the deeper conversations necessary for ensuring that deep change occurs along with the necessary ownership, partnership and clarity for carrying it out. Keep your eyes on the prize and hold onto the big picture.

Getting to the Heart of the Matter

How do models of leadership and governance fit with a community's understanding of their vows? Vows are not merely related to governance, but are central to its existence. For many, these vows ideally define what

it means to live in religious life. Such connections are written out in the constitutions and directories of every community. These are the pretext for understanding the agreements set forth in the constitutions and further concretized in the directories that make up the existing model of governance.

Messing with new models means messing with these vows and corresponding agreements that are the backbone of any model. Birthing a new way of being requires the labor of revisiting and renewing your understandings of these core agreements and how you intend concretely to live them out. It is an opportunity to explore and more fully resolve the otherwise uncomfortable gap between what is written and what is lived. It is the heart of the matter for many communities and where substantial tension may exist.

For example, different understandings related to the vow of obedience directly impact how power and authority are understood, codified in any model of governance and lived out behaviorally. A simple question in exploring any new model might be, "Who should have the power to make what kinds of decisions?" This question will surface paradigmatic differences regarding the vow of obedience. Does obedience translate into *deference* to superiors and laws of the Church? Or is obedience more about an asceticism of *listening* to the truth and wisdom of others? Such different understandings of obedience directly inform how power and authority *ought* to be exercised and, in turn, the approach to models of governance.

Any effort to create new models must grapple with these basic questions in order for it to have integrity. Does this mean that it will take years of theological updating and that everything about religious life is open to question? Hopefully not! How much time is spent working through these issues is entirely dependent upon each community's interests and motivation to grow in this arena. However, because such basic commitments to the life and mission of a community are both the pretext and building blocks of any model, they cannot be ignored. If these remain absent from discussions meant to shape new models, you will run the risk of creating something that is at best functional, but will neither have integrity nor attachment to the soul of community.

Truth and Reality Will Set You Free

Henry Ford helped us to understand this principle, when he said that "form follows function." While you can get ideas based upon what other communities are

A simple question in exploring any new model might be, "Who should have the power to make what kinds of decisions?"

doing, you cannot adopt their model and expect it to fit your needs. A community of one hundred members geographically dispersed with three sponsored ministries and a strong revenue stream is very different from one with twenty largely retired members living on a fixed income all in the same motherhouse. If a model is to be effective it must be born out of a particular context, chosen for particular reasons and shaped in earnest by those who wish to live it.

Having actuarial projections that clearly spell out your current and future demographics is a good first step. Another helpful step is to start with an assessment of your community. How many able-bodied members will you have in five, ten or fifteen years? What are your strengths, weaknesses and opportunities as a community? How will this picture change in the years ahead? How will you ensure the continuation of your mission and charism past the days of your youngest member?

Communities regularly conduct such projections and needs assessments, but such numbers and projections may not sink in as real unless members get honest and real with one another. Your truth, individually and collectively, will set you free, only *if* you can say it openly and honestly. If members are less than fully honest in saying when they want to retire or change a particular ministry, then any model based upon such misinformation would be a house of cards. If the youngest members do not want to do leadership for the rest of their life, they must say it. If someone does not want to live in a certain location for leadership, they must say it. The only way to be set free and find reality-based solutions is by putting the cards on the table.

Get Outside the Box

It might be helpful early on in the process to brainstorm with the participating members regarding all the reasons that will inevitably be voiced as to why a new

An important guiding principle is to consider all results a work in progress rather than something to be perfected once and for all.

model “can’t be done.” What are all the things that will be said? “*It’s against Canon law!*” “*We’re too old.*” “*It will take too much time.*” “*It won’t do any good.*” In ten minutes you will have dozens of these statements written on newsprint and splashed upon the walls, because we have all heard and said them before. Having named and claimed these knee-jerk, norm-enshrining, change-rejecting reactions, it might be just a bit easier to set them aside and let change begin.

You will need to set aside momentarily, at least, all constraints and pooh-poohing remarks that are sure to put a damper on the creative energy needed to spawn new possibilities. There are innumerable possibilities for new models, not just three or four, and in order to let these possibilities live, it will be necessary to let *what is* give way to *what could be*. Dream beyond minor changes (e.g., adding or subtracting one in leadership, full versus part-time, extended councils) and think big. To be sure, down the road, it will be important to test these possibilities against the rigors of reality (financial, legal and otherwise), but in the initial stages let your imaginations run wild and free.

Groups and Processes

After you have identified the various needs of your community, brainstorm about potential work groups (structures) that could address these needs. For example, maybe you want a group of members to attend to the *care of the elders* in community, another to handle *finances*, and another to assist with *formation*. List the possibilities and then try to combine and collapse these into a manageable number of working groups (four to seven depending upon size and complexity of your community).

Once you have tentatively outlined what each small group might do, have members temporarily place them-

selves in the groups in which they wish to participate according to their personal desires and talents. Once in these groups, have them work on developing decision-making processes, work flow and communication. Who will have the authority to make what decisions, and how will this be done? Who will inform or consult with whom, and how will the flow of communication work? How often will these small groups meet and where?

Figure out together how to get the work done during meetings and in-between. Who will plan and evaluate the work? How will the separate work groups integrate and coordinate their work? How will you include the elders or those unable to do the work of your community? This is where the model begins to take shape, which is exciting. It is also where the reality of “meetings” hits home, which is not so exciting. Ownership means involvement, which means meetings, which is commitment, which asks for sacrifice. Keep talking and keep it all tentative.

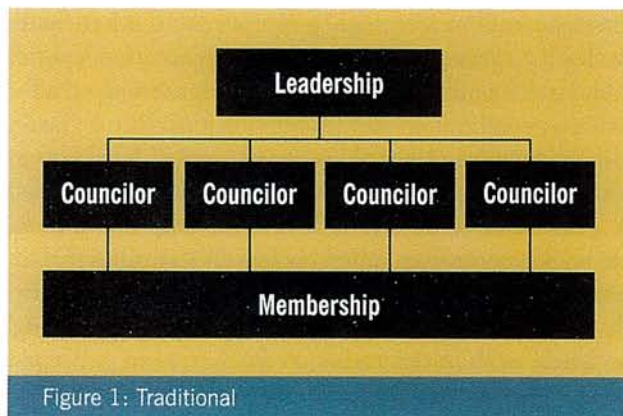
Embrace the Journey

The more radical the departure from what currently exists, the more time and effort it will take, and the more mistakes there will be in working through all that is required to bring clarity. Confusion, messiness and mistakes are all part of the creative process. In such a process, an important guiding principle is to consider all results a work in progress rather than something to be perfected once and for all. A mindset that views such efforts as an ongoing evolutionary journey rather than a one-time event is an important one to adopt.

A corollary to this guideline is to work at becoming a learning community. In other words, let your mistakes, which are inevitable, be a helpful guide to your next best step. Treat the chaos and missteps as learning opportunities rather than failures. Periodically reflect upon what you have done, how you have done it, where the new model is working and where it is not. Let these reflective learnings continue to unearth new pathways and opportunities for growth. *Keep it simple, write nothing in stone and continue to experiment and evolve.*

Discerning Participation

The ones who involve themselves in creating a new way of being, those who craft and create a new model, are the ones who will eventually own it and claim it as theirs. If there is no involvement, there is no ownership. Thus, everyone needs a place at the table, and there must be a means for finding their seat.



Yet finding the best combination of those “willing” and “able” to help with each component of the model is no easy task to accomplish. Many times those who are *able* are *less willing* and those who are *willing* may be *less able*. There must be a method for discerning together which individuals are both willing and able to do what and how this fits with the needs of the whole. These conversations about abilities, boundaries, and sacrifice are both delicate and essential to the future viability of any model. Participants must be valued for what they are actually capable of doing and challenged not to do more, or less, than their abilities allow.

Using discernment as a method for placing your talents to their best use in community is a valuable means for arriving at peace-filled choices. Combining personal and communal discernment methods ensures that individual preferences are in sync with the needs of the whole. This way everyone discerns with everyone and ownership is ensured by all. I have seen this process work in some cases.

MODELS OF LEADERSHIP

The following models depict three broadly different approaches to leadership (*Hierarchical, Concentric and Circular*) with one or two variations on each. These are merely examples and not at all exhaustive of the endless possibilities and permutations. Use these as “departure points” intended to illustrate models that support different values of leadership, each with their pros and cons. Adapt the categories, numbers, squares, or circles shown here to suit your own needs. Use your imagination and determine what fits for your community and your circumstances.

Hierarchical models

The traditional hierarchical model is the one most familiar to us. This is the model out of which most businesses and communities govern themselves. In this model, leadership resides at the top and authority is delegated from the top-down. In the first example, (figure 1) the “councilor” might just as easily be depicted as department “chair,” “vice president” or other titles familiar to us as the second tier of management. The expanded council model (figure 2) is a variation on this same theme and some communities have adopted this model. Remember, the number of councilors and boxes could easily be adjusted to whatever suits your needs.

Concentric models

Shortly after 9/11, when Michael Bloomberg was elected mayor of New York City, he chose to take his office out of the upper floor and place it right in the middle of where his staff worked. He chose this both as a symbol and as a genuine effort to work as *one-among*. He was still in charge, but he wanted to open up communication and operate more collegially. He did not want to remain in the ivory tower, aloof and removed from where the action was. Rather, he wanted to roll up his sleeves and pitch in along side everyone else. He tore down the walls and partitions that separated and rank-ordered the offices and staff that inhabited them. He created a more open space where communication and decisions could flow more easily.

The concentric model puts leadership in the middle, (i.e., at the hub, instead of on top) and encourages more reciprocity between leadership and membership. Leadership is concentrated in the middle, but also extends outward as other subgroups take the lead in



their respective areas. In other words, subgroups are not simply committees that do the work delegated by leadership, but workgroups with distinctive areas of responsibility and authority. While the emphasis may be on coordination, integration and planning they have a specified degree of autonomy to implement and make decisions as well.

The concentric model could be organized by *function* (figure 3) or by *area* (figure 4). When organized by function, different groups come together to take care of certain functions or responsibilities. These are passed through and coordinated with leadership. Leadership serves as the primary locus of integration and coordination and retains whatever authority is agreed upon.

Leadership by area representation is best used when a community or province has sub-communities that are geographically dispersed. Each local or sub-community would have a team who would assist in coordinating efforts in their particular area. These teams, including the central leadership team, however, are not emphasizing a top-down approach. Like the *leadership by function* model, their primary purpose is coordination, integration and planning, though they too have a certain amount of autonomy to implement and make decisions.

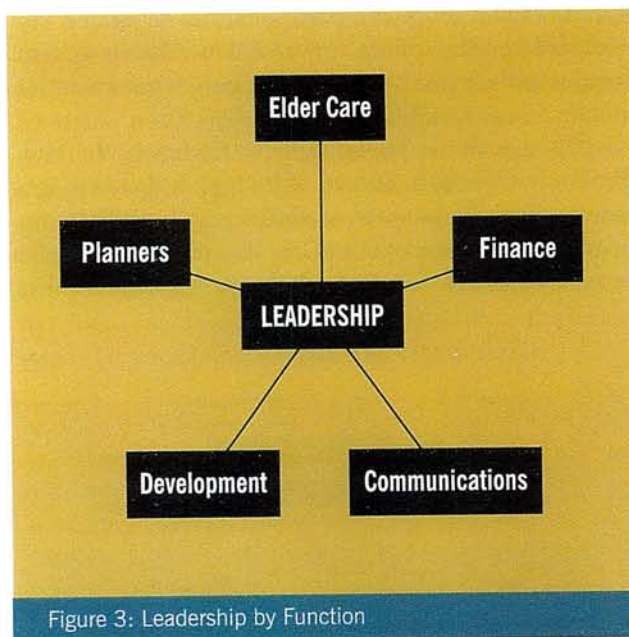


Figure 3: Leadership by Function

Circular Models

In the *leadership as one among* (figure 5) the canonically required leaders *choose* to function with

the same kind of reciprocal power as do all other small circles (i.e., groups or teams). They are not atop a pyramid. Each small circle, including the leadership circle, has responsibilities and powers distinctive to their respective areas. All of these small circles share power within their members and with the other circles. Just as with other small circles, the leadership circle does not wield power over others except in their designated responsibilities. The finance, elder care and other circles function similarly and are responsible for making decisions in their respective areas.

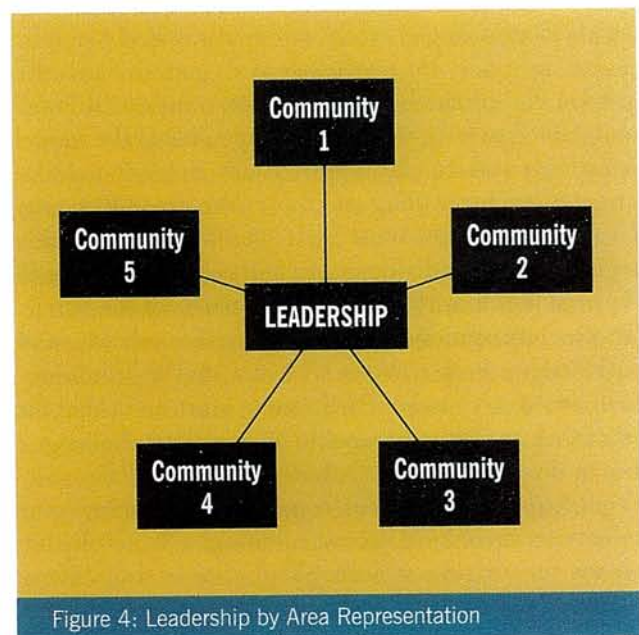


Figure 4: Leadership by Area Representation

In the "*leadership as one circle*" (figure 6) the entire circle functions as a leadership team. All of the traditional responsibilities of leadership are distributed to members in smaller circles. There is no leadership of just three or five. Rather, it is comprised of all who participate in small circles who, in turn, make up the large Circle. This could be any number of people depending upon the size and compositions of the small circles. All "major" decisions come to this large circle forum, while other decisions are made in their respective smaller circles. This large circle sets direction, makes final decisions and agreements for the new model, and discerns who participates and how.

The canonically required leadership *chooses* to function in the similar manner as other members. In

other words, they each have their distinctive responsibilities and share power with other members who likewise have other distinctive responsibilities. They technically fulfill the canonical requirements (more titular in this regard), but choose to function under a very different set of values. In other words, they share power and mutual accountability like everyone else.

Circular models of leadership encourage the greatest commitment to mutuality and reciprocity between members and leadership. These illustrate what are perhaps the most radical departures from the kinds of models currently in use by the vast majority of religious communities. Therein lies both the opportunity and the challenge. Few communities have tried them, and the ones that I have had the privilege to assist as midwife are still evolving and discovering new ways of being.

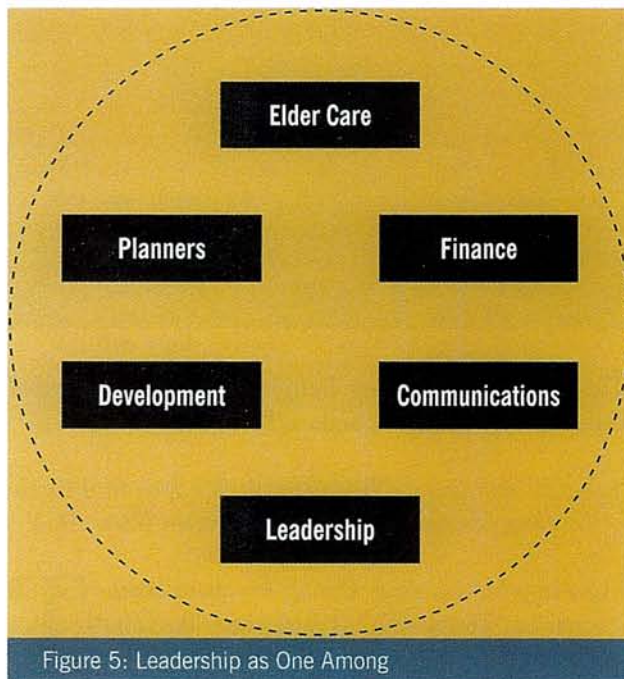


Figure 5: Leadership as One Among

CONCLUSION

Birthing a new way of being is about a journey toward life for communities that have reached a crossroads. Reconfiguring, re-founding and exploring new forms of membership are viable options for many communities to choose life. For communities whose demographics insist upon change, whose urgings to live their values more authentically impel them to change,

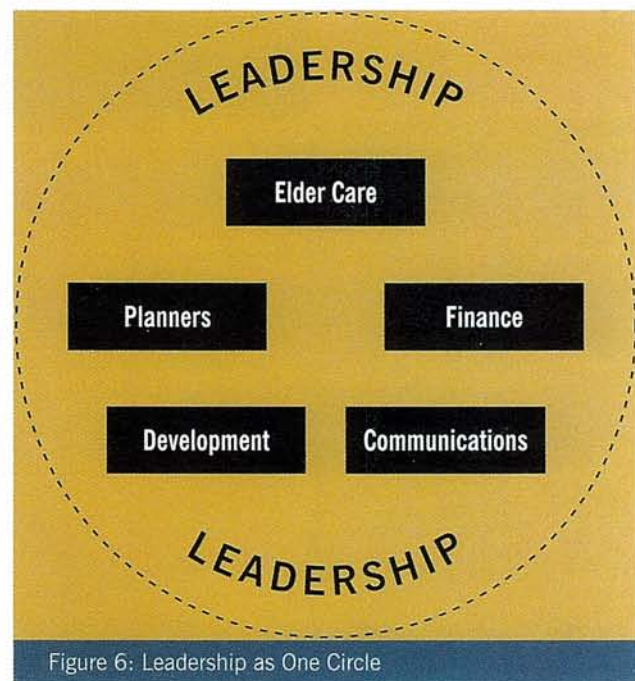


Figure 6: Leadership as One Circle

new models may be the way to go. It is one road that leads to re-founding and reclaiming community. When there are strong indicators that your current model is no longer viable, there may be sufficient motivation to embark on such a road less traveled.

I have had the privilege of assisting a small community in Canada, another in Central America and a few communities in the United States in giving birth to a new way of being. These communities knew that how they were living life was no longer working. They made a choice to sit down together and figure it out. They faced their choices for life or death and chose life anew by radically shifting the way they organized their community. They stopped "trying harder" and decided amidst great struggle and with a leap of faith to try something entirely different.

These communities did an honest appraisal of who in their community was capable of doing what regarding leadership and other internal ministry responsibilities. They let no one who was capable of doing something off the hook and remain on the fringes to "do their own thing." "Co-responsibility" and "mutual accountability" were no longer words given lip service, but were guiding principles in whatever new structures they created. Each community's circumstances, motivations and make-up has been different, but each shared some common characteristics.

They had more than a dim awareness that they

	Hierarchical	Concentric	Circular
Power	Top-down	Center - outward	Reciprocally shared
Work Flow	Delegated	Leadership collaborative	Mutually collaborative
Boundaries	Clear, "Need to know" basis	Clear, semi-permeable	Clear and permeable
Accountability	Member to leader	Leader to member, member to leader	Leader to member, Member to leader, Member to member
Efficiency	High	Medium	Low
Partnership Ownership Involvement	Low	Medium	High
Skills	Command and control, administrate, maintain and delegate		

Figure 7: Pros and Cons

were dying if they did nothing and were in enough pain to do something substantial about it. They had a pioneering spirit and enough courage to go with whatever discoveries that their processes and discernment uncovered. Their faith in God and one another fueled their willingness to stay in the struggle believing that if they did so, answers would come.

They have come to discover that any model has its pros and cons (figure 7) and that its integrity ultimately rests upon the people involved—their belief in what they are doing, why they are doing it and their willingness to carry it out. These communities have not found a panacea, but they are no longer stuck. They are on the road to new life and they are *in it together*.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Nielsen, J. *The Myth of Leadership: Creating Leaderless Organizations*. Palo Alto: Davies-Black Publishing, 2004.

O'Murchu, D. *Reframing Religious Life: An Expanded Vision for the Future*. London: St Pauls, 1998.

Quinn, R. *Building the Bridge as you Walk on It: A Guide for Leading Change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004.

Wheatley, M. *Finding Our Way: Leadership for an Uncertain Time*. San Francisco: Barrett-Koehler Publishing, 2005.



Ted Dunn, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist, works internationally with religious communities and other organizations providing education, training and facilitation. He can be reached at (636) 329-8363 or at www.ccsstlouis.com.