

Leading from the midst of the gathered people

The image of leadership often lifted up is the strong figure at the front of the pack, with an answer for every question.

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I wanted to go to my church's Monday night Bible study the day after Easter. This was remarkable. Easter Monday is usually a treasured day off after the marathon of Holy Week worship services, the work of planning Easter Sunday, the energy expenditure of the larger than normal crowd, and then the inevitable let down Easter night. But I didn't want to miss it.

I suppose a pastor should always want to go to Bible study. We are, after all, the religious nerds of our community, unusually committed not just to our own spirituality but to religious institutions as well. But honestly, I've been just as glad as anyone for a break from a long-term study. I've felt the glee of a second grader getting a snow day when I've cancelled a study because of inclement weather. I look forward to holiday breaks and summer vacation.

One of the dangers of being clergy is the blurring of the lines between what we do for a paycheck and what we do because it is authentically who we are. I've gone through periods not sure that I would go to worship if I weren't paid to be there. I have preached good news as much to convince myself as to convince the people in the pews. Sometimes I'm not sure if what I am saying is really what I know to be true or just something that sounds good.

To realize I wanted to go to Bible study was a gift. Something is happening for me in that group. I am growing and deepening spiritually. I am the leader of the group, but also a participant. We share deeply from our own lives and ask important questions of the text. We take the risk of not sticking with pat answers. We sometimes

disagree. I learn from the stories that others share and the wisdom of the gathered community. People share their life experiences, and together we ponder deep questions.

The image of leadership that I have most often seen lifted up is of the strong leader (typically masculine) standing at the front of the pack, a bit off at the distance and pointing with an outstretched muscled arm the direction for the group to go, "We need to go that way." A strong leader provides the answers to the people's questions. The leader wears golf shirts and carries the latest iPhone that has with the most current apps downloaded. The leader's LinkedIn page has a plethora of skill sets.

These days, I am not leading from the front with a bellowing voice. I convene the group, make room for questions, share what I know, ask what others know, and trust that the Spirit will move among us and not just to me. I am leading from the midst of the gathered people. Is that really leadership? I'm not sure what the leadership gurus would say, but it feels right to me.

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