

Archbishop Lori's Remarks: Conversations in Leadership

"Leadership Qualities in Principals"

Conversations in Leadership

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I am grateful to Jim Sellinger and Margaret Dammeyer for organizing this gathering and I thank all of you for your presence and interest, as well as for your service to Catholic education as teachers, assistance principals, and much more.

All of you have been chosen because we see in you talent and leadership qualities. I am impressed by what I know of your abilities to build relationships, your abilities to lead, your abilities to educate effectively, to employ technology, to employ 21st century learning techniques, your passion for Catholic education, your commitment to the faith, your sense of mission. For all of this and so much more, my warmest thanks!

These are qualities that you want to cultivate and that we want you to cultivate. Such qualities show even greater potential for leadership and service and it is our hope that these conversations are a step in that direction. So let me share a few thoughts about leadership in our schools. As I share these, I am conscious that you already exhibit many of these qualities but sometimes it helps to name them and to hear them from someone like me. Let's begin with the importance of leadership itself.

From where I sit, I think leadership is a most critical element in our schools and ministries. If the right leader is in place, with all the necessary qualities of mind and heart, usually our ministries not only go well but they also flourish. This doesn't mean there aren't bumps in the road, even an occasional crisis. It does mean that the leader knows how to inspire, to put together a strong team, to have the pulse of the community, to build relationships with all stakeholders, to implement good

policies responsibly and wisely, to be forward looking, to see around corners so as to avert crisis when possible, and never to rest on one's laurels. Now that's quite a lot. And I wish I were that leader! So, let's look at component parts of this leadership vision, recognizing that for all our talents, skills, and good will, we are all a work in progress.

Of prime importance is the power of example, the power of personal witness. Our schools have an identity and a mission. They are Catholic schools and were begun in the U.S. by saintly women such as St. Elizabeth Ann Seton and Servant of God Mother Mary Lange (on her way to sainthood). Our schools were founded not only to hand on the faith as a series of ideas but to form young people who would know, love, and live their faith, who would be formed intellectually, morally, socially, and spiritually. That mission hasn't changed very much and in fact has become more critical in the world today. Our parents may not, in the first instance, send their children to our schools because they're Catholic but as leaders we have to be wise enough to know that our Catholic identity and mission is what makes our schools distinctive and special, it's their *raison d'être*. But Catholic identity is not manufactured. It is not a commodity. It is not a program. The Catholic identity of a school or any ministry for that matter arises first and foremost from the personal commitment of the leaders to the faith. When a critical mass of school leadership are personally committed to the faith, then the identity and mission of the school is woven into everything. It is not drudgery, not an added burden, not yet another area of accountability, but a joy. This is what Pope Francis means when he calls for missionary conversion. When our own hearts and those of our colleagues are won over to the Lord and to his Church, it makes all the difference in the world in how we go about our daily work and in the example we set for the young people and families that we serve. Nor is this a question of our being 'holier than thou', of being grumpy and judgmental. Rather, it's all about our being joyful witnesses to the Lord and his love for us. It's also a question of how we influence the lives of those with whom we interact. So practicing the faith, growing in the faith, nurturing your relationship with the Lord, striving to live the faith on a daily basis – this is critical for creating a culture in which God and the things of God hold first place – a culture in which giving God his due doesn't diminish our pursuit of excellence but enhances it.

At the heart of the Catholic faith we find a few principles that guide us daily – love of God, love of neighbor, the dignity of the human person, the pursuit of the common good, a sense of human solidarity, and the need to build up local communities. So, if we begin with love of God and neighbor, we will begin to build an atmosphere, a culture that is first of peaceful, civil, respectful ... a bit of a contrast to the world we live in and attractive even to many of those parents who do not practice any faith. It is a culture in which we recognize that God has already built a bridge to us, namely, Jesus, that we need to travel over that bridge every day, and that in doing so, we grow in our capacity to build bridges to others.

In terms of human dignity ... in our faith, we look at the children we educate differently. They are made in God's image and likeness and, comprised of body, mind, and spirit, they are called to eternal friendship with the Lord and with all the saints. We seek to help young people to acquire knowledge and skills, to perform well on tests, to have what they will need to further their education in this 21st century – all that and more – but we also want to develop in them a grateful sense of their own human dignity and the dignity of other people all around them. Thus we speak of educating, forming really, the whole child, and this is truly a distinctive part of the education that we render. In the rough and tumble of a busy school, a leader keeps everyone focused on creating a culture in which our students can flourish and on the mission to educate the whole child no matter what the subject or the activity.

A leader knows how to foster a sense of the common good, an idea that often seems to be endangered in a me-first society. This is where our relationship building skills are also tested, sometimes severely, for self-absorption is an all-too-common trait and it affects our students and parents, and even sometimes our colleagues . . . let me share two examples:

First, is how we go about implementing policies and procedures. A good leader steps back and discerns the good they are meant to protect and foster and tries to see how they can best be applied to the local situation. A good leader also takes responsibility for these policies and procedures and is not afraid to discuss them openly and transparently with colleagues. and seeks to implement them in ways that are faithful, prudent, and wise. Never would a leader use phrases such as “downtown is making me do this” or encourage colleagues to adopt such an attitude.

Such an attitude does not enhance one's authority or leadership but diminishes it.

Second, sometimes parents will approach our schools as consumers. They reason that they are paying plenty of tuition and so they should call the shots. But before we criticize them for this, let's try to understand their situation. Many parents feel a lot of anxiety about their children's future. Competition is fierce, scholarship dollars are limited, many are falling behind. It takes a lot of leadership to work with parents, to engage them, to involve them, and to bring them beyond that view of things - to help them see the larger picture - to help them become contributors to the common good of the whole school community. This involves a style of leadership that gets out in front of these tendencies, not by denouncing them but by showing them empathy (many of you are fellow parents) by inspiring and involving parents and teachers, by communicating with them proactively and effectively, and ultimately by convincing them that their children will be better off if they are formed not only to look after themselves but to be concerned about others.

This goes to the importance of human solidarity, a sense that we are all fellow human beings sharing a planet, a sense that we are somehow in this together, and that we are in fact our neighbor's keeper. To achieve this sense of solidarity, this sense of fraternity, the leader must be willing to go beyond his or her comfort zone, and must be willing to foster a sense of unity-in-diversity. The community all around us is growing more and more diverse and if we hope to serve it we must develop our capacity to understand as best we can the cultures that are all around us - whether it is a growing Latino population, immigration from Africa, African-American youth, those who live in our more rural communities. Human dignity and the common good cannot be had with a sense of solidarity that is able to respect and span this diversity of culture and experience.

And finally, is the capacity to build community. There are all kinds of communities large and small but every school should be a community of faith, learning, and service. It is a community to which administrators, faculty, parents, volunteers, and students belong. Creating this community requires constant leadership skills. For community does not come about by domination or heavy handed authority but by fostering a sense of common mission, by convincing those around us that this mission is good for them, their families, and the wider community. It also means

team building - a strong leader will attract other strong leaders - capable and committed, people to whom responsibility can be delegated, people who themselves will do the right thing even when not under the microscope. A community that is so transformed becomes powerful in evangelization, powerful in communicating and teaching the faith, powerful in forming young people and touching the lives of their parents and families.

So, these are a few thoughts on leadership from my perspective. This is something I pray about, examine my own conscience about, and ask for the grace to foster in those around me. Thank you again for your presence, your service, and your attention. God bless you and merry Christmas!