



AFRICAN AMERICAN CATHOLIC ADMINISTRATORS

AND SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Keynote Address
Annual Meeting
The National Association of Black Catholic Administrators
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His Excellency,
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Bishop Emeritus
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Peace be with you!

We gather this morning mindful that dear Bishop Fernand Cheri, O.F.M., the auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, is very seriously ill suffering from heart and kidney ailments. I have known Bishop Cheri long before he became a Bishop and I appreciate his Franciscan spirit and his many contributions to the Church so very much. Let us pray for him constantly throughout this day and the days ahead.

As the National Association of Black Catholic Administrators gather to rededicate yourselves to leadership in the Church, especially in the African American Catholic community, it is clear by the very nature of your ministry, that you yourselves are called to be leaders and to collaborate with other Church leaders. As Directors of offices of African American Catholic Ministries, Superintendents of Schools, representatives of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' African American Affairs Office, Xavier University Institute for Black Catholic Studies, the National Black Catholic Sisters Conference and others, you work with bishops, priests, deacons, religious school administrators, and lay leaders.

You do this in the Catholic Church in which, unfortunately the racial divide still exists. African American Catholics are a very small portion of the Church. The number of African American Catholics serving in positions of leadership is smaller still. But this should not diminish your appreciation of the importance of your leadership. As a Bishop of the Church, I wish to thank you and express the Church's appreciation and gratitude to you for your exceptional service, which I know is not always appreciated and is sometimes ignored.

The theme of my remarks this morning is AFRICAN AMERICAN CATHOLIC ADMINISTRATORS AND SERVANT LEADERSHIP. I will explore this theme under five headings.

I. Recent Examples of Leadership

II. Many Kinds of Leadership

III. Servant Leadership

IV. Jesus Christ, Servant Leadership and Black Lives Matter

V. Conclusion: A Community of Foot Washers

I. Recent Examples of Leadership

Recent events have prompted us to think critically about leadership. The August 30th death of Mikhail S. Gorbachev, 91, the last leader of the Soviet Union, who adopting the principles of *glasnost* and *perestroika* presided over the end of the Cold War, lifted the Iron Curtain transforming the map of Europe and the political climate of the world, leading to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Vladimir Putin, by contrast, has tried to undo all that Mr. Gorbachev accomplished and, with Zarist ambitions is prosecuting a gravely immoral war against the people of Ukraine causing unspeakable violence, destruction, suffering and death in the hope of restoring Russia's empire status.

Ukraine's President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, has demonstrated heroic courage and bold leadership defending his homeland against an unjust aggressor. He has amazed the world by the defense he has mounted, with the help of President Joseph Biden, the United States, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Just days ago, the world seemed to pause to honor Queen Elizabeth II during her funeral liturgy at Westminster Abbey. The Queen died at 96, after a 70-year reign and 73 years of marriage to Prince Phillip. A constitutional monarch with no political power, Elizabeth exercised unique moral leadership with grace and dignity. Her service provided an extraordinary stability to the United Kingdom as she gave wise counsel to fifteen prime ministers, and fourteen American presidents. Notwithstanding the well-known terrible racist evils of British Colonialism, the Queen is admired as a towering leader.

In the United States the January 6 Committee led by African American Mississippi Congressman Bennie Thompson seeks to understand forces that are threatening the very foundations of democratic leadership in this country. Daily we hear the fiery rhetoric of mid-term election campaigns with the elected leader of one party expressing concern for the soul of our nation and the *de facto* leader of the other party proclaiming, falsely, that the 2020 presidential election was invalid.

Furthermore, the country is in a state of crisis over the Supreme Court's Dobbs vs. Jackson Women's Health Organization ruling. Because of its decision to overturn the 50-year-old Roe vs. Wade concerning what it deemed the constitutional right to end developing fetal life in the womb, the moral leadership of the Supreme court is celebrated and praised by some and condemned and rejected by others.

In the Church, our Holy Father, Pope Francis has brought to the Roman Pontificate a style of leadership somewhat unlike that of his predecessors, Pope Benedict XVI and St. John Paul II. Francis's leadership style has been brought to full expression in his refocusing all leadership in the Church, including Papal leadership and Episcopal leadership on synodality. The pontiff is directing a renewed spirit of cooperation, consultation and collaboration to be implemented at all levels of the Church.

Catholics are in the midst of a unique, vast worldwide consultation in preparation for the Synod on Synodality scheduled for October 2023. Some observers, applauding the Roman Pontiff's vision, wonder if he can bring it to fulfillment at this point in his pontificate. You may each have your own ideas about how successful the synod will be based on the preparations in your area while the Pope presses on, placing his trust in the Holy Spirit.

This summer we saw a further example of papal leadership when frail, and in a wheel chair on a "pilgrimage of penance," Pope Francis apologized to Indigenous people in Canada for the cruel, sinful, and murderous deeds committed in church-run schools.

II. Many Kinds of Leadership

The moving viewpoint of these examples of leadership reminds us that there are many different styles and models of leadership in our world and in the Church.

In the Church, a bishop, a vicar general, a deacon, a religious, a superintendent of schools, a principal, a chief financial officer, a parish council chairperson, the head of a diocesan department or agency, and those charged to lead African American Catholic ministries may lead in different ways. They may lead in the style of 1) a ruler, 2) a manager, 3) a teacher, 4) a prophet, 5) a sage, 6) a holy man or woman, or, 7) a servant leader.

1) Rulers tends to lead with the idea that they are in charge. Decision making is from the top down. They assume that their judgements are the correct ones. They may be impatient with those who disagree with their decisions, since they believe that they alone see the bigger picture.

2) Managers lead with the idea that it is the details that count. They may not see the bigger picture, but they are determined to dot every 'I' and cross every 'T' in a given project. Managers are willing to delegate but they will always follow up to make sure a task has been done without any missteps.

3) Teachers usually lead first by studying. They read about every aspect of a given undertaking. They also want to make sure that everyone on the staff is knowledgeable, well informed and understands the reason why a project is being tackled in a specific way. Their focus on studious preparation can sometimes slow a project down.

4) Prophets almost always lead by challenging the ideas of others, especially those who lead as rulers. They are not afraid of confrontation. They are bold and confident in their approach even though they may not know the details that the manager or the teacher knows. They have a strong interior sense about the way things should be done. If they do not get their way, they may abandon the project.

5) Sages generally lead with a degree of detachment, offering wise counsel and illuminating insights from the perspective of years of experience and reflection. While they may not involve themselves in the thorny details of the issues that are confronting the community, those who are

sages often see the critical questions to be addressed with incisive clarity. The Sage remains calm in the midst of conflict.

6) Holy men and holy women lead from a zone of solitude and prayer. Their leadership, like their lives, is God centered. No plan or program is undertaken without prayer. This is not the superficiality of, “Let’s begin our meeting with a prayer.” All meetings and examinations of the way forward are saturated with a prayerful spirit. A spirituality of discernment is at the heart of this leadership. For such leaders, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are called upon. “Lead me, guide me.”

However, no matter what style of leadership one follows, leadership in the Church cannot be effective in the long run unless the leader and the leader’s collaborators are willing to follow consistently certain key imperatives. A successful leader must Listen! Learn! Think! Pray! and Act! A good leader must listen to the opinions of coworkers, learn from their opinions, think carefully about what has been learned, pray over the issues being thought about, make decisions, and act with confidence.

Often when the efforts of a leader fail it is because the leader did not consistently Listen! Learn! Think! Pray! and Act! These imperatives must be followed throughout the task at hand, not simply at the beginning. These imperatives may be of particular importance in situations in which African American Catholics exercise administrative responsibilities while working with larger white Catholic leadership structures.

Perhaps you see yourself or those with whom you work in the African American and multi-racial Catholic community in these descriptions of leadership. You may think that the ideal leader brings all of these dimensions of leadership together and relies on a different dimension as circumstances suggest. However, this is not easy. Your own experience of the way you and those around you lead probably confirms that one or two of these models dominate your leadership style.

7) & III. Servant Leadership

There is however a final model of leadership that I wish to suggest is the most appropriate form of leadership in the life of the Church. This servant leadership model is as old as the gospels and Jesus of Nazareth and has been explored in the writings of Robert K. Greenleaf. I highly recommend Mr. Greenleaf’s magisterial book, “Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness.”

It was while reading Herman Hesse’s novel *Journey to the East*, that the idea of servant leadership dawned on Mr. Greenleaf. The book centers around a group of people journeying on a pilgrimage together. One of the main characters in the story is a servant named Leo, who accompanies the group doing menial tasks for them. He talks to and listens to everyone. He helps keep morale high and from time to time he makes extraordinary suggestions that make the journey more beneficial for everyone. He then disappears. Without Leo, the group gradually falls apart and decides to abandon the pilgrimage. However, Leo reappears and the pilgrims realize that Leo, despite his servant’s attitude, was actually giving shape and purpose to the pilgrimage all along. Leo was their servant leader.

Mr. Greenleaf highlights certain qualities of servant leaders:

1. Servant leaders communicate and influence, but do not force, dictate, or demand.
2. Servant leaders avoid using power language to maintain control over others.
3. Servant leaders defend coworkers who stand up for principles.
4. Servant leaders champion sound, moral behavior as an aspect of leadership.
5. Servant leaders convince those around them that collaboration serves the interest and well-being of all involved.
6. Servant leaders suggest a plan but allow coworkers to make it their own.
7. Servant leaders are openly accountable for their decisions to all involved in the task at hand.
8. Servant leaders make the continued personal growth and well-being of coworkers a priority.
9. Servant leaders display conviction and willpower but make it clear to coworkers that the leader's ideas do not arbitrarily replace the ideas of subordinates.
10. Servant leaders respond to problems by listening in order to understand. Servant leaders are truly active listeners. In stark contrast to "listening to respond," "listening to understand" requires listeners to put all of their energy toward absorbing what other people are saying rather than formulating a response while others are still talking.
11. Servant leaders take time for themselves. In essence, servant leaders know that when their energy is depleted, they will not be at their best for the people around them. Servant leaders regularly ask themselves what they need to do in order to serve others better.
12. Servant leaders are skilled at leading people into the future from alongside or behind them, allowing each person to know that what they do makes a difference.

A successful servant leader always Listens! Learns! Thinks! Prays! and Acts! careful to head these imperatives over and over again.

Robert Greenleaf gave Mahatma Gandhi, Helen Keller, Mary McLeod Bethune, Eleanor Roosevelt, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr. and Jesus Christ Himself as good examples of servant leadership. But he stresses most servant leaders are not famous. They are ordinary people in ordinary circumstances with everyday responsibilities who grasp that leadership should not primarily be conceived as power. They are people who lead by serving. As Jesus teaches us "I am in your midst as one who serves. I have come to serve not to be served."

At its core, being a servant leader means taking the responsibility of meeting others' needs before oneself. Further, it means making the growth and development of others personally and professionally a high priority.

Some have described servant leadership as an upside-down pyramid. In traditional structures, including the Church, the CEO, the Bishop, the head of an office and upper levels of management are at the top of the pyramid. Those underneath, including middle management and frontline coworkers, are responsible for carrying out the directives of those at the top with little

or no participatory consultation. Servant leadership refashions this model, making coworkers and those being served as the top priority.

A good way to test servant leaders is to ask if the people who work with them, not for them, are becoming healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, happier and more likely to become servant leaders themselves. I know from my personal experience as a pastor and bishop that servant leadership is not easy. Most people in positions of leadership are confident that they know what must be done and they know how best to do it. They may consider servant leadership inefficient.

In the diocese of Belleville I introduced many *fedei donum* missionary priests from abroad. Before they began their ministry, these priests from Poland, Kenya, Columbia, Nigeria, Uganda and beyond, lived with me at the Bishop's Residence for a three-month period of orientation to help prepare them for the totally different ecclesial, cultural, and social life of the Church in the United States. I personally picked them up at the airport, carried their luggage into the residence, cooked and served their meals and talked with them for hours learning about their lives and ministry back in their home dioceses.

I taught them how we celebrate the Eucharist in the United States, taught them how to cook, use the microwave, dishwasher, washing machine, how to iron and to shop for groceries. These outstanding priests were amazed. First, because in their home cultures, especially Africa, all of these things were done for them by generous devoted laypeople. They could not believe that in wealthy America, many priests must do these things for themselves. Most of all, they were shocked that they were living in the Bishop's Residence and that he, himself was doing these things for them.

In their home cultures based on tribal structures, the Bishop functions more or less as a tribal chief, the ruler model. The people and priests considered it their privilege and duty to serve the Bishop whom they love as their father and leader. So I spent many hours explaining servant leadership to them. Still, they were embarrassed and uncomfortable when I served their meals and cleared away the dishes.

IV. Jesus Christ, Servant Leadership, and Black Lives Matter

I believe Jesus of Nazareth articulates a critical foundation for servant leadership by the example of His life. In the Sermon on the Plain in the Gospel of St. Luke when he announces the moral imperative: "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." This imperative is a call to servant leadership.

These challenging words of Jesus express a central moral principal at the heart of servant leadership. What if each of us, and all in leadership positions in the Church and others would take the words of Jesus seriously? "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." Do not lie about other people, if you do not want others to lie about you. Do not threaten to harm other people if you do not want others to threaten to harm you. Do not endanger the lives, safety, and well-being of your neighbor's children, if you do not want others to endanger the lives, safety, and well-being of your children.

Do not treat people unjustly because of their religion, nationality, race, gender, sexual orientation, or social status, unless you want others to treat you unjustly because of your religion,

nationality, race, gender, sexual orientation, or social status. Do not use your position of leadership as a steppingstone to a position of greater power. This moral imperative has long been called The Golden Rule, the principle of treating others as one wants to be treated. Once again, we must Listen! Learn! Think! Pray! and Act! if we are following this mandate of Jesus Christ.

It might be helpful if you would reflect on your specific ministry in the Church as African American leaders and try to see the ways that your particular work is an expression of servant leadership as well as the ways in which it is not. What could you do to make it more of an expression of servant leadership? If we say we cannot do that, it might be the same as saying we cannot do unto others as we want others to do unto us.

Let us now look at the Black Live Matter Movement and its relationship to servant leadership and the words of Jesus, "do unto others as you would have others do unto you."

Since you are who you are and since you do what you do, I know all of you agree that African American lives matter. At the same time all of you know there is much debate and controversy about some of the statements and tactics of the Black Lives Matter Movement. Like any new social movement there are certainly aspects of this movement that merit scrutiny and critical appraisal. The movement clearly espouses moral beliefs that are incompatible with the clear teachings of the Catholic Church.

However, as African American Catholic Administrators, you must surely be able to affirm that Black Lives Matter without in any way endorsing beliefs and attitudes contrary to the Good News of Jesus and the clear teachings of the Catholic Church.

If we examine the meaning of Jesus' words, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you," it is possible to see that "Black Lives Matter" and "All Lives Matter" are not necessarily incompatible. "All Lives Matter" need not be a way to divert attention from the urgent concerns of African American people. But, if there is to be some compatibility between the two expressions, it is necessary to acknowledge the legitimacy of the particular concern for the lives of People of Color. This is not something all Americans recognize.

Consider this example. You are secure in your comfortable home with your family on a cold winter night with the fireplace burning and more than enough to eat, your life certainly matters. The doorbell rings and there is a shivering, starving homeless family at the door in dire need of food and shelter. You tell them there may be a homeless shelter about ten miles away. The father looks you in the eye and says, "We cannot travel ten more miles. Our lives matter." You reply, "So does my life and the lives of my family members."

As you attempt to close the door in their faces, you have a kind of spiritual awakening, an epiphany. You gradually realize that, in that instance, it is their lives and not your family's lives that are in peril. They are urgently in need of help in this existential moment. Their lives matter! Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.

If people simply say, "All Lives Matter," there is a danger of falsely implying that every group of Americans is facing the same degree of peril which then makes it possible to ignore or deny pressing issues like the frequent violent and even fatal encounters of African Americans with police officers in the face of minor or suspected misconduct. Young, African American males are sometimes tried, convicted and sentenced to death on the streets. African Americans

may feel that those who say, "All Lives Matter!" do not really mean it. They remind us of George Orwell's dystopian novel "Animal Farm." In the novel, Big Brother imposes "Newspeak" on everyone. Thus, "all animals are equal" becomes "all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others."

The point of Black Lives Matter is that many in the African American community face existential threats that must not be ignored. Police officers, civic and religious leaders who understand servant leadership will never allow "all people are equal" to become, "all people are equal, but some people are more equal than others." Nor will Catholics in positions of power ever say, "All Catholics are equal, but some Catholics are more equal than others."

If the Black Lives Matter Movement were to think in terms of how it can be servant leadership, then the movement could not be silent about the significant number of young African American males who die at the hands of other young African American males, or the alarmingly high number of abortions that bring abrupt ends to nascent Black lives in the womb that certainly matter. There would be a repudiation of any form of violence against White people, Latino people, Asian people, especially, police officers. Ultimately, as servant leadership, the Black Lives Matter Movement would recognize that there are other vulnerable, marginalized groups in the country whose lives also matter because ultimately All Lives really do Matter. Do unto others as you would have others do unto you!

V. Conclusion: A Community of Foot Washers

Every Catholic knows from the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that all lives matter. However, a hasty assertion of this universal truth obscures the sad truth that People of Color have often not been included as a part of "all lives." Tragically, this goes back to the Declaration of Independence, which makes no mention of People of Color because Thomas Jefferson's tortured, complex, and contradictory paragraph on the "buying," "owning," and "selling" of free human beings was deleted from the final draft of the declaration. This was no doubt in part because Jefferson himself owned enslaved free human beings, including his mistress, Sally Hemings.

As African American Catholics and administrators, we must acknowledge that there were flaws at the foundation of our country, written into the Declaration of Independence by Thomas Jefferson. There was certainly minimal acknowledgement of servant leadership.

Servant leadership leads to moral leadership in action. We need moral leadership in action not only from the candidates up for election at the midterms, but for every citizen as well. We need it from law enforcement, gun legislation supporters, protest groups, the media, civic and religious leaders, including the Catholic Church (where sadly, racial prejudice, segregation and racism still exist), educators, mental health specialists, businesses, coaches, parents and extended families and parish communities. In addition, we need it from the members of the National Association of Black Catholic Administrators. To provide moral leadership in action, we must all Listen! Learn! Think! Pray! and Act! so that we can exercise authentic servant leadership.

Servant Leadership is not perceived as the primary model of leadership in the Catholic Church. In many ecclesial communities it is a high and distant goal. Many Catholics in positions of leadership, including some bishops, tend to favor the model of ruler or manager as their paradigm for leadership. Servant leadership can only be accomplished by the conversion of

hearts under the power of the Holy Spirit. Christians working to establish servant leadership in a parish, diocese, or in the National Association of Black Catholic Administrators must persevere in the face of obstacles. As African American Catholics, ever mindful that God is not God the way we would be God if we were God, we should commit ourselves to the arduous work of introducing servant leadership in our communities.

Let me conclude meditating on these words from the gospel of John:

“It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for Him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. The evening meal was in progress and Jesus got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around His waist. He then poured water into a basin and began to wash the feet of His disciples, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around Him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to Him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” Jesus replied, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.” “No,” said Peter, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash your feet, you have no part with me.” “Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “Not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!” Jesus answered, “Those who have bathed need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean.”

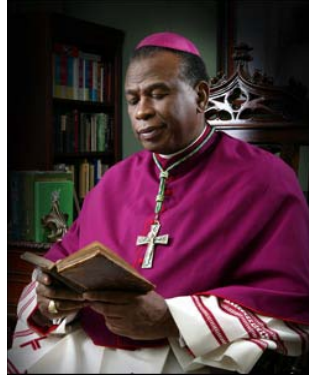
When He had finished washing their feet, He asked “Do you understand what I have done for you?” “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that indeed is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do for each other what I have done for you. Amen, Amen I say unto you, no servant is greater than his master. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them!”

The servant leadership of Jesus Christ calls us all to be a community of foot washers!

Praise be Jesus Christ. Both now and forever. AMEN.

Thank you. Thank you very much.



His Excellency, The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Ph.D., S.T.D.

Our speaker this morning, Bishop Edward K. Braxton, originally a Priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago, earned his Ph.D. and an S.T.D. summa cum laude from the Pontifical Faculty of the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium. He has served on the faculties of theology at The Pontifical North American College in Rome, The Catholic University of America, The University of Notre Dame, and The Harvard Divinity School.

He was appointed to the Episcopacy by St. John Paul II and consecrated Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of St. Louis in 1995. He later served as Bishop of Lake Charles, Louisiana and Bishop of Belleville, Illinois, where he now serves as Bishop Emeritus.

The Bishop is the author of numerous theological articles that have appeared in The New York Times, The Harvard Theological Review, Louvain Studies, Theological Studies, The Irish Theological Review, Seminarium, Commonweal, America, and other journals. His books The Wisdom Community and The Faith Community are well known in Catholic circles. He is an active member of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

His most recent book, The Church and the Racial Divide in the United States: Reflections of an African American Catholic Bishop has added to his reputation as a leading voice in the Catholic Church on the racial divide in this country. Bishop Braxton lectures nationally and internationally on a wide range of pastoral and theological topics. His current studies and writings are focused the tensions between the biblical affirmation of the mystery of the resurrection, popular Christian devotional belief in “life after death,” and secular, scientific culture which brands such beliefs as mere fantasy.

There are at least two reasons why the Bishop could have chosen not be with us this morning. The first is that he recently fell on his early morning walk and injured his wrist and cut his forehead, forcing him to prepare his manuscript with only one hand. This explains his attire since he is unable to put his bandaged hand through his suit coat.

The second more profound reason is the sad news that Bishop Braxton’s sister, Mrs. Patricia Braxton Wills, died suddenly just weeks ago in her home in Duarte, California. His sister is the dearest of the dear in his life. He spoke with her EVERY day. Because he and his family are experiencing unspeakable sorrow at this time, the Bishop was unsure that he could prepare this morning’s address for the NABCA or that he would be able to deliver it. He asks your prayers for him, his family, and his beloved sister, Patricia. We are grateful to the Bishop for joining us under these difficult circumstances. The Bishop can be reached at ekbraxton@charter.net.