

INTRODUCTION

After this, the Lord appointed seventy-two others whom he sent ahead of him in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit.

—Luke 10:1

I expect you are reading this book as a newly appointed pastor, newly ordained priest or deacon, recently hired catechetical or faith formation leader, a youth minister, new pastoral council member, or another leader beginning a new role in your Catholic parish. You may feel hesitant, anxious, or perhaps even fearful about your new responsibilities. Well, Jesus has some wonderful advice about leadership just for you! At the beginning of chapter 10 in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus sends out seventy-two disciples and the instructions he gives them remain just what today's Church leaders still need. I wrote this book to make our Lord's ideas easy to understand and put into practice so that your ministry will be as effective and rewarding as he wants it to be for you and for the community you serve.

Luke's gospel provides us a detailed description of the saving message, life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus. By the time he was writing, several decades after the death of Jesus, some people were already distorting what Jesus said and did, so Luke set out to correct the distortions by writing an accurate and orderly account (see Luke 1:1–4). He wisely consulted eyewitnesses to make sure he had the story right, and his careful detective work produced, in Luke 10:5–9, a record of Jesus' instructions for evangelization, which are, perhaps surprisingly, extremely helpful for those of us called to leadership in the Church today.

Some two thousand years later, we live in circumstances quite similar to those that Luke faced. The message of Jesus has been distorted in many ways throughout our often-turbulent history as a church and as a culture. False claims about what Jesus taught are often made. Not for the first time, the Church now faces terrible scandal and a painful crisis in leadership, both of which make stepping into a new role more complicated for you than it might otherwise be. Priests have lost much of the automatic respect we enjoyed for years as pillars not only of the Church but of our wider communities. Deacons and lay ministers are not always welcomed in parishes as legitimate leaders or authorities in their areas of responsibility.

Parishioners today who are well educated, carefully trained professionals in a wide variety of fields frequently lament the lack of professional expertise they see in some priests and parish ministers who have never, or perhaps only minimally, trained in organizational leadership. They are right to do so. While many lay professionals are required to update their skills with continuing education, very few dioceses *require* such seminars for clergy and lay ministers. In fact, too many dioceses place people in leadership positions without much attention to their competence in leading people or overseeing the complex organizational structures a parish ought to have. While these assignments may be well intentioned, they can set up a sincere and well-meaning new pastor, associate pastor, deacon, or lay parish minister for failure and tragically disillusion them for the future. That should never happen.

HOW THIS BOOK CAN HELP

You may already have extensive experience in leading organizations, either in the Church or perhaps in the business world. Experience can certainly provide confidence that you are ready for leadership. Yet ironically, the sign that you are truly experienced is a hunger to learn even more. The most effective leaders always feel

the tug of further growth, even in areas where they have worked for years. They *continuously* improve pertinent skills. Jesus must have been amused at his disciples, who quickly assumed titles of “Rabbi” (teacher) and “Master” (Mt 23:8, 10). It probably never occurred to them that they were arrogant. Make sure you are not.

Instead of thinking of ourselves as teachers, Jesus proposes that we in leadership consider ourselves learners. Many of his teachings begin with words such as *seek*, *find*, or *ask*. Jesus even calls himself “meek and humble of heart” (Mt 11:29). Let us seek leadership in that same humble way so that no one will ever say that we acted like Pharisees . . . or arrogant disciples. Consider Peter, whose sometimes-overinflated ego and failures did not keep Jesus from naming him to lead the Church. He certainly had a steep learning curve and must have been embarrassed, probably even chagrined, at hearing stories of his early days as a companion of Jesus repeated time and again when early Christians gathered for Eucharist. Everyone knew that Peter’s behavior back then was really not the best! But Peter learned humility and accepted his role in leadership.

A special burden that all Church leaders, whether clergy or laity, carry today is the horrible legacy of the abuse scandals that have so traumatized our parishioners. Parishioners may understandably be suspicious of any new leader who arrives at their parish. You were, no doubt, googled the instant you were announced as a parish leader. You are under more scrutiny today than ever before. You can be sure parents will want to know quickly if you are a person whom they can trust with their children. Your integrity is immediately in question.

You arrive with a handicap not of your making, your good name and reputation at stake right away. Such was also the case at the time of the early Church. Christians were outliers in Roman culture, following a religion that was suspect because it was new and not in accord with Roman pagan beliefs and practices. Jesus prepared his disciples specifically for the difficulties and resistance they were sure to meet, so perhaps you can feel a connection with

that heroic first generation of leaders who faced deep suspicion and even persecution.

Fortunately, most people truly want to feel proud of our Church and its leaders again. They will be reassured by the clear way you address any issue the Church faces. I hope these short chapters will provide a clear path to help you find success and happiness in your ministry. They are designed to help you achieve the trust and confidence of your parishioners as you begin to lead them. Most importantly, they arise from the very teachings of Jesus right there in the opening verses of Luke 10.

Despite the many challenges, the first disciples successfully led Christian communities with optimism and confidence in the midst of a hostile pagan culture. They were trained by our Lord and trusted that his way of introducing the kingdom of God would work—and we know it can work today as well. This book will guide you through what I call our Lord’s “Luke 10 Leadership” training for pastors, priests, deacons, and lay ministers to lead Catholic parishes today with that same optimism and confidence.

LUKE 10 LEADERSHIP

At the end of the ninth chapter of Luke, Jesus resolves to travel to Jerusalem through the hostile territory of Samaria, sending advance teams of his disciples ahead of him to prepare the way. That was a courageous choice. There were other, safer ways to travel to Jerusalem, such as along the Jordan River Valley to the east, yet Jesus opted to go directly through an unfriendly area, sending his disciples right into hostile territory. His disciples must have wondered and likely worried about how this journey would turn out. They knew that Samaritans practiced a form of Judaism that caused friction with the mainline Jews of Jerusalem and Galilee and that most Jews avoided Samaria and Samaritans. In the same manner, Samaritans would never associate with Jews like Jesus and his followers. Samaria also included Greco-Roman villages filled

with people who thought of Jews as alien and opposed to their own culture. A lot of tension there!

It's not hard to understand, then, that Samaritans, Greeks, and Romans viewed Jesus and his followers with suspicion. Yet Jesus boldly decided to go precisely to places filled with tensions, presumably knowing full well that he and his followers would not be met with a friendly reception. He planned his approach wisely and carefully. Fortunately for us, Luke records in the beginning of chapter 10 the important advice Jesus gave his disciples as he sent them ahead to make ready for his arrival. Jesus advised his followers to act among the Samaritans the same way he directed them to act in every place they traveled for the rest of their years as disciples.

JESUS' WISE AND CAREFUL PLAN FOR EVANGELIZATION

During the first century, before the gospels and letters of the New Testament were even written, no one was under more suspicion than our own heroic ancestors in faith. They were a small band of disciples living within the immense Roman Empire, which was then about the same size as the continental United States. It encompassed most of modern Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, with colonies from the far north of England to western Spain and east to modern-day Syria and Iraq. Moreover, none of the inhabitants of this vast empire believed as the disciples believed that Jesus had come as savior. They were alone in this.

So how were they to reach the people they encountered? What approach would work? In ancient times, the expected way to try to change a foreign culture was to conquer it with military force. Well, the disciples had no army and no weapons; worse still, they were led by former fishermen! How could they possibly succeed? Jesus could see how, and he had a plan.

Jesus' vision of and plan for leadership centered entirely on the behavior and example of his followers. After all, the early

community of his followers had no buildings—no church halls, no cathedrals. They had no websites, radio, or television stations; no social media platforms; no schools, colleges, hospitals, or universities. They certainly had no army! They did not even have the New Testament scriptures yet. They were only people, and fairly simple people at that. Jesus' plan for evangelization and leadership, outlined in Luke 10:5–9, would be built on what ordinary people could do.

Jesus said to them, “The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest” (Lk 10:2). Notice that Jesus did not ask for *more* laborers; he asked that the laborers he already had would respond well to his instruction to go out and reap the harvest. That was a remarkable expression of confidence in his very small band of followers and is a reminder of the confidence that our Lord has in you.

The seventy-two disciples of Luke 10 listened closely to Jesus as he sent them out. They knew they had a powerful message of salvation to offer people in those difficult places; but Jesus knew that even the goodness of his message was never enough! Our Lord's plan went beyond just speaking beautiful words of salvation. He asked for more from those he sent out, and he asks for more from you. How often do we assume that because we have a solid, true, and authentic message to give, all we have to do is simply announce it and people will follow? Well, they very well may not follow, for many good reasons which include our own lack of being well trained and prepared for leadership. Hopefully this little book will help to remedy that.

PREPARING THE GROUND ACCORDING TO LUKE 10

The parable of the sower is instructive here. Take a few minutes to read it (see Luke 8:4–15). The farmer in this story has excellent seed to sow in a field, but he *haphazardly* throws the seed all over

the place: some lands on rocky ground, some on hard ground, and some even among thorns. Farmers then would never do that! Good seed is too valuable. A wise farmer first carefully prepares the ground so that every seed will take root and a great harvest will grow. Jesus calls his disciples to be like that wise farmer who carefully prepares the ground, so that their every evangelizing action will produce a good harvest.

Jesus himself instructed the earliest disciples on how to be successful and effective ministers; we should carefully heed that lesson. Knowing his disciples well and deeply understanding how human beings behave, Jesus devised a model of leadership that still proves both effective for announcing the kingdom of God and profoundly rewarding for you as a leader.

Luke 10 offers a number of helpful instructions on Christian leadership and evangelization; these four main steps are the focus of this book:

1. “Into whatever house you enter, **first say, ‘Peace to this household’**” (v. 5).
2. “Whatever town you enter and they welcome you, **eat what is set before you**” (v. 8).
3. “[C]**ure the sick**” (v. 9).
4. “[S]**ay to them, ‘The kingdom of God is at hand for you’**” (v. 9).

The next four chapters will delve into what these instructions meant to Jesus’ disciples in the first-century Roman Empire and what they mean for you today.

1.

FIRST SAY PEACE

“Go on your way; behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves. Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals; and greet no one along the way. Into whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this household.’ If a peaceful person lives there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you.”

—Luke 10:3–6

KEY IDEAS

Jesus sent his disciples into a hostile Roman culture and sends you now into a world that has grown at least suspicious of, if not openly hostile toward, institutional religion. Jesus says you must first say peace because it is not enough to simply be at peace. You have to say and visibly signal by your behavior that you mean no harm. And you need to do that right up front! The angels at Bethlehem said this peace right away at our Lord’s birth, when people would have expected the Messiah to arrive with an avenging army for all their sinfulness. That proactive signaling of peace is especially important in cross-cultural ministry, where you might lead a community that has experienced hostility and discrimination.

There are many ways to say peace. Your dress, your behavior, and—most important—your facial expression are all opportunities to say peace. Your parish buildings, office procedures,

communications, and staff behaviors can also say peace. Finally, the manner in which you handle problems, particularly conflicts with parishioners, is a powerful way to demonstrate your commitment to first communicating peace (that you intend no harm).

Jesus started his instructions by directing his disciples to first say peace. First words are important. The seventy-two would have paid close attention to what Jesus said first in preparing them to lead as his disciples, especially since they knew what suspicion and resistance they would meet where they were headed! Jesus let them know that it was not enough for them simply to *be* at peace with people they met; as his disciples, they must *say* peace. They must visibly and audibly signal peace up front, before any other interaction or conversation took place.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SAYING PEACE IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Why was that so important? Jesus was sending them into clearly hostile Greco-Roman and Samaritan territory. Because they were going among people who already had a negative opinion of them, they had to convey proactively that they meant no harm, had come in peace, and respected the people of the places where Jesus sent them.

There is a lot of new scholarly interest in this time of Church history and in how these former fishermen were so successful. Understanding the cultural context of our early-Church ancestors and the challenges they faced reveals the wisdom of the instructions our Lord gave to his disciples then—and gives to us today. Let's take a closer look at this ancient world in which our Lord founded his Church. You will be amazed at how courageous our spiritual

ancestors were to leave familiar surroundings and go among enemies. Here is what they were up against.

Samaritan Suspicion

Some of the people living in Samaria, the area south of Galilee where the disciples were sent, were Jewish people who had intermarried with pagans and developed a hybrid form of Judaism and so were no longer considered truly Jewish by mainstream Judaism. Orthodox Jewish people like Jesus and his disciples would normally never travel through Samaria. Obviously, Samaritans would not look kindly on Jewish emissaries from Jesus either . . . yet here they were!

Roman Paranoia

Several centuries before Christ, Rome was conquered by Gallic armies from what is now France. This trauma caused the Roman people to embark on centuries of conquest. By conquering neighboring tribes, they extended the boundary of Roman territory farther and farther from the city of Rome itself, thus better ensuring their safety. A deep fear of any repeat of that earlier humiliating Gallic conquest drove the vastness of Roman conquest. The Romans feared even the smallest threat from any of their conquered peoples. Although it seems counterintuitive, the mighty Roman Empire actually rested on fragile egos, profound fears, and deep suspicions.

Roman religion addressed these fears with a mechanism for avoiding evil and ensuring safety, but the Roman religious sense was very different from our Christian sensibilities today. The many Roman gods were emotionally distant figures who acted very much like tyrants. They expected sacrifices and offerings of incense in payment for their protection from disaster or bestowal of blessings. Roman religion was actually a form of extortion.

Humans did not have personal relationships with the gods of any of the ancient religions—Greek, Assyrian, Babylonian, or