

## Necessary Leadership Virtues, According to Pope Francis

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As he did in 2014, Pope Francis used his [Christmas 2015 speech to the Roman Curia](#) to discuss styles of effective leadership. In the previous year, he focused on 15 “curial diseases”; in 2015, he described a “catalogue of needed virtues.” The requisites were offered as 12 pairs of qualities with the first letter of each spelling *Misericordia*, the Latin word for mercy and the theme of Pope Francis’s Jubilee Year. The virtues are: missionary and pastoral spirit; idoneity and sagacity; spirituality and humanity; example and fidelity; rationality and gentleness; innocuousness and determination; charity and truth; honesty and maturity; respectfulness and humility; diligence and attentiveness; intrepidness and alertness; and trustworthiness and sobriety.

And, as with the [lessons he offered in 2014](#), the pontiff’s recent list of qualities reaches beyond the cardinals, bishops, and priests of the central Vatican administration and can serve as a guide for all organizational leaders. Reflecting Pope Francis’s style and intention, following are five pairs of virtues for leaders in Catholic higher education.

**Mastery and balance** (idoneity, rationality), *possessing the abilities and confidence to serve as an influencer with a “balanced personality.”*

Leaders express these virtues when engaging in ongoing professional development, because competence and confidence grow with discipline- or job-specific continuing education. As university leaders, however, we are also called upon to deepen our understanding and animation of the mission, vision, values, and identity of our particular Catholic institution. Moreover, not only is *what* we do important but so too is *how* we do it. Affective temperance has been identified as an important characteristic of “virtuous leaders” (Green, Wheeler & Hodgson, 2012). Thus, the ability to be poised, yet authentic, in times of both crisis and triumph, in addition to having expertise, is virtuous.

**Earnestness and boldness** (innocuousness, diligence, intrepidness), *to “give of ourselves” while “acting with boldness, determination and resolve.”*

These qualities are evident interpersonally when leaders demonstrate a fortitude and strength of mind to navigate and thrive through difficult circumstances. Moreover, an interpersonal focus on building positive relationships that promote a culture of campus collaboration and attention to justice on the “frontiers,” as Pope Francis would say, is also necessary.

**Righteousness and reputability** (example, honesty, trustworthiness), *a virtuosity grounded in honesty—“the*

*foundation on which all other qualities rest”—dependability, and “a style of life which points to the primacy of others.”*

Because leadership is not an isolated activity, these important principles are exhibited when college leaders use communal discernment to reach consensus in making decisions. This spiritual, mission-centric approach is outlined in seven steps:

- List the pros and cons of the options with the university’s values in mind.
- Enter the gathering with an impartial attitude.
- Share your opinions; encourage and support the contributions of others.
- Listen intently to the opinions of your colleagues, especially if they differ from your own.
- *Pay attention to your feelings.*
- Be open to *God’s presence and will.*
- *Deliberate* until there is a shared sense of contentment with a decision.

Discerning leaders make hard choices that typically balance the needs of individuals with those of the institution. When this process is used, leaders are viewed as honest, trustworthy, and collegial.

**Compassion and appreciation** (respectfulness, charity), *to genuinely respect and have concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others.*

In addition to leading a culture of collaboration, building a “culture of encounter” is virtuous. Pope Francis invites us to connect intentionally with people in friendship and dialogue with those whom we might not otherwise, to be with people who are different from ourselves. He encourages our “stepping out” in solidarity with the marginalized around the globe—but also on our campus. When college leaders take the “challenge of finding and sharing a ‘mystique’ of living together, of mingling and encounter, of embracing and supporting one another ... we will learn to look at the world with different eyes and come to appreciate the richness of human experience.”

**Yearning and authenticity** (missionary spirit, spirituality), *expressing an intense faithful love of life and people through “the effectiveness, efficiency, and authenticity of our activity.”*

Virtuous leadership assumes that our processes and actions are fair, just, and ethical. But it also encompasses a *passion* or *calling* for the mission of Catholic higher education in developing students intellectually, morally, and spiritually. Pope Francis describes the gift by saying, “True education enables us to love life and opens us to the fullness of life.”✠