



Catholic Education
An Irish Schools Trust



TIME FOR THE LEADERSHIP TEAM

CARING FOR THE CARER

Easter – a time to pause and to reflect

This reflection for you, as the Principal/Deputy Principal is quite different in tone to the other reflections we've been offering. It's very much written for your use, rather than for your teachers or students and their families. It's an extended reflection so obviously feel free to take it in chunks, dividing it over a few days if that's what works best for you.

As part of this reflection, there are some questions for you to sit with. These are found in the text boxes. We also include some images. You can also just sit with them – you can approach this prayer/reflection in any way you wish.

We send it to you with our prayers. Please know as you reflect on these words, we are also reflecting on them and praying for you. May this Easter be a time of real rest for you; a time to recharge yourself for the work to be done in the third term. May you find the time to come to a new and ever deeper awareness of God leading you in your work.

We begin as we always do, "In the Name of the Father..." And we take a moment to come into the prayer moment by becoming aware of ourselves and our breathing.

We are taking time to reflect and to give thanks. Gratitude is the start always of our prayer. These have been challenging times but Easter joy breaks through and we pause and reflect to say thanks.



We begin....

Moment 1:

Jeffrey Krames in his book *Lead with Humility: 12 Leadership Lessons from Pope Francis* offers a practical guide for how anyone in a leadership role can become an authentic and humble leader like Pope Francis.

It is interesting that Jeffrey Krames is a Jewish author. This gives a different kind of perspective and arguably makes him a little bit more neutral in his treatment of his subject. Krames doesn't idolise Pope Francis; he is real about his humanity but he describes him as 'the real deal' in terms of his leadership style. This has made Pope Francis a source of real interest to politicians, businesspeople, faith leaders and others since he became Pope in March 2013 and Krames's book reflects that interest.



Moment 2:

Krames suggests there are 12 lessons Pope Francis has for leaders. They are:

1. Lead with Humility
2. Smell Like Your Flock
3. Who Am I to Judge?
4. Don't Change-Reinvent
5. Make Inclusivity a Top Priority
6. Avoid Insularity
7. Choose Pragmatism over Ideology
8. The Optics of Decision-Making
9. Run Your Organization Like a Field Hospital
10. Live on the Frontier
11. Overcoming vs. Sidestepping Adversity
12. Pay Attention to 'Non-Customers'

Take a moment to reflect on how these 12 leadership lessons are sitting with you now as the principal or deputy principal of a Catholic post primary school? What do they have to say about leadership now in these very challenging times? Spend some time just sitting with the list. If there are any you don't really get, that's fine. Just sit with what strikes you. What is striking you about how you lead? Don't worry if you're not getting into any of them at all. We'll do a little unpacking of a few of them shortly.

Moment 3:

We'll spend a moment or two now drawing out what three of the 12 of these lessons might have to say to us now. Before we do that, we pause again, to remind ourselves to be still, in the presence of the One who offers us peace and consolation.....



Moment 4:

Let's take number two; smell like your flock. It's a strange image! Again and again, Pope Francis has instructed his bishops and priests to get out of their offices and their Church buildings and to go where the people are; to mix it up, to live among the people, to be part of the people rather than apart from them. He says that it's only when we 'smell like our flock' that we can really serve them. It's about avoiding insularity and embracing the reality of where people are and what they need from us in any given time and situation.

Just take a moment now to picture your own school, and your students (just allow to come to your mind images or memories). Offer a prayer for them.

Now pause with these questions:

So how do you do that when you're physically separated from the people you serve? What about leading a Catholic school during the Covid 19 pandemic?

Well, it's clear in our CEIST schools that you have been doing this in very creative ways; reaching out to support your staff and your students and their families. There have been heroic efforts made up and down the country from school leaders to stay connected; online, through videos, through phone conversations. We are hearing the most amazing stories of principals, deputies and teachers really going the extra mile to support students. Why? Because fundamentally we want to stay deeply connected so that our students know in very practical ways that we're really with them and their families.

Pause for a moment in silent gratitude for what you have been able to do. (It's also obviously okay to feel as if you haven't been able to do everything or as much maybe as you would have liked, but we've all been able to do something and that something has made an impact).

Moment 5:

How about number seven! This might surprise a lot of Catholics; the writer suggesting pragmatism is more important than ideology for the Pope! But this Pope really wants us to get real with one another and stop hiding behind the rules or some grand vision of the ideal. There is no such thing as the perfect teacher, the perfect student or indeed the perfect principal! Pope Francis had this to say about rules, "The church sometimes has locked itself up in small things, in small-minded rules. The most important thing is the first proclamation: Jesus Christ has saved you. And the ministers of the church must be ministers of mercy above all."

Pause for a moment to reflect on students you know who have really needed your mercy! What does that mercy look like for you as the principal of a Catholic school? How can we be real about 'mercy' in our systems and structures?

First and foremost, school leadership is about relationships and knowing the things that have to happen for those relationships to work. As a young man Pope Francis loved to tango. He sees human relationships more like a dance rather than a march in a straight line. This isn't about doing what is most expedient or taking short cuts or being Machiavellian! It's about acknowledging that human relationships are complex and we've to meet people in their own contexts if we are to bring them with us. Equally, this isn't to suggest that rules aren't important but what Krames is offering leaders here is something we all know; we have to be real about different people and their capacities, interests and backgrounds. Ideology can be hard; relationships require something much



more nuanced. This kind of responsiveness is key in these strange times of a global pandemic but it's also exhausting. Feeling as if you're constantly being pulled out of, moving from one difficult situation to another is really challenging. It's interesting to see how Pope Francis responds to the demands of leadership in a time of crisis. (And let's face it, that's what it feels like the Church is constantly in). Firstly, he prays... a lot. As well as daily Mass, he prays for 2 hours every morning, says the rosary every day and Vespers every evening! We're not suggesting you as a principal or deputy principal could possibly pray that much! But it is interesting to note how much time he spends with God, with the one who inspires him to lead in the way he does.

Secondly, he draws on others for support and inspiration. He lives his vision; he goes out and he meets people. He is humble. He accepts the fact that he does not have all of the answers. Pope Francis admitted that when he put together an unprecedented advisory panel called the Vatican 8 or V-8. He also respects the principles of subsidiarity, solidarity and synodality; that is that decision making should be made at the right level and not always at the very top, that we are all in this together and that the best decisions we can make are the ones we make together. These are principles for school leaders not just in a time of crisis but obviously for all the time.

Take a moment to reflect deeply about your own self-care. Where are you with everything that has happened over the last few weeks? How are you feeling now? What kind of prayer life do you perhaps need to look at developing for you to continue into Term 3? What kind of other supports do you need?

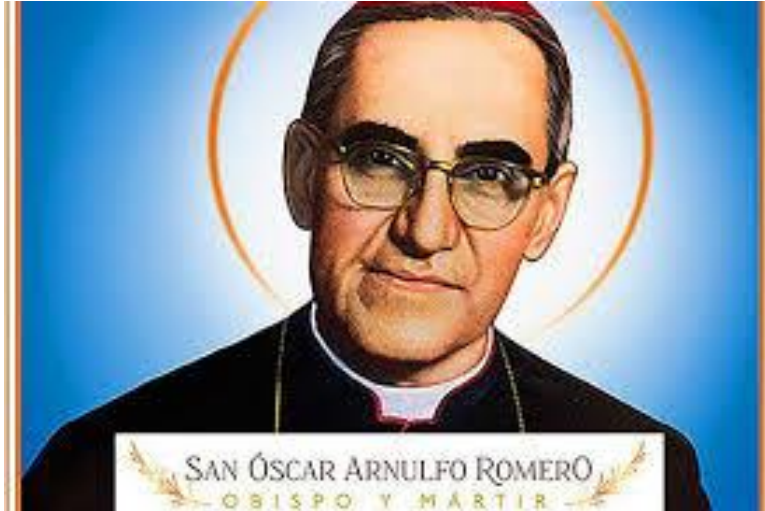
Moment 6:

Finally, for the purpose of our reflection, have a look at number nine; run your organization like a field hospital. In a sense, this image of your school as a field hospital unites the previous two principles; smell like your flock and chose pragmatism over ideology.

For Pope Francis the thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. Pope Francis: "I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds.... And you have to start from the ground up."

What is that healing of wounds going to look like now into Term 3? Knowing you can't do everything, spend some time in prayer now deeply reflecting on what you can do to run your school like a field hospital?

Moment 7:



We come to the end of this reflection. We pray this prayer now from St. Oscar Romero. In this prayer we have an acknowledgement that we can only do what we can do; God is the Master Builder; we are the workers. This prayer applies as much to the mission of our school as it does to the mission of the Church:

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.
The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.

Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.

No prayer fully expresses our faith.

No confession brings perfection.

No pastoral visit brings wholeness.

No program accomplishes the Church's mission.

No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.

We plant the seeds that one day will grow.

We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.

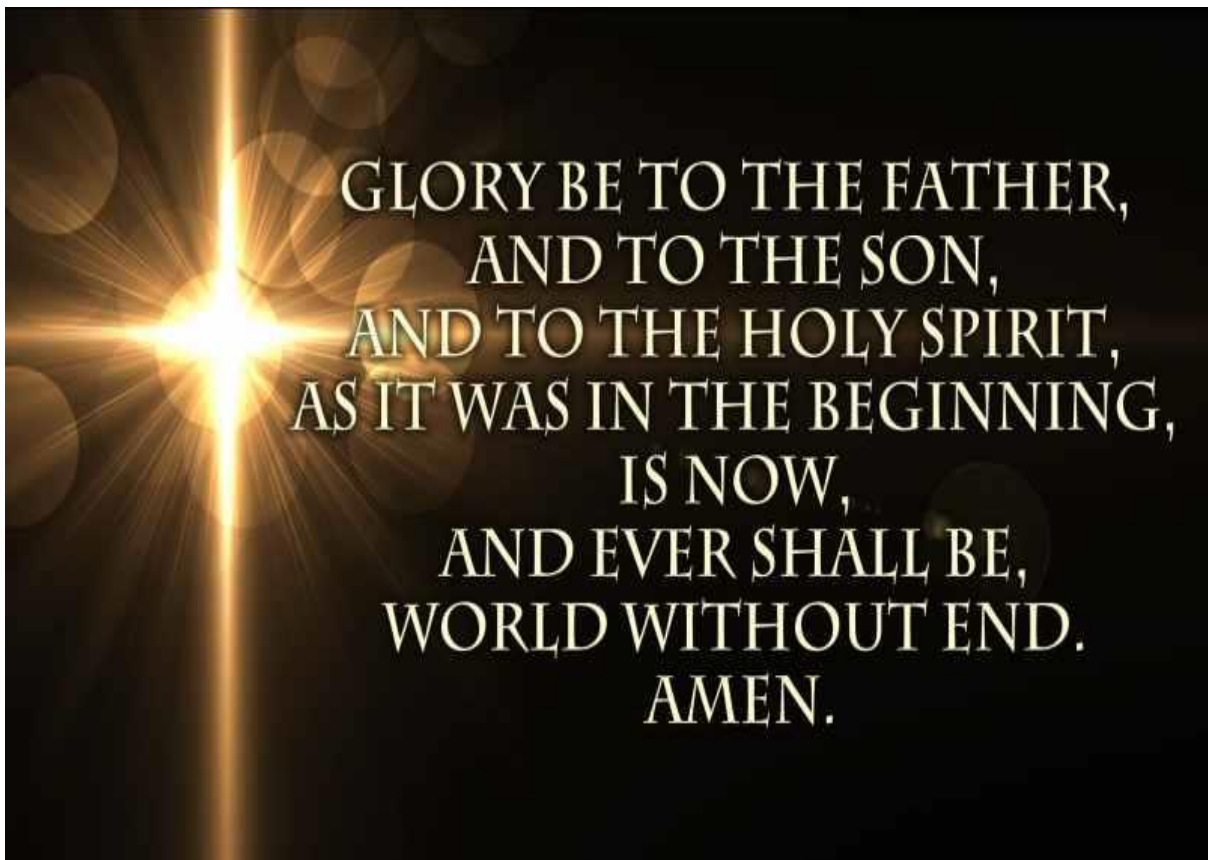
We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.

This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.
We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.
We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future not our own.

And we conclude by saying together



Kate Liffey April 2020