

# A New Center for Spirituality and Leadership at Bon Secours Richmond



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**A**t one point during a think tank meeting last April, after several hours of discussion and idea generation, Mel Dowdy turned to the people he had invited to help plan a new leadership center at Bon Secours Richmond Health System, Richmond, VA. "We were well behind on the agenda to identify the mission of the center," Dowdy recalled, "but I said to the group, 'The ideas are like confetti still up in the air, and we have to trust the chaos and let the confetti come down as it should.' And from that conversation, the theme of mentoring the next generation of leaders for the ministry emerged, and that theme is now central to our mission."

Now, Dowdy's patience and ability to "trust the chaos" is paying off. Following the December launch of the Center for Spirituality and Leadership at Bon Secours Richmond, Dowdy is recruiting participants for the center's first program, the Ministry Leadership Formation Intensive. It's the culmination of years of investigation and planning at Bon Secours Richmond and its parent organization, Bon Secours Health System, Inc. (BSHSI), Marriottsville, MD. Dowdy, who holds a doctorate in counseling psychology and served as organizational consultant and ethicist at Bon Secours Richmond, is the executive director of the new center.

"Three years ago, Bon Secours Health System, Inc., conducted an appreciative-inquiry process focused on the experience of vocation," Dowdy told me. "We interviewed all the sisters of Bon Secours, all our vice presidents of mission, and other men and women religious working in the system. The major insight from the appreciative inquiry was that a person's recognition and understanding of his or her own vocation to ministry often occurred because someone else recognized the person demonstrating the qualities of

ministry leadership. We learned that we shouldn't wait for people to self-identify their vocation. We should tap them on the shoulder and invite them to consider the role they might play in our ministry."

At the same time, Dowdy, who serves on CHA's Ministry Leadership Development Committee, was participating in the committee's development of the statement on leadership formation (see Ed Giganti, "What Is Leadership Formation Now," *Health Progress*, September-October 2004, pp. 18-22). "Through that work, we [at Bon Secours] learned a great deal about what other organizations across Catholic health care were doing to develop and form new leaders."

That led Dowdy and colleagues at BSHSI to focus new attention on how to talk about and develop "vocational competency" among BSHSI leaders. In the system's competency model, vocational competencies are identified as an understanding of the healing ministry of Jesus Christ and a working knowledge of the tradition and an ability to respond to the Bon Secours charism. "Great progress has been made in assessing our leadership capabilities, creating career development plans for all leaders, and mapping our options for leadership succession," Dowdy said. "Our greatest challenge is to clarify what we at Bon Secours mean by vocational competency. In particular we are giving more attention to the leader's interior spiritual experience of the ministry and exterior expressions of service, what we have called the practices of 'reflective integration'."

So, with his encouragement and with support from senior leaders at Bon Secours Richmond and BSHSI, the idea of the center was born as "an experiment of full engagement with vocational competency," Dowdy said. "We know that



what helps us retain people who will provide quality health care service is their sense of connection with the values and mission of our ministry. What's the likelihood that this will happen for our employees if it is not happening among our leaders? So how do we go about inviting our leaders to make that connection?"

An answer to that question lies in the first program to be offered by the Center. The Ministry Leadership Formation Intensive is a nine-month, cohort-based program designed in collaboration with the Mendoza College of Business at the University of Notre Dame. (In addition to curriculum design, Notre Dame will also provide faculty support for the program.) Beginning in April 2006, a group of from 20 to 25 participants will engage in a series of three-day retreats, immersion experiences, action learning projects, reflection and journaling exercises, coaching, and, if they choose, spiritual direction (See **Box**). Through the retreats and other experiences, participants will grow in their recognition of being called to ministry leadership, their understanding of what it means to be a responsible steward of the ministry, and their ability to take action on behalf of the mission. Upon completion of the nine-month program, participants will receive a certificate in ministry leadership from Notre Dame.

Participants in the cohort may be nominated by their supervisors or may self-nominate. The program is open to all Bon Secours Richmond leaders, from frontline supervisors to the CEO—approximately 275 individuals. Selection will be based on candidates' demonstrated commitment to ministry, which, Dowdy said, will be determined through interviews with candidates, their supervisors, peers, and direct reports. "Ultimately, we want a group that reflects the ethnic, racial, and religious diversity of our communities, as well as different ways of learning and a wide variety of skills that will be useful in the action learning projects."

Once selected, the cohort members will complete the Leadership Circle Profile 360-degree assessment, a tool that Dowdy said examines how leaders manage two key polarities: task orientation vs. relationship orientation and reactivity vs. creativity. "We are too often rewarded for being reactive, for pleasing our constituencies, or for maintaining control," Dowdy explained. "Creativity is about taking a larger, strategic view of the results we want. The more reactive we are, the more our employees will see us as self-protecting, overemphasizing approval or acceptance rather than vision and mission."

"Effective ministry leaders must have a strong

## Ministry Leadership Formation Intensive

Pre-Work	Intensive I	Intersession	Intensive II	Intersession	Intensive III	Intersession	Intensive IV	Intersession	Intensive V
	April 2006 (3 days)	May 2006	June 2006 (3 days)	July-August 2006	September 2006 (3 days)	October 2006	November 2006 (3 days)	December 2006	January 2007 (2 days)
Leadership Circle Profile, culture survey, Gallup update	<b>Authentic Leader—</b> Vocation and spirituality, including introduction to theological reflection	Coaching, readings, spiritual gifts inventory, small formation group meetings	<b>Vocation, Values, and Spirituality—</b> Integral perspective, optimal experience, leadership culture, spirituality at work	Immersion experiences, reflection and journaling, small group meetings, action learning team meetings	<b>Stewardship of Catholic Tradition—</b> Catholic social teaching and health ministry, integrity in ministry leadership	Action learning team meetings, organizational ethics assignment, formation group event	<b>Becoming a Prophetic Voice—</b> Servant leadership, spirituality and workplace transformation, advocacy leadership	Action learning projects completed	<b>Team Presentations</b> to Bon Secours executive council, recap and learning synthesis

**Vocation, Call, and Connectedness**  
Attending to spiritual life, sources, and practices

**Becoming a Responsible Steward**  
Understanding and together making sense of the challenges of leading a ministry

**Transformational Community**  
Taking responsible action to advance liberation, healing, and hope



# Ministry Leadership

BY ED GIGANTI

vision and something courageous inside of them to stay focused on that vision. That's what being grounded in an authentic spirituality does," Dowdy said, "and that's what the center's programs are about, focusing spirituality in one's day-to-day experience of leadership."

The design of the center's programs is strongly influenced by the thought of Jesuit theologian Fr. Bernard Lonergan, SJ (1904-1984), Dowdy told me. "Lonergan made the assertion that there is a natural progression in coming to know who we are," he said. "He described a lifetime process of conversion. The lifetime process of leadership formation is similar. So, in our nine-month program, we will look at four tasks that draw on Lonergan's work: Be attentive; be understanding; be responsive; and be committed."

"We want our leaders to pay deeper attention to their own experience and how they locate meaning in what they do. We want to present a view of leadership as shared meaning-making. To understand what is really needed in leadership, the leader must embrace a social construction of meaning. You are not in a solitary monologue with yourself. You have to engage others in making sense of the challenges you face together. That's what it means to be understanding," Dowdy said. "Being responsive" means being a good steward of what has been given to the leader, including the legacy of the Catholic social tradition. "Being committed" is the accountability end of Lonergan's model, Dowdy added. "How do you advocate? How do you demonstrate that you have created environments that are places of liberation, healing, and hope?"

This fourth task of commitment takes fuller shape in the second of the center's programs, a nine-month follow-up to the Ministry Leadership Formation Intensive called "Ministry Leadership Mentoring." During this program, participants will learn how to engage in formal mentoring

relationships, how to listen to others' descriptions of the challenges in their work, and how to assist them in dealing with issues of team building, realigning of services, and other skills. Once these participants have completed the nine-month program, they will serve as resources for the participants in upcoming Ministry Leadership Formation initiative cohorts.

In addition to the two formation programs, the center is also initiating a Ministry Leadership Series open to all associates, physicians, board members, and volunteers in the Bon Secours Richmond Health System. The series will consist of focused conversational learning experiences on a variety of ministry-related topics. Dowdy said the series will open with sessions on religious diversity and inter-religious dialogue, engaging in honest, difficult conversation, and reconciliation within groups and communities with a history of painful division. Eventually, the Ministry Leadership Series will be opened to the broader Richmond metropolitan community.

Dowdy told me that Bon Secours Richmond has invested approximately \$250,000 in building the infrastructure for the Center for Spirituality and Leadership. Fees for the cohort members will be about \$10,000 each and will be funded from the local organization's budget. (The Richmond system is made up of four hospitals, a long-term care facility, and a home care service.) Dowdy credited BSHSI leadership with encouraging the development of the center, which is viewed as a pilot that could lead to expansion of the concept systemwide. He particularly praised Bon Secours Richmond CEO Peter J. Bernard, for his unflagging support in making the center a reality. ■

*For more information on the Bon Secours Richmond Center for Spirituality and Leadership, contact Melvin Dowdy, PhD, executive director, at [melvin\\_dowdy@bshsi.com](mailto:melvin_dowdy@bshsi.com).*