

WHY YOU NEED A CHAPLAIN ON YOUR PERSONAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS

For those who steward the Catholic health ministry, today's leadership demands constant assessment of how decisions strengthen or limit the influence of our Catholic identity. Whether on behalf of patients, their families or their communities, the decisions leaders make are inescapable and carry lasting implications.



JILL FISK

How does one appropriately decide how to care for all while maintaining financial sustainability? How does one empower teams to reimagine health care today while structural lethargy, political polarization and societal progress innovate at different speeds? What is the best approach to inspire those within

your health system and/or community to unite as one ministry working toward a common mission? How can we support new generations of ministry leaders with the guidance and encouragement they need to steward the legacy that has been entrusted to them?

Consider the last big decision you made personally or professionally. I would venture to guess you were not alone in that choice. Whether you mulled it over with a colleague, called a family member, spoke to God or summoned inner stillness, at least one other guided your decision. Allow me to be so bold to say that for every good decision ever made, guidance was present. We don't decide in a vacuum.

A VOICE TO CALL UPON

A few years ago, through a leadership forum, I was introduced to the idea of establishing a "personal" board of directors — a network of four to six trusted colleagues to advise me in my personal and professional growth.¹ On a personal board, the individuals who serve as guides offer wisdom and thought partnership regarding the choices and challenges a leader faces. While one's personal

board does not actually convene, leaders establish relationships with a team of seasoned counsel to ensure they have access to wise voices to call upon and learn and grow from, a mentorship that is enriched through each guide's respective gifts and talents.

What benefits would Catholic health leaders attain from establishing a personal board? Might there be denominators in the composition of a ministry leader's board that would differ from other executive leaders' boards? What is most needed, or better said, "who" is most needed to

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support a Catholic health leader's decision-making? I have a suggestion that may be right under our noses.

Chaplains are integral members of the interdisciplinary care team. They are professional partners who highly regard maintaining trusted relationships with co-workers across the continuum of care. They commit themselves day after day to honor the dignity of every person in their care with compassion and ethical service as they help others navigate life's most existential questions, from birth to death.

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Allow me to unpack how including a chaplain on a personal board of directors might profoundly serve growing leaders, guiding them in leadership capabilities and, at best, the larger Catholic health ministry. Let's explore how this potential partnership can benefit leaders through some common questions they all face.

How do I determine priority needs?

Prioritizing tasks and decisions almost never turn out as cut and dried as they appear in a tool such as the Eisenhower Matrix, which classifies matters as urgent or not urgent, important or not important. For those of us who seemingly spend most of our time on urgent but unimportant matters,² the work of a chaplain knows time through a different lens.

While time itself cannot slow down, nor can many timelines for decision-making, the expertise of a chaplain can help reorient us to what is truly urgent and important, what is lasting and what is fleeting.

Day after day, the bulk of their work requires tending to existential, meaning-making questions around the quality of life and death, which are often also urgent. As they accompany patients facing decisions in serious illness or co-workers in crisis situations, chaplains have a skilled capacity to sort out what is eternal and what is temporal. They offer a solution to the ongoing quandary of the Eisenhower Matrix we know all too well.

Author and founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation, Fr. Richard Rohr, provides a perspective on time that also resonates with chaplains. He speaks of *chronos* time as a moment-by-moment, life-according-to-the-clock kind of time. In contrast, he offers an alternative: *kairos* time, the "eternal now" kind of time.³ Chaplains know *kairos* time well.

Forged through reflecting upon others' experiences, chaplains operate from a deep sense of time that allows them to differentiate the urgent from the nonurgent, the important from the unim-

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How do I lead like the founders?

In the swarm of daily turbulence, leaders can lose their bearings. One's "why" — the why of the ministry's mission and the legacy that leaders have been called to steward — can get lost. Chaplains are keen observers of what's most important, helping one rediscover the anchor of vocational meaning and visionary focus. They astutely identify where one's joy is operative and/or where vision is impeded, steadily offering questions to reorient one's leadership back to the ministerial mission, vision and values.

Like the founders, a chaplain's spiritual life also informs their sense of community and their

ability to perceive holiness in ordinary circumstances: sacramentality is their mainstay. Just as the community and rituals of religious life formed the attunement of the sisters, clinical pastoral education trains chaplains to perceive the constant presence of the Spirit. At its best, this awareness continually crosses the divides of denominations

and/or spiritualities, opening one to receive the Holy in whomever or whatever form it may arrive.

Leading in the way of the founders empowers one to understand that the mystery of the Holy is among and within all as it heals, sustains and guides. Chaplains are expert ambassadors of sacramentality who can help leaders discover and embody what Sr. Mary Roch Rocklage, RSM, the late president and CEO of Mercy, called the "permeating presence" of Catholic health care.⁴

How do I maintain healthy boundaries?

The ministry of effective chaplains demonstrates appropriate boundaries to serve others sustainably.

Time: They practice the importance of sleep, personal and/or family time, and time away from pastoral duties. They know when to respond and when to delay a response.

Guidance: They regularly receive guidance from a ministerial supervisor or a spiritual di-

rector. A safe and loving listener can help them explore their own internal resistances and invitations. As they are listened to, they are better positioned to be listening guides to others.

Connection: They know and maximize their resources. They prioritize life-giving relationships and take time away from work to protect those connections. They don't take on what's outside of their capabilities but instead, refer out through a network of resources.

LEADING WITH AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE

As we look to nurture our personal and professional growth and the ministries we steward, it would do us well to intentionally consider who surrounds us. Whose voices are in our ears and our hearts when we make decisions? Whose wise words will we recall as we guide others? Perhaps it is a chaplain you will consider.

The call to be a leader in the healing ministry of Catholic health care presents challenges that require the guidance and support of special, trusted advisors, however seasoned or fresh you are in a leadership role. Through their eternal perspective, sense of the Holy, practices to maintain healthy boundaries and a strong moral

compass, chaplains can be vital partners on your personal board of directors to shape you and the people, communities and generations within your reach.

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NOTES

1. Susan Stelter, "Want to Advance in Your Career? Build Your Own Board of Directors," *Harvard Business Review*, May 9, 2022, <https://hbr.org/2022/05/want-to-advance-in-your-career-build-your-own-board-of-directors>.
2. Daniel Kennedy and Andrea Porter, "The Illusion of Urgency," *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* 86, no. 7 (October 2022): <https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe8914>.
3. Richard Rohr, "Growing Up Men," On Being with Krista Tippett, June 13, 2019, <https://onbeing.org/programs/richard-rohr-growing-up-men/>.
4. "Mercy's Sister Mary Roch Rocklage Contributions Honored with Sculpture," Mercy, August 24, 2023, <https://www.mercy.net/newsroom/2023-08-24/mercy-s-sister-mary-roch-rocklage-contributions-honored-with-scu/>.



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