

Faculty and Staff Awards Dinner Remarks

August 26, 2003

**“Leading/Teaching/ Serving with the Mind of Christ”**

**I Corinthians 2:16b**

“...But we have the Mind of Christ.”

I spent the summer reading and reflecting on I Corinthians 2:16, “But you have the mind of Christ.” I have tried to interpret or at least relate this scripture passage to our leadership assignments at MVNU. Not just my leadership style. But, because I believe that all of us are both leaders and followers in our various ministry assignments at MVNU, I have pondered this scripture passage and its relationship to each of us.

I read several books this summer; but spent most of my free time completing a 16 session, 90 minute per session module on Leadership entitled: Leading the People of God: Servant Leadership for a Servant Community.

The module, prepared for the new modular Ministerial Course of Study Course for the Church of the Nazarene, is designed to assist students pursuing ordination in the Church of the Nazarene.

Dr. Jeannie Serrao and Dr. Bruce Peterson have also written modules for this program – one for New Testament Studies, and one for Pastoral Care.

As important and significant are the other books I read this summer for my professional understanding, I believe, for leaders at MVNU, my module asks the priority question and addresses leadership from a theological perspective. The book speaks to the priority of a theological vision for our assignments.

Early in the book I stated that:

“Effective Leadership for Ministry Expression is grounded in biblical perspective. Organizational skills of course, are needed. However, sharp skills without Christian motives easily leads to manipulation. The primary orientations and motivation of our actions as Christian leaders must be deeply theological.”

My conviction is that there must be a vision within the Christian community we serve regarding ministry that is shared by both the leader and the led. Without this shared vision of ministry, the community of faith will experience disintegration and despair. Conversely, mobilizing a Christian community for ministry hinges on a radical commitment to our identity as:

- Brothers and sisters in Christ,
- Fellow travelers on a spiritual journey,
- Members together of Christ’s body,
- A fellowship of God’s people,
- A microcosm of the kingdom of God on earth,
- A community of faith, and
- A sacramental community in and through which the grace of God flows.

Now back to our text and theme for tonight:

- a. “If, ‘In Christ all things are made new,’ then how does our relationship with Christ convert or transform our leadership lifestyle?”
- b. In the midst of conflicting expectations, sometimes irreconcilable expectations, how do we lead—really lead--with the mind of Christ?”  
(I Corinthians 2:16)

I am passionate about relating what I believe theologically to how I live daily and lead this institution. Relating our theology and ethics and what I do and how I do it “haunts” me! Permit me to broaden my concern and inquiry beyond myself:

-In the midst of our work at MVNU-

- Faculty
- Staff
- Administration

How do we relate our theology (what we believe) to the life we live and the way we relate to other faculty, staff and to the students of Mount Vernon Nazarene University?

I am growing in Three Convictions!

- A conviction about who we are as the People of God; (we are the graced, blessed, and gifted children of God)
- A conviction about what we are to do as the children of God; (we are to live as extensions of Christ, incarnating the healing, guiding,

reconciling, and sustaining work of Jesus in the ministry assignments God gives to us), and

- A conviction of how to live together as the family of God, (we are to live together as an academic community of faith whose primary assignment is to shape Christ-like leaders for lifelong service).

Regardless of where God places us as leaders and with whom he places us within the Christian fellowship, we need - we must have at the core of our being - at least these three compelling convictions!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community*<sup>1</sup>, lists seven expressions of ministry by which a Christian community must be judged and characterized.

### **1. The Ministry of Holding One's Tongue**

"He who holds his tongue in check controls both mind and body," James tells us. "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth..." is an admonishment from the Ephesian epistle. When this passage characterizes us, we will be able to cease from constantly criticizing the other person, judging him and condemning him, putting him in his particular place. We can allow the other to exist as a completely free person.

### **2. The Ministry of Meekness**

This is "caring more for others than for self." "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought," Paul tells us in Romans 12:3. John tells us to make no effort to obtain the praise that comes only from God. He who serves must learn to think first of others.

### **3. The Ministry of Listening**

The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists of listening. Listening can be a greater service to people than speaking.

### **4. The Ministry of Active Helpfulness**

Simply assist others within the Christian community in external matters, big and small.

### **5. The Ministry of Bearing (Supporting)**

"Carry each other's burden" is the challenge of Galatians 6:2. Bearing means forbearing and sustaining one another in love. Ephesians 4:2 commands us to "be humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."

### **6. The Ministry of Proclaiming**

This is the ministry of the word of God. Bonhoeffer does not mean the message of Scripture proclaimed in a formal setting such as in the worship service. He is referring to the free communication of the word of God from person to person. He is referring to that unique situation in which one person becomes a witness in human words to another, with Christian consolation.

### **7. The Ministry of Authority (Leadership)**

Jesus states in Mark 10:43, "Whoever wants to be great among you must be first your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave." This is the paradox of ministry. Jesus made authority in the fellowship dependent upon brotherly service.

**A servant is one who gets excited about helping someone else succeed.**

For Bonhoeffer, these practical expressions of Christian ministry provide the *context* which our specific ministries must function within. This is particularly true as it relates to the specific ministry of leadership.

These are theological issues that must be addressed again and again in our academic community of faith. Pursuing these questions “with the mind of Christ” will keep us from drifting into an organizational structure and leadership lifestyle that is not substantially different in outcome from our secular counterparts.

In the book, *A Wesleyan Holiness Theology* Dr. J. Kenneth Grider, highly esteemed professor emeritus of Nazarene Theological Seminary reflects on his own need to grow in grace through service, wherever the call of God places him. Listen to his prayer.

*Father,*

*“ I am your bread, break me up and pass me around to the poor and needy of this world.*

*I am your towel. Dampen me with tears and wash the feet of people who are weary with walking and with working.*

*I am your light. Take me out to where the darkness is thick, there to shine and let Christ shine.*

*I am your pen. Write with me what ever work you wish, and spread the word where the least and the lost of the world will see it, and read it and be helped by it.*

*I am your salt. Sprinkle me on all of the things that you want for people, so that my faith and love and hope will flavor their experiences.*

*I am your water, Pour me into people who thirst for you but do not even now that it is you for whom they thirst. Pour into them the trust that you have helped me to place in you.*

*Pour into them the promise that soon the summer drought will pass and refreshing rivers of water will gush down over them.*

*I am yours, Lord Jesus. Use me up in what you will, where you will, for whom you will, even if it means that I am given responsibilities that are considerate and costly.*

*Amen.*

My Challenge to you at the beginning of this school year:

To join me in intentionally and practically seeking to understand what it means to lead, teach, and serve with the mind of Christ!