



FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

## Narrative Assignments

What stories do you tell? Stories are powerful tools for individuals as well as for institutions: they reveal our values and assumptions and depict their consequences in daily life. Our institutions are places of memory and imagination. As such, they are brimming with stories. These stories are typically filled with dilemmas and humor, traditions and forces of change, chaos and grace.

**The Assignment:** We invite you to write a 1-2-page narrative that tells the story of one situation or scene in the life of your institution. (Note that this is not a case study, which is more didactic and controlled, but rather a story, which has a life of its own in the best sense of the storytelling tradition.) This story should embody your organization's day-to-day existence -- the particular successes and challenges, or the things that drive you up the wall. This story will become a building block for your first week at Foundations of Christian Leadership. Your audience is the group of Foundations participants who will serve as supportive conversation partners or "holy friends" throughout the week. Your story will not be shared outside of our circle of participants and staff.

**The Purpose:** The purpose of the narrative is two-fold:

1. It provides an entry point into your particular leadership setting and your role in that setting for our conversations during the program, so the narrative should focus on a question that serves as a window into a host of issues for you: personal, professional, institutional and ecological.
2. It helps you identify and articulate a situation, challenge or turning point that you want to address in the life of your own institution.

**The Form:** Your story should have both a setting -- a particular time and place -- and a purpose -- the reason you choose to tell this particular story. Dilemmas, confusion, changes or quandaries provide the action for your story. The tension may be between characters or groups, or between conflicting values or traditions. Some stories have resolutions, but yours may not. You should start from a real event, but the narrative can be a fictionalized account. Let your imagination fill in the details! Include dialogue and a brief, catchy title. Consider these story examples as you begin to brainstorm:

- An email venting one man's frustration about changes at his institution is mistakenly sent to the entire organization. The shame-faced writer receives a host of surprisingly grateful responses.

- The same day a young woman is promoted on the staff of a large organization, she discovers that two of the staff members she is to supervise have been locked in a battle of wills for several years.
- An organization's leader calls you, his second-in-command, and announces that the organization will continue to offer only print publications, declaring that social media tools are a fad, not a trend.

**Please send narratives to Mary Page at [mpage@div.duke.edu](mailto:mpage@div.duke.edu). Please contact María Teresa Gastón [mtgaston@div.duke.edu](mailto:mtgaston@div.duke.edu) with questions. We are glad to help you brainstorm or provide feedback during your writing process.**

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**Revising the Narrative:** In preparation for the second session of Foundations of Christian Leadership, we invite you to return to your original narrative and revise your text. After experiencing the learning and conversations of Session 1, the feedback in your peer groups, and time to reflect, please rewrite your narrative, considering the following questions:

1. Is there another way to tell this story? Is there another perspective from which the story could be told?
2. Who or what is missing from the story?
3. What do you need to change, to make this a story you could lead from?
4. How or where can hope enter the story?

You need not address each of these questions in your rewrite; they are meant to offer you possible avenues back into the narrative. Select one of these suggestions or make other changes to your narrative that would make the story most helpful to you and your institutional setting.

As you plan your revision, we'd like you to consider one of your assigned reading books, *Living into Community*. In this book, Christine Pohl writes about the ways in which communities can cultivate the practices that sustain us. She focuses on **gratitude, making and keeping promises, living truthfully and hospitality** as four of the core practices that sustain healthy communities. If appropriate, we invite you to incorporate or lift up one of these practices within your story. Does your narrative describe the presence or noticeable absence of one of these four practices?

During Session 2, you will have the opportunity to explain to your peer group why you made the revisions you selected. Please contact María Teresa with any questions.