



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 small group of three 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. The narrative should focus on a question that serves as a window into a variety 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.

**Please send narratives to Donielle Cyprian at [leadership@div.duke.edu](mailto:leadership@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.**