



FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

Narrative Assignment

What stories do you tell? Stories are powerful tools for individuals as well as for organizations: they reveal our values and assumptions and depict their consequences in daily life. Our institutions and organizations 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 organization. (Note that this is not a case study, which is more linear and controlled, but rather a story, which lends itself to more creative thinking.) 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 organization.

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 person's frustration about changes at their organization is mistakenly sent to the entire organization. The shame-faced writer receives a host of surprisingly grateful responses.
- The same day a young leader is promoted on the staff of a large organization, they discover that two of the staff members they are to supervise have very different ways of understanding the organization's mission, priorities and methods and consequently often clash.

Please send narratives to Donielle Cyprian at leadership@div.duke.edu. Please contact María Teresa Gastón mtgaston@div.duke.edu with questions. We are glad to help you brainstorm or provide feedback during your writing process.