

Article juxtaposes leadership and authority

The July 20-27 issue of *America* magazine features a cover article by Jesuit theologian Richard McCormick. McCormick's piece is entitled "Leadership and Authority: the Moral Challenge." In the article he reflects on the notions of leadership and authority in the church in a way that I found most helpful. I suppose that's because I learned two things early on in my days as a bishop and, I hope, continue to learn about them today: 1) the bishop has a great deal of authority and 2) things rarely happen simply and solely because the bishop says they should.

I think Father McCormick helps me to probe my experience further when he distinguishes between authority and leadership. His working definition of authority is the right to speak and decide for a particular group, and to bind its members to the goals and methods of the group. It is the right to command and order.

He thinks of leadership as the capacity to influence the behavior of others in a given situation toward some goal or objective. McCormick notes that the two concepts are related to one another both theoretically and practically. But he adds, "What is clear, however, is that leadership is a much broader notion than juridical authority. In other words there are many other ways to influence conduct than by commands issued by reason of office. One can command all day without being a leader for a minute."

As I sit here thinking about Father McCormick's article and writing on this peaceful

along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

summer night, I realize that the question is one with which I'll be dealing for the duration of my active ministry, and even beyond. As I do so, I realize that I'll always welcome the question, difficult as it can be at times. I say that because dealing with this question has taught me a great deal over the years.

To put that statement in more personal terms, working with the people of this diocese has taught me a great deal. Being with you and working with you has taught me that sound leadership, and the fruitful use of authority within that context, are most effective when they are informed by the wisdom of the community and when they help members of the community to grow in freedom.

I know and so do you that people in authority sometimes have to make decisions that are difficult and unpopular. But you have helped me grow in my awareness that if one in authority issues orders without appropriate input from the community affected, or acts for reasons other than the good order of the community and/or the greater freedom of its

members, that person misuses the authority invested in him or her. When that occurs, I believe at least two bad things happen: People tend to resist the direction determined by the person in authority, and the person in authority finds her or his capacity to offer effective leadership seriously diminished.

I wish I had a nickel for every time I have erred in this regard. And I'd like to have a dime for every time I'll miss in the future. If I had both, I'd be rich and could retire early. But, mistakes notwithstanding, I am convinced that the effort to lead in a way that tries to stay close to the faith of the people and their honest desires, and is directed to their growth in freedom, is the kind of leadership to which we are called. It can be a very difficult type of leadership, but I believe that it imitates the kind of leadership Christ offers.

You have come this far with these thoughts. Let me ask you a few questions about authority and leadership:

1. When asked to name people who are great leaders and handle authority well, of whom do you think? What are the main qualities that lead you to think about them?
 2. In what ways in your life are you called to show leadership or exercise authority?
 3. What do you judge to be your strengths as a leader and/or person in authority?
 4. How might you become better in both?
- Thanks for thinking about these questions. I hope you find them helpful.
Peace to all.

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Bishop Gasparini today at 82; he recently retired as Awasa's bishop

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