

Lessons from a leadership pioneer

Mary Parker Follett (1868-1933) was a pioneer and, perhaps more importantly, her ideas were and continue to be groundbreaking. She was taken seriously as a writer, lecturer, and thinker long before this was common for a woman. She published two books on government before she had the right to vote. A basic principle for her was that every human interaction, from the seemingly most common and insignificant to the most profound, should be cultivated for its potential learning and creativity. Therefore, she talked to people everywhere — bus conductors, maids— anyone whose experience could provide insight into the nature of the social process. Here are three examples of her ideas that have influenced my leadership and writing:

Vision is the “invisible leader.” ~ It is the shared vision that becomes the “invisible leader” of an organization. A traditional understanding sees an organization as a pyramid in which the leader or leaders at the top decide what needs to be done, and everyone below accomplishes what has been decided. She proposed that an organization be seen as an inverted pyramid. At the top of the inverted pyramid is the vision as the invisible leader. Everyone else finds a place within the pyramid. Leaders are at the bottom of the inverted pyramid and their primary task is keeping everyone within the organization focused on the vision and faithful to it. In the inverted pyramid paradigm, everyone in every group can truly say, “We can have only one leader.” However, the leader commanding the loyalty of everyone is the invisible leader of the common purpose. Plans and differences are all settled by the single standard of the shared vision.

Leadership emerges from different people at different times in different ways. Follett found that leadership within groups is not fixed in the hands of only a few. Rather she observed that different people were leading at different times and in different ways. She called this multiple leadership. Leadership tasks are not allocated in a rigid or arbitrary way that makes someone always a leader and makes someone else always a follower. Indeed, someone may assume the roles of leader, follower, and peer depending on the nature of the tasks undertaken. Multiple leadership is a creative way of people working together as needed and appropriate to accomplish a shared vision.

Compromise is not always the best way forward. Follett shared with John Wesley the belief that truth does not lie in a compromise solution between two sides. She thought the greatest deficiency of compromise is that there is no real change in one’s own thinking. She warned against “sham reconciliation” and believed each side must persist until a way is found by which both sides can contribute to the solution. A great advantage of finding solutions through integration is the personal change that takes place. We come to understand and appreciate the ideas and values of others. ~ **Lewis Center for Church Leadership**

Bishop Lewis urges “non-anxious presence”

In a statement on Mar. 5, Bishop Sharma Lewis shared the following: “Greetings to you, Virginia Conference, in the midst of this time of self-examination and reflection, during this Lenten Season.

As you are aware, anxiety is high worldwide as governments and private individuals seek to understand more about the coronavirus.

As people of faith, we pray for those working on the front lines of this new virus and those who find themselves ill.

As individuals, we may have concerns as to how we respond going forward from church services to our own personal self-care.

It is important that we know where to get proper information. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is updating information daily at <https://www.cdc.gov/> by sharing information about symptoms, frequently asked questions and the cases in the United States and around the world.

The Rev. Sarah Calvert, Arlington District superintendent, has shared very helpful information as we consider how this may affect worship services, Communion and facilities management and how to lead from love rather than fear. View this information at <https://novaumc.org/flu-season-2020/>.

In all things, encourage those around you and your church communities to be a non-anxious presence during this time and to use best practices of washing your hands, staying home if sick, and following directives from our local community leaders. Peace and Blessings, Bishop Sharma D. Lewis”

Coronavirus: What to know, how to help

With new cases being diagnosed seemingly every hour, the question of “How concerned should I be about coronavirus?” is being asked by many around the world. While places where people gather in close proximity, such as worship services, may be vulnerable, there are simple steps to take to limit risks, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Above all, anyone feeling unwell should stay home and seek medical care. Stay informed and follow advice given by your healthcare provider. Stay up-to-date on coronavirus by checking reliable sources, such as the World Health Organization, National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control, and Global Health Tracker.

Stay informed on General Conference

To find the latest news concerning General Conference 2020 and the Virginia delegation, visit <https://vaumc.org/GC2020>.