Servant-Leadership in the Context of Our Times

by Jeff McCollum

When Robert K. Greenleaf wrote The Servant as Leader, he had spent a career with AT&T, at the time America's largest privately-held corporation, and a deeply introspective period during which he experienced, first-hand, the turbulent atmosphere of the American college campuses of the late 60's and early 70's. AT&T, like DuPont, General Motors, Sears and other large companies, practiced (some would say perfected) a model of organizational governance which has been variously described as "patriarchy" and the "machine bureaucracy." Power was concentrated in a few (mostly white male) hands. Strong staffs helped control the organization through rules and policies. Organizational members were viewed as interchangeable parts—cogs in the machinery.

The governance model was practiced in other institutions including families, schools, churches and government. That model which alienated the members of the organization, depersonalized work andagranded power to its top echelon came under attack in the campus unrest which (Continued on page 4)

On the Road and in the News With the Greenleaf Center

Listed below are some of the programs and outreach activities conducted by Greenleaf Center personnel and members in recent months. The Greenleaf Center offers a wide array of workshops, seminars, and consultative services. Please contact us if you are interested in our providing servant-leadership programming or speakers for your group or conference, or articles on servant-leadership for publication. Also, please let us know of any articles or books which you may see published on servant-leadership.

Selected Programs and Activities

RKGC Program Director Richard W. Smith has been working with a faculty group at Indiana Wesleyan University to rewrite the course curricula for their Leadership Education for Adult Professionals (L.E.A.P.) program in an effort to incorporate servant-leadership throughout that program.

RKGC Trustee Jeff McCollum and Executive Director Larry Spears were the guests for an hour long radio interview on servant-leadership on radio station WDVR, in New Jersey.

Richard W. Smith has been consulting with the Governor's Office of Employee Relations in New York State on servant-leadership and public service.

Larry Spears gave a special luncheon address in conjunction with a workshop held in Philadelphia, Pa.

RKGC Member Larry Ladd spoke on the Greenleaf Archives Project at the Academy of Management Meeting in Dallas.

Publishing Project Associate Don Frick spoke at the North American Conference for Christian Philanthropy, held in Indianapolis. His address was titled, "The Emergence of Spirit in Business."

Executive Director Larry C. Spears and RKGC Member Larry D. Spears co-facilitated a six-day workshop, "Servant-Leadership and Friends," at the annual Gathering of Friends General Conference (Quakers) in Amherst, Massachusetts.

Program Director Kelly Tobe facilitated a session on servant-leadership at the 1994 conference of the National Association for Community Leadership, held in Seattle, Washington.

Kelly Tobe gave informational talks to the Rotary Club of Indianapolis, and to Renaissance, Inc. also located in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Jack Lowe, Jr. spoke on servant-leadership to a group at Texas A&M University, in College Station, Texas.

Greenleaf Center personnel have also recently conducted our one-day workshops in the following locations:

- Ann Arbor, Michigan
- Caldwell, New Jersey
- Carrollton, Georgia
- Chicago, Illinois
- College Station, Texas
- Collegeville, Pennsylvania
- Fort Wayne, Indiana
- Greensboro, North Carolina
- Manhattan, Kansas
- Meridian, Mississippi
- Minneapolis, Minnesota
- Muskegon, Michigan
- New York, New York
- Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- South Bend, Indiana

(Continued on page 5)
Guest Column

Servant-Leadership and Philanthropy

by Joyce DeShano, SSJ

(Editor’s Note: The following remarks are condensed from Joyce DeShano’s keynote address at the Association for Healthcare Philanthropy Lecture, Milton Murray Foundation for Philanthropy, held October 2, 1994, in Orlando, Florida.)

Webster’s defines philanthropy as “a loving individual; an active effort to promote human welfare.” This definition is echoed by Marian Anderson in the 1994 Philanthropy Calendar: “Leadership should be born out of the understanding of the needs of those who would be affected by it.” The service of philanthropy, particularly within the health care arena, is fertile ground for a cultural transformation to servant-leadership.

I was struck in preparing these remarks by The Association for Health Care Philanthropy President Bill McGinty’s comments: “Allocated resources never have funded all the care people need, and they never will—no matter what reforms are instituted.” It sounds like shades of Greenleaf’s words: “And what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived?”

Today we honor [RKGC Member] Milton Murray as one who exemplifies a way of service that is both effective and inspirational. It has been said that imitation is the greatest form of honor. Milton is no stranger to Robert Greenleaf, as he indicates in his most recent publication:

“Sometime in the 1980’s I became familiar with Robert Greenleaf’s concept of servant-leadership. It seems to me that his idea has special application to people who work in philanthropy. We serve and we love. If we love mankind, we serve mankind. Ironically, I have discovered that in the process of serving through philanthropy, my work inevitably thrusts me into a leadership role. An attitude of service is the most effective path to leadership.”

Within the Sisters of St. Joseph Health System, five values guide our decision making and leadership. One of these is servant-leadership. We define it as “the use of gifts and talents on behalf of all of us in a way that models what we can be and empowers us to try.” It is an echo, in different language, of Bob Greenleaf’s statement: “Do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?”

Philanthropic leaders like yourselves, in the shadow of Milton Murray, may look to Robert Greenleaf as a colleague who saw reality, struggled with the contradictions, shouldered the burdens, but also discovered and taught a way to accomplish unmeasurable benefits that outlast and outweigh the tangible and financial advances we experience.

I offer you the same test of leadership I use every day in corporate service. I offer you the same litmus test Bob Greenleaf offers to those who seek a better world, a new paradigm of leadership, or a more life-giving way to work for the betterment of society. May this test find us not perfect but willing; not without limitation but ready to continually be transformed. May the test of servant-leadership find us open, responsive and advancing.

(Joyce DeShano, SSJ, is Senior Vice-President, Sponsorship, Sisters of St. Joseph Health System, in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and a Greenleaf Center trustee. Milton Murray is a former NSFRE Outstanding Fund Raiser of the Year award recipient, and the subject of the recent book, The Making of a Philanthropic Fundraiser: The Instructive Example of Milton Murray, by Ronald Knott, Jossey-Bass Publishers.)
Message from the Executive Director

by Larry Spears

One of the terrible ironies of human history has been that religion and spiritual beliefs have been at the root of many wars, discrimination against groups of people, and hatred between both individuals and nations. Over the past several thousand years of human existence a great many injustices have occurred because of the unwillingness of various peoples to embrace diversity of thought and beliefs.

The ecumenical movement among religious denominations in America, in this century, has been a noble attempt to build bridges between diverse, denominationally-based beliefs, and to seek to identify those areas of shared core beliefs upon which all can agree. While ecumenism has met with resistance in some quarters, the ecumenical movement has gone a long way toward helping to establish acceptance of diverse spiritual views as the norm, instead of the arrogant notion that one must accept only a static understanding of the nature of spirituality.

While servant-leadership is not a religious belief, it nevertheless is a very powerful idea, and one which can potentially be corrupted by similar attempts to define it as a fixed or complicated set of requirements. Those of us who are excited by servant-leadership, and by our own exploration of it, would do well to reflect upon some of the lessons coming out of our religious and social history.

Servant-leadership, like all spiritual inquiry, is open to considerable interpretation and values judgment. For most people, servant-leadership is first-and-foremost a belief in that often-quoted definition by Robert Greenleaf:

“The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant—first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or at least, not be further deprived?”

— from The Servant as Leader by Robert K. Greenleaf

The Greenleaf Center’s Mission

“The Center’s mission is to fundamentally improve the caring and quality of all institutions through a new approach to leadership, structure, and decisionmaking. Servant-leadership emphasizes increased service to others; a holistic approach to work; promoting a sense of community; and the sharing of power in decisionmaking.”

The Greenleaf Center’s Goals

1. To help deepen an understanding of the original ideas of Robert K. Greenleaf and the principles of servant-leadership, via the preservation and promotion of his writings.
2. To nurture colleagues and institutions by providing a focal point, and opportunities to share thoughts and ideas on servant-leadership.
3. To produce and publish new resources by others on servant-leadership.
4. To connect servant-leaders in a network of learning.

Originally founded in 1964 as the Center for Applied Ethics, Inc., the Center was renamed the Robert K. Greenleaf Center in 1985. The Center is an international, not-for-profit institution headquartered in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Who is the Servant-Leader?

The servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant — first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or at least, not be further deprived?”

(Continued on page 5)
Context (Continued from page 1)

Greenleaf witnessed and the civil unrest which we all witnessed.

On one level, servant-leadership can be seen as an antidote to the alienation of Greenleaf’s time. It can be seen as conservative—change the governance to preserve the institution. It can be seen as restoring soul and relationship to an environment filled with machine images and machine metaphors. Perhaps that’s why Greenleaf talked about a theology of institutions and used the phrase “in the spirit” to close his correspondence.

On the other hand, there seems to be something more timeless in the idea of servant-leadership. Certainly it extends backward in philosophical and religious thought. But does it stretch forward? As Bob Dylan wrote in the 60’s, “the time’s they are a changin’”. The 1990’s seem to be bringing wrenching change to all of our institutions from Wall Street to Main Street to Washington. Five authors, all of whom will lead sessions at the Greenleaf Center’s annual conference from October 19-21, bear witness to the tension and struggle of being human within our contemporary institutions.

James Autry (Love and Profit: The Art of Caring Leadership) and Tom Chappell (The Soul of a Business: Managing for Profit and the Common Good) approach contemporary institutions from the CEO’s perspective and wrestle with the human side of organizations. Margaret Wheatley (Leadership and the New Science: Learning about Organization from an Orderly Universe) and Robert Kelley (The Power of Followership) come at the phenomenon of contemporary organization from the perspective of behavioral scientists. David Whyte (The Heart Aroused: Poetry and the Preservation of the Soul in Corporate America) brings the poet’s eye, ear and voice to the table.

One phenomenon, Three positional perspectives. The multiple perspectives, individually insightful, yield unusual depth and dimension in aggregate. Themes, like spirit, relationship, autonomy, personal purpose and community, resonate with concepts in Greenleaf’s body of work, and connect Autry to Chappell to Kelley to Wheatley to Whyte. They also connect to others such as Peter Block, Max DePree and Peter Senge who have acknowledged their debt to Greenleaf and led sessions at the annual Servant-Leadership conference.

The nature of our relationships to each other and to our institutions is at the heart of servant-leadership. Greenleaf’s ideas of “service” and “primum inter pares” parallel the principles, “building relationship” and “doing good”, for which Chappell argues and upon which he has built his company, Tom’s of Maine.

Chappell draws at length on Martin Buber’s book, I and Thou. In it, Buber writes about relationships of instrumentality (“I-It”) and relationships of intimacy (“I-Thou”). The organizational context of Greenleaf’s time was one of instrumentality. Servant-leadership can be seen as a substitution of “I-Thou” for “I-It”. The “I-Thou” experience also emerges from Autry’s collection of essays and poems on the personal side of organizational life. In his poem, “What Personnel Handbooks Never Tell You”, Autry observes: “They leave a lot out of the personnel handbooks/Dying for instance./You can find funeral leave but you can’t find dying./You can’t find what to do/when a guy you’ve worked with since you both were pups/looks you in the eye and says something about hope and chemotherapy.”

Autry, the poet with the insider’s eye, and Whyte, the poet with the outsider’s eye, bring the inner experience of life in our modern institutions to the surface for examination. Autry talks of the emotional side of organizational life and the functional as encompassed by the enterprise. Whyte writes, “The poet needs the practicalities of making a living to test and temper the lyricism of insight and observation. The corporation needs the poet’s insight and powers of attention in order to weave the inner world of soul and creativity with the outer world of form and matter.” Buber writes of “two fold consciousness” and the need to be successful at both “I-It” and “I-Thou” relationships.

Service is at the heart of the “I-Thou” relationship. Kelley’s definition of “exemplary follower” rests on two qualities: personal engagement and independent thought. Whyte talks about finding one’s “own voice” and personal sense of purpose. Wheatley describes the “new science’s” discovery of a participative universe. “It is the participative process that generates the reality to which they then make their commitment. There are no recipes or formulae, no checklists. . . . There is only what we create through our engagement with others and with events.” Chappell seeks out people for whom this company’s mission statement makes an emotional and visceral, as opposed to intellectual connection. Autry describes management as a “helping profession.” Service generates engagement.

Autonomy, too, courses through Kelley, Whyte, Wheatley, Autry and Chappell. For Kelley, autonomy is a characteristic of an exemplary follower. Whyte’s chapter, “Fire in the Voice”, is about sheathing our dependence to independence. Autry’s poem “Resisting” is about the reluctance of those who have power to step down from the pedestal and engage others on a human level—to allow them their freedom of thought. To Wheatley, the “self organizing”, “self renewing”, “resilient” systems which are found in nature are the way because they are autonomous and have an innate sense of the future. It is these qualities that will permit our institutions to survive the turbulence of the 1990’s.

When we as independent, free-thinking individuals encounter other independent, free-thinking individuals we find relationship. And in that relationship, rests a powerful possibility of generating an ineffable connection to others. That connection, that energy is described by some as community, by some as spirit. It is profoundly human and profoundly divine.

Extrapolating from the scientific examination of morphogenic fields to organizational life, Wheatley writes, “This type of field possesses very little energy, but it is able to take energy from another source and shape it . . . . Field images, when applied to organizations become quite provocative.” Fields are the by-product of conversation and filled with ideas. Love and service are ideas which can fill an organization. To Buber, human love holds the possibility of opening into divine love.

Connections, love, relationship is found in letting go—in allowing (Continued on page 5)
Context (Continued from page 4)

ourselves to be given over to something larger than ourselves.

Wheatley writes: “I believe that we have only just begun the process of discovering and inventing the new organizational forms that will inhabit the twenty-first century. To be responsible inventors and discoverers, though we need the courage to let go of the old world.”

Whyte observes, “It seems that to find the real path we have to go off the path we are on now, even for an instant, and earn the privilege of losing our way. Questioning in a real way, we start, by all the lights of the poetic tradition, to awaken.”

Whether you choose to engage these five authors through their writing or through their spoken words at the Servant-Leadership Conference in October, the imperative seems to be engagement. The struggles, the question, the fear of giving ourselves over to something greater are part of creating the organizational form which will emerge in the years ahead and part of our awakening to it. So, it seems, is the joy of relationship and the possibility of creating organizations in which the human spirit flourishes and is nurtured. The tenets of servant-leadership seem to run like golden threads through the tapestry which is being created. As Wheatley and Whyte suggest, we need to find the courage to let go of the old and the power of our own voice.

(Jeff McCollum is Director of Organization Development for Warner-Wellcome, a consumer health products manufacturer, and a member of the Greenleaf Center’s Board of Trustees.)

On the Road and in the News (Continued from page 1)

Publications and Outreach

The following is a partial listing of recent articles and publications by-and-about our Members that have profiled servant-leadership and The Greenleaf Center:


Upcoming

Reflections on Leadership: How Robert K. Greenleaf’s Idea of Servant-Leadership Influenced Today’s Top Management Thinkers, edited by Larry C. Spears. This is a collection of 27 essays on servant-leadership by Peter Senge, M. Scott Peck, Ann McGee-Cooper and others, a foreword by Max DePree, including a never-before-published essay by Robert K. Greenleaf. John Wiley and Sons Publishers. The scheduled publication date is May 5, 1995. This 352-page, hardback book will be available through the Greenleaf Center at the special price of $25.00, plus $3.50 for shipping and handling. Contact the Greenleaf Center for more information, or to order your copy in advance.

“Personal Journey Through Servant-Leadership” a one-day workshop, will be offered in Indianapolis, Indiana on Friday, April 21, and in Chicago, Illinois on Thursday, May 18. “Servant-Leadership: A Foundation for Effective Organizational Change” a one-day workshop, will be offered in Indianapolis on Friday, April 7, and in Chicago on Friday, May 19. All four workshops will begin at 8:00 a.m. and end at 4:30 p.m. Cost of each workshop is $150. Discounts are available for members and students. Contact Michele Lawrence at the Greenleaf Center for more information or to register.

“The Soul of Leadership,” The Greenleaf Center’s 1995 International Conference on Servant-Leadership, celebrating the 25th Anniversary of The Servant as Leader, October 19-21, in Indianapolis. Featured presenters will include: James Autry (Love and Profit, Life and Work), Tom Chappell (The Soul of a Business), Robert Kelley (The Power of Followership), Margaret Wheatley (Leadership and the New Science), and David Whyte (The Heart Aroused).

Message from the Executive Director (Continued from page 3)

reject as they are moved to do so. Good faith acceptance of his “test” ought to be the central defining element of whether one is a servant-leader.

The servant-leadership movement can continue to grow just so long as we remain open to accepting Greenleaf’s core definition as that which fundamentally delineates what it means to be a servant-leader. I hope that those of us who are a part of the servant-leadership movement will reject any more narrowing requirement of what constitutes legitimate servant-leadership beyond Greenleaf’s “test.” Honoring and accepting diversity of opinion in our interpretation of servant-leadership is vitally important for the continuing growth and well-being of this belief.
The Soul of Leadership

October 19 – 21, 1995 • Indianapolis

- What can organizations learn from particle physics?
- Do leaders have as much power as followers?
- Can you succeed in business without sacrificing your personal values?
- Why do we resist bringing our whole selves to work?
- Can poetry help an organization find its way through the thicket?


Registration Form

Name __________________________
First Name for Nametag __________________________
Organization __________________________
Address __________________________
City __________________________ State ______ Zip ______
Daytime Phone ( ) ______________________
FAX ( ) ______________________

If you are physically challenged in any way, please state how we can make the program more accessible to you (e.g., interpreters, visual/audio aids, etc.) Note: All rooms and public spaces are wheelchair accessible.

Pre-Conference Workshops Thurs., Oct. 19 (includes lunch)
These run all day, concurrently – please choose only one.
___ $150 Introduction to Servant-Leadership
___ $150 Servant-Leadership: The Emerging Model
___ $150 Making Ethical Decisions

Full Conference All day Fri., Oct. 20 and All day Sat., Oct. 21
Postmarked by: 4/15/95 8/15/95 After 8/15
___ $395 ______ $425 ______ $450
Student Rate (please provide verification with registration)
___ $295 ______ $325 ______ $350

One-Day Conference
Please check ___ Fri., Oct. 20 or ___ Sat., Oct. 21
Postmarked by: 4/15/95 8/15/95 After 8/15
___ $200 ______ $225 ______ $250
Student Rate (please provide verification with registration)
___ $150 ______ $175 ______ $200

Meals

Friday Dinner (with poet David Whyte) ______ $50
Saturday Dinner (no program, just fellowship!) ______ $35
Friday Lunch (roundtable) ______ $18
Saturday Lunch (program) ______ $18
SUB-TOTAL CONFERENCE
(Exclude 10% for members)
TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED

___ Check enclosed
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