

## chapter SIXTEEN

### **Mission Integration and the Board of Trustees: Formation for Transformational Leadership**

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#### **Introduction**

Every institutional mission exists in a wider and often complex social and economic context. Cultural trends are shifting away from personal identification with religious institutions and transcendent values in the direction of secular materialism and a reductionist orientation. Crises in the global economy, demographic downturns in numbers of college-age students, and disruptive changes in online learning are challenging leaders of religiously affiliated institutions, including boards of trustees, to devote greater attention to the Catholic and charism-based mission of their schools and to the way that mission guides executive decision making. A transactional management style may have once been sufficient for trustees as they executed their fiduciary responsibilities on behalf of their institutions, but no longer. New and emerging challenges call board members to lead the adaptation and evolution of their institutions while at the same time deepening commitment to their mission. Successful institutional adaptation requires a transformational leadership style that inquires into operating assumptions, revises core strategies, and inspires a higher level of organizational performance.

Board members, whether they are Catholic or not, are called to exercise a transformational style in their internal and external leadership roles, to work with presidents, executive teams, staff, and faculty to inspire an institutional ethos that reflects deeper commitment to the vision and values of Catholic higher education, and to motivate both professional morale and performance. The effectiveness of transformational leadership depends on the values and priorities of individual trustees, grounded in faith-based education of the whole person and academic excellence oriented toward service of the common good. The leadership role of mission officers often includes active engagement with the board of trustees, with the chair of the board, the chair of the mission committee, and the committee itself. The reflection that follows will explore practical ways of building this transformational leadership capacity through board formation and the particular functions the board's mission committee might serve.

#### **Formation for Transformational Board Leadership**

Collaborative transformational leadership requires boards to work with administration and faculty to present a compelling, value-based education rooted in the Catholic tradition, while also open to diversity and practical for the times. Board members with knowledge and

appreciation of the essential traits of Catholic higher education can confidently express these values to a public that is suspicious of liberal arts and seeks both lower costs for education and efficient tracks to post-graduation employment.

This shift requires board members to have an informed knowledge of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, the charism of the founding orders (where applicable), and the particular qualities of the institutional mission that distinguish it from other schools. These areas of content knowledge can be shaped into learning objectives for board orientations and guide the development of assessment tools for board members. For example, early in their service, do board members understand the essential aspects of the mission of Catholic higher education and have a basic familiarity with key documents, such as *Ex corde Ecclesiae*? Later in their service, are they confident in their ability to articulate and champion their school’s mission to external audiences, including donors and foundations? To effectively engage and help transform the dominant cultures, both inside and outside Catholic institutions, board members must demonstrate their knowledge and their conviction that Catholic higher education is an essential and value-adding feature of the educational landscape.

A transformational leader is able to tell the story of his or her institutional mission in a way that inspires, motivates, uplifts, and illustrates this mission through the unmistakable authenticity of his or her own lived example. Informational learning alone does not foster this kind of leadership. Such formation for boards requires both information and transformational elements in order to reach the degree of substance and depth called for in transformational leadership. Informational elements are easier to deliver in the form of introductory readings supplied to board candidates during the period in which they are vetted by governance committees, as well as in orientations for new members, and in mission-oriented modules scheduled each time the board gathers. While some universities will use online and video-based materials for such informational purposes, these have less impact than face-to-face meetings to discuss and reflect with mission officers, college personnel, students, alumni, and fellow board members.

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At Le Moyne College, the Mission & Identity Committee of the Board is designing a board formation model that will begin with areas of content knowledge that determine objectives for new and more experienced members, and which will be staged over the course of several years of the board member’s service.

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Combinations of online and face-to-face opportunities also can be helpful.

Transformational elements of board formation involve experiential learning, and usually entail more investment of time, money, and personnel, but yield a greater depth of impact. Examples of such transformational formation include in-depth case-study work in groups, mission-related retreats, heritage tours in the footsteps of religious orders’ founders, and combinations of such experiences in the form of pilgrimages, brief service immersion trips, and experiences shadowing current students. The most effective transformational experiences deepen knowledge and understanding, build community, and help board leaders translate mission in terms of the particular functions and roles they serve and the way they take up these roles on behalf of the institution. For colleges and universities living out the charism of religious orders, it is helpful if both the informational and transformational elements of mission formation are developed out of the distinct spirituality (Augustinian, Benedictine,

Dominican, Franciscan, Jesuit, Marianist, etc.) and way of proceeding at the heart of the institution. In this way, board members can participate in the spiritual embodiment of the mission even as members of religious congregations seek to do the same.

A commitment to forming board members for mission might be worthwhile as an end in itself, yet the value of this investment is most evident in the quality of board members' service to the institution. A solid mission-related knowledge base empowers board members to offer more informed service in the internal fiduciary roles they serve in hiring presidents, maintaining and increasing institutional fiscal health in such a way that margin is linked to mission, safeguarding academic quality consistent with the standards of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, and supporting efforts to enhance student life and development. This formation might best begin with a mutual partnership between chief mission officers and a core group of board members who serve on a mission committee.

### **Functions of the Board Committee on Mission and the Mission Officer**

Many institutions opt for a model of mission leadership that integrates mission across all the board's functional committees (academic affairs, student life, enrollment management, finance, institutional advancement, etc.). Mission awareness often begins with a handful of internal institutional officers and highly invested board members working hand in hand with the president and mission officer, or through a mission sub-committee. With the goal of building board members' capacity to serve as transformational leaders for mission, the purview of a board committee could include the creation and implementation of a board formation program, oversight of mission-related dimensions of the strategic plan, and fundraising for mission endowments. In the interest of long-term, sustainable capacity-building, the most significant role may be that of supporting ongoing formation in partnership with the mission officer.

How does the mission officer best strengthen the capacity of the board to lead in a mission-driven and transformational manner? First and foremost, the mission officer builds upon the diversity, gifts, and competencies of each board member. Mission officers

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At Le Moyne College, the Office of Mission & Identity uses a "mission integration map" to align institutional functions and operations in the service of mission-driven goals including: spiritual, intellectual, and professional formation; the development of a mission-inspired, intentional academic and organizational culture; and mission-aligned organizational structures, policies, and procedures.



need to be skillful at engaging each board member where they are, using appropriate means to help them further their appreciation of and commitment to the mission. Finally, in order to facilitate ongoing and sustainable board development, mission officers need to be able to work collaboratively with members, deepening trust through their credibility and competence, and the collegial and compassionate way in which they support and challenge the board.

### **Conclusion**

In order to support Catholic institutions of higher education in the increasingly secular climate of the United States, board members need to be as much transformational leaders as they are fiduciary managers. As transformational leaders, board members inspire

deepening commitment to the mission, vision, and values of Catholic higher education, both with their internal stakeholder responsibilities and as external spokespeople in society. In close partnership with chief mission officers and other internal stakeholders, board chairs and mission committees can help guide and enhance efforts at mission integration within the institution, offer orientation and ongoing formation for board members, and serve as champions for the unique contributions that Catholic institutions provide American higher education.

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