

Leadership formation can strengthen the mission of Catholic organisations

Executive leaders of Catholic organisations and ministries could strengthen the organisational culture of their workforce by taking advantage of leadership and mission formation opportunities, according to Reverend Associate Professor Jamie Calder SJ.

Fr Calder is the Academic Lead for ACU's leadership formation experience, the Ministry Leadership Program (MLP), which is designed to support executive leaders of Catholic organisations focused on health, aged care, and social services. Fr Calder said workplaces that were more mission-aligned also tended to be culturally safer working environments.

"It's very important for leaders of Catholic organisations to be able to welcome a diversity of people to embrace the mission, but also to articulate in an invitational way the Christian underpinning of the mission of the organisation," Fr Calder said.

"But if we talk about mission literacy and we do that only in terms of having or communicating certain values, then we're missing half of the full literacy. The other half is the Christian perspective: *why* Christians think this work is important. It is precisely this component that further guarantees the safety and inclusivity of the workplace."

While working with executive leaders in the MLP, Fr Calder said leadership formation was now being viewed as essential professional development, although it was fundamentally different to leadership development.

"If it were solely leadership development, then we would be teaching participants about how to manage difficult personalities, what to do in different kinds of HR scenarios or how to handle particular workplace situations," Fr Calder said.

"But leadership formation importantly reflects upon people's experience of their leadership, providing opportunities for individual and group reflection on that wisdom in the context of engaging intellectually rigorous content on topics such as ethics and Christian heritage."

Leadership formation was also interrupting "mission drift", a phenomenon where an organisation has drifted from its central mission, across a range of Catholic organisations and reconstituting "mission alignment".

For Catholic organisations, mission alignment requires all staff, but particularly leaders, to have some understanding of the Christian rationale that informs their work, especially in the areas of health, aged care, education, or social work. One of the distinct benefits of a mission-aligned workplace, Fr Calder said, was a safer working environment because it ensured the mission values are sustained and known in the organisation.

Fr Calder said many Catholic organisations would benefit from increased mission formation opportunities, and encouraged leaders to take the first step.

"Catholic organizations generally are incredibly diverse, with many, many different components," Fr Calder said.

"The thing about mission is it has the powerful potential to unify an organisation so that's why mission formation is so crucial, because without it, you're just going to have 'silo-fication', as I call it, and competitive silos at that.

"While in some organizations, care for and that enactment of the basic Christian understanding of the human person is manifest, in others, it is a work in progress."

Registrations for the 2023-2024 Ministry Leadership Program are now open. To enquire about the program or to register, visit acu.edu.au/mlp.

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