

SEPTEMBER 2026



FROM THE CIRCLE

*A monthly letter for
contemplative leadership
in times of change*

Before We Decide

*When what we see is not yet
the whole story*

There are moments in leadership when the answer seems almost obvious. Membership is declining. A building is costly. Leadership is carrying too much. A ministry no longer fits.

We look at what is in front of us and naturally begin asking,
What should we do?

But perhaps there is a question that belongs before that one:

Do we understand what we are seeing?

Experience helps us see patterns. It can also cause us to decide too quickly which pattern we are seeing. Scripture offers a different pace—one that might help us lead more faithfully.



Be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.

— JAMES 1:19



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AT THE TOMB

Mary Magdalene — John 20:1–18



Mary Magdalene came to the tomb while it was still dark. The stone had been moved. The tomb was empty. Something had changed.

What she saw was true.

And yet, what Mary could see in that moment was not enough to understand what was unfolding.

She remained.

She looked again.

And gradually, what first appeared to be only absence revealed something entirely different.



*What Mary saw was real.
She simply could not yet
see the whole story.*

There may be wisdom here
for leadership.

Sometimes the facts before us
are completely accurate—
and still not sufficient to tell us
what they mean.

WHAT WE'RE NOTICING

The presenting problem is not always the problem.

WHAT WE SEE		WHAT WE MAY CONCLUDE		WHAT WE DON'T YET KNOW
 Fewer sisters.	→	We need fewer employees.	→	What work will remain, what work will increase, what work will disappear, and who should carry it?
 A property is increasingly expensive.	→	We should sell it.	→	What functions does it carry? Who depends on those functions? What obligations are attached to it?
 Leadership is overwhelmed.	→	We need another leader.	→	How much of leadership's workload requires canonical leadership, and how much is operational work?
 A ministry is no longer sustainable in its current form.	→	The ministry needs to end.	→	What essential expression of charism does it carry, and could that purpose continue in another form?



*The first observation may be completely accurate
without the first solution being correct.*





AROUND THE TABLE

Before We Decide

Bring one unresolved decision to the table.

The decision before us is: _____

1**NAME**

What do we actually know?



- Facts only. No interpretation.
- What evidence can we put on the table?
- What is really happening?

2**UNDERSTAND**

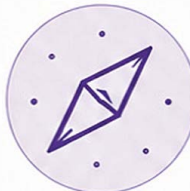
What don't we know yet?



- What information would change our understanding?
- Whose perspective is missing?
- What assumptions are we treating as facts?
- What function is this person/place/ministry/structure currently carrying?

3**DISCERN**

What must be faithfully carried forward?



- What has completed its purpose?
- What might continue differently?
- What are we protecting—and why?
- What is mission asking of us now?

4**DECIDE**

What decision best serves what we now understand?



- What is the next faithful and responsible decision given what we now know?
- What is the right next step?

*Faithful decisions are not made quickly.
They are made well.*





TO CARRY WITH YOU



“

Mary Magdalene eventually understood what had happened at the tomb. But understanding required her to remain with what she did not yet understand.

Perhaps there is wisdom there for leadership.

Not every unanswered question requires an immediate answer.

Sometimes our responsibility is to stay with what we are seeing long enough for the deeper reality to become visible.

There will be a time to decide.

Be quick to listen.

Be willing to look again.

And leave enough room for what you see to mean something other than what you first imagined.

”

JOHN 20:1–18 | JAMES 1:19

Before We Decide

Something I am being asked to decide:

What I know:

What I am assuming:

What I still need to understand:

What must be carried forward:

What might I need to look at again:



You are not called to have all the answers.
You are called to lead faithfully
in the season you are in.





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SERVING RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES



Otwarte Circle

accompanies religious communities and LCWR regions through times of transition—creating the conditions for honest discernment, courageous decisions, and faithful next steps. Areas of expertise include:

- Temporal Affairs & Back-Office Management
- Leadership & Discernment Support
- Fractional COO & Consultation

Sacred History Technologies

helps religious communities make their stories living, accessible, and formative. This work exists to keep the stories of women religious within reach so the legacy they carry can continue to form, guide, and live on through those who come next. Our platform serves as a vessel to protect what is sacred while illuminating what is meant to be seen.



Elysian Acres

is a restorative hospitality house in Wisconsin where rest and renewal is the ministry. Surrounded by the quiet beauty of nature and the gentle rhythm of the water, this riverside retreat offers space for rest, reflection, prayer, and renewal. Bookings for 2027 will open within the next month.



DIFFERENT GIFTS. A SHARED MISSION.

