Introduction

Although most administrators spend their days interacting with others by phone, email, and in person, one of the most common complaints about the job—ironically—is a sense of isolation. While they have many opportunities to converse, often the content of their conversations has to do with schedules and order forms, rather than matters of deep meaning and value. Furthermore, the confidential nature of much of an administrator’s work means that many topics of import are simply off-limits for casual conversations with colleagues. Administrators are surrounded by people but often unable to form mutual friendships with those people or ask them for personal support. Given this reality, administrators might want to consider creating administrators’ spirituality groups or support groups of four to eight members that meet on a regular basis to share the spiritual journey of administration.

*Suggestions for Beginning an Administrators’ Group:*

- Identify several other administrators within your institution or from other institutions who want to reflect on their administrative work as a spiritual quest. Invite interested administrators to an initial gathering to find out more about the nature of the group and group expectations before making a commitment.

- Among interested participants, consider guidelines that will help to get the group off to a good start. Sample guidelines include:
  - Make a commitment to meet regularly (e.g., once a month for an hour and a half).
  - Establish a period of commitment after which time people may choose to step out of the group and/or new members may join the group (e.g., one year).
  - Decide how each gathering will flow (e.g., *Will it begin with a meal or snacks? Should it include prayer at the beginning and/or end? Should it in-*)
clude some time just to “catch up” with one another? Will it be based around discussion of a common reading, or a case study brought by a member of the group?). More details on possible structures are found below.

Promise to keep confidential whatever is discussed within the group and to navigate dual relationships within the group carefully.

- Come to agreement about how various responsibilities will be divided among group members (e.g., Who will be responsible for sending out a reminder about the meeting? Who will plan prayer? Who will host? Who will facilitate discussion and monitor the time?).

*Redeeming Administration* is a great book with which to launch an administrators’ spirituality or support group and offers material to help a group through its first twelve to fifteen months. You might simply follow the arrangement of the book beginning any time of the year and utilize the suggested discussion questions for each gathering included in the guide.

Your group may also want to use the prayer services available to accompany this book. *Redeeming Administration: Praying with Our Saintly Companions* provides brief prayers for use on the feast days of each of the books saints. There is one feast for each month of the year except for May, which seems not to be a good month for holy administrators for some reason! But you will find two saints remembered in June, one of which you can simply celebrate a bit early in May. This gives you an alternative sequence for your gatherings since the saints do not appear in order according to the calendar.

Certainly you will want to structure your meeting format to suit your group’s needs and emerging personality. The following is one possible template using four simple steps for a series of fifteen, ninety-minute sessions.
Template for Administrators Group Gatherings

1. Opening Prayer and Silence  (10 minutes)

2. Reporting on Insights and Actions  (20 minutes) In this template, each session ends by asking group members to identify and write down an action item for the coming week or another period of time until the group meets again. At the next meeting the group can then hear from each member an update about what has been going on in his or her life, with special attention to the action item named at the end of the last meeting. Have each member report on how she or he did in terms of that action item and any changes that have been noticed as a result of it. A good way to focus this step in the process is to ask whether group members are changing how they approach the work of administration because of their time together.

3. Discussion of Advance-Reading Material  (50 minutes) See below for suggested discussion questions for each session.

4. Closing Prayer and Silence  (10 minutes)
Suggested
Advance-Reading
Selections
and Discussion
Questions
Gathering 1:

Laying a Foundation /
Defining Our Terms

Advance Reading: *Redeeming Administration*, pp. xi—xiii

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you make of Garrido’s definition of spirituality? How does this resonate with or differ from your own working definition of spirituality?

2. What aspects of your job do you find most life-draining and what aspects do you find most life-giving?

3. What do you make of the idea that work—even administrative work—can be part of God’s plan for us to become more holy, healthy, saintly people?

4. How does your feeling toward your office change if you imagine it as the chapel in which you worship and give honor to God each day? Write down one small change you can make to your office space this week to remind you that it is sacred space—the space of your spiritual journey.
Gathering 2:

Breadth of Vision

Advance Reading: *Redeeming Administration*, pp. 13–26

Discussion Questions:

1. How has your experience of administration expanded your vision of the whole of your institution’s life? In what specific ways has it stretched you to love more widely?

2. Share the story of a time when you let go of your own agenda or aspiration because you realized that there was a larger common good that, as administrator, you needed to pursue? What lingering feelings do you have about this decision?

3. Is there a situation in your current administrative ministry in which you feel challenged to take a broader view? What wisdom might the group offer about how to embrace the big picture in this situation?

4. What insights does the life of St. Angela offer in your efforts to live with a big-picture vision?

5. At the conclusion of this conversation, make note of one new thing you will try this week or month to expand your vision as an administrator.
Gathering 3:

Generativity

Advance Reading: *Redeeming Administration*, pp. 27–40

Discussion Questions:

1. What is your attitude toward work? Does your work evoke images of curse or blessing for you? In what ways does your administrative ministry give you the opportunity to experience work as generative?

2. Tell the story of a time in your work as an administrator when you faced a moment of decision between generativity and stagnation and you chose generativity. What do you most remember about this moment? How did it feel?

3. Which is a greater danger for you: the malignancy of stagnation or the maladaptation of over-generativity? What most hinders you from being able to exercise generativity in a consistently healthy and wholesome way?

4. What wisdom exists in the group about strategies for living a healthy generativity? What have others discovered about when to say yes to a new opportunity and when to say no?

5. What insights does the life of Bl. Jordan of Saxony offer regarding healthy generativity?

6. What do you take away from this conversation about generativity? Write down one new thing you want to try in your ministry or some insight you want to make sure to remember in coming weeks.
Gathering 4:

Trust

Advance Reading: Redeeming Administration, pp. 41–54

Discussion Questions:

1. Has your experience of administration increased your sense of trust in others? In yourself? In your ministry? In God?

2. Talk about a time when your work as an administrator urged you to trust and things worked out better than you expected. Then share the story of a time when things did not turn out as well as you expected. What allows you to continue choosing trust, even when things do not work out as hoped?

3. Is there a situation in your current administrative ministry in which you are discerning whether it is the right time to increase trust? What is the wisdom of the group around when and how to best practice trust in this situation?

4. What insights do you take from the life of St. Louise de Marillac regarding the invitation to trust?

5. At the conclusion of this conversation, what is one insight about trust you want to remember this week or month as you return to your work? Write it down.
Gathering 5:

Agape

Advance Reading: *Redeeming Administration*, pp. 55–66

Discussion Questions:

1. What has your experience in administration taught you about the mystery of love and its many faces?

2. Tell the story of a time when you poured out your energy for another or others who never knew how much of yourself you were giving to them. How did this feel? What motivated you?

3. Is there a situation in your current job where God may be inviting you to love more freely, without reward or recognition? What is the wisdom of the group about how to discern when and how to give of yourself in that situation?

4. What clues does the life of St. Richard of Chichester offer you as to what it might mean to live agape as a way of life?

5. Write down one action of agape you will undertake this week or month at work.
Gathering 6:

Integrity

Advance Reading: *Redeeming Administration*, pp. 67–80

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think the poet and philosopher John O’Donohue means when he says that “the only appropriate response to privilege is absolute integrity”? In what ways are you in a position of privilege, even though it may not always feel like it?

2. Share the story of a time when your work as an administrator invited you to greater integrity and you changed your behavior? What made this possible?

3. Is there a situation in your current ministry in which what you say you believe and what you actually do need to be better harmonized? What is the wisdom of the group concerning how to go about making this change?

4. Is there a situation in which what your institution professes as a value and what it is actually doing need to be brought into greater harmony? What is the wisdom of the group concerning how to respond to this perceived discrepancy?

5. What insight does the life of St. Bruno offer as you ponder the call to greater integrity?

6. What do you take away from this conversation about integrity? Write down one new thing you want to try in your ministry or some insight you want to make sure to remember in the coming week or month.
Gathering 7:
Humility

Advance Reading: Redeeming Administration, pp. 81–92

Discussion Questions:

1. What events in your administrative work evoke “identity quakes”? Which is the greater temptation for you in moments of identity quake—blaming others or blaming yourself?

2. Can you tell the story of a time when you were able to learn something new about yourself in the course of your administrative ministry? What has been the fruit of this discovery?

3. Is there a situation in your current job in which you might need to be more honest with yourself? What is the wisdom of the group concerning strategies for being increasingly honest?

4. What clues does the story of St. Martha offer in regard to practicing humility? Jot down one way you might try to incorporate this practice into your work in the coming week.

5. At the conclusion of this conversation, write down one new insight you want to hold onto this week or this month in terms of humility.
Gathering 8:

Courage

Advance Reading: Redeeming Administration, pp. 93–106

Discussion Questions:

1. How do you balance humility and courage in your administrative ministry? How do you know when to say, “I’m not sure I can do this; I need help,” versus the moment to say, “I’m not sure I can do this, but I need to act”?

2. Tell the story of a time when you stirred into flame the Spirit that lives within you in order to confront a difficult challenge. How did this feel?

3. Is there a situation in your current job where you can (and maybe should) be more courageous? A situation you have been avoiding that you know you need to address? What is the wisdom of the group regarding strategies for overcoming hesitancy?

4. What insights does the life of St. Ambrose offer regarding the righteous practice of courage? How can you use these to become a better administrator?

5. To what act of courage are you ready to commit this week or month as a fruit of this conversation? Write it down.
Gathering 9:

Reflection

Advance Reading: Redeeming Administration, pp. 107–120

Discussion Questions:

1. How has administration slowed your judgment process and led you to become more reflective? Tell the story of a time when you changed direction because of what you learned in the process of reflecting?

2. What aspects of your job most hinder reflection? What aspects most invite or encourage it?

3. Is there a situation in your administrative ministry in which God is calling you to assess and reflect? What is the wisdom of the group concerning how to recognize times that invite reflection?

4. How does the life of St. Joseph Mukasa speak to you about living a life of reflection within complex circumstances?

5. What do you take away from this conversation about reflection? Note one new thing you want to try in your ministry or some insight you want to make sure to remember in the coming weeks.
Gathering 10: Humor

Advance Reading: *Redeeming Administration*, pp. 121–136

Discussion Questions:

1. Share the story of a time when your work as an administrator evoked a new capacity to laugh at things in a way that you would not have before that experience.

2. Is the humor that you enjoy in your work right now primarily humor of deprecation or elevation? What are the clues that help you to distinguish between the two?

3. Is there a situation in your current job where you might stop getting upset and start laughing? Is there a situation where you may be challenged to stop laughing and try another approach? What is the wisdom of the group about how to discern the righteous use of humor in such situations?

4. What possibilities does the life of St. Thomas More illumine regarding the role of holy humor in administration?

5. What do you take away from this conversation about humor? Write down one new thing you want to try in your ministry or some insight you want to make sure to remember in the coming weeks.
Gathering 11: Forgiveness

Advance Reading: *Redeeming Administration*, pp. 137–152

Discussion Questions:

1. What have you learned about the process of forgiveness from your experience in administration?

2. Tell about a time when you were able to forgive a supervisor or a coworker. What made it possible? What did you learn about yourself?

3. Share the story of a time when you have been forgiven by a supervisor or coworker. What made this possible? What did you learn about yourself?

4. Is there a situation in your current ministry where you may be challenged to “let go of every hope for a better past”? What is the wisdom of the group around knowing when it is time to let go?

5. What insights does the life of St. Mary MacKillop offer you concerning forgiveness in the workplace?

6. What effort toward forgiveness are you ready to commit to this week or month as a fruit of this conversation? Write it down.
Gathering 12: Embrace Death

Advance Reading: Redeeming Administration, pp. 153–168

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some of the small deaths you have experienced as an administrator? What have they taught you about the act of dying?

2. Share the story of a time at work when you were able to graciously let go of something very significant to you. How did this feel? What happened to you in the process?

3. Is there a situation in your work where you think God may be inviting you to embrace dying? What is the wisdom of the group about how to discern between suffering from which one should walk away and suffering toward which it seems important to walk?

4. How does the life of St. Rose Philippine Duchesne speak to your own struggle to let go?

5. To what act of “letting go” are you ready to commit this week as a fruit of this conversation? Write it down.
Gathering 13: Hope

Advance Reading: Redeeming Administration, pp. 169–186

Discussion Questions:

1. How has your experience of administration increased your capacity to hope?

2. Tell the story of a time when your work as an administrator required you to live by hope. Share about a time when you thought you knew how the puzzle pieces of life fit together, and God surprised you with an alternative picture of reality.

3. Is there a situation in your current job where you could really use an infusion of hope? What is the wisdom of the group concerning sustaining hope in particularly tough times?

4. What insights does the life of St. Gregory offer to you about what it means to live by hope?

5. What do you take away from this conversation about hope? Write down one new thing you want to try in your ministry or some insight you want to make sure to remember in the coming week.
Gathering 14: Time

Advance Reading: *Redeeming Administration*, pp. 187–200

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some ways that “the devil” regularly comes to you in your administrative ministry “disguised as more”?

2. What wisdom exists in the group concerning how to recognize when the invitation to “the more” is the voice of God and when it is the voice of evil?

3. How do you interpret God’s command to honor the Sabbath at this time in your life?

4. Which of Garrido’s six suggestions for living righteously with time do you think are most valuable to you right now? What additional suggestions from your experience do you want to add and share with the group?

5. Write down one new practice you will experiment with this week or month in order to live rightly with time.
Gathering 15:
Wrapping Up

Advance Reading: *Redeeming Administration*, pp. 201–204

Discussion Questions:

1. If you were to write a Morning Offering to help administrators give the stuff of each day to God in prayer, what would you say? Share these prayers with the group and discuss what common themes emerge.

2. Has your experience of administration changed at all the way that you participate in Eucharist? What connections are you now seeing between what you do in your office and what we do as a community at the altar?

3. This book contains twelve spiritual habits that administration can cultivate, but the list hardly needs to be confined to twelve. What additional habits would you add to Garrido’s list? What “more” do you discover administration inviting you to right now?

4. Of the many practices, actions, and insights you’ve attempted to integrate into your administrative ministry this past year, which ones are keepers to which you want to commit for the long haul?
Extending

*Redeeming Administration*

into the Future

After your group has concluded its reading and discussion of *Redeeming Administration*, chances are that members will know each other quite well and may be interested in moving to a deeper level of reflection with one another. The case study method can be a powerful means of fostering ongoing spiritual growth and community building. Here is how it works:

For each gathering a different member of the group presents a “case incident” from his or her work as an administrator. An “incident” can be any short snippet of one’s ministry that seems to hold particularly strong emotional resonance. It could be something as large as letting an employee go or something as small as rearranging one’s desk drawer organizer. The key is that it is a moment that—for whatever reason—lingers in one’s mind. These “lingering moments” tend to be the ones that hold the most revelatory potential for us. Our emotions are trying to give us the clue that a “teaching moment” has been had—a moment from which we have something more to learn.

It is important that case incidents be written in advance of the gathering rather than simply presented orally. Writing forces the presenter to refine one’s thoughts, let go of side topics, and focus on the essential facts of the incident. It requires one to choose one’s words intentionally and helps guard against judging the actions of everyone involved by reporting only what happened, not commenting on why. Follow these simple guidelines in writing a case incident report: A written case should be no more than one single-spaced typed page. It should describe the incident as objectively as possible, deleting any analysis or interpretation of why the event went the way it did or what it means. The presenter narrates what she or he saw, felt, and thought as the event took place, but does not ascribe perceptions, feelings, or thoughts to other persons in the incident. (Beware, this is easier said than done!) When the group gathers to reflect on a case incident together, one person should be prepared to facilitate the discussion and monitor the time. Consider using the following steps to help guide the reflection process:
1) Ask the presenter to pass around copies of her or his case incident so that each member of the group can have the text available during the reflection. Then invite the presenter to read her or his case incident aloud.

2) After the presenter finishes reading, the group takes a moment to ask questions of clarification about aspects of the event they do not understand. It will be tempting for this period of questioning to get off track quickly. In the early stages of a group’s life, members will tend to ask leading questions rather than clarifying questions (e.g., “Don’t you think you should have…?” “Why didn’t you…?”). They will also become curious about aspects of the case that aren’t really related to the presenter’s spiritual journey (“So tell me about how long your institution has been around…”). The facilitator may need to frequently remind group members to hold non-clarifying questions for later in the process. The goal at this point is simply to make sure the group understands the basics of the case.

3) Take a moment of silence for prayer, asking God to open the ears, eyes, and hearts of the group to hear and receive God’s invitation to fullness of life as administrators.

4) Now the group moves into the first phase of “seeing.” In this stage of the process, the presenter grows silent and listens to what the members of the group see in the incident. Questions to guide this stage include:

   - What are the various threads of personal and institutional history that make up the fabric of this particular event?
   - What role does the larger culture play in this incident occurring? How about the personal history, preferences, and personality of the administrator? What about the patterns of this particular institution’s life?
   - What is really going on here when we look closely?

5) At certain points in time, it will become clear that efforts at seeing are going to be clouded by the interpretive lenses that each administrator wears—those biases through which each sees. Allow members of the group simply to become aware and to articulate when they are aware that their seeing may be colored by a particular experience in their own lives.
6) Then, the group moves to a second phase of seeing in which they look again from the angle of the spiritual habits explored in *Redeeming Administration*. They highlight places in the incident where the presenter may have been invited to practice trust or forgiveness or hope, and consider ways in which that invitation was received or possibly missed. This phase in the process certainly requires the greatest vulnerability and openness on the part of the presenter. The pursuit of virtue, according to Catholic theology, requires great creativity and discernment. If it were always clear what virtue should be practiced in what circumstance, life would be a great deal easier, but such clarity is not often granted this side of heaven. There will often be disagreement within a group about whether a particular moment most called for humility or for courage, for humor or for direct confrontation. It is in the discussion around what each member of the group sees that wisdom begins to emerge—not necessarily in any one person’s insights but within the group as a whole. Questions to guide this stage include:

- To which of the twelve spiritual habits do you see the presenter being invited in this case? Are there other invitations that you see beyond the twelve discussed in the book?

- Where do you see the invitation being accepted? Where is it missed?

- What other ways might this invitation have been received and virtue practiced?

7) Allow another moment of silence in which the group sits with what they have seen and heard and considers how it speaks to their own ministry as administrators.

8) Ask the presenter to name one or two insights that she or he will take from this reflection to consider further during the week. Is there an action she or he wants to take this coming week as an administrator? Then ask each person in the group the same questions. Even though it is not his or her case that has been reflected on, generally there will be insights that apply to his or her own life as well. Though the experience belongs to another, the invitation to ongoing conversion belongs to all who are committed to the spiritual journey.

In my experience, it takes about an hour and fifteen minutes for a group to adequately reflect on a single case. I have found that groups with fewer than four members sometimes struggle to generate a robust, multi-perspective reflection. Groups
larger than eight tend to have too many voices for all to be heard well. It is only over the course of multiple case reflections that the full fruit of the method begins to emerge. Group members will begin to see threads that permeate all of the cases, regardless of who presented. They will also begin to see particular themes in each member’s ministry that repeat themselves over time. With repetition comes even greater clarity and the possibility for real personal transformation.