

## What is a Servant Leader? Who is a Servant Leader?

“What is a Servant Leader? Who is a Servant Leader?”

These are the foundational questions for the discussion held on April 10<sup>th</sup> at BELIEVES when Janice Givens, Founder of the Young Adults Ministry for Archdiocese of Atlanta, shared her insights and engaged in dialogue with those in attendance on these questions and more..



“I just have to be a screen door to let the Holy Spirit go through,” Givens said when opening the session with her remarks.

“It’s interesting that all these big things in my life are hitting this week – a Catholic radio station launching, this BELIEVES talk, a diaper collection effort for missions in Jamaica.

“Holy Spirit come and use me however You need.”

Givens went on to share she believes there was an exact reason for someone to be present in the audience on April 10<sup>th</sup> versus when the session had been scheduled several months ago but had to be rescheduled due to snow hitting Atlanta.

When it comes to who is a servant leader, Givens said ultimately, Jesus is the greatest servant leader.

“Being a servant leader doesn’t mean laying down and letting people walk over you. It’s empowering others with gifts from within – finding the gift and using it for a common goal,” she said. “Volunteering is a short-term concept, but using gifts is a whole other story – pouring out yourself to find the common goal.”

Givens’ past has been filled with a lot of different jobs.

“I have done many different things including ministry, being a part or coordinating big events like the Super Bowl and World Cup, starting Young Adults ministry for the Archdiocese of Atlanta, and more.”

Then she shared a reflection she for her that she believes applies to everyone.

“Don’t ask, ‘God what is your plan for my life?’ Rather ask, ‘God, how does my life fit in Your plan?’ Whew! That’s so freeing and takes the pressure off. Maybe it’s just a smile in the grocery store.”

She then added, we need to get rid of “should” and just “be.”

One recent situation she found herself in seems rather innocuous on the surface – but when seeing it from how the Spirit moved, it was anything but that.

“Yesterday, I was at Panera visiting with someone for 1.5 hours, when a lady named Nicole commented on the cross I was wearing,” Givens recalled. “Before long she had asked me about my cross three times, invited me to her church, wanted to go on the mission trip to Jamaica, and wanted to pray over me.”

The person who Givens had been visiting with later asked her how long she had known Nicole.

“I responded, ‘How long have we been here?’ and she said, ‘An hour and a half.’ I said, ‘That’s how long I have known her.’”

Givens then went on to share more thoughts about who a servant leader is.



“To be a servant leader is to be present in a state of complete surrender, and do little things with great love.”

The actual phrase “servant leadership” was coined by Robert Greenleaf, in *The Servant as Leader*, an essay that Greenleaf first published in 1970. In that essay, Greenleaf said that the servant-leader is servant first ...then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead once the natural feeling of wanting to serve is present first.

“A lot of times we forget to be Christ-like when doing Christ-like ministry,” Givens commented. “We have to be present every moment.”

Servant leaders believe that...

1. Every person has value and deserves civility, trust, and respect
2. People can accomplish much when inspired by a purpose beyond themselves

According to Edmonds, the five practices of servant leaders include the following...

3. **Clarify and reinforce the need for service to others**  
Servant leaders educate the members of their team through their words and actions, and they encourage their people to set aside self-serving behaviors in favor of serving others.
4. **Listen intently and observe closely**  
Servant leaders really listen to their people, and they actively solicit their participation, their ideas, and their feedback. In time, they get to know the worldview of each one of their employees, and they tailor their leadership approach accordingly.
5. **Act as selfless mentors**  
Servant leaders know that by helping to guide the people who work for them, they will help their employees learn vital skills that will both improve their performance, and improve them as people.
6. **Demonstrate persistence**  
Servant leaders realize that one or two conversations may not have the desired change in an employee's assumptions or mindset. So they are tenacious and invest whatever time it takes to educate and inspire servant leadership practices in the members of their team.
7. **Lovingly hold themselves and others accountable for their commitments**  
Servant leaders know that no one is perfect, and everyone makes mistakes—including themselves. With that in mind, they push for high standards of performance, service quality, and alignment of values throughout the team, and they hold themselves and their people accountable for their performance.

One key of being a servant leader that Givens told everyone is rather difficult for her is listening.

“This is tough for me sometimes as an extrovert – but then in small things, like when meeting people and giving them a hug, I’ll make a sign of the cross on their back when hugging them to bless them.”

Beyond listening, another key to being a servant leader, in Givens’ view, is to lovingly hold one’s self and others accountable for their commitments.

What does this look like?

The central question Givens says we need to keep in mind when it comes to accountability is – *How can I help you to do what you said, but not do it for you?*

“You have to allow others to fail,” stated Givens. “I am denying you of a miracle if I take what you’ve committed back from you. We have to allow it to be messy – this is when the beauty happens.”

CTK Parishioner John Monroe then asked Givens who she thinks is a good living example of a servant leader.

Givens paused.

“The fact you paused says a lot,” commented Monroe.

CTK Parishioner Tim Doyle, then said he felt Pope Francis is a good example of a servant leader.

“I’ve heard Arthur Blank really lets people do what they do best,” added Givens. “Father Josh Allen also comes to mind.”

Fernando Silva, a regular attendee at BELIEVES, then mentioned another person he felt was a good example of a servant leader.

“We’ve had one here ... Coach Bill Curry.”

Nancy Coveny, Executive Director of the Catholic Foundation of North Georgia, then mentioned “I think Clarence Smith is another.”

Looking for the common thread in all the names mentioned, Givens noted that the common denominator amongst all the examples is they let the best come out in people.

“One thing I think we need is a 6-8 week series on coaching so people can be the best Catholics possible, and form habits of Christ. Msgr. Gregory in Jamaica with Mustard Seed is all on me for this.”

Msgr. Gregory has told Givens that if we can create time with Jesus for 2.4 minutes per day (face-to-face time), things will change.

Within the Mustard Seed community, Msgr. Gregory has all staff take 2 hours to bring each disabled child to the adoration chapel, now that they’ve put adoration chapels in place all throughout the community.

“It’s really the kids being the guardian for the adults,” said Givens. “There’s been tremendous change ever since all the adoration chapels get put in.”

As the session began to come to a close, Givens decided to share a rather personal reflection from her life in recent years that she felt ties to all that was discussed.

“When I had breast cancer at 41, I heard a saying from someone which was, ‘Don’t bother praying if you’re going to worry, and don’t bother worrying if you’re going to pray,’” said Givens.

“I love truisms, and I’ve been living by this in my life ever since. I like to live faith with joy, invitation, adventure – including inviting others into do things with our family.”

