

Blackrock, Cork  
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## **Introduction**

In the past, church leadership was highly centralised and autocratic. Pope Francis is trying to encourage a different, more collaborative kind of leadership. This affects us here too because in two years' time there is to be a National Synod.

## **Topic**

What are we looking for in leadership?

## **Steps**

What I'm going to say next applies, I think, to leadership across the faith community – pastoral councils, parish clergy, religious orders and dioceses. In our leaders we need the following qualities:

First of all a person of faith and prayer. It might seem strange to have to say that, but it has not always been the case. So, someone who knows what it is like to be on a spiritual journey, with all the ups and downs.

Secondly, we look for someone who genuinely cares, a proper pastor or shepherd. The leader's outlook has to be for those in his or her care, first of all. Not, in other words, their own needs or status or even the institution. We've all experienced that in the past and still sometimes in the present.

In the third place, a leader has to be a reasonably decent administrator – able to manage correspondence and meetings. This has often become a priority but should not. If a leader is lacking in this, help can be brought in without too much difficulty. The skills can be learned.

Finally, and most importantly, in a faith leader we look for someone who can read the signs of the times and can help us, as a community of faith, to see where to from here. To my mind, this last one is most often lacking and is really crucial. It means a good deal of understanding of where we are – reading books such as Derek Scally's *The Best Catholic in the World*, or Ellen Coyne's *Are you there, God? Its me, Ellen*.

So four qualities, each important: faith, service, administration and discernment.

## **Conclusion**

It may seem a lot to ask and I guess it is. You never get all four skills equally in one person. If I were to choose, I would put administration in the fourth place and discernment of the times in the first. I would add a fifth: capacity for collaborative leadership – synodality in the new language. The pope is trying to lead by example – but it is a struggle, as we can all see.