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## INTRODUCTION

ROBERT K. MARTIN

The Journal of Religious Leadership has been blessed since its founding with a host of visionary and dedicated persons who have led this organization faithfully. This past year I moved from the Board to the smaller editorial team that produces the journal. On behalf of the JRL editors and board, I want to acknowledge and thank several persons who have prepared the way before me as wise stewards of the journal.

First, we owe a great debt of gratitude to Carson Reed and Stephen Sprinkle who co-edited the journal for a season. I am only now coming to realize the effort it takes to publish the journal; the careful and capable work of Carson and Stephen is immensely appreciated.

Serving on the JRL Board affords a delightful opportunity to work as a team with wonderful colleagues, some of whom have now transitioned off the Board. A special word of thanks and blessing we give to Prof. Craig van Gelder who has retired from an illustrious tenure at Luther Seminary. Craig was a member of ARL even before its founding, and it is an understatement to say that the ARL and JRL would not be here today if it were not for his invaluable contribution. We also are immensely grateful to Emily Click for her many years of service on the JRL board. In addition, we wish Leanna Fuller, our production editor, all the best as she steps away from her board position to take up a well-deserved research leave.

We welcome back former editor Bill Kondrath in a new role as editorial mentor who will guide authors in the writing and publishing process for JRL. We also welcome Karen Dalton onto the JRL board and eagerly anticipate working with her. The JRL is fortunate to have a vigorous board, and I am grateful

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beyond measure for the opportunity to fulfill the mission of the journal with them.

The present issue of the JRL includes five articles that approach the topic of religious leadership from serendipitously harmonious perspectives. The first is from co-authors **Lee Beach** and **Andrew Rutledge**, both of whom hail from Hamilton in Ontario, Canada. This article takes its point of departure from Thomas Friedman who argues that the world is increasingly ‘flat’, which means that traditional structures of institutions and societies are giving way to those which are less hierarchical and more diverse. Beach and Rutledge argue that a flat world requires a style of leadership that welcomes diversity, fosters wide-ranging leadership, and spreads responsibility for organizational health and cohesion broadly.

In a similar vein, but originating in and oriented to Church of Scotland, the article by **Neil Dougall** asks: “What kind of leadership does the Church of Scotland require from its parish ministers if it is to be faithful to its missional vocation?” Given the Church’s numerical decline and the greying of congregations, and given the widespread ebbing of Christendom, what types of leadership will equip for service and build up the body of Christ? He suggests that life-giving leadership will need to be adaptive, servant-like, collaborative, facilitative, and empowering. The implications of a reoriented church leadership for Scotland – and for the wider Church – are significant.

With a view to the seismic shifts in ecclesial institutions and the appropriately radical reorientation in leadership, **Chloe Lynch** brings our attention back around to a fundamental dimension of Christian life and leadership – that of the *prophetic*. Drawing appreciatively upon Walter Brueggemann’s masterful treatment of the prophetic imagination, Lynch argues that the speech of ecclesial leaders should not only make ‘divine reality’ more accessible, but also incarnate. In this theologically rich and eloquent article, Lynch describes prophetic leadership that makes an alternate and eschatological consciousness incarnationally present and real. And further, it cultivates

believers' responsibility to interpret, live, and extend that reality more fully as an enactment of the *missio Dei*.

Approaching change-oriented leadership as well, **Lisa Withrow** deftly takes on the thorny and timely issue of civil discourse in a polarized world. She points to the need for leaders to intentionally identify spaces that are in-between diametrical opposites and to inhabit those liminal spaces with gracious creativity and perseverance. Interim ministry serves as a vivid example of a liminal space that can be fraught with anxiety and conflict. A wise interim minister strives to draw others into holy conversations that transcend the discordant status quo to generate new life-giving possibilities. Just so, leaders in other polarized contexts need to find – and even create – liminal spaces where people can detach from unhealthy and unjust commitments and join together to create salvific rituals and practices that reconcile and restore.

Transformational leadership is all about making something that wasn't there before. It is about creativity. **Thea Mirabella Maeve Wyatt** invites readers to listen to spiritual leaders who engage the artistic process as a spiritual practice that is crucial to their leadership. Not only does art-making nourish them spiritually, but they understand their leadership as an artistic process of creating something new and vibrant in their lives and communities. The essay is constructed from several interviews of church leaders for whom the artistic process helps them to be present in the moment, to be vulnerable and open, and to risk failure in service of creativity. In the end, Wyatt echoes Walter Brueggemann's musing that perhaps an artistic imagination will not only make us better leaders, but more importantly, better humans: "Perhaps the moral life can once again be understood as an aesthetic mode of seeing and beholding, rather than only in terms of decisions and action."<sup>1</sup>

As the world changes so dramatically and rapidly, great pressures come to bear upon those who are in leadership

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<sup>1</sup> John Dykstra Eusden and John H. Westerhoff, III, *Sensing Beauty: Aesthetics, the Human Spirit, and the Church* (Cleveland, Ohio: United Church Press, 1998), 42.

positions. These essays not only remind us of our ultimate and divine call to hope and faithfulness, but each in its own way offers important clues to living and leading hopefully, faithfully, and more effectively in tumultuous times.