

Article

# How Saint Clare of Assisi Guided Her Sisters. Impulses for the Today's Leadership Context

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**Abstract:** Saint Clare and leadership? A lot of research on her person has been done in recent years. However, her importance for today's management has not been taken into account. In this article, we will look more closely at her understanding of leadership and how the medieval saint led the community of her sisters. To do this, we first look at biographical reports and written testimonies (about and written by her) that characterize her leadership actions and behavior. First and foremost, it was her endeavor to lead a life according to Jesus Christ under the privilege of poverty. In this presentation, the excerpts from the canonization process and passages of her order rule are of central importance. These testimonies provide valuable information on her understanding and her leadership style. Her biography, her leadership, and the values that shape her actions provide valuable insights into today's leadership challenges. Through her example, St. Clare can help us to train ourselves as authentic leaders and to reflect on our own leadership and values. She can sensitize people to cultivate an appreciative inner attitude in dealing with others and thus develop our own effect as (leadership) personalities.

**Keywords:** Saint Clare of Assisi; leadership; Franciscan spirituality; 'evangelical' poverty; being serving; virtues; values; behavior

## 1. Introduction

The authors of this volume want to show the diversity and relevance of Franciscan Spirituality for postmodern society and the globalized world. This article presents a feminine perspective of Franciscan spirituality and shows the importance of St. Clare of Assisi for today's management and leadership. Clare of Assisi is one of the great women of the Christian and Franciscan tradition. In this article we want to inform about Clare's understanding of leadership. We focus on the specific attitudes of her spirituality, in the light of the practical question of how to lead others, especially the community of her sisters.

In the life, spirituality and work of Clare of Assisi we can still find an answer to many questions and challenges in today's world of work and leadership. Clare's biography, letters, writings and the Acts of the Process of Canonization are intended to bring us closer to her understanding of management and leadership. The description of the main aspect in her vita and the work with the focus on central values—based on evangelical poverty—will be presented first. In a second step we will focus on the leadership understanding and management style of St. Clare. It becomes clear: leadership means to be servant, to have a sense of responsibility, to be courageous and to be ready to fight for one's own goals. In the final step we will draw conclusions for today's leadership context: First and foremost, we learn from St. Clare about essential virtues and values for the attitude of our own leadership.

### 1.1. Background

Who is Clare of Assisi? Clare was born in 1193/1194 as the eldest daughter of Favarone di Offreduccio and his wife, Ortulana, in the upper town of Assisi. The son of a merchant, Francis of Assisi (1182–1226), lived in her hometown, whose “scandalous way of life” in turning to the poor and socially excluded must have deeply impressed her (see [Carney 1993](#); [Dalarun 2005](#); [Kreidler-Kos 2003](#); [Kreidler-Kos et al. 2015](#)). He abandoned a life of luxury for a life devoted to Christianity after reportedly hearing the voice of God ordering him to rebuild the Christian church and live in poverty. St. Francis represented a radical way of life. He established an attitude based on love for people and God, and considered it his mission in life to live the gospel. Clare felt called to follow the gospel, as Francis taught and lived. On the night of Palm Sunday 1212, she joined Francis and his community. It was a conscious decision against family policy, deliberately against a predetermined path to wealth and security of the residential tower. Instead, she chose a life of seclusion, in the evangelical vision (she received from the preaching of Francis of Assisi) she rejected the prestige and privileges offered by her noble family. This is why she chose to live in worship, building a new kind of monastic life which can be described as, “ . . . an enclosed contemplative life in an urban setting with highest poverty” ([Bekker 2005](#), p. 2). During her lifetime, she founded a monastic religious order for women in the Franciscan tradition. She is the first female leader in the history of Christianity to write a religious rule sanctioned by pontifical approval ([Gregg 2017](#), p. 35).

On 11 August 1253, two days after pontifical approval of her rule, Clare died. Within two months of Saint Clare’s death, Pope Innocent IV issued the papal bull, *Gloriosus Deus*, 18 October 1253, in which he entrusted Bishop Bartholomew of Spoleto with the responsibility of promoting the Cause of her canonization. On 24 November 1253, they visited the convent of San Damiano in Assisi and officially interviewed under oath thirteen of the sisters who had lived with Saint Clare. Two other sisters, one of whom was in the infirmary, were interviewed on 28 November 1253, and, on the same day, Sister Benedetta, the Abbess of San Damiano, spoke on behalf of the entire community and declared the willingness of all the sisters report on the holiness of Saint Clare. Two years later, on 12 August 1255, Clare was canonized by Pope Alexander IV ([Armstrong 2006](#)).

The religious community that Clare founded spread rapidly throughout the rest of Italy, Europe and the world. The Poor Clares or Poor Sisters (as the Order is called today) boast, 800 years later, over 20,000 active members in 76 countries ([Bekker 2005](#), p. 2).

### 1.2. Aim of the Study

What does St. Clare have to do with leadership? How does she lead her sister community? In the research literature of recent years, these questions have only attracted particular attention so far. In the American research landscape, there are some approaches that associate Clare with servant leadership, especially her letters to Agnes of Prague ([Bekker 2005](#); [Karecki 2008](#); [Christenson 2013](#); [Till and Petraný 2013](#)). There are also explanations for Clare’s incarnated leadership ([Self 2008](#)) as well as a connection between Clare and the leadership of the Sacred Heart ([Burchard 2012](#)). In German-speaking countries, there is a study on Clare’s potential as a mentor ([Löser and Zimmerbauer 2010](#)) and little studies on Clare and Leadership ([Dienberg 2016](#); [Gerundt 2018](#)).

With this article, we want to contribute and show what distinguishes St. Clare of Assisi in her leadership actions and behavior. For this purpose, different sources (The Legend of Saint Clare, the Acts of the Process of Canonization as well as the Form of Life of the Poor Ladies, her Testament, her Blessings and excerpts from her Correspondence with Agnes of Prague) are often used to draw an authentic picture of her management understanding and leadership style.

It should be noted: her community has grown rapidly and her personality also has an enormous impact on other great personalities, especially women of that time. One example is princess Agnes of Prague (1203–1282) ([Van den Goorbergh and Zweerman 2000](#); [Mueller 2001](#); [Ledoux 2003](#)) who took the example of St. Clare. She exchanged her life of aristocratic privilege for a life in contemplation and prayer as a “poor lady” ([Armstrong 2006](#), p. 39).

## 2. Results

### 2.1. Embracing the Poor Christ

In the truest sense of the word, leading and guiding people means accompanying people and the community on their way to God, creating and securing the framework conditions so that individual and the community succeed in leading a life pleasing to God. Central to the understanding of the leadership of St. Clare is the knowledge of the source from which she lives and through which she can lead. It is her trust in a reliable foundation: Clare of Assisi wrote about her intention to live her life exclusively out of Lord's vocation: "Observing the holy gospel" (FLCI 1:1) became a life's work for her, but also for St. Francis and future generations. Clare only wanted to be dependent on Christ and to live every day to serve and share the gospel. "Gaze upon him, consider him, contemplate him, as you desire to imitate him", she wrote to her confidante Agnes of Prague (2 LAg 18:19). To embrace the poor Christ, that was St. Clare's program. She aligned herself with Jesus Christ and let herself be guided by him. Her life plan was about God, about God-seeking, about meeting God. "Her whole life is founded in God" (Proc XI: 2). She was held and supported by God. Clare gained strength through daily prayer. She drew from this source. As a dying woman Clare cheered God, even in a time when her life's work was not yet finished. She has a source that gave her support and orientation and at the same time gave her enough security to evolve herself further, to develop her own personality and to dare something new.

Clare seemed to be aware of her vocation: she did not speak of herself in a small or simple way—although these attributes have always been attributed to her. In her Testament, she stated that the Lord had "called us to such great things" (TestCl 21). She had the confidence to go out and to find out how she could live her vocation and how she could "please God". Considering the fact that Clare had no earthly model for her purpose, she did "pioneering work".

Her courage and determination were nourished by her trust in God: Clare could make a difference because she was moved by God. She followed the footsteps of Jesus Christ and experienced herself as led by God. Clare first received in her life and then accepted the "call of Jesus". She followed Jesus and became an example for others. She encouraged people to follow a new path. She herself was a source of inspiration for many more women of her time, who also wanted to get away from the usual life and to follow another, higher purpose. Thus, her "religious leadership was used by others in the women's religious movement in the thirteenth century as an example setting forth a timeless model of female sanctity" (Gregg 2017, p. 35).

### 2.2. Clare and Her Community of the Poor Ladies

From the beginning of May 1212, a new community was built around Clare of Assisi in San Damiano (Mueller 2010; Kuster 2013). Clare and her biological sister and first companion Agnes were accompanied, in the course of time, by new followers. Without fixed structures, the women first went an innovative way: together they led a religious, unmarried and poor life, with sedentary-contemplative and social-charitable elements, (Kreidler-Kos et al. 2015, p. 96) which faced the world and at the same time were protected by an inner form, and were bound to a fixed place and renounce an evangelical wandering life (Kreidler-Kos et al. 2015, p. 101).

What was special about Clare and her sister congregation was the Privilege of Poverty (Mueller 2006; 2010, p. 50). Clare thus made an unimaginable request to the Pope and the Church. But she managed to defend this way of life without mighty support, economic, or financial security, privileges or property. It is this very concrete form of poverty that has its roots in the incarnation and life of Jesus Christ. It expresses itself in lifestyle, manual labor, simple houses, and the renunciation of all possession. Poverty is therefore more than renouncement or renunciation of material things; it is a basic attitude, a habit of life: to recognize oneself as dependent, not to make oneself larger than one is, to experience life as a gift, to be open to what one encounters in the world and other people, to search and find God in the simple things of daily life. The attitude of being poor, emptying oneself and being

open to the better, the greater and the different is a fundamental attitude in the Franciscan–Clarian spiritual life. This openness on the other hand, leads to a possible transformation in the encounter with the world and with others. It can happen that this openness transforms the individual. Something happens to him or her—and the individual must let it happen. Thus, the community in San Damiano does not fit into any of the previously established patterns (Kreidler-Kos et al. 2015, p. 99) and Clare’s way of life was for a woman at this time no easy task and a novelty in church history.

The period from 1216 to 1226 (death of Francis) is regarded as the stage of the formation of the young women’s community. In the beginning St. Clare and her companions did not have a written rule to follow beyond a very short formula vitae given by St. Francis. This form of life was a guideline in the initial phase. Clare wrote the final rule, the “Form of life of the Order of the Poor Sisters” and fought until the end of her life for papal recognition. After the pope had issued a new regulation for women’s communities, which in turn did not address the core of their vocation, Clare began to write her own rule. The Rule presents poverty as the key to the life of a sister of the Poor Ladies.

From the beginning it was recognized that the focus of a sister’s life was “to observe the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, by living in obedience, without anything of one’s own” (Mueller 2010).

Her Form of Life is a transcript of lived experience and her attention is directed to the shaping of life in the community of sisters. Above all, the living relationship of the sisters to one another and to the brothers, which should be characterized by love. For some of the phrases, St. Clare uses the Benedictine Rule and takes the title of abbess, but fills this position with attributes that Francis uses for the Minister General. She therefore did not embody the typical role of the abbess as described in the institutional documents in force at the time, such as the Rule of Hugolino or that of Innocent IV. These rules functioned with a hierarchical understanding of monastic leadership and patronage that Clare did not emphasize in her own rule (Till and Petraný 2013, p. 48).

Sisterly ministry, mutual benefit, and love were central features in Clare’s understanding of community and leadership. The way of life of the poor sisters is primarily based on Clare’s own way of life and takes it as an example. She therefore offers specific guidelines on how to lead and guide the sisters of San Damiano.

### 2.3. Clare’s Understanding of Management and Leadership: *The Abbess is a Servant (for All)*

Clare’s Process of Canonization contains a wealth of material about Clare’s life in the monastery of S. Damiano. It consists of a sworn testimony about the life of Clare. From these Acts we learn that she first had to grow into her role as leader and at first even refused to take over the leadership of the community (Proc I: 6). After a fierce controversy with Francis, she finally assumed the leadership responsibility from 1214, without ever claiming the title “abbess” for herself or calling herself as such. She tried to avoid the title at all costs and presented herself as servant and maid of others (for example Agnes of Prague 1 LAg 2; 1 LAg 33; 3Ag2; 4 LAg 2). Clare had a clear vision and gave a living testimony in her discipleship and commitment to poverty. She also expected from each individual sister this trust in Jesus Christ and his message. In her Testament she wrote:

“For the Lord Himself has placed us as a model, as an example and mirror not only for others, but also for our sisters whom the Lord has called to our way of life as well, that they in turn might be a mirror and example to those living in the world. Since the Lord has called us to such great things that those who are a mirror and example to others may be reflected in us, we are greatly bound to bless and praise God and to be strengthened more and more to do good in the Lord” (TestCl; see also: FLCl 8:10.14–16)

But it was Clare’s resistance and refusal to accept the markings and privileges of the religious temporal forces of her time, her courage, her determination, and her energy that make a difference. The community around her went its own way with a common goal in mind. Attitudes of humility and awe, solidarity, gratitude, love, and kindness were of central importance.

What does that say about the woman, who had led her sister community for 40 years and how was she perceived in her leadership? The sisters described the Saint in her (leadership) acting as maternal and caring. Love for and service to other people was at the center. Thus, Clare presented anything but a handsome style of leadership that reflected the feudal power structure (Kreidler-Kos et al. 2015, p. 114). She lived a radical understanding of service. For the rest of her life, she did not want to be in the foreground. This is why she placed herself at the service of others—and for God. This basic understanding forms the maxim of how to lead and live: She was a servant for each individual sister and cared for the benefit of the whole community. This was also an expression of her humility.

From the files of the Process of Canonization we learn about Clare's practical approach to mentality and everyday virtues. Clare, although abbess, considered herself the servant of all. She washed the feet and cleaned the commodes of the sick, and covered her sisters at night from the cold.

(Proc VI: 7,24). Clare embodied an attitude that manifested itself in concrete actions and deeds, less through words than through gestures and signs that touched and showed that she cared for each individual sister, her search for God, and the whole community. Clare lived a "foot-washing-leadership" (Karecki 2008).

This paper uses Clare's Form of Life (Rule) as a central reference to describe her understanding of management and leadership. Especially Chapter 4 gives relevant statements for today's management and leadership, as it is about the structure of the community. Clare stated that the abbess should look after her sisters like a mother. "She should with discernment provide them clothing according to the diversity of persons, places, seasons, and cold climates, as it shall seem expedient to her by necessity" (FLCI 2:16). "Abbess and mother" are mentioned in the same breath (FLCI 4:7; TestCI 63).

She expressed that sisters who had an office, especially the abbess, should be guided by her example and love, not by authority and status: "I beg that sister who will have the office [of caring for] the sisters to strive to exceed others more by her virtues and holy life than by her office so that encouraged by her example" (TestCI 61).

Again it becomes clear that the "success for the community" depends on one's own attitude. If this is characterized by love and altruistic behavior, the sisters willingly followed their life in the community and make it obedient (TestCI 61–70).

Several sisters (witnesses) in the Process of Canonization emphasized Clare's great honesty, kindness, humility, compassion, gentleness, righteousness, and patience (Proc I: 1,3; Proc II: 2,8; Proc IV: 3,9; Proc VII: 11,22–24; Proc VIII: 1,1–3; Proc X: 2,4–6; Proc XII: 6). These virtues always apply to strengthen each other and are aimed at welfare and empowerment. In return, Clare empowered her sisters and companions to act in accordance with their values—this is the opportunity for transformation. Clare did not claim "power" alone, and did not commit to a title. Instead, she consistently described herself as servant and maid (1 Ag 2, 1 Ag 33). She acted in the service of love (Mertens 2011). Finally, one of the most important things about her leadership is the fact that she serves as an example for someone who wants to live all life according to the Gospel (Gregg 2017, p. 35).

#### 2.4. Clare's Leadership Style

Clare's leadership style is at first strikingly democratic and fraternal. In the Acts of the Process of Canonization, Sister Pacifica (witness 1) mentions the great importance that the community held for Clare. It represents a pleasant and very demanding form of leadership (Proc I: 14). Sister Cecilia (witness 6) reports that Clare was very gentle and "highly attentive". She drew a "motherly picture" of Clare and emphasized that the community was something precious for her.

The sixth witness testified:

"God chose her as mother of the virgins, as the first and principal abbess of the Order, so that she guarded the flock and strengthened the other sisters of the Order with her example in the goal of the holy Order. She was certainly most diligent about encouraging and protecting the sisters, showing compassion toward the sick sisters. She was solicitous about serving them,

humbly submitting herself to even the least of the serving sisters, always looking down upon herself" (Proc VI: 2,7–9)

Clare fought for the fellowship with loving zeal. That is why she received the love and appreciation of the sisters (LegCl 38). Clare felt responsible but also grateful for her concrete community (Maier 2011). Especially in the early years of the constitution, the solidarity and friendship of the women who risked a life in poverty together gave Clare power to hold on (Kreidler-Kos et al. 2015, p. 109). Clare, and especially the first sisters, defended the "privilege of poverty" as their most fundamental spiritual treasure. Finally, with *her* Form of Life, Clare gave her community a solid foundation and orientation in *their* way of life.

In the following step, we want to shed more light on single passages of the Rule in which she defines the core ideas for her life-program and the life of future generations. In the first lines of Chapter 4, Clare described the abbess's election procedure and the circumstances that required a new election (4:1–7). An admonition to the abbess (4:8–14) followed. Finally, it was clarified to what extent the community was involved in decisions and had the opportunity to participate (vv. 15–24) (Maier 2011). Clare formulated codes of conduct for living together, which can be sources of inspiration for our way of life. In FLCl 4:8–10 she writes:

"Let whoever is elected reflect upon the kind of burden she has undertaken on herself and to Whom *she must render an account* of the flock committed to her. Let her also strive to preside over the others more by her virtues and holy behavior than by her office, so that, moved by her example, the sisters may obey her more out of love than out of fear. Let her avoid exclusive loves, lest by loving some more than others she give scandal to all."

Clare emphasized the enormous responsibility demanded of the leading sister and described the task of an abbess as a burden for which the respective sister must be accountable. The abbess should act for the community through her example. She has to be convincing in everyday life and finally she has to follow words with deeds. The persons entrusted should be convinced of "love" and of a consequent lifestyle, not by the demonstration of power or perseverance in the formal function (TestCl 59–66). It is a matter of an encounter at eye level and in mutual respect. The abbess should always remember to remain objective and impartial, to renounce personal sympathies in order not to survive or discriminate against anyone. Humility is one of the most cardinal leadership values for her.

Clare was committed to authenticity: the abbess must live the central values and serve the community. Authenticity requires you to be with oneself. It requires to know oneself well, to be self-reflexive with oneself and to seek phases of peace and silence. The retreat allowed Clare to (re)focus herself and to concentrate on the essentials.

Clare wanted to remain silent and pray. The cultivation of the relationship with God is of enormous importance to her. Within the monastery, she created a place where she normally prayed (TestCl 59–66). Clare's neighbor and distant relative, Sister Pacifica, who was one of the first sisters to join Clare in her penitential life, explained that Clare had spent much of the night in vigilant prayer (Proc I:7). The undisturbed and personal prayer was a special value for her—for example in her rule she set the prayer times for her sister community and prayed during periods of illness and crisis. Already on her deathbed she reminded her sisters to "stay in prayer" (Proc X: 10,43). The ability to immerse oneself intensively in prayer, to free oneself from everyday life and worries, gave Clare a different presence, a certain clarity:

"She was vigilant in prayer and sublime contemplation. At times, when she returned from prayer, her face appeared clearer than usual and a certain sweetness came from her mouth." (Proc VI: 3,10) and "When she returned from her prayer, the sisters rejoiced as though she had come from heaven". (Proc I:28)

By cultivating her prayer life and spirituality, Clare was more easily able to be there and take care of herself and others. It allowed her to have a more intense form of presence for her sisters. Several

sisters testified in the Process of Canonization and pointed out that the most important fruits of Clare's prayer were the words of consolation and guidance that she was able to give her sisters (Proc I:9; IV:4; VI:3f.) (Mueller 2010, p. 63).

In addition, her leadership style lived on empowerment, her respected maturity, and the self-responsibility of each sister: The abbess was democratically elected: "In order to preserve the unity of mutual love and peace, let all who hold offices in the monastery be chosen by the common agreement of all the sisters" (FLCI 4:22).

With this determination, Clare trusted the sisters that they could judge when an abbess is harming the community. "If at any time it should appear to the entire body of sisters that she is not competent for their service and common welfare, the sisters are bound as quickly as possible to elect another as Abbess and mother" (FLCI 4:8). In this way, the abbess who did not fulfill her "obligation" could be voted out and replaced, so that no sister could claim a permanent office and rely on it. Life in the unity of mutual love and peaceful coexistence was at the center; this should be preserved and protected. All who held offices had a ministry function and the abbess should be the maid of all the sisters (FLCI 10:5). The abbess should know the needs of each of the sisters. The abbess is expected to be attentive to these needs. She must be obedient by listening to the needs of her sisters.

Clare took up the term "obedience": obedience involves the willingness to listen to someone else, to confine oneself to one's own desires for the sake of the other. Obedience is the effort to learn to distinguish all voices that speak. Obedience also means engaging in a common journey. It is not the monastery that creates the community, but the willingness to listen to one another and renounce one's own for the sake of the other. The abbess should inspire the sisters through her virtue and holy way of life. In this way the sisters could obey her more out of love than of fear (FLCI 4:7). Clare explained that the abbess's task was to comfort the advocate and to be the last refuge for the suffering and the restless (FLCI 4:11–12).

Listening to and nurturing the sisterly conversation was an essential part of understanding the role of an abbess and leader. She advised to be a "refuge" (FLCI 4:11–12). It encouraged people to perceive the needs and feelings of other people, especially the sisters, to be ready to talk, and to be responsive to worries and needs. This required a reception on the other side and the attitude of being with the heart of the "listener".

Closely related is a wording from the tenth chapter: The abbess must exhort the sisters, correct them humbly and charitably, and be aware of each other's independence (see FLCI 10:1). When Clare talked about exhortation and correction, we need to think about how she wanted to be understood and how she thought exhortation should be done. For admonition is not identical to criticism—it is more about assistance, encouragement and comfort. It is about solidarity and meeting at eye level. In the correction, the abbess is not the mother of her daughters, but a sister among sisters. As such, she should discipline them with humility and charity. As a sister among sisters, every correction is made by an abbess with the intention of inviting a sister to greater fidelity. Only charity could, of course, convince a sister to feel secure enough to put aside any excuse, listen carefully to the abbess, and reform her conduct. The aim of teaching, personal interaction, and correction of the sisters is fidelity to the *forma vitae* of the sisters—the life to which God has inspired them (Mueller 2010, p. 249).

For example, Clare knew exceptions in the practice of fasting for the weak and the sick. She considered their individuality into account and did not abandon their worries and needs: "If she needs it, the sister may use it; otherwise, let her in all charity give it to a sister who does need it." (FLCI 8:10). For those who could not maintain the hardness of life, she allowed a moderate lifestyle: "Those who are ill may lay on sacks filled with straw and may use feather pillows for their heads; those who need woolen stockings and quilts may use them" (FLCI 8:17–18).

She accordingly called the companions to harmony with one another, goodness, and humility in the monastery. As mentioned earlier, Clare established a democratic leadership model for her sister community. She emphasized the personal responsibility of each sister for the benefit of the community. In the fourth Chapter of the Rule she writes (FLCL 4:15–18):

“The abbess is bound to call her sisters together at least once a week in the chapter, where both she and her sisters should humbly confess their common and public offenses and negligences. There let her consult with all her sisters concerning whatever concerns the welfare and good of the monastery, for the Lord frequently reveals what is better to the youngest.”

Clare formulated how the other sisters are involved in responsibility and decision making. She called her sisters together and held a weekly Chapter. There it was possible to discuss important topics with the entire convent, seek advice, or consult with each other.

First of all, the attitude with which the sisters came together was important for Clare: she described a humble attitude and an honest confession that it is each individual’s responsibility how perfect life or unity is. It is therefore necessary to reflect on the contribution each individual can make to the success of relationships, projects, or tasks. It also resonates with the idea of being at peace with oneself, in one’s own relationship with God and the sisters. It is necessary to order one’s thoughts before talking about community. First of all, the necessary conditions and terms are to be created, only then dialogue and exchange takes place. The exchange of information is consciously addressed to all, not only to a closed circle of sisters. In this way, the entire potential of ideas, creativity and knowledge can be captured, succeed and used for the company. This is why Clare initiated discussions with everyone and sought the opinion of younger people. She sought forms of sisterly dialogue that were characterized by humility and willingness to listen, but also by an inspired and committed approach to authentic conviction.

### 3. Discussion

After examining Clare’s life through her biographies and testimonies and reading what can be deducted from her life, we collected characteristic components of her management understanding and leadership style. The following table gives an overview of the essential components (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Essential components of St. Clare’s leadership understanding

vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clare creates a new form of spiritual life and establishes her own religious order, because previous ways of life do not fit to her understanding of spirituality. [LegCl 13–14]</li> <li>- her vision/ way of life is to observe the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, by living in obedience, without anything of one’s own, and in chastity [FLCl 1:1]</li> <li>- to live in radical evangelical poverty [LegCl 13–14; TestCl 37]</li> <li>- following the footsteps of Jesus Christ [FLCl 1:1; 2 LAg 11]</li> </ul>
resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- faith in God strenghtens her belief in own talents and abilities (The Lord called her to so great) [TestCl 21]</li> <li>- the retreat to silence</li> <li>- her trust in the power of prayer [Proc X: 10,43; LegCl 21]</li> <li>- embracing the poor [LAg]</li> </ul>
(building) community relationships and networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clare could not create her vision all alone; she needs allies [LegCl]</li> <li>- she establishes a new form of community [LegCl 1:1–2]</li> <li>- her community is democratically and fraternally: the common consent of the sisters is necessary [FLCl 4:23; FLCl 10:7]</li> <li>- obedience/listening: readiness to listen to another [FLCl 4:8.15–17.23; FLCl 12:12–13; TestCl 65–66; 2LAg 15.18–19; 4LAg 16–18]</li> <li>- to reflect and to identify the will and needs of the whole community [FLCl 4:23; FLCl 9:5–10]</li> <li>- to be awesome and careful in interaction and communication [LegCl 38; FLCl 4:16; FLCl 10:4; Proc II: 3,14; 6,21; Proc X: 5,12–15]</li> <li>- Clare has a rich network of relationships despite a cloistered-contemplative lifestyle</li> </ul>

Table 1. Cont.

empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clare builds a community that is based on equality [FLCI 4:22]</li> <li>- she wants to accompany the community on their way to God</li> <li>- she has the willingness to entrust followers with power [FLCI 4:17]</li> <li>- she respects and asks for the opinions and skills of her sisters [FLCI 5:4]</li> <li>- she has commitment to the growth of the others [1LAg 3; FLCI 4:17]</li> <li>- she provides opportunities for personal growth and supports personality development [FLCI 4:17; FLCI 7:1.5]</li> <li>- Clare wants to lead her sisters to personal transformation [BICI 14–16]</li> <li>- she wants to lead herself and others to wholeness (healing); [FLCI 4:11–12; LegCI 21–27]</li> </ul>
courage and persistence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clare fights for the approval of her rule till the end of her lifetime</li> <li>- Clare gets out of all security to follow the Lord Jesus Christ [LegCI 7–10]</li> <li>- Clare does not shy away from conflicts and fights against resistance</li> <li>- she is consequent and consistently: Clare does not change her mind, she fights for her ideals, which threaten to dilute again and again</li> <li>- she acts proactively/with foresight: her struggle for the approval of her form of life secures the existence of the community until today [FLCI 4:7; BICI 11–13]</li> </ul>
love	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clare is motherly and caring—these are virtues of every following abbess [FLCI 5:3; FLCI 8:12–16]</li> <li>- she strives to lead others to true fulfillment</li> <li>- Clare has esteem for her followers/her sisters' community</li> <li>- honoring all people and take care about their best [LegCI 38]</li> </ul>
empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- to accept the uniqueness and greatness of the others</li> <li>- to serve others for the sake of serving [FLCI 10:4–5]</li> <li>- to be grateful to others [Proc IV:3,9]</li> <li>- to console those who are afflicted [FLCI 4:11–12]</li> <li>- to be the last refuge for those who are troubled [FLCI 4,11–12]</li> </ul>
humility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- not over-valuing ourselves: Clare rejects the title and expands to be addressed as an abbess [Proc I:6]</li> <li>- it enables to respect the worth of all persons [FLCI 4:15–18]</li> <li>- Unassuming behavior of being humble [1 LAg 2; 2LAg1; 2 LAg 2; 3LAg2; 4LAg2]</li> <li>- Realize: you do not have the answer to everything. It causes to seek the advice of others and listen to their advice [FLCI 4:15–18]</li> <li>- the ability to be vulnerable and humble [Proc VIII 1:1–5]</li> <li>- to have awe for the responsibility: To be an abbess/leader is a burden and demands justification [FLCI 4,9]</li> </ul>
trust and faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- first of all: trust in God [FLCI 1]</li> <li>- to be guided by God (and his Holy Spirit) [TestCI 2–6]</li> <li>- Trust in one's talents and abilities [FLCI 4:7.24]</li> <li>- Trust in others and treat them with respect and goodwill [FLCI 8:12–13; FLCI 4:15–18]</li> <li>- to have integrity and acceptance/respect</li> </ul>
Recognition of responsibility / stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- to have respect for the responsibility. To be an abbess/a leader is a burden and demands justification [FLCI 4,8]</li> <li>- to be a servant: You have to try the best for the community [LAg; FLCI 10:4–5; BICI 5]</li> <li>- necessity to be impartially and objective [FLCI 4:10]</li> <li>- to be an authentic person [FLCI 4:8–9; Proc I: 1,3; Proc II: 2,8; Proc IV: 3,9; Proc VII: 11,22–24; Proc VIII, 1:1–5; TestCI 19–21]</li> <li>- to hold all in sacred trust for the greater good of all people and things [FLCI 2:10; 4:19; 7:1]</li> </ul>
Spirit of serving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- not center attention on her own accomplishments, but rather on other people</li> <li>- to concentrate on service limits, the negative effects of self-interest</li> <li>- Clare lives a radical understanding of service: in word and deed [Proc VI, 7:24]</li> <li>- she is appreciatively, caring and turned to the people [FLCI 8:12–13]</li> <li>- Servant and handmaid in all things [1 LAg 2; 2LAg 1; 2LAg2; 3LAg2; 4LAg2]</li> </ul>

For Clare, it was a development process: she had to grow into her leadership role. It should be noted that there was no direct role model for her to imitate or be guided by [Kreidler-Kos \(2011, 2013\)](#). At first, she was only a companion of Francis, a member with a nonspecific role. Then she was forced to take over the government of the sisters. When she was urged by Francis to take over the leadership, she refused. At first sight, leading and serving seemed incompatible to her. It seemed to be a conflict of interest for her, because she only wanted to be a servant of Jesus Christ and a servant of her sisters. According to the legend, Clare rejected the name and office of abbess and wanted to serve her sisters, but three years after her conversion, pushed by Francis, she accepted the government of the sisters.

She defined her leadership as an office of ministry and service. Later on, her attitude toward this office was the acceptance of a deeper sense of service. As abbess, she carried out family tasks: washing the sisters' hands, serving those who sat at the table, and waiting for those who ate. She rarely gave an order, but did what is necessary spontaneously, preferring to do things herself rather than to command her sisters (LegCl 12).

When we ask if and how the Clarian spirit can be translated into today's leadership, it is advisable to look at approaches such as Greenleaf's concept of Servant Leadership. Clare was a leader who focused on service. She embodied the essential elements that would later include Robert Greenleaf's work on Servant Leadership. He defined the concept as follows (Greenleaf 1998, pp. 18–19):

“The servant-leader is servant first . . . It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. He or she is sharply different from the person who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions.”

Subsequent studies and research derive further criteria and categories from Greenleaf's work. Larry Spears for example identifies ten characteristics of serving leaders in Greenleaf's writings: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of others, and building community (Spears 2010, pp. 25–30; 1998; 2002). “Leadership experts” such as Bolman, Deal, Covey, Fullan, Sergiovanni, and Heifitz also describe these characteristics as essential components of effective leadership. Leadership is, first and foremost, serving people. Service becomes an attitude of life.

The examples of Clare's life story explicitly show that everything depends on a person's attitude. It is not the techniques, the methods, and the concepts that are important, but the attitude towards oneself, one's fellow (wo)men and entrusted goods. Franciscan–Clarian—that is the attitude that aims nothing other than to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ and make it accessible to the world. Clare's leadership was essentially based on her trust and clear orientation towards Jesus Christ, which she recognized in radical poverty. Clare lived her life through her relationship with God and prayer. The cultivation of the prayer life supported her in daily management of ministry and service; it gave her and her sisters the necessary strength, but also structure. From this source, Clare, despite her monastic lifestyle, could act courageously and persistently, building relationships and networks.

As mentioned in the introduction, there are few studies on the understanding of leadership and management of Saint Clare of Assisi, especially in the German-speaking world. Internally, we have also concentrated our research activities more intensively on Francis of Assisi as well (Dienberg 2009; Gerundt 2012; Warode and Gerundt 2013, 2014, 2015; Dienberg and Warode 2015; Warode 2016).

The feminine side of Franciscan Spirituality has recently moved into our focus (Gerundt 2018). The task for the future will be to strengthen and put into practice the essential characteristics of a Franciscan–Clarian understanding of leadership. Similarities, but also the essential differences in the understanding of the two Saints should be worked out. The effort to find, develop and put into practice sustainable leadership concepts is still unbroken. Our task is “to look into the past to inform our present as we discern the direction of our future” (Swan 2014, p. 8).

#### 4. Conclusions: Impact on Leadership Today

Finally, what can we learn about leadership from this medieval woman? Are her life and message applicable in today's situations? Can she talk to the people of the 21st century?

Clare's life and work were marked by a firm inner attitude that made her mature into an authentic leader. She characterized a leadership that is fuelled by the unconditional following of Jesus Christ in poverty, humility, and sisterhood (living like brother and sister). She understood her ministry as a service to others. Clare was fully committed to the vision of the Gospel in evangelical poverty which she had fashioned with Francis and then implemented with the sisters at San Damiano. Without this kind of commitment, the community would have failed and threatened its mission to glorify God

through its way of life (TestCl 13–14). Being faithful to the original vision is the most important form of service that she and every other leader can provide.

What can the ideal of evangelical poverty teach us today? What can we learn from it? Humility and modesty would be useful for many of us today. In contrast to a constant quest for successful self-empowerment, the life and work of St. Clare was marked by a commitment to values and virtues such as solidarity, justice, freedom, and sustainability. It points out to today's leaders that they should be humble towards the given responsibility. Power, leadership, and responsibility should always be associated with humility. It reminds us, how each one of us is a small part of a big whole. Therefore, it is essential to look to after the common good and to subordinate one's own interests to the overriding purpose. This does not prohibit the appearance of self-confidence, as long as the idea exists to do the best for the cause and the following persons.

We can learn that humility depends on our own attitude towards ourselves and our fellow human beings. Although Clare did not want to be a leader, she took responsibility without ever being addressed by her official title. This attitude fit with her understanding of poverty and humility. She wanted to follow the "poor" Christ: a life of simplicity, sharing of goods, and solidarity with the poor. In San Damiano, Clare founded a revolutionary way of living together, without claims to power and property. The renunciation of power and property gave Clare and her community freedom. Her attitude of poverty reflects her trust in God, the Father and Creator of all things.

Determining the attitude of service in today's leadership context and focusing on the question "What can I do for others so that they can personally evolve and achieve the common goals" is worthwhile in many ways. The underlying idea: Only what serves everyone ultimately serves ourselves. A serving leadership is an invitation to change perspectives in order to lead companies even more successfully into the future and, at the same time, bring more humanity and a deeper sense into the working world. A community or organization will only prosper if individual gifts for the common good are developed and put into the service of the group's mission. Without a clear focus, there can be growth, but it will not coincide with the original purpose for which the group was formed.

This includes discussion and awareness of one's own life resources and self-direction, from which one can draw for both, the professional and the private context. Leaders have the task of becoming aware of the sources of their actions. The attitude of hearing is central. The cultivation of one's own spirituality sensitizes us to listen to ourselves (inner perspective) and to listen to what is brought to our side (dialogue orientation to the outside). From St. Clare's biography it becomes clear that the focus on God and the prayer helped her to be present—that means more than just presence. By preparing herself internally for the coming and ensuring an inner availability, she could fully concentrate on her counterpart/her sisters.

Clare's perseverance and courage teach us how important it is to stand up for our beliefs and ideals—even when it is unpleasant. A solid dose of courage, determination and assertiveness is essential for successful leaders. Those who want to lead effectively and sustainably must not shy away from conflicts and risks. A leader must be prepared to think continuously about his/her own ideas, expectations, and goals in order to be able to assert their own position wisely and persistently—even against resistance. Clare showed the necessity to become independent and to develop a style after one's own conviction. A certain compromise is part of it. In her behavior and actions, Clare has led us to think in new directions, to be visionary and to go new ways. It becomes clear that everyone who wants to achieve goals must position oneself and communicate clearly.

The biography of St. Clare tells us that it is necessary to cultivate and shape relationships, and to build a sustainable network. We need people who accompany us on our way, who support us, who are mentors and friends. Clare could not look at any earthly role model, but she herself was a counselor and role model for her sisters. Networks are most important for working life, especially for women. From Clare we can learn to present ourselves with a healthy self-confidence, not to be "small", to be courageous, to think in big contexts and to build a strong network to realize our own goal. To do this,

Clare must break a few rules and “break through societal barriers for women of her time” (Gregg 2017, p. 49 )

A serving acting leader will also take care of individual members of the organization. There is no substitute for constant attention to the needs of others.

In short, Clare’s leadership is inspiring for our day, because she shows us how to

- develop a respectful inner attitude
- reflect our own leadership behavior and our own values
- develop our own effects as a (leadership) personality
- perceive the patterns of personality, communication and dealing with conflicts in daily leadership and to take consciously action
- be able to trust one’s own competencies and use one’s strengths effectively
- gain natural authority and integrate our personality into the leadership style
- create trust, feedback culture and open communication and
- find access to the interlocutor.

Clare offers an alternative leadership concept through her writings and wealth of thoughts. It is a practical concept that has been lived in monasteries for more than 800 years and can have positive effects for today’s leaders. Despite all the parallels that have been identified in the Franciscan–Clarian leadership concept, the limits of transferability may not be disregarded. The respective context, the historical background and circumstances must always be considered.

Any attempt to transfer Clare into today’s leadership must not hide the diversity and plurality of life horizons with their experiences. Not all of the prescriptions that Clare has formulated can be transferred into today’s leadership challenges; this expectation must be abandoned. But to explain these aspects in detail is not the subject of this article.

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