

## LEADERSHIP FROM THE HEART: Guidance from Angela Merici

Angela Merici created a new way of life for women in founding the Company of St. Ursula, still flourishing since 1535. The Ursuline Order and its mission of education developed from this foundation. Angela's enduring leadership principles, philosophy, and spirituality unfold for today in *Leadership from the Heart*.

This work explores the leadership manuals that Angela left for her successors:

- **Counsels** for the Company's "teachers and guides,"
- **Testament** for its administrators.

Mary-Cabrini leads the reader through Angela's teachings with an invitational style that fosters personal engagement with Angela herself.

Grounded in her relationship with God, Angela Merici launched a creative, person-centered enterprise. Ursuline leaders and educators draw upon these rich resources for authentic, vital service.

*"A unique and inspirational work that will capture your attention and your heart. Mary-Cabrini Durkin reflects on the leadership charism of St. Angela Merici and identifies what is at the core of this spiritual leader and visionary."*


*"Ursuline educators will find depth, fulfillment and guidance as they ponder the words of St. Angela and strive to imitate them in their own vocations to model Angela's leadership skills in today's classroom, administration and board-room challenges. I love love love the reflection and discussion questions!"*

- Joanne Kelly  
Principal, Holy Family School, New Rochelle NY  
former Assistant Principal, The Academy of Mount St. Ursula  
UEN member



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She leads the Company in the USA and serves on the Council of the worldwide Federation of Companies. She is a writer, editor, and civic activist.

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## Preface

How many institutions or movements active today started as long ago as 1535? That is when Ursuline life began with the Company of St. Ursula, out of which evolved the Ursuline Order. How many started as long ago as 1612? That is when formal Ursuline education began with Ursuline monastery schools in France. Company – Order – schools. These thriving twenty-first-century global realities trace their beginnings to Angela Merici (1474-1540) in Brescia, Italy. She left an indelible personal mark on history. And she did it in less than five years between the foundation and her death.

Why did the first Ursulines gather around Angela, follow her teaching, and look to her as their leader? She had an inner authority, that is, authority based on authenticity. It is no accident that the words *authority* and *authenticity* have the same root meaning. Before there were roles or positions, there was the person. Her authenticity radiated from within. Angela was in love with God and with the people around her. She was full of life and gave life to others. They called her “Madre.”

Today we call this powerful, personal, spiritual gift a “charism,” the founding charism. Successive generations are authentic insofar as they embody the charism in dialogue with the new circumstances where they find themselves. Authenticity ... not a period piece, not a relic from the past. The enduring vitality of the charism is entrusted to leaders in whom that charism abides and ever deepens.

Contemporary leaders are urged to prepare for succession. Angela did it so successfully that her guidance to her successors re-



mains effective even today. She addressed her Counsels to the Company's "teachers and guides" and her Testament (a collection of "Legacies") to its administrative leaders. The two texts, the subjects of this work, are her leadership manuals.

Their human wisdom is universal. Their Merician spirit and character are distinctive. Through the centuries, Ursulines have embodied their guidance and passed on their lessons as much through modeling as through instruction.

A new moment calls for fresh leadership. Ursuline life, long centered in Western Europe and the Americas, now flourishes in Asia and Africa. Ursuline education, long conducted by religious sisters, now flourishes in the hands of lay educators. Angela's newest successors are hungry for her guidance. I hope that this book may be a tool to assist them in their service of leadership.

There is nothing abstract here, no articulated theory or philosophy or method. Yet solid principles underlie Angela's teachings, expressed in her directions for dealing with certain concrete situations such as self-doubt, danger, or personal conflicts.

Rather than attempting a theoretical analysis, I have chosen to follow the Counsels and Testament as Angela laid them out for leaders of the Company of St. Ursula in the 1530s. For example, we will see how the advice in a given Counsel or Legacy supports the mission and functions within the Company. This historical perspective will allow the reader to understand them as Angela and her first followers did.

Today's reader will also find that Angela's words, though based in sixteenth-century Italian spirituality and social structures, are applicable to their own contexts. Secular and religious Ursulines today will hear the Madre's voice echoing in their lives. Ursuline associates will find themselves drawn to this woman of whom her friend Agostino Gallo said, "I did not know how I could live without her, nor my wife or my family." Ursuline educators and ministers will recognize the distinctive character of their service.

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Nonetheless, each teacher and leader must incarnate Angela's wisdom anew, for a particular time and place, for a specific field of mission. Each has a role to fulfill in assuring the continued vitality of "this vine that has been entrusted to you." I hope that the contemporary reader will find helpful tools in the reflection points that follow each chapter. Let them be an invitation to unfold the Madre's guidance further and to embrace it more deeply.

In this spirit, at times I have used the first-person "we," hoping that reader and writer – together – may engage with the Madre and learn from her. Indeed, "together," *insieme*, is one of Angela's favorite words.

Finally, a word about the imaginative dialogues with Angela – indented on the page. Because she dictated them, the Counsels and the Testament have an oral character that invites the reader into the texts. The dialogues suggest a way to listen and respond to the voice of the Madre.

She spoke from her heart. Let us listen with ours.