

# **Emotional Intelligence for Enhanced Leadership among Religious**

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## **Abstract**

This study explores the significance of emotional intelligence (EI) in enhancing leadership within religious communities, emphasizing its vital role in fostering spiritual growth, pastoral sensitivity, and community well-being. Drawing from biblical examples of effective leadership the study illustrates how EI, through self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation, aligns with Christian values and leadership. It highlights how emotionally intelligent leadership can address community members' spiritual and emotional needs, promote human dignity, and navigate conflicts effectively. The article underscores the importance of EI for religious leaders, suggesting that it is crucial for creating environments that reflect Gospel values and sustain harmonious, supportive communities. Key components such as self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation and social skills are discussed as essential traits for leaders in Consecrated Life.

**Keywords:** Emotional Intelligence (EI), Leadership, Consecrated life, Religious communities

## **Introduction**

Leadership or authority in consecrated life has a deeper meaning as it is a call to service. It is a vocation to love and serve. It requires spiritual depth, emotional balance, pastoral sensitivity, and practical wisdom. A community's quality depends on the dynamics of

leadership within. The Church emphasises the enormous responsibility of the leaders in caring for the members. It suggests exercising their authority in a spirit of service, ensuring the spiritual and material well-being of their members. In this context, it is pertinent to analyse how emotional intelligence (EI) can contribute to effective leadership and accompaniment in consecrated life.

### **Emotional Intelligence and Leadership**

Emotional intelligence is defined as the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and the emotions of others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). It underlines the ability, capacity, skill, or self-perceived ability to identify, assess, and manage the emotions of one's self, of others, and of groups. In the context of leadership, EI enables leaders to connect with others, manage conflicts, and inspire those they lead. Studies reveal the correlation between emotional intelligence and effective leadership. According to Goleman (1998), EI is more important in effective leadership than traditional cognitive intelligence (IQ). This is particularly relevant in Consecrated Life, where leaders are called to model Christ-like behaviour and create environments that reflect the Gospel values of love, compassion, and service.

### **Emotional Intelligence and Leadership: A Biblical Perspective**

The Bible offers numerous examples of emotional intelligence (EI) demonstrated by key figures who showed self-awareness, empathy, and social skills in their interactions with others. These biblical examples can serve as powerful models for leaders in Consecrated Life, illustrating how EI can be lived out in ways that align with Christian values.

### ***Emotional Maturity of Joseph in the Old Testament***

Joseph's total forgiveness of his brothers who had harmed him (Genesis 45:1-15) is proof of his emotional maturity. Joseph's story is a profound example of emotional intelligence, particularly in the realm of self-awareness, empathy, and forgiveness. After being sold into slavery by his brothers, Joseph rises to a position of power in Egypt. When he finally reveals his identity to his brothers, Joseph could have sought revenge, but instead, he chooses to forgive them. His ability to empathize with their fear and remorse, coupled with his self-regulation of any lingering anger, allows him to reconcile with his family. This story illustrates how emotional intelligence can lead to healing and restoration of relationships.

### ***Emotional Resilience and Authenticity of Job***

Emotional intelligence (EI) in Wisdom literature, such as the biblical books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job, along with other ancient texts is often intertwined with themes of self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and the appropriate expression of emotions. These texts offer insights into how emotions can be understood, managed, and used to live a wise and virtuous life.

The Book of Job deals with profound suffering and emotional turmoil, offering insights into the role of emotional resilience and integrity. Throughout the book, Job expresses his deep sorrow and frustration but remains honest in his emotions, reflecting the value of authenticity in emotional expression. His friends, who fail to empathize with his situation, represent a lack of emotional intelligence in understanding the depth of his pain.

Ecclesiastes reflects on the complexities of life and the range of human emotions. It emphasizes the importance of balancing emotions and understanding their role in a meaningful life. Ecclesiastes 3:4, “A time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,” underscores the importance of recognizing and accepting the appropriate time for different emotions and acceptance of life’s emotional complexity. The text encourages wisdom in acknowledging and navigating life’s emotional highs and lows without becoming overwhelmed or losing perspective.

### ***Emotional Balance of the Prophets***

Elijah’s emotional intelligence is evident in his resilience, even when he faces extreme opposition and threats from Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 19). Though he experiences a moment of despair and even asks God to take his life, he ultimately finds renewed purpose and strength after a period of rest and divine reassurance. He had empathy for the vulnerable. Elijah’s interaction with the widow of Zarephath and her son during a famine (1 Kings 17:8-24) demonstrates his compassion and empathy for those in need. He not only provides for them but also raises the widow’s son from the dead, showing deep emotional connection and care.

Jeremiah’s Emotional Expression is apparent as he is known as the “weeping prophet,” Jeremiah openly expresses his sorrow for the impending destruction of Jerusalem and the suffering of his people (Jeremiah 9:1). His ability to articulate his emotions, even in the face

of rejection and persecution, reflects his emotional authenticity. He also had empathy and courage. Despite the personal cost, Jeremiah continues to speak God's message to the people, driven by a deep empathy for their spiritual condition and future. His lamentations over Jerusalem (Lamentations) are powerful expressions of grief, yet he remains steadfast in his mission, demonstrating emotional resilience and empathy.

Isaiah is known for his social awareness and empathy. Isaiah's prophecies often highlight social injustices and the suffering of the poor, reflecting his deep empathy and concern for the marginalized (Isaiah 1:17). He calls for justice and righteousness, showing his awareness of the community's broader social and emotional needs. His emotional strength is clear as he balances his messages of judgment with hope, offering comfort to the people in times of distress (Isaiah 40:1-2). His ability to inspire hope and perseverance reflects his emotional intelligence, particularly in understanding and addressing the emotional needs of his audience.

Daniel's emotional regulation and wisdom are marvellous. Daniel exemplifies emotional intelligence through his calm and composed demeanour, even in the face of life-threatening situations. Whether interpreting dreams for kings (Daniel 2, 4) or facing the lion's den (Daniel 6), Daniel maintains his faith and composure, showing remarkable emotional regulation. Daniel's prayers for his people (Daniel 9) reflect his deep empathy and concern for their well-being. He identifies with their sins and intercedes on their behalf, showing both emotional and spiritual leadership.

Nehemiah's Leadership (Nehemiah 1-2) displays emotional intelligence. Nehemiah, upon hearing about the ruined state of Jerusalem's walls, displays self-awareness and empathy as he mourns, fasts, and prays for his people. When he approaches the king to request permission to rebuild the walls, Nehemiah demonstrates social skills and emotional intelligence by carefully timing his request and presenting it in a way that gains the king's favour. His ability to understand his emotions and those of others, combined with strategic communication, showcases effective leadership rooted in emotional intelligence.

The prophets in the Bible demonstrate various aspects of emotional intelligence through their empathy, emotional regulation, self-awareness, and understanding of others. Their ability to connect with their communities' emotional and spiritual needs, often in the face of

great personal challenges, is a key part of their prophetic ministry. These traits not only made them effective messengers of God's word but also served as examples of emotional maturity for their followers.

### ***The Humanistic Approach of Jesus***

Jesus had a compassionate approach to the sinners and the outcasts of the society. He could see beyond their external appearances. Jesus' approach to the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11) exhibits his understanding and compassion for the sinners. Jesus demonstrates profound emotional intelligence in this passage by balancing justice with compassion. When the woman caught in adultery is brought before Him, Jesus shows self-regulation and empathy. Instead of reacting with anger or condemnation, He calmly writes on the ground and then challenges those without sin to cast the first stone. By doing so, He diffuses a volatile situation, protects the woman from harm, and offers her a path to repentance. This story highlights Jesus' ability to understand and manage the emotions of others, as well as His deep empathy for those in difficult situations.

Another example is His empathetic approach to Martha and Mary who experienced immense grief at the loss of their brother Lazarus. Jesus was emotionally moved and raised Lazarus from death. Pope Francis reminds us "We must always take care never to lose sight of the flesh of Jesus Christ: that flesh made of passions, emotions and feelings, words that challenge and console, hands that touch and heal, looks that liberate and encourage, flesh made of hospitality, forgiveness, indignation courage, fearlessness; in a word love." (Pope Francis, 2024)

### ***St Paul, an Icon of Emotional Intelligence***

St Paul the Apostle, in his writings and life, demonstrated profound emotional intelligence, even though the term as we know it today didn't exist. Emotional intelligence involves understanding and managing one's emotions and those of others, fostering empathy, and building strong relationships. Here are examples of how St Paul exemplified emotional intelligence.

*Empathy and Compassion for Others:* In Philippians 1:3-11, Paul expresses deep gratitude and affection for the believers in Philippi. He thanks God for them and prays for their love to abound more and more. His letters often begin with warm greetings and prayers, showing his genuine concern and empathy for their well-being. In Romans 12:15 he reminds: "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who

mourn.” This instruction reflects Paul’s ability to connect with people emotionally, sharing in their joys and sorrows.

*Self-Awareness and Humility:* In 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 Paul talks about his “thorn in the flesh,” a personal struggle that kept him humble. He acknowledges his weaknesses and recognizes that his strength comes from God. This shows self-awareness, a key aspect of emotional intelligence, as he understands his limitations and vulnerabilities. In 1 Timothy 1:15, he expresses: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.” Paul’s humility and self-reflection demonstrate a deep understanding of his own nature and the need for God’s grace.

*Managing Emotions and Responses:* In Acts 16:25 after being unjustly imprisoned, Paul and Silas pray and sing hymns to God. Instead of reacting with anger or despair, Paul chooses to manage his emotions and maintain a positive outlook, even influencing others in the process. In Ephesians 4:26-27 he reminds, “In your anger, do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.” Paul teaches the importance of managing anger and not letting it lead to destructive behaviour.

*Social Skills and Relationship Building:* In Romans 16, Paul sends personal greetings to many people in the Roman Church by name. This chapter reveals his deep connections and relationships with various individuals, showing his ability to build and maintain strong social networks. In 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, Paul adapts his approach depending on his audience, becoming “all things to all people.” This adaptability and understanding of others’ perspectives reflect high emotional intelligence in social interactions.

*Handling Conflict with Grace:* In Philemon, Paul advocates for Onesimus, a runaway slave, asking Philemon to receive him back not as a slave but as a brother in Christ. Paul handles this sensitive situation with tact, appealing to love and mutual respect rather than authority or force. In Galatians 2:11-14: Paul confronts Peter (Cephas) when he believes Peter’s behavior is hypocritical. He does so directly but respectfully, addressing the issue without attacking Peter’s character. This balance shows Paul’s ability to manage conflict while maintaining relationships.

*Encouraging Others and Providing Emotional Support:* In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, Paul speaks of God as the “Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,” who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort

others. Paul often encourages others, providing emotional support through his letters. 1 Thessalonians 5:11: “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” Paul constantly emphasized the importance of mutual encouragement and support within the community.

St. Paul’s life and writings are filled with examples of emotional intelligence, from his deep empathy and compassion for others to his ability to manage his own emotions and navigate complex social situations with wisdom and grace. His teachings continue to be a source of guidance for living a life of emotional maturity and relational harmony.

These examples from the Bible illustrate how emotional intelligence can be effectively integrated into leadership and relationships. Figures like Jesus, Joseph, Job, prophets, and Paul demonstrate that emotional intelligence is not only a valuable skill for leaders but also a vital component of living out one’s faith. By embodying EI in their leadership and interactions, biblical figures serve as powerful role models for leaders in Consecrated Life, who are called to guide their communities with compassion, wisdom, and grace.

## **Key Components of Emotional Intelligence in a Religious Leader**

### ***Self-Awareness***

Leaders who have self-awareness are conscious of their emotions and the impact those emotions have on their behaviour and decision-making. This self-awareness leads to greater self-reflection and personal growth (Cherniss, 2022). For leaders in Consecrated Life, self-awareness is foundational. It involves understanding one’s strengths, weaknesses, emotions, and how these impact others (Goleman, 1995). *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992), an apostolic exhortation by Pope John Paul II, stresses the importance of self-knowledge and personal growth for effective leadership. Self-aware leaders are better equipped to handle the challenges of leadership, as they are more attuned to their own spiritual and emotional needs.

### ***Self-Regulation***

Self-regulation refers to how you manage your emotions, behaviours, and impulses. The more self-aware you are, the easier this becomes. If you can recognize what you’re feeling and why, you can respond appropriately. Leaders in religious communities often face stress and

conflict. Self-regulation, or the ability to control one's emotional responses, helps leaders remain calm and make thoughtful decisions (Goleman, 1998). In *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), the Second Vatican Council emphasizes the importance of inner peace and self-discipline in the Christian life. This teaching aligns with the concept of self-regulation, highlighting the need for leaders to cultivate inner tranquility and self-control, which are essential for maintaining a peaceful and prayerful community atmosphere. Proverbs 16:32 states, "Better a patient person than a warrior, one with self-control than one who takes a city." This reflects the idea that understanding and managing one's emotions (like anger or impatience) is a sign of true strength and wisdom.

If prone to emotional outbursts or overreacting, there are tactics you can use to improve your self-regulation:

*Pause before responding:* Give yourself time to stop and think before immediately replying. This could be as simple as taking a deep breath and allowing for a 20-second pause so that your feelings get out of the way of your thoughts.

*Take a step back:* Sometimes, you might need to leave the room, and that's OK. It's often better to take a walk, drink some water, or call a friend than to make a snap judgment, send a scathing email, or lash out at your team.

*Recognize your emotions:* Try jotting down what it is you're feeling and what caused the distress. You'll likely start identifying patterns. If you know what triggers you, the next time a similar situation occurs, you'll be better positioned to handle it in a healthy, positive way. If you acknowledge your emotions and give yourself time to process them, you can carefully craft how you respond and avoid doing anything that could jeopardize the goodwill you've worked hard to build.

## ***Empathy***

Empathy is the capability of understanding another person's experiences and emotions, and has been ranked as the top leadership skill needed. Empathy allows leaders to understand and respond to the emotions of others. In a religious community, where individuals often live closely together, empathy is crucial for building trust and fostering healthy relationships. The encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (2005) by Pope Benedict XVI underscores the importance of love and empathy in Christian leadership. Empathetic leaders can better support



their community members' emotional and spiritual needs, reflecting Christ's commandment to love one another as He has loved us (John 13:34). empathy and understanding others: Proverbs 15:1 advises, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." This highlights the importance of understanding how one's words and actions can affect the emotions of others, a key component of emotional intelligence.

By actively listening to your community members and taking the time to understand their wants and needs, you can boost engagement, build trust, and more effectively coach them through challenges. The more your community feels appreciated, the more invested they'll be, which, in turn, leads to higher morale and a stronger family spirit.

### ***Motivation***

Motivation refers to your ability to inspire both yourself and others to action. Here, it's essential to lead by example. Self-motivated leaders in all settings care more about hitting organizational milestones than monetary awards. They set goals, take initiative, rise to the challenge, and stay optimistic during turbulent times. The more positive you are, the more confident your team will feel. Your intrinsic motivation will permeate the community, and you'll have a better understanding of how to empower.

### ***Social Skills***

Effective communication and relationship management are essential for leadership in Consecrated Life. Leaders with strong social skills can navigate group dynamics, mediate conflicts, and build a sense of unity within the community (Goleman, 1998). *Christus Dominus* (1965), another document from the Second Vatican Council, emphasizes the role of bishops and religious leaders in fostering communion and collaboration within the Church. These social skills are necessary for promoting collaboration and ensuring that the community works harmoniously toward its spiritual goals.

### ***Discernment and Decision-making***

Leaders with high EI are better equipped to process emotional information and integrate it into their decision making. According to Wong and Law (2022) emotionally intelligent leaders are more likely to make balanced decisions considering both rational and emotional factors which leads to better outcomes in a community setting.

Discernment which is an important aspect of religious leadership is possible only if the leader is emotionally mature and able to listen and understand.

### ***Conflict Resolution***

Conflict is an inevitable part of human interaction, and leaders are often called upon to navigate and resolve disputes. Leaders with emotional intelligence (EI) are particularly effective in conflict resolution because they possess the skills to manage emotions—both their own and those of others—in ways that foster understanding, collaboration, and positive outcomes.

Leaders with high emotional intelligence are adept at recognizing the emotions of those involved in a conflict and can view the situation from multiple perspectives. This empathetic approach helps to de-escalate tensions, as individuals feel heard and understood. Empathy allows leaders to address the underlying emotional issues that often drive conflict, rather than just the surface-level disagreements.

Another critical aspect of emotional intelligence in conflict resolution is effective communication. Leaders with high EI can communicate clearly and calmly, even in emotionally charged situations. They know how to listen actively, ensuring that all parties feel respected and valued. By creating an open environment where people can express their concerns without fear of judgment or retaliation, emotionally intelligent leaders facilitate constructive dialogue. This open communication is essential for identifying the root causes of conflict and finding mutually acceptable solutions.

By not reacting impulsively or allowing their own emotions to cloud their judgment, they can maintain a level-headed approach to resolving conflicts. Their composure sets a positive tone for the entire process, encouraging others also manage their emotions and engage constructively. Emotional intelligence helps leaders remain patient and persistent during this process, enabling them to navigate complex issues without becoming discouraged or frustrated.

By demonstrating respect, fairness, and transparency, emotionally intelligent leaders earn the trust of those they lead. This trust is crucial for effective conflict resolution, as it encourages parties to be more open, honest, and willing to compromise.

Leaders with emotional intelligence are uniquely equipped to resolve conflicts in ways that foster understanding, collaboration, and long-term harmony. Through empathy, effective communication, self-regulation, problem-solving, and relationship-building, these leaders create an environment where conflicts are addressed constructively and where all parties feel respected and valued. Emotional intelligence is not only a valuable tool for resolving disputes but also for strengthening the bonds within a community.

### ***Promotion of Human Dignity***

Religious leaders have a crucial role in promoting human dignity, which is a foundational principle of Christian life. Human dignity is rooted in the belief that every person is created in the image and likeness of God and thus possesses inherent worth and value.

Religious leaders also promote human dignity by encouraging ethical leadership and integrity within their communities. They provide moral guidance, emphasizing the importance of honesty, fairness, and respect for others. By modelling these values, religious leaders inspire their followers to treat others with dignity and to act justly in their own lives. In his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (Pope Francis, 2020), Pope Francis emphasizes the need for leaders to uphold the dignity of every person and to work towards building a society where all individuals are respected and valued.

Most of the leaders understand the value of diversity. Empathy, listening ability and respect are traits of a good leader. They are flexible, approachable, accommodative, empathise and get along well with others. They motivate people and win the cooperation of one and all as they are aware of their inner feelings and strengths and can manage their emotions as well as those of others. Managing the emotions of self and others by the leaders necessitates that they be emotionally intelligent. If the leaders are not emotionally intelligent, even if the organizations or communities possess good financial, technical, and natural resources they will not be able to lead with effectiveness. The relevance of emotional intelligence in today's world is such that even small organizations have started mobilizing all their energy to develop executives to be emotionally intelligent leaders. Evidence from studies conducted over the last several decades which reveals that EI plays a vital role in leadership performance (e.g., Wong & Law, 2002). Advocates of EI argue that a person can have outstanding employment, a very

analytical mind, a compelling vision, and wonderful ideas, but still not produce a superb leader if lacking in emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998). Researchers (e.g., George, 2000) contend that leaders with larger emotional intelligence are more able to appraise and influence the emotions of their followers. Such abilities help leaders to accumulate a great deal of support for his or her goals, objectives and vision, as they will use intense emotions to direct followers' attention (Zeidner et al., 2004). Leaders with larger emotional intelligence can infuse enthusiasm, optimism, and excitement among the work surroundings while anticipating the follower's reactions to changes.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, emotional intelligence (EI) is an indispensable aspect of effective leadership, particularly within religious communities where spiritual growth, pastoral sensitivity, and communal harmony are paramount. By embodying the key components of EI—self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation, and social skills—religious leaders can mirror Christ-like compassion, wisdom, and grace, thereby fostering environments that reflect Gospel values. Biblical examples, from Joseph's forgiveness to Jesus' empathy, illustrate how EI can profoundly impact leadership by addressing the emotional and spiritual needs of communities. As religious leaders navigate the complexities of human emotions and relationships, EI enables them to promote human dignity, resolve conflicts, and inspire others to live out their faith authentically. Ultimately, emotionally intelligent leadership is not just a practical tool but a spiritual calling that aligns deeply with the mission of consecrated life, ensuring that leaders can guide their communities with love, understanding, and integrity.

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