Some people are born administrators. For the rest of us, it’s a steep learning curve. For many within the latter group, it is both a difficult and an undesirable burden. We see it as a distraction from those things God is truly calling us to, and from those things we truly love doing. We really do feel that administration is sucking the life out of us like the haunting Dementers of Harry Potter infamy.

In this small and accessible book, Ann Garrido invites those of us in the latter group to take another look at administration. If what doesn’t kill us makes us stronger, could it be that administration literally has redeeming value? Garrido is convinced that it does and shows us how it might from 12 different angles that are familiar to every administrator.

The book has a consistent pattern to it. Each chapter begins with a carefully selected quote from a well-known source that captures the essence of the spiritual habit under discussion. This is followed by a simple exposition of the habit most often rooted in Garrido’s own extensive experience of administration. It is practically free of burdensome jargon or technical language. You get the sense that Garrido is sharing her personal reflection on her own experience like you might be sitting and sipping a Starbucks coffee together. Although Garrido draws from a variety of disciplines in her discussion of each habit, the book is not burdened with academic terminology or specialized language. Her discussions remain simple and accessible, yet substantive. Then, she tells a story. She selects a holy person who in her mind exemplifies the value being considered. These stories are told without the unnecessary fluff of piety. One gets the sense that when she considers the Saints, Garrido does so more from the perspective of a historian than from that of a hagiographer. The result is a series of utterly relatable portrayals. The connection between the saintly portrayals and the habit being discussed is not always as obvious as she seems to think, but Garrido illustrates her points effectively. Each chapter concludes with a few questions for reflection and sharing. The final touch is an original prayer that summarizes the salient aspects of the chapter and re-proposes the challenges of administration as grace-filled opportunities.

The 12 spiritual habits addressed in the book are breadth of vision, generativity, trust, integrity, humility, courage, reflection, humor, forgiveness, embrace death, and hope. These twelve habits do not represent any particular list of Christian virtues or gifts of the Holy Spirit. Garrido chose them, rather, based on personal experience of the ministry of administration—her own and that of other administrators she admires. She is convinced that understood rightly, these twelve habits can become rich sources for a spirituality of administration. Or rather, that these challenges of
administration can be transformed through reflection into rich sources of meaning for the spirituality of Christians, especially Catholics, engaged in the ministry of administration.

A key to the book is this challenge of perception. Garrido does not try to convince the reader of the virtues or joys of administration but frankly acknowledges its challenges. Insisting that her goal is not to add spiritual tasks to the already-overburdened administrator, her goal instead is to move the reader to a new way of understanding the tasks that administration already demands of them and to see within those tasks the potential for growth in spirituality. Underlying this approach is her understanding of spirituality as integral to life rather than somehow separate. In this view, she demonstrates a kinship to the Dominicans in whose ministry she participates at Aquinas Institute. Dominicans, or more formally, the Order of Preachers, were a Catholic religious order founded to counter the dualistic heresies common in the 13th Century that radically denied the Incarnation. Instead, these “Preachers of grace” preached that God reveals Godself through created reality since God is the author of all creation, and so created reality, including the work of administration, is a source of transforming grace. “And hence, when we speak of the spirituality of administration, the key question we will want to ask is, ‘How is the ministry of administration somehow part of the way that God is transforming me into the person God dreams me to be?'” (7).

This book is solid spiritual reading written at a popular level for any Christian who works in administration and shares the author’s positive view of creation as a potential locus of grace. The structure lends itself to monthly reflection on a particular spiritual habit. It would be useful for personal reflection, for group discussion, and as good source material for development into a full retreat for Christian administrators or leaders.