

Nothing so Contagious as Holiness: Developmental Initiatives for Increased Parish Vitality Grounded in Spiritual Practice

By Michelle Heyne, OA & Robert Gallagher, OA

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Introduction

This book offers nine programs that are designed to foster holiness of life. They are pathways of grace. The hope is to open up the possibility of significant movement in a person's spiritual life. To help us take on practices grounded in the church's traditions. Habits to be engaged as adults accepting responsibility for our spiritual life, responsibility in which we cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit. Our concern is two-fold. Yes, about the individual's growth in the Christian Life. And also, about the nurturing of an apostolic core and an apostolic climate in each parish church

Chapter 1: Readiness and Intervention Theory

There are two things we'd like you to consider as you decide on which intervention to use. Is your parish ready for it? And will you be able to create enough internal commitment on the part of participants and those who may need to authorize the project? This chapter ends with a Developmental Initiative Worksheet. You can use the worksheet after you've selected one of the developmental initiatives (DIs). It may help in your assessment of readiness.

Chapter 2: Experiential Education and Spiritual Development

The educational designs presented here come from work we've done with lay people and clergy in the Episcopal Church. Our intention is to help parish leaders develop effective methods to connect with parishioners about spiritual life, to deepen individual spiritual life, and to nurture the overall health of the parish by attending to one of the church's primary tasks: the formation of Christians.

We offer an approach that combines opportunities to learn about spiritual practice, to experience various expressions of those practices, and to participate in structured opportunities to reflect on those experiences. Experiences coupled with *structured opportunities for reflection* on that experience are the primary elements of experiential education.

Chapter 3: Spiritual Life Assessment

This is a one-session spiritual reflection. You can facilitate a group as individuals explore how their current spiritual discipline is working? Does your practice need some adjustment? A change in the time for Morning Prayer? A way to combine walking or gardening with serious reflection? They'll review their existing rule of life and make changes. This is an especially useful exercise to use pre-Lent.

Chapter 4: In Your Holy Spirit: Five session spiritual assessment

This is a five session participatory and experiential program for adult formation. You will use Sister Michelle's educational design for helping a group apply the practices in her *In Your Holy Spirit: Traditional Spiritual Practices in Today's Christian Life*

Session 1: Overview & Eucharist: Weekly Practice

Session 2: The Daily Prayers of the Church

Session 3: Reflection

Session 4: Community

Session 5: Service

Chapter 5: Sanctification of all

There are two segments to this material. The first is a workbook, "Taking Responsibility for Your Spiritual Life," that a person can use as they reflect on their spiritual life. This includes a process of assessment and reflection leading to the development of a rule of life that fits an individual's personality, gifts, and circumstances, and hopefully be grounded in our tradition's way of being a Christian.

The second is a program, "Parish Education Design," to guide people in an assessment of their spiritual life. The program can be used with a group using the workbook and have the benefits noted above. But because it is done with a group it may also help nurture the parish's apostolic core and climate.

Chapter 6: Public Daily office

Establishing a public daily office is a vehicle for the expression of apostolic faith and practice. It makes it easier for people to engage in the practice. Many find it more emotionally rewarding to be able to say the office with others. Some will find it easier to begin saying the office if there is a public office. It can also enhance an apostolic climate in the whole parish. Even those who will never say the office may be pleased that the parish does it. A public office will over time significantly contribute to an apostolic climate in the parish.

Chapter 7: Creating an Adult Foundations Course

An adult foundations course will increase the Christian proficiency of participants. They will gain the knowledge and skills needed by adults for living the Christian life. The idea is to offer a critical mass of spiritual exercises and practices. Enough weight that the participant may opt for maturity or be strengthened in their maturity. This kind of work offers people the information necessary for a free choice to move more deeply into the Christian life. In the process of such a course the apostolic center is nurtured. People get to spend time with one another in a manner likely to increase the bonds of affection. A course offered over a period of years is likely to strengthen the apostolic core of the parish. That, in turn, will more definitively orient the parish toward apostolic climate and corporate practice.

Chapter 8: Apostolic Practices Coaching

This initiative is about as direct as you can be. “Want to move toward living an apostolic faith? Allow us to coach you.” A parish might offer this coaching process every year. Some years no one will sign up. Other times you may have between one person or a small group. It’s a bit more of a jump start than what’s provided in the In Your Holy Spirit initiative. For example, you’re doing the Office over a longer period of time. That may make it easier to stay with the practice once the coaching process ends. We’re using the Threefold Rule of Prayer model as a working framework. The assumption is that if a person develops the habit of participating in the Eucharist on Sundays, the **Principal Feasts, Ash Wednesday and Good Friday; says the Daily Office in some form most days; and develops a reflection practice that helps them in self-examination and gaining perspective – they are deeply engaged in apostolic faith and practice.**

Chapter 9: Book discussion -Apostolic Faith & Practice

Use book discussion groups for nurturing apostolic faith. Do that in a couple of ways. One is offering readings that will serve to deepen and broaden those already of apostolic faith or are progressing toward it. The other is as a means to nudge a person to consider a fuller spiritual life. Select carefully. As most parishes will have only one such discussion each year, make good use of the opportunity. The book may be about a saint, a mystery, or spiritual practice. Consider whether it is likely to nurture apostolic faith and practice.

Chapter 10: Eucharistic Practices

There are three primary ways people join in the Holy Eucharist: Be Present, Participate, and Engage. People need to be told that it matters that they are just present. We exist to participate in the life and glory of God and it is in the Eucharist that life is focused and actualized.

The parish can do a great deal to assist people in becoming competent participants in the Eucharist. The starting place is simple. Parishioners can learn the sequence and the common responses. They can be encouraged to develop the habit of setting the book aside and allowing their attention to be on the liturgical action. Our deeper engagement will vary from person to person, temperament to temperament. This program is offered to improve a person’s ability to join in the Eucharist in all three of these ways

Chapter 11: Parish Organization Development Process

We’ll describe a process used at St. Clements Church, Seattle, and touch lightly on other similar processes. St. Clements 2040. The objective was to set in motion the work needed to shape ensure a stable and faithful life in the future. We said, “When 2040 arrives, we want St. Clements to be here.”

We want to note that this isn’t at all an off-the-shelf” program. It is complex and difficult. Still, we think you may find it useful to explore a longer term organization development process. If you have a sense of what’s involved it may help you decide whether you have the skills to facilitate such a process, and if not, to know what kind of consulting assistance you need.

In the St. Clements 2040 We began with five parish community meetings over a couple of months and a sixth meeting several months later. That was to be followed by the rector, wardens, and vestry. Your authors designed and facilitated the meetings.

Chapter 12: Evaluation of your initiative