

From: *Fill All Things*

Congregational Development

Congregational development as a field of study and category of strategic action emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The major contributor to its appearance was the work of Loren Mead and Project Test Pattern (PTP), which later developed into the Alban Institute. PTP was an initiative of the national church generally concerned with evangelization but more specifically with how to best revitalize parishes. What Loren Mead quickly discovered was that the emerging discipline of organization development had application to church systems. PTP's work builds on what the church had been doing since the 1950s in the field of group dynamics and experiential education. The Episcopal Church was among the first religious organizations to involve itself in the learning and application about groups and organizations happening in universities, the military, and other organizations.

In the 1970s and early 80s there were large ecumenical training programs that equipped church leaders and consultants in "organization development in religious systems." The training often involved a minimum of three years, 300 hours of experiential workshop training, reading in the field, application projects, work with mentors, and a supervised internship. Today that approach continues in the work of the Church Development Institute (CDI).

The Church Development Institute created a training program that includes organization development but has integrated ecclesiology, pastoral theology, and ascetical theology. In recent years CDI has reintegrated in its training more experiential work that helps participants in the "use of self" and group dynamics and development. CDI now offers the most complete program available in congregational development.

Three interrelated streams of thought have emerged about how to define congregational development.

For some it is about starting new parish churches. That may involve special training or not. If there is any training it may focus on a short-term, entrepreneurial approach to development or it may include consideration of longer-term development dynamics and how to start the new parish with clarity about the primary task of formation.

Others seem to think of congregational development primarily as a division of work that includes anything related to revitalizing congregations or starting new parishes. In such cases people may have been appointed as diocesan congregational development officers with little or no training in the field.

The approach I'm taking in this book is to understand parish development (or congregational development) in a manner consistent with its roots. In that sense it is a field of competency with trained practitioners who serve the church in many roles. The level of competency may range from graduate level work with CDI or a university program in organization development, to having done a few days of workshops with a national or diocesan program office.

As an approach and discipline, congregational development has something to offer just about all aspects of parish and diocesan life. Everything that impacts the parish's health and its ability to form people in Christ is related to the field – the recruiting and training of lay and clergy leadership, ways of encouraging and supporting parish leaders, how we begin new parishes, issues of the parish's financial health, and so on.

So, a search process is understood as a major intervention in a parish's life, and the methods used to carry out the search require considerable skill on the part of consultants. This isn't a place to be running volunteers through a few days of training, handing them a manual, and dropping them into a parish's life.

Another example would be using competencies of congregational development in beginning a new parish. Leaders might be helped by the field's knowledge about creating healthy organizational cultures from the beginning and its understanding of the management of narcissism in entrepreneurial work. Connecting congregational development with new start-ups might point to the need for explicit agreements about denominational loyalty and the need in the earliest stages to integrate spiritual life and growth alongside the emphases on growth in numbers.

A Short Definition of Parish Development

Parish development is an effort to increase a parish's ability to improve its:

- Health as a community and organization
- Capacity to be productive in its primary task of worship and formation
- Ability to both define itself in relation to its heritage and to adapt to new challenges and opportunities that emerge in the church and society
- Strategic, problem-solving and renewal process

By making use of the theory and methods of pastoral and ascetical theology and of applied behavioral science, usually with the assistance of a leader or consultant trained in the field, and carried out in as collaborative and inclusive a manner as possible given the parish's current capacities and requirements.

A Longer Definition of Parish Development

- The development of the parish as a community of faith with a unique identity, purpose and dynamics.
- The development of the parish as an organization that can be understood, assessed, and improved using the knowledge and methods of pastoral and ascetical theology and organization behavior and development.

The goals of congregational development include:

A. Developing the community of faith by enabling a pattern and culture of congregational life

that is:

- Rooted in our tradition
- Adapted to the local context
- Appropriate for the particular group(s) of people drawn to the congregation
- Reflective of the unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the Church.

And that:

1. Renews people in their baptismal identity and purpose and sends them, in Christ, for an apostolate in family, work, civic life and church.
2. Nurtures the Christian life of people at all phases of maturity; gives special attention to guiding and equipping those of Apostolic Faith; encourages all toward a more prayerful, disciplined, and compassionate Christian life.
3. Fosters a strong life and ministry of worship, doctrine, action and oversight.
4. Enables people to seek the presence of Jesus Christ in the people, things and circumstances of life, through stability, conversion of life and obedience.

B. Developing the congregation as an organization that:

1. Has established structures, processes and a climate that allow it to effectively manage its important and pressing business (e.g., projects, problems, crises, etc.) while giving adequate attention to strategic issues (e.g., long-term development and renewal, people development, planning and envisioning, relationship building, engaging new opportunities, crisis prevention)
2. Has increased its ability to adapt to new conditions, solve problems and learn from experience.
3. Has an increased ability to engage formation issues such as:
 - A vision that is sacramentally actualized in the parish's culture. That vision includes the defining of identity, purpose, values, organizational culture and related programs and activities
 - Attracting new people (as staff and/or members) who join in living within a healthy culture.
 - Increased competence and commitment in liturgy, spiritual life and discipline, and emotional intelligence.
 - Creating an alignment, an adequate "fit," among the various aspects of the organization's life such as income/expenses, space/program needs and possibilities, vision/resources of leadership, energy and money
 - Establishing relationships with external "public" or constituencies that have a stake in the organization.