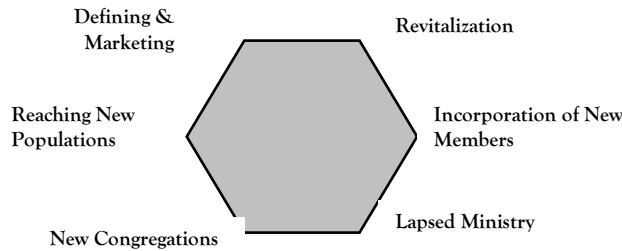


# Six Strategies for Growth and Evangelization

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## I. Revitalization, Renewal and Development

Being a healthy, faithful and attractive congregation is a base for all growth strategies. This is the ministry of nurturing a congregational culture in which people mature in Christ; the building of a community in which women, men and children are renewed in their baptismal identity and purpose and sent, in Christ, into families, the workplace and civic life.

Here are a few examples of how congregations engage in their own development.

- 1. Ground the Congregation's Life in Prayer** – Equip people for prayer; teach methods of contemplation and centering, intercession, and participation in the Eucharist and daily office.
- 2. Stay Focused on the Primary Task of a Congregation** – How well does the congregation serve people in the renewal of their baptismal life; to what extent are people aware of and prepared for their apostolate in families, workplace and civic life. Focusing on this core process can free us from the habit of measuring congregational life by the “success” of programs (numbers, excitement) and whether everyone is “happy.”
- 3. Build the Capacity of the Congregation** – Train leaders for development and increased levels of competence and commitment. Establish an alignment between the vision, ministries and institutional resources of the parish. Increase people's skills for working in teams.
- 4. Give Attention to Strategic Issues** – Establish processes and structures in the congregation's life that help it give adequate attention to long term systemic or capacity building issues. These matters are usually not urgent even if they are important, so there is a tendency to get caught up in those things that are urgent or more immediate and to put off strategic issues. This includes taking time for relationship building and new opportunities. The result of giving attention to strategic issues is usually a climate with a sense of vision, balance, discipline and fewer crises.
- 5. Nurture a Climate that is Mature and Enjoyable** – Work actively at trust development through open information, free choices, and seeking internal commitment and collaborative relationships. Teach leaders how to deal with triangulation and cope with their own and others' tendencies to play “cynic, victim or bystander.” Develop the principles and norms of the congregation as a “learning community” that is open to change and new life in Christ – less fear and blame, more learning from experience and focus on improvement. Laugh, dance, eat and drink together. Openly share the times of tears and pain.

## II. The Incorporation of New Members

Growth is advanced if the congregation gives attention to the incorporation process by assessing its overall effectiveness, gathering information to help understand what is happening to new people, and monitoring implementation.

The congregation can look on the incorporation process as:

- 1. Inviting** – Equip people for and encourage them in inviting friends and family members. Look at the exterior of your buildings and grounds as something that draws people or pushes them away. Advertise in a way that offers your strengths in an interesting way.
- 2. Greeting** – Develop a way to greet visitors that fits your size and style. Train members for a non-intrusive attention to visitors (e.g. a member offering a Hymnal opened to the right page to someone who appears confused is much more powerful than an over-functioning presider announcing every hymn.). Have a norm that the visitor at coffee hour is never abandoned; is engaged in conversation and asked to give their name and address; has a follow-up contact that week.
- 3. Orienting** – From the first Sunday a person visits into their third month attending, people will need to be oriented into the way this particular community lives and what it values. This allows a person to make a free and informed choice about whether this congregation fits him or her.
- 4. Incorporating** – Incorporation has taken place when the person can affirm that this is his or her faith community; and has established a somewhat stable pattern (for now) with regard to their own baptismal renewal and their apostolate in family, workplace and civic life.

## III. Lapsed Ministry

People drift away for all sorts of reasons, e.g. troubles in their life (divorce, loss of job, etc.), depression, disagreements with parish leaders or members, distress about the policies of the denomination, a change in how they see themselves and their needs, etc.

My assumption is that there is a good chance of restoring them to the congregation's life if you reach out quickly and skillfully. It is easy to not notice or make up reasons when people are missing. Before too long, people who are drifting away feel certain that the church doesn't care about them. You need to reach out before that happens and before they settle into a new pattern of how to use Sunday morning. Train callers on how to listen to everyone they visit. Give special attention to the danger of triangulation with those who are chronic victims, bystanders or cynics. Such members can be very effective at "plugging into" the victim, bystander and cynic that is in all of us.

## IV. New Congregational Development

Bishop Michael Marshall said, "If you want to sell more beer open up more pubs." Well done new congregation development has the potential for significant membership growth.

Some guidelines:

### 1. Think it Through Before You Begin

What styles of parish are you open to forming (e.g., be part of an area ministry; a series of small house churches; storefront or other small, low cost buildings; large with many programs and a sizeable staff)? What fits the potential in the area you are looking at? What is an appropriate way to begin the style you have decided on?

### 2. Invest the Resources Needed to Set it up for Success

It takes time to build something new. Think of all the businesses that fail or never reach their potential because they were undercapitalized or had unskilled leadership. Do not build a building until you are close to the number of members needed to cover the costs involved. Require the clergy leaders to get significant

training in congregational development, to use an outside consultant, and to arrange their schedule in a manner that allows adequate time for self-care/development and attention to strategic issues in building the new congregation.

### 3. Have a Realistic Target for Financial Self-Support

Diocesan and congregational leaders need to monitor this together, as a partnership. Set target dates with objectives but don't deal with it as though these are set in stone. Work together in creating agreement about the approach being used to build the new congregation. If it becomes clear that your approach is not showing results, change it, including changing leadership if necessary. You may even need to change the style of congregation (e.g. from a large church with a variety of ministries and a sizeable building to a small faith community in a storefront that is part of a cluster).

## V. Reaching New Populations

Another method of increasing the membership of a congregation is to focus your attention on a segment of the population that is not currently represented in the parish (or may be present in small numbers). For example.

- People who are uncertain or tentative about faith or the Church.
- People of another culture, race, language, class, sexual orientation, generation, life style or spirituality.
- People who see themselves as Episcopalians but are not on our membership lists. The Ethos 90's study claims that about 7½ million people have an Episcopal Church preference.
- People who have a vicarious relationship to the parish through family, neighborhood, programs, etc.

There are a number of pathways we can create to include new populations.

### 1. Parallel Congregations

This involves maintaining two or more different congregations that share the same facilities. It may help to begin to think of the parish church as having several congregations; each with a different style of worship and community. Many parishes already do this in regard to a certain range of preference around spirituality. There is the 8:00 AM congregation with a shorter Eucharist, no music, brief homily, traditional rite, usually no coffee hour, more regular and frequent average attendance, possibly a more settled spirituality with little desire to be involved in most parish programs; and there is the 10:00 AM congregation with all that this involves.

An example of using a parallel congregation to revitalize a dying church comes from a small city in which one of the parishes had declined to a handful of loyal English speaking and rather steadfast, even stubborn, people, mostly retired. The bishop took the initiative when there was the opportunity to select a new vicar. He decided that he would exercise his prerogative to appoint the vicar. He asked a Hispanic priest to come, and informed the existing congregation that the new vicar would have an English Eucharist at 8:00 AM on Sundays and a Spanish Eucharist at 10:30 AM. The new vicar's job was to quickly develop a new congregation alongside the existing congregation. The assumption was that the new congregation would take over responsibility for the formal governance of the parish. The view was to provide a faithful, pastoral and liturgical ministry to the English speaking group. Within a few months there was a congregation of 85 at the Spanish language Eucharist.

The strategy in the example was to create a parallel congregation that in time would probably become the only congregation in the parish. As the older English speaking members died or moved the 8:30 AM Eucharistic congregation would be ended.

Another parish maintains a traditional Rite 1 congregation alongside a more experimental congregation that has contemplation, jazz, communal dancing and a Quaker style sermon as part of its Eucharist. Each congregation could continue, side by side, for many years.

Parallel congregations are a way of creating a space for a new population to shape a different style of liturgy and community.

## **2. Extended Congregation**

In the extended congregation strategy the parish reaches toward a new population by establishing a new congregation off-site. As much as possible this congregation is viewed as and talked about in terms of being an extension of the parish, another congregation of the parish, rather than as an “outreach” or a “chaplaincy.” An urban parish in New Jersey arranges to have a weekly Eucharist in the chapel of a hospital that is in a different section of the city. The aim is to attract people from the neighborhood, the hospital staff and patients to a new congregation. This could in time become the base for a new parish church in that neighborhood, continue as an extended congregation or discontinue its work if the need changes. In another situation, a small town parish was near a large retirement community from which it was drawing only one person. The parish decided to move its Wednesday morning Mass to the retirement community’s common room on a permanent basis. This was not seen as a chaplaincy (though it did end up replacing an inadequate Episcopal chaplaincy program being conducted by the area deanery); but as an external congregation. The parish’s mid-week service quickly expanded from an average attendance of four to twenty. To enable participation in the Sunday congregation the parish offered a Sunday pick-up service to bring people to the parish and Lay Eucharistic Ministers to take the sacrament to those who had a difficult time traveling.

Extended congregations might be institutionally based as in the examples or could be based in homes or rented space.

## **3. The Diverse Congregation**

This is the congregation that has a significant mix of cultural groups, sexual orientations, classes or races. It involves maintaining that identity for at least a generation. It includes parishes that are: African American, Caribbean and African; or half gay singles and couples and half straight singles and families; or a strong mix of Asian, Hispanic and white. These are congregations in which there is a stable presence of the diverse populations.

These congregations seem to emerge for a variety of reasons, e.g., they reflect the neighborhood; some families of a new population group come, feel accepted, and decide to stay, others follow and find “their own” already attending; a congregation intentionally “targets” a group that is present in the community but under-represented in the parish.

People who are part of these congregations often mention several factors that hold them together:

- People who make up the congregation have chosen diversity. They could be in an all black or white, straight or gay congregation but they have decided to be in a diverse congregation because that is what they value.
- The diversity is intentionally reflected in the leadership, in who assists at the liturgy, and in the special events of the parish.
- There is often a parish culture that is sharply defined. That way of being together has such a focus in their lives that their differences are brought into a unity they share. This may be a parish with a strong liturgical tradition or a common commitment around compassion and justice.
- There are other ways in which the members share characteristics, e.g., educational background, class, etc.

A neighborhood in a large city has people who speak thirty seven languages. It is an area that a generation

was all white, people with a European background. The Episcopal parish has changed in the past ten years from a white congregation to one in which no group predominates. It includes whites, African Americans, Liberians, Nigerians, Costa Ricans, Puerto Ricans, Chinese and Caribbean peoples. Their approach has been to build a diverse congregation. The Roman Catholic parish in the area has followed its tradition of having a number of ethnic congregations in the same parish; a parallel congregation approach. The Episcopal parish takes great care to express and affirm each culture: in who reads and assists in the Sunday Eucharist, in leadership roles and by incorporating special times into its liturgical practice, e.g. Feast of the Epiphany, Chinese New Year, Martin Luther King Day, the presentation of newborn children in a manner that reflects specific cultures. They also undergird and interpret the experience with a theology of the Kingdom and by affirming their own uniqueness as a congregation.

Maintaining a diverse congregation is enabled by: a deep sense of acceptance in the congregation (not just tolerance), the visible expression of that diversity in leadership and liturgy, and an active reaching out that strives to maintain the diversity.

#### **4. A “Friends” Category of Relationship**

Some congregations are working with an approach to membership that includes “active participants or members” and a “friends” list. There is no attempt to try to match this with formal canonical membership standards.

This is an attempt to create a space of hospitality for people who are maintaining a concrete relationship with the congregation (e.g. attend on a regular, if infrequent, basis; or pledge; or offer other resources for the congregation’s life) but for whatever reason do not want to see themselves as being “members” in a formal manner. They may simply be uncomfortable with the idea of church membership or seeing themselves as “religious,” they may have unresolved issues with the Church, or they may belong to another church but also want a relationship with your parish.

## **VI. Defining and Marketing the Congregation**

The process of defining ourselves as a congregation can have dramatic results. When a congregation that has seen itself as primarily a “neighborhood church” redefines itself as a “regional church” it both changes the population group it will be actively inviting into its community and it forces a reconsideration of the worship patterns, programming and style of community life. Not only is there a larger group to draw from; there is also a need for us to look at how we may need to change as a congregation if we are to be an attractive possibility for that larger group. Other congregations have redefined themselves in terms of size in just one meeting. There have been congregational “town meetings” in which over \*80% of those present establish a goal to grow from their present size to a significantly larger size. They are not only beginning the process of possibly changing their size (and all that comes along with such a change) but they have redefined themselves from being a somewhat settled congregation to being a congregation in transition.

Defining the congregation is a statement of how we see ourselves; how we understand our identity and purpose as a congregation in relation to the external environment. That self-understanding must be grounded in the realities of our life as a congregation. For example, if we hope to increase in size, there needs to be evidence that there is a population base we can draw from, that we are ready to learn how to grow, and that we are willing to change our life as a community to invite and adapt to the new members. There have been parishes that make the decision to grow, try one or two methods to invite people, attract a large number of visitors, and have none come back. In one parish they sent out a mass mailing inviting people to a specific Sunday. They attracted forty visitors for that Sunday (This doubled their average

attendance.). They did special music; the priest put extra attention into the sermon; they worked at being friendly. No one came back. They stopped trying. In this case the problem seemed to be that they had too limited an understanding of how to grow. They had sent a team to a one-day diocesan evangelism event; this is not enough training! Weak follow-through with the visitors was certainly part of the problem. The more essential issue was that what visitors seemed to pick up from the congregation was that new members were needed to allow things to remain as they were. The new people would bring new money and energy but hopefully not new ways and new ideas. The message was received within a climate of liturgy and social life that was dull and depressed. This congregation needed to work on its own renewal before it was going to be able to be a place of hospitality to others. A parish's self-definition must be grounded in the realities of its life.

Organizational self-definition may be primarily of interest to those who are already members. It clarifies how we see ourselves and how we want to use resources. However, the self-definition may also be part of an external marketing effort and so be of interest to both the membership and potential members.

Some aspects of parish self-definition are:

1. Size – How large do we want to be? How large are we able to be?
2. Ministry Area – How do we define the scope of the parish's ministry? Is it directed at individual and family pastoral care and/or spiritual development; does it explicitly include equipping people for Christian living in the workplace or in civic life? Is it more directed at nurturing and equipping people for Christian living in the daily life of the family, workplace and civic life or is it more directed toward the corporate life of the congregation whether in its common service or evangelism toward others or its functioning as an organization? How does the congregation define itself in terms of geography; is it oriented to this neighborhood or town or is it regional in its draw?
3. Episcopal Church/Anglican Tradition and Spirituality – To what extent has the parish incorporated the riches of its own larger tradition – a culture of: common life and prayer and individual spiritual growth; that assumes that people have a vocation, a ministry; that is interested in stability and change; that sees spirituality as related to our relationships with God, self, creation and others/society; etc., etc.
4. In Relation to Other Congregations in the Area – How is this congregation seen when compared with other congregations?
5. The Culture and Demographics of the Congregation's Ministry Area – How might we address this particular community? How do we address the larger contextual issues this community faces?
6. Uses Parish Strengths/Gifts – What are our strengths as a congregation? Are there people with gifts that might allow us to develop a unique identity or ministry?
7. Fits Where the Parish Is in its Life Cycle – If the parish is stable and healthy, it is appropriate to have a more "settled" self-definition. If the parish is in decline, it needs to see itself more as a "missionary society." How we see ourselves needs to be reflected in how our resources are used, e.g., in a "missionary society" self-definition the priest needs to be giving less time to internal nurture and more to evangelization of new members, programs that reach out may need to be more evangelistic, etc.
8. Rooted in Parish History – What are the stories in the history that may speak to a current need? What are the values that have served in the past that speak to the present generation's longings and issues?
9. Potential Constituencies – Who might we establish a relationship with (e.g., volunteer fire company, performing arts community, business people, the homeless, etc.) that would contribute to a civic life and help the general population to notice us?

In the overall marketing process congregational leaders are engaged in:

### **1. Organizational Self Definition**

Parish leaders explore various aspects of self definition and create a statement, a vision of:

Who we are as a congregation - what we value and how we live together

- What we want to contribute to the world God loves
- What we want to achieve

## **2. Influencing the Image People Have**

Members, and those outside the parish, have an image of this congregation. That image is the sum total of people's impressions and ideas about the parish. Parish leaders need to discuss what image they would like members and others to have of the parish. You are seeking something that people can understand and appreciate.

## **3. Positioning**

This is what sets your congregation apart from others. It needs to build on your strengths and be sustainable over the long term. You're looking for a "position" that is not easily duplicated and will cause some people to walk or drive past other churches to get to you. How many people and which people will determine whether your position is as a leader, challenger (to the leader), follower (using what the leader does in your congregation) or "niche". Another aspect of positioning is re-positioning the competition. An example of this is when we use an advertisement that says "you don't have to leave your mind at the door to worship here." That ad's inference is that other churches don't want adult, thinking people. This is an attempt to define your congregation and the other at the same time.

## **4. Communicating**

We need ways of communicating who we are in our invitation. Methods may include using existing members to reach friends and family, mass mailings, advertising in newspapers or radio, billboards, articles in newspapers, special events that draw people and also say who we are, etc.

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