Shaping the Parish

Developmental Initiative Report

Initiative Title: Communal Voice

Level: A

# YOUR NAME

E-MAIL

DESCRIPTION

This initiative is to create or significantly improve the parish’s approach to communal voice. The core of this initiative is around establishing a pattern of community meetings, the use of survey-feedback methods, and an understanding of communal discernment. A useful and effective “communal voice” depends on the positional leadership (rector, vestry, others) staying in role.

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From *Fill All Things* p.110 “Some parishes have started having community meetings three times a year. These are opportunities to have all those willing to gather focus on one significant issue. I’ve seen parishes do it around things such as hospitality, membership growth, and finances. The meetings are usually about 1 1⁄2 hours long. They may include “channeling” (gathering prioritized lists of issues to address and moving them into a channel for action) and ”testing” processes or some other way to gather information related to the topic.”

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From *In Your Holy Spirit: Shaping the Parish through Spiritual Practice*, Chapter on Community – “The parish community needs regular meetings over the course of the year. At times the whole parish, at other times a congregation within the parish. That will depend on the issues to be engaged. These meetings need to make use of the methods known to facilitate dialogue and listening. Having three or four such meetings each year provides the opportunity to engage more people in the significant questions of the community’s life.

It is important that these not turn into “town meetings” with their image of a contentious and argumentative spirit. It’s also important that they not undercut the responsibility of the rector and vestry for decisions they have to make. They are a chance for leaders to test things with the community and for the community to hear its own voice. The effect of such regular gatherings is usually increased trust and commitment. “

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From *In Your Holy Spirit: Shaping the Parish through Spiritual Practice*, Chapter on Community, especially see methods p. 101 “Communal discernment is the process by which a community of faith seeks to see God’s movement in the world and in that community’s life. It is our attempt to see “rightly;;” to see our experience and our goals through the eyes of Christ. It is our striving to listen deeply and grow in our conformity with God's love for us.

There may be many faithful pathways for a parish or an individual. Discernment isn’t about finding the one right way. It is about grounding our life in prayer, reflectiveness, and community. It is also about testing the spirit of our decisions: can we see the Spirit’s movement, the influence of the church and a consistency with history and gifts?

Communal discernment is already happening in all Christian communities. It may be more or less skilled, grounded or intentional in various communities. To the extent a community is grounded in Eucharist and the daily prayers, and has ways of being reflective, that will show itself in the decisions made and the life lived.”

**In the Short-Term (within the time frame of this initiative, 2 – 3 months):**

1. Design and have a parish community meeting. Involve a working group in this. Assess and reflect on how the meeting went.
2. Make use of 2 or 3 tools, methods, processes that you want to integrate into parish use.
3. Place on the parish schedule, and announce, at least three community meetings over the next 14 months
4. Establish a working group (small 3 – 4peopel including the rector) to design and facilitate future meetings. It’s best of most people in the group have training from systems such as Shaping the Parish, LTI, NTL, or CDI.

**In the Longer Term:**

1. Establish community meetings as a routine part of parish life
2. Integrate several methods, tools, processes into the communal habits of the parish
3. Provide a rationale for a communal voice – in practical and ascetical theology and behavioral science related to groups and organizations.
4. Engage in an action-learning process that helps you continue to learn from the experience and make adjustments along the way.

**Resources:**

*Fill All Things* – Community p. 65 – 66, Listening p. 93, 100, 107 - 117, 185,

*In Your Holy Spirit: Shaping the Parish through Spiritual Practice*, Chapter on Community

*In Your Holy Spirit: Traditional Spiritual Practices in Today’s Christian Lif*e, chapter on Community

Survey-feedback – see paper in [Free Documents](http://www.shapingtheparish.com/free-documents) on web site

Guidelines for Communal Discernment – Presbyterian Church

[www.hudrivpres.org/upload/docs/curtiss\_discernment.pdf](http://www.hudrivpres.org/upload/docs/curtiss_discernment.pdf)

A critique of the above

<http://naminghisgrace.blogspot.com/2008/08/guidelines-for-communal-discernment.html>

Listening Hearts Ministry

[www.listeninghearts.org/history.htm](http://www.listeninghearts.org/history.htm)

Participant’s additions & changes to the description

If you are revising the above in some manner, note that here. Offer a rationale for the change. Changes may not be so extreme as to change the basic thrust of the initiative description above --

Have you carefully reviewed the above description?

Yes No [ Note: You must have done this review for the DI to be accepted]

ACTION PLANNING

1. What are you planning to do? What is the action plan? First steps. How you will monitor and adjust along the way

2. Theoretical base and strategic assumptions for the project

a. Theoretical Base (connect related theory to the project and the particulars of your parish) -

b. Strategic Assumptions (In your parish as it is now – what were you assuming would happen allowing the project to move forward? A strategic assumption has enough significance that if it turns out to not be true, the project will fail) -

A. Results: What are the initial results are you seeking? Note: we are assuming you are working from the basic DI description. This section is more a brief statement of overall objectives expressed in a way that integrates the description with the particularities of your parish.

Do the same regarding longer-term development goals? Relationship to the parish’s overall health? Relationship to the primary task of a parish church? -

B. Reflection

1. Strategic (pp 12 – 13 *Intervention Considerations*)

*The Developmental Initiatives are by their nature strategic or at least they are in that arena. These elements may help you consider related factors*

* Long term, developmental, likely to have a ripple effect -

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Not likely |  |  |  | Very Likely |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Comment:

* Related to the primary task of a parish church (form people in faith, renewal in baptismal identity and purpose, facilitating the movement between renewal and apostolate) -

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Not related |  |  |  | Very related |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Comment:

* Can anticipate adequate resources of time, money, and energy devoted to the initiative? -

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Anticipate inadequate resources |  |  |  | Anticipate very adequate resources |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Comment:

2. Demand System (pp13 – 14 *Intervention Considerations*)

*What is really developmental is usually also not urgent. It may be important but it is not urgent. How do you establish a new demand system that serves what’s important?*

* How will you cope with all the other demands, expectations and pressures of the parish an your life as you try to focus on the DI? -
* How will you work to create a new “demand system” that will make this initiative part of the parish’s routine business? -

3. Critical Mass (pp. 23 – 29 *Intervention Considerations*)

*In general critical mass theories are about building the overall level of commitment, competence and emotional maturity at the center of the parish so that it grounds the system in a mission orientation and an organizational culture that supports the mission. In relationship to a specific Developmental Initiative there may be two considerations.*

* What will you do to create enough “weight” to support this particular DI? Will there be enough physical and emotional energy to get the work accomplished? This has to do with the social and political process by which you help the parish move forward. (For example, if working on Group Functioning – can you anticipate enough initial support from members of the groups you want to involved?) - Describe it. -

* In most DIs there is a second consideration. Will enough of a critical mass develop in relationship to the *desired results* of the initiative? (For example, if working on Group Functioning – How will you develop a critical mass of competence and commitment in the groups going through the process? What will you do so people become more skilled?) -

* Is there an “emotional inversion” in the parish, either broadly in the parish in general or in regard to this particular DI? (See bottom p. 26 *Intervention Considerations*) -

4. Internal Commitment (pp. 29 – 31 *Intervention Considerations*)

*This is often interrelated with critical mass considerations. You want as many people as possible, at least a critical mass, to have a high level of commitment to the direction or action that was chosen. This makes it more likely that the intervention will continue to have its benefits for the parish over time and under stress. The assumption is that commitment is built upon a base of valid and useful information and free choice. One element builds on the other. The more the information is valid and useful, the more likely the free choice, the more there is truly free choice, the more likely there will be internal commitment.*

How will you help people engage an adequate amount of valid and useful information? --

How will you design the process so that people have an adequate degree of free choice vs. acting from habit or emotional pressure)? --

5. Your influence (pp. 31 - 34 *Intervention Considerations*; take note of “OD Roles” and “Circles of Influence”)

Assess your influence in relationship to this specific DI? -

6. Readiness (pp. 34 - 38 *Intervention Considerations)*

* Adequate dissatisfaction – Is there dissatisfaction with the way things are in relationship to the DIs field of interest? -
* Favorable stance of people – Is there a person, or more than one person, who wants this to happen and is willing to spend energy making it happen? A person with enough influence with people who would need to cooperate in order for it to happen? -
* Competence for change – Did you have the skills and knowledge needed for this particular intervention? -
* How does it fit with the parish’s current culture? -
* Resources available – Are there adequate resources of people, money, facilities and such to implement the project/change? Any concerns? -
* Energy and attention – What are the likely problems around having the needed amount of energy? -
* Formal authorization – Most of the efforts that can shape a parish only require the

investment of the parish priest. That role assumes the authority to initiate efforts to improve the faithfulness and health of the parish. But there are situations requiring vestry action. Is formal authorization needed from some group within the parish or diocese? -

7. Intervention Choices (pp. 39 - 41 *Intervention Considerations)*

*We are constantly making choices about interventions. Who to involve - just the leadership, a working group, everyone in the organization? What to focus on - the issue it would be easiest to make headway on or the most strategic opportunity? The style of work - do we take a problem solving approach or use some appreciative process? How deep shall we go - are we working on deep underlying assumptions about how we work and relate with one another or are we simply trying to get this problem behind us?*

* What is the unit focus of the intervention? Is there a need to engage at several levels? Rationale for this -
* What is the opportunity, problem, or issue to address? Not simply the title of the DI but in relation to those listed on p 39 -
* What is the intervention method? (for example those listed on p. 39)-

8. Your stance (pp. 42 – 43 *Intervention Considerations)*

* What leadership style do you see yourself taking in doing the intervention (p 42)? How does that match with your preferred leadership style? Do you find yourself needing a broader range of styles? -
* What is your usual stance in relationship to the parish and its leaders (loving critic, unloving critic, uncritical lover)? How might that impact the intervention? -

RESULTS & LEARNINGS

A. Results: What happened? What are the initial results you’re seeing? Also look at it in terms of the project goal/objectives. Is there anything to report in regard to longer-term development goals? Any initial sense about sustainability over the long-term and under pressure? Relationship to the parish’s overall health? Relationship to the primary task of a parish church? Experience regarding your strategic assumptions -

B. Theoretical base and strategic assumptions for the project

a. Theoretical Base (connect related theory to the project and the particulars of your parish) -

*Mark one*

-As expected (in action planning) -

-Differed from what we expected -

If different, please comment -

b. Strategic Assumptions -rate and comment in relationship to strategic assumptions as noted in action planning -

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Not on target |  |  |  | Very much on target |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Comment -

C. Reflection

*Make comments connecting what happened with the area of reflection.*

1. Strategic (pp 12 – 13 *Intervention Considerations*)

*The Developmental Initiatives are by their nature strategic or at least they are in that arena. These elements may help you consider related factors*

* Long term, developmental, likely to have a ripple effect; rate and describe -

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| None |  |  |  | Strong effect |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

* Related to the primary task of a parish church (form people in faith, renewal in baptismal identity and purpose, facilitating the movement between renewal and apostolate); rate and describe -

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| No noticeable relationship |  |  |  | Strong relationship |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

* Were adequate resources of time, money, and energy devoted to the initiative?; rate and describe -

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Not adequate |  |  |  | Very adequate |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

2. Demand System (pp13 – 14 *Intervention Considerations*)

*What is really developmental is usually also not urgent. It may be important but it is not urgent. How do you establish a new demand system that serves what’s important?*

* How did you cope with all the other demands, expectations and pressures of the parish an your life as you tried to focus on the DI? -
* How have you worked to create a new “demand system” that will make this initiative part of the parish’s routine business? -

3. Critical Mass (pp. 23 – 29 *Intervention Considerations*)

*In general critical mass theories are about building the overall level of commitment, competence and emotional maturity at the center of the parish so that it grounds the system in a mission orientation and an organizational culture that supports the mission. In relationship to a specific Developmental Initiative there may be two considerations.*

* Was there enough “weight” to support this particular DI? Enough energy to get the work

accomplished? This has to do with the social and political process by which you help the parish move forward. (For example, if working on Group Functioning – was there enough initial support from members of the groups you wanted involved?) - Rate and Describe -

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Not enough |  |  |  | Enough weight |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

* In most DIs there is another consideration. Is enough of a critical mass developing in relationship to the desired results of the initiative? Rate and Describe (For example, if working on Group Functioning – Is a critical mass of competence and commitment beginning to develop in the groups going through the process? Are people becoming more skilled?) -

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Not enough |  |  |  | Enough |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

* Was there an “emotional inversion” in the parish, either broadly in the parish in general or in regard to this particular DI? (See bottom p. 26 *Intervention Considerations*) -

Yes No unsure

Comment -

4. Internal Commitment (pp. 29 – 31 *Intervention Considerations*)

*This is often interrelated with critical mass considerations. You want as many people as possible, at least a critical mass, to have a high level of commitment to the direction or action that was chosen. This makes it more likely that the intervention will continue to have its benefits for the parish over time and under stress. The assumption is that commitment is built upon a base of valid and useful information and free choice. One element builds on the other. The more the information is valid and useful, the more likely the free choice, the more there is truly free choice, the more likely there will be internal commitment.*

a. What did you do to build internal commitment as seen is this approach? -

b. Assess

Enough internal commitment for what was needed in this case -

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Not enough |  |  |  | Enough |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Base of free choice and valid and useful information to build the internal commitment -

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Not enough |  |  |  | Enough |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Comment -

5. Your influence (pp. 31 - 34 *Intervention Considerations*; take note of “OD Roles” and “Circles of Influence”)

Was your influence adequate to manage the intervention?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Not at all |  |  |  | Adequate |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Comment -

6. Readiness (pp. 34 - 38 *Intervention Considerations)*

* Adequate dissatisfaction – Was there dissatisfaction with the way things were in relationship to the change projects field of interests? -

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Not at all |  |  |  | Adequate |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Comment -

* Favorable stance of people – Was there a person, or more, who wants this to happen and is willing to spend energy making it happen? A person with enough influence with people who would need to cooperate in order for it to happen? -

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Not at all |  |  |  | Adequate |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Comment -

* Competence for change – Did we have the skills and knowledge we need for this particular intervention? -

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Not at all |  |  |  | Adequate |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Comment -

* It fit with the parish’s current culture -

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Not at all |  |  |  | Adequate |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Comment -

* Resources available – the people, money, facilities and such needed to implement the project/change. -

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Not at all |  |  |  | Adequate |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Comment -

* Energy and attention – The needed amount of energy was available -

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Not at all |  |  |  | Adequate |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Comment -

* Formal authorization – Most of the efforts that can shape a parish only require the

investment of the parish priest. That role assumes the authority to initiate efforts to improve the faithfulness and health of the parish. But there are situations requiring vestry action. Was there the needed authorization? -

Yes No Uncertain

Comment -

7. Intervention Choices (pp. 39 - 41 *Intervention Considerations)*

*We are constantly making choices about interventions. Who to involve - just the leadership, a working group, everyone in the organization? What to focus on - the issue it would be easiest to make headway on or the most strategic opportunity? The style of work - do we take a problem solving approach or use some appreciative process? How deep shall we go - are we working on deep underlying assumptions about how we work and relate with one another or are we simply trying to get this problem behind us?*

* What was the unit focus of the intervention? Did that end up being appropriate? Was there (or is there) a need to engage at several levels of units? -
* What was the opportunity, problem, or issue to address? Not simply the title of the DI but in relation to those listed on p 39 -
* What was the intervention method? (for example those listed on p. 39)-

8. Your stance (pp. 42 – 43 *Intervention Considerations)*

* What leadership style did you take in doing the intervention (p 42)? Was that effective? Did you find yourself needing a broader range of styles? -
* What is your usual stance in relationship to the parish and its leaders (loving critic, unloving critic, uncritical lover)? How did that effect the intervention? -

C. Learnings

1. About change theory and methods -

2. About spiritual practices in shaping the parish -

3. About emotional & social intelligence in shaping the parish -

4. About yourself as a person and leader

D. Next Steps

1. Thoughts on long-term goals -

2. Next steps in the short term -

3. Comments -