The elements of an effective parish development training program

Over a period of about 20 years Robert Gallagher, at times in consultation with other CDI trainers, shaped a particular form of training for parish development. Robert was a trainer in the MATC (Mid-Atlantic Training Committee) system. He was involved with coordinating and staffing lab training in organization development, consultation skills, group development, conflict management, educational design, and human interaction. And in 1975 he launched what, in time, became the Church Development Institute (CDI). That first program was to train consultants for the Diocese of Pennsylvania.

Here are the elements of a training system that were established during those 20 years.

1. A significant amount of workshop training time was required, usually two years. This was about 120 hours of workshop time. (beginning in 1978)

2. The workshop sessions were a mix of experiential exercises with a disciplined learning reflection process, explorations regarding application, skill training, and theoretical presentations. This was pretty standard in the training offered in both secular and religious systems. (Used beginning in 1978)

3. The workshops were a mix of organization development, organizational psychology and ascetical theology and practice. The last was a new element. Early on it drew on the work of Martin Thornton and Esther deWaal and the set of core frameworks developed by Robert Gallagher (The Christian Life Model, the Shape of the Parish, the Renewal-Apostolate Cycle, and the Benedictine Promise Model). All sessions included saying the Daily Office together. (Beginning in 1978)

4. A significant course of reading in the field. At first it was required for those who wanted a certificate. Later in became a requirement for everyone. And everyone participating in CDI was engaged in all the work related to receiving a certificate. (Beginning in 1978)

5. Training parish rectors and vicars to lead parish development efforts in their own churches. This was a shift from most of such training being for consultants in several denominational judicatories. Of course, there were always some participants using it as part of learning how to become a parish development consultant. (Beginning in 1981 in first diocesan program in the Diocese of Connecticut)

6. Parish teams consisting of the rector and a few lay members was at first encouraged, and in time, became the norm. (Beginning in 1981 in first diocesan program in the Diocese of Connecticut)

7. A learning culture that with high expectations regarding participation and the completion of work, openness to personal feedback, and common worship. (Beginning in 1978 and building in strength with the establishing of the Connecticut program in 1981 and the General Seminary – Order of the Ascension program beginning in 1985)

8. Taking seriously the ethos, spirituality, and culture of the Episcopal Church as part of what shapes the training. (Beginning in 1978 and growing over the years especially when Gallagher received training from Edgar Schein on organizational culture.

9. The design, implementation and reporting on projects or developmental initiatives. Application in the parish with a process of report and critique. (Beginning in 1981 in Connecticut. Became the norm by 1999)

10. A norm that each participant must complete the entire program. Make up sessions and work are provided. This was a shift from some in the program seeking a certificate and doing all the work and some just attending workshop session and doing what additional work they wanted. (Beginning in 1999)

Contributions

There were contributions to all the changes noted above from the many trainers that served on staff during these years. However, Robert Gallagher was the director and the primary educational designer. None of those changes were contributed to by those who became the College for Congregational Development (CCD) training staff. They inherited the skeleton and muscles of what makes for an effective parish development training program.

There were other kinds of contributions made by several people. Melissa Skelton’s marketing skills turned around a declining participation rate in the mid 1990’s. Craig Anderson, Dean of General. Seminary at the time, made a formal appoint of Robert Gallagher to the GTS staff and provided additional funds to undergird the program. And Peggy Bosmyer & Dennis Campbell, leaders of the CDI at Sewanee, worked with Gallagher and Skelton in creating a partnership of the CDIs at Sewanee and General.

Shaping the Parish

2010-2013

 program to equip lay and ordained leaders to develop and nurture healthier parishes in a two-fold program of providing a support system for the parish and competency development for the leaders. It focused on immediate, tangible improvements in the parish while building long-term health. Shaping the Parish assumes that vibrant, faithful churches will flourish as leaders and parishes improve their own: spiritual practice, emotional and social intelligence, and change theory and methods. The results of the initial programs were encouraging. A new diocesan program will begin in 2022. Founded in July 2010 by Michelle Heyne and Robert Gallagher.

Shaping the Parish was a major shift in emphasis. It focused on revitalizing parishes in the short term while building long-term health. CDI and its spin offs often have the effect of revitalization but the process is less direct than in Shaping the Parish. As designed Shaping the Parish offered:

1) Both short-term improvement in parish health and long-term transformation

2) A focus on parish health and change rather than the development of the practitioner

3) Expected more of participants - parish interventions between all weekends, more reading

4) Gave significant attention to the spiritual practices and emotional intelligence of the participants.

5) Provided a high level of guidance and support to participants from the trainers throughout the program.

**Suggestions**

We are offering a few suggestions to DCDI and CCD based on what was learned in Shaping the Parish:

1. Provide developmental interventions (projects) for participants to use that are designed to be truly developmental. Support that with coaching from experience trainers. Comment - we continue to hear about projects that are designed by participants in the two programs. Most are not really developmental. Of course participants can still learn about the process of change in a parish as well as about their own emotional and spiritual life as they engage the work. Participant skills can be better increased if they are provided with a few well designed developmental initiatives to carry out in the first year of the program. That pattern might be continued or they might then be invited to design their own projects.

2. Begin with a weekend T-group and the use of several instruments (MBTI, FIRO B, and TKI). Information on T-groups -- [Crosby](https://crosbyandassociates.wordpress.com/2012/12/06/t-groups-misundertood-all-too-often-historically-mismanged-yet-the-most-significant-social-invention-of-the-century-according-to-carl-rogers/)  [Gallagher](http://static1.1.sqspcdn.com/static/f/630204/18819955/1340039143073/About%2BT-groups.pdf?token=NNCmmzW6bpWcfFOAKEntPiYBtAQ%3D).  Our Shaping the Parish experience suggest that doing these activities at the front end of a program creates a more open learning environment that persists, establishes a norm of useful and skilled feedback, and sharpens the emotional intelligence of most participants. A difficulty with this is that it means that the training staff need to have a much higher level of training competence.