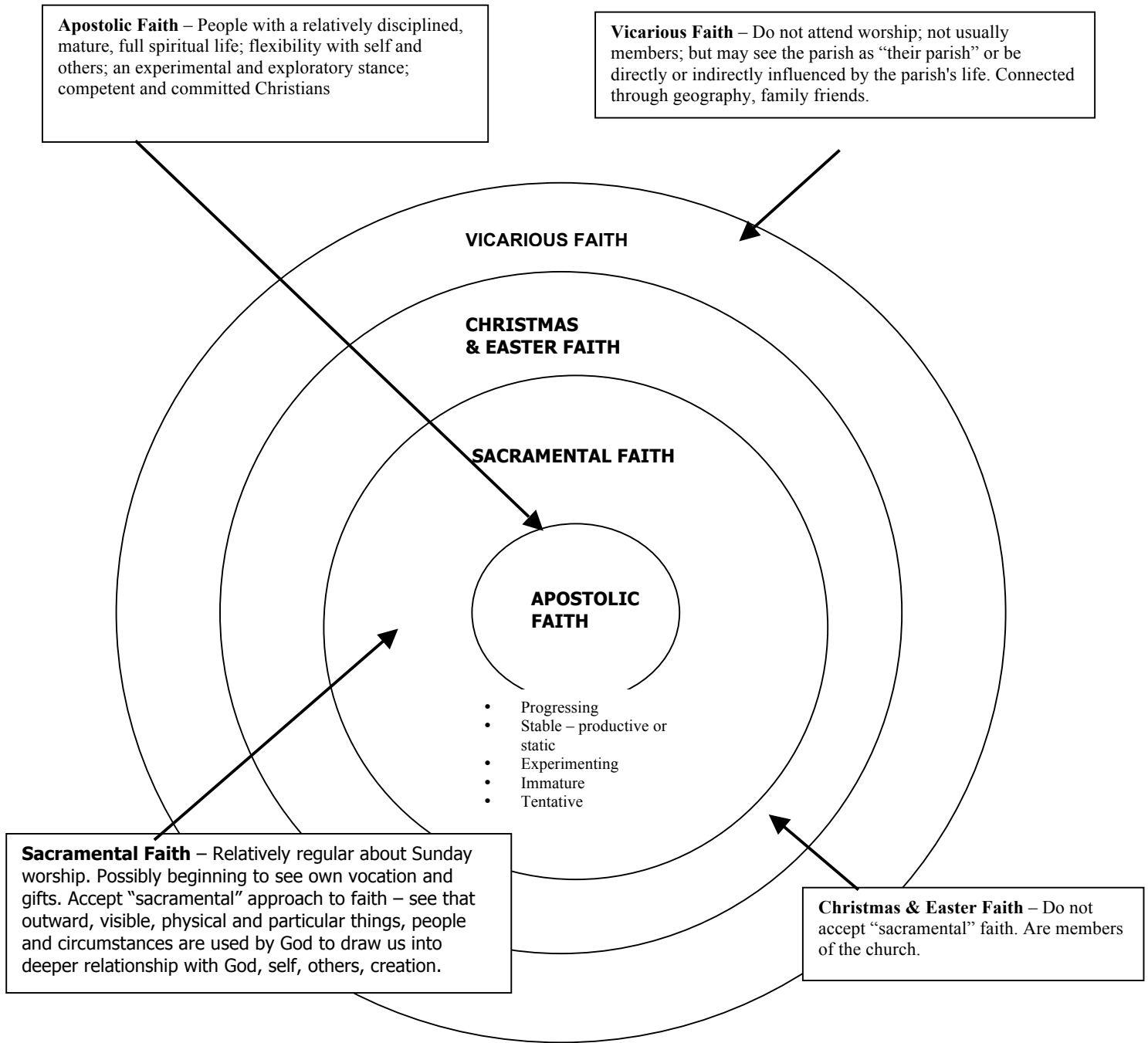


# The Shape of the Parish



The model can be used:

- To assess the health of a parish, and
- To develop a strategy that deepens the parish's spiritual life, while staying open to the various places people are in their faith journey.

From *Fill All Things: The Spiritual Dynamics of the Parish Church*, Robert A Gallagher Copyright 2008  
 "Shape of the Parish" Diagram -- Robert A. Gallagher/Mary Anne Mann, 1983; Revised RAG 1999, 200

## More on Shaping the Parish

“The ‘Shape of the Parish’ is a critical mass theory. Critical mass theories are used by many Organization Development practitioners. The model suggests building the level of commitment, competence and emotional maturity at the center of the organization so that it grounds the system in a mission orientation and an organizational culture that supports the mission. The grounding then is enlivened; made real in the lives of men and women. It’s in the habits of people rather than statements of leaders.

Critical mass models draw the attention of leaders away from obsessing about “fixing” the problems and dysfunction at the edges and toward building the center. We can all too easily find our attention drawn toward the “difficult people” or those who constantly demand personal attention. A critical mass model suggests that we give much more of our time and energy to developing the center by equipping those already of Apostolic Faith and those ready to move in that direction. *Fill All Things: The Dynamics of Spirituality in the Parish Church*, Robert A Gallagher, Ascension Press, 2008, p. 125)

“When a parish has a healthy and productive Shape you see a definite movement. People are drawn into a deeper relationship with God and the church. There is a sense of spiritual movement in the parish.” (*Fill All Things*, p. 142) Leaders are establishing two dynamics at the center in shaping the parish. They are the deep underlying assumptions that provide the base for a healthy parish culture. The parish church is about forming people for “real life;” for maturity in Christ. It is developing in women and men a taste for life in what John Macquarrie saw as “a commonwealth of free, responsible beings united in love.” Secondly, the parish is about engaging “an energy not its own.” Formation isn’t about creating perfect, sinless people. It is about connecting us to the power of the Holy Spirit. (*Fill All Things*, p. 156)

### ***General Comments on Nurturing Growth***

1. The core pastoral strategy is to **accept** people where they are *and* to **invite** them to move beyond where they are.
2. Individual growth often comes in leaps (e.g., a person may move quickly from Experimenting to Progressing to Apostolic Faith).
3. Foundations are important. At times there is a desire to grow, or there may be deep feeling about God and/or the church. Such feelings can be the pastor's opening to invite the person into a setting where the needed base is offered. That foundation in spiritual life or knowledge may serve the person ten years later when they are prepared to move more deeply into the relationship with God and the church.
4. Address the gaps that people live in. The gap may be between the person's intentions and the impact of their behavior on others. There may be gaps of

understanding more common to some forms of faith than others. The “Believing-Belonging” gaps may be especially strong in people of Vicarious and C&E Faith. The gap between faith and daily life may be common in the phases of Vicarious, C&E and early Sacramental faith.

5. New members need special attention. They may be people transferring from other parishes who already live an Apostolic or Stable Sacramental Faith. They might be C&E or people who for some reason have decided to begin attending. Or they could be people with almost no religious background, without any connection to the parish, who have just decided to "try it." Often these people may come with a good bit of emotional intelligence, a strong longing, and good intentions but lack foundational practices. There is the potential that they might move quickly into a progressing expression of Sacramental faith.”

*(Fill All Things, page 135)*