

# THREE MOVEMENTS OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

This model is based on the work of Henri Nouwen in *Reaching Out*, Doubleday & Co., 1975

Nouwen writes that “the spiritual life is that constant movement between the poles of loneliness and solitude, hostility and hospitality, illusion and prayer. The more we come to the painful confession of our loneliness, hostility and illusions, the more we are able to see solitude, hospitality and prayer as part of the vision of our life.”

## REFLECTION ON THE PARISH

This is an opportunity to contemplate your congregation by using the framework of “the three movements”. Circle phrases or add your own comments in the various categories. Your objective is to see clearly. Try to avoid getting into how to change things.

### LONELINESS

- Greedy, needy, clinging, exploitative, dependent, sentimental
- A place of rivals and competition
- Seem to be driven by a need for words and events that bring immediate satisfaction
- Seem to assume that togetherness is “the solution”
- See parish as a place to take away our loneliness
- Not OK to be “closed” for now, have difficulty honoring and projecting our own inner life



### SOLITUDE

- Mutual respect, consideration, for individuality, allows aloneness
- Capacity to be still and silent together
- Capacity to listen uncomfortable words
- Value those who listen to their inner voice

### HOSTILITY

- Impatient, frustrated, busy fearful, aggressive, passive
- Parish life if crowded with things to do, events, expectations, pressure
- Running from pain and death
- Sees new people as a danger to the way are; or to be used for parish needs



### HOSPITALITY

- Receptive, safe boundaries, question and experiment without fear; Invites openness while honoring uniqueness
- Touches pain and death with compassion
- Sees the parish as a space in which people might be changed
- Children are valued
- There is a “defined” culture, a sense of who we are as a community of faith; there are limits and boundaries with flexibility
- Receptivity and challenge

## ILLUSION

- Discussion and prayer seems trivial, full of platitudes
- Illusion of immortality; sentimentality, violence, overly serious
- Making idols of our dreams
- Seeking quick healing; sense of desperation for fulfillment
- Illusion of control of self and others; church (parish) the result of human efforts
- Prayer is an “add on” to our togetherness



## PRAYER

- Longing for “reality”
- Acceptance of our own and life’s complexities; humor, life as fragile gift
- Community provides training and support for prayer and spiritual life
- Patient, a waiting community, acceptance of God’s presence and absence
- Parish’s depth is by God’ Initiative
- Prayer is at heart of parish life