St. Paul's Parish, Seattle

Growth and Decline

Michelle Heyne, OA and Robert Gallagher, OA

September 2, 2019

The Feast of the Martyrs of New Guinea

From the Parish Profile 2014

From liturgies and sermons, to classes and participation in mutual discernment, I am invited into patterns of formation at St. Paul's that shape the way I engage in worship, relationships, and my daily ministry in the world. This formation, centering on Benedictine prayer, the arts, and traditional liturgies, awakens my imagination and invites me to engage the world with curiosity and reverence. — Parishioner of four years

St. Paul's provides me with a deep and sustaining anchor, giving shape and purpose to my life. It is at the heart of my spiritual practice and journey, providing rhythm and cadence to prayer. Here I cultivate rich personal connections, and am connected in community. — Parishioner of eight years

[St. Paul's is] a place where worship is possible —a place conducive to worship—a place where quietness and stillness create a space largely lacking in the world—a place where the beauty of language is appreciated and where clear thinking is valued. — Parishioner of 22 years

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The Issue We Face

The parish's attendance has declined significantly since 2014 (the start of the interim period) and we are not attracting new people as we once did.

This has been the elephant in the room. Most people know attendance is down. And yet it wasn't until recently that it was discussed directly in any public gathering of members. Michelle Heyne raised it at a recent community gathering as we were talking about changing the Sunday schedule. A couple of other parishioners then also expressed concern.

This document is about St. Paul's growth and decline since 2005. It's an analysis of what factors may have been involved both in the growth and in the decline. We also offer some speculation about what might be done to address the decline.

Blame and Defense

When a parish declines in attendance and membership what is set loose most of the time is the cycle of blame and defense. That cycle is usually around the priest: some blame the priest, and some defend the priest.

It's a fair guess that the silence about the decline up till now has, at least in part, been related to a desire to not enter into that cycle. People intuitively know that cycle is likely, and they choose to avoid the topic. While understandable, it's a damaging response. Human dignity is lessened, the parish's ability to cope with challenges is weakened, and in the end, many still suspect the rector has been causing a problem. So even while this remains unsaid, you may begin to see those close to the rector and those in parish leadership acting more and defensively, which is unlikely to be helpful in trying to figure out what the parish should do next.

We want to be clear that the reasons for, and the dynamics of, growth and decline are complex. As important as our rectors are in a parish's life, when we invest ourselves in the blame-defense cycle we avoid seeing the complexity.

Join Us

We invite you to join us in this exploration. Our aim is to help stimulate useful and productive conversation about what's happening. We hope this will provide a pathway for St. Paul's, as well as for other parishes that are finding it difficult to engage the conversations they need to have. We hope you'll suggest additional factors that may have been involved that we have missed, offer wording that may help us better capture the factor being discussed, and share your own perspective.

For you to be able to do that, you need to set the blame-defense cycle on the shelf. It's part of our training as parish development consultants to do that and we know it's very hard to do. We also know it's possible to do.
In reading this you may experience wanting to blame someone—maybe the former rector, the current rector, vestry members, or maybe the two of us for raising these

issues. We invite you to notice those feelings or judgments and to set them aside for a bit. Set them on the shelf. Similarly, if, as you read this you find yourself feeling defensive on your own behalf or that of others, do the same thing and set that on the shelf.

After some time has passed, and we've heard from some of you, we'll offer another posting on the blog.

Contact us with your questions, wonderments, and suggested changes:
    Michelle Heyne   michelleheyne@gmail.com
    Robert Gallagher   ragodct@gmail.com

About Michelle & Robert

We are both life-professed members of the Order of the Ascension, a dispersed religious Community of the Episcopal Church, with a charism related to parish development and revitalization. St. Paul's is our parish and we care deeply about it. That means we are in no way "disinterested." At the same time, we have a great deal of experience and training in parish and organization development (see "About Us" in the last section of this document for more information), and we've spent many years paying close attention to how St. Paul's has developed. Robert was closely connected to the changes the former rector implemented starting in 2005. Michelle has been a member of the parish since the late '90s and served on the vestry both during a time when there was real fear the parish would need to take drastic action to survive, as well as when the former rector began to make the changes that led to the period of growth of 2005 to 2013. She remembers the stress—both negative and positive—she and other leaders experienced and hopes that this paper will be helpful in channeling the stress productively for a new generation of leaders.

An Acknowledgment

The two of us have had a difficult relationship at various times with both of the rectors. Robert is an ex-husband of Mother Melissa. He was also a significant resource and source of counsel to Melissa in the first couple of years of her time at St. Paul's. In addition, Melissa received her training in parish development from Robert through her participation in the Church Development Institute. Her trust in his judgment about these matters was underscored when she contacted him years after the divorce to seek his assistance as she ran for bishop in a couple of dioceses. She welcomed Robert back to the parish prior to her election as the Bishop of New Westminster; we have both been back at St. Paul's since 2013, having left the parish in 2007. We did stay broadly in touch with what was happening during our absence and Michelle continued to attend periodically.

In this paper we have tried our best to stay professional and objective. We have also tried to differentiate what we have observed from what we assume or what we speculate about. We recognize that despite our best efforts we may allow our feelings to influence what we are offering. We ask your understanding and forgiveness to the extent that is true, and we welcome your responses and corrections.

The Context of the Parish Church and Key Hypotheses

Parishes exist within a wider social and institutional setting that includes cultural, political and economic forces that may be regional, national or global. They operate within a larger organizational framework that comes from being part of a diocese, the national church and the Anglican Communion. The grid below is one way of picturing all that. It shows "The Parish" as the local organizational setting. Everything else is the context, or environment, in which the parish exists.

	WIDER SETTING	**LOCAL SETTING**
SOCIAL CONTEXT	Social, economic, political and cultural forces on a national/global scale	The impact of wider contextual forces on the region Forces that are peculiar to the region
ORGANIZATIONAL	Forces coming from the wider organizational context, i.e., diocese, the national church and the Anglican Communion. This may include policies, resources, the organizational culture, national reputation, etc.	*The Parish* The goals, structures, culture, people, size, leadership and dynamics of a particular parish. Its strengths and weaknesses, its gifts and blindside. How it relates and adapts to the forces of its social and organizational context.

The local organizational (parish) issues include these:
1. System assessment factors such as: Apostolic strength at the center coupled with a climate of acceptance of people at all stages of faith development; operational understanding of the primary tasks of a parish church; productivity, innovation, quality of life in the parish; information flow and response time, usefulness and accuracy; quality of work life for parish staff; organizational culture; ability to set direction and navigate toward it, oversight/leadership strength.
2. Size and the dynamics related to size.
3. Leadership style range, adaptability, fit with the parish culture and needs of the moment
4. Primary psychological contracts—around liturgy and music, formation of adults and children, community life, relationship with the rector, the building, parish history, etc.
5. Parish self-definition.
6. Dominant strength.
7. Dominant parish pathology.

The above is based on "Contextual Issues" in the manual of the Church Development Institute © Robert A. Gallagher, 1990, 1994, 1996, 1997

In relationship to matters of growth and decline, our starting point is life within the parish. How might this parish best express itself as a microcosm of the Body of Christ?

How does it most effectively manage the issues above?

There's really not much impact the parish church can have on contextual forces outside itself, i.e., on the non-parish contextual issues. We don't have much influence on the environmental forces around the parish, and certainly are not able to control them. Where we do have influence and control is about how much adaptation is necessary for survival and effectiveness; and how the parish maintains and advances its identity and institutional integrity in relationship to the contextual forces.

Overall, we do not believe that the growth or the decline in attendance has a strong relationship to the external environment. We think it's a matter of the parish's pastoral and developmental strategy.

Our key hypothesis is that an appreciative strategy, with a focus on the parish's strengths and gifts, was the primary factor in our growth. A reduction of emphasis on the elements of that strategy is related to the decline. Another important internal factor seems to have been the number of people who developed a psychological contract more around the rector than being incorporated into the parish's culture of being a place of deep prayer, especially as expressed in liturgy and music.

## Background information available

Theories, models, people and issues mentioned in the paper and background resources on St. Paul's are available at:
http://www.congregationaldevelopment.com/means-of-grace-hope-of-glory/2019/8/30/saint-pauls-parish-seattle-growth-decline.html

A Chart of Growth & Decline

Average Sunday Attendance (ASA)

Note: The numbers we've gathered come from different sources. They differ slightly from each other but are all close enough to one another to show the trends.
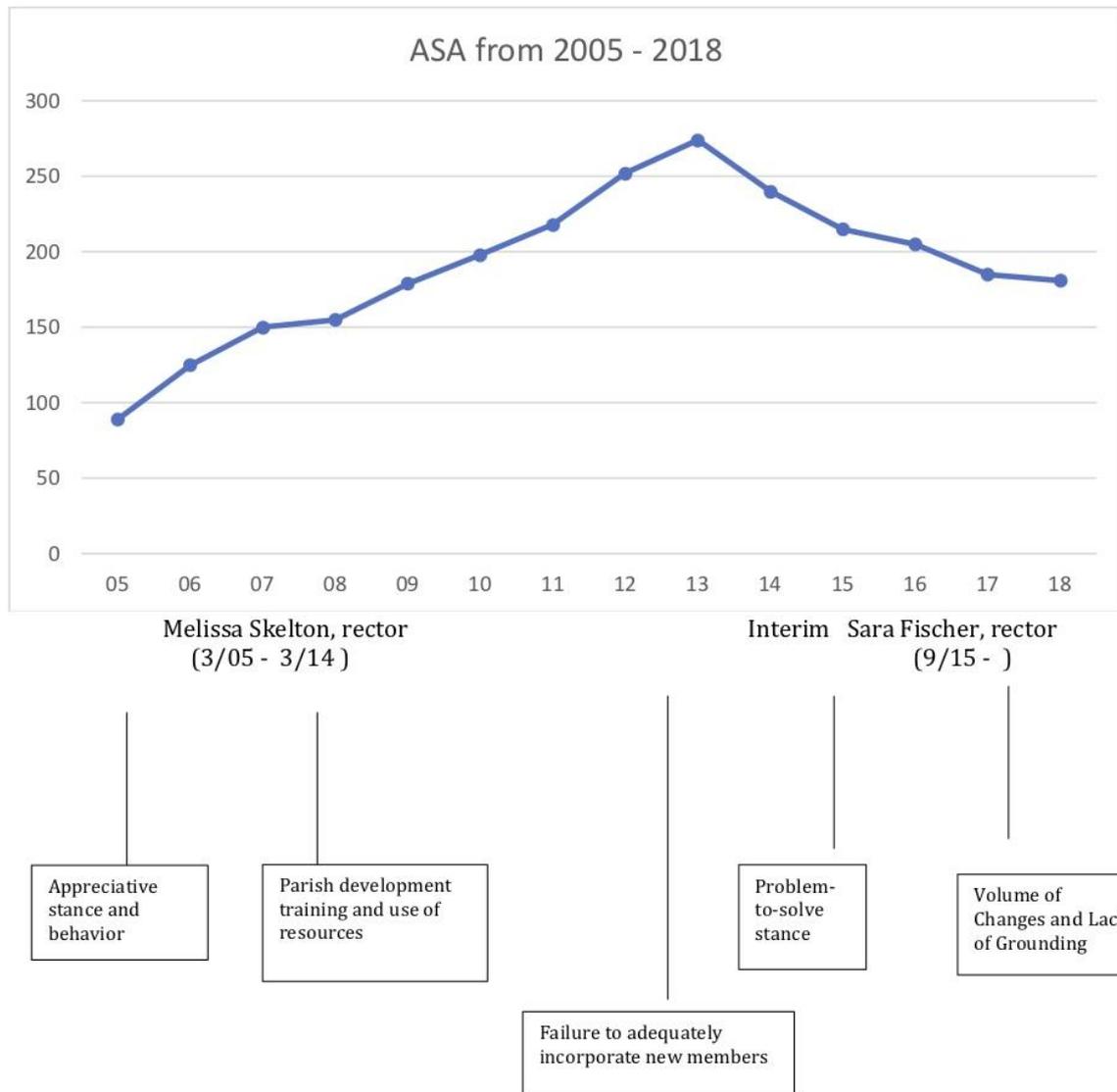
The ASA numbers from 2005 – 2013 are based on those reported by the Rt. Rev Melissa Skelton in presentations she has made in various dioceses. The ASA from 2014 to 2018 are based on charts produced by the national church database, reflecting data from parochial reports. We thank Mother Sara Fischer for pointing us to this resource.

The various sources of numbers are not entirely aligned, but the overall trends seem clear. If there was a group that felt it was necessary to revisit the historical numbers, we would suggest having a group of "neutral" members compile the ASA and some financial information for 2005 through 2018. Such a group could compare apples to apples and might be able to clear up slight discrepancies such as Skelton's report of an ASA of 274 in 2013 and the parish profile reporting 265. If possible, such a group might

be able to track attendance at the four Masses during the time they all existed. As the overall picture of growth and decline is unlikely to change based on such work, we would not be inclined to do this ourselves.

The 2014 Parish Profile reported the 2013 figures for each congregation:

7:30 am 20
9:00 am 70
11:15 am 125
5:00 pm 50

We want to end this section reiterating what we started with. Parishes lose people and gain people. St. Paul's is where it is not only because we have lost people. We have also not continued our prior success in attracting people in numbers that made up for those leaving.

What are the factors involved and what might we do about it?

Why the Growth—Decline?

When dealing with growth and decline there are many forces and dynamics in play. There is no way to be totally certain about which factors have most contributed. The best we can do is make informed guesses about what the forces have been. Others may have different or additional hunches. We do believe that our guesses or hunches about the *primary* forces are pretty much on-the-money. We say that because of our training, experience, and vocation. That said, if additional information comes to light, that could change our view.

The way we come at this from our background in organization and parish development is through action research.

Action research is a cycle between intentional action to change an organization and disciplined reflection and learning arising out of that change effort. Sometimes it's a simultaneous process. An underlying assumption of action research is that you learn about an organization when you try to change it.

In this paper we are using action research in two ways. First, by looking at the situation after a change has occurred—growth or decline in attendance. And, second, in speculating about what changes might improve the parish's situation.

The characteristics of action research include: it's a cycle (action – reflection/learning – action – reflection/learning); it's collaborative and participatory (members of the organization are involved in the learning and acting); it's informed by both theory and practice; and it feels risky (those involved experience anxiety about the open discussion of the various interpretations of the situation). Taking this pathway requires both some humility and courage.

In this section of the paper, we're going to offer a series of hypotheses of what may have contributed to growth or decline and provide some commentary on those.

Factors in Growth/Decline Related to 2005 - 2013

Appreciative Stance and Behavior

Hypothesis: Melissa Skelton's appreciative stance and behavior, and the parish leadership's concurrence, was a significant factor in the parish's growth. This was characterized by the leadership accepting, valuing, building upon and expanding the parish's gifts of liturgy and music, Anglo-Catholic identity, and inclination toward the inner life.

Mother Melissa took note that the parish was a community of extraordinary liturgy and music. When she and Robert participated in their first Mass at St. Paul's they found themselves crying with joy.

The appreciative stance/behavior strategy was at the heart of the parish's new growth and vibrancy. What is meant by engaging in an appreciative process is not simply words of appreciation—e.g., saying how wonderful our liturgy is, how nice it is that we have prayer in the chapel every day, and so on. It is first of all actions to undergird and make incarnate that appreciation. It was also a deeper look at the parish's best, its heart, the place of its deepest joy, and what it had done well over time.

For a rector to choose to take an appreciative stance rather than a problem-to-solve focus may be the most important developmental decision made early in the relationship. Other routes are neither appreciative nor problem-focused and are all too common. Some priests come in and are eager to make their mark; they get caught up in their self-regard. Others naturally get drawn in by what they perceive to be deficiencies in the parish. They may have some vision or some "right" way things are supposed to be. Or maybe they're stuck looking through the lens of what they did in their last parish. There are also rectors who are invested in a political ideology or view of an age when the church was better than it is now.

Melissa Skelton took the appreciative pathway. She asked, what was St. Paul's best gift? Liturgy and the music of liturgy was what she saw. It was what others talked about. It was year after year what visitors were swept away by.

The rector acted quickly to enhance the liturgy by routine and frequent training of servers and lectors. A booklet was made available, *Liturgical Presence*, by Robert Gallagher, OA, to guide the norms for those serving at the altar. That booklet was used in the parish until 2016. Excellence in preaching was the norm. She also acted to strengthen the public Daily Office: teams were formed and there was regular coaching for team members, a customary was drafted, and internal advertising begun. Within a year weekly attendance at the Office had gone from around 14 to 45 or so. This contributed to the healthy synergy that exists between the Sunday Eucharist and the percentage of a parish participating in the Daily Office either on their own or in a public offering.

Two large scale initiatives that extended the parish's liturgical gifts were the renovation of the liturgical space and the expansion of the number of Sunday Masses, first from two to three, and then from three to four.

Melissa was also able to accept and work with the introverted nature of the parish community. An extravert herself, she didn't strain against it or make comments about the problem with introverts. What she did was enable ways of connecting that fit that orientation while also serving those who are more extraverted.

Another aspect of the appreciation strategy was building a denser culture around it. So, teaching would be done on the Daily Office, people would learn how to say it on their own as well as how to participate in the chapel. There were classes in Benedictine spirituality, the Benedictine Promise was put on the website, and a Mass was celebrated in the church with choir on the feast of St. Benedict. People learned of the threefold rule of prayer and it, too, was on the website. There were programs in Anglo-Catholicism—the tradition, worship and approach to justice. The parish offered "Foundations" classes, which taught parishioners the basics of Christian proficiency with an emphasis on practice. These classes were, for a number of years, offered with some repetition to better enable more members to participate over time.

Father Rob Voyle is the Episcopal Church's expert in Appreciative Inquiry. Rob is the Director of the Clergy Leadership Institute. He has a doctorate in clinical psychology and has done extensive training and coaching with clergy in appreciative inquiry. Rob heard Mother Melissa talk about what was happening at St. Paul's in 2012 at a clergy gathering in the Diocese of Oregon. He wrote an assessment in which he captures the essential movement she took of valuing the ethos and people of the parish, **as it was** (our emphasis). A few phrases from that document, "Creating Sustainable Change through Incarnational Leadership": "It begins with delight in what already is and not what might be." …"When the people knew that Melissa knew what they valued and that she shared that value they trusted her and were then willing to follow her lead in experimenting and making changes."

Another sign of this stance was seen in the frequent references to John Orens' "The Anglo Catholic Vision." Many of Orens' phrases sounded as though they'd sprung out of the life of St. Paul's: "But ours is a century unwilling to remember and unable to hope…," …"In the secret places of their hearts, modern men and women are seeking themselves. They sense though they cannot believe it, that they are of enduring value, that there is more to themselves than their employers, their accountants, their government, or even their families can possibly know. What the world craves is the assurance that there is 'a splendor burning in the heart of things,'" and, "we have been graced by the presence of gay men and women whose saintly lives have been sacraments of God's love," and "the joyful fact that conversion is the fruit of love," and "They are intentional and have created a culture of excellence," and "engagement with reality is a risky business."

Mother Melissa's approach was seen by others as strongly appreciative. Bishops Gray-Reeves and Perham in *The Hospitality of God*, noted the parish's growth and their description of their experience confirmed the correctness of the rector's decision to build upon and enhance the gifts that existed before she arrived. The bishops found that

"it was easy to be swept up to full participation in the liturgy because it was confident, well done and a genuine expression of the spiritual life of the body. It was simply true."

On leaving the parish to become Bishop of New Westminster Melissa pointed not to her own considerable parish development knowledge and skills, but to what was true about St. Paul's. She said it was "a parish that was deep and well-defined in its Christian and Anglo-Catholic spirituality, flexible in its organizational life and lovable beyond all my expectations."

An appreciative stance and behavior have long been accepted in the field of organization development as one of the most successful ways to improve organizations. Even before the work on Appreciative Inquiry was developed, when leaders would do what is called a SWOT analysis (Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats), many recognized that the primary work was to focus on the strengths and opportunities identified. The weaknesses and threats were addressed if they were seriously endangering the survival or mission of the organization.

The parish's growth took the form of organic evangelization. As a kind of "buzz" developed regarding the parish, and the apostolic center was strengthened, so the attractiveness of the parish increased for a variety of potential members. In *Christian Proficiency*, Martin Thornton wrote of the dynamic this way: "…the main, if not the sole, evangelistic power is the efficient spirituality of the Catholic Church…our own growth in prayer and spiritual perception exudes a joyous stability more attractive and influential than any argument or exhortation." (p. 165)

Mother Melissa's Parish Development Training and Use of Parish Development Resources

Hypothesis: Melissa Skelton's parish development training and experience, along with the coaching resources provided by an experienced consultant (Robert), in cooperation with lay leaders, was a significant factor in the parish's growth.

Mother Melissa's first learning experience in parish development was as an observer of the Church Development Institute (CDI) program at General Theological Seminary when she was the Vice President there. Her task was to make a recommendation to the new Dean about continuing the program (then co-sponsored with the Order of the Ascension). The program was continued, and she later participated in it by coming as a participant with a team from her Maine parish and by becoming a trainer. Melissa also received an Organization Development certificate from the National Training Labs (NTL). She married Robert Gallagher and made use of his consulting skills in her parish in Maine and early on at St. Paul's. Her earlier learning experience and work as a manager at P&G was another significant part of the competency base she made use of in the process of St. Paul's revitalization.

A few examples:

She put in place an incorporation process that included getting more people to attend coffee hour, monthly orientation dinners at her home, and the Adult Foundations

Course that offered in-depth modules to give new and old members the skills of Christian proficiency.

She did excellent work in combining useful parish and organization development theory with strategic action. The appreciative approach mentioned above is one illustration. She also made good use of survey-feedback methods in combination with intervention theory to increase parishioner involvement and ownership. Her understanding of pastoral theology models such as the Renewal-Apostolate Cycle and the Shape of the Parish Model helped her stay oriented to the broader and long-term developmental goals of healthy and faithful development.

Her rather sophisticated grasp of marketing, along with the above pastoral theology models, helped her make sound decisions to establish connection with people and groups already inclined to religious participation, especially evangelicals seeking mystery and beauty, and Roman Catholics seeking good liturgy and a more liberal social ethic.

She also involved parishioners in attending the Church Development Institute and later the College for Congregational Development. That allowed more partnership between lay leaders and Mother Melissa.

Melissa's natural inclination was to assess a situation, determine the needed direction, and pursue it, including giving orders to those who were to carry out various aspects of the work. She was naturally good at doing those things. She improved her effectiveness by expanding her range of leadership styles and decision-making through her training in parish and organization development. She gained skill in involving others. This involvement was not just to get people committed to her direction but to involve them and to create opportunities for dialogue among parishioners. She offered strong leadership and facilitated strong leadership from others.

Seattle has Increased in Population

Hypothesis: The city's growth provided a steady stream of people the parish could seek to attract. It's likely that this contextual factor played some role in our growth.

The city has been growing steadily since 1980. Since 2010, the population has increased by 18.7%. From 2010 – 2017 Seattle added 114,000 to its population, 167,000 since 2000. A *Seattle Times* article from May 24, 2018, noted that, "The city is still blowing away the suburbs when it comes to growth." Toward the second half of Mother Melissa's rectorship, the Lower Queen Anne neighborhood, where St. Paul's is situated, had experienced a significant increase in residential housing units, many of them rentals. There are significantly more people living within walking distance of the church than would have been true in 2005-09.

Seattle population milestones
Last year, Seattle passed the 700,000 mark for the first time. New census data estimate the city's 2016 population at 704,352.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

THE SEATTLE TIMES
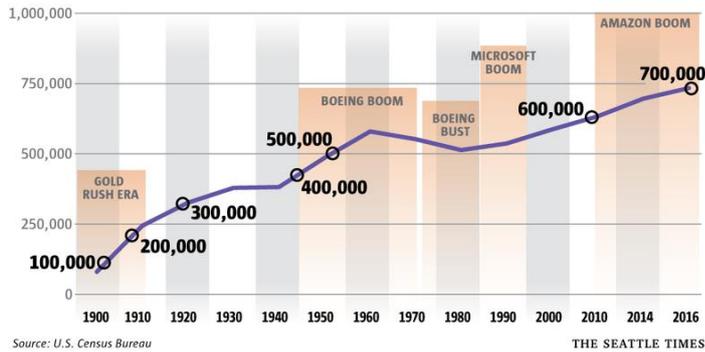
Discomfort with the Size of the Parish

Hypothesis: Some members were (and are) uncomfortable with the larger parish experience and will press for arrangements in which they will feel more at ease. This may cause a slight drag on the parish's growth.

As the parish grew there was a segment of people who felt uncomfortable with that growth. They had an assumption, possibly a sub-conscious assumption, that they should know everyone in the parish. That became less and less possible as we became a community of more that 400 members. Even if they were all together in one space on Sunday you still could not know all the people. For some this discomfort may have involved grieving for or nostalgia for the parish as it had been. Newer members may have come from smaller churches themselves and come to miss that experience. There may even have been some from evangelical or Roman Catholic backgrounds who had come to dislike the large size typical of many churches in those traditions.

There is always a group of people who feel this way and growing organizations almost always hear some degree of complaining about "not knowing everyone," even when people don't even know the people in the service they attend. It is not actually possible to know everyone unless the parish shrinks significantly. That means the expression of this desire to know everyone, and especially the related energy to address it, is unrealistic and unhelpful.

St. Paul's did an exercise in 2005 on what size members would like the parish to be. At that time, we had an average Sunday attendance (ASA) of 89. This was an exercise that Robert Gallagher, OA, had done with dozens of parishes and hundreds of clergy in parish development training workshops. The size chart used was developed by Doug Walrath.

Here's the result:

One of the realities about membership growth is that while a parish can take actions that are likely to increase or decrease membership, the parish can't control that process once it is in motion. You may *want* to grow to be 150 ASA, yet here you are with 270. Mother Melissa's willingness to discuss it openly early on was likely a factor in helping get more members on board with growth and to help some manage their feelings of discomfort.

This issue about discomfort with the size of the parish continues into the present and we have seen some evidence that this discomfort is now cited as a reason for some of the parish's change efforts.

Inadequate Institutionalizing of the Use of Effective Parish Development Methods

Hypothesis: The parish failed to institutionalize the use of parish development methods. This most likely caused a decrease in the levels of internal commitment and mutual trust that the use of such methods creates. That may have impacted the parish's ability to engage the rapid decline in attendance that occurred after Melissa left.

As mentioned earlier, Mother Melissa had made good use of parish and organization theory and methods. It appears that she failed to adequately transfer those theories and methods to a critical mass of other parish leaders. There also appears to have been a lack of awareness of the need to address this. We wonder if Melissa's level of expertise was so superior to that of others that she might have found it easier to do it herself. If true, it's possible that she failed to train and coach others to the extent needed for them to internalize the needed skills.

Organizations tend to revert to old behavior patterns unless efforts are made to institutionalize the changes. If the parish's leadership had been aware of this as an issue, here are examples of standard organization development methods that could have been used:

- Have a team continue monitoring and reinforcing changes.
- Key leaders need to "check in" occasionally on how well the new ways have become part of the organization's life. For example, is the parish continuing to make effective use of survey-feedback? Is the "new" incorporation process continuing to work as intended and what needs to be amended or improved?

- Train people in the skills and knowledge needed to competently function in the new way. Are there enough skilled facilitators and a process to keep developing them?
- Provide adequate resources.
- Change related policies and practices.
- Reward teams and individuals for making the new ways work.

Establishing More Congregations in the Parish

Hypothesis: Establishing two additional congregations within the parish created more space for people and created a sense that something exciting was happening. This contributed to the parish's growth.

Having two relatively large congregations with basically the same liturgy on Sunday at 9:00 and 11:15 served people primarily around the convenience of time. For some parents of young children, it provided a reasonably early (but not too early) Mass that got children home in time for their nap. The early Mass at 7:30 offered a standard said service in Episcopal parishes that served a smaller group. The 5:00 pm congregation provided both an alternative time and experience yet was firmly grounded in the parish's catholic liturgical culture.

As a general rule of thumb if you increase the number of congregations you will increase the average attendance. If you decrease the number of congregations, you'll decrease the average attendance. Of course, sound judgment is needed to decide the timing and nature of the new congregations.

Each congregation's culture was congruent with that of the parish as a whole. They were all identifiably catholic. Those with the highest attendance (9:00 and 11:15) were the same in format and music.

As is common in many parishes, as St. Paul's increased the number of congregations there were some pressing in the opposite direction. There were those who carried a strong if unreflective view that everyone should know everyone else in the parish and there were a few who thought there should only be one congregation gathered for the Eucharist on Sunday.

Related to the interim period 2014-15

Failure to Adequately Incorporate New Members

Hypothesis: If we had done a better job of incorporating new members, their attachment to a particular priest and the impact of their lack of a full transition from their former Roman Catholic or evangelical traditions, would have been mitigated. We would not have had as significant a decline during the interim period.

There's a clear decline in attendance during the interim period (approximately 50 people). We can't know for sure but it's possible that the forces responsible for that decline continued into 2016.

What begins to happen during the interim is not just that people left but that new people didn't arrive in adequate numbers to replace them, let alone to continue the growth pattern the parish had experienced from 2005-2013.

Mother Melissa's limited availability toward the end of her tenure was most likely a factor in this area. It takes a great deal of time to prepare and conduct an Adult Foundations Course, and to maintain synergy among the different elements of incorporation. Between her work outside the parish, and her efforts to be elected as a bishop, it's likely the incorporation work suffered. It's also possible that, like many vision-driven leaders, she simply didn't have a strong awareness of the need to be present.

Interim Clergy

Hypothesis: Having Fr. Samuel Torvend and Mother Catharine Reid as the interim clergy was comfortable and possibly self-protecting. Both had a long history in the parish. Mother Catharine was a close friend of the former rector. This may have reduced the likelihood that people would speak freely about concerns about the parish or about the former rector. If so, that could relate to leaders not addressing the decline in attendance and could also have affected the work of the Profile Committee.

Fr. Samuel had been part-time on the parish staff for several years and Mother Catharine had been a long-time parishioner and was sponsored for ordination from the parish, in addition to being close friends with the rector. Many dioceses wouldn't permit priests with those kinds of connections to a parish to serve during an interim period. It happens, but that's usually when a parish is seen as being in a rather fragile emotional state. Often, when such exceptions are made, Bishops later question themselves about the decision. This is not to disparage Fr. Samuel or Mother Catharine in any way; they were asked to serve and they did. It's the inherent dynamics of the situation that we are curious about.

For many years the church has worked to develop search processes that allow a maximum amount of open information and free choice. There's been a recognition that it's difficult to create the conditions in a parish allowing for effective transition work to occur. There is no way to get that perfect. There will always be some in a parish who may be inclined to want to say something critical about the work of the recent rector and hesitate because they don't want to upset others. Creating processes to facilitate open communication and using clergy known to be "temporary" and with skill in helping parishes reflect on their life, are standard ways to create conditions that support honesty and clarity.

What we do know is that attendance sharply declined during the interim period and there does not appear to have been open discussion of that or work done to address it. We're not aware of anything that happened during that time that would set off an exodus in such numbers, and we are also rather certain that neither Fr. Samuel nor Mother Catharine did anything personally that would account for it.

Mixed Messages in the Parish Profile

Hypothesis: The parish profile contains a couple of significant mixed messages regarding areas needing attention in the future. That may have contributed to time and energy being used, during the interim and beyond, on addressing issues of parish community life and service ministries that could have been used more productively elsewhere.

We believe the Profile Committee was dedicated and sought the best for the parish. They took on a complex and difficult task. The Profile itself provided the needed information for decisions that had to be made. It offered a valid picture of the state of the parish. Overall it captured much of the beauty and complexity of the parish's life and ministry.

We also wonder if a couple of small elements in the Profile ended up confusing the search process and some actions since then.

Mixed messages in the area of parish community life.

The "Community" section of the 2014 Profile said, "As St. Paul's has grown, we have had to face the fact that we as individuals can no longer know or recognize everyone in the parish. Sometimes we welcome as newcomers people who have been around for a while, or we feel like newcomers ourselves when we go to an earlier or later service than normal. One strategy for coping with this change is to develop strong communities around each service, with lay leaders who find ways to form strong ties in smaller groups." It goes on to offer more detail, including this, "Newcomers who have joined the parish tell us that attending one or two of these gatherings was one of the turning points in their decision to become members of St. Paul's. A warm, informal social visit in a home setting speaks of welcome and family — the personal attention that makes strangers feel known and wanted." The solutions were pragmatic, took into account our introverted ethos, and were grounded in the catholic understanding of the Eucharistic Community.

Yet, in the section "The Priest We Seek" we say, "We want someone who can help us to know each other in the wake of dramatic growth that has, in some ways, made us strangers to one another, who can help us take stock of ourselves and grow in ways that will support everyone in the St. Paul's family and everyone we hope will join our family in the future."

No doubt, this reflects some tension in the parish about all the growth. In the first part quoted, we acknowledged the growth and the way the parish shifted from the stance of knowing or recognizing everyone, to developing strong communities around each congregation. But in the second quote, instead of helping those with an unfulfillable need come to terms with the new reality, the Profile suggested there is some way of addressing it. And we placed that unrealizable burden firmly on the back of the new rector: "We want someone who can help us to know each other…"

Notice we use the word "strangers" in a way that illustrates the tension: we are "in some ways…strangers to one another," and we have an approach "that makes strangers feel known and wanted."

The fact is that in a parish of over 300 members, with an average attendance of over 250, you are not ever going to know everyone or even recognize many of them if you pass them on the street. And yet, there are always some members who long for the days of a small parish in which they did recognize all the others. As we discussed above, there is only one way to meet that need—shrink the size of the parish and have only one primary Eucharist on Sunday.

We now seem to be trying to address the unattainable goal of knowing everyone by having a community time between the two most-attended Masses, as well as offering a variety of opportunities to spend time with other parishioners based on geography or interests rather than which congregation you are part of. Mother Sara and other parish leaders have spent a great deal of their time and energy creating programs to address this need for community.

But what if our reading of what people actually want has been mistaken? We wonder if what the data really said in 2014 was that the parish needed a deep exploration and dialogue about what it seeks in its community life. In the Profile we pointed in two different directions and told the rector to make that work. We have expended considerable effort on the issue of "community" without having had that needed conversation to guide and focus us. Such a dialogue might allow us to look at the relationship between "community" and the culture of the parish, e.g., how do introverts "do" community? How do Anglo-Catholics "do" community? What has been the impact of losing a well-attended and vibrant coffee hour for a community time between Masses? This would be a way of applying an appreciative stance to the issue of community life.

Mixed messages in the area of service ministries.

The Profile said, "We have developed some ways of answering this call, and look forward to new inspirations to respond to those who are lonely, hungry, or in physical or spiritual need." The parish's approach had been to do a few things well. The CAT survey from Holy Cow! Consulting used as part of the search process, and which contributed to elements of the Profile, seemed to press the parish to do much more: "The responses to the survey also suggested areas where parish life could benefit from the investment of new energy. Across all demographics, the following priorities were identified: …Expand outreach ministries that provide direct services to those living on the margins of society. Develop ministries that work toward healing those broken by life circumstances. Work as an advocate for social and institutional change so that society might better reflect the values of the kingdom of God." These are all things the parish had been doing. So, was the survey result just utopian dreaming or actual commitment to new efforts?

The summary based on the CAT survey does seem to tilt in the direction of "fix-the-problem" and "balance the system." We wonder if the survey has at least two features that can take churches into pathways that aren't really based on reflection and free

choice, or adequately grounded in the culture and ethos of their tradition, and therefore are unnecessary uphill struggles. One feature is what we call institutionalism. The second is about the way questions are asked, or what we call the "should the parish have Bible study?" question.

Avoiding "should the parish have Bible study?" types of questions is a standard caution for parish leaders and consultants who construct surveys. If you ask, "Should the parish have Bible study?" almost everyone will say, "yes." However, if you ask, "Will you commit to participating in a Bible study group every two weeks?" there will be many fewer saying "yes." Surveys have the same problem in regard to any worthy program. "Should the parish do more to serve the most vulnerable and advocate for justice?" will receive overwhelming support in most Episcopal parish churches. That doesn't tell us whether people will lend their time and energy to such parish efforts nor does it invite people into the needed pragmatic conversation of how much this particular parish is called to do and is able to do.

The CAT survey asks questions from within a certain box—the functioning of the institution, our satisfaction with that institution, and how we can improve it. The survey does seem to tilt in the direction of "fix-the-problem" and "balance the system." It does that work rather well. But its bias seems to be that the laity's ministry is in and through the institution of the parish. It doesn't make much use of the work done over the years on the primary ministry of the baptized or of the organic functioning of the Body of Christ—we are fed by the love of Christ in the Eucharist and we carry that love into our daily life. The principal way in which a parish church carries out its mission is through the baptized who are scattered throughout the institutions and groupings of society. To the extent we become light and salt by our participation in the Eucharist, daily prayers and formation of the church we are light and salt with family and friends, in workplace and civic life.

Related to 2015– 2019

Problem-to-Solve Focus

Hypothesis: The shift in our development strategy from a primarily appreciative stance to a more problem-to-solve approach has created a more discouraged and unfulfilled climate and a less attractive parish community to join or stay part of.

We have shifted our attention from accepting and building upon our gifts of liturgy and music; Anglo-Catholic identity and ethos; and introversion with its inclination for the inner life and reflectiveness, to a more problem-to-solve approach in which we are giving more energy to what some see as deficits of parish community life and corporate action regarding social service/justice.

There is more attention to what some believe needs fixing than appreciation for what is.

This is expressed as attention to shaping a more extraverted form of "community," as well as social service/justice programs. While these are certainly worthy efforts, the former may communicate lack of acceptance of the parish's culture, and both take time and energy.

The "problem-to-solve" is a standard leadership approach in the church (as well as in other organizations) and it can be effective. It is common for the incoming priest to see his or her job as claiming a new space that differentiates the current leader from the former one, and by addressing areas of Christian life that the new priest, and others, believe had been neglected. That differs from a stance that enters leadership appreciating what is already going well and looking for what the new priest can build upon in the predecessor's work. The internal (or external) pressure to differentiate one's work from the prior priest's can be significant, especially when the prior priest was highly successful. Similarly, it can be difficult to know how to improve on success. A problem-focused approach can feel like the path of least resistance and it can also provide a sense of immediate usefulness.

While it is clear that an appreciative approach typically has more positive impact than the problem-to-solve, it's also true that effective appreciation involves identifying "problems" in some form. If we seek to improve our gifts, a part of that is noticing and mitigating the elements of our life that detract from those gifts.

Institutionalism

Hypothesis: A shift in the leadership's priorities to institutional functioning, from the organic functioning of the Body of Christ, has devalued the reality of members' lives and has drained energy from the system. The shift in energy may have contributed to the decline in attendance.

The parish is an institution. The leaders of a parish need to concern themselves with the well-being of the institution. We need people's energy, time and money for the institution to run. "Institutionalism" is when the level of activity around that overwhelms the organic functioning of the Body. Confusion about this is very common in the Episcopal Church.

So, the parish is both an institution and it is the Body of Christ. Let's explore what the Body of Christ looks like.

> *You are the Body of Christ….That is to say; in you and through you the method and work of the Incarnation must go forward. You are meant to incarnate in your lives the themes of your adoration. You are to be taken, consecrated, broken, and made a means of grace; vehicles of the Eternal Charity*. Evelyn Underhill

The organic functioning of the Body of Christ, and therefore every parish church, is that in the Eucharist we are renewed in our baptismal identity and purpose and we return to an apostolate that for most of us most of the time is with family and friends, in workplace and civic life. That's where we are "means of grace; vehicles of the Eternal Charity."

Many people will give themselves, for a time, to the institutional work of the church, such as vestries, service ministries, the upkeep of the property, and so on. But most members' willingness to do that is limited. What is organic (in that it just happens) is

this: to the extent that our participation in the Eucharistic life of a parish makes us salt and light, instruments of God's love, to that extent, we will carry that into our daily life.

We wonder whether the parish's prior appreciative stance, coupled with the former rector's theoretical understanding of the organic functioning of the parish church, allowed Mother Melissa not to get caught in the trap of the institutional overwhelming the organic.

A Number of People Can't Afford to Live Here Anymore – Especially Young Families

Hypothesis: The increase in living costs in the city, especially housing, caused some members to move outside the city and in so doing to leave the parish.

The question of young families is an important one. We know from our own observation that some families—especially at the parish's 5 p.m. Mass—have moved. What isn't as clear is how many people have moved, and what the reasons are. Are they people with younger children? Or with children at all? How significant are these families to the overall numeric decline?

Downtown parishes in every big city have a classic problem: some families outgrow the city—they can no longer afford it, they're looking for better schools, etc. There's also often a certain kind of energy and focus in urban parishes that feels more "adult."

While it is true that some will leave for a variety of reasons, all things being equal a significant increase in population, such as Seattle has experienced since 1980, should provide a larger base of potential members. In theory, a growing population increases the ability of the parish to maintain organic equilibrium.

Volume of Changes and Lack of Grounding

Hypothesis: The degree of change and lack of clear grounding, including, for example the changes in the 7:30 – 11:00 a.m. period, may have been unsettling for some people and caused a lowering of investment in regular attendance or membership.

We have wondered about the impact of the series of changes implemented in the parish between 2016 and the present. We have been curious if these changes contributed to the decline in attendance, either directly or by possibly contributing to a general decrease in parishioner investment.

St. Paul's implemented a number of changes on Sunday mornings. These changes include shifting the 7:30 liturgy from Rite II to Rite I. The 7:30 congregation had previously had coffee together in the narthex. This was changed to doing nothing, then changed to having breakfast together at a local restaurant, and back to coffee in the narthex. Now the rector and vestry have eliminated the 7:30 service and shifted to an 8:30 Mass that will, as the rector describes it, "combine the best of 7:30 and 9:00." Mother Sara appears take the position that it is helpful "to develop a wide variety of worship experiences." We understand this is grounded in an assumption that doing so will attract a variety of people and increase the size of the parish. In parishes with a thin organizational culture that may be an effective method. In parishes with a dense culture, as has been true at St. Paul's, that approach is likely to work only as long as all the

congregations adequately share the overall culture. Otherwise we might expect a drop in attendance and/or conflict in the parish about worship styles.

There were a large number of changes made to the 9:00 a.m. liturgy (which will become the 8:30 a.m. on September 8). There is less music, including fewer hymns and a different choir, no Gloria, and changes to the procession. We heard a number of reasons for the changes, including most frequently some variation on, "The conventional wisdom is that the liturgies must be different from each other to attract different groups," and, "The parish wants the rector to focus on community, so we need to increase the time between the 9:00 and 11:15 Masses in order to spend more time at a new Community Hour."

In making the changes to liturgy, there were intervening steps to change coffee hour. There had been a community developer for each of the 9:00 and 11:15 congregations. These roles were eliminated. The 11:15 coffee hour was eliminated, then moved to the narthex, then moved back to the parish hall. The 9:00 coffee hour, previously overseen by the community developer, had been very well attended (the 11:15 was also pretty well attended, though proportionally smaller than the attendance at the liturgy). The congregation-based coffee hour was changed to create a parish-wide Community Hour, with the assumption that people from both congregations would attend. The plan was to offer adult formation during Community Hour. We believe that originally Community Hour provided little or no time for organic social interaction, but that this shifted to permit 15 minutes or so of social time and approximately 30 minutes of topical formation. The attendance at the Community Hour appears to be significantly lower than the prior attendance at the 9:00 coffee hour.

This series of changes strikes us as a large number in a fairly short period of time. As members, the changes felt ungrounded to us. We weren't sure when the next change would come, or why the change was needed. The rector seemed genuinely concerned about taking care of people's feelings and we had the impression that some changes may have been made or retracted because of a desire to respond to someone being upset. Overall, the rector seemed willing to adapt, which can be beneficial in any change process. Our concern as observers has been focused on three things:

(1) Any time a parish of deep prayer and extraordinary worship (descriptors that definitely apply to St. Paul's) makes changes to the liturgy, we assume that needs to be done to improve what is already excellent. The changes need to foster renewal, and they need to reflect the primacy of worship. That connection has not been apparent to us and the changes have felt ungrounded. This suggests to us a lack of clarity about the underlying pastoral and ascetical strategy.

(2) The changes do not appear to have been broadly requested and there was no open process using valid and useful information for checking in on the impact, either initially or after the changes were made. Chris Argyris, considered a founder of the field of organization development and a proponent of effective learning organizations, theorized that certain elements are necessary if an organization seeks a high level of ownership and internal commitment in its members, a kind of commitment that will hold over time and under stress. Specifically, organizations need to promulgate *valid and useful information*— information that can be publicly verified, tested with a broad range of people,

openly gathered and discussed, and that is useful in that something can be done with it to effect change. If the members of the organization have valid and useful information, they can make *free choices*—choices that are based on an exploration of real options, and that are voluntary, not made out of habit or due mainly to a desire to be cooperative with the priest. The theory assumes the elements build on one another: the more the information is valid and useful, the more there is truly free choice, the more likely there will be internal commitment.

If Argyris' theory is right, that means there is likely to be little ownership of or commitment to the changes by parishioners generally. People may like them or dislike them, but they probably don't have a sense that the changes *belong* to them. The sheer number of changes also probably felt tiring to some. Coupled with declining investment or a possible sense—most likely unarticulated—that parishioner views don't have much impact on leadership decisions, we wonder if it becomes easier to leave the parish, including by simply drifting away.

(3) Listening processes used did not gather feedback openly or prioritize what was heard. We discuss this factor in detail below.

Lack of Collective Voice and Inadequate Dialogue

Hypothesis: The parish's ability to cope with significant issues, such as growth and decline, is compromised when we don't have an adequate level of dialogue in the broader community, and an expression of the parish's collective voice. These deficits tend to result in more centralized authority and less ownership of decisions in the broader community.

When asked about reasons for changes, the response of leaders is often related to information in the Profile, which is now five years old. We believe the basis for change needs to be grounded in regular meetings with the parish that update our collective sense of direction.

Group conversations have generally been held *after* decisions have been made by the rector or the rector and vestry. Those who made the decision are forced into the position of "selling" that decision, rather than inviting the parish into an exploration. This sets up an inherent conflict, that will be expressed more or less openly. An alternative is to begin by identifying an area of interest or concern, such as the incorporation of new members, or declining attendance at the 9 a.m. liturgy. Gather all who are willing to come together and have a structured process to explore that issue. The structured process would be designed to result in the participants hearing from one another, and having expressed a collective voice about the issue. The issue may then lend itself to those in the room agreeing to work on it right then, or it may go back to the rector and vestry for additional reflection.

The impact of "selling" decisions

We have observed leaders routinely selling their own decisions. This tends to put the leadership in a defensive position. It is natural to feel defensive when you've spent a lot

of time thinking and planning and now experience resistance from the people you're trying to help. From the parish's standpoint, some people will feel pressured to conform and frustrated that they didn't have an opportunity to provide real input.   In many cases, parishioners will notice the defensiveness and either drop the matter so as not to be "difficult," or they may push back and experience increased defensiveness. Because the decision has already been made and the leaders are committed to it, the resistance is unlikely to sway them. Some leaders may experience normal resistance or even differences of opinion as oppositional or "sabotage;" that is more likely to be true the more committed leaders are to the selected path. That's one reason why it's very helpful to bring people along with you, so that most everyone becomes committed over time and together.

It's important to understand that people may not be completely forthcoming when the rector (any rector) is promoting an idea she's committed to. Most of us want to be supportive, we want to be liked, we don't want to hurt the priest's feelings, etc. This is one reason it's important to gather data in ways that are known to increase openness and avoid groupthink.

Ineffective use of method

In this section, we describe a couple of group methods we've been using as a parish. We assume each of them has value. The difficulty comes when the process or method used doesn't allow for adequate dialogue or hearing the collective voice of the community.

First, a common approach to change has been for the rector or vestry members to have one-on-one meetings, through which they would formulate and/or confirm a plan. These one-on-one meetings would sometimes be followed by larger group meetings that failed to get at collective voice and adequate dialogue among the participants. At these meetings, instead of talking with one another, the engagement has been either: (1) between individuals in the parish and the rector; or (2) between individuals sitting at a table and an assigned vestry member.

There's nothing inherently wrong with one-on-one meetings, but there is a problem in the absence of methods that get at community dialogue and collective voice.

One of Mother Sara's most striking gifts is her capacity for personal connection in one-on-one relationships. Our observation is that she maintains a high level of awareness of the personal issues faced by parishioners and she gives generously of her time to connect individually. This is obviously very valuable in a priest. (As consultants, we do worry about the personal toll this can take on the priest, especially in larger parishes, as well as the development of unrealistic expectations in parishioners. We hope everyone is sensitive to those concerns, but that doesn't detract from the importance of affirming the gift.)

Our hope would be to see Mother Sara continue to exercise her gifts and pursue connections that provide meaning to her, while also creating parallel structures that permit greater dialogue among parishioners and community voice.

In using one-on-one meetings, it's important to recognize that all people come at things with their own frame of reference. All of us will accurately hear some things and also misunderstand some things because we're operating through our own filters. A common weak point of one-on-one meetings is that the listener fails to use paraphrasing as a way to offset their internal filters and allow the speaker to correct them if they've misunderstood something. Frequent use of one-on-one meetings may leave leaders more confident than they should be that they know what "the parish" really thinks.

One of the jobs of leadership is to facilitate discussions about important matters in a way that allows the rector to share her vision and priorities, while also soliciting open and honest feedback about how the parish feels about those things. One-on-one conversations are generally not useful in building consensus.

Second, listening methods, such as brainstorming, have not employed effective prioritization, with the consequence that the parish as a whole, and the individual congregations in the parish, do not have a sense of common mind or where the weight of concern resides. The rector and wardens may have formed inaccurate perceptions of what parishioners most value.

When the parish has been able to discuss issues together, the process used has typically been a form of brainstorming. Sometimes this has been done in smaller groups, with reporting back out to the larger groups, and other times it's been done as a whole group. In every instance we've observed, data have been gathered but not prioritized. This leaves the group with a laundry list of comments, many of which may have little or no importance to most people in the room. When using brainstorming, it is critical to prioritize the results. What are the top three concerns of this group? Have everyone come up and put a check mark by their top three. Maybe things will still be all over the map, but in many cases you will see clear weight around certain issues. Once you know where the weight is, you can continue to drill down and assess things in greater depth.

What we've seen at St. Paul's is a tendency for vestry members or the rector to look at those laundry lists and then separately determine what they believe the priorities to be. While we assume the intention is to be open and inclusive, the impact of doing things this way is that leaders are effectively imposing their own priorities while using a process aimed at inclusion. Some people will feel manipulated. Some will feel frustrated that their concerns were ignored. Some will be pleased that what they care about is what was selected. Others may feel energized by the process of using newsprint and talking. But the parish as a whole is unlikely to feel fully committed to the outcome because the parish as a whole was not given a voice. The energy generated by the process will be short-lived and will probably not contribute to lasting commitment. In addition, the overall energy in the parish can be flattened by repeatedly spending time on activities that do not lead to deeper understanding or that, for some, confirm a sense that their voice doesn't matter.

Slow to Acknowledge and Face into the Issue

Hypothesis: The parish did not have ways to quickly identify the decline and address it promptly. This allowed the decline to continue unattended longer than it otherwise

may have. The longer the decline has gone on, the harder it is to reverse the trend. This may be rooted in a culture of conflict avoidance.

We have found ourselves reflecting on our own behavior. Yes, Michelle raised the question of the decline in average Sunday attendance at a recent public meeting. And her initiative was picked up by two others and advanced during the meeting. Our understanding is that a committee of sorts has been formed to look at the issue, though the existence of that group hasn't been made public to the whole parish community. So, mostly good.

But why did it take two experienced parish development practitioners four years before one of them spoke up publicly about the decline? We knew it was happening, so why not speak openly?

We've also learned that others noticed the decline and spoke to the rector or members of the vestry. We know that parishioners spoke informally to one another about it, but none of us raised it in a public setting until now. Why?

Another piece of this for the two of us, having worked with so many churches, is that we've never seen another parish behave in this particular way. To be sure, they had their own quirks. But if the elephant in the room was that of a significant decline, someone would raise it in a public setting if the leadership failed to do so.

As noted earlier, we have wondered if Mother Melissa failed to adequately institutionalize processes or train others in the reflection and facilitation skills that would allow the parish to recognize quickly that numbers were declining and to take steps to address it. Based on the ASA chart, Mother Sara inherited a parish that had experienced significant decline during the interim period. We doubt there were many people clamoring for Mother Sara to address this though we know that some people did raise the issue with the rector. But neither they nor the rector ever brought the issue to a public setting in which the parish community could acknowledge its own reality and possibly act.

We would imagine that the rector likely felt significant anxiety and may not have known how best to address the issues. In our experience, St. Paul's is highly conflict averse and tends to be very accommodating. The parish would be quite comfortable *not* talking about this. Our guess is that delay in realistically assessing what was happening hastened the decline.

Why don't we speak more freely about whatever the elephant in the room might be? Following are some of our guesses.

1. We generally don't use processes for discernment and decision-making that make it easy for real dialogue and exploration to take place.

2. The parish has an organizational culture that is conflict averse. We are a parish that may find it easiest to experience and express the fullness and depth of our life in liturgy and its music. That fits our ethos. Our instinct for what is interior, and sacramental and prayerful, has been a gift, an expression of God's love and grace in our common life.

But gifts usually come with a blindside. We wonder if ours may include a difficulty having the complex and awkward conversations necessary from time to time in any community that is to be faithful and healthy. Our valuing harmony is a good value. Our valuing it at the cost of avoiding mutual responsibility is a problem.

3. We each bring our own fears, anxieties, and illusions into the parish. That both strengthens and gets influenced by the parish's overall culture.

4. The parish has a limited history of clergy isolating or punishing people who disturb the equilibrium. Over the years, we know of a case in which a woman parishioner was asked to leave the parish while her former husband stayed (he was more powerful and wealthier). Another priest took inappropriate action against a part-time priest, two lay leaders, and a staff member. And another priest took action to push a few people out of the parish.

This isn't about a broad pattern of abusive behavior to many people. It's rare and limited. Yet, when it happens it has a big impact on those directly involved and those who learn of what has happened. It sends a message to people to keep your head down and don't upset the priest. What leaders reward and punish shapes the culture of the parish.

All clergy make mistakes, all are human, which means they are subject to sin and human limitation. All need love and forgiveness. And, clergy need to take special care in their behavior because it has a larger ripple effect than anyone else in the parish.

Father Dennis Campbell used to tell a story to Church Development Institute classes to explain how culture was formed and transmitted.

> *Start with a cage containing five apes.*
>
> *In the cage, hang a banana on a string and put stairs under it. Before long, an ape will go to the stairs and start to climb towards the banana. As soon as he touches the stairs, spray all of the apes with cold water. After a while, another ape makes an attempt with the same result—all the apes are sprayed with cold water. This continues through several more attempts.*
>
> *Pretty soon, when another ape tries to climb the stairs, the other apes all try to prevent it. Now, turn off the cold water. Remove one ape from the cage and replace it with a new one. The new ape sees the banana and wants to climb the stairs. To his horror, all of the other apes attack him. After another attempt and attack, he knows that if he tries to climb the stairs, he will be assaulted.*
>
> *Next, remove another of the original five apes and replace it with a new one. The newcomer goes to the stairs and is attacked. The previous newcomer takes part in the punishment with enthusiasm. Again, replace a third original ape with a new one. The new one makes it to the stairs and is attacked as well. Two of the four apes that beat him have no idea why they were not permitted to climb the stairs, or why they are participating in the beating of the newest ape.*

After replacing the fourth and fifth original apes, all the apes, which have been sprayed with cold water, have been replaced. Nevertheless, no ape ever again approaches the stairs. Why not? Because that's the way they've always done it and that's the way it's always been around here.

Low Transparency

Hypothesis: The rector and vestry's tendency toward non-transparency, coupled with the parish's tendency to accommodate leaders and avoid conflict, has led to inadequate sharing of information, inadequate collaboration with parishioners, and a lack of buy-in for decisions. It may also have decreased trust in the system.

As discussed above, the rector and vestry have often announced significant changes without including the parish in their decision-making process and without gathering feedback. Regardless of whether the decision was a good one, or whether the decision was within the rector's or vestry's "rights," this reflects a lack of transparency. When information is not shared freely, it is easy for trust to erode and people may not feel as committed because they simply don't know what's happening.

This can be a little confusing in an Episcopal parish because decision-making authority *does* rest with the rector for worship and the spiritual jurisdiction of the parish, and with the vestry for property and financial matters. It's important, however, to distinguish between legal rights and responsibilities, and effective leadership. It is simply true that there are some decisions that need to be shared with the whole parish, or with some smaller groups, to get feedback and buy-in before proceeding.

People have different orientations with respect to transparency. We've all known a leader who over-shares, and we've all known a leader who keeps everything close to the vest. There's no magical "right" amount of transparency, but it's important to assess what and how much information, and the ways information is shared, to ensure enough trust and engagement in the system. In our view, Mother Sara's natural tendency is on the less transparent end of the spectrum. To the extent that's accurate, vestry members will in turn likely adopt a less transparent stance as they develop alignment with the rector.

Vestry minutes are generally posted late. For example, the September, 2018, meeting minutes were, as of August, 2019, the most recent posted. They were replaced with the June minutes when a parishioner requested an update at an August parish meeting about planned liturgical changes.

Some members of the vestry seem to believe that their proceedings are confidential. In one case, a vestry member shared at a public meeting discomfort because the vestry was about to go forward with a project that the parish didn't know about and this member was worried people would feel blind-sided. Several parishioners who heard this went to the senior warden and asked what was going on. The senior warden's response was that the vestry member "shouldn't have talked about that—we were waiting for the rector (who had been out of town) to make an announcement." Following additional pressure, the rector and vestry held meetings to let people know

what was happening; the issue had, indeed, been decided and the meetings felt somewhat contentious.

In June, the parish's weekly newsletter had an announcement about the vestry having reaffirmed the vision adopted a few months earlier and "acknowledging this is also a commitment to change, risk, and experimentation." Immediately following that statement, the vestry reminded parishioners that a healthy parish is dependent on continued giving and urged people to stay current on their pledges. We were curious where this statement came from and assumed there was some change afoot the vestry worried people wouldn't like. Michelle ran into a vestry member the day after the announcement came out and asked about it. The vestry member acknowledged they'd received some questions but assured Michelle there was nothing going on. Michelle asked directly, "So there's no specific change you have planned?" The vestry member said, "No, nothing at all is planned." That Sunday, we learned that the rector and vestry had decided to eliminate the 7:30 Mass. Shortly thereafter came proposals to change the times of the remaining morning services. They have since decided to move the 11:15 Mass back to 10:45, and combine the 7:30 (said Rite I) Mass with the 9:00 (sung Rite II) Mass at an 8:30 Rite I with one hymn and chanted service music. We assume the vestry member had good intentions and that this person believed they needed to keep the discussions and plans "confidential." That is a serious misunderstanding of Episcopal Church polity and culture and it will almost certainly negatively affect trust between leaders and parishioners.

There's been a lack of public assessment of programs and activities. Some programs around community or service seem to appear and disappear without explanation.

The members of the transition/search committee seem to have agreed that what they did in committee would not be disclosed to others in the parish. This displays a serious misunderstanding of their role in the entire system. While there may be a case to be made about not disclosing the names of candidates being interviewed or even keeping discussions confidential at certain points in the process, the unwillingness to disclose information at other points and after the interim is odd. It reflects a misunderstanding of the need for oversight in the Body of Christ

Flattening of Energy

Hypothesis: There has been a flattening of energy with the shift to a problem-to-solve strategy, reduction of the number of congregations, lessening of internal commitment, decline in attendance, and ungrounded change of recent years.

The former vibrancy of the parish is reduced so that we no longer set loose the organic "buzz" that naturally attracts new people to the extent we once did. The self-generating, word-of-mouth communication in some Seattle circles seems to have decreased. Beautiful, rich, liturgy; great preaching and music as part of liturgy; the sense of being accepted in the community as we are—all had touched people. Those people told others, and the parish grew.

Another aspect of this has been an increasingly institutionalist approach. There has been an increased emphasis on what we do as a parish, what we do together, versus the

natural oscillation of a Eucharistic people—we gather and we scatter, we come together to be fed by Love and we return to family and friends, workplace and civic life to be instruments of that Love. The institutionalist approach—what the parish as institution does is what matters—appeals to a few in each parish and for those few it's a faithful expression of their calling. A parish's energy flattens when those few pressure the whole Eucharistic community to do as they do. In such action, people are being asked to betray their vocation and take on what others think is the vocation of all.

The Effect of Anxiety and Self-Doubt

Hypothesis: Comparisons to her predecessor and insecurity about her effectiveness may contribute to a sense that the rector is "in over her head." To the extent this anxiety is concealed or dismissed rather than effectively and lovingly addressed, it could lead to significant stress, ungrounded decisions, failure to take effective action, and reluctance to seek support or competent assistance. It could also lead to difficulty accurately assessing the value of changes and related strategy, and could be unsettling for the parish.

Since becoming rector, we've heard Mother Sara make comments that suggested she might feel that she'd gotten in over her head. We have heard comments related to the difficulty of following a "star" like Mother Melissa, and the challenges of coming in after an incredible period of growth. Early on we also heard comments that favorably compared Mother Sara's pastoral presence with Mother Melissa's. Our sense is that she made these comments to a number of people. While the feelings are natural, and a priest should have a few people to go to vent about these things, the wide sharing of anxiety will usually set off anxiety in the parish. It can be contagious. It also may prevent parishioners from talking openly about their concerns if they're worried it will reinforce the rector's anxiety.

There is no doubt it is challenging to follow someone with more experience and training in parish development. The response to that challenge, though, has significant impact on whether it needs to be debilitating. The truth is that most priests have very little training in parish development. In our work we've found the best approach is an appreciative stance, curiosity, and willingness to learn from disciplined reflection on experience.

Other

We have heard several hypotheses from people in the parish about the cause of the decline.

"It wasn't sustainable." The implication that what had been created at St. Paul's was inherently unsustainable strikes us untrue on its face. It was sustained over a number of years and could well have continued if we had done better at maintaining a strong incorporation and formation system; if we had picked up quickly on the decline; and if we had stayed with a strong appreciative stance and behavior strategy.

"Natural ebb and flow."   Analogies may be used that compare parish churches to plants or a physical body. If we remember these are analogies that tell us something about a parish but don't tell us many other things, they're workable. Parishes consist of human beings who reflect upon their experience and make decisions about how to behave. And we sometimes get it wrong. The people of God are not like a body of water with a tide, regularly receding from and returning to shore.

"Melissa was a charismatic priest." In our experience most large Anglo-Catholic parishes don't have especially "charismatic" priests and yet they maintain their people. To the extent people are using "charismatic" to couch a criticism, it would be more effective to talk directly about specific problematic behaviors and their possible impact on attendance.

In themselves the statements don't say anything. The speakers may have something else sitting behind such statements that should be considered. In each case the questions of how and why need to be pursued.

What We Can Best Influence

There's a simple exercise used by consultants to help leaders think about the use of their influence. It sometimes helps them avoid spending their time on matters about which they have no or little influence. In regard to whatever the issue is the leaders identify what fits in each circle below. The consultant then invites them to reflect— sometimes about their values and the use of control or influence and other times about their feelings when they exercise or lack influence.

CIRCLES OF INFLUENCE

WHERE I HAVE NO
CONTROL OR
INFLURENCE

WHAT I INFLUENCE

WHAT I
CONTROL
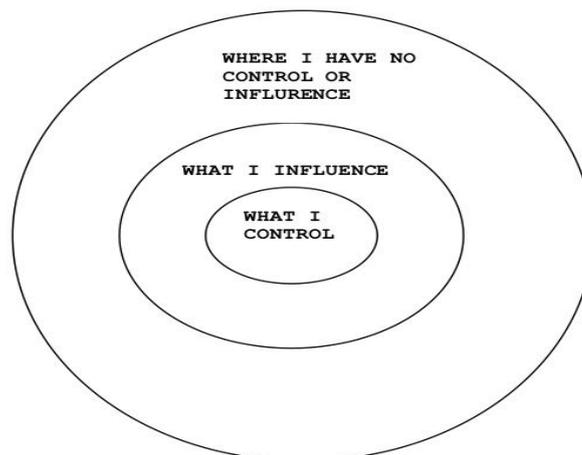
If we use the Contextual Issues grid to explore growth and decline what usually becomes obvious to leaders is that they have no or little influence in the areas outside the parish itself. A global recession, shifting demographics in the city, and the diocese's reputation in the region may all impact the parish's life. And there is little parish leaders can do except adapt and cope with the situation. Their influence is primarily around adaptation to environmental forces and wise pastoral oversight regarding the internal life of the parish.

We want to now turn our attention to what the parish can best control or influence.

Shift the Strategy – Back to Appreciative Stance and Behavior

Hypothesis: It may help stabilize the attendance and membership picture if we rebalanced by taking a more appreciative stance, less a problem-to-solve stance.

Refocus our attention and energy on appreciative processes. We need to be asking questions such as:

- What has the parish done really well over a period of time?
- Where are the parish's known strengths and gifts?
- What have been the high points in the life of the parish? When have people felt most alive, joyful, energized, involved, committed, etc.?

Having asked those questions, what can we build upon? What can we expand? What can we enhance?

Some of the answers to these questions likely include: Invest more in an appreciation of liturgy and music, a deep inner spirituality, and our Anglo-Catholic identity and ethos. Return to primary Sunday Masses of such grace and beauty that they sweep people of their feet and bring tears of joy. Effective equipping of the public Office, in which teams offer daily praise to God on behalf of everyone in the parish and all of creation. Build forms of community life that accept the parish's introverted ethos. In discernment seek a place in which the balance and wholeness of the parish's life is advanced by attention to the apostolic witness of love as people return to families and friends, workplace and civic life. Provide adequate offerings for those called to more connection with others within the parish. Return to the strategy we found successful in the past: "develop strong communities around each service, with lay leaders who find ways to form strong ties in smaller groups." (Parish Profile 2014)

For example, it's clear to us the Wednesday evening effort (Evening Prayer, Mass, a meal, formation) is valued and useful. An appreciative approach would gather more information about what has been especially valuable and then build and expand upon what's happening now. Possibly a similar format on another evening with a formation focus on spiritual practice. On the other hand, the Sunday morning community hour has meant the loss of what had been a well-attended, vibrant coffee hour after the 9:00 am Mass. Consider a return to vibrant and well attended coffee hours after each Mass.

The parish had developed an approach to incorporation that drew people into its life: a Sunday focus on graceful and beautiful liturgy; ways of shaping a vibrant coffee hour after the primary liturgies; frequent orientations over dinner with the rector and a few others; and an Adult Foundations course that built Christian proficiency in core practices. We could return to what has worked for us.

Making a judgment about how to engage in an appreciative stance and behavior is a fairly complex matter. It requires some understanding of the work done around appreciative inquiry, a feel for how systems work, and that ability to see the ethos and

culture of a system. In the church's situation it also calls for some grasp of pastoral and ascetical theology as applied to the parish church.

Most rectors would do well to identify and partner with people who have an appreciative orientation—an orientation that is not naïve or simplistic, but theologically grounded—and an understanding of how organizations work at their best, especially parish churches.

There can't be any certainty that if we reengage a stronger appreciative strategy for the parish's development that we're going to see an increase in membership and attendance. Once a pattern of decline has begun it's not easily turned around. That doesn't mean the attempt shouldn't be made. It would probably be helpful to use someone like Rob Voyle for training and coaching.

Accepting Mutual Responsibility

Hypothesis: Suggestions that the rector should leave—whether from the rector or from other people—are deflections from our ability to effectively engage the growth-decline issue. We need to give ourselves to collaboration and openness with one another as we face into the challenge of decline.

Much of the decline took place before Mother Sara arrived. She came into a parish that was losing people and not drawing enough new people to maintain its size. However, the question of what she bears responsibility for is appropriate. So, three thoughts:

First, that responsibility is not hers alone. All the wardens and vestry members that have served with her share that responsibility. And, all of us who make up the various congregations of the parish also carry responsibility for what has happened.

Second, the responsibility that we share is about facing into the issue now that it has been named. It is useful to look back and ask how we got here because we want to avoid repeating unproductive patterns of behavior. But having reflected, and learned, our task is about moving forward together, not blaming.

Third, the issue we now face is that the decline continues. We lose people at a faster rate than new people enter. We need to turn around in a manner that brings us three years of stable numbers. That is to say, the first task is to stop the decline.

Many of us are aware that Mother Sara has experienced being our priest as hard going at times. It seems clear that she has come to love this community and given herself to the task of priestly oversight. Yet, it's true that from early on she's known some self-doubt within and challenge from without.

So, some may wonder whether Mother Sara should stay at St. Paul's. In fact, she may have that question in herself.

We believe it would be a mistake to enter into the blame—defend cycle (see the introduction for an explanation of this). Some may imagine asking the rector to resign; the rector may fantasize about leaving. Sometimes rectors ask the vestry for a

confidence vote or, conversely, the vestry offers a formal vote of affirmation. None of those help us address the issue. *They make the rector the issue when the issue is declining attendance.*

The task is to join with one another to learn from our common experience. That calls, not for doubling-down, but for reflection and prayer, a deeper appreciation of our core ethos, and applying the insights of Organization Development informed by Anglican pastoral and ascetical theology. Then trying again.

Still, there will be some who think Mother Sara needs to leave and make way for a new priest. Some may say that out of a desire to blame, others because they don't think she's up to the task, or that she lacks the skills or personality needed in this situation.

The alternative is for Mother Sara to stay in place, have the opportunity for reflection, adapt the course, and equip herself for the work ahead. We see that as the healthiest and most faithful stance both for Mother Sara and for the parish.

On occasion we've had to offer parish leaders a caution about the illusion they have that changing rectors will improve everything. Such action, when taken, inevitably divides the congregation. Resentments can linger for decades. Putting the parish through another time of transition may add to a sense of defeat and discouragement. And that would most likely to have a negative impact on attendance and financial stability

Our stance is to focus on the issues and dynamics within the parish that priest and people, together, can address. Our pathway would be to build upon and enhance our traditional gifts and repair what has been damaged.

To the extent that any of our rectors made serious misjudgments they did so in collaboration with the lay leaders of the time. Such mistakes can be acknowledged, but the remedy is not blaming and defending. The remedy is humility and courage—for all of us. If missteps have been made, then the rector, lay leaders, and all of us can accept responsibility and move forward in shared concern for our common life.

Engage Ways to Offset Continuing Decline

Hypothesis: We will continue to decline. We can protect the institutional life of the parish into future generations.

It's possible we will continue to decline. If we engage a more appreciative stance strategy and other initiatives, they may not have the desired effect. The momentum of decline may drag on us. The combination of baby-boomer aging and death and the current low interest in religion on the part of younger people may bring further decline.

We could explore ways to off-set a decline. For example:
- Build trust and endowment funds to cover all/part of our property costs and/or clergy salaries.
- Make bold use of our property. Look into what Trinity Church, Seattle, is doing and look at the blog posting St. Paul's, Seattle – a future.

- Other options

Living the Benedictine Promise

Hypothesis: In the Benedictine tradition faithful change, and true conversion of life, rises out of obedience and stability. The parish may increase its ability to manage changes, including growth and decline, by moving deeper into that Benedictine pattern.

We might find it useful to give ourselves more fully and with greater proficiency in three areas.

First, gaining a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the Benedictine tradition as it applies to a parish church and our individual spiritual practices. Grounding that learning in a revived Daily Office: stronger teams, maintaining norms of reverence, upholding it as a truly public Office of the church that is congruent in style and tone with our other forms of public worship.

Second, making more use of listening processes that involve the wider parish community in critical decisions. Increasing our corporate level of skill at using methods that engage valid and useful information, make intentional and free choices, and result in a higher internal commitment to decisions that are made.

Third, a renewed investment in our primary strengths—an Anglo-Catholic and Anglican ethos, liturgy with music that sweeps people off their feet, and a spirituality given to the inner life. And more effectively forming new and old members in those primary strengths.

Increased Transparency

Hypothesis: Increasing the amount of transparency in the parish may allow for a broader and more timely participation in the oversight of parish life and ministry.

Increasing transparency won't have a short-term impact on growth or decline. Over the years it may build more trust among people and allow a more effective form of mutual ministry and oversight in the parish. That makes for a healthier parish; and that in turn may have a beneficial effect on growth and attendance.

A few specific actions that could be taken:

1. Establish a clear policy that all meetings of the parish are open and that all participants are asked to freely offer thorough accounts of discussions and decisions when asked.

2. Post the vestry minutes on the website within two weeks of a meeting.

3. The minutes of meetings are to include all topics discussed and decisions made.

4. In the vestry, and in meetings of the parish community (general or a particular congregation), participatory and decision-making methods are to be used that facilitate respectful listening, the expression of a collective voice of those gathered, and that encourage individual reflection and action (rather than groupthink).

5. The vestry could prepare a policy on what, if any, matters might be held in confidence, e.g., personal issues regarding paid staff, and pastoral issues discussed among the parish clergy. This policy would be posted on the website.

6. Reports are to be made to the vestry and annual meeting regarding: 1) the average Sunday attendance and pledge information (units, averages, numbers of people in various giving clusters, etc.); to include comparison information over the past 10 years. And 2) in regard to parish programs: assessment of participation, participant satisfaction, and participant ratings of success in achieving stated program goals, especially programs for building community, adult formation and children's formation, e.g., group dinners, book groups, and formation classes. Note: We do not assume that numbers are an indicator of the worth of a program, though in some cases that may be true. Sound pastoral strategy often means looking at the results over a period of years, e.g., a yearly offering in how to say the Daily Office, or how to understand and pray the scriptures, may only attract a few people each year; but over several years that might have made a significant contribution to the development of a proficient critical mass at the heart of the parish.

7. Establish a general norm – "We seek maximum transparency. If you are in doubt, be open with the information. Provide requested information in a respectful, timely and thorough manner."

Begin to Use Group Processes that Enable Deep Dialogue and a Collective Voice

Hypothesis: We need a more robust level of dialogue and exploration if we are to effectively engage the issue of growth and decline (and other matters that are important). That process needs to involve both all who want to participate, and people with expertise in the field of parish and organization development.

St. Paul's has a long-term inclination toward conflict avoidance. That can lead to groupthink, a failure to explore alternatives, not looking at the possible consequences of decisions, and, occasionally, a level of internal commitment inadequate to provide adaptable stability. Our parish generally has a conflict averse style. Too often we're inclined to accommodate, avoid, and compromise when faced with disagreements. And because of that, once decisions are reached, we can get defensive if questions and challenges are offered. That style isn't likely to change in the short run. A community doesn't change its wiring all that easily. So, what might we do?

A standard answer is to change the methods used in group meetings. When we consider new initiatives or ways of arranging our common life, we might benefit from processes that provide ways for parishioners to engage one another in large group conversations seeking both mutual understanding and respect, as well as testing at various points the collective voice of the parish; that asked parish leaders to openly disclose their self-

interest in the matter (e.g., any impact on salaries, time use, emotional well-being, etc.); that encourages a deeper dialogue, and that provides a wide-lens systems view of what is being considered and the likely costs and benefits.

There are dozens of methods that can help us achieve this. We need regular and reliable methods in place for checking in with the parish community, to share relevant information, and to identify and prioritize likes, concerns, and wishes about common life.

Here are a couple of examples of methods:

- At least once a year in the vestry, and in each annual meeting, engage in a full or partial channeling process. That's a method by which a group: 1) identifies possible issues to address; 2) prioritizes the ones that seem either most important or most actionable; and 3) has people sign up to work on the top priorities they are interested in or refers the top priorities to individuals or groups with a related responsibility.

- Every year at the annual meeting use a spectrum that allows the community to indicate its satisfaction with parish life and ministry (1 is very low, 6 is very high). And then to talk in small groups about what that rating means, followed by sharing significant things with the larger group. This can also be done by an exercise using the Parish Life Cycle in which people mark on the Cycle drawn on a newsprint sheet. They go to the paper and indicate where they think the parish is right now in the life cycle (i.e., Heathy Stability, Static, In Decline, etc.). Once everyone has done that they explore why they said what they said.

The vestry can help us use good process, but if they misunderstand their role, that ability gets undermined. There's been a tendency on the part of some vestry members in the 2005-19 period to see themselves as part of the "rector's team." Some have held to an understanding that they are to support the rector. In fact, what parishes need are vestries with a stance of cooperative independence; or in John Gardner's thinking, to be loving critics rather than unloving critics or uncritical lovers. Wardens and vestry members are an essential part of the check and balance system of the parish's decision making. If they become part of the rector's team, or if they see themselves as the rector's opposition, they have failed to serve either the parish or the rector. Gardner said, "Pity the leader caught between unloving critics and uncritical lovers."

Our parish leaders might work at a bit more self-regulation of emotions when feeling challenged; less explaining why what they want to do is the correct thing and more asking questions ("What is it you're seeing? Can you say more about that?"); less about being understood and more about understanding; more, "what I hear you saying is …" and "what I can appreciate/value about that is …" and "what concerns me is …"

Our hesitation as a parish community to publicly address matters that are important to parish life is, at least in part, related to fear. Fear of being excluded, mistaken, judged; fear of feeling foolish, of losing our standing in the community, fear of [insert your fear here]. "But perfect love casts out fear." So, how are we to love one another?

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. (1 John 4:18)

Continue on the Present Course with Legs that Reach the Ground

Hypothesis: A problem-to-solve strategy, with its focus on addressing perceived weaknesses, may prove effective in this instance, if legs are placed under the changes helping us stay grounded in our strengths and gifts.

Such an approach may be necessary if the leadership can't bring itself to return to an appreciative stance and behavior strategy for parish development. As noted earlier an appreciative strategy is generally more effective than the problem-to-solve approach. It's easier on the parish as it makes use of what the parish already knows how to do well. It creates less tension in the parish community and offers a form of stability that provides the base for faithful adaptation.

If we stayed with the present course, and put legs under the changes, that might at least result in a more faithful parish approach to life and ministry, and at best attract new people and grow the parish community. That would especially be true if such an approach was more deeply and explicitly grounded in our Anglo-Catholic and Anglican ethos, respectful of the inclination toward an inner spirituality and a form of community life more comfortable for introverts, and made full use of our gifts for liturgy and music within liturgy.

Some may make the case that our institutional social service and social justice ministries (as opposed to a more organic understanding of Christian service as expressed in the lives of the baptized), and our life as a community, outweighs any concern about numbers. From that perspective there's really nothing that should be done about the decline in attendance. Instead, attention should be turned to how to more effectively use the parish's community and institutional strength to influence issues we care about.

It's also possible that an emphasis on institutional social service and justice ministries, along with the development of a stronger parish community life, will attract new people. Especially if the legs are placed under it.

It's fairly common to see people affiliate with a parish because of some particular externally directed ministry of the parish. Most often those people don't want to be directly involved in carrying out those ministries but do want to be associated with a church that has a relationship with the arts, feeds and/or houses the poor, and demonstrates for justice.

Such a strategy does run the risk of the parish measuring itself by the standards of a social service agency and losing touch with its identity and purpose as a local expression of the Body of Christ. Probably the most effective way to avoid such a loss and to keep ourselves grounded is to frequently return to our Anglo-Catholic tradition's approach to social issues in preaching, education, book groups, icons, art, and so on. We need to hear and inwardly digest the voices of that tradition. And more, we need to integrate our tradition's understanding of the relationship between worship and action.

That would mean a clearer affirmation of the majority of the parish who come to Mass and return to the groups and institutions of their life serving in those places as instruments of the Divine Charity. And we need to help those called to ministry in and through the parish to ground their work in the Eucharist and Office.

Here are some of the voices already familiar to many in the parish:

> *It is the mystical which gives warmth and humanity and tolerance, and without which religions can grow hard, inflexible, and cruel. It is the mystical element which integrates theology, action, and prayer.* Kenneth Leech

> *Christian action arises from, and is sustained by, Christian worship and prayer.* Ken Leech

> *You are the Body of Christ…That is to say; in you and through you the method and work of the Incarnation must go forward. You are meant to incarnate in your lives the themes of your adoration. You are to be taken, consecrated, broken, and made a means of grace; vehicles of the Eternal Charity.* Evelyn Underhill

> *One's first duty is adoration, and one's second duty is awe and only one's third duty is service. And that for those three things and nothing else, addressed to God and no one else, you and I and all other countless human creatures evolved upon the surface of this planet were created. We observe then that two of the three things for which our souls were made are matters of attitude, of relation: adoration and awe. Unless these two are right, the last of the triad, service, won't be right. Unless the whole of your…life is a movement of praise and adoration, unless it is instinct with awe, the work which the life produces won't be much good.* Evelyn Underhill

> *Ours is the vocation of enchantment, restoring to humanity the divine image which sin has hidden but cannot destroy. It is a ministry of holy responsibility as well as delight. We must teach the truth to an age that does not believe in truth, preach hope to men and women bereft of confidence in the past or the future, and labor for justice in a time of ideological bankruptcy and political cynicism. But what will ultimately win souls—drawing human beings out of despondency to embrace their true selves, their brothers and sisters, and their God—is wonder: the spontaneous love and joy which lures us to Mass Sunday after Sunday. The future of Anglo-Catholicism and of the whole Church depends less on our work than on our ability to enflame our neighbor's hearts. This may seem an intimidating assignment, but it is breathtakingly simple. Every day we work our magic on those we love: our children, our friends, our spouses, and our lovers. And this is how we will lure the world.* John Orens

Our witness in social and justice ministries can be given legs that touch the ground as we connect these wise ones with our work. We can draw on material such as that of Fr. Ken Leech in his exploration of the social vision that emerges from the Anglo-Catholic tradition—corporate, materialistic, a transformed society, a rebel tradition, and a kingdom theology.

In recent years the parish has given special attention to the matter of "community." It's something the two of us have also reflected upon and written about in our books and the "Means of Grace, Hope of Glory" blog about parish development. Robert has offered ideas about how leaders might "shape a transforming community…in which people's lives are made new" and affirmed the role of social activities "in which the exchanges of the Holy City occur: where people encounter others' needs and desires, where they run up against each other, experience hurt and forgiveness, and are called to courage and patience." In recent months he's looked at how a parish can become an empowering community in its appreciation of the uniqueness of each congregation and its use of decision-making and leadership methods. The chapter on Community in Michelle's *In Your Holy Spirit* book begins with Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "We are one, after all, you and I. Together we suffer, together exist, and forever will recreate each other." She quotes Nouwen, "the Christian community is not a closed circle of people embracing each other, but a forward moving group of companions bound together by the same voice asking for their attention." Michelle goes on to explore Scott Peck's understanding of "true community" (with its honest communication and safety and enjoyment of one another), the model of financial consultant James Ware on the relationship of openness and candor in shaping a community, and Saint Benedict's call to listen.

To place the needed legs under our seeking of true community we suggest exploring one set of questions and two facets of Christian life.

The questions: How do introverts "do" community? How do Anglo-Catholics "do" community? How is community formed in the liturgy and in the music of liturgy? What is it to be the Eucharistic community?

Facet one: Love. God's love for use. Our love of God. Loving ourselves, loving one another, loving our neighbor and our enemy.

For our reflection –

> From John - I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'
>
> From 1 Peter - Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins.
>
> Tertullian reported that the Romans would exclaim, "See how they love one another!"
>
> From 1 John - "He who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?"

We offer these passages as sources for a Catholic wholeness. We think they are the legs we need to ground us more fully in the ways of God's love. It is Gospel.

Our liturgy and music of the liturgy certainly speak of God's love for us and our love of God—adoration, praise, awe, wonder, joy. And in sermons and programs we know about loving those outside the parish's communal life—the homeless and oppressed, the vulnerable and the marginalized. We routinely hear of the need for our love to go beyond our immediate circle of love and caring. We hear the invitations in Matthew and Luke, "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others?" and "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? ... But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return." It is Gospel.

It is all Gospel.

Those who come to visit may comment: "See how they worship together!" or "See how they serve others!" They are less likely to say, "See how they love one another!"

It's not that we don't love one another. Maybe a mix of our introversion, and the heavy emphasis on those outside the walls, hides and even diminishes that expression of love. Perhaps we need a balanced diet of word and action—God's love for us and our love of God; our love of the stranger, the vulnerable and our enemies; *and* our love for brothers and sisters in this Eucharistic community.

We might consider the restoration of full coffee hours with community developers and more attention to each congregation's life; reestablishing a pastoral care team with lay leadership; forming self-selected groups for mutual spiritual reflection and guidance.

Facet Two: The Church's way of reconciliation and forgiveness. How we handle disagreements, how we deal with one another when we have been offended, what we do with our resentments and old grudges, all this is at the heart of being a Christian community. This is another arena of Christian life infrequently addressed at St. Paul's. Our conflict aversion may lead us to pretend we have no conflicts and to minimize those conflicts that are acknowledged. In relation to the theme of this paper, it's fair to say that the reason we have not talked about the decline is because we don't know how to manage the conflict that might occur.

Community is built as we understand and act upon the Church's way of reconciliation and forgiveness.

For our reflection –

> So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. (Matthew 5:23-25)
>
> Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger (Ephesians 4:26)

Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. (Colossians 3:13)

and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:32)

Then Peter came and said to him, 'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. (Matthew 18:21-22)

There are four guideposts; four ways of grace:

1. Timely & quickly: get on with forgiving, do it now, take the time to complete the action.

2. Face-to-face and with those directly involved: Not by e-mail but face-to-face. With all the parties directly involved, so sometimes one person and other times many. The exception: When a conflict is at a very high level, we normally need external assistance to lower the temperature enough to allow for face-to-face meetings. So, we use mediators and consultants. This is usually needed when we have been unwilling to be timely and quick and/or take a stance of forgiveness (that is, when we hold onto old resentments and grudges).

3. Witnesses: If an initial gathering of those directly involved doesn't move in a constructive direction then we need to invite others to be witnesses. A witness isn't there to take a side. The witness is first there to simply be present. At times the presence of another person slows things down and helps people hear one another. The witness isn't there to facilitate the meeting or be a mediator (though these roles may be necessary in some cases). The witness will join in any times of prayer or silence.

4. Forgive: This is about a stance we take on. It's the Christian decision to be a forgiving person. It's not about how we feel but what we believe and have decided to act upon. We forgive because we are commanded to forgive.

Maybe our parish is longing for a deeper and more authentic expression of community. A community that provides ample space for all the humble and common connections of life. Connections that by grace and human initiative sometimes takes us into companionship and friendship. And also, a community in which our inclusion is by way of Holy Love and the Holy pathways of reconciliation and forgiveness.

In our *In Your Holy Spirit* books we offer a model that has at its base Eucharist and Office. And, among other things above that base, is "community." We believe that a healthy parish community rests upon and rises from the same sources as healthy Christian action—"worship and doctrine" says Leech, "Adoration and Awe" says Underhill.

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Background information available

Theories, models, people and issues mentioned in the paper and background resources on St. Paul's are available at -
http://www.congregationaldevelopment.com/means-of-grace-hope-of-glory/2019/8/30/saint-pauls-parish-seattle-growth-decline.html

Join us

Our aim is to help stimulate useful and productive conversation about what's happening. We hope this will provide a pathway for St. Paul's, as well as for other parishes that are finding it difficult to engage the conversations they need to have. After some time has passed, and we've heard from some of you, we'll offer another posting on the blog.

Contact us with your questions, wonderments, and suggested changes. Also, let us know if you are part of one of the St. Paul's congregations and would be interested in being part of a small group discussion:

Michelle Heyne   michelleheyne@gmail.com
Robert Gallagher   ragodct@gmail.com

About Us

Michelle Heyne, OA

Michelle brings empathy, humor, and a solid grounding in ecclesiology and effective organizational dynamics to her work as a trainer and consultant. She is committed to helping parish leaders bring about effective change by developing the skills they need to make the most of the gifts they already have. She worked as a financial services executive for over 25 years and served as a parish lay leader for 15. She currently is a partner in a consulting practice focused on developing healthy financial services companies using Organization Development theory and method. Michelle lives in Seattle with her husband, Sean Fitzpatrick.

Michelle served as part of the Church Development Institute (CDI) training team with the Diocese of Washington and national CDI and Shaping the Parish. She has also done training with and received a certificate from the Church Development Institute. Michelle also has completed NTL's Organization Development Certificate program. Michelle has extensive experience with financial management, interpersonal communications and team dynamics, and developing and implementing organizational change initiatives. She has non-profit experience in the areas of team building, strategic planning, and conflict management. She attends St. Paul's, Seattle. Michelle is a Life Professed Member of the Order of the Ascension, the 8th Superior of the Order, and the first lay person to serve as Superior.

Writing: *In Your Holy Spirit: Traditional Spiritual Practices in Today's Christian Life*, Ascension Press 2011; "Teaching Spiritual Practice: An Experiential Approach to Christian Formation and Parish Development," Ascension Press 2012; "Understanding from Within: Working with Religious Systems," OD Practitioner, with Robert Gallagher, January 2015; "Quality & Empowerment: Organization Development at WomenRising 1992 – 2016." OD Practitioner, with Robert Gallagher, Spring 2016. Book in process: *Shaping the Parish*: *A Theology of the Parish Church,* with Robert Gallagher.

Robert Gallagher, OA

Robert brings over 50 years of experience in leadership training and parish development. Fr. Robert offers exceptional skills in facilitating shifts and changes in people and organizations. He provides practical methods and vision for a transformed parish. He has a master's degree in Organization Development from Goddard College. He lives in Seattle.

He's been a consultant and trainer in religious systems, non-profit organizations and small businesses since 1970. Robert has been a parish priest; on the staff of or consultant to ecumenical training organizations, an industrial mission and metropolitan and state councils of churches. He served as the congregational development officer for the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut from 1981 - 88. He has consulted with hundreds of congregations. He has served as adjunct faculty in congregational development at Hartford Seminary and Seabury-Western Theological

Seminary and in Anglican Studies at Bangor Theological Seminary. He was Director of the Church Development Institute (CDI) at the General Theological Seminary from 1985 - 2000 and continued as the Director of CDI - Seattle until in 2011 when that changed to Shaping the Parish. In recent years Robert served as the Associate Priest for Ascetical and Practical Theology at Trinity Church, Seattle, and as a priest associate at St. Paul's Church and Saint Clements Church, Seattle. He attends St. Paul's, Seattle. An article in the Washington Post on Bob's work. Fr. Robert is a Life Professed Member of the Order of the Ascension.

Writing: *Fill All Things: The Dynamics of Spirituality in the Parish Church*, Ascension Press, 2008. *Parish Assessment Workbook*, Coauthor, a manual for conducting a self-study, Ascension Press, 1988; *Faith Sharing*, Coauthor, exercises for groups exploring life histories and spirituality. Ascension Press, 1989; *Conformed to Christ: Structures and Standards for Parish Life*, Coauthor, guidelines and samples of job descriptions for staff and committees. Ascension Press, 1983, revised 1988 and 2004 as a CD; *Power from on High: A Model for Parish Life and Development,* Ascension Press, 1982; *Stay in the City*, A strategy for dioceses in regard to urban parishes. Forward Movement, 1981; *The Ministry of the Laity as Agents of Institutional Change*, *Audenshaw Documents*, 1972 and a shorter version in *Asian Focus*, East Asian Christian Conference, 1971. *In Your Holy Spirit: Shaping the Parish Through Spiritual Practices*, 2011. *Understanding from Within: Working with Religious Systems*, OD Practitioner, with Michelle Heyne, January 2015. "Quality & Empowerment: Organization Development at WomenRising 1992 – 2016.", with Michelle Heyne, Spring 2016 OD Practitioner. Books in process include: *Eucharistic Spirituality: From Audience to Congregation*; *Shaping the Parish: A Theology of the Parish Church,* with Michelle Heyne