

Assessing using the Benedictine Promise

To seek the presence of Jesus Christ in the people, things and circumstances of life through stability, obedience and conversion of life. The Promise (as used in the Order of the Ascension)

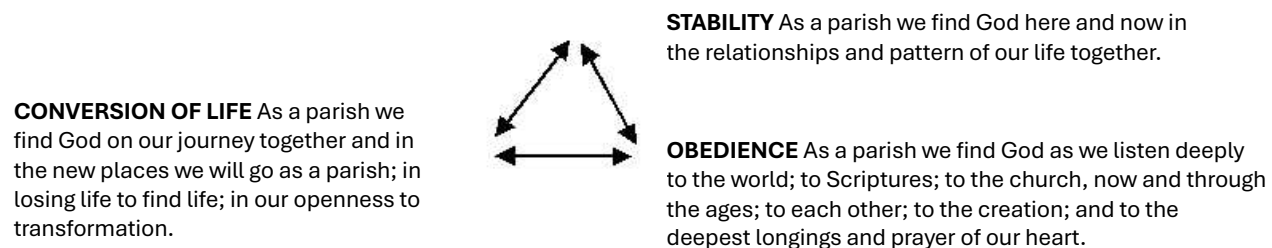
Preparing to use the assessment

The group needs to be somewhat familiar with the Benedictine Promise. There are groups where a 15 minute presentation on the Promise will be adequate. And others where it would help to have engaged members in a variety of ways, e.g., a book reading of de Waal's *Seeking God*, a few teaching sermons, the use of the Promise as a self-assessment and reflection resource in adult formation. Is your group willing and able to make use of this approach? Some people find the Promise elusive and not comprehensible. We need to be patient with them and ask them to be patient as they learn to use it. This kind of assessment also doesn't lend itself to the purposes of offering feedback on the quality of the rector's preaching or the depth of the vestry's spiritual life.

An Introduction

From Chapter 3 "The Benedictine Promise", *Fill All Things: The Spiritual Dynamics of the Parish Church*, Robert A. Gallagher, Available from Amazon.

The three elements of the Benedictine Promise, and the whole of Benedictine spirituality, can help us see some of the hidden dynamics of parish life.



Benedictine spirituality is part of our Anglican DNA. It's the way of the Prayer Book and is embedded in much of the way we function as parish communities. We can make use of it in the work of congregational development: 1) as a way to see and enter into the depth of our own culture as Episcopalians and 2) because it is the spirituality of particular communities that have developed a capacity, over time, to maintain their integrity while renewing themselves in adaptation to the environment.

Developing a parish culture that is marked by:

Stability – Especially seen in Liturgy, prayer and relationships.

Obedience – Seen in our openness to listen, and respond to, one another, our bishop and the larger church.

Conversion of Life – Out of our life of stability or obedience we see and act on new challenges and opportunities for mission and building up the Body of Christ.

Assessment

Stability

1. To what extent have we faced into difficult issues in the parish’s life? In Esther deWaal’s words, “Stability means that I must not run away from where my battles are being fought, that I have to stand still where the real issues have to be faced.”

Very poorly

Very effectively

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

2. To what extent have we maintained a healthy stability by engaging rubs and tensions in a timely manner, listening respectfully to one another, and creating structures and processes helping us to address issues?

Very poorly

Very effectively

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

3. To what extent have we as a parish maintained or established a fruitful stability in liturgy, prayer and relationships?

Very poorly

Very effectively

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

Comments on Stability:

Obedience

1. To what extent do we as a parish live within the norms and ethos of the Anglican tradition?

Very poorly

Very effectively

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

2. To what extent does the parish have a critical mass of members who live a deep and proficient life of prayer that increases our ability to respond to nudging of the Holy Spirit?

Very poorly

Very effectively

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

3. To what extent do we listen with “the ear of our heart” to one another in the vestry, the vestry to the larger parish and the parish to the larger community?

Very poorly

Very effectively

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

4. Listening can be seen as part of how parish leaders manage the polarities of change and stability, individual needs and community needs, necessary adaptation and institutional identity, integrity and integration. How well are we as leaders listening?

Very poorly

Very effectively

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

Comments on Obedience:

Conversion of life

1. To what extent are we committed to a parish expression of maturity in faith and practice. Seeking to accept responsibility and take needed action.

Very poorly

Very effectively

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

2. How well are we managing the tension between making necessary changes while also maintaining our basic identity and ethos?

Very poorly

Very effectively

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

3. To what extent do we tell our history as an account of how well the parish has adapted to changes within and around it; stories of courage, vision and persistence?

Very poorly

Very effectively

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

Comments on conversion of life:

Using the Assessment

1. If you are using it as a tool to enable reflection, discernment and planning

Have participants complete the assessment. Transfer their answers onto several sheets of newsprint that are in front of the group. Identify areas of strong agreement and clear differences. Walk through the section and allow time for people to share their thoughts about why the rating as they did. Insist on respectful listening. Consider closing the session by asking the wardens and rector to fishbowl – sit together before the group – and each share “Here’s what I hear the group saying?”

Consider whether it will be helpful to set the assessment process with worship and periods of silence.

What steps do you want to take beyond the above? Will brainstorming ideas to maintain our strengths and address a few of our weaknesses or blind spots be useful at the same session as when we do the assessment, or might it be better to allow time in between? Would it help to ask a small team to take the group’s assessment and thinking, create an action plan, and return to the group to test the plan and hear ideas about improving it?

2. If you are using the tool as part of a mutual ministry review.

You might engage in the above. That could be followed by the rector and vestry going into different rooms and for each to answer the question, “what will I/we do to nurture and expand our existing strengths and help address our weaknesses and blind spots?” Come back together and share.