DEVELOPING CRITICAL MASS IN THE DIOCESE

Critical mass theories are used by many Organization Development and parish development practitioners. It's also a resource for understanding how some dioceses seem healthier, more vital and engaged than others. The model suggests building the level of commitment, competence and emotional maturity at the center of the organization so that it grounds the system in a mission orientation and an organizational culture that supports the mission. The grounding then is enfleshed; made real in the lives of men and women. It's in the habits of people rather than statements of leaders

The diocesan community's commitment to its own decisions is directly related to its health. The internal commitment of a critical mass of clergy and diocesan leaders to the diocese's direction and culture is interdependent with a variety of other things—trust, collaboration, and the willingness of people to accept responsibility. All that is connected with the diocese's ability to stay focused on its primary task parish revitalization.

Understand and use a critical mass strategy

This is about building the level of commitment, competence for spiritual life, emotional intelligence and leadership at the center of the diocese so that it grounds the system in a mission orientation and an organizational culture that supports the mission. This will take the shape of a series of circles, one within the other. Those at the center will share more of the "common language" of healthy and useful skills, knowledge, attitudes and values.

Critical mass models invite leaders to attend to building the center and to stop the tendency to obsess about "fixing" the problems and dysfunction at the edges. New and unskilled leaders are especially inclined to focus on the "difficult people" or those who constantly demand personal attention, or the crisis of the moment.

A critical mass model suggests that we should give much more of our time and energy to developing the center. Support and build the capacity of those willing and able to more fully give themselves, whether to the overall health of the diocese or to a particular project that moves toward health.

The emerging field of network science may help us understand how a critical mass develops. Network science studies how behavioral changes spread through social systems. There's an obvious link to developing and spreading emotional intelligence, sound spiritual practice, and virtues such as kindness, patience, gentleness, courage and perseverance.

These social networks are of people in face-to-face contact, people we see regularly. Researchers are looking at how the structure of these networks affects our adopting and sustaining habits. There's some evidence that networks of overlapping social ties were the most effective. That is to say, we don't know everyone in the network, but we know some

people and they know others. It's like a web. In such networks, people catch things from one another.

"Most of us are already aware of the direct effect we have on our friends and family; our actions can make them happy or sad, healthy or sick, even rich or poor. But we rarely consider that everything we think, feel, do or say can spread far beyond the people we know...As part of a social network, we transcend ourselves, for good or ill, and become part of something much larger. We are connected."

Malcolm Gladwell's concept of the tipping point is related to the idea of critical mass. A tipping point is when the impetus for change becomes unstoppable. Gladwell defines a tipping point as "the moment of critical mass, the threshold, the boiling point."

Gladwell believes, "Ideas and products and messages and behaviors spread like viruses do." To facilitate critical mass around a healthier set of diocesan habits we might pay attention to Gladwell's notion that three types of people are needed: 1) connectors, those who easily make friends and build connections; 2) people with the new and needed competencies such as spiritual practice and emotional intelligence; and 3) people with skills at persuading and negotiating. Not much good will happen in a diocese without social connection (emotional glue), leaders with a deep and grounded spiritual life and adequate emotional intelligence.

There are three broad objectives that make up a critical mass strategy.

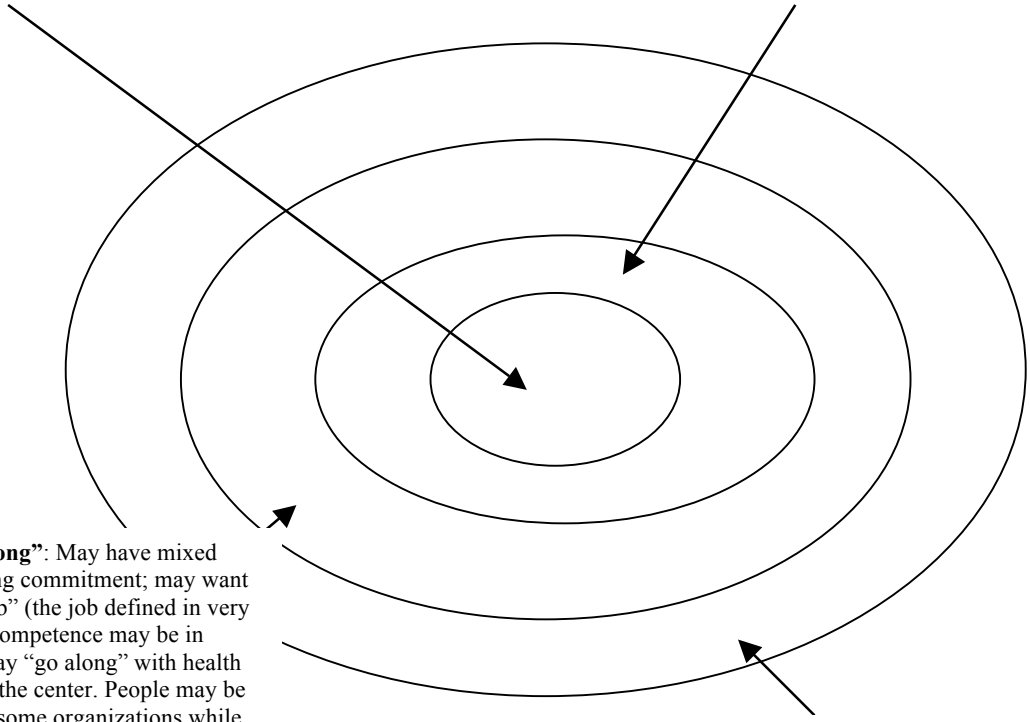
Nurture the Shape. If there are no people of high competence and commitment in spiritual life, emotional intelligence and leadership ability -- seek ways to establish a core of such people in the diocesan leadership. Assume that it will take years to do these things. If there are a number of people in leadership with these capacities the task is to see to their development. Accept that not all will be in the inner circle of high competence and commitment; that being "supporters" is often enough.

Accept and Invite. Take a stance in which you accept people wherever they are in the journey and invite them to go deeper. Include people in a manner that respects and loves them for who they are now, what they bring to the table now, while also seeking opportunities to offer new ways and new life. The work of the bishop's office includes the development of diocesan leadership. Over the past 30 years the non-profit community has become clearer about it being part of an executive director's job to develop the capacity of the board. In too many dioceses the bishop and staff simply accept those elected to diocesan council and the standing committee as factors to collaborate or struggle with and ignore the need to develop these groups and people for the ministries they perform.

Set Loose the Dynamic. Ground the overall climate of the diocese in Apostolic Faith and set loose the dynamic by building the appropriate culture. Seek ways to build emotional and spiritual glue among the priests, deacons and diocesan leadership groups.

High competence and commitment: People invested in all aspects of the diocese's life. High competence and commitment for spiritual & emotional maturity, leadership ability. Clarity about the primary task of the diocese – parish development and the other important tasks – engaging the region of the diocese in service and evangelization and connecting the diocese with the broader church.

Supporters: Not as invested as the core. Possibly somewhat less competence or commitment. Yet are "with you" in the effort. Are aware of diocesan organizational norms and have decided to cooperate with the norms and serve by use their competence



"Just Going Along": May have mixed feelings regarding commitment; may want to"just do my job" (the job defined in very narrow terms); competence may be in limited areas; may "go along" with health or non-health at the center. People may be in this stance in some organizations while in others taking a *Core* or *Supporter* stance.

Stances of Cynicism, Counter- dependency, Passivity : Most dioceses have people that are not able or willing to take a healthy and productive stance. This may be a stance that the person typically takes or may be situational. We are all there at times.

STRATEGY: In most organizations -- Build a "critical mass" of people with a stance of *High Commitment & Competence* and *Supporters*. Develop organizational processes, values and norms that reinforce a productive, empowering, and humane culture. Accept people in the stance they have taken; invite them to develop their abilities and willingness to invest themselves more broadly and deeply. Place boundaries on behavior that is undermining the well being of the organization's culture.

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DEVELOPING "CRITICAL MASS": AN ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR THE DIOCESE

A. Build a Core of High Competence and Commitment

1. Be clear about who must be part of the core, e.g. the bishop and bishop's staff, a significant number of priests of the diocese, especially those in charge of parish churches ("take your share in the councils of the Church"). People who by their position in the diocese have significant influence on productivity and the organizational culture need to be part of this core group. Through training, coaching, recruiting and hiring processes bring these people "on board".

2. Acknowledge, encourage and support those who are in this group.

3. Provide regular training and coaching to support and develop them.

B. Focus on Developing and strengthening a "Critical Mass" of people with *High Competence and Commitment* and *Supporters*. Avoid getting caught up in trying to "fix" people in *Stances of Cynicism, Counter-dependency, or Passivity*. Do set boundaries on behavior that undermines what is healthy in the diocese's life. Take a stance of accepting people in the stance they have taken; invite them to develop their commitment and competence, and to invest themselves more broadly and deeply.

C. Develop Diocesan Processes, Values and Norms that Develops and Maintains a Culture in Support of the Mission and Primary Task

Develop a clear vision that includes your mission, primary task, core values and broad direction. Create processes for diocesan listening to its own life and the external context. Nurture a capacity to maintain organizational integrity while adapting to new forces in the diocese or environment.

D. Including Everyone

1. *Supporters* - Offer ongoing training and coaching; seek and encourage people ready to go further.

2. *"Just Going Along"* - All of us are in this stance in relationship to some organizations. Include them in activities around the mission, core values, etc.; invite them to develop increased competency; engage them through the regular processes of the organization, inviting them to move forward with the diocese; do not over react to their low commitment or competence.

3. *Stances of Cynicism, Counter-dependence, Passivity* - Ignore their stance if possible; if the stance needs to be challenged engage people one-to-one by listening to their views ----> sharing your vision for the diocese's direction and culture ---> invite the person to join in making the vision work; if their stance and activities threaten the diocese's direction and culture seek ways to create boundaries that limit their influence in the system.

4. There may be people who appear to vacillate among stances, e.g., at times seeming to be *High Competence and Commitment*, at other times just *Supporters*. It may be possible to stabilize this by inviting the person to maintain a more consistent stance and offering help as required.

E. Address the Situation if there is an Inversion of the "Emotional" System

If the emotional center of the diocese is held by those with *Stances of Cynicism*, *Counter-dependency, Passivity* the task will be to displace those at the current center and establish a "critical mass" as described. Organizations or subsystems of a diocese can find themselves captured by a form of emotional coercion by people caught up in one of these stances. Others who may be more committed, competent or emotionally mature back away from leadership.

F. Decide on the Shape of the System that is Needed Given the Diocese's Work

Most organizations, including dioceses and parishes, can tolerate a certain amount of *"Just Going Along"* and a *Stance of Cynicism, Counter-dependency, Passivity*. You may not have the resources for consistently selecting or rewarding people of higher commitment and competency. Some organizations expect to include these people because of the mission of the organization, i.e. some religious groups. Other organizations have missions that require all its members to have high commitment and competence, e.g., Navy Seals, the bishops of the church.

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