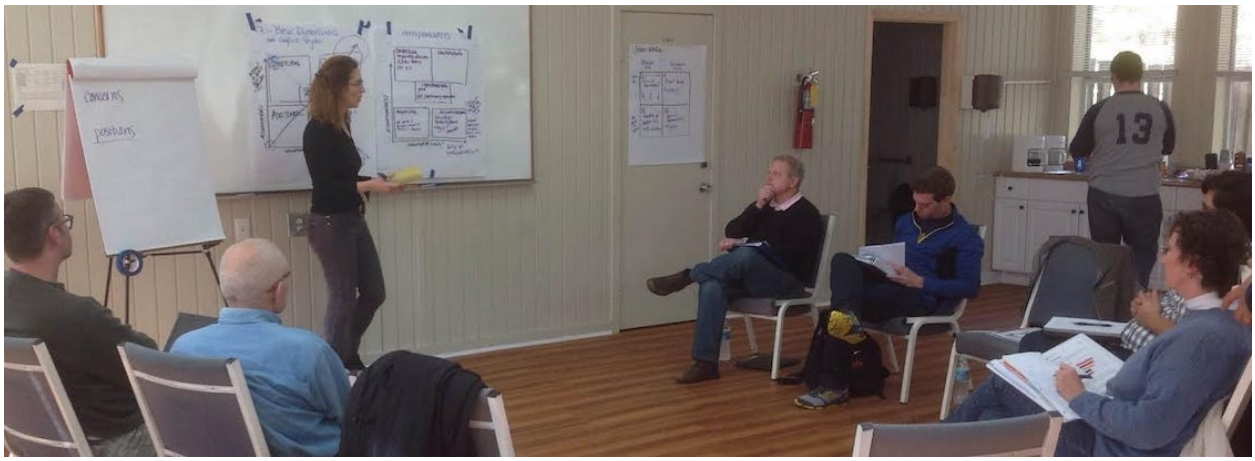
The History of Parish Development in the Episcopal Church

As of October 9, 2026 Brother Robert Gallagher, OA

Please suggest additional information that will help fill out this history.
A word about links – when posted all the links worked; I'm assuming that over time some will fail. My effort to restore such links will be sporadic.



An overview of current primary programs

Currently there are three active training programs that offer a solid foundation in parish development. They have shared roots. The Diocesan Church Development Institute has a history going back into the 1970s. The College for Congregational Development started in 2009. Shaping the Parish, a third program, was active from 2011 - 2012 and restarting with a different format in 2023.

Roots of the primary training programs in the Episcopal Church



The history line begins with Organization Development (OD) in Religious Systems. That was an offering of MATC (Mid Atlantic Training and Consulting), a training system sponsored by judicatories in the Mid-Atlantic region. It was a yearlong program with three weeks of workshop time, back-home projects, and a coach-consultant for each participant. To enter the program, you

had to already have had three weeks of lab training in human relations, group development and experiential educational design skills.

The first trainers in the Church Development Institute (CDI) had all gone through the MATC OD program. The first CDI programs, in the late 1970s into the early 80s, were diocesan based in Pennsylvania and then Connecticut. In 1985 it was offered nationally in a program cosponsored by General Seminary and the Order of the Ascension. A primary motivator for creating CDI was the desire to make use of ascetical theology and practice in combination with organization development.

The three current programs were all developed and led by people who had received training from CDI and LTI (Leadership Training Institute). The programs all have much the same learning culture and offer a mix of organization development and ascetical theology.

About me

From 1973 into the 80's I was a MATC trainer. I served on the staff of most of the programs offered and was the coordinator of weeklong labs on OD and consultation skills. During that period I was the developer and coordinator of the Consultant Network in the Diocese of Pennsylvania. From 2001 – 12, I continued doing lab training with LTI (Leadership Training Institute) and Shaping the Parish. I was certified as a practitioner by ACC (Association for Creative Change) in the fields of group development, experiential educational design skills, and organization development. I received an MA in organization development from Goddard College. The Philadelphia field faculty person for Goddard was Elsie Cross an experienced OD consultant and at the time the president of National Training Labs (NTL).

I've been a consultant and trainer in religious systems, non-profit organizations and small businesses since 1970; served as a parish priest and on the staff of ecumenical training organizations, an industrial mission and metropolitan and state councils of churches. I was the congregational development officer for the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut from 1981 - 88. I've been adjunct faculty in parish development at Hartford Seminary and Seabury-Western Theological Seminary and in Anglican Studies at Bangor Theological Seminary. I was the founder and the Director of the Church Development Institute at the General Theological Seminary (1985 - 2000). . And continued as the director of the national CDI as it moved to Maine and later Seattle. Later I served as the director of the Leadership Training Institute and Shaping the Parish. I've written a number of articles and books in the field. For more information, scroll down – here. A current activity is working with Sister Michelle Heyne, OA in the 2040 Process of Saint Clement's Church, Seattle. For more on that process.

All of that is to say, I've been deeply involved in much of this history. Something for you, the reader to keep in mind. The story is both personal and inevitably will have my own bias within it.

The backdrop

After the Second World War the Episcopal Church's interest in and use of the applied behavioral sciences increased. This impacted its institutional life at all levels and in many arenas. Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) blended clinical insight with traditional spiritual care. The Christian education of children radically shifted with the Seabury Series using age-specific behavioral psychology based on research on how children socially interacted and matured. In 1975 the Education for Ministry Program (EfM) was established to move away from lecture-based instruction toward experiential education. It was all influenced by the lab training movement that emphasized learning by doing, experiencing, and reflecting in small groups rather than passively listening to an expert. Lab training became a routine resource to help clergy and lay leaders learn about group dynamics and the impact of their behavior on groups they worked with. This influenced how vestries functioned and helped in managing conflict. The church made use of sociological research on economics, racial inequality, and urban demographics in its service and advocacy efforts.



In 1976 during the Bicentennial celebration in Philadelphia, I toured the USS Becuna (SS-319), a World War II submarine. I toured it again more recently in another trip to that city. Cramped, narrow spaces. No place to be alone. Trying to imagine 75 men squeezed into a tube 311 feet long packed solid with massive diesel engines, heavy electric batteries, torpedoes, and fuel tanks. There was very little space left for human beings. When I was first introduced to the work of Jack Gibb, I was told that his research on trust development was based on his work with submarine crews. It's a lovely myth.

What is true is that his experiments took place in more conventional settings, e.g., corporate offices, and T-groups of the National Training Laboratories (NTL). The Navy provided funding because they wanted to understand how to improve leadership, reduce friction, and boost productivity across any organizational unit, including on submarines. One result was TORI, his Theory on Trust Development in Groups. From 1953 to 1961 he was funded by the Group Psychology Branch of the Office of Naval Research **t**o track how defensive behaviors are triggered or minimized in small group dynamics.

Humility – we all stand on the shoulders of people that went before us

Do you wish to rise? Begin by descending. You plan a tower that will pierce the clouds? Lay first the foundation of humility. — Saint Augustine

Jack Gibb's work on trust development (TORI) would have been part of the learning that took place in the many of the Episcopal Church's Parish Life Missions and Conferences of the 1950s and 60s and the work of ecumenical organizations like MATC (Mid Atlantic Training and Consulting) that went into the 70's and 80's. My "Trust Development in Organizations" owes a good bit to Gibb's work while taking into account later work on organizational culture, organization development, and empowerment dynamics. I had first learned Gibb's theory when a participant in a MATC lab and continued to learn more as I completed the two-year training-of-trainers program at Lands' End, I had the opportunity to read the large number of articles at Lands' End on Gibb's theory. I believe Gibb's model is routinely offered in the College for Congregational Development (CCD). The initial CCD trainers would have been exposed to Gibb's work as they participated in the Church Development Institute and the Group Development Labs of the Leadership Training Institute after 2001.

Bishop Tutu said, "I have frequently said when one is in a crowd and stands out, it is only because one is being carried on the shoulders of others. After all, what is a leader without followers?" While the famous phrasing "standing on the shoulders of giants" is historically attributed to Sir Isaac Newton, Archbishop Tutu used a communal metaphor to express the exact same sentiment in his speech at Marquette University.

The story of parish development is about the creation of the field of organization development (OD), the church's early adoption of OD, and a process of several generations during which individuals and groups expanded and built upon the work of those who had come before them.

An Outline of the History

We'll begin this story in the late 1940s into the early 60s. That's a period when significant changes were taking place that provided the foundation for today's parish development efforts. Participation in early T-Groups (training groups focused on group dynamics) and organization development (OD) transformed the Episcopal Church by shifting local parishes toward team-based, participatory governance and reducing traditional liturgical conflict. The initial human relations and group process labs at NTL (the National Training Laboratory Institute) included

significant participation by Episcopalians and people from other denominations. By the mid 1960s training networks were being created that made this form of training widely available.

The Episcopal Church was an "early adopter" in Organization Development (OD) and the utilization of T-groups, fundamentally reshaping how the denomination managed its parish churches, trained its leaders, and navigated social change. Alongside entities like the US and UK militaries, General Mills, and the National Education Association, the Episcopal Church was at the forefront of applying behavioral science to institutional structures in the mid-to-late 20th century.

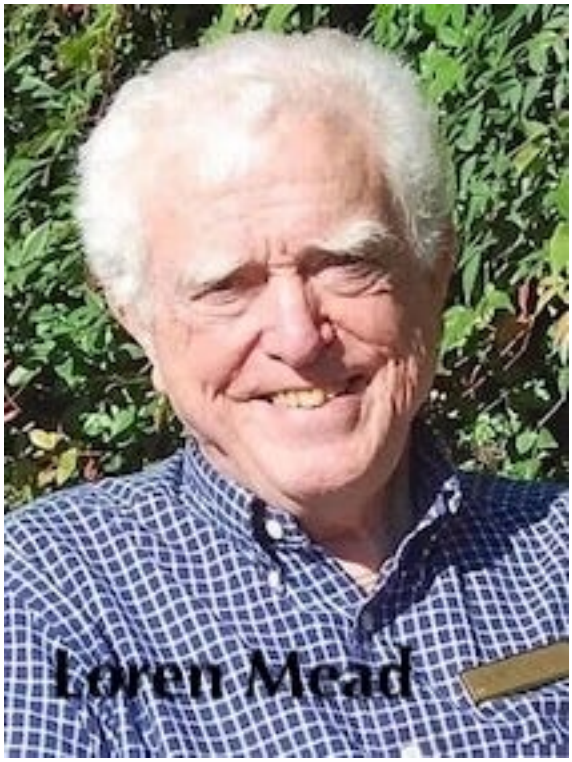
The field of Organization Development (OD) was created in the mid-to-late 1950s in the US, growing out of post-World War II behavioral science research. In 1946, social psychologist Kurt Lewin's work on group dynamics and the invention of T-groups at Bethel, Maine, laid the groundwork for the field. Around 1959 people like Richard Beckhard (defined OD), Douglas McGregor (Theory X and Theory Y), Robert Blake (Managerial Leadership Grid), and Herbert Shepard (Rules of Thumb for Change Agents) began to use the term "Organization Development" in their consulting work. In the 1960s the field expanded as universities and corporations adopted action-research, survey feedback, and team-building interventions.

Basic background on T-groups, experiential education, and Organization Development. Current offerings of lab education include Leadership Institute of Seattle (LIOS), National Training Labs (NTL), and Stanford University Business School,

An anonymous Episcopal layperson made a significant donation that was used in the **development of a national training program**. George Peabody (1922-2010), an Episcopal priest, educator, and organizational behavior expert was responsible for gaining the layperson's interest, Most Episcopal clergy were invited to participate in a 2-week "Church and Group Life Laboratory." For the most part these early efforts were concerned with helping parishes improve their educational systems and meetings. Over time there was also a reduction in the polarization over theological and liturgical differences. Clergy that were active during this period reported a reduction in conflict, partly related to the cost it was having on the church and partly because of the new skills clergy had gained in lab training. Around the same time, NTL developed an OD (Organization Development) certificate program and a number of universities begin to offer advanced degrees in OD and organizational behavior.

The 1970s was a time of liturgical change leading up to the adoption of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer (BCP). The methods used to help parishes manage the change, and accompanying conflict, rose directly out of what had been learned from the applied behavioral sciences. Clergy and lay leaders having gone through lab training in group and organization development used what they had learned. There was a parallel track strategy of using the trail services some Sundays and the 1928 BCP on others. That offered those who were more hesitant about possible change a space where they did not feel immediately challenged to accept the new rites. Alongside debates and teaching on liturgy there were structured parish community meetings designed to receive feedback on the proposed changes. That influenced the pace of change. An awareness of the Iceberg Model helped leaders see and address issues of trust and grief that existed at a deeper level in among members.

When I went through my first lab training as a participant in the early 1970s many of the trainers were Episcopal lay woman. The directors of several organizations offering training, including MATC the largest, were Episcopal priests. I included a description of my early experience with lab training in Group development – Personal growth.



PTP (Project Test Pattern) was established and funded by the Episcopal Church in 1969 -- **Loren Mead** (1930–2018) was the director. PTP was an experimental program in parish renewal. It did research, produced resources for consultants, published books and occasional papers. PTP tested the use of Organization Development as a means of strengthen congregations. In 1970-72 twenty-eight people with human relations training and consulting backgrounds were brought together and oriented to OD. PTP evolved into Alban Institute, an ecumenical organization. Other programs were also the result of the "three phase training" to which so many clergy and laity had been exposed.

A variety of projects started in dioceses to strengthen parishes; for example, in 1966-67 the Diocese of Southern Ohio trained about 24 people in consulting and planning to work with parishes; in 1969 parish teams were trained in organizational dynamics and change strategies. In 1968 the Diocese of Pennsylvania formed "The Committee on the Renewal and Mission of the Local Church" with recommendations that focused on planning and launching a series of pilots to experiment with new forms of parish ministry. The diocese followed up with "The Viable Parish Commission" that made use of the Metropolitan Associates of Philadelphia (MAP) problem-solving method. I was on the MAP staff at that time. We trained facilitators to work with parishes in a problem solving and envisioning process; in 1973 a more highly trained network of consultants was formed and trained through the MATC OD program. The Diocese of Michigan (1970-72)

equipped a group of human relations trainers with OD and consultation skills working with parishes with the same purposes as PTP. A number of structural approaches to renewal emerge during this period including, team ministries, cluster ministries, and local ordination. In 1974 Loren Mead established the Alban Institute.

Loren Mead (1930–2018) was the leading figure in the effort to make use of the apply behavioral sciences in the work of parish revitalization and development. He inspired others to create training programs, he connected people in the field to each other, wrote several books, led a groundbreaking action-research project, and was an encouraging voice to those who had lost hope in the parish church. Over the years Loren and I connected many times. The first was in 1970 in his office. He pointed me to Jim Fenhagen. Soon after that I had some time with Jim. Years later Jim and I would work together creating a co-sponsorship arrangement between the Order of the Ascension and General Theological Seminary for the Parish Development Institute (later the Church Development Institute).

Later he put Cal Wick and me together. That lead to several conferences of young clergy and lay leaders exploring the ministry of the laity. The group ended up as an article in "the Episcopalian." My last meeting with Loren was during the 2011 convention of the Diocese of Washington. Sister Michelle Heyne, OA and I were there to promote Shaping the Parish and sell our new books (here and here). I had also been asked to conduct a workshop during the convention – Congregational development through spiritual practices. Loren attended the workshop and we talked for a bit after. When I was on the Connecticut diocesan staff, we had Loren consult with us about our demand system. You can get a sense of Loren's humor and wisdom about parish life in a short paper, "Myths and Norns in Parish Life: A Guide to Parish Pathology." "The Parish is the Issue" (1971) was a report of what Project Test Pattern was doing and had learned. He later wrote a book with the same title. At the top of his list of learnings was this –

Parishes are complex sets of relationships, embodying particular values, norms, standards, having particular dynamics of interrelationship that can only be understood in terms of the people in the parish and their histories. Although they often have formal structures, bylaws, and organizational shape, they are more likely to be influenced and shaped by informal understandings, customs, unspoken rules, and interpersonal patterns of action. These elements can be at least partially understood and dealt with. Change at those systemic levels of the congregation are most likely to result in lasting changes.

MORE on Loren Mead (and me)

Before the link gets created between what is happening at NTL and religious systems, there was notable work taking place in developing rural and urban parish ministry. In the late 40's, 50's and 60's including the work and writing of Paul Mussselman, Paul Moore, and Kilmar Myers that impacted the church's understanding of the urban parish. Roanridge (National Town & Country Church Institute) was established around 1945 as a training center for rural parish work. The first director was Norman Foote, Boone Porter was director later. The Roanridge Trust continues that work by offering grants to be used for the training of town and country clergy and rural Christian workers of the Episcopal Church.

The story of every parish should be a love story. ...One possible definition for a parish is that it is God's way of meeting the problems of the unloved. This meeting between God and the unloved, the unwanted, takes place in the preaching of the Word, in the Sacraments, in the social life of the parish made possible by the climate of acceptance which is engendered by those who have been baptized and confirmed in the Catholic faith. One of the main tasks of the parish priest is to train the militant core of his parishioners in such a way that they understand as fully as possible the true nature of a Christian parish. **- Kilmer Myers**

Parish Development or Congregational Development?

The name of the field has bounced around over the years. We used "parish development" in the General Seminary program. The term "congregational development" became common for a time. When the General and Sewanee seminary programs joined together we shifted to "The Church Development Institute." That in part was a recognition that we served dioceses as well as parishes but was mostly about our thinking that the word "congregation" was problematic. I generally use the word "parish" rather than "congregation" in this article. It's a preference not a heavenly command. But it is the better word for several reasons. For a fuller explanation see the article by me and Sister Michelle Heyne, OA, "Parish or congregation? Parish Development or Congregational Development?" Below are four of the reasons we offer.

1. "Parish" assumes that the local assembly of the faithful are in relationship with and have some responsibilities regarding the surrounding neighborhood and/or other external communities.
2. Parish churches have a rootedness, persevering, and pragmatic life
3. "Parish" avoids the tendency to think that we're part of the church because we've decided to come together (congregate) at a time and place of our choosing.
4. "Parish" assumes there may be several congregations within the parish

Our approach to parish development is about the improvement of the whole system. The shaping of a faithful, healthy, and dense culture that engages the purposes of any parish: the worship of God, the formation of the people of God, and the sanctification of the neighborhood or some other external community.

Several church related training networks were established

Mid-Atlantic Training and Consulting (MATC) led by John Denham, was an ecumenical training and organization development (OD) agency active from 1965 into the 1980s. MATC provided lab-based training. Three-phase training was three weeks over a year+ in human relations, group development, and experiential educational design skills. They also offered consulting services for churches, religious judicatories, and nonprofit groups. Their approach: combined organizational psychology and systems thinking to help parishes navigate change and build leadership skills. The MATC Organization Development in Religious Systems program trained hundreds of clergy and lay leaders. This was a yearlong OD training program with "three-phase training" as a prerequisite. MATC also began to offer consultation skills training. This MATC OD training was largely started because of the initiative of Project Test Pattern and Loren Mead.

PDFs of the training manual for human relations, group development, experiential educational design skills and consultation skills used in the Leadership Training Institute around the turn of the century. Much of the material is the same as would have been in the earlier training manuals of MATC.

NETI (New England Training Institute, led by John Swanson, later John Julian founder of the Order of Julianne of Norwich, OJN), The Leadership Training Institute (LTI)- at first called Alabama Training Network was led by the Rev'd Bill Yon. Here's a PDF of the case made by the Alabama Training Network in 1976-77

The professional recognition program of ACC (Association for Creative Change) provided a development and accountability system for practitioners in religious systems. ACC continued until 1996. ACC was **founded in 1968 and was** originally named the **Association of Religion and Applied Behavioral Science (ARABS)**. When I first joined Bill Yon was the president. ACC held annual professional development conferences and awarded professional recognition in organization development, group development, experiential education, design skills, and human relations training. There was a peer-reviewed academic publication, the *Journal of Religion and the Applied Behavioral Sciences*.

A gathering was held by PTP for **leaders of Diocesan Consulting Networks**, at Claggett Conference Center, MD, April 9 – 11, 1973. This was a significant event in advancing diocesan efforts. The leaders of around 30 networks meet for a couple of days to share their experience. A paper by **Ted Blumstein and John Bowers** was produced on "Consultant Issues: Networks and Teams", PTP, August 15, 1973. The paper and the gathering addressed issues such as foundational challenges and logistics involved in deploying trained networks of parish consultants to support local churches; establishing the baseline of competence required for effective human relations and group dynamics work within religious systems; defining professional boundaries, compensation, and funding mechanisms for internal consultants; navigating the complex authority dynamics between independent parish consultants and formal diocesan bishops or denominational structures; and strategies for helping local congregations become healthier, more adaptive, and receptive to long-term systemic change. The conference was a significant resource for me as I was in the process of developing a consulting network for the Diocese of Pennsylvania. We made good use of the discussions around managing the relationship between a diocesan consulting network and the diocesan office, e.g., the amount of information about a client we would share with the bishop and bishop's staff.

Alban Institute was founded in 1974. Alban carried out work in research, training, publishing, and consulting. **Loren Mead** was the first director. He was joined by **Celia Hahn, Roy Oswald, and Speed Leas** in breaking new ground in our understandings of religious communities. Consultations and action research provided a means for new ways of looking at and helping congregations. Alban held a commitment to the idea that trained consultants working with the people facing a particular challenge in a parish were best suited to discover ways to approach that challenge. Action research projects addressing issues such as visioning and planning, congregational growth, welcoming and involving new members, parish dynamics when clergy leave, managing conflict in parishes, exploring the role of lay leadership, financial crises, etc. Incorporating new knowledge in the fields of sociology, human relations, and organization development, Alban shared its research through publications and training events. Alban's work

continues through two vehicles -- Alban at Duke and Congregational Consulting Here's a link to Duke's news release on the transition.

LAND (Leadership Academy for New Directions) began in 1970. LAND developed a significant training program based on a particular set of principles for work in small communities. Many of the early LAND people received their training in the MATC OD program. LAND played a significant role in establishing cluster and multi point ministries. **Herb Gravely** was an early PTP consultant and the rector of a parish in Kingstree, SC. He developed a consulting ministry in the small parishes of South Carolina. When LAND was beginning, **Loren Mead** let LAND leaders know about Herb's work. That led to Herb being part of the early LAND training staff. Loren Mead and others linked people together in the emerging field of parish development.

"Local ordination" (initially Canon 8) rose out of the needs of the Diocese of Alaska. **Bill Gordon** as bishop, faced too many situations where there was no way to maintain a viable Eucharistic community given the existing norms about clergy training and deployment. Working along with **Boone Porter, and later Wes Frensdorff**, a variety of ways have been developed to provide for the ordination to the priesthood of a person in a parish who would not complete the standard process of seminary education. In broad terms two pathways emerged. One was with people who had the time, intelligence, and energy for training that would allow them to exercise a rather standard set of priestly functions; the second was to ordain someone for a more limited role, usually just to perform certain sacramental functions. The pattern of having a ministry team take on responsibility for a parish has been part of this second approach. Someone would be the liturgist, others would deal with pastoral care, education, etc. Another common element of this approach has included supervision by a seminary-trained priest. The writings of Roland Allen have been part of the culture of the local ordination movement. Allen proposed that "local churches" (referring to what we think of as areas that would make up a diocese or province, not a parish) raise up their own ordained leadership. The "movement" quality of the local ordination effort has gone by several different names including Total Ministry, Total Common Ministry, and Ministry of all the Baptized. Over the years there have been concerns about issues such as separating the presiding role at the Eucharist from the presiding role in the parish community (a set of hands? A shaman?); dioceses not maintaining adequate systems of accountability and support; and the tendency of some locally ordained clergy to have limited leadership skills (one bishop saw a tendency toward autocratic behavior).

Hartford Seminary's work in congregational studies with **Jackson Carroll** and others. The Seminary's Hartford Institute for Religion Research worked at "policy-relevant research, anticipation of emerging issues and commitment to the creative dissemination of learning." Many Episcopalians participated in the seminary's programs and made use of the Institute's research. I taught "Parish Development and Management" in their D Min program when I was on the Connecticut diocesan staff. I would make use of the methods and models we were using in the Church Development Institute. Most of the students were not Episcopalians so I invited them to modify the material in ways that would better align with their traditions. Here are the course outlines from 1983 and 85 along with my notes. Since that time the institution shifted away from its origins as a traditional Christian seminary. It's now a private graduate institution with a global, multi-faith student body and its expanded mission centered on inter-religious education, research,

and global peace studies. The student body consisting roughly of 43% Muslim students, 40% Christian students, and 20% from Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, or non-religious.

The Rev. Arlin J. Rothauge was the Episcopal Church's officer for congregational development and evangelism from 1980 into the 1990s. He developed frameworks on congregation size and life cycles and in 1995 establish the doctoral program in congregational development at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary. His "Sizing Up a Congregation for New Member Ministry," relied heavily on sociological indicators, e.g., size determines a parish's organizational complexity, leadership behavior, and communication system. He classified churches into four distinct, size-based structural types: Family, Pastoral, Program, and Corporate. He also drew on organization development. In OD, we are concerned with how an organization's design matches its current needs. Rothauge helped some clergy understand that parish dysfunction will take place when its structure doesn't match its size (e.g., trying to run a 300-person church with the informal hierarchy of a 30-person family). He was less concerned about the problems going in the other direction as he pressed the church to focus on creating large parishes more than revitalizing, smaller, or struggling churches (e.g., trying to run a 30-person church with a system that fits a 250-person church). For a broader look at Church Size, Size Transitions, a video presentation, Transitions in parish size, Parish Size: Categories, Dynamics, and Issues

Seabury Institute (of Seabury-Western) with Arlin Rothauge offered a D'Min in Congregational Development beginning in 1995. A program of three summer sessions, back-home reading, application, and writing projects; provided an understanding of the factors related to the decline and growth of congregations, theological reflection on the nature and meaning of congregational development, and practical skills necessary for starting new congregations and revitalizing churches in transition and decline. Bexley Seabury offers a DMin that appears to offer work on congregational development. They have an emphasis on indigenous congregational studies and church planting.

I had some contact with Arlin when he served at 815 and I was on the staff of the Diocese of Connecticut. I appreciated how he brought together many of us working in the field of parish development for large conferences. These were opportunities to learn from one another. At the same time, I thought his emphasis on building large churches, and what I saw as a deterministic viewpoint about size and life cycles were mistaken. He had a colleague on the national staff that I worked with on several occasions, and I thought had a better and more subtle grasp of parish systems. John Vogelsang worked in the field of training and education. During the early 1980s I was still routinely serving on lab staffs with MATC. John and I shared several interests and that had us reconnecting times on several occasions. We both had training in and offered experiential education programs. Later he was Director of the Michael Harrington Center for Democratic Values and Social Change Queens College/CUNY prior to the 2009 which overlapped with my long but light involvement with socialist movements. And from **2009 until his passing in 2022** he was the editor of the OD Practitioner, a professional publication of the Organization Development Network. He published two articles by sister, Michelle and I: "Understanding from Within: Working with Religious Systems" was for the secular OD professionals showing how our connection with, and appreciation of, the church's culture allowed us to better serve parishes and dioceses as OD consultants. "Quality & Empowerment: Organization Development at

WomenRising 1992 – 2016." Was an exploration of the 24 years during which WomenRising had used an organization development approach to improve and sustain their work and life.

While some tell the story as one of dramatic shifts, I think the reality was more nuanced. Alongside of SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) came appreciative processes that gave more emphasis to building on strengths and opportunities. Parishes began to ask questions such as – "what have we done well over a long period of time and how do we build upon that?" The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode with its two dimensions of *assertiveness* and *cooperativeness* were used alongside Speed Leas Levels of Conflict. We used Kurt Lewin's Change Model (Unfreeze → Change → Refreeze) and Force-Field Analysis alongside having parishioners create a timeline on newsprint that mapped out the parish's history of transitions, decline and growth, success and failure. This provided an opportunity to more clearly hear from both those inclined toward change and those who were more resistive. Training programs such as the Church Development Institute included all these methods and helped parish leaders and consultants to develop the capacity to decide which methods might be most appropriate.

At national and local levels, the church was using the methods of organization development (OD). It was at times competent and useful and sometimes clumsy and disconnected from theory and values.

In OD practice there were three sets of values underlying practitioners' work with organizations: First, fostering humanistic concerns--such as empowering managers and enhancing the quality of work life. Second, addressing the more traditional organizational needs and measures, including increased effectiveness, efficiency, and profitability. Third, places where humanistic and standard business concerns overlapped such as creating openness in communication and promoting collaboration. Presiding Bishops and the 815 staff made use of OD methods to advance institutional or ideological agendas. In itself such use might be seen as inevitable, at times appropriate, while at times tilting in ethically questionable ways. PB John Allin made use of OD methods to manage conflict and sought to avoid alienating traditionalists to assist in standard management matters. Whereas PB Edmond Browning's used OD methods to advance explicitly progressive social policies. Critics have pointed to instances where the use of organization development and laboratory training under the two presiding bishops ignored or subverted standard OD values and theoretical frameworks. The problem wasn't so much in the stated use around institutional conflicts or improving operations. It was seen in implementation which drifted away from central behavioral science principles. For example, a core tenet of standard OD is voluntary participation and informed consent. Change interventions should never be forced upon a client system. All too often church leaders were mandating participation and clergy and vestries who resisted might be marginalized or viewed as "uncooperative." It violated the OD ethic of autonomy and self-determination. Standard T-group theory focuses on unscripted, authentic interpersonal feedback to foster individual awareness about the impact of the person's behavior on the group as well as developing an awareness of the stages in group development. Some critics claimed that during the two administrations group dynamics methods were at times used as tools for behavior modification and institutional compliance. Instead of allowing organic solutions to emerge from the group. Staff sometimes used high-pressure psychological environments to dismantle resistance to national church initiatives, effectively turning an OD tool for open communication into an apparatus for engineering artificial consensus.

Classic OD theory views an organization as a holistic system comprised of structures and processes, visible elements such a policies and more covert or hidden dynamics such as trust development. Lab training and OD interventions were to increase the flow of valid and useful information that would increase the degree of free choice and finally internal commitment. Critics noted an unhealthy fixation on intense emotional and interpersonal confrontation. The assumption appeared to be that people could be manipulated to resolve personal friction and that would somehow effectively address significant disagreements around theological and ideological matters.

The problem wasn't seen much in the programs offered by organizations like MATC. They generally maintained the core values and theoretical assumptions of the field. It was in programs directly conducted by diocesan and national offices which were often lead by less well trained and professionally accountable staff members.

It takes some discernment to see the problem clearly. It's not that it was wrong to use the methods to manage conflicts or support social justice. It's that in carrying on that work, all too often instead of allowing the data to speak there was a selective use of data, just part of the truth was offered. Clergy and lay leaders were forced to attend sessions not out of free choice, but in conformity to the current institutional leadership. And a façade might emerge about the extent of agreement resulting from such programs. The problem is ongoing and still exist today. A particular theological or ideological agenda is used to legitimate the overriding of standard values and theory. It's a form of institutional totalitarianism that we saw on a grand scale in the Soviet Union's use of psychological treatment and institutionalization being used to marginalize Russian Jews and political opponents.

I can't say I was fully aware of the issue back in the early 70s. My attention was on learning how to consult and conduct lab training and serving on lab staffs and doing some free-lance consulting. However, I do recall a minor tussle with the bishop's staff in Pennsylvania. The bishop at the time had taken a couple of courses in OD in a Harvard continued education program. He was supportive of sending people to training and establishing a diocesan consulting network. I had an arrangement with the diocese that they would cover the cost of my training and I would work that off by creating the diocesan consulting group. The rub came over how much information about client parishes we consultants would share with the bishop's office. Some on the bishop's staff thought that as the diocese was underwriting the consultant network we should be willing to share everything that was going on in our consultations in parishes. We thought that the ethics of the situation required that we not do that. Our operational client was the parish, even if the diocese was paying the fee in some situations. There was also the practical matter that if a parish rector or vestry saw us as agents of the bishop's office they were going to be less forthcoming with their thoughts and feelings and that would make it harder to help them improve their situation. The conflict never went beyond what Speed Leas would call level two. I think most of the diocesan staff came to understand the practical dimension of the issue if not the ethical question. The consultant network agreed that if we thought the parish would benefit by having the Bishop more directly involved in discussions, we would encourage parish leaders to speak with the Bishop about that. We also agreed that if the situation in a parish was seen as potentially very destructive

to the well-being of that church, we would insist on the Bishop's involvement and if the parish refused, we would disengage from the consultation.

The emergence of a new approach

The things concerning the Ascension:
Set up Thyself, O God, above the heavens
and Thy glory above all the earth.
By thine Ascension
draw us withal unto Thee, O Lord,
so as to set our affections on things above,
and not on things on the earth. **(Lancelot Andrewes)**



Father Doug was a participant in the 1976 MATC OD training and went on to participate twice in the Church Development Institute (CDI). First in the Connecticut Diocesan program and then the national CDI at General Seminary, he shared his experience this way –
Other than Verna Dozier, there was no other trainer/consultant who spoke of the spiritual part of the equation of OD. It was assumed ..... When I took the Congregational Development Course (later becomes CDI) in Connecticut, '83-84, there was more integration that spoke of the spiritual issues such as the Christian Life Model. When I decided to do it again in '96-97 (in NYC), there was definitely that piece. The centrality of the Eucharist, the Benedictine Promise, the Order of the Ascension and the life of the worshipping/studying community. I think Alban Institute and the others have also sought that integration as I read their material and take their course offerings.
In this section of the history, we'll explore how the shift Doug experienced happened.
Currently there are three active training programs that offer a solid foundation in parish development. They have shared roots. The Diocesan Church Development Institute with its origin in 1978. The College for Congregational Development started in 2009. Shaping the Parish, a third program, was active from 2011 - 2012 and restarting with a different format in 2023. All combine ascetic theology and organization development. All share many core facets making up a dense learning culture

'To use Edgar Schein's approach, cultural density is a large number of practices that are in harmony with one another and with the espoused values and deeper underlying assumptions of the culture. Density is the weaving together of various elements in such a manner that the parish has a powerful solidity; it includes effective management of adaptability and organizational identity and integrity. Think quilt, not sheet. Think thick, not thin. The elements of the system reinforce each other. They are interdependent and generate a synergy." (From *A Wonderful and Sacred Mystery: A Practical Theology of the Parish Church*, Chapter 4)

Over several decades a dense culture developed in CDI around both the nature and dynamics of the parish church and the learning process. If you look into the statements and work of the existing three primary training programs you'll see artifacts (practices), espoused values and deeper underlying assumptions that began with CDI. For example,

1. The program draws on organization development and ascetical theology. Including clarity about the Anglican/Episcopal ethos/culture, and there is an innovative spirit in making use of emerging methods used in non-profit, corporate and church organizations.
2. As Loren Mead put it, "The parish is the issue"." The program values and addresses the needs of all parish sizes and contexts and assumes that parishes of any size can live a full Christian life. The task is to equip clergy and lay leaders so they might develop their parishes into healthier, sustainable, and more faithful communities. The parish is a local expression of the Body of Christ, the People of God. The task is to build its life and future on a deep appreciation of its distinctive qualities and strengths
3. The role of the diocese is valued. Parish development is seen as the most significant purpose of a diocese. A high level of trust between the parishes and the diocese and staff and infrastructure is to be enabled. Develop a diocesan common language (i.e., models, theory, underlying assumptions, skills, and practices, etc) around parish development.
4. It's a practical, experiential and spiritually grounded approach that provides skills and methods, is grounded in successful parish development efforts, and reflects on and learns from our experience together and our back-home interventions. All within the context of common worship in Eucharist and Daily Office.
5. It's a program that calls for a high level of internal commitment from participants. It involves enough density of workshop hours, readings, worship, and back home work to significantly increase the participant's knowledge and skill. We come together as a learning community. We share responsibility for our learning and community life. We strive for an open, non-defensive climate in which there is an ability to give and receive supportive and challenging feedback. It's most effective when there is a parish team participating.

Shaping the Parish 2011-13

I want to step aside from the linear process of development and tell you about the first Shaping the Parish (STP) in 2011. **The most effective parish development training program** the church has ever had. In designing STP we built upon the five factors listed above and went further. Our

focus was on immediate, tangible improvements while building long-term health. This was a two-fold program of providing a support system for the parish and competency development for the leaders. The program jumpstarted parish teams in a process of revitalization. It was designed so that substantial progress was made during the 16 months of the program. One element that was new from the design of other programs was that the parish team engaged six Developmental Initiatives (DI) instead of just one or two. It was also new that the initiatives were selected from a list of 29 developmental initiatives that had been designed by the training staff to ensure that they were truly developmental and strategic.

Three other significant factors in the program were a T-group during the first weekend, a content exam at the beginning of each weekend, and the training staff providing some consultation services to the teams. The learning group culture that emerged out of this was competent, focused, emotionally, intelligent, and persistent.

Weekend #1 Emotional & Social Intelligence Feb 18-21, 2011
A human interaction workshop done over a long weekend.
Friday 2:30 - 8:30 p.m. Saturday 9:00 a.m. - 8:30 p.m. Sunday 2:30 - 8:30 p.m. Monday 8:30 - 11:00 a.m.

Emphasis: The weekend has an emphasis on core skills for emotional and social intelligence

Weekend #2 Spiritual Practices May 6-7, 2011
Friday 10:00 a.m. - 8:30 p.m. Saturday 9:00 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Emphasis: Spiritual maps, creating a spiritual practice /discipline, designing parish ed/training for spiritual practice, personality type and spirituality

Weekend #3 Change Theory & Methods Sept. 16-17, 2011
Friday 10:00 a.m. - 8:30 p.m. Saturday 9:00 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Emphasis: Seeing, understanding and influencing the spiritual dynamics in the parish church

Weekend #4 Emotional & Social Intelligence December 2-3, 2011
Friday 10:00 a.m. - 8:30 p.m. Saturday 9:00 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Emphasis: Self-differentiation as a member and a leader, working effectively with groups & teams

Weekend #5 Spiritual Practices March 2-3, 2012
Friday 10:00 a.m. - 8:30 p.m. Saturday 9:00 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Emphasis: The dynamics of Benedictine Spirituality in self and parish, shaping the parish climate and culture

Weekend #6 Change Theory & Methods May 4-6, 2012
Friday 10: a.m. - 8:30 p.m. Saturday 9:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m. Sunday 2:00 - 6:30 p.m.

Emphasis: Conflict management, intervention strategy and methods, negotiation skills

The Developmental Initiatives

Developmental Initiatives created by the training staff were used in the 2011 Shaping the Parish program. Our experience with participants in the Church Development Institute (CDI) and the College for Congregational Development (CCD) was that their projects were rarely strategic or developmental. While the ideas about being strategic and developmental are part of the teaching that did not seem to always result in related projects. For the most part the projects were worthy endeavors. However, they rarely had much of a ripple effect or were likely to impact the parish culture. We decided to focus on helping parish teams produce truly strategic and developmental results emphasizing the immediate results for the parishes over the design skills learning of the participants. Our hope was that participants would come away with a stronger sense of what was developmental and strategic and would have implementing six such initiatives and built momentum toward health and faithfulness in the parish.

The Developmental Initiatives are available for you to use. They are found on two websites. The Shaping the Parish site and Shaping the Parish Resources on the website of the Order of the Ascension. There is a section on Developmental Initiatives (DI). Both include a description of each DI and a link to download the complete initiative. You are invited to make use of all that material as long as you acknowledge the source. You'll want to be aware that there are titles of books and PDFs offered that were later changed. Most of that ended up as part of the books making up the Shaping the Parish Series on Amazon.

If you want to explore more: An overview of Shaping the Parish in the Diocese of Washington, The Participant Manual, Trainer educational design 2011-12, First evaluation, Trainer thoughts

From the late 1970's to 2010 a new approach was developed in the Church Development Institute

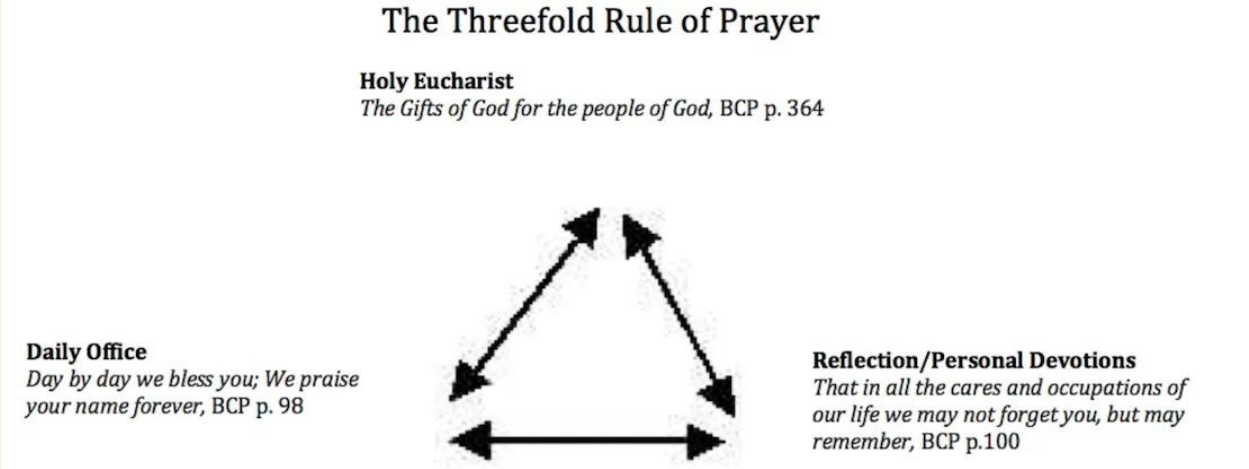
The **Church Development Institute (CDI)**—which eventually became known as the Diocesan Church Development Institute (DCDI)—acted as the vital institutional bridge that formalized, standardized, and scaled organization development (OD) and behavioral laboratory skills across much of the Episcopal Church. Founded in 1978, CDI took the loose, experimental T-group paradigms of the 1950s and 60s and institutionalized them into a highly disciplined, multi-year leadership curriculum for both clergy and lay teams. Its primary contribution was a unique synthesis: marrying secular behavioral science with historic Anglican ascetical theology. Between the two expressions of CDI there have been two seminary based expressions (General Seminary 1985-2000) and Sewanee 1995 -2004) and 20 diocesan CDI programs - Pennsylvania, Atlanta, Connecticut, Milwaukee, Newark, North Carolina, Northern Indiana, Rochester, Southwest Florida, Southwest Virginia, Virginia, Washington, Western New York, Western Massachusetts, Georgia, Utah, Eastern Michigan, Western Michigan, Long Island and Southern Virginia. The last two are still operating. MORE - The Church Development Institute: History and issues Church Development Institute - 2008 Manual

Bring together ascetical theology and organization development

The shared experience of many church members going through the lab and OD training offered in the 70's and early 80's was that while the skills and methods were very valuable, there was not an explicit exploration that related the theory and methods to faith and practice. The MATC OD program made good use of OD practitioners in government, business, and the church. It was well

done and offered participants a solid grasp of organization development. However, it didn't address the unique dynamics of parish churches, draw on models of ascetical theology that illuminated the more hidden realities of parish life, or make connections between the theories of the two disciplines.

I had been reading **Martin Thornton's** books since the early 1970's and developing parish development models that drew on his work. His threefold rule of prayer was a perfect fit for the "Worship" element of the **Christian Life Model.**



By 1977 I was using the Christian Life Model in a parish based adult formation program, "The Christian Life Course." Around the same time I was offering the model and a related assessment form as an optional module in the MATC OD program. In 1982 Ascension Press published *Power from on High: A model for parish life and development* (a free PDF of the book). It is also a chapter in *Fill All Things: The Spiritual Dynamics of the Parish Church* (2008).

As Martin Thornton's thinking developed, he discovered the behavioral science work of Bruce Reed from the Grubb Institute on oscillation theory (extra-dependence – intra-dependence) and wrote about it in *Spiritual Direction* in 1984. I first read the book around 1985 shortly after I developed the Renewal-Apostolate Cycle. The Cycle was influenced by Reed's work and that of Hans-Ruedi Weber in Salty Christians (1964), Now here was Thornton with a new contribution. The overlap between the work of Thornton and Reed centered on oscillation theory as applied to spiritual development. Thornton integrated Reed's behavioral science framework into his own classical approach to Christian practice. Both saw how people navigated spiritual life in a rhythmic cycle. Reed framed human behavior and religious life as a necessary movement between "Extra-dependence" where we rely on something outside ourself (e.g., corporate worship, sacraments, the priest) and "Intra-dependence" in its movement back into the world where we rely on our own judgment and accept responsible. Thornton place Reed's cycle onto the rhythm of prayer and spiritual life. He described an oscillation between conscious attention to God ("S' activity) and subconscious reliance on God ("W" activity). Psychological and spiritual health depends on successfully managing the oscillation. Both made a case that a functional human life requires a productive balance between a state of healthy dependency in which we recharge, then returning to responsible living in the world.

Thornton saw Reed's work as an example of social psychology repeating "the wisdom of orthodoxy but in a different jargon." He thought such an effort can "illuminate tradition as well as substantiating it in the minds of modern people." In the Renewal - Apostolate Cycle, I offered an oscillation between renewal in baptismal identity and purpose, and participation in the work of Christ as we live our lives with family and friends, in workplace and civic life. (A PDF of the Cycle) The connection was getting made in many ways between ascetical theology and the applied behavioral sciences. The more recent Shaping the Parish series of books continues the effort and offers a more complete course of material that brings together the two fields.

As of 2026 there are three primary expressions of this approach in training programs:

1. Diocesan Church Development Institute – Rooted in the beginning of CDI in 1978. With programs in Long Island and Southern Virginia.
2. The College for Congregational Development – A program, beginning in 2008, in the Diocese of Olympia and spread to 13 other dioceses.
3. Shaping the Parish - A Zoom based, with participants from dioceses in the US, Canada, UAE, Zambia, Mexico and Haiti. Sponsored by The Order of the Ascension, a Benedictine religious community.



All these programs make use of the program elements, structure, processes and culture initially created in CDIs work. All the initial primary trainers were trained through CDI as participants and as trainers. Their readings and use of OD theory substantially overlap. All the programs receive high ratings from participants. The programs rise out of a common history. Here are two pieces on that history. The first is a PDF that sets the Episcopal Church's relationship, as **an early adapter,** in the field of Organization Development--"History of Organization Development and the Environment." The second is an article "Understanding from Within" published in the *OD Practitioner* (a quarterly journal published by the National Organization Development Network from 1968 to 2018.)

The Order of the Ascension (OA) has its beginnings in 1981 as several Philadelphia priests and lay leaders began to pray and think about the formation of a dispersed Benedictine religious order with a mission around parish development. The Order would go on to co-sponsor with the General Seminary the first national CDI, create Ascension Press to publish related books, and offer a variety of in-person and online programs. More on OA history.



2026 retreat Order of the Ascension

The renewal and development of a parish is a process of entering more deeply into the life of Christ and the nature and mission of the Church. A parish is being renewed as it enters into and reflects the mind, heart and work of Christ. A parish is being renewed as it enters into and reflects the unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the Church. A parish is being renewed as it pursues the mission of holy unity. Parish development is our striving, as a community of Christian people, toward God. It is not primarily something we do, or create, or make happen. It is the way in which a parish, a local manifestation of the Holy Catholic Church, shares in the Divine Life. It is living the Christian life, not simply as individuals, but as a people. (**From the Rule of the Order of the Ascension)**

When I have reflected on the role of OA in the church, I usually look at the tangible work done by members in their parishes and dioceses, books produced by Ascension Press, and training offered through CDI and Shaping the Parish. On occasion, I see something else that parallels this quote from Martin Thornton.

England was converted to the faith when Saint Augustine of Canterbury arrived on the island of Thanet with forty companions. They might have offered service and they probably preached, but they certainly settled down to Benedictine stability and contemplated God. That is one out of thousands of examples of the mystical process of spiritual power. It is mysterious but indisputable. When we look at our contemporary trouble spots, at violence in the inner cities, and racial hatred, or torture, murder and rape, I can muster little faith in the efficacy of "praying about it." I have absolute confidence in the efficacy of planting a contemplative community in the middle of it and letting God manifest his power.

Might one aspect of the Order's role in the economy of the church and its connection with the apply behavioral sciences be as "a contemplative community in the middle of it and letting God manifest his power?"

From OD to OD with ascetical theology

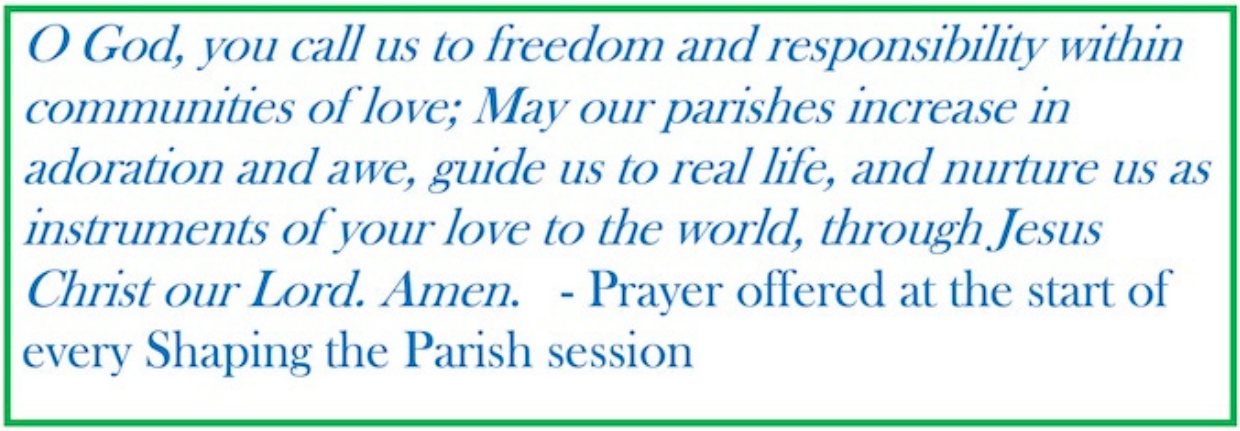
CDI was grounded in the early work of the MATC OD in Religious Systems program (which in turn had learned from a variety of NTL programs). The yearlong MATC program required that participants came having already completed labs in human interaction, group development, and experiential educational design skills. So, participants ended up with a considerable amount of training by the time they were finished.

The program didn't however make very useful connections between OD and the unique dynamics of the parish church, the culture of the Episcopal Church, or the place of ascetical theology in relation to improving the life and work of parish churches.

The shared experience of many church members going through the training offered in the 70's and early 80's was that while the skills and methods were seen as very valuable, there was not an explicit exploration that related it all to faith and practice. The Church Development Institute was the first program that addressed that issue in a significant manner.

There has been an expansion of ascetical models use in the training over the years from Father Doug's noting the Christian Life Model to "the core frameworks of parish life" developed in the 1980s and finally in 2008 offered in book form as *Fill All Things: The Dynamics of Spirituality in the Parish Church (i.e.,* The Renewal-Apostolate Cycle in 1985*,* The Shape of the Parish in 1983*,* The Benedictine Promise in 1987, and the Christian Life Model by 1977). The Diocesan CDI in Long Island has produced a video series that includes presentations on the models, for example this on the Renewal-Apostolate Cycle. The In Your Holy Spirit Model emerged out of work with the CDI in the Diocese of Colorado in 2008 and was offered in two books - *In Your Holy Spirit: Traditional Spiritual Practices in Today's Christian Life* and *In Your Holy Spirit: Shaping the Parish Though Spiritual Practice.* When serving on the staff of the Diocese of Olympia Melissa Skelton created the "Gather–Transform–Send" framework.[1] A mainstay of all the programs as been Esther de Waal's Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict. Over the years the programs have made use of the work of Martin Thornton, Julia Gatta, Kenneth Kirk, and Evelyn Underhill. In the last few years Sister Michelle Heyne, OA and I have written four books that are culmination of the effort to bring together the fields of ascetical theology and organization development - *A Wonderful and Sacred Mystery: A Practical Theology of the Parish Church* in 2021, *An Energy Not Its Own: Three cycles of parish life and the purposes of the parish church* in 2023, *Nothing so contagious as holiness: Developmental Initiatives for Increased Parish Vitality Grounded in Spiritual Practice* in 2024, and *Finding God in All Things: Contemplation, Intercession, and Intervention* in 2023. Bishop Scott Benhase's *Done and Left Undone* in 2018 has offered a wonderful resource in the ascetical theology of leadership based in St. Benedict's Promise of Stability, Obedience, and Conversion of Life. Here's the current reading list of Shaping the Parish. The Shaping the Parish Resources page on the OA site provides dozens of articles, spiritual maps, and assessment forms.

Resources such as the above have been integrated into the primary training programs, found their way into seminary courses, and been used by consultants and diocesan leaders in programs across the country.



One of the most obvious changes from the MATC OD Program of the 70s and the later more integrated programs beginning in the late 70s has been the role worship plays. The Daily Office and Eucharist are central in the life of the in-person programs. Some form of the Threefold Rule of Prayer is taught. The current Shaping the Parish program opens its website with "How do we shape parishes that are characterized by prayer and service? Parishes of adoration, awe and service that also are making use of the best methods of parish development?" The change grounds all the programs in assumptions that go beyond the preoccupations of institutional maintenance, survival and success. Kenneth Kirk's understanding would seem to apply.. "Worship lifts the soul out of its preoccupation with itself and its activities and centres its aspirations entirely on God."

A parish church faces three basic demands of the spiritual life -- "the need not to run away, the need to be open to change, the need to listen. They are based on a commitment which is both total and continuing. And yet the paradox is that they bring freedom, true freedom." **Esther de Waal**

[1] An AI generated explanation of the model. ***Gather: Focuses on building community, affirming a parish's identity, and bringing people together around ancient roots, liturgical beauty, and shared purpose. Transform: Involves spiritual growth, formation, and renewal—often grounded in ascetical theology, spiritual practices, and resources like Esther de Waal's Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict. Send: Moves the congregation outward from internal reflection into active mission, service, and engagement with the wider world.*** **Systems theory views any process, organism, or machine as a connected whole that converts resources into results through a core sequence: Input → Transformation (Process/Throughput) → Output (Result)**



I don't think that God intended to develop three programs. That seems to be more a matter of human limitation and sin. But I do believe that God makes use of the frail instruments that we are. I believe that the church is infused with an energy not its own. [1] And we see that energy in these three programs striving to help the parishes of the Episcopal Church become healthier and more faithful.

The hopes and tensions that led to the development of the current programs

Improvement, focus, independence. Divorce, limited vision, impulsiveness. And within it all the nudging of the Holy Spirit.

Between 2008 and 2011 the CDI Trainers system crashed. In 2009 the College for Congregational Development begins in the Diocese of Olympia. In 2011 Shaping the Parish is running in the Diocese of Washington. And in 2011 the Diocesan Church Development Institute begins.
Of course, things were moving in that direction before then. In 2008 Melissa Skelton and I got divorced. In 2010 I have esophageal cancer and am spending time reflecting on better ways to do parish development training. In 2010 the leaders of three diocesan based CDI's are feeling dissatisfied.

Let's back up a bit. What was the CDI Trainers system?

CDI Trainers was established in 1999. That group oversaw both the diocesan CDIs that had developed, the existing national programs (Sewanee and the former GTS program then CDI-NYC), and later the Leadership Training Institute (LTI) series of lab training.

The first annual gathering was in 2001. Twenty two of us met for three April days at Camp McDowell, Alabama to create social glue, give structure to diocesan CDIs, work on marketing, and

develop a functioning team. When we met in 2002 we had four diocesan CDIs and the 2 national CDIs functioning. A few years later the LTI program with its labs in human interaction, group development, experiential education design skills, and consultation skills was folded into the system. At that time there were 33 CDI trainers and interns and 6 senior LTI trainers, 3 co-trainers and 16 interns. It was an interdependent system that offered effective training to participants, a process for trainer recruitment and training, and an oversight system that maintained norms of quality, empowerment and productivity. For a while it was a good example of a system with a high degree of synergy. There was a collaborative spirit from where the combined effort of the elements produced results far greater than what they could have achieved working alone.

Letter initiating CDI Trainers formation. Founding Charter All the CDIs had a common participant manual (2008 update) and required reading list (from 2004) Core training norms

The hopes and tensions that led to the development of the current programs

Right down into the mess

"Marital discord can have effects far beyond the married couple." was the first sentence in "Two schools of Congregational Development," an article by Kirk Petersen in The Living Church (4/8/18). The fact is that if Melissa Skelton and I hadn't been divorced in 2008 the College for Congregational Development wouldn't exist. Still, telling the story of through the lens of our divorce came as a shock. And there's a lot more to the story.

Yes, Melissa is The Most Reverend Melissa M. Skelton 9th Bishop of New Westminster and Metropolitan of British Columbia and Yukon

Greg Rickel, the new Bishop of Olympia wanted to have a CDI in Olympia. He was installed in September 2007 and the two of us had been discussing how to get a program underway. Greg had participated in the Sewanee national CDI and was a member of the Order of the Ascension. So, he knew his diocese could benefit from using the program. I had worked out a budget for the first four years and plans to get underway. Initially I was going the be the lead trainer.
Life can be very messy. Our marriage was in trouble. Greg Rickel must have felt confused, torn, and I would imagine a bit angry. I had suggested to Greg that he run in the election. Melissa had placed his name in nomination. Who would lead the CDI bounced around - me, Melissa, someone outside the diocese. By the Spring of 2008 our divorce was final and Greg had decided that he wanted Melissa to run the diocesan CDI. The diocese and CDI Trainers couldn't work out a way forward. Melissa Skelton then took the lead in creating the first College for Congregational Development (CCD) in 2009.

It's possible to tell the story of how CCD came into being without mentioning the divorce. And telling it that way is certainly appropriate when marketing the program on your website. But not speaking of the role the divorce played would be dishonest in a history, and I think, lead to bad theology. That said, the creation of CCD is first rooted in the desire of people wanting to help a new bishop have a solid training program. Melissa and the others involved in creating CCD sought to build upon the foundation of the programs that came before it (MATC OD and CDI). And there is

the extraordinary competence of Melissa Skelton in knitting together a new and successful program.

The saints do not stand aside wrapped in delightful prayers and feeling pure and agreeable to God. They go right down into the mess; and there, right down in the mess, they are able to radiate God because they possess Him. **Evelyn Underhill**

Cancer, reflection, and impulsiveness

On Thanksgiving Eve 2009 I preach the sermon at Trinity Church, Seattle went home, passed out, was taken to the emergency room, and was diagnosed with stage four esophageal cancer. 2010 was my cancer year. Chemo, surgery, having to step aside from running CDI's in the Diocese of Washington and the national program in Seattle. A lot of time to reflect.

The reflection took me into considering ways in which the training of people for parish development could be improved. I spent time looking at the evaluations of CDI programs, reflecting on my own experience, and talking with Sister Michelle, OA who was filling in as the lead trainer in both the national and Washington programs and had became a professed member of the Order that year. Shaping the Parish (STP) was the result. Possibly the most effective parish development program the church has seen. Our focus was on immediate, tangible improvements while building long-term health.

My impulsiveness became a problem. I wanted to get underway with the new program immediately. Sister Michelle and I had thought through, in some detail, how STP would work. We knew it would be considerably more effective than the existing CDI program. There was nothing impulsive in the nature of the program itself. My impulsiveness had to do with not adequately involving people in the Bishop's office of the Diocese and other leaders of CDI Trainers. There had been a high level of planning, reflection, and considering the long-term consequences in regard to the program itself. And a significant failure in regard to the politics of the situation. My INFP was in full swing. The tension between my quiet, deeply deliberate self and my sudden and unpredictable leap of spontaneity played out. My ability for skillful innovation was seen in the design and implementation of STP with the participants. But not with people in key institutional roles. Thankfully I was able to work with them to secure their approval and support. The quality of the program sold them. But doing your politics after the fact left others feeling caught off guard and confused. My tunnel vision failed to consider the impact on institutional leaders. Michelle and I lead a very effective program for 16 months in 2011 -12. The program was transformative for many participants and parishes. Not so much for the institutional leaders of the diocese and CDI Trainers.

A desire to focus their work

In 2010 the leaders of the three existing diocesan CDI's wanted to focus their energy and time on the programs of their dioceses and collaborate with one another in a way that strengthens that work. It was an entirely reasonable desire.

However, the intensity of that desire may have overwhelmed other factors. They ignored their agreement with others in the CDI Trainers system and instead of waiting to gather all parties into conversation, prayer, and discernment — they acted unilaterally. Setting off pain in others that I doubt they intended. They also ignored the limitations of their own experience. Their CDI training had been within diocesan programs. The longer-term reality was that the establishment of diocesan CDI's was highly dependent on the national CDI programs. In fact, each of their programs could be traced back to someone who had gone through the national programs at General Seminary or Deer Isle. Finally, they didn't have enough organization development training to realize how the synergy of the total system worked. In the end, the failure to see the larger picture resulted in the collapse of the national DCDI system and the likelihood that the two existing programs will be the last ones. The current status of Diocesan CDI is that there are two dioceses with active and successful programs - Long Island and Southern Virginia. However, it appears that there's no national effort to create more diocesan CDI's.

The 2011 leaders of the three diocesan CDI's did not understand how the synergy of the CDI Trainers system worked. And I didn't fully understand the extent of their not understanding it nor did I appreciate the intensity of their need for more focus on the diocesan programs. After three decades of being the person knitting together the fabric, I assumed that what was so obvious to me would be obvious to everyone else or at least everyone would cooperate with a four-year transition process in which they would see and reinforce the synergy. It was a mistake on my part.

The synergy was lost when the elements were torn apart. Understanding how synergy works in a system is a complex undertaking. If your eyes are focused primarily on the one piece you are primarily associated with, it's easy to miss the negative impact that will unfold on your element of the system when the other elements collapse. For more, see the discussion of synergy and founders in the article on the Church Development Institute.

Overall

These events between 2008- 2011 are the backdrop to the three current programs. They also, especially the third, cause the collapse of the CDI Trainers system.

The challenges and opportunities

Maintaining quality

At a practical level, quality is maintained by specific people in each of the programs. Melissa Skelton in the College for Congregational Development (CCD). Liz Tunney and Susan Haynes in the Diocese CDIs, and Sister Michelle Heyne, OA and myself in Shaping the Parish (STP). There are signs that all of them collaborate with other trainers in their systems, but at this point, the buck stops with those individuals. As noted earlier, all of them share in the legacy of the MATC OD program and the Church Development Institute CDI). That becomes apparent if you look at the practices, values and assumptions they are operating out of. It's also true that all of them were trained for parish development initially in the CDI system.

Institutional oversight appears to be lodged in the individual dioceses sponsoring the programs of the College for Congregational Development and the Diocesan CDI. We won't see the actual impact of that for another 10 or 15 years. But the danger is that as new bishop's are elected and each comes with his or her own experience and vision, programs will be replaced. Some form of national institutionalization seems the most possible in CCD. That would depend on Melissa Skelton and another key trainers creating some kind of public national system. STP is a accountable.to the superior and chapter of the Order of the Ascension. Because it's a smaller system and there has been an intentional process of graduation in the development of trainers, we're likely to see ongoing quality maintenance.

This is my best read on the situation. It's difficult to be exact because two of the programs lack a publicly known governance structure. The need is for an increase in transparency, an increase in: the open, clear and understandable sharing of information; the reasoning behind decision-making, and performance evaluations across all levels.

Collaboration and reconciliation

There also is some prospect for partnership between the two congregational development organizations, which for years have had no contact. In separate interviews with Bean and another DCDI leader, the Rev. Walter Hobgood from the Diocese of Georgia, each independently broached the idea of connecting with CCD. Newton seemed surprised and interested: "I have never been approached by anybody in the CDI organization, but I'll talk to anybody." (From Two Schools of Congregational Development)

The fact is that permission was given by CDI Trainers back in the 2008-11 period for CCD to freely use the books and materials of CDI and offers were made for future collaboration. There's also the fact that even after Kirk's 2018 article none of the parties actually called the others. Bean and Hobgood could have added to their comment, "And I'm going to call the CCD people today." and Newton could have phrased her response this way, "I don't know that anyone in CCD has been approached by anybody in the CDI organization, but I'll call them today." There has been little willingness to engage the processes of reconciliation. It's become more common both in society and the church to ignore the normative Christian calls for a reconciliation and forgiveness. Instead, we have the strategic and power dynamics in which a dominant party may believe they can achieve all their objectives unilaterally. They see reconciliation as a compromise that unnecessarily forces them to cede ground to a weaker opponent. Conversely, a weaker party might fear that entering negotiations will simply legitimize the stronger party's position without yielding real concessions. We also see psychological and ideological factors undermining reconciliation. If a dispute is framed around fundamental moral principles, identity, or core values, reconciliation can be viewed as an unacceptable ethical compromise. Then there is the really difficult part. When we have invested ourselves deeply in grievance and resentment, turning in a new direction to reconciliation and new life may seem impossible.

Reconciliation might allow all the systems more internal freedom in their improvement processes. They might explore the sharing of models and educational designs. All the programs might benefit from the use of the Gather-Transform-Send model or the STP work on cultural density. CCD might

feel freer to use ascetical models that have been in common use since the 1980s. The learnings about educational design in the Shaping the Parish program 2011-12 might be tested by others. There is the deeper and even more realistic reason to respond to the nudging of the Holy Spirit toward reconciliation. Mending relationships establishes psychological safety and a larger sense of belonging. The unity of the church is affirmed and restored. Individuals and systems will experience less anger, defensiveness, resentment, and shame. When segments of the church reconcile, we begin to heal the wounds and regains our authenticity and moral authority.

Misuse of Applied behavioral science

I mentioned this issue earlier in the history. I don't think it's something we can fix and leave behind us. There will always be the danger of people misusing the tools of the applied behavioral sciences. Sometimes it will be simply rooted in a lack of competence and other times, it will be in the service of some ideology. The field of organization development has generally had values and related practices in regard to voluntary participation and informed consent, autonomy and self-determination, allowing the data to speak, avoiding the selective use of data in which just part of the truth is offered. Lab training and OD interventions have had the intention to increase the flow of valid and useful information that would increase the degree of free choice and finally internal commitment. Those norms and processes will cut across attempts to limit the information we look at or narrow the acceptable choices to those that fit an ideological narrative and the desires of the most powerful in the system. Maintaining the values and processes of valid and useful information and free choice will help us not end up with a façade of internal commitment.

Attempts to misuse the tools of the applied behavioral sciences in the service of some ideology or narrative will always be with us. We have seen it on a large scale in totalitarian regimes such as the Soviet Union and we can see it vestry meetings when clergy or strongly leaders cut off discussion about information and choices they disapprove of.

I have found some of the comments of Pope Leo helpful.

He has held that ideologies they always undermine human dignity. "He argued that ideologies reduce the richness of human life to a single idea, offering a false sense of clarity by oversimplifying the world. For the ideologue, this illusion of certainty replaces the ongoing pursuit of truth, and the uncertainty through which faith must guide Catholics." (in South Bend and the Holy See). The Pope has critiqued the rise of modern, especially Western, ideologies that undermine human rights and religious freedom. He takes a rather standard Christian approach that sees social doctrine, or social ethics, as a "way of seeing reality illuminated by faith and reason" rather than a set of slogans or political programs. The church's concern is with the nature of God, the dignity of human beings and the virtues and gifts of faith. The task is to base our social teaching on those things rather than a utopian scheme. In his January 2026 "State of the World" address, Pope Leo spoke of an "Orwellian-style" language being used in support of ideologies that claim inclusivity while excluding those who do not conform with the ideology. That leads to a condition in which basic freedoms around conscience and speech are restricted. He has cautioned about the immorality of indoctrination because it "stifles critical judgment and undermines the sacred freedom of respect for conscience." Pragmatism, ideology and faith

His concern with a "new Orwellian-style language" taking root in the West included three matters: 1) Exclusion via Inclusivity: Attempts to use inclusive language often result in the exact opposite, ultimately excluding people who do not conform to the ideologies driving the language. 2) Loss of Objective Truth: True freedom of expression requires words to remain tethered to reality and truth. He warned that when language is manipulated to fit ideologies, it loses its objective meaning. 3) Threats to Conscience: This linguistic manipulation restricts fundamental rights—particularly freedom of conscience. He specifically defended the right to conscientious objection for religious or moral reasons. - - Pope Leo's address to the diplomatic corps at the Vatican

The Pope's concern is with today's manipulation of language. The totalitarian practice has much longer roots. For example, we can look at the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. Both systems manipulated language and successfully altered how citizens perceived reality. Violent language was sanitized. Human ideals such as freedom, democracy, and justice were inverted. Language was changed to dehumanize targeted groups, shifting the perception of human beings into vermin or biological threats. For example, the Nazis routinely used terms like Untermenschen (sub-humans) and compared targeted demographics—specifically Jewish people—to diseases, parasites, or vermin. George Orwell wrote of this approach to language in his *1984*. (also see The totalitarian mindset). The official newspaper of the Soviet Union was Pravda which translates to "Truth."

In the church the misuse of language and the undermining of the usefulness of the applied behavioral sciences is likely to be based on a certain ideological perspective about standard church values. Calls to harmony and unity get used to suppress articles and conversations that don't conform to the ideology of those in power. We see it in more conservative churches by claims to biblical values, Godly authority, and spiritual warfare. And in more liberal churches to the language of love wins, inclusivity, oppressed - oppressor.

"If we are unhappy with the state of society, we must eschew extreme, utopian visions in favor of the messy and imperfect work of human community." -Nathan Beacom, "How not to be a fascist", *The Dispatch*, January 2026

Vitality grounded in competence

Vitality is the word of this period in the church's institutional life. What may be missing is adequate competence and grounding in how all systems function and how the Holy Spirit moves within the life of the church. Our need is for vitality grounded in competence.
It's not just a word being used in the church. We see it in a number of institutions. Institutional vitality involves the system's ability to adapt, stay relevant, and fulfill its core mission over time rather than just surviving. In vitality thinking we are looking beyond survival or size and measuring health and energy. That would include things such as staying true to the mission and values, adaptability, effective management of resources, and keeping people motivated and excited. Some of the advocates see it as an alternative to the word viability. Yet viability is an institution's ability to survive, sustain operations, and fulfill its core mission or purposes over time

and under stress. That would include financial health, adaptability, and maintaining institutional integrity, identity and integration.
This sounds like another inherent polarity to manage rather than in either/or choice. The fact is that systems that are not viable are not going to become vital.

I'm not too concerned about the church's changes in internal or external marketing. Such changes in language are inevitable in all systems. My concern is in two interdependent areas. First, some people have training and education in how systems work, adapt and change. And other people have ideologies and unformed opinions. We need to have some clarity about who is who. I love America and our free-speech so I don't want to cut off the ideologues and the uninformed. At the same time, I want to be clear about matters of competence. The related concern is when the changes in language are used to constrict conversation, the flow of information, and the exploration of choices in decision-making. That's when ideology trumps pragmatic decision-making.

Over the last 60 years, the Episcopal Church has moved through a series rhetorical eras. New catchphrases used to define some central focus in response to perceptions about changes in the broader culture. In the 60s there was "Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ" (MRI) and Partners in Mission." And regarding the parishes we spoke of viability and renewal. In the 70s and 80s we heard of baptismal identity, church growth, and evangelism. More recently, the Jesus Movement and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Parish development shifted to congregational development and now from "Survival" to "Vitality" and a return to "Renewal."

Some shifts were pragmatic and faithful responses in a changing world. "Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence" (MRI) was our response to the end of colonialism. Nation after nation in Africa and Asia were becoming independent. So, the church was shifting from a concept of global mission that fit the prior hundred years toward a partnership between independent dioceses. It was necessary for the integrity of the European and American churches to do this. At the same time, it can be seen as an active self-serving virtue signaling. It set off anxiety and criticism from many of the newly autonomous dioceses. They faced the reality that rapid structural independence did not automatically mean they had financial or institutional readiness.
In the field of parish development there was a shift away from two modes of operating. One was renewal coming from revival gatherings and other forms of emotional engagement. The second was away from prescriptive top-down programs from the national church or diocese that told parish leaders what they should do and now they should be, without assessing whether the programs fit the local context or achieved results.

In Project Test Pattern, Loren Mead used the theory and methods of the applied behavioral sciences, especially organization development to empower parishes to analyze their life and work with the help of trained consultants. It was a process of data-based action-research seeking all the useful and valid information relevant to the parish's situation and openly and freely exploring all the options. This was a shift that was grounded in research showing how organizations actually managed large scale changes in culture and direction.

There are also shifts that are ways in which the system's inherent polarities are managed. You'll have a time of focus on spiritual life (maybe with a Catholic tilt) to one of structural changes followed by another form of spiritual life (maybe with an evangelical tilt) followed by a return to structural changes.

Finally, you have changes in the language used. While some people can get very invested in the language and even develop a kind of ideology around it, the fact is it's usually cosmetic. All organizations do it. The current word is vitality. In 15 years, it will be something else.
Some believe the change in language helps us move away from maintenance or self-preservation. Maybe. But what we can be certain about is that at some point the need to address issues of maintenance and survival will reassert itself. It's actually another polarity inherent to the system. There's a little harm in it if we don't make too much of it.

The need is to accept and make use of language shifts and: 1) not lose the pragmatic need for actual competence rooted in the applied behavioral sciences and aesthetic theology and 2) not allow it to shut down needed conversations and information. I'm going to explore that a bit more now.

It is a church fully living the Christian life that includes a rich life of prayer and reflection that's going to be most able to see whether frameworks and language are helpful in a pragmatic sense or are a form of manipulation and avoidance.

> *A parish church faces three basic demands of the spiritual life -- the need not to run away, the need to be open to change, the need to listen. They are based on a commitment which is both total and continuing. And yet the paradox is that they bring freedom, true freedom.* Esther de Waal

Language shifts may rise from large scale changes in the world (e.g., MRI) or new research and knowledge (PTP) or simply be an expression of a polarity that the system is managing. Sometimes it's born out of desperate institutional pragmatism. A large, democratic, and historically fractured body like The Episcopal Church requires common language to hold itself together. In this view, changing the vocabulary isn't a conspiracy to promote an ideology or avoid uncomfortable truths, but an effort by church leaders to provide a fractured denomination with a shared identity and a coherent sense of purpose.

On the other hand, it may at the same time be used to undercutting honest dialogue, police information, and sidestepping true free choice. Sometimes it has to do with promoting an ideology and other times, avoiding an uncomfortable truth. The big uncomfortable truth that many believe is being avoided is the obvious decline in membership. In my lifetime we have gone from over 3 million members to half that. Sometimes institutions introduce new vocabularies to shift the goalposts. It's something like a magic trick in which you're invited to look at what's going on in the magician's right hand and not notice what's going on in her left hand. Years ago, our response to

the decline was to focus on evangelism. In that process, we borrowed a lot from the more evangelical traditions. It was not a natural fit for the Episcopal Church and had little success. Then we began a process of language change. Often the change was getting at something important and true while at the same time serving to distract us from the uncomfortable truth of decline.
For a number of years now, there's been an effort by some in the church to downplay the significance of membership loss by emphasizing other things that are true or could be true about our parish churches. We seem to finally have settled on the word vitality. So we are told, by some, that vitality matters over the actual numbers. This may end up stifling necessary conversations about alignment issues (see Some Key Factors) such as what number of people are necessary to maintain the parish or discussions about why this decline has occurred in the Episcopal Church as a whole or why people are leaving or were not coming to this particular parish. So we get offered opportunities to spend time assessing our "vitality" using approved metrics instead of having the uncomfortable conversations. The danger of some forms of assessment is they offer a supposed objectivity while actually telling the parish what they should be doing. It's a very different approach than asking a parish what are your gifts and what have you done well over a period of time? How might we enhance that and expand that? How might we communicate that to others? It can be a shift away from organic people centered discernment to a technocratic system. The "free choice" of a vestry or congregation then gets bounded by the parameters of the survey they are given. It implies that if a parish is struggling, it isn't because the institution's core theology or structure is flawed, but because the local parish didn't execute the "vitality playbook" correctly. My own view is that some of these assessments may be useful if they accurately reflect the traditions of Episcopal spirituality and are dealt with in a competent process of conversation and exploration of options that is broad and does not avoid the uncomfortable truths.

The disciplined, prayerful, listening Christian community, located in a specific place ... tries to understand and respond to the challenges of its immediate context ... it is rooted in the worshipping and corporate life of actual communities; it begins with concrete and specific issues and moves outwards; and it overcomes the syndrome of a facile optimism in which we seek to deal with problems over too wide an area, at the level of general principles and moral rhetoric, and then gradually move to a cosmic pessimism, which abandons any hope of change of any kind.* - Kenneth Leech in *Subversive Orthodoxy: Traditional Faith and Radical Commitment

Brother Robert Gallagher, OA

[1] *The Church (it was early decided) was not an organization of sinless men but of sinful, not a union of adepts but of less than neophytes, not illuminati but of those that sat in darkness. Nevertheless, it carried within it an energy not its own, and it knew what it believed about that energy.* -Charles Williams, *He Came Down from Heaven*

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