

Heart of the Leader

In Workshop 3 your RenewalWorks Workshop Team will be breaking out into groups focused on each of the best practice principles for vital congregations. A small group of Clergy, Wardens and Vestry members, are being charged with reflecting on the principle: The Heart of the Leader and reporting back to the Workshop Team.

Research has indicated that among the best practice principles that make for vital congregations, the central and most important principle focuses on the Leader's Heart. Clergy and lay leaders who give their heart to development of a deeper spiritual life are better able to lead congregations into that deeper spiritual life. Leaders who fail to embrace that focus are less likely to do so. Leaders can't give what they don't have.

You will brainstorm ways this principle could be put to work in the congregation, noting some ideas that you will present to the Workshop Team. Ideas need not be programmatic. Culture shifts that have no impact on budget or staffing—things like beginning and ending all meetings with prayer, having prayer partners on the vestry and other committees, adding scripture reflection to outreach efforts, etc. can be as effective if not more in achieving this goal. It's important to resist the temptation to come up with a long list of ideas that you will not have the time or energy to accomplish. Your group should identify just a few ways to apply these principles to help your congregation move forward.

Some questions to consider as you reflect on this principle:

1. Is our leadership grounded and surrounded in prayer?

The psalms tell us that unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it. The church is distinctive among other organizations in that it relies on God's help to fulfill its mission. Prayer is the expression of that reliance. With that in mind, consider these questions:

- Are both clergy and lay leaders committing to pray and read scripture daily? (Could be as little as 10 minutes)
- Does every lay leader have a Bible and Book of Common prayer they can readily access?
- Are lay leaders, as well as clergy practicing praying aloud as a regular part of meetings and gatherings?
- Is prayer part of every Vestry meeting?

2. Are we embedding scripture in every gathering?

Vital congregations embed scripture in everything they do. There are all kinds of ways to do that, but it takes leadership, both coaching the congregation but also modeling for the congregation what that looks like.

- Do vestry meetings include time for scripture reflection?

- Do both lay and clergy leaders practicing scripture reading and reflection personally? Are they able to lead others in the congregation who are exploring scripture reading practices?
- If your workshop team is considering a parish-wide bible reading campaign, would your church leaders be willing to commit to actively participating in it and modeling scripture engagement?

3. Are we framing all our work as a ministry?

The Prayer Book notes that all the people of the church are ministers. It is sometimes a culture shift to get people to realize that vocation. Congregants and even community leaders will often respond to the idea that they are ministers by saying: Who? Me? It is important for leaders to see themselves as ministers in the church, even if they have never been to seminary. It is the first step in building that awareness in all the members of the church.

- Would all ministries in your congregation, including Vestry be able to answer these questions:
 - i. What do we do?
 - ii. Why do we do it?
 - iii. How does what we do contribute to spiritual growth?
 - iv. What would we like to do moving forward?
- If Vestry members have programmatic responsibility/serve as liaisons to specific ministries, are those Vestry members emphasizing the spiritual dimension of those efforts, even those that seem most mundane or secular in character (e.g., Finance Committee, Property Committee)?

4. Are we adequately developing, equipping and caring for our leaders?

The phrase, *equipping the saints*, comes from the fourth chapter of the Letter to Ephesians, a powerful vision of how the church can best function. Many clergy feel ill-equipped to meet the tasks presented them. Bishops and seminaries have work to do in making sure clergy are prepared and supported in the many tasks they face. Similarly, lay leaders may agree to take on tasks, but need to be taught and coached and encouraged in their ministries.

- Do our clergy feel properly equipped? Are they given the resources they need to accomplish their ministry (Sabbath, Sabbatical, staff support, lay support, personal spiritual development time, encouragement and support of Vestry)?
- Do our lay leaders feel properly equipped?

One of the spiritual dangers for leaders in congregations, clergy and lay, has to do with a sense that the work they are doing has no end, and that they are not sufficiently appreciated. With that in mind, a spiritually healthy congregation will always be welcoming new people into leadership roles. The willingness to do the work of personal invitation is key.

- Are we inviting different people (and newcomers) into leadership roles? Are we identifying people's gifts and helping them share those gifts?
- Do leaders feel encouraged and strengthened by their leadership roles, or drained and unappreciated? How can we change leadership if it is a negative experience?
- Are we good about honoring people's presence and participation by beginning and ending meetings on time?

5. Is there accountability for our leaders? Are our expectations high enough?

One of the marks of vital congregations: They elevate expectations for congregants. They coach and even challenge people to go deeper, raise the bar. That is especially important with clergy and lay leaders.

- Are the expectations of leadership clearly defined and do they include expectations for spiritual growth? Are there regular conversations among Vestry about what each member is doing to deepen his or her spiritual growth?
- Are the Vestry asking the clergy about their spiritual health and looking for opportunities to encourage clergy to do things that fill them and help them avoid burnout?

6. Are there other any other aspects of the Leader's Heart that need to be addressed?

Next Steps

After reflecting on some of these questions and identifying areas for growth, spend some time brainstorming a few ways you can begin to focus on the Leader's Heart in your congregation. (RenewalWorks provides some suggestions below that may give you some ideas, but feel free to get creative!) Commit to a few initiatives, or ideas for addressing this area and prepare to share these with the workshop team.

We offer these suggestions for ways to develop the Leader's Heart and to lead for spiritual growth. These suggestions are intended for clergy, Wardens and Vestry members, and for other lay leaders:

Grounding & Surrounding Leadership in prayer:

- Every lay leader should commit to a daily time of prayer and scripture reading, even if it's only 10 minutes a day. Clergy should also make that commitment, as we note that many clergy have no such practice.
- Every lay leader should have a Bible and a Book of Common Prayer readily accessible, and a place in their residence where they go for daily devotion.
- One way to practice this kind of daily prayer is to use the Devotions for Families and Individuals in the Book of Common Prayer, beginning on page 137.
- Another resource: Forward Day by Day, hard copy or app.

- Lay leaders should practice praying aloud/in public/as part of meetings. It's not just the clergy's job to lead in this spiritual way.
- Lay leaders, especially Vestry members, should consider and explore what it means to be a spiritual leader. Vestries should discuss openly what that means.
- As church leaders, make a commitment for your church that every meeting, outreach effort, gathering will begin and end with prayer.
- We can learn how to pray, and lay leaders and clergy should explore this kind of formation. Here are a few suggestions:
 - A simple way to pray as a group: Go around a circle and fill in the blanks of these two prayers:
 - I thank God that...
 - I ask God that...
 - Learn how to craft a prayer using the STAF method. Write a prayer for the beginning of a meeting that includes these four elements (Describe these four elements:
 - Create a Vestry prayer list that is included in every prayer meeting
 - Establish prayer partners in Vestry and other groups

Embed scripture in every gathering

- Build time for scripture reflection into every Vestry Meeting as a model for other groups meeting in the church. Let prospective Vestry members know that this will be part of the meeting, even if it lengthens the monthly gathering. It can be relatively brief, but one church has successfully committed to an hour of bible study and prayer at the beginning of every monthly Vestry meeting. It has transformed their work together.
- Consider using following resources for Bible study in groups:
 - The African Bible Study method, described in the appendix to this document
 - Use a guide to the gospel for the coming Sunday produced by St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Richmond. It is an extraordinarily thoughtful guide to the reading, with background information and helpful questions
<https://www.ststephensrva.org/reflect-learn/weekly-bible-study-guide/>
- Encourage parishioners to preview Sunday's scripture readings and be in reflection on them in preparation for worship. An easy way to make those readings available on your church website is a resourced called *Preparing for Sunday* (www.preparingforsunday.com)
- Commit your parish to a bible reading campaign (Bible Challenge, The Path) Make sure that Vestry and other leaders actively participate, modeling engagement with scripture.

Frame the work you do as a ministry

- Ask these questions of every ministry, including the Vestry: What do we do? Why do we do it? How does what we do contribute to spiritual growth? What would we like to do moving forward? (These questions can easily become the substance of an annual report.)
- If Vestry members have programmatic responsibility/serve as liaisons to specific ministries, have those Vestry members emphasize the spiritual dimension of those efforts,

even those that seem most mundane or secular in character (e.g., Finance Committee, Property Committee)

- Embrace a Rule of Life.
 - It can be as simple as the church which developed this four-point rule: Worship. Study. Serve. Give.
 - Forward Movement has resources that can suggest ways to shape a Rule of Life (for example, they produce a “Living a Rule of Life Card” available on the Forward Movement website.)
 - The Society of St. John the Evangelist, a monastic community in Boston provides a lot of good materials. Go to ssje.org/ssje/growrulersources/ to learn more about how to shape a rule of life.
 - Once you have committed to a rule, share it with someone. Even better, ask them to share their rule of life with you.

Equip the saints for ministry

- Regular reflection on this passage from Ephesians 4:11-16:
The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.
- Consider a mentoring program such as *Revive*, whereby clergy work with a small group of lay leaders to teach them how to be spiritual leaders.
- Encourage leaders to attend conferences and workshops in their area of ministry (there are many online offerings, so travel need not be a barrier!)

Honor people's presence and participation. Develop new leaders.

- On a regular basis, review the list of parish members, and especially newcomer roles, to identify gifts that they can be invited to share and always keep an empty seat on committees and ministry teams to allow room for newcomers.
- It's been said that the newest in-law always has the best read on family dynamics. Invite newcomers to share their insights on the life of your church.
- Pray that God will guide provide the gifts and talents needed for the work before you.
- Make a commitment to begin and end meetings in timely fashion. You can raise expectations, as long as you make them clear.
- Recognize that ministry in the church should not be a life sentence. In ministries, perhaps consider term limits as appropriate. As leaders, offer regular opportunities to check in with other lay leaders, to see if their sense of call is still compelling, or whether it is time to look for other ministry opportunities.
- Offering hearty “thanks be to God” for the ministries people offer.
- Make sure to offer commissioning services in the liturgy as people begin ministries. Also offer opportunities in liturgy to offer thanks to God for the offerings people have made.

- Reconvene retiring Wardens and Vestry members in some way to keep them informed on what is going on with leadership and to seek their counsel.

Remember: it's relational

- Spiritual growth is about growing in relationship with God and neighbor. Spiritual leaders develop relationships within the parish. Too many people speak of their sense of isolation in the congregation.
 - We can learn from community organizing principles which invite one on one conversations.
 - One Vestry at a medium-sized Episcopal congregation decided that Vestry members would contact every member of the church to learn about them and to discover how the members see themselves within the community. These contacts had nothing to do with ask for money.
- It is also important for clergy to cultivate relationships with peers. Isolation is commonly recognized as one of the major causes of clergy burn out. Healthy colleague groups can provide the spiritual friendship clergy need to maintain their own spiritual health and vitality.

Practice accountability (and elevate expectations)

- At the end of every meeting, take a few minutes to ask: Where did you see God today in our conversation?
- Develop a Vestry covenant, which is embraced by every member of the Vestry and is known to the congregation. Look at the Vestry Resource Guide published by Forward Movement if you'd like a template, or create your own. Further examples and information: <http://www.ecfvp.org/tools/116/vestry-covenants-and-norms>
- Make sure that Vestry Retreats are really Vestry retreats and not just an extended business meeting.
- Have an annual conversation among Vestry members about what each person is doing to deepen his or her own spiritual life. Report back the following year.
- Make expectations for Vestry members clear regarding regular church attendance, participation in ministries of the church, financial commitment to support the ministry of the church. Have an orientation for new Vestry members to review the expectations and exit interviews with retiring clergy to debrief and reflect on the experience.
- Clergy should seek colleague groups to form friendships, accountability and encouragement.

Anticipate resistance and conflict

- Reading *Canoeing the Mountains* by Tod Bolsinger, a great book about leadership in our current context. It tells a lot about the challenges of resistance in the midst of a changing and challenging religious environment.
- Make sure clergy have colleague groups and/or mentors to discuss issues of resistance and conflict.
- Wardens and Vestry members may also want to connect with others in neighboring congregations who can provide insight and support.

Make it all joyful

For clergy, it's important to keep in touch with the first love, with those things that motivated you to be ordained in the first place. For Wardens, Vestry and Lay leaders, it is also important to stay connected to those things that led these leaders to give of their time, talent and treasure.

With that in mind, we suggest:

- Discovering resources for clergy that will be sustaining. These include colleague groups, formal or informal relationships with mentors, spiritual direction, retreats, weekly study time and annual continuing education.
- Lay leaders, and especially wardens, should insist that clergy are discovering these resources, should uphold and defend the clergy when they work to discover these resources, should provide financial and staff resources to make sure that clergy take this kind of time.
- Lay leaders should also work on a relationship with clergy whereby they can ask "Is it well with your soul?"
- Read *The Book of Joy*, a story of a meeting between Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama, a great description of how leaders, even those who are both busy and persecuted can stay in touch with their first love.

APPENDIX:

The African Bible Study method

Begin with a prayer

Read the passage out loud.

Ask people to listen for a word or a phrase that strikes them from the passage. Take 3 minutes of silence. At the end of the silence, go around the circle, each person telling what word or phrase struck them. Simply name the phrase. This is not meant to be a discussion, or a time to ask questions.

Read the same passage again, this time from another version. Another person should serve as the reader.

Ask people to take about 3 minutes to think about how this passage intersects with their lives. At the end of the 5 minutes, go around the circle and let each person offer their sense of where the passage touches them. Again, not for discussion or for questioning.

Read the same passage one more time, again from yet another version, and with a different reader.

Ask people to take about 5 minutes to think about what God is calling them to do in light of this passage. At the end of the 5 minutes, go around the circle and report, again without discussion, question or comment.

If it feels right, after everyone has reported, you can go around the circle in prayer, praying for the person next to you (on the right or the left), asking that they will be able to do what God is calling them to do.

Conclude with the Lord's Prayer.

Then in remaining time, have a period of evaluation and questioning if you wish.