

Rooted in GOD

Moving from Maintenance to Mission



Developed by
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LeaderResources
Evolutionary Resources for a changing church



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Rooted in God:

A Process of Formation for the Congregation

Introduction and Overview

Rooted in God is the second step of a process to help church communities discern their unique calling in God's work, and commit themselves to it. After identifying the basic qualities of the congregation (using a *Congregational Identity Workshop* or another method of assessment to articulate the parish's present personality), using the process *Rooted in God* will address two formational goals:

- Parishioners will explore creatively what it means, foundationally and universally, to be Church
- The group will discern specifically what God is calling their church to do and to become

Each two hour session includes Bible study, reflection on readings, an experiential learning activity, and group discussion. Depending on the schedule chosen, the entire process takes between three to six months. The learning model is self-discovery among peers. Leadership is shared among members of the group. The finale is a 6 hour workshop led by the group members in which a congregational Rule of Life is crafted by as many parishioners as possible.

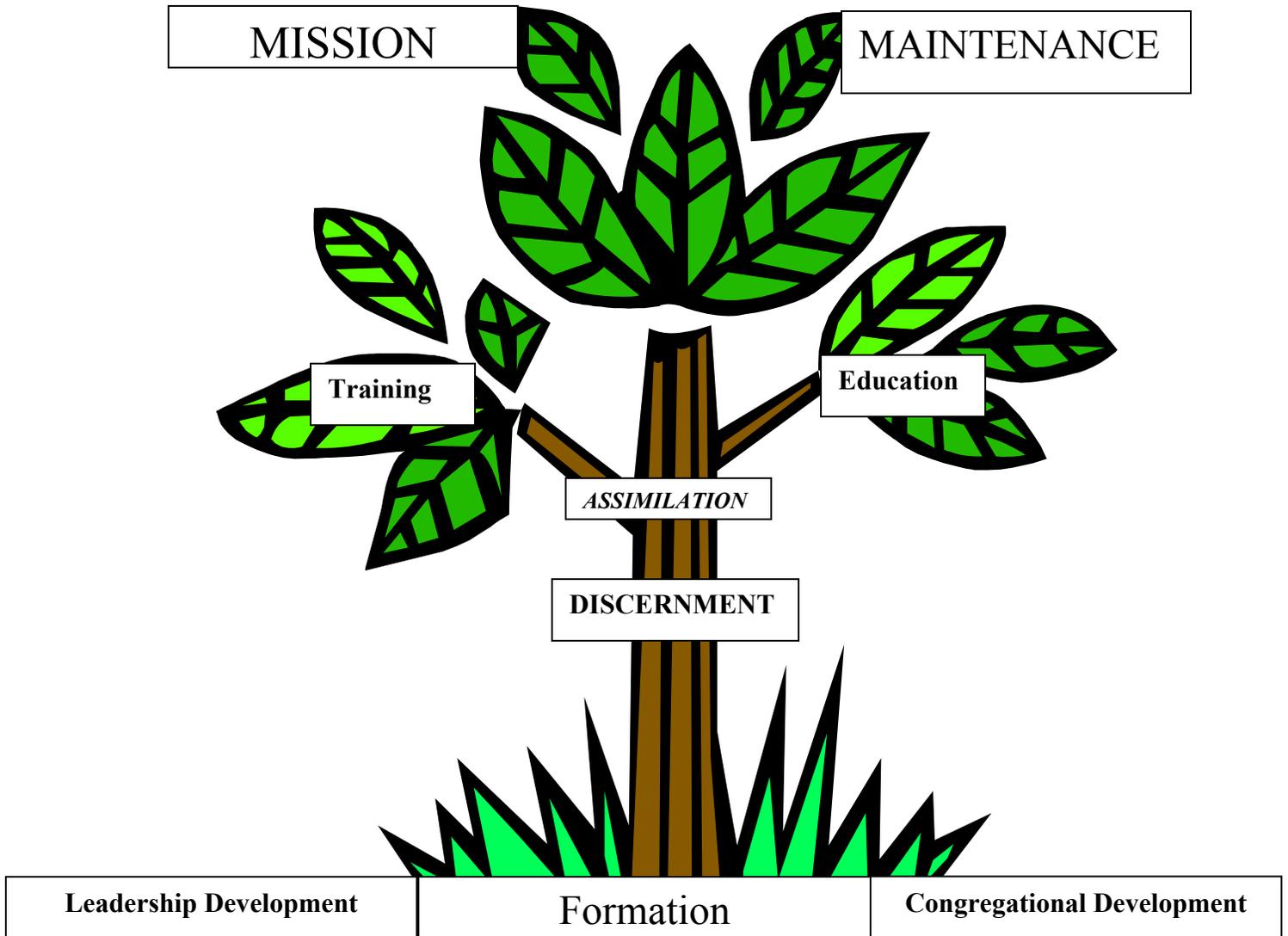
About the Process of Congregational Formation

This process of congregational formation recognizes that change is necessary in the Church, as it is in all living entities. Further, it is assumed that at this point in our history, systemic (or second order) change is required for the Christian community to continue to grow and develop. Unlike first order changes, such as hiring a new rector or offering new programs, systemic change "...involves discontinuity, a leap from one level to another where a different set of rules and logic apply."¹ *Rooted in God* gives a boost to a congregation taking this leap from a traditional, hierarchical church organization into the unknown future to which God calls us.

The first challenge is to help people let go of first order change solutions being applied to second order change issues. While many church members realize that their congregations need to do business differently to survive in the new millennium, this insight is usually initiated by financial and staff problems rather than by theological reflection. The harsh reality of dwindling membership, combined with rising costs, forces a lowering of expectations regarding long established norms (such as full time priests, paid choir directors and traditional Sunday schools). The question then asked is: "How can we do less as the kind of church we know and get by?" rather than, "How can we be the best Christian community possible?" This attitude can be in play even when differing models for being Church are pursued as possible systemic solutions. A congregation may embrace a Total or Mutual Ministry model, even call local priests and deacons, with no recognition that this model assumes systemic change: the whole membership being called to live out their relationship with each other and God in a radically different way. Whatever change occurs, the parish remains reticent, in actuality just waiting out the crisis, hoping that some shift in economy or population will bring members into the pews once again so they can get on with being a "real" church. The result of this half-hearted attempt at change is frustration and burn-out....and an even weaker congregation.

¹ Kenneth A. Halstead, *From Stuck to Unstuck: Overcoming Congregational Impasse* (Alban Institute Inc., 1998) p. 40).

Rooted in God builds on the foundation of the congregation’s basic identity. It poses the question, “What is essential to being the community of God?” If we visualize the parish as a tree, formation happens at the roots and nourishes the development of that tree. (See diagram below)



In this metaphor, the tree, like the congregation, has two goals for its existence. The first is its own life – to develop and grow . In a parish, this is called Maintenance. The second is to reproduce: having enough energy to create and disseminate seeds. In a congregation, this is called Mission: sharing one’s relationship to God with the outside world and even beginning new communities of faith. When a tree is failing to thrive and/or not producing fruit, something must be done or it will be good for nothing but firewood. Most gardeners would check to make sure that the tree is getting enough water and sunlight (i.e. the training and education that are necessary for Christians to mature and use their gifts). But the wise vinedresser in the parable Jesus told about the unproductive fig tree knew that sometimes radical action is called for . . . and he got out his spade, dug around the roots and put manure on it (Luke 13:6-9). He knew that without healthy roots, no amount of sunshine and water would be helpful, because the tree would not be able to assimilate and use these resources. Similarly, without healthy formation of the whole Christian community, beginning with a core group which has a deep and vital sense of their relationship with God and their call to be God’s partners, no amount of outside resources will reactivate Mission or Maintenance.

Rooted in God seeks first and foremost to advance the effective formation of Christians in community. The objectives pursued as a means of achieving this goal are:

- Introduction of members to the concept of paradigm change in the Church as the movement of the Holy Spirit, continuing development of God’s incarnate Word.
- Exploration of relational power and our responsibility in covenant with Christ.
- Exploration of the Benedictine understanding of obedience and the practice of discernment as a community.
- Exploration of the Benedictine concept of stability and assessment of the foundation of the participants’ community.
- Exploration of the Benedictine ideal of transformation and embracing new life in God’s Spirit.
- Formation of a Congregational Rule of Life which will guide the parish in fully living into their communal relationship with God.

Leaders in the Process

Rooted in God defines “leader” in the tradition of community organization. A leader is anyone who can bring another to the table, so his or her voice will be heard in discussion and negotiation. It further defines “leader” in light of our baptismal covenant, as one who works with God to bring others to God’s table. While leadership gifts and styles differ, leadership development is part of the formation of the whole Christian community and everyone in it. Therefore, this process invites members to try on different leadership roles in the context of the group sessions. Depending on the make up and confidence of the participants, all the roles described below could either be rotated through the group or one person could be chosen to act in a particular role for all sessions. The group may want to designate one Session Leader for the whole process, especially if there is a person more familiar with group process and/or church history and theology. Those with experience in these various roles will surely adapt the design to fit more closely with their own leadership style. The leadership roles, which need to be filled for each session, are as follows:

Session Leader:

- In charge of overall rhythm of session.
- Is familiar with the concepts presented and ready to summarize.

- Has material ready for group activities and discussion.
- Leads the group through activities and discussions.

Host/Hostess:

- Is at least 10 minutes early and sets up the space for group.
- Provides refreshments.
- Begins the session with Rounds and opening prayer.
- Reminds members of the next session’s assignment.
- Ends the session with prayer.

Bible Study Leader:

Takes responsibility for leading a short Bible study of the passage indicated for each session. Gospel Based Discipleship method is recommended, but any other method of sharing reactions to the passage may be used.

Book Reporter:

- Reads all the homework assigned for the session.
- Defines for the group any new words or concepts.
- Summarizes briefly the main points of the readings, especially anything exciting or troubling.

The Gospel Based Discipleship method of Bible Study: Ask these questions in turn after each of three readings of the Bible passage.

1st Reading:
-What word, idea or sentence stands out for you in this passage?

2nd Reading
- What is God saying to you in this reading?

3rd Reading
-What is God calling you (or your community) to do?

People respond to the question briefly and without discussion – or they can “pass.” The Bible can be left in the center of the group and the passage referred back to at any time during the session.

Sessions and Activities

The basic outline for each session includes: Rounds (a method for gathering and checking in with group members), a short Bible study, a summary of the homework readings, and an experiential activity and/or group discussion. There are a total of eleven 2 hour sessions and a concluding 6 hour Rule of Life workshop. The process is designed to take place over a 6 month period of time, with the group meeting every other week. A congregation choosing to go through the program more quickly could opt for meeting every week. Remember, though, that time is needed for assimilation of new ideas and the conceptualization of how these ideas might be applied in each particular and peculiar congregation.

Some activities presented in the sessions include:

- Exploration of our habits and how we learn discipline
- Mission vs. Maintenance: Where are we in our church?
- Relationship meetings in the community organizing tradition
- Congregational Discernment Exercise from “Growing Healthier Congregations”
- Guided Imagery Exercise
- Personal Change Compasses

It is assumed that a small core group of congregational members will be able and willing to make the commitment that participation in *Rooted in God* requires. Systemic change, however, only happens when a critical mass of the parish is on board. It is recommended, therefore, that a plan for connecting with the rest of the congregation be formulated as the sessions begin. One group dealt with this simply by reporting during the announcements at Sunday worship the main topics and discussion of the last *Rooted in God* session. Other churches have had success in organizing “World Café” conversations

after (or between) church services on Sunday. The basic rules of the “World Wide Café” can be accessed on the web at <http://www.theworldcafe.com>. It is simply a way of encouraging deep conversation around significant issues in small groups of people. Questions which are suitable for such cafés, or other coffee hour discussions, are provided at the end of each session.

While group membership in the 11 sessions of *Rooted in God* remains basically consistent, the whole congregation should be invited to the concluding Rule of Life workshop. This is another opportunity to bring on board those who could not be regular attendees at the ongoing sessions. In the first part of that workshop, those who regularly attended the 11 sessions review the themes and learning of those gatherings. Then all workshop participants engage in the creative work of imagining a different way to be church. The leaven of the core group which has spent 3-6 months in study, prayer and conversation with each other around what is essential to being Church, will impact the rest of the workshop’s members...inviting them to look outside the box they have known as their congregation. The goal of the workshop is to create an outline for the discipline and actions needed for the congregation to follow God’s call to them as a faith community.

Books

Members of *Rooted in God* will need the following books:

The Once and Future Church by Loren B. Mead. Alban Institute, Inc., 1991.

Practicing Our Faith, Dorothy C. Bass, editor. Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997.

The Three Colors of Ministry, Christian A. Schwartz. Church Smart Resources, 2001.

All of these books are published in paperback editions and quantity discounts may be available.

Session I

Objectives:

- To introduce members of the group to one another
- To begin reflection on guiding principles in our lives, personally and as a congregation
- To introduce the concept of “Rule of Life” and review the overall goal of the *Rooted in God* process

Assignment:

Nothing is assigned for this session.

Assignment for next week:

Mead, Chapters 1-3.

Introduction *Host*

20 minutes

Gather and put on name tags. (This is important if even one person is not familiar with everyone present. If everyone knows everyone else, you can skip it.)

Rounds - Each person introduces him- or herself and shares why he/she came tonight and what he /she would like to get out of the session.

Bible Study *Bible Study Leader*

15 minutes

Luke 13:22-30 (If it’s available, for this session, read the passage from *The Message*, a modern paraphrase of the Bible by Eugene Peterson). Ask each of the following questions, inviting each participant to respond in turn – each person can respond briefly or say “pass.”

- What word, sentence, idea stands out?
- What is Jesus saying to you?
- What is Jesus calling you or your community to do?

Activity (In Pairs) *Session Leader*

15 minutes

Find one person you don’t know well. Share about the routine of your life - i.e., five to ten habits you do daily.

Discussion (Plenary) *Session Leader*

15 minutes

Have available a large pad of paper to record what people say. As you list the habits of members’ lives, try to group them into categories, i.e. health, hygiene, relationships, spirituality. You might want to highlight different ways we develop these habits, e.g.: some we learned at our mothers’ knee and others we taught ourselves.

- 1) What kinds of things do we do routinely?
- 2) What do these say about our lives and what is important to us?

Break *Host*

10 minutes

Discussion *Session Leader*

10 minutes

Introduce the goal of the *Rooted in God* process and the definition of a Rule of Life. Then ask for feedback, questions, etc. It may be helpful to have on hand contemporary Rules of Life, such as the 12 Steps of AA, the guidelines for the 4th Day of Cursillo groups, or the “Guiding Principles” found on page 40 of *A Disciple’s Prayer Book* which may be obtained through Episcopal Parish Services 1-800-903-5544; <http://www.episcopalparishservices.org>.

Goal of *Rooted in God* - To discern God’s will for a congregation through study of scripture and missional theology, in order to form a Rule of Life that will clarify the mission of the parish, inform the discernment process of its ministries and leaders, and shape the communal life of the parish.

Definition of Rule of Life: “Rule” comes from the Latin “*regula*”, a straight edge such as a plumb line or carpenter’s edge, which sets a measure or boundary of that which is “true” or properly aligned, to guide the building or development which is underway.

Discussion (Small Groups of 4-6) *Session Leader* **20 minutes**

Break into small groups to discuss the following two questions:

- 1) How do our actions witness to our faith?
- 2) What is our Christian responsibility? How is it different from our civic responsibility?

Evaluation (Plenary) *Session Leader* **10 minutes**

- How did this go for you tonight?
- Insights, concerns, questions?

Closing *Host* **5 minutes**

- Remind everyone of the assignment for the next session; clarify the date and time of that meeting Assignment for next week: Mead, Chapters 1-3
- Choose leaders for next session (Host, Session Leader, Bible Study Leader and Book Reporter)
- Closing prayer



About LeaderResources

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The goal of LeaderResources is to foster learning communities. To this end, the resources we create are constantly changing, improved by those who use them. These “evolutionary resources”™ invite those who use them into the development process with the original program developer. This discourages the tendency to see the developer as the “expert” and encourages those who use the programs to become active participants in the learning process.

Resource Materials

LeaderResources produces practical training manuals, “how-to” leader’s guides and educational materials that are easy to use and can be modified to fit your situation. Step-by-step guides assist experienced and new leaders alike. We develop and produce resources in the areas of Christian Formation (children, youth and adult education), Lay Ministry and Leadership Development.

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