



Clergy Group Coordinator's Manual and Resource Guide:

**Approaches and Practices for
Clergy Communities of Practice
And Clergy Small Groups**

**Coordinator Manual
April 2023**

**Developed by UCC COMPASS
With gratitude to
Christina Braudaway-Bauman and Lawrence Peers**







Introduction, Fall 2022

Twenty years ago, in its strategic plan, *A Vision for Renewal and Growth*, the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ made leadership development one of its most significant priorities. In setting this goal, the Conference began to think in new ways about the essential role of pastoral leadership in fostering and sustaining congregational vitality and about what our pastors and churches need to be supported and strengthened in ministry.

In 2003, two significant efforts under the leadership of Susan Dickerman, Christina Braudaway-Bauman, and Lawrence Peers were launched in keeping with these aspirations: A New Clergy Group program and a network of Clergy Communities of Practice.

New Clergy Groups: New pastors in their first three years of ministry are invited to join a small group of three to five colleagues. Meeting monthly for three years, these groups, each facilitated by a more seasoned pastor trained for this role, have the purpose of offering new pastors an intentionally supportive entrance into ministry, to surround them with peers with similar experience, give them a mentor to turn to, and provide opportunities to develop life-giving practices and habits right from the start.

Clergy Communities of Practice: More seasoned pastors are also offered opportunities to gather in small groups for learning, reflection, and conversation about their ministries. Covenanting to meet together monthly for a year at a time, Communities of Practice foster an environment of collegial trust, friendship, and mutual support.

A Movement for Ministry

These initiatives to support and equip pastoral leaders have been part of a much larger effort across the country in many denominations and church organizations. Initial experiments in the Transition into Ministry, for new pastors, and Sustaining Pastoral Excellence, for more experienced clergy, were supported with grants by the Lilly Endowment. In time, the ventures developed into a movement across the wider church focused on sustaining and strengthening pastoral leaders in every season of ministry.



In the United Church of Christ, the New Clergy Group Program and Clergy Community of Practice grew to include hundreds of pastors in Massachusetts. Beginning in 2006, the programs expanded to other New England Conferences, Wisconsin, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and the Pacific Northwest. Sometime later, New York, Minnesota, Illinois, and the Southern Conference launched similar programs. The Community of Practice model was soon replicated for Christian Educators, Chaplains, Lay Leaders, especially local church Moderators, and sometimes Clergy and Lay people together sharing experience and wisdom around particular topics, such as Stewardship or Strategic Planning.

COMPASS

In 2012, a steering committee was formed to provide ongoing support and training for the network of peer learning and support groups in the United Church of Christ. COMPASS (Communities of Ministerial Practice, A Sustaining Support) is now part of the national setting of the United Church of Christ. Tara Barber, of the Ministerial Support and Accountability Ministry of the UCC, serves as the staff person for COMPASS.

As Clergy Communities of Practice and the New Clergy Group program were becoming embedded into the culture of the United Church of Christ, Larry Peers and Chris Braudaway-Bauman wrote a manual to train group facilitators and to share practices of peer learning and support. In 2022, these materials were updated and expanded by the COMPASS Steering Committee.

Vibrant ministry is a communal project, not a solo endeavor. It is shaped by God's guidance, of course, but also by our collaborative participation, by the mutual sharing of faithful gifts, challenges, questions, and insights. In New Clergy Groups and Communities of Practice, the church's leaders have found the resources they need, including the room they need to grow, so that they can serve the church with greater vision and more joy.

As you train group facilitators or serve as one, that is our prayer for you and for the whole church - clearer vision, renewed calling, flourishing ministry, transformed lives.



Dedicated to strengthening and sustaining excellent pastoral leaders for a lifetime of creative and effective service to the church.

Building on the foundational work of the Pastoral Excellence Network, COMPASS (Communities of Practice - A Sustaining Support) developed this workbook in order to:

- Help new pastors get a strong start
- Promote peer learning to sustain pastors in every season of ministry
- Gather and share wisdom and best practices
- Facilitate connections between pastoral excellence efforts for mutual learning
- Convene leaders to engage the pressing challenges and emerging opportunities in the church and the world



PAGE LEFT INTENTIONALLY BLANK



Table of Contents

Coordinator's Manual

Foundations for a Community of Practice

What is a Community of Practice?

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| a. Purpose of Clergy Communities of Practice and Communities of Practice for First Call Clergy | ...Page 13 |
| b. Key Questions for Launching Clergy Communities of Practice | ...Page 14 |
| c. Establishing a Community of Practice Program in Your Conference | ...Pages 15-17 |
| d. Community of Practice Facilitator On-going Education and Support | ...Page 18 |
| e. Community of Practice Group Development | ...Page 19 |
| i. Adding Members to a Group | ...Page 19 |
| ii. Stages of Group Development | ...Page 20 |
| iii. Optional Exercises | ...Pages 21-22 |
| f. Managing a Polarity | ...Page 23 |
| g. Queries for Ongoing Formation of a COP | ...Page 24 |
| h. Communities of Practice and Mental Health | ...Pages 25-28 |

Characteristics & Role of the Facilitator

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| a. Characteristics of An Effective Group Facilitator | ...Page 30 |
| b. The Role of Facilitator | ...Page 31 |
| c. Personal Reflections and Goals | ...Page 32 |
| d. On Not Being an Expert | ...Page 33 |
| e. People Live in the World Their Questions Create | ...Pages 34-38 |
| f. Developing Your Repertoire of Questions | ...Page 39 |



- i. Why Use Questions? ...Page 39
- ii. The Types of Questions We Ask ...Page 40

Developing a Group Covenant

- a. Covenant Considerations ...Page 41
- b. Developing a Covenant ...Page 42
- c. Encouraging Agency ...Page 43
- d. Touchstones for Creating Safe Space ...Page 44
- e. Sample Group Covenants ...Pages 45-47

Clergy Group Meeting Practices, Devotions & Formats

- a. Heather's Best Practices for Online Groups ...Pages 49-50
- b. Facilitating a Community of Practice Online ...Pages 51-53
- c. Launching a New Group - First Meetings ...Pages 55-56
- d. Format of a Group Meeting - Model 1: Focusing on a Case Study ...Pages 57-58
- e. Format of a Group Meeting - Model 2: Focusing on a Topic ...Pages 59-60
- f. Practice: Focus on an Opening Questions ...Page 61
- g. Case Study Preparation Sample Format ...Page 62
- h. Practice: Exegeting the Congregation ...Page 63
- i. Practice: Moving Along a Spectrum ...Page 64

Devotions ...Pages 65-75

Resources

- a. Special Considerations for Member in Discernment Communities of Practice ...Pages 79-81
- b. Together We Thrive Coaching Program ...Pages 83-85
- c. Coaching – Encuentros Latinx Data 2020-2022 ...Page 86
- d. Online Study and Discussion Resources ...Pages 87-89
- e. Sample Retreats



- i. **Pandemic Pondering** ...Pages 93-108
- ii. **IKC Community of Practice Retreat** ...Pages 109-110

Coordinator & Facilitator Letters & Forms

- a. **Sample Community of Practice Participant Application** ...Pages 113-114
- b. **Participant Scholarship Application Form** ...Page 115
- c. **Participant Year End Evaluation** ...Page 116
- d. **Sample Facilitator Letter of Agreement** ...Pages 117-118
- e. **Sample Facilitator's Expense Report** ...Page 119
- f. **Monthly Facilitator's Report** ...Page 120
- g. **Facilitator's Year End Evaluation** ...Page 121
- h. **Facilitator's End of Program Year Short Survey** ...Page 122
- i. **Frequently Asked Questions** ...Page 123
- j. **Acknowledgements** ...Page 124



PAGE LEFT INTENTIONALLY BLANK



Foundations for Clergy Communities of Practice

“Human conversation is the most ancient and the easiest way to cultivate the conditions for change – personal change, community and organizational change, planetary change. If we can sit together and talk about what’s important to us, we can begin to come alive.”

Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future by Margaret Wheatley

What is a Clergy Community of Practice?

We have often participated in “communities of practice”^{*} without even calling it that.

Whenever a group forms to work together on similar concerns, explore new ways of approaching their work or helping each other cope—we are part of a community of practice. A clergy community of practice is one that is intentionally focused on learning how to do better what we do as we interact and gather wisdom from the perspectives and practices of others in the group.

There are three necessary and interacting dimensions of a community of practice.

1. **THE FOCUS IS MINISTRY:** Clergy communities of practice are identified by their shared interest in and their commitment to the ongoing development of competence in ministry (in a variety of settings). There are topics, issues and concerns that form a common domain of interest that creates a bond among participants.
2. **THE COMMUNITY IS ESSENTIAL:** As clergy engage in discussions, shared activities, help each other, and share relevant information



with one another, they build relationships with one another. Over time, trust develops in these relationships and members come to share their deepest questions, their expertise, as well as their uncertainties. Mutual accountability becomes a way of caring for one another.

3. **KNOWLEDGE IS PRACTICE-BASED:** Knowledge within a community of practice is developed and is tested through actual practice as it is refined into common wisdom. Skill develops within the group as it helps its members to craft practices that members can use to address specific issues or the growing edges of their ministry.

The combination of each of these three dimensions creates a clergy community of practice.

As a clergy community of practice develops each of these dimensions will require emphasis. A clergy group facilitator or a clergy group can often review which of these dimensions is strong and/or which needs attention. A careful cultivation of each of these brings about the potential of a clergy community of practice to become a valued, trusted resource in the lives of clergy.

* To read more about communities of practice go to www.ewenger.com



Purpose of Communities of Practice and Communities of Practice for First Call Clergy

To strengthen and sustain pastors by:

- Offering care, support, and accountability
- Nurturing practices of spiritual discipline
- Developing “the craft” of ministry and strengthening practices of pastoral leadership
- Engaging in theological reflection on pastoral identity and congregational ministry
- Fostering a sense of ministry as a shared endeavor
- Forming life-sustaining friendships
- Preparing for a church whose future we cannot yet see or imagine

Additional Purpose of Groups for First Call Clergy

- Assisting new pastors in making a strong transition into ministry with the support and guidance of a mentoring community
- Providing space to reflect on and learn from the firsts in ministry (first baptisms, communions, weddings, funerals, first full liturgical years, first conflicts)
- Developing and honing good habits and practices of ministry from the start



Key Questions for Launching Communities of Practice

1. Why do we want to launch Communities of Practice?
2. How will we get the attention and investment of clergy to participate?
3. How will our groups be facilitated?
4. How will we recruit facilitators? What's our criteria?
5. How will we train and support facilitators?
6. How much money is involved, who will receive stipends and how will we manage it?
7. How can we create a sense of accountability and build a body of wisdom about clergy communities of practice?
8. Who will organize and oversee this work?
9. What else do we need to ask ourselves that will make a network of Community of Practice groups possible in our setting?



Establishing a Community of Practice Program in Your Conference

Tasks of the COP Coordinator

The “Coordinator” is the person who administers COP groups in the Conference, Association or Region. Depending upon the sponsoring organization, the role of Coordinator is reimbursed for their time. The number of hours assigned to this position depends on the number of groups that the sponsoring organization supports - the greater the number of groups, the greater the number of hours which are needed to complete the Coordinator’s tasks. More hours may be required at the beginning of a program and fewer hours once the program is established and maintained. Every year you can expect to put in more hours at the beginning of the program cycle and fewer as the program year progresses.

1. Orientation

Your first assignment is to orientate yourself to the Clergy Community of Practice Field. Make contact with your Conference Minister and staff, other COP Coordinators via COMPASS and with people who have had experience running a COP Program. Learn of their successes and challenges in doing so. Speak to as many people as you can to learn more. Read the COP Manual. Do the COP Training with the COMPASS Steering Committee.

Learn everything you can. Questions to ask are:

- What does the COP entail?
- What is its purpose?
- Who will it serve?
- Who will benefit from the program?
- How is it different from other clergy programs?

2. Familiarize Yourself to the Pressing Needs of Those You Intend to Serve

Find out about the need for the program. Why is a COP program vital and lifegiving for clergy? Make contact with Conference Staff, Association Boards, Committees on Ministry and local church pastors to ascertain the pressing needs and concerns of Clergy and Members of Discernment. What are the needs and



concerns in general and specifically of clergy, chaplains and MIDs? Is there a sense of urgency? We know that even before the pandemic clergy were struggling. The COVID 19 exacerbated the needs and issues clergy face in and along with their congregations.

3. Developing COP Groups

Having assessed a list of needs, concerns and issues facing clergy, envision what types of COP groups you might develop? Set a goal. How many CCP groups would you like to develop in the first year, involving at least 5 clergy participants per group? What kinds of groups would you like to offer participants?

4. Finding COP Facilitators

For each group you will need a trained COP Facilitator who will have to undergo training with the COMPASS Steering Committee from the National UCC MESA office. Speak to your conference minister and conference staff as to who might be good facilitators for the COP groups. Then make contact with these prospective facilitators preferably by telephone, outlining the COP program and its goals. Spell out stipend details to each facilitator. It is best if participant fees (which pays for the COP facilitators) can be handled through the Conference office. Once the program has started, it is advisable to meet with the facilitators once per month to discuss how their groups are going, to share joys and concerns and any hurdles encountered. Usually finding a time when everyone can meet is the biggest challenge for facilitators as they plan to meet with their groups. The COP coordinator meeting with the facilitators helps offer them support and to a lesser extent serves some function of a COP group for the facilitators themselves.

5. Recruitment of COP Participants

Generate interest in the new emerging COP Program by developing a Blurb and Participant Interest Form to be circulated through Conference and Association Newsletters, via email and /or whatever communication vehicles you have at your disposal. If possible, the COP Coordinator should avail him or herself to existing meetings held in your conference such as meetings with presidents of associations, meetings with clergy in their specific geographical regions, meetings with Committees on Ministry etc.



They can help you spread the word and help to recruit COP participants.

6. Maintaining the COP Program

The first year of the COP Program serves as a pilot for the ongoing work of this vital program. The Coordinator meets regularly once per month or a couple of times per year on Zoom or in-person with the COP facilitators, to help the coordinator and facilitator group respond to challenges and ensure the smooth running of the program. Facilitators are encouraged to fill out a monthly progress report to be returned to the Coordinator and participants are to fill out quarterly progress reports sharing their experiences and benefits of the group, if any. These self-reports are helpful with future recruitment of participants.



Community of Practice Facilitator On-Going Education and Support

Many Conferences offer a modest stipend to facilitators of the COP groups. A gift Conference administrators could offer to their facilitators, in addition to their stipend, could be educational sessions so that they may grow as well. It is suggested that the facilitators gather at least twice a year - preferably in October and then again in May. It is an opportunity to have a COP group for facilitators.

The format of the gathering could be similar to the process facilitators use in their groups. It is suggested that the meetings include a devotional, a check-in time and a case study or educational presentation. The case study could be based on an experience for which a facilitator would like feedback. The educational pieces would include offerings that would help facilitators become better at their task. The presentations can be given by an in-house presenter or an outside expert. For example: during COVID, information from Susan Beaumont on How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're Going and her take on how liminal time was impacting the church was helpful; also a presentation on Tod Bolsinger's Canoeing the Mountains to talk about change and its implications for congregations offered additional support for facilitators working with pastors who were dealing with change.

Finally, it would be a time to share the “nuts and bolts” information that is involved in COP administration. Also, asking questions of evaluation can be helpful to grow and improve the COP program.

If a Clergy is Not Appropriate for a Group Setting

If there is the rare situation in which a group setting is not appropriate for a clergy person, it is recommended that clergy be referred to appropriate resources for their growth, spiritual and mental health.



COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE GROUP DEVELOPMENT

The diagram (on the next page) outlines the movement of a COP group through various stages. The length of time a group spends in each stage often depends on the size of the group and whether members have had previous group experience. The main role of the facilitator is to build trust between themselves and the facilitator and between group members during these stages. The facilitator's responsibility is to be aware of these stages and recognize when a group is ready to move on to the next stage. This is discerned by being aware of the "major issues" of each stage. When trust grows and the issues are addressed the group will be ready to move forward or re-visit a previous stage if necessary. The gift in a well facilitated group is that members will actually start moving in that direction as they get their needs met in each stage without much coaching from the facilitator.

ADDING MEMBERS TO AN ESTABLISHED COP GROUP

Adding new members to an established group requires changes in the group. The existing group may be experiencing the later stages of group development, whereas a new member will come into the group at Stage One. That situation has implications for the facilitator and the group members.

The facilitator will need to be intentional about preparing the established group members to the dynamics brought about by this change. The group will probably have to go back to stage two in order to help the new group member feel comfortable as they enter the group, especially if the new person is not known to the established members.

The time that it takes to move to the more advanced stages usually depends on how many new members are brought into the group at one time. The more new members the longer it will take to move forward.

It is important for the leader to know, that when someone leaves the group or enters the group, essentially, a new group will be formed. Being sensitive to the change in dynamics surrounding the comings and goings requires the facilitator to be aware and flexible regarding the changes in the group dynamics.



STAGES OF COP GROUP DEVELOPMENT

(Adapted from the Napier Group 2014)

FORMING

MAJOR ISSUES: Inclusion, individual identity

Do I want to be here? Will my needs be met? Am I safe? Will they like me? Will what I have to contribute be taken seriously?

MEMBER BEHAVIOR:

Withdrawal, reservation, politeness, formality, awkwardness, testing, humor, silence

APPROPRIATE FACILITATOR ROLE:
"Parent"

Explain guidelines, share purpose/goals, accept, nurture, take care of needs, initiation activities, give everyone an opportunity for their voice to be heard, develop bonding and trust, model desired norms: openness, honesty, clarity



NORMING

MAJOR ISSUES: Group identity, norms

Do we cooperate or compete? What are the norms? How do we make decisions?

Individual vs. group responsibility, roles

MEMBER BEHAVIOR: Testing, experimenting, establishing routines

APPROPRIATE FACILITATOR ROLE: "Teacher"

Communal covenant development, model skills and effective communication, empower group members, be patient, reinforce appropriate behaviors, structure and role model caring



STORMING

MAJOR ISSUES: Power and control

Challenge to authority, clarification of purpose, question commitment, increased participation and energy

MEMBER BEHAVIOR:

Challenges to group leaders, disillusionment, testing of group norms, power struggles, open honest sharing

APPROPRIATE FACILITATOR ROLE: "Safe harbor"

Don't panic, claim your authority, role model feedback, clarify issues, provide structure, protect emotional safety



PRODUCTIVE

MAJOR ISSUES: People's needs being met, cohesion

MEMBER BEHAVIOR:

Cooperation, enjoyment, effective discernment, if necessary – can deal with conflict effectively, strong sense of group purpose and identity

APPROPRIATE FACILITATOR ROLE:
"Reinforcer"

Back off, let them go, focus on generalized learnings, ask challenging questions, reflect back their growth



TERMINATION (Group or Individual)

MAJOR ISSUES: Letting go, fear of leaving

Nostalgia, grieving, loss of intimacy, anxiety what's next, application of learnings

MEMBER BEHAVIOR: Withdrawal, anxiety, detachment, sadness

APPROPRIATE FACILITATOR ROLE: "Coach"

Support, affirm, focus on positives, solidify learnings, validate experience, rituals for leaving, talk about transition and closure

"Let us consider how we might spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another."

– Hebrews 10:24-25



AN OPTIONAL EXERCISE: BUILDING TRUST

An Exercise

As a group moves through the various stages of group development, the facilitator provides opportunities to build trust during which group members can feel more comfortable being transparent and vulnerable.

The following exercise is meant to help facilitators experience a trust exercise and engage in a conversation regarding their experience.

TRUST EXPERIENCES

Supplies: 2 pieces of string or yarn each about 15 feet long, 6 obstacles

1. Lay out a path that is about a yard and half wide and 15 feet long. (You can use string or yarn to outline the side boundaries.)
2. Place 6 obstacles at various points along the path. (The obstacles can be as simple as 6"x6" squares of paper.)
3. Ask for a volunteer to walk down the path blindfolded.
4. Make sure the person who is walking the path sees an example of the obstacle before being blindfolded.
5. Blindfold one person who will walk down the path, trying to avoid the obstacles.
6. Remaining people, together, will try to give the blindfolded individuals instructions to help them get to the end of the path without being touched by obstacles.
7. For the second part of the exercise, rearrange the obstacles and have the blindfolded person pick out one other participant to be the only person to give them instructions. The blindfolded person will walk down the path.
8. Debrief the exercise with the following questions:

(For the blindfolded person)

- a. What are the thoughts and feelings you had during this exercise?
- b. What was it like having the group give you instructions?
- c. Was there a difference for you when only one person gave you instructions?



- d. Can you share why you picked the person you did to guide you in the 2nd part of the exercise?

(For other participants)

- e. What thoughts do you have regarding what you experienced? What was it like to be giving instructions to one person - either as a group or as a single individual?
- f. What are the implications of this exercise for building trust in your group experiences?



	+	+
Support Group		Learning Group
	-	-



Queries for Ongoing Formation of a Clergy Community of Practice

Adapted from Parker Palmer

From the Quaker tradition, there is the practice and a discipline of asking a query of ourselves as individuals and as a group. You may want to introduce one or more of the following queries from Parker Palmer listed below at the beginning of a community of practice session. People can reflect on the query in silence.

Occasionally, you may want to invite responses.

1. Do I come to my community of practice prepared for a genuine meeting between myself, other people, ideas and texts?
2. Do I try in speaking and listening, to stay close to what I know experientially, and do I take the care to ask the same of others?
3. Am I willing to devote the energy necessary to engage my whole self in the community of practice process, and especially to cultivate those aspects of myself which are underdeveloped?
4. Do I take full advantage of my community of practice by sharing my insights with others, and by my willingness to test myself against their experience? Do I help foster my community of practice in this way?
5. Do I appreciate that the consequences of learning will be different for different people, and am I open to unexpected consequences for myself?
6. Do I accept the possibility that my community of practice may change not only my mind but also my life?



Communities of Practice and Mental Health

Communities of Practice are supportive spaces and are not intended to be mental health therapy groups. Though they may often provide compassionate care and touch on topics related to mental health, these groups are designed to attend to what is shared by participants and refer to mental health professionals and specialists when appropriate.

We recognize that everyone needs a safe space to name professional and personal needs, including the need for mental health support, AND that the stresses and traumas of the past few years have increased the need for mental health resourcing. Facilitators are encouraged to create a list of mental health resources that are available in their local area and national online resources.

How to frame this conversation about mental health with your COP group -

1. Initially - when you begin to set hopes and expectations, as well as during the covenanting conversations. Everyone has mental health and there is no shame or stigma in experiencing mental health challenges.
2. When what is shared is indicative of mental health challenges - What to look for? Talk of suicide, self-harm, drug and alcohol use, changes in sleep patterns, lack of motivation, mood swings, and inattention to hygiene.
3. How to hold space with nonjudgement, compassion, and honor the group process.
4. How to refer
 - a. Develop list of local resources.
 - i. Vetted, safe for GLBTQIA+, etc.
 - b. Journey with the individual to obtain support.
 - c. Refer to list of national resources.

Suggest Mental Health First Aid Training for All facilitators, coordinators link - <https://www.mentalheathfirstaid.org>

Suggest Mental Health America Free, Confidential Online Mental Health Screening—<https://screening.mhanational.org/>

Suggest connecting to National Alliance on Mental Illness—support groups and resources—<https://www.nami.org/Home>

Suggest connecting to UCC Mental Health Network and WISE (Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged) for Mental Health resources—<https://www.mhn-ucc.org/>

Attend to own needs as Coordinator or Facilitator

Safe place and person (could be a therapist, counselor, spiritual director) to process outside of group



Encourage tools to develop capacity and attend to fluctuating mental health needs
What does emotional, spiritual, and mental wellness look like for you?

UCC national Resource: https://www.ucc.org/what-we-do/justice-local-church-ministries/justice/health-and-wholeness-advocacy-ministries/disabilities-and-mental-health-justice/resources_for_disabilities_and_mental_health_justice/



A Mental Health Devotional

Opening Litany

(inspired by Mark 1:21-28)

Brothers and sisters and siblings in Christ,
what hopes do you bring this day?
We bring hope for health and wholeness.

What afflictions do you bring with you?
Physical pain?
From illness and injury.
Emotional pain?
From sad and scary life situations.
Mental pain?
From dis-ease of many kinds.

With all of these afflictions,
it's a miracle that any of us have made it to this day!
But where else would we be?
We yearn to know God's powerful love
and to know that wholeness is possible.

In today's gospel, a person with an "*afflicting spirit*" * interrupts Jesus
and Jesus meets him in his affliction.

And where does the miracle of his story and our stories begin?
When we bring all of who we are
—hopeful, afflicted, bold—
into relationship with the Divine.

So come, let us enter this time with our whole selves
—hopeful, afflicted and bold—

Amen!

— adapted from **Holy, Whole-y One: Service Prayers for the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany**, written by the Rev. Dr. Ginny Brown Daniel, former Conference Minister and pastor of Plymouth United Church, UCC, in Spring, Texas. Posted on the United Church of Christ's [Worship Ways](#) website.

**afflicting spirit is terminology that comes out of a biblical-era awareness. We recognize that we are afflicted by many things - generationally, psychologically, physically, spiritually, etc.*



Check in - What is the connection between the prayer and your story today?

Deeper Reflection - What are the signs that you need to pay more attention to your mental health? How do you support your mental health?

Prayers - let's name (and write down) those who are struggling with mental health -

Collective Prayer

God, be with us -

We recognize that there is only "us" and no "them",
And we all are challenged to live through these days
healthy in body, mind, and spirit.

Bless those we have named aloud and written in silence,
That together we may access all that leads to health - prescriptions,
therapeutic options, spiritual care, companions, moving our bodies...
We are ever grateful that you meet us just where we are, gracious God,
And gently rock us into wholeness.

In your many names we pray, Amen.

Closing

Share resources for Mental Health support in your communities - and links to wider resources.



Characteristics & Role of the Facilitator

Leadership is “the quality of one’s capacity to be fully present, comprehend what is happening, hold steady in the field of action, and make choices regarding when and how to intervene from within the social group in ways that help the group to make progress on [its] issues.”

*Leadership Can Be Taught:
A Bold Approach for a Complex
World*
by Sharon Daloz Parks



Characteristics of an Effective Group Facilitator

Criteria for Facilitators of Communities of Practice

The pastors recruited to serve as Facilitators of Communities of Practice are carefully selected.

- They are experienced pastors who love ministry.
- They serve a healthy and vital congregation.
- They have known enough of the difficulties of church life not to be surprised by the challenges of ministry.
- They are deeply faithful and theologically inquisitive and articulate.
- They are emotionally mature.
- They are intellectually curious, and see themselves as learners, eager to continue developing as pastoral leaders.
- They are respected by their peers.
- They have a good relationship with and participate in the wider church.
- They are generous with their time and energy.
- They are full of grace, continually making room for others and giving love away, while also maintaining appropriate and respectful boundaries.
- They are known to respond quickly and creatively to new opportunities.
- They are confident in their own gifts, but humbly do not see themselves as “experts.”
- They are listeners before they are talkers.
- They are good at asking questions that invite others to explore issues more deeply.
- They hold a clear and deeply theological sense of what it means to offer hospitality to others.
- They are able to speak the truth in love and are willing to confront, if needed.
- They have the ability to stay “on the balcony” (see definition on the next page)
- They are able to pay attention to process.
- They are able to hold space for all to participate.



The Role of Facilitator

Host: The group facilitator sets the space (usually a room in his or her own church or home), puts the coffee on, arranges for lunch or snacks, and ensures that there will be no distractions or interruptions.

Administrator: The group facilitator keeps the meeting calendar, sends reminders, keeps track of the group's agenda from meeting to meeting, and writes and sends reports as needed.

Worship Leader: Some groups rotate worship leadership among members. Many, however, do not, relying on the group facilitator to plan and lead worship. Many pastors find group meetings to be one of the few places where they themselves get to worship fully.

Facilitator: The facilitator does not see him/herself as an expert or try to act like one! He or she attends to the group's process, listening more than speaking, asking questions rather than making statements, trusting the wisdom in the room and drawing it out, working to help the conversation move more deeply. The facilitator invites group members at every meeting to review learning, evaluate the group's process, and discern next steps.

Covenant Keeper: The facilitator calls the group back when it strays from its best intentions, including ensuring that airtime is shared, complaining is kept to a minimum, advice giving is restrained, and every member is held in high regard both personally and pastorally. The facilitator seeks to create an atmosphere of safety and mutual accountability, following up in the next meeting regarding goals and actions pastors may have set for themselves.

Stay on the Balcony: It is helpful for the facilitator to be on the balcony and to model this perspective for group participants as they formulate their questions for discussion. According to Heifetz and Linsky* achieving a balcony perspective means taking yourself out of the "dance" in order to gain both a clearer view of reality and some perspective on the bigger picture by distancing oneself from the fray.



1. What are my current strengths as a facilitator?

2. What are my current weaknesses/challenges as a facilitator?

32



On Not Being the Expert

As a facilitator—or as a group member—it is important to reflect on whether you tend to “show up” as the expert in the conversation.

Here are some questions to ask to reflect upon your own role:

1. Am I making space for the group’s members to explore their topic?
2. Am I clearly allocating enough time for this exploration?
3. Am I explicitly giving permission and support for the group to engage with each other around the case or problem situation/concern presented?
4. Am I filling up the space with ideas, reassurances, and brilliant suggestions?
5. Am I using the space instead of the case presenter or other members of the group?
6. Am I willing to let myself and the group go to edge of our own knowing to allow space for the Spirit to reveal something new and to change us?
7. Do I have ways of covering up anxious feelings? What are those?



PEOPLE LIVE IN THE WORLDS THEIR QUESTIONS CREATE¹

If you truly wish to change your world, you must change your way of asking questions. It could be that the moment you did so, a totally different world will take shape around you.²

“Research has found that the common denominator of 100 happy, successful people is that they all had the capability “to look for and find what is good in him or herself, in others, and in all life situations.”³ Words create worlds, so it would be important for facilitators to choose your questions intentionally and wisely from what is good or best in the situation and/or person.

Another aspect of asking questions carefully is based on the understanding that any group or organization is a system. Peter Steinke says: “Systems thinking is a way of thinking about life as all of a piece. It is a way of thinking about how the whole is arranged, how its parts interact, and how the relationships between the parts produce something new.”⁴ When questions are asked it is important to think about the system rather than looking for who or what is at fault, but rather that any person or event stands in relationship to something. Steinke goes on to say: “You cannot isolate anything and understand it. The parts function as they do because of the presence of the other parts. All parts interface and affect each other. Their behaviors are reciprocal to one another, mutually reinforcing. This change in one part of the process changes in another part, even in the whole. There is a “a ripple” through the system. No problem can be seen in isolation.”

Whenever humans interact, emotional and physical processes happen. When facilitators ask questions, it is important to keep in mind, as people of faith, that we are the “Body of Christ” and that one part of the body suffers, the whole body suffers. That would be true for all emotions. We also know that we are encouraged to love the Lord with our mind, body and spirit. It is important that our questions address the whole.

Many of the challenges with which we are dealing today are adaptive changes to the system as opposed to the everyday technical problems. Technical problems are those for which we have the know-how and procedures. Adaptive changes are those that “require experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments from numerous places in the organization or community. Without learning new ways - changing attitudes, values and behaviors - people cannot make the adaptive leap necessary to thrive in the new environment. The sustainability of change depends on having the people with the problem internalize the change itself.”⁵



“Adaptive change stimulates resistance because it challenges people’s habits, beliefs and values. It asks people to take a loss, experience uncertainty, and even express disloyalty to people and cultures.”⁶ Therefore, to ask appropriate and compelling questions in this environment facilitators must encourage the person with the problem to take a balcony view. To get this perspective the person must remove themselves from the problem (sometimes physically, but usually emotionally) and allow themselves to gain both a clearer view of reality and some perspective on the bigger picture.

It is helpful for the facilitator to understand the role, asking positive questions, using systems thinking and be aware of whether the changes are technical or adaptive, therefore, providing helpful questions with which group participants can grow. If you are interested in learning more about each of these areas, the resources below can be helpful.

SOME OPTIONAL EXERCISES:

For systems thinking:

Supplies - a long rope or yarn that would encircle the group.

1. Invite the group to stand in a circle shoulder to shoulder.
2. Circle the group with a rope.
3. The facilitator picks up the rope and invites each participant to pick up the part of the rope that is behind them so that the rope is taut around the circle.
4. Tell the participants that the rope is a very precious item and cannot be dropped.
5. Then the facilitator removes themselves and asks half of the participants to let go of the rope and leave the circle as well and encourage the remaining people to respond so that the rope does not fall on the floor.
6. Questions:
 - How did the system (participants and the rope) respond to the insertion of the facilitator?
 - How did the system (participants and the rope) respond to the vacating of half of the participants?
 - What does this tell you about the dynamics of systems in a group, congregation, community?



For positive, adaptive changes:

1. Invite participants to share an adaptive change with which they have dealt or are presently dealing.
2. What would they see if they took a balcony view of the situation?
3. What is one positive question that a facilitator could ask the participants to help him/her to think through the process of bringing about change?

A mindful exercise to help facilitators be present to their participants:

Supplies: Two or three balls about 10" - 15" in diameter (Balls need to be different from one another either in size, texture or color)

1. Invite participants to stand in a circle and raise one hand.
2. The facilitator will have a ball and will toss it to one person in the circle by first calling out the person's name.
3. The person who received the ball will put down their hand and catch the ball.
4. The person who received the ball will then call another person's name and toss the ball to that person.
5. The person who received the ball will put down their hand and catch the ball.
6. Continue this procedure until everyone in the circle has had the ball.
7. The last person will send the ball back to the facilitator.
8. The facilitator will then send the ball back to the same person to whom they first tossed the ball.
9. The participants will do the same.
10. The group will do this until they have learned the pattern.
11. When the group has established a pattern, the facilitator will introduce a second different ball. (The ball can be smaller or bigger, or a different color - just so the two balls can be distinguished from one another)
12. The facilitator and participants will proceed as before, but each person must toss the ball to someone different than they had passed to in the first round. (Make sure to have raised hands at the start.)
13. Continue the process until the second pattern is established.
14. The facilitator will now start the first ball to go around using the first pattern. Wait until the ball is in motion and then start the second ball



around using the second pattern.

15. Continue the process until the group can correctly move both balls from person to person.
16. If the group is courageous, they can take a third different ball and establish a third pattern. The facilitator will then start all three balls around the circle in their respective patterns.
17. Questions:
 - a. What was this experience like for you?
 - b. When you were receiving and tossing the ball, was your focus on yourself or on the ball, or the receiver?
 - c. What do you think happens when someone focuses on themselves fearing that they may make a mistake or drop the ball?
 - d. Having had this experience, what would you say it means “to be present” to the person with whom you are in conversation?
 - e. Have you been the recipient of that kind of presence from another individual? What was that like for you?

References:

¹Whitney, D., Copperrider, D., Trosten-Bloom, A., Kaplin, B., Encyclopedia of Positive Questions Vol. #1: Using Appreciative Inquiry to Bring Out the Best in Your Organization, Crown Custom Publishing, Brunswick, Ohio, 2005.

²Ibid

³Powell, John, Happiness Is An Inside Job, chapter 6, Thomas Moore Association

⁴Steinke, Peter, Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach, Alban Institute, Inc., 1996.

⁵Heifetz, Ronald A., Linsky, Marty, Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through The Dangers of Leading,” Harvard Business School Press, Boston, MA, 2002.

⁶Ibid

Footnotes:

Friedman, Edwin H. A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix, Seabury Books, New York, 2007.



Heifetz, Ronald A., Linsky, Marty, Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through The Dangers of Leading,” Harvard Business School Press, Boston, MA, 2002.

Powell, John, Happiness Is An Inside Job, chapter 6, Thomas Moore Association

Steinke, Peter, Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach, Alban Institute, Inc., 1996.

Whitney, D., Copperrider, D., Trosten-Bloom, A., Kaplin, B., Encyclopedia of Positive Questions Vol. #1: Using Appreciative Inquiry to Bring Out the Best in Your Organization, Crown Custom Publishing, Brunswick, Ohio, 2005.



Develop Your Repertoire of Questions

One temptation we might have as a clergy group facilitator is to think that we *have* to have *the* answers. Indeed, there will be times when we will offer a suggestion, our own advice or some alternatives for the clergy participants to consider. But our facilitator role is not constrained by the burden or the limitation of being the resident expert. We are not always helpful if we are only offering our own solutions.

Instead, as a facilitator, we can be most helpful when we ask questions that enable group member(s) to reflect upon their own experiences, to consider alternatives, and to decide on their next steps. When we ask questions that engage the group member in these sequenced and interrelated phases, we allow the member's own thinking to become visible to her or himself and to the group:

- Phase 1: Describe and reflect upon what is
- Phase 2: Consider possibilities of what could be
- Phase 3: Clarify purpose, intentions, or calling in this situation
- Phase 4: Discern and decide on a specific action or plan for what's next.

If we prematurely rush forward with advice, we may shortchange the development of description, reflection, imagination, theologizing, discernment and decision making that are implicit in these phases of inquiry.

An Optional Exercise: Make a list ahead of time of the kinds of questions you could ask in Phase 1 (Descriptive and Reflective), Phase 2 (Imaginative), Phase 3 (Purpose or Calling), and Phase 4 (Discernment and/or Decision).

Why Use Questions

In his book, *Leading with Questions*, Michael Marquardt, states that questions:

- *Cause the person to focus and to stretch.*
- *Create reflection.*
- *Challenge taken-for-granted assumptions that prevent people from acting in new and forceful ways.*
- *Generate courage and strength.*
- *Lead to breakthrough thinking.*
- *Contain the keys that open the door to create solutions.*
- *Enable people to better view the situation.*
- *Open doors in the mind and get people to think more deeply.*
- *Test assumptions and cause individuals to explore why they act in the way they do as well as why they choose to take action.*



The Types of Questions We Ask

From our own experience and from research on brain science, we know that merely giving advice does not often energize or motivate the other person. When we ask questions, we activate the brain activity of the other person who must then search through their own experiences, insights and motivations and make connections. When we ask questions, we allow for the heart to open to the group and to the Spirit.

David Rock offers these examples of the kinds of questions that could become part of the clergy group facilitator's repertoire:

<i>Ask questions that elicit the other's:</i>	<i>Examples:</i>
Thinking	How long have you been thinking about this? What are some of your current thoughts about this situation?
Vision	What do you want to achieve here?
Planning	What is your plan for achieving these outcomes?
Detail	Tell me about what you have done so far? What else do we need to know?
Drama	Tell me what you imagine will go wrong if you don't achieve your goals? What is the worst that could happen?
Theology	How is this grounded in your own theology of (church, ministry, salvation, etc.)?
Adapted from David Rock, <i>Quiet Leadership</i>	

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." -Matthew 7:7

*"Be patient toward all that is unresolved in your heart. Try to love the questions themselves.
Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given because you would not be able to live them.
And the point is to live everything. Live the question now.
Perhaps you will then gradually without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answers."
-Rilke*



Developing a Group Covenant

“Which commandment is the first of all?” Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” - Mark 12:28-31

Covenant Considerations

Why is it important to develop a group covenant?

What needs to be included?	Why is this important?



Developing a Covenant

- Arrangements for Meeting
- Expectations for Participation Sharing “Airtime”
- Developing Trust
- Developing Learning Practices
- Holding One Another Accountable
- Holding One Another in Prayer
- Authorizing the Facilitator
- Financial Commitment
- Adding New Members to the Group
- Clarity of the Duration of the Group



Encouraging Agency

As each group writes its own covenant, members are encouraged to take responsibility for their own participation in the group and for their own learning and development as pastors.

Two questions we invite every group member to answer are:

- What do you need this group to be and do in order to make an enthusiastic commitment to show up for every meeting?
- What do you need this group to be and do in order for it to make a positive difference in your life and ministry?

Clarifying Hopes*

Here is an exercise to use to help the group members clarify what they want to give and to receive from their group for their ministry.

Participants write the answers to two questions on file cards:

1. What do I hope to bring from my life and church to the group?
2. What do I hope to take from the group to my life and my church?

Answers are read aloud by the participants

The facilitator types up the responses and emails them to the participants for the next session.

Group members can then reflect upon what they have said and can include in their group's covenant statement those behaviors and agreements that allow their expectations and gifts to be fully utilized.

* Adapted from Robert Hill, *The Complete Guide to Small Group Ministry*



Touchstones for Creating Safe Space

(Adapted from Parker Palmer)

Come to this work with 100% of yourself. This means three things: to attend as faithfully as possible, to be as present to this work as we can be, and to bring all of who you are - your joys and successes, as well as your fears and failings.

Presume welcome and extend welcome. We all learn most effectively in hospitable spaces. Know that you are welcome, that you belong, and extend this welcome to others.

Speak your truth in ways that respect the truth of others. Speak from your own center to the center of the group, using “I” statements.

Share the airtime. Pay attention to how much of the group time you take. Every voice is important, and no single voice ought to dominate.

Listen to Silence. Silence is a rare gift in our busy world. Allow silence to be another member of the group.

If the going gets rough, turn to wonder. If you find yourself feeling uncomfortable with the perspective offered by another, try not to allow judgment to set in. Instead, become intrigued. Ask for more information and be open to the experiences of others. Differences offer us an opportunity to learn from one another.

Attend to your own inner teacher. Our time together also offers us an opportunity to learn from within. Pay attention to your own reactions and responses so that you can grow in self-awareness.

Keep the trust placed in you. Our work requires you to commit yourself to a special confidentiality which promises to hold with care the difficulties group members reveal to one another both inside and outside the group meeting.

No fixing. Offer advice or reflection when invited to do so, but otherwise avoid the temptation to fix, set-straight, or counsel another group member.

Believe that it is possible to emerge from this work refreshed, surprised and less burdened than when we came. Expect that your group’s work together can provide for renewal, refreshment and helpful perspectives.



Sample Group Covenant

*This Covenant is adapted from the Manual of the **Colleague** program of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.*

I declare my intention to be a faithful participant in this group for three years as long as I remain settled in a church in the area.

As a faithful participant I will attend every group meeting. If an emergency should prevent my attending, I will notify our facilitator.

I will recognize that the central purpose of our meeting is to engage in disciplined reflection on our questions, problems, and joys in ministry.

I will hold confidential all that occurs in our group meetings, sharing only that which is explicitly negotiated.

I will communicate honestly about myself and my experiences in ministry, even those which seem like failures, recognizing that from these experiences, through reflection with my group, I can most readily explore and enlarge my understanding of what it means to be an excellent pastor.

I will demonstrate respect for my colleagues by letting them see me as I am, not solely as I would like to be. I will demonstrate trust by allowing my colleagues their right to privacy, when they so choose.

I will seek opportunities to affirm and support the colleagues in my group, not forgetting that our leader is also my colleague.

I will pray for my colleagues in and between group meetings.

I will recognize the presence of God with us in all our doings—

- in our struggles and perplexities
- in our joy and laughter
- in our times of worship

and whenever we meet to search for ways to enhance ministry in our part of God's world.

Signature

Date



A Covenant Among Colleagues Written and Signed by a New Clergy Group in the Massachusetts Conference, United Church of Christ

Purpose

We join for worship, for fellowship, for learning, and for mutual support. We join an ongoing journey as a new group seeking to travel with Jesus on our way as clergy in the United Church of Christ. We expect to be a vehicle for growing in pastoral excellence. We hope to meet as a group for three years.

Uber-Promise

In the tradition of our Biblical ancestors, we promise to care for our shared journey and each other. We promise these things while invoking the companionship and witness of our God.

Promises

We promise to affirm each other's gifts, faithfulness, effort, and aspirations with the help of God.

With the help of God, we will place each other's growth and experience at the center our group's attention, honoring that manifestation of the Holy Spirit working out the will of God.

We will emulate God's ongoing, active presence in our lives so that with God's help and example, we can offer each other solidarity in our personal struggles. We recognize that sharing the same vocation may give us special insight.

We will use our individual resources of honesty, courage, insight, spirituality, and love to engage each other's stories with God's help.

We will attend to the group's growth, seeking growth through focused presentation, group discussion, worship, and other forms of experience.

We will honor each other's boundaries and specifically establish our group boundary that information shared in confidence will not be shared outside the group unless that sharing is explicitly negotiated.

We will lift our group experience and each other in prayer to our God.

Signs - We know we are keeping our promises when

- We feel drawn to each meeting with eagerness We find ways to deepen our relationship
- We anticipate each other's contributions



with positive expectation We engage in a conversation

- We begin to remember specifics about each other
- While tender with each other, we are also bold to challenge each other
- We show good stewardship of our time together, for example, ending when we say we will end We know we are straying from this shared commitment when
- Our focus is elsewhere during meetings, meeting after meeting We feel our voice is unheard
- We hear our own voice exclusively We feel unsafe
- We feel bored

Techniques

- We will sometimes ask each other questions in the spirit of reaching clarity (rather than questions that are assertions in disguise).
- We will sometimes use storytelling as a way to open a new perspective, affirm what someone has just said, etc., as a way to affirm how storytelling is central to our call and our faith and our God.

Together we covenant to journey together with these promises and practices as our guide. (Each member of the group signed the covenant).



PAGE LEFT INTENTIONALLY BLANK



Clergy Group Meeting Practices and Formats

Heather's Best Practices for Online Groups

- Use a video conferencing software program. Examples are Skype, Zoom, and Google Hangout. Zoom is most familiar to a majority of the population, so that would be the top suggestion.

Security Best Practices

- When setting up the meeting link, be sure...
 - A password or authentication process is enabled and embedded in the link that is sent out.
 - To check the setting so that only the host can share their screen (and others only with permission from the host).
 - Enable the “mute participants upon entry” to prevent background and additional noise interrupting conversations when people join. Participants can then unmute themselves when ready.

Note: A waiting room further protects the meeting from uninvited guests, but if other best practices are followed, it may not be necessary.

- Only share the meeting link/info with participants directly (i.e., via email or private/direct message). Never post the link in public or even semi-public spaces like websites, FB pages, etc.
- Have a backup plan in case the meeting is disrupted by an uninvited guest (“Zoom-bomber”). For example, once a disruption begins
 - Everyone logs out immediately and the host ends the meeting for all.
 - The facilitator creates and sends out a new link via an agreed upon communication process (i.e., text, email, message, etc.).
 - All participants rejoin the meeting

~OR~

- Lock the meeting
- And/or enable the waiting room
- Remove the disruptor(s) from the meeting (and block them from re-entry).
- Continue your session in the same meeting link.



Maintaining online community

- Incorporate technology boundaries into the Covenant, such as
 - While on the video call, all agree to be fully present and focused (and not multi-tasking)
 - The group agrees to minimize background noise whenever possible and/or to stay muted when not speaking.
- When sharing worship or reading, avoid unison prayers or group singing unless only 1 voice is leading and all others are muted.
- When using interactive conversation or exercises or wanting to hear from everyone, use...
 - Mutual invitation (someone speaks and then chooses the next person to invite to speak),
 - Hand raising (either literally or using something like the hand “reactions” in Zoom),
 - Facilitated round robins to invite everyone to speak or share questions (facilitator calls on each individual)

Technical Tips

- Using headsets, headphones or ear buds helps improve sound quality for everyone.
- If a participant is struggling with sound or video...
 - encourage them to log out of the meeting and rejoin.
 - If that does not work, encourage them to log out, close their browser, restart their browser and rejoin.
 - If it is a sound issue, also have them unplug their headphones and try the sound again without them.

When sharing a video, be sure to select “Share computer audio” so everyone can hear it. This can be found in the initial Share Screen popup box and in the floating control bar at the top. Once the video has begun and the sound is working, do not mute yourself or the video sound will also be muted.



Facilitating a Community of Practice Online

Many of the same processes that you would use in a face-to-face group, you also want to use as your group meets virtually (either on a conference call or a videoconference service).

It helps that you have actually met face-to-face once and taken time to launch the group. As the facilitator, you will have to reinforce those practices that build community and keep you focused on your aims. Overtime, members of the group will be part of that “reinforcing”, and you will only need to occasionally remind people of the covenant, time frame, focus for the call, etc. Here are some reminders and suggestions:

Send out a reminder to the group about the upcoming meeting date and time and always include the dial-in information in that communication. If you are using a videoconferencing service, ask them to “sign up” ahead and/or download the software (if needed.)

Create the climate of the group. Keep in mind that each person in the group (whether they state it or not) has a need to (a) feel included, (b) feel that they have some influence on the group and (c) feel that there is a climate of openness. As a facilitator, you may need to be intentional about ensuring that these needs are attended to in as you are *listening in a particular way*—not just to the content of the group, but to the group ambience as well.

Have a common visual focus. If you are doing a conference call, then your common visual focus will be the simple agenda sent out ahead of time. If you are using a videoconferencing service, each person speaking will be the visual focus.

Have a simple structure. If you have a similar structure for the conversation people will know what to expect and will help self-manage how the time is used. Review this “agenda” ahead of time (by email and/or in the introduction to the call.) Having an outline of the “agenda” for the call gives you a common visual focus. For example:

- Welcome each member by name as they come on the call
- Review the plan for the meeting
- Give each person an opportunity to check in briefly at the beginning



of the call. This is a way to become “present” to one another as you are beginning.

- Begin with an opening prayer(s)
- You may also decide that you want to invite a timed, deeper check-in after each person has spoken in the brief check-in
- Introduce the focus of the group (a prepared case study, a common focused topic, more in-depth conversation with each other around varied topics, etc.)
- Discuss the next meeting plan (e.g., focused topic that emerged during this call, who will present a case study, etc.)
- Quick evaluation of the meeting: What went well? What could be improved? Suggestions for improvement? (always do this briefly in a virtual call)
- Closing prayer

Ground Rules are important. You may want to add a ground rule of “Be 100% present.” This is another way of asserting that there should be “No multi- tasking during the call (e.g., checking e-mail, working on computer, answering other phone calls, etc.) It seems obvious, and we are also living in a time when many of us are so used to this that we are not even aware of doing it and the impact that it has on others when we are not 100% present. If there is background noise in the setting where the person is making the call, then encourage the person to put their phone on mute until ready to speak.

“Hold the space.” As a facilitator, it will be your role to “hold the space” so that people who are not necessarily in the same room with each other— have a sense of being together and learning and working together in the community of practice. You may need to invite participation and/or ask someone if they are finished— since the usual visual cues are not there and people might tend to speak over one another. You will make sure that the “airtime” is shared.

Invite in the visual cues now, especially in a conference call. “If we were seeing you right now, what would we be noticing about your expression or how you were sitting or expressing yourself with your body while you were talking?” This allows us to make present to one another what would otherwise not be “seen.” It allows the possibility for fuller communication than what we might hear from a person’s words.



Allow silence as a teacher. Occasionally invite in a time of silence before someone else speaks or before moving from one activity to another. When silences come into the group you might ask, “What is this silence saying to us?” or “How is this silence our teacher as well?” or “What do you hear within yourself during this silence?”

Use “round robins” occasionally. This is when you intentionally go around, and everyone shares something on a topic or a reaction to what has been said or shared (if invited.) The person can feel free to “pass” or “pass for now.”

Use your intuition. Sometimes as a facilitator even though you can’t “see” the participant on a call, you get some intuitive sense or gut feeling. If so, you might choose to share this as a question, “Are you saying...”, or “I wonder...”



PAGE LEFT INTENTIONALLY BLANK



Launching a New Group: The First Meetings

Opening Worship For many of your group members, this may be one of the few occasions that they themselves get to worship. This is also an opportunity to foster prayer practices or other spiritual disciplines. It is suggested that the facilitator be the most consistent worship leader. Think creatively and prepare intentionally for worship.

Brief Introductions Participants take time to share their names, the setting where they serve and for how long and very briefly how they are doing physically, mentally, and/or spiritually. Agree upon a time frame up front. (e.g., each person shares for 2 or 3 minutes. Time for longer introductions follows).

Orientation and Creating a Covenant The first meetings are an opportunity for each person to discuss what they hope and expect from this group and to create a group covenant. This is also an opportunity for the group to explore what it means to focus both on support and on learning. (Questions to consider in creating a covenant and sample covenants are included in this manual).

If possible, by the end of the third meeting, the group should review the covenant it has drafted and reach a common agreement. Having group members sign a written document underlines the commitment. On the basis of this covenant the group's members can hold one another accountable to participation in the group.



Becoming a Group

Becoming a community of trust requires intentionality. Taking time for each person to tell something of his or her own story in ministry enables members to get to know and appreciate one another more fully, laying a foundation for collegial sharing and friendship.

Some groups have appreciated sharing the stories of their call to ministry. Others have invited members to choose a Scripture passage and explain how it informs their ministry.

At the second meeting, it is important that members also introduce the group to the settings where they serve. One facilitator urged the members of his group to present their congregations not “as a set of problems to be solved,” but as a community they have joined.

Preparing for the next meeting

Schedule the next meetings. We have discovered the groups that have the most consistent attendance establish a regular monthly meeting time, e.g., the first Thursday morning of each month, so that members can plan their lives accordingly.

Touch base on what will happen in the next meeting: continued introductions and developing the covenant or identify a particular topic that the group members will explore together or begin a practice of sharing case studies. Identify whose turn it will be.

Closing Evaluation and Prayer

Before closing ask, “What from this meeting do we want to be sure to continue in future meetings and what do we want to do differently?”

The facilitator offers a closing prayer or members may offer one another words of blessing.



Format of a Clergy Group Meeting

Model 1: Focusing on a Case Study

Opening Worship	Light a candle and set a table in keeping with the liturgical season, read and reflect on a biblical text, spend time in extended prayer. Be creative and be intentional. Creating a holy space may be the most important thing you do for your group.
Check-In	Participants take time to share, usually one at a time, how they are doing physically, mentally, and/or spiritually. Agree on how long each person will share and keep time. New clergy, in particular, appreciate having an opportunity for longer check-ins. Encourage members of your group to develop a practice of preparing what they would like to share before they arrive, so that the time is used well. You may have this be open-ended or choose a focus question. (Examples are included in this manual).
Focus	A case study is presented by a member of the group on a particular problem or situation.
Clarifying Questions	Before launching into a discussion of the case it may be helpful to make sure that any questions for information or clarification are asked. Ask the presenter: "What would you like for us to focus on in this case study?" "What help do you need in particular?"
Interaction around the case	Encourage the group to interact with the presenter by attending to the type of feedback he or she is requesting.
Checking in with the presenter	Following the interaction around the case, ask the presenter, "What are you taking away from this discussion?" "What do you want to do or not do differently?"
Group Reflection	In these sessions in which there has been primarily one case presenter, go around and ask each participant to reflect on what he/she has learned from this case for their own ministry or what issues/concerns the case brought up for him/her. "What are you taking away from this case for your own ministry?"



**Housekeeping
Details**

Touch base on: Who will be doing the case next time,
etc. Remind everyone of the next meeting.

Closing Prayer

Close with a prayer or blessing.



Format of a Clergy Group Meeting

Model 2: Focusing on a Topic

Opening Prayer	Be creative and be intentional. Creating a holy space for prayer and reflection may be the most important thing you do for your group.
Check-In	<p>Participants take time to share, usually one at a time, how they are doing physically, mentally, and/or spiritually.</p> <p>Agree on how long each person will share and keep time. New clergy, in particular, appreciate having an opportunity for longer check-ins. Encourage members of your group to develop a practice of preparing what they would like to share ahead of time, so that the time is used well. You may have this be open-ended or choose a focus question. (Examples are included in this manual).</p>
Focus	This may be a discussion on a particular practice of ministry (e.g., rites and sacraments, leading through conflict; living a balanced life; stewardship; seasonal preaching).
Clarifying Questions	Before launching into a discussion of the topic it may be helpful to make sure that any questions for information or clarification are asked. What do you want to focus on regarding this topic? What questions or concerns are you bringing?"
Interaction around the topic	This can be done in a variety of ways. Discuss a topic that everyone has had time to reflect on during the past month. Reflect on an article that everyone has read together ahead of time. (A few samples are included in this resource manual). Share resources that everyone has brought from their own practice. (e.g., stewardship materials, wedding or baptism services, sermons, adult ed. lesson plans).
Group Reflection and Evaluation	<p>Following the interaction around the topic, ask each group member:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "What are you taking away from this discussion for your own ministry?"• "What do you want to do or not do differently?"



Closing Prayer

This may be a familiar prayer, or a prayer offered by the leader to close the group, or a blessing that members offer one another.



Practice: Focus on an Opening Question

Examples:

1. What question lies at the heart of your ministry right now?
2. How have you experienced God in your life/ministry in this past month?
3. What question, if answered, could provide you guidance for your ministry right now?
4. What scripture (hymn, chapter title, etc.) characterizes your ministry right now?
5. How would a (particular) member of your congregation describe your ministry right now? (You may choose someone who is not the usual suspect for this question—not a board member, not a critic, etc.).
6. In what ways are you experiencing the prodding of the Spirit in your life/ministry right now?



Case Study Preparation Sample Written Format

Note: The write up should not exceed 3 pages (1 to 2 is better).

Timeline: Create a timeline indicating the sequence of issues as they unfold. To the extent possible, indicate that the timeline references critical decision points or pieces of conversation and each of the stages of any interventions.

Background: Is there background information or history that is helpful in setting the situation in context?

Issues and Assumptions: Define the presenting issues from your perspective and the questions the situation raises for you.

Reason for the Case Study: What prompted you to select this case to study?

Looking Back: In hindsight, what might you have done differently?

Feedback: What kind of feedback are you seeking? Are you asking for others simply to listen? To ask clarifying questions? Do you want to know if anyone else has experienced something similar and to hear what they did? Or what they might do if they were in your shoes? Do you want to explore with the group what wisdom about pastoral leadership might be gleaned from the case study?



Practice: Exegeting the Congregation^{*}

1. Which stories are repeated with greatest frequency in the recounting of the congregation's own story?
2. What is the founding story of this congregation? How do the theme(s) in that story still resonate within the life of the congregation today?
3. Who are identified as heroes in the stories of congregational life, and what are the qualities that have made them so? (Are there identified villains?)
4. What are the silences in the storytelling of the congregation—the things everyone knows (or at least all the insiders), but no one talks about? What do those silences tell you about the congregation?
5. Are there any recurring images or metaphors in the congregational story as people tell it that give you insight into how they perceive themselves and the world? (Do members speak about being a “haven” or other images?)
6. Is there any common dream or vision that seems to unite these people as they move toward their common future?
7. If you were to plot the story of this congregation, like the plot of a novel, what would that plot look like?

^{*} Adapted from Tisdale, Leonora Tubbs. *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997



Practice: Moving along a Spectrum^{*}

Not all change is “transformative” - but each level of change has a gradually higher degree of demand and potential resistance from the congregation.

Ask any of the following questions in a case study presentation/interaction:

- **How do you want to Maintain _____:** Actively holding on to something that is already being done.
- **How do you want to Reinforce _____:** A decision to strengthen a particular process in the congregation’s life (committing additional resources to an effort.)
- **How do you want to Build Upon _____:** Not changing the overall direction of a core emphasis but altering one or more aspects of an emphasis that is already present. Simply making alterations in the frequency, times, or focus of an emphasis.
- **How do you want to Redefine _____:** Calling the congregation to examine basic assumptions about why we do what we do.
- **How do you want to Retool _____:** A step beyond redefining, it takes new goals, hopes and dreams, and crafts existing structures into forms that can support these fresh ways. It addresses distinct areas of a congregation’s life more than it does the whole life of the church.
- **How do you want to Restructure _____:** In contrast to retooling, which focuses on an area of a congregation’s life, restructuring dares to look at the wholesale remodeling of the way we are organized as a congregation to accomplish our ministry and mission. (What is God calling us to be and do as a congregation?)
- **How do you want to Renew _____:** Turns the congregation upside down - inside out, calling the congregation to a whole new self-awareness and commitment to its mission. A Rebirth.

^{*} From *Welcoming Resistance* by William Chris Hobsgood (Alban Institute)



Devotions

“The pastor’s question is, ‘Who are these particular people, and how can I be with them in such a way that they can become what God is making them? My job is simply to be there, teaching, preaching Scripture as well as I can, and being honest with them, not doing anything to interfere with what the Spirit is shaping in them. Could God be doing something that I never thought of?’”

The Contemplative Pastor by Eugene Peterson



PAGE LEFT INTENTIONALLY BLANK



Sample Devotions for Communities of Practice

A Service of Prayer (Sample Worship for Clergy Group)

Opening

Hebrews 10:24-25

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another.

Prayer

Erasmus (1469-1536)

Lord Jesus Christ,
You are the sun that always rises but never sets.
You are the source of all life,
 creating and sustaining every living thing.
You are the source of all food, material and spiritual,
 nourishing us in both body and soul
You are the light that dispels the clouds of error and doubt, and
 goes before me every hour of the day,
 guiding my thoughts and actions.
May we walk in your light,
be sustained by your mercy,
and be warmed by your love. Amen.

Scripture Readings

From *The Message*

Moses raised another objection to God: "Master, please, I don't talk well. I've never been good with words, neither before nor after you spoke to me. I stutter and stammer." . . . God said, "I'll be right there with you—with your mouth! I'll be right there to **teach** you what to say." (Exodus 4:10-12)

My **teaching** is as precious as your eyesight - guard it! Write it out on the back of your hands; etch it on the chambers of your heart. Talk to Wisdom as to a sister. Treat Insight as your companion. (Proverbs 7:1)

Then they entered Capernaum. When the Sabbath arrived, Jesus lost no time in getting to the meeting place. He spent the day there **teaching**. They were surprised at his **teaching**—so forthright, so confident—not quibbling and quoting like the religion scholars. (Mark 1:21)

Now Jesus turned to address his disciples, along with the crowd that had gathered with them. "The religion scholars and Pharisees are competent **teachers** in God's Law. You won't go wrong in following their **teachings** on



Moses. But be careful about following them. They talk a good line, but they don't live it. They don't take it into their hearts and live it out in their behavior. (Matthew 23:1)

Later a few religion scholars and Pharisees got on him. "**Teacher**, we want to see your credentials. Give us some hard evidence that God is in this. How about a miracle?" (Matthew 12:38)

But they were vehement. "He's stirring up unrest among the people with his **teaching**, disturbing the peace everywhere, starting in Galilee and now all through Judea." (Luke 23:5)

Then he said, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You address me as '**Teacher**' and 'Master,' and rightly so. That is what I am. So, if I, the Master and **Teacher**, washed your feet, you must now wash each other's feet. I've laid down a pattern for you. What I've done, you do. (John 13:12)

If you preach, just preach God's Message, nothing else; if you help, just help, don't take over; if you **teach**, stick to your **teaching**; if you give encouraging guidance, be careful that you don't get bossy; if you're put in charge, don't manipulate; if you're called to give aid to people in distress, keep your eyes open and be quick to respond; if you work with the disadvantaged, don't let yourself get irritated with them or depressed by them. (Romans 12:6)

Oh! **Teach** us to live well! **Teach** us to live wisely and well! . . . Surprise us with love at daybreak; then we'll skip and dance all the day long. (Psalm 90)

Teach me how to live to please you, because you're my God. Lead me by your blessed Spirit into cleared and level pastureland. (Psalm 143)

Silence

Shared Reflection "A Teachable Spirit"

*Reflecting on these Scripture verses and our work together,
what does it mean to have a teachable spirit? What does a
teachable spirit look like?*

Blessing

Phillips Brooks

Jesus said, "You ought always to pray and not to faint."
Do not pray for easy lives;
pray to be stronger women and men. Do not pray for tasks equal
to your powers, but for power equal to your tasks.



Then, the doing of your work will be no miracle -
you will be the miracle.

Every day you will wonder at yourself and the richness of your life which has come
to you by the grace of God.



COP Devotional Ecclesiastes - seasons

Welcome

Devotional Scripture 1: *For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven—a time to be born, a time to die; a time to plant, a time to pluck up what is planted; 11: (God) has made everything suitable for its time; moreover (God) has put a sense of past and future into (our) minds, yet (we) cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. ... 14: I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it... .*

Ecclesiastes 3:1. 11, 14 [NRSV]

Prayer

Generous God,

We offer you the fruits of our time, talents and resources
in celebration of all that we have been given.

Loving God, we give you thanks for all that we have
and ask a special blessing on the fruits we have given back
to help meet the needs of your beloved community.

May the gifts nourish and strengthen the community to
grow spiritually, emotionally, and physically.

In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Check in - Where is the harvest, what are the falling leaves, and/or the buried bulbs?

Focus question - What are your hopes for this season of COP?

Deeper questions - What is difficult in your work?

What support do you need to overcome the challenges and realize your hopes?

Closing Prayer

Let us go forth thankful that we have come.

Let us go forth renewed in God's abiding love.

And let us go forth rejoicing in the Good News,
of Jesus Christ, whose love will never let us go. Amen.

Abiding in Love: Service Prayers for the Fifth Sunday of Easter Year B, was written by the Rev. Dr. Sheila Harvey Guillaume, pastor of Union Congregational United Church of Christ in West Palm Beach.



A COP Devotional for Facilitators Found Tonight + Womanist Lord's Prayer

Welcome

Introduction

One thing you have learned while leading a community?

Check in - What is one thing that's capturing your imagination?

Prayer

A womanist version of the Lord's Prayer, used at Grace Cathedral at the Beyonce Mass. Author: Rev. Yolanda Norton.

Our Mother,
who is in heaven and within us,
we call upon your names.

Your wisdom come.

Your will be done,
in all the spaces in which you dwell.

Give us each day
sustenance and perseverance.

Remind us of our limits as
we give grace to the limits of others.

Separate us from the temptation of empire,
and deliver us into community.

For you are the dwelling place within us,

the empowerment around us,

and the celebration among us,

now and forever. Amen.

Deeper introductions

What is one way that you living into God's call on your life?
What is one thing that's getting in the way?



Found Tonight - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2aQykulaJVI>

Deeper Reflections -

What are the stories you are telling about these times? How does this impact your leadership as a facilitator?

How are you being “found”? How are you creating ways for the pastors in your group to be seen (aka “found”)?

Prayers to hold for each other

Evaluation

Group questions - what do you need from this facilitator group?
what do you hope to receive from it?

Close - Simple prayer



Community of Practice Engagement with the Marks Rev Richard Slater

A Thought for the Beginning of our Time Together

“Behold God beholding you . . . and smiling.” Anthony de Mello SJ

Responsive Reading “God of My Life” by Karl Rahner

- (1) Only in love can I find you, my God.
 - (2) In love the gates of my soul spring open,
allowing me to breathe a new air of freedom
and forget my own petty self.
 - (3) In love my whole being streams forth
out of the rigid confines of narrowness and anxious self-assertion,
which makes me a prisoner of my own poverty and emptiness.
 - (4) In love all the powers of my soul flow out toward you,
wanting never more to return,
but to lose themselves completely in you,
since by your love you are the inmost center of my heart,
closer to me than I am to myself.
-
- (1) But when I love you, when I manage to break out of the narrow circle of self
and leave behind the restless agony of unanswered questions,
 - (2) When my blinded eyes no longer look merely from afar and from the outside
upon your unapproachable brightness,
 - (3) and much more when you yourself, O Incomprehensible One,
have become through love the inmost center of my life
 - (4) then I can bury myself entirely in you, O mysterious God, and with myself
all my questions.

Questions for Conversation:

- What words or phrases in this poem catch your attention?
- The Sunday of Transfiguration is at hand, inviting us to reflect on the mystery of the Christ’s nature. What mysteries might you name that connect you to the Christ?



Prayer for One Another

A Deep Checking in with One Another - let's spend some relaxed time in conversation with one another. If the questions below are helpful (they were prepared for use at the COP retreat in December), please frame your sharing around one or more of the questions.

Conversation Topics Rooted in the Marks (The acronyms in parentheses point toward a Mark, ex. PTP - Participating in Theological Praxis)

One of the Marks of Ministry is ongoing discernment of call in community. Share a little bit about how you are feeling called right now. How has this changed over time for you? What role has your community played? What is your WHY in judicatory ministry? **(ESFOP)**

Identify areas where you would like to see your conference's ministry grow and move in the next two to three years. How do you understand your role in bringing that movement? **(BTLS)**

Describe ways in which you or your setting confront injustice, oppression or practice radical hospitality. **(WTJM)**

What of this conversation can you take with you into the next weeks?
Is there one place you are ready to make a commitment to growth?

Shared Prayers

Closing



COP Devotional Beatitudes Weariness Fall 2021

Check In:

What are you harvesting?
What are the leaves that you are releasing?
What bulbs have been planted for the spring?

Prayer from the Beatitudes

Blessed are you who are weary and burdened,
You whose heart aches with the news of the day,
May ease find its way into your being,
Softening your heart as you rest
In God's promise of love.

Blessed are you with chaotic minds,
You who carry schedules and to-do lists,
May Grace whisper softly with a gentle reminder:
You are enough. You are enough.
You are enough.

Blessed are you with tension in your neck,
You who are worried, tired, or stressed,
May the breath of the Spirit fill your lungs,
Stilling your thoughts, softening your brow,
Unclenching your jaw.

Blessed are you with a weary heart,
You who carry the weight of the world,
May the peace that passes all understanding,
Work its way into every crevice of your being,
And fill you with Love.

Amen.

Adapted by Pastor Kelsey Beebe and shared with permission

Response Question - what word or phrase resonated for you?

Reflection

"This is what I want to tell you: You don't have to make yourself suffer in order to serve. You don't have to grind your bones into the ground. You don't have to cut your life up into pieces and give yourself away until there is nothing left. You belong to a community and a broader movement. Your life has value. We need you



alive. We need you to last. You will not last if you are not breathing. Place a hand on your chest. Take a deep breath. Feel your belly fill up. Hold the inhale for four counts. Feel the suspension. Now exhale for eight counts. Feel your heart beating in your chest. You are alive. You are here.” From “See No Stranger” by Valarie Kaur

Engagement

Practice the breathing she names.

Share how you are feeling with the group.

Where have you learned about service and limits?

What do you need to sustain you through Advent?

How can the COP support that good and faithful work?

Prayers of the People

Holy God,

the world in which we live is as terrifying as it is wonderful.

We need Jesus as much today as in times of old.

Many sow in tears, and go out weeping.

Offer prayers for those things that cause you to weep

Replenish our lands,

fill our hearts with gladness,

restore our faith in you and each other,

wipe away the tears of despair.

Offer prayers for those things bringing deep gladness

As we leave this gathering today,

we tilt an ear to listen close.

To let the voice of your angel fill our minds with new understandings.

We are waiting for you. Speak to us again. Amen.

— written by Rev. Penny L. Lowes (and adapted for our use), Senior Pastor at the Congregational Church in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. These resources are part of a larger collection called [*From Tears to Rejoicing: Service Prayers for the Third Sunday of Advent.*](#) They were posted on the [Worship Ways](#) website of the United Church of Christ.

Closing

God be with you until we meet again.



Resources



PAGE LEFT INTENTIONALLY BLANK



Special Considerations for Member In Discernment Communities of Practice

In many ways, the MID Community of Practice is set up and run like any other Community of Practice. They have the same three foci; 1. The Focus is ministry, 2. The community is essential and 3. The knowledge is practice based. However, there are some needs and differing realities facing any given group of MIDs that require some extra attention in the formation and leadership of these groups.

Given that The Manual on Ministry (2018) affirms multiple paths to ministry, a MID COP group may be more vocationally diverse than other COPs. MIDs may be in seminary fulltime or part time, bi-vocational, attending seminary in person or online, attending a regional theological education program in person or online or working on some other educational path approved by a local Committee on Ministry. They can also be more geographically diverse than usual, attending farther flung seminaries or practical work out of state. More and more, MIDs are pursuing a wider selection of ministerial positions; local church ministry, military, medical or corporate chaplaincy and other settings or ministries that have not been dreamed of yet.

How then do you best gather a focused, practice-based community in this type of complexity? What follows are some best practice suggestions from one COP coordinator. These suggestions are grounded in practical experience with coordinating an Association-based MID COP and are in no particular order.

Practice 1: Allow the MID process to be central

Given that their settings are more diverse, the one thing that the group has in common is the MID process. They are in a process of discernment that is life-changing and career-forming. It is important to allow space for their discussions and support of each other's process. This is also a wonderful time to teach the importance of covenant within the MID process between the MIDs and COMs (who can sometimes be seen as gatekeepers instead of partners) in preparation for the covenants of ministry that will last a lifetime.

Practice 2: Meet primarily online, offer at least a yearly retreat

We learned this lesson well during the COVID pandemic in the 2020s. We had no option but to hold COP groups online. The MID group I led in this time were at educational institutions in Minnesota, Iowa and California, served as National Staff, had been licensed ministers in rural settings for over 20 years, were serving local churches full and part time and current chaplains in another region of the state we are in. Having the option of (at-least) yearly retreats, usually around Christmas or in the summer when



seminarians are more likely to be “home” for a season, invites deeper relationships, the opportunity to eat together and share the blessing of communion.

Options for this retreat include bringing in a leader for a one- or two-day retreat, including a meal with the local COM (this helps both groups to be more connected in the processes they are both attending to) or studying a particular book or text. The more time offered for deepening relationships, the better.

Practice 3: Use the Marks of Effective and Faithful Ministry as a grounding (devotional) practice

The Marks have become central in the life of active, retired and aspiring ministers alike. MIDs, due to the processes of ordination, sometimes approach these as a checklist of things they must master, instead of a way to discern their best skills and callings in the ministry. Encountering the Marks throughout your meetings as an inspiration for liturgy or devotion can be a way into the theology behind the Marks and, as a bonus, can help later when preparing for ordination when COMs often require an interaction with the Marks either in a portfolio or ordination paper.

Practice 4: Gather MIDs by their timing in the MID process

It is best practice to start a new MID COP each year with MIDs that have just entered the process in the last year. As said in Practice 1, today’s MIDs are vocationally diverse, therefore their commonality, their basis for conversation, their shared knowing is in the process. It helps when they are all in a similar phase.

Practice 5: The life of the Group is 3-5 years

The group is gathered at the beginning of their process, so it makes sense for the group to have a metered end after they have travelled through the MID process together. Some groups have a rule that when someone is approved for ordination, they fall away from the COP group. Others leave after their ordination. In either case, I encourage the use of some form of leaving service to acknowledge the change in the group. The way the group ends could be delineated in the group’s opening covenant. It is my experience that 3-5 years is about the time in which the process has, or is, coming to an end and these individuals are (hopefully) ready to enter into other COP groups brought together by affinities or ministry settings.

These practices are by no means exhaustive, nor required for MID COP groups. As always, listen for what the Spirit is saying is needed in the moment. These times of developing vocation are essential, yet unsettling for some. Empathy for the diversity of emotions that may surface is essential. In this, the facilitator has the most important role of modelling compassion in the moment and inviting the group



to work through the emotions raised. These practices will enable your MID group to be an essential support throughout the process toward ordination.

With appreciation for the work of all supporting the MID process, and respectfully submitted by Rev. Anissa Glaser-Bacon



PAGE LEFT INTENTIONALLY BLANK



Together We Thrive Coaching Program

Difference Between Facilitating and Other Helping Professionals

What guidance can a Coach provide?

When working with individuals, a Coach uses Deep Listening and Powerful Questions to structure a process that helps draw out the wisdom within the client. The focus of coaching is to address tasks and performance so that the client's goals can be achieved.

Can a Coach work with churches or groups like a leadership team?

Absolutely! Whether your congregation is wanting to do the work of revisioning, is looking to turn a vision statement into an action plan, is moving through a big change, or is discerning the future of its ministry, a Together We Thrive Professionally trained Clergy Coach can be an excellent resource for your process.

How does Group Coaching work?

Coaches bring curiosity and strategic questions to any process and are gifted in pinpointing a group's shared values and common priorities. The work of a Coach brings increased communication, improved effectiveness and great efficiency. Our Coaches are not subject matter experts; they are proficient in the art form of coaching. Using specific interventions and techniques, a Clergy Coach can journey alongside a group and support them to hear one another more clearly, challenge limiting assumptions, and communicate more effectively. A Coach assists in finding common ground and a common page, turning conversations into action, developing a plan for moving forward, diffusing tensions, and encouraging healthy group dynamics. Because Coaches can use a variety of frameworks and strategies, they are able to work with a wide range of topics, dynamics and needs.

If you are interested in knowing more, read our FAQ, contact the TWT Program Director (see below) or complete one of the request forms at the bottom of the page.

How is Coaching different?

The following Information is created by Claire W. Bamberg, D.Min, LMFT, MCC. Potentials Coaching and Consulting, LLC 2019. Claire@potentials.us

- 1) The **facilitator** often interprets what is being said to serve a certain goal, or desired outcome that "will"/" should be" the goal. A facilitator, by definition, is facilitating a particular conversation. In coaching none of this is true. The **coach** does not have an agenda, and coaches to a goal set by the client at the beginning of each session.



- 2) Sometimes people use the words **mentoring** and **coaching** interchangeably, but they *do not* describe the same type of working relationship. While **mentoring** emphasizes both the professional and personal development of the individual, it assumes that the mentor offers from their own life experience to instruct and guide the mentored in some way. **Coaching** is a more formal, contracted, and structured association, focused on improvements in behavior and performance in the coachee's life, to resolve present work issues, handle specific aspects of the job or personal life. The coaching client defines the focus of their time and the pace of their work. The coach respects the coachee's pace, perspective, focus, and growth path are their own to identify and to articulate.
- 3) A **consultant** is expected to be a subject matter expert and is called upon for professional or technical advice, guidance and/or opinions. A **coach** does *not* function as a subject matter expert, and does not need to be, in order to coach the client. Consulting is unlike coaching in many ways, and primarily because with "pure coaching" answers come from within the client. I tell my students that *not* knowing is their best coach-approach.
- 4) A **mental health professional** (therapist, counselor) seeks to explore the underlying dynamics of an individual, their family and their relationships. Counselors and coaches both ask questions, but counselors tend not to focus on tasks and performance potential. In **therapy**, one "works to achieve wellness", whereas in **coaching** one focuses more on increasing capacity and reaching goals. In coaching one does not focus on symptoms or draw conclusions. The coach is there to help the clients achieve success. In the discipling of coaching, it is said that **therapy** focuses on archeology while **coaching** focuses on architecture.
- 5) **Spiritual Direction** is the focused practice of facilitating or fostering a person's relationship with their faith tradition. While a coachee may also choose to **coach** around/about their spiritual life, this is not the primary focus of the coaching relationship. By definition, a spiritual director, directs. A coach questions, and goes where the client leads, meeting them where they are.
- 6) **Training** is all about the acquisition and development of knowledge and skills. As a trainer, you must rely upon tools other than asking questions such as lecturing, giving feedback on assignments, and in some cases, offering evaluative feedback.
- 7) A **manager** seeks to assure themselves, or their supervisor, that an individual who is the focus of their attention "does his/her job" or "fulfills



his/her contractual duties,” as the manager understands them. The manager holds authority over the other and provides evaluation of their job performance.

A **facilitator’s** role is to move discussion among multiple people towards a specific outcome. This resolution does not require consensus.

A **mentor’s** role is to impart their story, learning, experience and guidance to the other.

A **consultant’s** role is to be the subject matter expert regarding the focus of concern to a larger body. They are hired to achieve a certain result and/or movement towards a specified goal.

A **mental health professional’s** role is to assist the other in identifying the origin or message of something that is holding them back, impeding their life in some way, and devising a “treatment plan” that moves them towards healing.

A **spiritual director’s** role is to focus on assisting the client to move towards wholeness through the language and relationship with a Universal Other, in a faith tradition embraced by both parties.

A **trainer’s** role is to impart knowledge and assist the other in the development of a specific, employment-related skill set.

A **manager’s** role is one of authority over and encouragement of a desired goal-oriented outcome. Usually, employment related.

- Be sure you give clear definitions to potential clients, to reduce any role confusion and to identify potential role conflicts.

"As a coach and a coachee, it is freeing to know I have this tool of companionship in the deep movements of life. When I am challenged, I can reach out to my coach to work through those learning opportunities to productivity and movement. When I coach someone, I get great joy out of seeing the personal growth, freedom and blessing that comes out on the other side of a coaching conversation."

- Kirsten Nelson Roenfeldt



Encuentros Latinx Data 2020-2022 Pastoral Coaching Program

Encuentros Latinx is a program funded by the Carpenter Foundation and run by the National UCC. It exists to create visibility for Latinx LGBTQI with historically white churches. It creates educational materials, relevant programming, and opens doors for this community in mainstream UCC congregations.

In 2020, Encuentros Latinx launched a Pastoral Coaching initiative to support UCC clergy and Members in Discernment. The main goal was to create support that responded to the specific needs of clergy of color as well as to accompany the efforts of white clergy to make their congregations more inclusive.

14 Coaches were enlisted. 2 Afro-Latinx, 2 Black, 1 white and 9 Latinx. In the LGBTQ Spectrum: 3 Gay, 1 lesbian, 5 Straight allies, 5 queer identified.

16 people have enrolled in this program to receive coaching. 75% have identified themselves as part of the LGBTQI community: 3 trans, 4 gay men, 2 bisexual, 5 straight allies and 2 lesbians. The ethnic distribution is as follows: 4 Afro-Latinx, 1 Black, 2 White, 9 Latinx

In an evaluative session done in February of 2022, 4 former coaching recipients reported they were matched well, found the coaching to be supportive, valued the experience, and understood the journey they were on.

Participants felt their coaches were accessible and connected with them all while remote sheltering in place.

The coaching was crucial for discerning next steps in their spiritual journey, it also provided a safe space to vent and be heard. Participants felt that the coaches brought experience, wisdom, and cultural competence to the work with them. It was key to have coaches who understood the complexity of intersections of faith, culture, and religion.

Participants gained tips for their spiritual well-being as well as how to navigate working at white congregation while being BIPOC Clergy.

Participants were challenged to think creatively, inviting them to see different perspectives of a situation, helping them to set healthy boundaries, and supporting them to remain authentic.



Online Study and Discussion Resources

These books offer further help in thinking about the structure and content of clergy peer learning groups:

A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life,
by Parker J. Palmer.

Palmer describes the ways in which "circles of trust" support peer group commitments. He provides a helpful framework, along with poetry, exercises and stories for thinking about group dynamics.

Know Your Story and Lead with It: The Power of Narrative in Clergy Leadership, by Richard L. Hester and Kelli Walker-Jones.

The authors help clergy explore and articulate their stories and then use these stories as a resource for leadership. The book grows out of the authors' work with clergy peer groups in the Lilly-funded Sustaining Pastoral Excellence project.

Preparing the Pastors We Need: Reclaiming the Congregations Role in Training Clergy, by George Mason.

Drawing on his own and others' experience in the Lilly Endowment's Transition into Ministry initiative, Mason provides a guidebook for those considering the development of a pastoral residency program for recent seminary graduates in a congregation. He covers everything from assessing readiness, to building the program, recruiting residents, implementing and sustaining the program, and evaluating effectiveness.

Pursuing Pastoral Excellence: Pathways to Fruitful Leadership,
by Paul E Hopkins.

Hopkins explores the stories of seven pastors to show pathways to leadership-- and to illustrate practices that lead to clergy burnout.

Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry,
by Gregory L. Jones and Kevin R. Armstrong.

This book provides the theological basis for exploring pastoral excellence. The authors focus on the practices of living as faithful disciples and the ministries of pastors, lay leaders and congregations that embody "a more excellent way."

Sabbath in the City: Sustaining Urban Pastoral Excellence,
by Bryan P Stone and Claire E. Wolfteich.

The authors identify challenges that face urban pastors and practices that foster excellence in urban ministry, including cultivating holy friendships.



The Art of Convening: Authentic Engagement in Meetings, Gatherings, and Conversations, by Craig and Patricia Neal.

This book describes a system of convening that includes nine principles and practices for conversation. These aspects provide a model facilitators might use to assess the life of a peer learning group.

The Contemplative Pastor by Eugene Peterson.

Peterson, who has been gaining a growing reputation as a "pastor's pastor", speaks words of wisdom and refreshment for pastors caught in the busy-ness of preaching, teaching, and "running the church". Chapters include poetic reflections on the Beatitudes, advice on spiritual direction "between Sundays", and the language of prayer.

The Art of Community by Charles H Vogl

This practical leadership guide offers seven timeless principles for building a supportive and inclusive community with a strong sense of purpose.

Saying No to Say Yes: Everyday Boundaries and Pastoral Excellence by David Olsen and Nancy Devor

Combining family and congregational systems theory to provide tangible support and process for setting priorities, navigating boundaries, and fostering health churches and pastors.

References:

¹Whitney, D., Copperrider, D., Trosten-Bloom, A., Kaplin, B., Encyclopedia of Positive Questions Vol. #1: Using Appreciative Inquiry to Bring Out the Best in Your Organization, Crown Custom Publishing, Brunswick, Ohio, 2005.

²Ibid

³Powell, John, Happiness Is An Inside Job, chapter 6, Thomas Moore Association

⁴Steinke, Peter, Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach, Alban Institute, Inc., 1996.

⁵Heifetz, Ronald A., Linsky, Marty, Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through The Dangers of Leading, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, MA, 2002.

⁶Ibid



Footnotes:

Friedman, Edwin H. A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix, Seabury Books, New York, 2007.

Heifetz, Ronald A., Linsky, Marty, Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through The Dangers of Leading," Harvard Business School Press, Boston, MA, 2002.

Powell, John, Happiness Is An Inside Job, chapter 6, Thomas Moore Association

Steinke, Peter, Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach, Alban Institute, Inc., 1996.

Whitney, D., Copperrider, D., Trosten-Bloom, A., Kaplin, B., Encyclopedia of Positive Questions Vol. #1: Using Appreciative Inquiry to Bring Out the Best in Your Organization, Crown Custom Publishing, Brunswick, Ohio, 2005.



PAGE LEFT INTENTIONALLY BLANK



Sample Retreats



PAGE LEFT INTENTIONALLY BLANK



Origami butterflies with prayers and names of those who died from COVID hang from the rafters, First Congregational UCC, Boulder, Colorado

PANDEMIC PONDERINGS: How Has Ministry Changed?

A Conversation Guide

By

Christina Braudaway-Bauman



Introduction

In March 2020, churches across the country emptied our buildings and closed our doors, joining workplaces, schools, and other public places in response to government and health department mandates to prevent the deadly spread of COVID-19.

Overnight, everything changed. Sanctuaries were suddenly empty on Sunday mornings. Cherished activities, all meetings, and small groups were abruptly canceled. Our elders living in retirement communities were in lockdown. Parents of school-aged children were required to work from home while simultaneously helping their kids with online school. Hospital visits were not permitted. Memorial services for beloved church members had to be postponed indefinitely. We worried terribly about everyone's physical and mental health.

And yet, if it felt at times like the world was falling apart, our churches stepped up to find ways to keep people together. In my own congregation, we quickly learned how to prerecord our services on video to then broadcast them on YouTube at our usual Sunday morning worship time. As the pandemic lingered, we worked with an audiovisual company to install cameras and livestreaming equipment in our sanctuary. We purchased five Zoom licenses and expanded our small group ministry, started poetry and centering prayer groups, a hymn sing on Facebook Live, and an online mid-week Vespers service.

We created a phone tree and called the entire church membership. Aware of all the enrichment activities our kids were missing, we hired a new youth minister and urged him to find new ways for our kids to play and support each other both online and outdoors. Concerned about the isolation of our elders, we delivered small care packages, "Grace Gifts," to shut-ins, and made front porch visits a regular part of our visitation ministry. We expanded the idea to hand deliver a gift bag of devotional materials to every household for Epiphany and sent packages in the mail for Lent. We added outdoor worship services on Christmas Eve and Easter morning in addition to our online offerings, and set up prayer stations in the Sanctuary and Chapel for Holy Week, inviting folks to sign up for short visits and have the space safely to themselves. In other words, we adapted. We acquired new skills and practices. We learned to do old things in new ways.

But COVID-19 was not the only crisis churches have faced in the last two years. In May, 2020, George Floyd was murdered by police in Minneapolis. The record of African Americans killed by police force is long, the brutality nothing new, but his death captured the attention of many of us in a new way, standing out as a critical sign of the unfinished work of racial justice in our country. The following January, a violent insurrection at the Capitol after a contentious political season revealed the fragility of our treasured democracy and starkly reminded us of the authoritarianism rising around the world.



In Boulder, Colorado, a mass shooting in a grocery store just a few miles from the church I serve killed ten people, joining a long, ongoing string of gun violence events. Then in December 2021, a wildfire roared through our community. More than 30,000 people were evacuated. More than 1,000 homes burned all the way to the ground.

We can add economic uncertainty and the Great Resignation to this this remarkable confluence of large-scale issues. We can then name myriad ways these matters have directly touched our churches. These, too, called our congregations to respond quickly and adapt flexibly, in many ways we never could have prepared for and predicted.

As we are now emerging from COVID-19 restrictions, I invited pastoral colleagues and friends to join me on retreats as part of a Pastoral Study Grant I received from the Louisville Institute. The focus of these two-day retreats was to take time to pause and reflect on our experience of ministry over the last two years, looking backward to see what we discovered and learned, and leaning forward to consider how we have been changed, what innovations will remain, and in what new ways God's Spirit is now calling us. In early June, I met with four pastors in Massachusetts on Cape Cod near the ocean, and in late June, another five clergy met with me in the mountains of Breckenridge, Colorado.

Most of our findings so far would not surprise you. For instance, having invested so much time and energy in learning audio-visual skills and training new staff and volunteers to run the equipment, most of us will continue to offer an online version of Sunday morning worship from now on. The shape of those services, however, will continue to evolve - shorter sermons, more mission moments, new forms of prayer, and electronic giving instead of, or in addition to, passing the offering plate. Online meetings and small groups will remain as well, though several churches are now learning how to conduct hybrid gatherings with participants on-site and online simultaneously. For many of us, concerns for justice, now both deepened and more focused, have notably grown into new and intentional ministries in our midst. These will continue to occupy our prayer, our study, our work, and our reflection and action, within and beyond our congregation in partnerships with others in the wider community.

Still, in other ways, our questions about the present and future church don't yet have clear answers. Our congregations look different now than before COVID. Some of our members have not yet returned, and it isn't clear if they will. Meanwhile, new people have joined us and have come to know us primarily through their online experience. We wonder what unique gifts, needs, and perspectives they will bring.

We also don't yet know how the heightened sense of vulnerability, the ambiguous grief, and the lingering stress experienced particularly by our elders, our parents, and our youth and children will affect our ongoing ministry. This life in a "liminal"



time, which was also our life before COVID-19, a time characterized both by great uncertainty and new possibility, will continue to shape us.

In the midst of our muddle, and also the fatigue all of us acknowledged, we draw strength from the assurance of God's steadfast love. Even though we sometimes feel like we are working in the dark and believe that "it has not yet been made clear what we will become" (1 John 3:2), the Spirit's guidance is often palpable, sometimes surprising us and our congregations with just the gifts we need to sustain us and to keep us moving through this season with creativity, patience, perseverance, and grace.

When those of us who went on retreat discussed what we'd like to share with others from our time together, we agreed the most important and useful thing is the conversation itself. Since our churches are still just beginning to gather from our pandemic separation, conclusions seem premature. But after experiencing how helpful it has been for us to have unhurried time to reflect with trusted colleagues and friends, we believe every pastor and congregation would benefit from the opportunity now to discuss important questions of ministry and meaning, to articulate the experience of the last two years for themselves, to take the time to listen deeply to one another and to the Spirit as we begin to venture what all of it means for a present and future church.

To facilitate your conversation, I offer you this guide - the questions, poetry, and exercises shared on two retreats. The retreats I hosted were for clergy, but the plan would work well for congregational conversation too. In fact, in recent months, many members of my church spent time in small groups, afternoon and evening gatherings not on a retreat, looking backward to explore what they had learned during the pandemic and looking ahead to next steps for our ministry.

Some of the questions in this guide were first posed at a Consultation on Congregational Life hosted by Lilly Endowment and the Center for Congregations in Indianapolis. You might find reassurance in knowing that church leaders across the U.S. religious landscape are curious about how ministry was affected and how churches are changing in light of all that happened in the last two years. An expansive five-year research project, Exploring the Pandemic Impact on Congregations: Innovation Amidst and Beyond COVID-19, led by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research, is researching, collecting, and sharing data about the possible changes and long-term implications the pandemic might have on religious life across the country. As we continue to navigate this liminal season, researchers will be curating resources, practical tools, and guidance into an online hub to support the church.

See <https://www.covidreligionresearch.org/> for more information.

As you review this guide and consider how you might host a conversation among pastoral colleagues or in your congregation, please receive the encouragement of



ten pastors in Massachusetts and Colorado who recently set aside intentional time to be with another, to talk, to listen, to pray, and to wonder. We are:

In Massachusetts:

Rev. Angie Menke Ballou, Cotuit Federated Church
Rev. Hannah Brown, West Concord Union Church
Rev. Dana Allen Walsh, South Church, Andover
Rev. Jennie Barrett Siegal, Old South Union Church, Weymouth

In Colorado:

Rev. Hal Chorpenning, Plymouth Congregational Church UCC, Fort Collins
Rev. Nicole Lamarche, Community United Church of Christ, Boulder
Rev. Michael Mather, First United Methodist Church, Boulder
Rev. Melissa St. Clair, Heart of the Rockies Christian Church, Fort Collins
Rev. Sarah Verasco, United Church of Christ, Longmont

And me.

With gratitude for your ministry and with every blessing, I am,
Rev. Christina Braudaway-Bauman, First Congregational UCC, Boulder, Colorado



Core Question

How has the church's ministry been changed by the dramatic confluence of critical issues of 2020 - 2022 – the global pandemic, renewed reckoning with racism, gun violence, the climate crisis, economic uncertainty, the Great Resignation, and polarizing political tensions?

What has been...

What is...

What can be...

Conversation 1

In advance of the retreat and in preparation for it, I invited participants to bring to our time together a tangible symbol that expresses for them something of what the last two years of life and ministry has been like for them. The conversation around these symbols was a great way to break the ice for our conversation and also to get right to the heart of the matter. We also began the retreat by centering ourselves in the Circle of Trust Touchstones from the Center for Courage and Renewal. For us they served to remind us of the respect and reverence with which we hold one another and each of our congregations, and the sacred nature of all our speaking and listening with one another.



Circle of Trust Touchstones

Center for Courage and Renewal

Give and receive welcome. People learn best in hospitable spaces. In this circle we support each other's learning by giving and receiving hospitality.

Be present as fully as possible. Be here with your doubts, fears and failings as well as your convictions, joys and successes, your listening as well as your speaking.

What is offered in the circle is by invitation, not demand. This is not a "share or die" event. During this gathering, do whatever your soul calls for, and know that you do it with our support. Your soul knows your needs better than we do.

Speak your truth in ways that respect the truth of others. Our views of reality may differ, but speaking one's truth in a circle of trust does not mean interpreting, correcting or debating what others say. Speak from your own center to the center of the group, using "I" statements, trusting people to do their own sifting and winnowing.

No fixing, saving, advising or correcting each other. This is one of the hardest guidelines for those of us in the "helping professions." But it is vital to welcoming the soul, to making space for the inner teacher.

Share the airtime. Pay attention to how much of the group time you take. Every voice is important and no single voice ought to dominate.

Learn to respond to others with honest, open questions . . . instead of counsel or corrections. With such questions, we help "hear each other into deeper speech."

When the going gets rough, turn to wonder. If you feel judgmental, or defensive, ask yourself, "I wonder what brought him to this belief." "I wonder what she's feeling right now." "I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself." Set aside judgment to listen to others - and to yourself - more deeply.

Attend to your own inner teacher. We learn from others, of course. But as we explore questions and share our stories in a circle of trust, we have a special opportunity to learn from within. So pay close attention to your own reactions and responses, to your most important teacher.

Trust and learn from the silence. Silence is a gift in our noisy world, and a way of knowing in itself. Treat silence as a member of the group. After someone has spoken, you may want to take time to reflect without immediately filling the space with words.

Observe confidentiality. Nothing said in a circle of trust will ever be repeated to other people without permission of the speaker.



Know that it's possible . . . to leave the circle with whatever it was you needed when you arrived, and that the seeds planted here can keep growing in the days ahead.

Reading

Blessing in the Chaos

Jan Richardson

All the readings were read aloud two or three times in a kind of modified lectio divina. Folks were invited to notice and share after the first reading the word or phrase that spoke to them, and after the second, to reflect on what the word or phrase was saying to them about their lives or this day and our work together.

To all that is chaotic in you,
let there come silence.
Let there be
a calming
of the clamoring,
a stilling
of the voices that have laid their
claim on you,
that have made their home in you,
that go with you even to the
holy places
but will not
let you rest,
will not let you
hear your life
with wholeness
or feel the grace
that fashioned you.

Let what distracts you cease.
Let what divides you cease.
Let there come an end to what
diminishes and demeans,
and let depart
all that keeps you
in its cage.
Let there be
an opening
into the quiet
that lies beneath
the chaos,
where you find
the peace
you did not think possible
and see what shimmers
within the storm.

Jan Richardson. The Cure for Sorrow: A Book of Blessings for Times of Grief. (Orlando: Wanton Gospeller Press, 2016.), 79, 80.

Sharing Symbols

Conversation 2

Looking Backward

Reading

The Guest House

Rumi

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.



Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

Rumi: Selected Poems. Translated by Coleman Barks. (Penguin Classics, 2004).

Questions

We used these questions to inform our conversation rather than answering them in order. It helps to have a facilitator to ensure that everyone has a chance to speak, to keep the conversation moving along while also allowing space for folks to gather their thoughts, and as needed, to lift up the questions that might not yet have been covered.

What did you and your church experience over the last two years?

How did your congregation maintain continuity with your ministry pre-pandemic?

How has your congregation and your ministry changed?

How have you personally been changed?

What did you discover and learn?

Looking back, where do you see God at work?

How does each of our experiences resonate with others? What are the commonalities?



Reading

For When People Ask Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

I want a word that means
okay and not okay,
more than that: a word that means
devastated and stunned with joy.
I want the word that says
I feel it all all at once.
The heart is not like a songbird
singing only one note at a time,
more like a Tuvan throat singer
able to sing both a drone
and simultaneously
two or three harmonics high above it—
a sound, the Tuvans say,
that gives the impression
of wind swirling among rocks.
The heart understands swirl,
how the churning of opposite feelings
weaves through us like an insistent breeze
leads us wordlessly deeper into ourselves,
blesses us with paradox
so we might walk more openly
into this world so rife with devastation,
this world so ripe with joy.

Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer. <https://ahundredfallingveils.com>. Blog post, March 13, 2022.

Praise and Lamentations Wall

Using large post-it notes and sharpies, we took time in silence to write out expressions of lamentation and praise for the last two years. We laid them out on a table, and then in silence read them. When we were ready, we spoke about what we saw, what insights we gathered, what we held in common, and what was unique. It was a helpful way to summarize the conversation. In our prayer that followed this conversation, we took turns praying what we saw and heard and blessing one another.



Conversation 3

Looking Forward

Reading

Romans 8:18-25

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Reading

Bishop William Barber

The mourning and the screams make us want to rush from this place, but there is a sense in which right now we must refuse to be comforted too quickly. Because only if we allow the screams and tears to shake the very conscience of this nation and call us to repentance, only then, can we hope for a better society on the other side of this. If we slow down and take the time to listen to this nation's wounds, they will tell us where to look for hope.

Rev. William Barber, The Guardian, May 30, 2020.

Reading

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ

Trust in the slow work of God.

We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.

We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new. And yet it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ. Hearts on Fire, Praying with Jesuits. Edited by Michael Harter, SJ. (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2005).



Questions

What are the most pressing challenges you see your congregation facing going forward?

What changes are you carrying forward into the future?

What new forms of ministry did you develop that your congregation feels called to continue?

What are the new opportunities for ministry?

In what ways is God's Spirit now calling you and your congregation?

What kinds of things are most needed to support and enhance the vitality of your congregation into the future?



Conversation 3

Gathering the Wisdom and Practices

Reading

Here,

Karen Hering

Here,
where already
you have left behind by
choice or by force what
you knew what you
might have cherished
what you maybe took for
granted.

Here,
where not yet
do you know
where you're headed
what it will take what it
will give how it will
change you.

Here,
on the threshold you
balance
on a comma between
the no longer
and the not yet.

Now,
may you pause,
breathing in, breathing
out,
on the cusp
in between.

Notice
where fullness gives way
to emptying
as the full moon each
month
sloughs

in its waning
and makes way
for new waxing.

Now,
letting go
of attachments
and assumptions, may
you release what you've
clutched in your fear,
making room
for the stranger
knocking,
who is always you.

Now,
may you discover what
you've carried within
all along
but not known, named
or needed - ancestors'
whisperings, newborn
powers, the hope of the
young,
the resilience of Earth
and her beings.

Now, these are crucial.
Clear a path
To their wellspring.
Walk it often.
Keep it open.

Now,
May you listen,
one ear turned inward
to your heart
and the body's knowing.
One ear turned outward
To the suffering - and
the joy -
that will teach us.

Now,
look around you
at the others waiting
with you
on the curl of this
comma.
You will need them.
They will need you.
Together
we will round this bend,
cross over
into the not yet, where,
having let go,
we might finally learn -
a new way
is possible
Now,
Here,

KarenHering.com. "A Poem for Living Through Change." Blog Post, December 2, 2016.



Questions

What are the insights and the lessons we are taking away from our recent experiences that may help guide us into a future church?

What wisdom can we glean from our experience that will continue to shape our ministries?

What practices will continue to shape our ministries?

How can we share these with others?

How can we encourage others to take the time to reflect on their own experience and learning for the good of their congregation and the whole church?

Wisdom Well and Practices Wall

Using large post-it notes and sharpies, we took time in silence to write out what we've learned over the last two years. What's the wisdom we have gleaned and what practices will we carry forward? We laid them out on a table, and then in silence read them all. When we were ready, we spoke about what we saw, what insights we gathered, what we held in common, and what was unique. You may choose to close this conversation with a prayer, naming and blessing what members of the group saw and heard.

Closing Worship

Partway through the reading, we each held and lit a candle and kept them lit through the final blessing.



Blessing for the Journey

Clarissa Pinkola Estés

"Letter to a Young Activist During Troubled Times"

My Friends, Do not lose heart. We were made for these times.

I have heard from so many recently who are deeply and properly bewildered . . . Ours is a time of almost daily jaw-dropping astonishment and often righteous rage over the latest degradations of what matters most. . . . You are right in your assessments.

Yet ... I urge you, ask you, gentle you, to please not spend your spirit dry by bewailing these difficult times. Especially do not lose hope. Most particularly because, the fact is - we were made for these times.

Yes. For years, we have been learning, practicing, been in training for and just waiting to meet on this exact plain of engagement.

I grew up on the Great Lakes and recognize a seaworthy vessel when I see one. Regarding awakened souls, there have never been more able crafts in the waters than there are right now across the world. And they are fully provisioned and able to signal one another as never before in the history of humankind.

Look out over the prow; there are millions of boats of righteous souls on the waters with you. Even though your veneers may shiver from every wave in this stormy roil, I assure you that the long timbers composing your prow and rudder come from a greater forest. That long-grained lumber is known to withstand storms, to hold together, to hold its own, and to advance, regardless.

In any dark time, there is a tendency to veer toward fainting over how much is wrong or unmended in the world. Do not focus on that. There is a tendency too to fall into being weakened by perseverating on what is outside your reach, by what cannot yet be. Do not focus there. That is spending the wind without raising the sails. We are needed, that is all we can know. . . . Ours is not the task of fixing the entire world all at once, but of stretching out to mend the part of the world that is within our reach. Any small, calm thing that one soul can do to help another soul, to assist some portion of this poor suffering world, will help immensely. It is not given to us to know which acts or by whom, will cause the critical mass to tip toward an enduring good.

What is needed for dramatic change is an accumulation of acts, adding, adding to, adding more, continuing...

One of the most calming and powerful actions you can do to intervene in a stormy world is to stand up and show your soul. Soul on deck shines like gold in dark times.

The light of the soul throws sparks, can send up flares, builds signal fires ... causes proper matters to catch fire. To display the lantern of soul in shadowy



times like these - to be fierce and to show mercy toward others, both — are acts of immense bravery and greatest necessity. Struggling souls catch light from other souls who are fully lit and willing to show it. If you would help to calm the tumult, this is one of the strongest things you can do.

...There will always be times in the midst of “success right around the corner, but as yet still unseen” when you feel discouraged. I too have felt despair many times in my life, but I do not keep a chair for it; I will not entertain it. It is not allowed to eat from my plate.

The reason is this: In my uttermost bones I know something, as do you. It is that there can be no despair when you remember why you came to Earth, who you serve, and who sent you here. The good words we say and the good deeds we do are not ours: They are the words and deeds of the One who brought us here.

Clarissa Pinkola Estés, “Letter to a Young Activist During Troubled Times.”

<https://www.clarissapinkolaestes.com>. Blog, Fall, 2017.

Song

Sending you Light

Melanie DeMore

Julie Wolf

YouTube Video: Awaking Joy, CD Release Concert, Freight and Salvage Coffeehouse, February 13, 2019.

Reading

Blessed Are You Who Bear the Light

Jan Richardson

Blessed are you
who bear the light
in unbearable times,
who testify to its endurance
among the unendurable,
who bear witness
to its persistence
when everything seems
in shadow and grief.
Blessed are you
in whom
the light lives,
in whom

the brightness blazes -
your heart,
a chapel,
an altar where
in the deepest night
can be seen
the fire that
shines forth in you
in unaccountable faith,
in stubborn hope,
in love that illumines
every broken thing
it finds.

Jan Richardson. *Circle of Grace, Blessings for the Season: A Book of Blessings*. (Orlando: Wanton Gospeller Press, 2015).



Community of Practice Retreat (February 9 and 10, 2022 with IKC)

“Planted by the Water”

Agenda: Wednesday, February 9, 2022

- 10:30am Gathering
Participants are invited to bring snacks to share.
- 10:45 am Welcome CCOP Coordinator and Conference Minister
Brief Check in and Introductions
- 11:05am Opening Worship Associate Conference Minister
- 12:00pm Lunch
- 1:00pm Keynote: “Planted by the Water” COMPASS Staff
Jeremiah 17: 5-10
- 2:15pm Small Group Gatherings COMPASS Staff
Participants practice the Shalem Method
<https://shalem.org/1995/01/01/group-spiritual-direction-what-is-it/>
- 3:00pm Free Time
Participants to walk the grounds, go to chapel, have a nap, gather with others as they wish
- 4:15pm Large Group Feedback COMPASS Staff
Idea of Clearness Committee introduced
- 5:30pm Dinner
- 7:00pm Centering Ourselves with a Spiritual Practice/s Conference Min.

Agenda : Thursday, February 10, 2022



8:00am	Breakfast	
9:00am	Small Groups regroup	COMPASS Staff
	<i>Participants practice Clearness Committee Method</i>	
10:00am	What do we need for our next steps?	COMPASS Staff
	Closing Gathering	COMPASS Staff
	Homeward Bound	



Coordinator & Facilitator Letters & Forms



PAGE LEFT INTENTIONALLY BLANK



Sample Community of Practice Participant Application and Interest Form

Please return to the Conference office by _____.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip Code: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email address: _____

Current Ministry Setting: _____

Years in Ministry: _____

Preferred Meeting Days, Times: _____

Hopes for the Group: _____

Anything else we should know... _____

Amount church or setting can pay (up to \$250): _____

Please designate the type of Community of Practice you are interested in:

Geographically based Clergy COP: _____

Affinity Based Clergy COPs:

Member in Discernment _____

New Clergy (1-5 years) _____

Seasoned/Mid-Career Clergy _____

Bi-Vocational Clergy _____

Clergy Considering Retirement _____



Retired Clergy

Women

Chaplains

Clergy of Color

LGBTQIA+

Other (Please Describe)

Applications can be emailed to:



COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE GROUPS

Participant Scholarship Application Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip Code: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email address: _____

Current Ministry Setting: _____

Address of Setting: _____

The fee for participating in a Community of Practice group is \$250/year.

The Conference Commission on Church and Ministry has decided to include participation in a Community of Practice in the pastor's call agreement, and to identify this as an expense of the congregation, not the pastor. This fee should not be paid from the pastor's continuing education fund.

Have you asked your governing body (Council, Consistory, etc.) to pay the fee?

_____ yes _____ no _____ not yet

If your church cannot pay the full fee, what portion of the fee could your congregation pay?

\$ _____

We will not let the inability to pay the fee prevent anyone from participating in a group. Scholarship funds are limited, however, and are not currently being replenished. Please describe the circumstances that have led you to request financial support now.

Please return to: _____



**United Church of Christ
Community of Practice
Participant Year End Evaluation**

1. What have you learned from your participation in this group?

2. Which practices (worship, check in, case presentation, shared meal, etc.) have been most helpful?

3. What impact has this experience had on your ministry?

4. What would you tell other clergy about participating in a Community of Practice?

5. Oh, and one more thing.....

Your Name: _____

It's ok to share excerpts from this evaluation without using my name in promotional materials for the Communities of Practice program. ____yes
____no

Please return to the Conference office by .



COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE GROUPS FACILITATOR LETTER OF AGREEMENT

The Community of Practice (COP) facilitators offer an important ministry to pastoral colleagues on behalf of the _____Conference. Each group develops its own personality, but there are some common expectations and understandings, outlined below.

- Each group covenants to serve as both a support group and as a learning community, with an intentional and disciplined focus on the practice of pastoral ministry. As a facilitator, you are responsible for managing each meeting, keeping track of agenda and time, and ensuring that each member has an opportunity to participate in the conversation.
- Groups meet monthly for nine months for a session lasting 2 ½ hours. Groups will adapt this basic structure based on the needs of the group. As a facilitator, you are responsible for holding the group's schedule, sending meeting reminders, convening meetings, and following up with members who miss meetings.
- Group meetings follow one of the formats outlined in the facilitator's handbook, and typically include:
 - Devotion and prayer
 - Check-in
 - Discussion on a topic of common interest or of a case study drawn from the experience of the group members
 - An opportunity for group members to review and evaluate the meeting
- Facilitators are expected to attend two facilitator gatherings each year. These gatherings are focused on honing skills and contributing to the facilitator community of practice.
- As the administrator of this program, Coordinators need to be aware of your meeting times and locations, group membership roster, and resources that have been beneficial to you. Coordinators will serve as consultants on any issue related to group dynamics, mental health concerns, leadership challenges, and other issues related to the functioning of the group and the wellbeing of the individuals participating.
- To uphold the integrity of our covenantal life together, it is essential that facilitators strongly encourage group members to seek counsel with the Conference ministerial staff if personal pastoral challenges or pastoral concerns arise in the congregation beyond the scope of the individual pastor's experience or wisdom. Such challenges are beyond the expectation of what groups have the capacity to deal with or to hold in confidence. Facilitators may need to take the initiative to tell the pastor that you will accompany him or her to a meeting with a staff member if it appears that the problem is not being resolved or addressed appropriately.



- Facilitators fill out a monthly report form after each group meeting, to be sent to Coordinator. These reports track attendance, indicate general topics discussed, outline resources shared or needed, and report support your group may need from Conference staff.
- Facilitators are asked to complete an annual evaluation form at the end of each program year.
- Facilitators receive an honorarium of _____ for each group they serve. This is paid in two installments. Facilitators also receive mileage reimbursement for travel at the IRS employee rate.
- A hospitality budget of up to _____ per program year is available to each group to pay for refreshments, resources, or to subsidize a retreat. Please submit receipts when requesting reimbursement.
- Group members receive invoices twice a year. Scholarship funds are available, and facilitators are asked to encourage their group members to apply for scholarship help if they learn of a need.

.....

The _____-Conference offers you the position of Community of Practice facilitator for the _____ program year. Please fill out the form below. Your signature indicates that you have accepted the expectations outlined above.

Facilitator Name:_____

Facilitator Signature_____



COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE GROUP Facilitator's Expense Report

Name of facilitator: _____

Expenses

Number of Miles Traveled/Date _____

Refreshments _____

Other (describe) _____

Total _____

Notes:

1. Please include all receipts for refreshments and other expenses.
2. We have to reimburse expenses in the budget year in which they were incurred. Please make sure that your _____ expenses are turned in no later than January, _____.
Please turn in your _____ expenses by July _____.



Community of Practice Monthly Facilitator's Report

Please complete following each meeting and send to _____

Facilitator Name: _____

Group's meeting location: _____

Date of meeting: _____

1. Members in attendance:
2. Topics/themes discussed: Members checked in and all were doing well.
3. Case study/topic/book or other method used to center the conversation.
4. Specific outcomes or learnings from the discussion.
5. Do you need resources to aid you in your conversation? Not at this time If so, what?
6. Do you have resources to recommend to other groups? Not at this time If so, what?
7. Do you have any concerns which arose from your conversations or concerning the group in general?
8. Are there any transitions within the group's membership, such as leaving or accepting a call, new members to the group, people leaving the group?
9. Any other comments about this particular meeting or your group in general?
10. Is your group accepting new members at this time?



United Church of Christ Community of Practice Facilitator Year End Evaluation

1. Describe your initial hopes/vision for the Communities of Practice program.
2. How has your group lived into the vision of the program?
3. What have you learned from your leadership of a group?
4. Which practices (worship, check in, case presentation, shared meal, etc.) have been most impactful?
5. How has this experience affected your ministry?
6. What do you need to strengthen your leadership in a Community of Practice?
7. Oh, and one more thing.....

Your Name: _____

It's ok to share excerpts from this evaluation without using my name in instructional materials for the Communities of Practice program.

_____yes _____no



COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE FACILITATOR'S End of Program Year Short Survey

1. Who in your group will continue?
(Registration for the groups will be open starting this _____)

2. Will you accept our invitation to continue to serve as a COP facilitator
_____ (year)?
(If "yes" please continue with the following questions)

3. Will your group continue on-line, in person, combination of both or
hybrid?

4. What are your needs as a COP facilitator?

5. What are the needs of your participants which have surfaced in your
groups?



Frequently Asked Questions

Q - What to do with people who are not appropriate for a group?

A - Offer a listing of alternate support opportunities (mentoring, coaching, therapy)

Q - Is there a cost to participants?

A - The cost varies from Conference to Conference, typically between \$250-\$300 per year, with scholarships available.

Q - Who supports this program?

A - The Conference and Committee on Ministry (COM)

Q - What is the time frame for the groups?

*A - September to May; Once or twice a month; 2-2 1/2 hours in length
The facilitator and group determine the schedule and time frame.*

Q - How many people are in a group?

A - Five to seven on the average

Q - Do Coordinators receive a stipend?

A - Yes (the amount is determined by the Conference and the groups also receive hospitality money)

Q - How do we deal with confidentiality?

A - Things said in the group are held in confidence except when issues need to be disclosed and then on a need-to-know basis only. If an issue arises that the facilitator believes needs to be shared, they will discuss the issue with the participant and encourage them to bring it to their ACM. If they are reluctant to bring it forward, the facilitator will offer to go with them.

Q - Facilitators encourage the question: What is the best way to communicate with one another?

A - E-mail, phone, texts, etc.



Acknowledgements

These resources are a result of months of effort by a team of individuals. In acknowledgment of their hard work in drafting, writing, and editing, please give thanks to:

The COMPASS Steering Committee

Rev. Ellie Richardson
Cathy Wille
Rev. Heather Ramsey-Mabrouk
Rev. Christina Braudaway-Bauman
Rev. Dr. Marsha Williams
Rev. Merlyn Lawrence

National Staff Contributors

Rev. Dr. Sarah Lund
Rev. Rhina Ramos
Rev. Anissa Glaser-Bacon

And all the Community of Practice Coordinators and Facilitators who have contributed to the ministries of countless pastors across the denomination.