**2018 Small Parish Forum – Meeting about our meetings tool kit.**

**Whether clergy or laity, council member or other ministry leader; these tools can be implemented for the *continuous improvement* of your parish, council, ministry, etc.**

Upon your return home, during your next meeting discuss selecting a future meeting date to discuss how the group meets, how they speak with one another, how decisions are made, and whatever else you want to discuss related to the *culture* of the group.

For lay leaders, make sure your priest is aware and involved in the process as he is (or should be) the *ex officio* chair of the group. He should technically preside even when he does not attend so be sure to keep him not just in the loop but knowledgeable of what you want to accomplish.

For clergy leaders, be sure to have the support of other officers of council and/or the lay leaders of the ministry you are working with.

**Day of the meeting:**

* Start with prayer (every meeting should start with prayer), and any other typical Scripture readings, devotions, reflection, etc.
* Though everyone should already be aware of the scope of what is being covered in the day’s meeting, be sure to clearly state the purpose of the meeting is to improve our meetings moving forward. This does not mean meetings were “bad” or done “wrong” … every parish and her ministries should be in a mode of *continuous improvement*.
* Describe what it means to be an *adaptive* parish vs. *adapted* parish. 80% of the council needs to agree that it is important and necessary to work towards being an adaptive parish (and dissenters are willing to not sabotage … this is known as “sufficient consensus”).
* Once the group achieves sufficient consensus, distinguish between *dialogue* and *discussion* using the slides from the PowerPoint.
* Engage in one or two (preferably two) activities similar to what was done in the presentation. Feel free to be creative … you know the people in your group.
* While in dialogue, employ different techniques to keep it fresh and avoid getting in a rut. There are a couple techniques listed at the end of this document. You can “google” other ideas. The website provided on the PowerPoint has many ideas.
* Have someone (can rotate this role over time) keep others accountable as everyone works to avoid “cross-talk”.
* Have the group process the advantages to this approach. People do not learn from experiences, they learn from *processing* experiences.
* Reach “sufficient consensus” that these ways of speaking will be used whenever there is a decision to be reached and there is anything less than obvious 100% agreement.
* Have the next meeting scheduled and end with prayer (every meeting should end with prayer).

**Various items to consider when creating a more collaborative environment:**

* Have an agenda distributed prior to the meeting.
* Consider specifically identifying agenda items as either topics for “dialogue” or “discussion”.
* When a potentially controversial or challenging topic arises, consider using one meeting to dialogue and the next meeting to discuss. This provides time for participants to consider all perspectives, be better prepared to discuss, and therefore reach a decision.
* Mix up when various persons (priest, council president, officers) offer their perspective / opinion during dialogue sessions. For example if the priest provides his opinion first too often, it may negatively influence other council members’ desire to share their thoughts.
* As groups become accustomed to the two ways of talking, they may become comfortable switching from dialogue to discussion when a decision seems evident as well as switching from discussion to dialogue when heightened emotions necessitate the group listening to everyone’s thoughts.
* During dialogue, participants need to exercise suspending judgement and pay attention to themselves to make sure this is happening.
* During discussion, participants need to strive to avoid a “win-lose” model.
* Keep each other accountable during dialogue to avoid “cross-talk” (i.e. one member of the group disrupts the dialogue process to offer commentary or opinion regarding someone else’s opinion).
* As a group, commit to reading a book or articles about working together as a group to create an environment for more efficient and effective meetings.

***Inclusion Activities* to Encourage Dialogue:**

**Round-Robin Reflection*[[1]](#footnote-1)***

Information Processing: Organizing and Integrating

PROCESS

* At a stopping point or at the end of the meeting, the facilitator asks, “What were some of the decisions you made about when and how to participate, and what were some of the efforts of those decisions on you and the group?”
* Members reflect privately.
* In round-robin fashion, each member shares one decision and the effects of the decision.

ALTERNATIVES

* During the round-robin the facilitator paraphrases and inquires, “Did your decision produce what you intended? How did the effects of your decision compare to what you intended? How might this be the pattern for you? What are some ways you can apply this learning to future meetings?”
* Pairs share instead of the full group.
* Journal writing only.

TIPS

* Be clear that the prompt refers to decisions about participation, not the meeting content.
* Members self-direct performance improvements through the process faster and more permanently than process observers reporting participant behaviors. Teams become more accomplished.

**Spend a Buck[[2]](#footnote-2)**

Decisions

PROCESS

* Members have 100 imaginary pennies they can distribute among a few options.
* Explain the options.
* Individual decides how many pennies they will spend on each option.
* Gather and present the data to the group.

ALTERNATIVE

* Use this for individual choices rather than for a collective expression of priorities.

TIPS

* Provide think time before members assign their pennies.

1. Garmston, R.J. & Wellman, B.M. (2009). *The Adaptive School: A Sourcebook for Developing Collaborative Groups*. 2nd ed., Norwood, Massachusetts: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc., p. 264. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., p. 276. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)