

Footsteps

Making spiritual growth the priority

Jay Sidebotham

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and members of the RenewalWorks team

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Forward Movement
Cincinnati, Ohio

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RenewalWorks is a ministry of Forward Movement, committed to supporting congregations, their leaders, and members in a process of spiritual growth.

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Introduction

RenewalWorks is a ministry of Forward Movement; both are committed to reinvigorating the church and strengthening disciples. Thank you for taking the time to read about the reasoning and research behind RenewalWorks. It is all part of an exploration of spiritual growth, offered with love and hope for The Episcopal Church.

A good place to start this exploration is with some key questions: Is your congregation healthy? What factors play a role in a vital and strong congregation? What about you personally? How would you rate your spiritual vitality? What can help you—and your congregation—deepen a relationship with God and with neighbors?

We can imagine a variety of answers to these questions. And certainly many answers would have merit. But we feel fairly confident that we can offer important insight into how congregations and individuals might take the first steps toward a deeper, richer faith.

This insight is based on the experience of 2,000 congregations and 500,000 individuals from across the country. With data collected and analyzed, a theme emerged: congregations and individuals with a vibrant, deepening faith place spiritual growth as a top priority.

The *Footsteps* workbook puts flesh onto this data, explaining the meaning and implications of the survey results. The workbook explores the meaning of spiritual growth as well as presents a plan for growth that can guide both congregations and individuals. The workbook outlines a broader process called RenewalWorks that encourages congregations to have spiritual growth as a common goal and aspiration. Once spiritual growth is a top priority and a common call for the congregation, other elements of health and vitality will fall into place.

As a way to begin, we invite you to join us in prayer for the renewal and mission of our congregations. Please offer this prayer, adding thanks for the grace that brings us together as a church. Take a moment of silence before you continue reading this material.

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquillity the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things that had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (*The Book of Common Prayer*)

- Jay Sidebotham and the RenewalWorks team

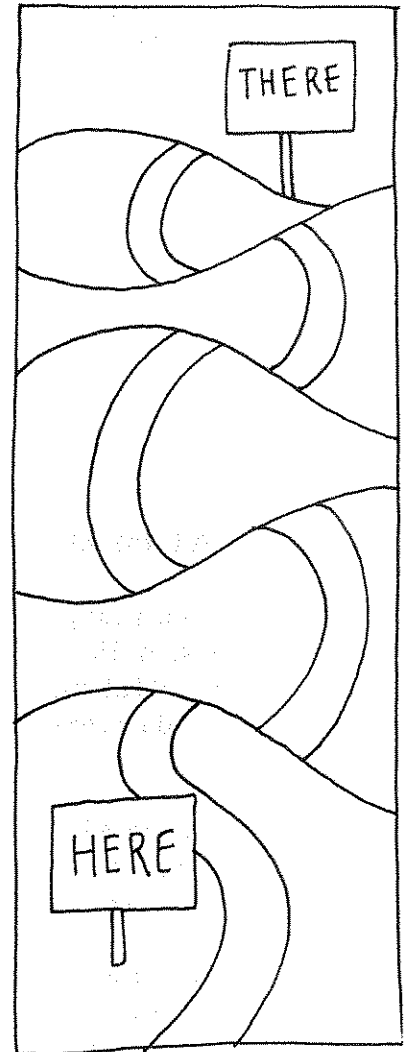
Chapter I

Getting from Here to There

*Where is my congregation right now?
Where would I like it to go?
How am I going to get there?*

Before they were called Christians, members of the early church were described as people of The Way. They were on the move. Because their life in community was so dynamic, because it was so clearly marked by love of God and neighbor, these first Christians transformed the world around them. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read that the church grew as outsiders witnessed the ways that Christians lived in community. People said: “See how they love one another. I want to be part of something like that.” As Christians grew and changed, their world was transformed in remarkable ways as well.

These changes were all about movement and growth. As Saint Paul guided the first Christian communities, he spoke of those who grow in maturity in Christ—some only able to digest the basics, others able to chew on meatier stuff. He had in mind the vision of a spiritual continuum. The letter to the Ephesians describes the Christian community as the body of Christ: growing, dynamic, changing, evolving, building itself up in love.



GET GROWING

Growth, change, and movement are part of the Christian story from day one, which is why the pointed question asked by Brian McLaren is so critical. McLaren, a well-known preacher, evangelist, and astute commentator on contemporary Christendom, asked: Is the church a club for those who have arrived, or a community of disciples who are on the way?

Episcopalians (sometimes jokingly described as the frozen chosen) have a call to spiritual growth, which is reflected in *The Book of Common Prayer*. It is captured in the baptismal service, as sponsors for young candidates pledge to help a child grow into the full stature of Christ. That's not a bad aspiration for all of us.



We welcome you to share in a process (an online survey followed by a series of workshops followed by a few specific next steps embraced by the congregation) by which we seek to help members of congregations focus on growth in their life with God, and in that way contribute to the vitality of their congregations.

The following pages tell a story of research done with thousands of Christians and hundreds of churches—research and resources being brought into The Episcopal Church through RenewalWorks, a ministry of Forward Movement. We are excited about this beginning. We are grateful for your interest and the prospect of your participation. We will learn together, and in the conversation and planning that unfolds, we envision a renewed commitment to spiritual growth in the church we love.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY SPIRITUAL GROWTH?

We believe that spiritual growth is fundamentally relational. The Hebrew scriptures capture that relational dimension. The Ten Commandments may sound to some like a list of rules, but actually, they are all about relationship. The first commandments describe a healthy and vital relationship with God, followed by commandments that ask how we live in healthy and vital relationship with each other.

In the New Testament, a lawyer puts Jesus to a test, asking about the requirements to inherit eternal life. Jesus makes reference to the scriptures he has learned and frames his answer relationally, in terms of love of God and love of neighbor.

Add to that love of the world God has made, and love of self, and we begin to see a way to understand spiritual growth. Spiritual growth becomes a matter of taking the steps needed to deepen relationship with God, with neighbor, with the world, and with ourselves.

WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

Love of God and Neighbor

As you begin to read, mark, and inwardly digest this material, spend a few moments attending to these passages in which Jesus calls his disciples to love of God and neighbor.

One of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matthew 22:35-40).

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:9-12).

TO CONSIDER

Before reading any further, pause and reflect on these two passages. Write your answers to the following questions:

1. What do these passages say to me about who Jesus is?
2. What do they say to me about what it means to be a disciple?

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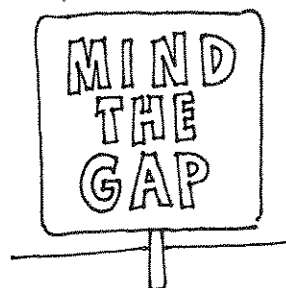
Chapter 2

The Challenge

So we repeat, with slight variation, the questions at the heart of this process:

Where am I now? Where do I want to be? Are those two different places? If so, what are the steps to get from here to there?

Research from more than 2,000 churches indicates that what people want from the church is a challenge to grow, to know how to take next steps in the spiritual journey, to get from here to there. We're talking about change, not always the easiest thing for anyone to embrace. In discussion of ways to lead change, Peter Senge, director of the Center for Organizational Learning at MIT's Sloan School of Management, talks about the gap between reality and vision. Reality indicates where we are now. Vision indicates where we want to be. Senge notes that mindfulness of the gap between the reality and vision provides the energy and creative tension needed to move from where we are to where we want to be. It's comparable to a rubber band stretched between vision and current reality. The tension will resolve itself in one of two ways, by pulling reality toward vision, or pulling vision toward reality. One can lower aspirations or one can create plans and strategies to move closer to where one wants to be.



ROOTED AND RESTLESS

Former Archbishop George Carey articulated a vision of The Episcopal Church as both “rooted and restless.” Our strong traditions, highly valued in our community as a resource for faith, give us stability. Surveys of Episcopal churches indicate that strong sense of rootedness. It is a gift and a treasure.

However, in a changing world where mainline congregations confront many challenges, we also hope for a healthy restlessness—a desire to grow more deeply into the life God intends for us. It can involve change, for sure. And we all know how hard change can be.

There's creative tension between reality and vision, rootedness and restlessness. We see that tension in all kinds of situations. An example: I weigh 205 pounds. I want to weigh 185. How will I get there? What steps will I take to accomplish that goal, or at least move in that direction? I want to learn to play the piano, but I've never given it a try. It won't happen unless I make time to sit down at the keyboard and practice. My golf game stinks. It won't get better unless I take some steps to improve that swing.

We can apply the creative tension to the area of spiritual growth. What's the gap between where I am now and where I would like to be, or perhaps in more theological language, where I feel called to be? The fact is, we may not know exactly where we'd like to end up. But we often know that we don't want to stay where we are. We have the inkling that there is more, and that God is not finished with us yet. The questions bear a measure of urgency, as reports of mainline denominational decline are common. It's an important call for our denomination, for our congregations, and for the individuals in those congregations.



It begins with each individual and calls for an honest look in the spiritual mirror: What can we say about the reality of our own spiritual lives? Do we have a sense of where we are in the spiritual journey? Do we know where we would like to be? Do we have a hunger, a vision for God's intention for us? Are we doing and being all we are called to do and be? What would it mean to answer Jesus' simple call to his disciples to follow him?

TO CONSIDER

Take a moment before you continue reading to ask yourself the following questions. We've left some space for you to jot some notes if that's helpful. If you desire, you may consider sharing some of your thoughts with a wider group.

1. When in my life have I experienced spiritual growth? What contributed to that growth?
2. When in my life have I been spiritually stalled, faced spiritual inertia, or reversal? What contributed to that dynamic?

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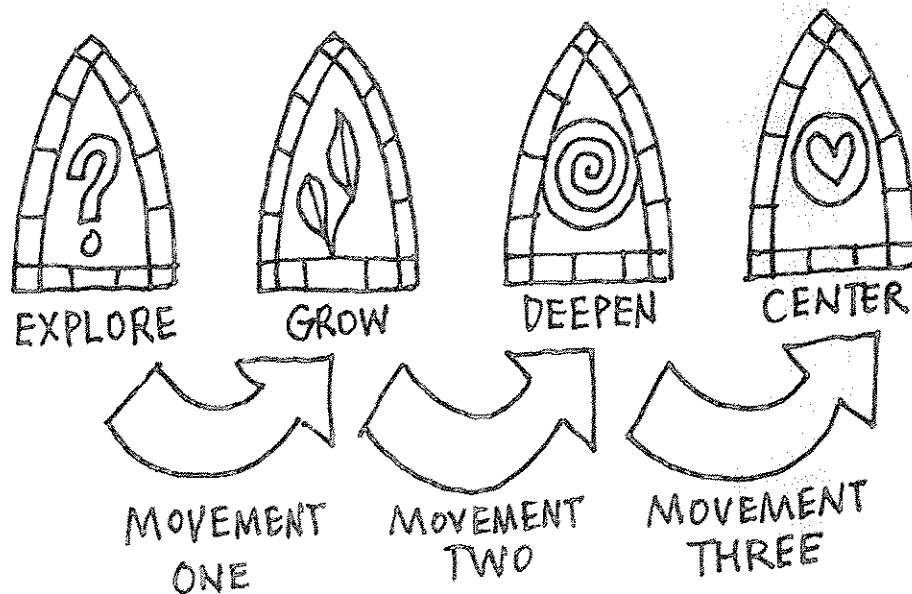
Chapter 3

The Research

*How can a survey tell me anything about faith?
What do numbers have to do with spiritual growth?*

The research that has shaped RenewalWorks is built on the premise that attitudes shape behaviors. The approach to research is common in the secular sphere. We believe it has application in the spiritual realm, as a deepening of love of God and neighbor, an attitude that will have impact on the way people live their lives, their behaviors.

This research began at a large non-denominational church in 2003 and continues today across a wide range of denominational and non-denominational churches. In 2009, we began to apply the learnings to Episcopal congregations. Since that time we have gathered input from several thousand parishioners from a growing number of Episcopal congregations, and those learnings are reflected here. We looked at spiritual growth through their eyes, coming to an understanding of both attitudes and behaviors, and trying to identify those things that help people to experience deeper growth, things that get people moving spiritually. Out of that research has emerged the picture of a spiritual continuum.



THE SPIRITUAL CONTINUUM

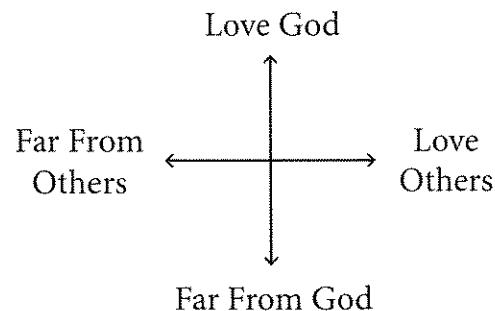
Research indicates there are four distinct groups in the spiritual continuum, centered on the idea that the Christian life is really about relationship, about increase in love of God and neighbor, and specifically that the Christian journey is one of discipleship of Christ.

We see this in the service of baptism in *The Book of Common Prayer*. In baptism we commit to an ongoing relationship with Christ. That relationship can be expressed and experienced in a variety of ways. The goal to which we aspire is to grow closer to Christ, to become more Christ-centered in our journey. The research around the Spiritual Continuum gives us insights into how that movement can happen.

That continuum is beautifully captured in several texts from *The Hymnal 1982*. Saint Richard of Chichester articulated this journey with these words: “Day by day, dear Lord, of thee three things I pray: to see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, follow thee more nearly, day by day” (Hymn 654). English poet William Cowper explained the progression this way: “O for a closer walk with God, a calm and heavenly frame” (Hymn 683). When we sing those hymns, we’re really praying our way along the spiritual continuum, knowing that, as Saint Augustine said, “the person who sings prays twice.”

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO GROW SPIRITUALLY? TO MOVE ALONG THE SPIRITUAL CONTINUUM?

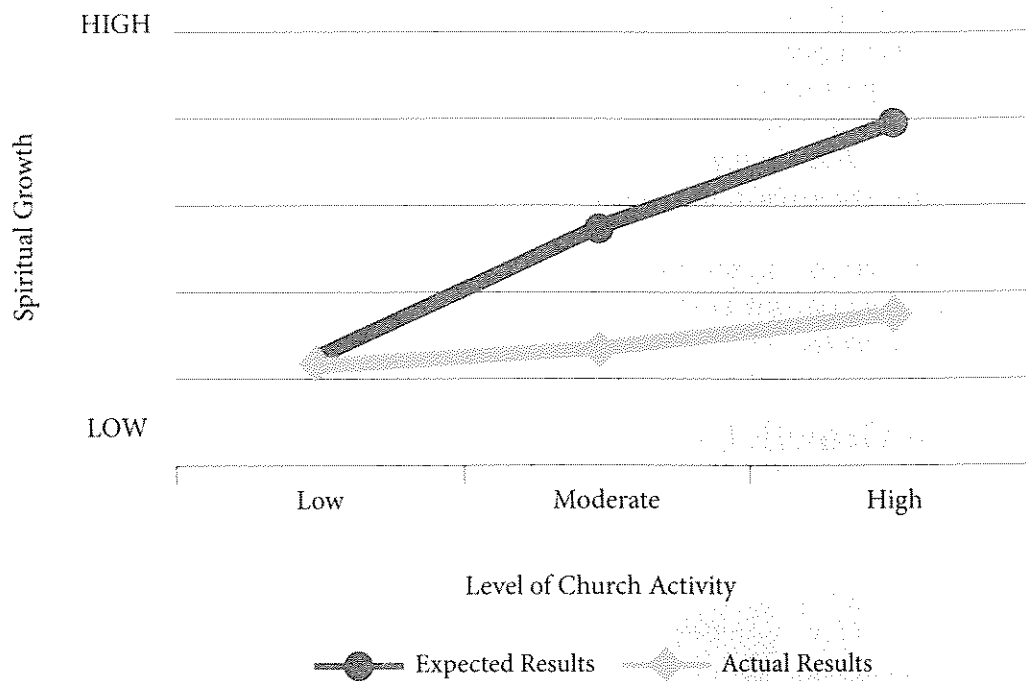
The process of growing as disciples of Christ—spiritual growth—requires that we always are growing in love of God and love of others. We can think of loving God as the vertical dimension of spiritual growth and loving others as the horizontal dimension. Through our cooperation with the work of the Holy Spirit, we grow from the bottom left quadrant toward the upper right quadrant. Love of God and love of others feed off each other as we grow. The more we love God, the more we love others. The more we show love to others, the more we grow in loving God.



For many years, church leaders assumed that attending church services and engaging in activities like small group Bible studies were the primary things that Christians could do to engage in a journey of spiritual growth. The thought was that more activities and a longer tenure of church attendance would lead to growth in love of God and love of others. But no one had ever tried to determine if this is true.

To test this idea, researchers surveyed more than 20,000 churchgoers to see if their level of involvement in church activities was directly related to their spiritual growth. If it were, the results would be reflected in a line that looks like the dark gray line in the graph. We would see the line

Activity: Driver of Spiritual Growth?



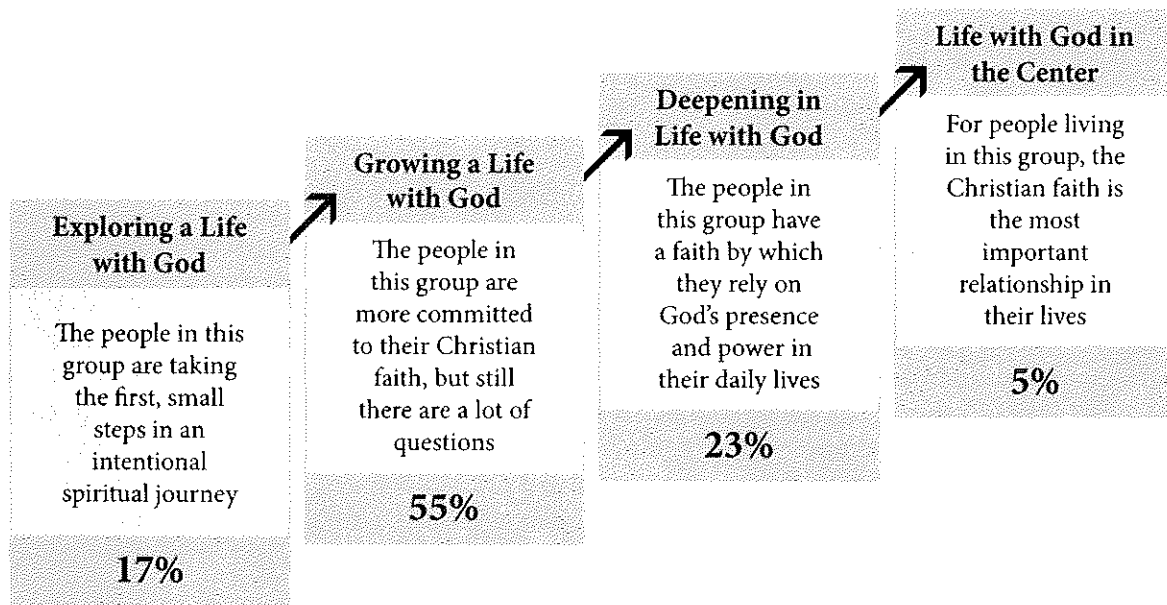
sloping up and to the right—as level of church activity increased, growth would increase also. What researchers found was that the line looked like the light gray line on the graph. It was fairly flat, indicating that an increase in level of church activity did not have much effect on growth in love of God and love of others. The researchers also looked at the relationship between years of church attendance and love of God and others. It looked similar to the light gray line. Even people who had attended church for twenty-five years or more did not show much of an increase in their love of God and others compared to people who had been attending church for only a few years. The researchers found that these results were the same in virtually every church (both denominational and non-denominational) that participated in the study, including the Episcopal Church.

If years of church attendance and degree of involvement in church activities do not correlate much with spiritual growth, what does? The researchers dug deeper into the data and discovered that a spiritual continuum describes growth on both the vertical (love of God) and horizontal (love of others) dimensions. On the vertical aspect of the continuum, the way in which churchgoers described the degree of intimacy of their relationship with Christ, predicted increases in love of God. On one end of this vertical dimension, some are just starting to explore the Christian faith. People who say that their relationship with Christ is the most important relationship in their lives are on the other end of the continuum. In between are those who are growing in what it means to know Christ.

The horizontal aspect of the continuum is growth in love of others. Those beginning their spiritual journey are developing their capacity to demonstrate Christ-like, self-giving love to others. Farther along the horizontal dimension, others are flourishing in their ability to love even those whom they don't know and to forgive those who have hurt them. All along both dimensions of the continuum, everyone is on a spiritual journey toward greater intimacy with Christ and greater love of others. The journey can be a wandering one, moving forward in fits and starts. Sometimes we become stuck, or circle back along the path to any earlier stage. No one ever arrives at the pinnacle of spiritual growth—the joy is in the journey.

Researchers discovered that by looking at where people are in their spiritual journey using both the vertical and the horizontal dimensions, they could create the four-stage continuum of spiritual growth shown below.

Spiritual Growth Continuum



This continuum of spiritual growth captures the fullness of what it means to be growing as a disciple of Jesus Christ. The percentages in each stage reflect the results from a survey of nearly 3,000 parishioners from thirty-three Episcopal congregations. As a benchmark for comparison, in surveys from more than 1,000 congregations from denominational and non-denominational churches, the percentages were 16 percent in the Exploring stage, 45 percent in the Growing stage, 24 percent in the Deepening stage, and 15 percent in the Life with God in the Center stage.

LOVE OF GOD AND NEIGHBOR IS THE MEASURE

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

These words begin the Shema, a central prayer within the historic Jewish faith. Observant Jews prayed the Shema at least twice daily from ancient times to today. The centrality of this prayer serves to remind us of the central place that loving God should have in our lives. Jesus quoted the Shema when asked to name the greatest commandment in all of scripture. Jesus said in Matthew 22:37-40 that loving God with all of who you are is the first, most important commandment. The second, Jesus said, is "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). Jesus raised the bar even higher in John 15:9-17, when he instructed us to love one another as he loved us, with a sacrificial, self-giving love.

Love of God, Love of Neighbor



LOVE OF GOD, LOVE OF NEIGHBOR

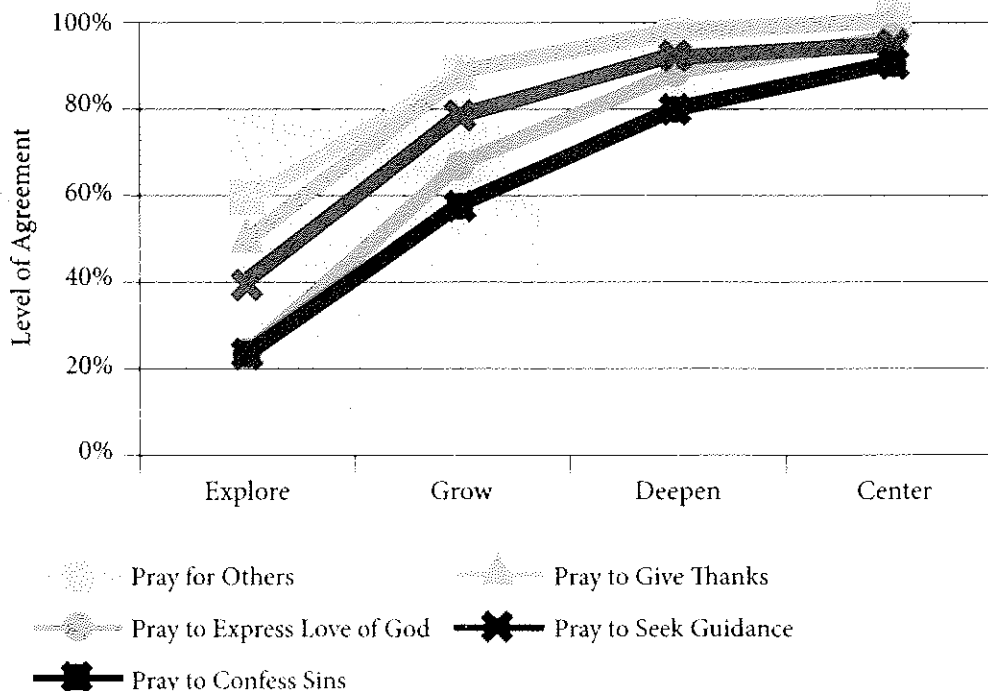
What helps people to move along the spiritual continuum?

We wanted to determine if there were particular beliefs, attitudes, spiritual practices, church activities, and behaviors related to putting the Christian faith into action that would help people to keep moving forward. Momentum is a powerful force on any journey, so knowing what gets people moving and keeps them moving is critical. A catalyst in chemistry is an agent that makes a chemical reaction occur more rapidly. In the same way, spiritual catalysts help people move more quickly from one stage of spiritual growth to the next by creating more fertile ground for the work of the Holy Spirit. The catalysts described here were discovered by examining the data from the 3,000 Episcopal Church parishioners who responded to the survey. We used statistical techniques to distill the key differences between people in each stage on the spiritual continuum. The catalysts are not the same for each movement between stages, so we will describe them by movement.

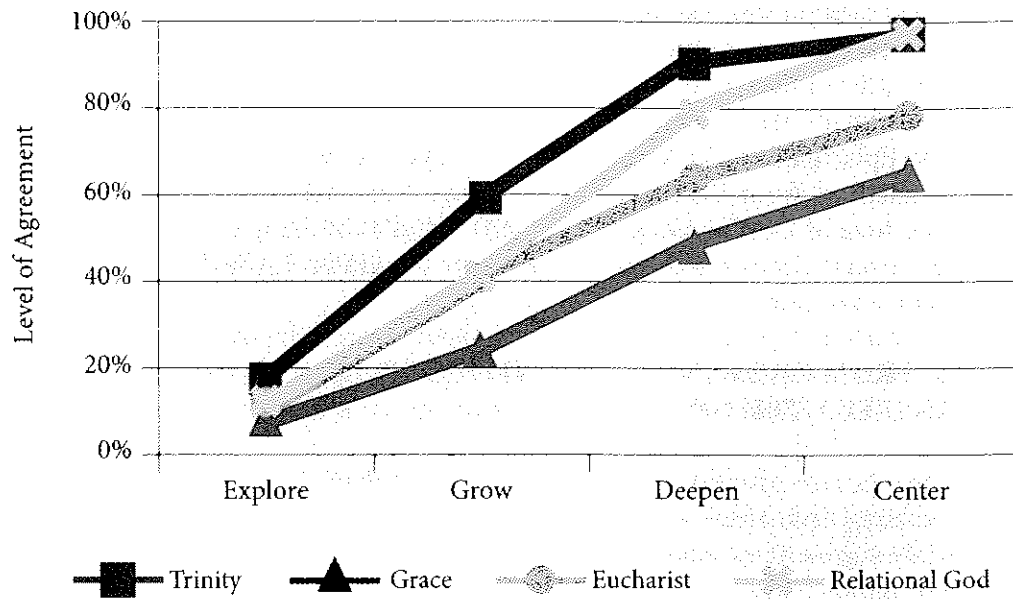
MOVEMENT 1: FROM EXPLORING A LIFE WITH GOD TO GROWING A LIFE WITH GOD

In this movement, growing in level of agreement with several core Christian beliefs is the key catalyst. As shown in the graph below, the journey from Exploring to Growing is marked by sharp increases in four core beliefs. Specifically, Episcopalians who are moving from the Exploring to the

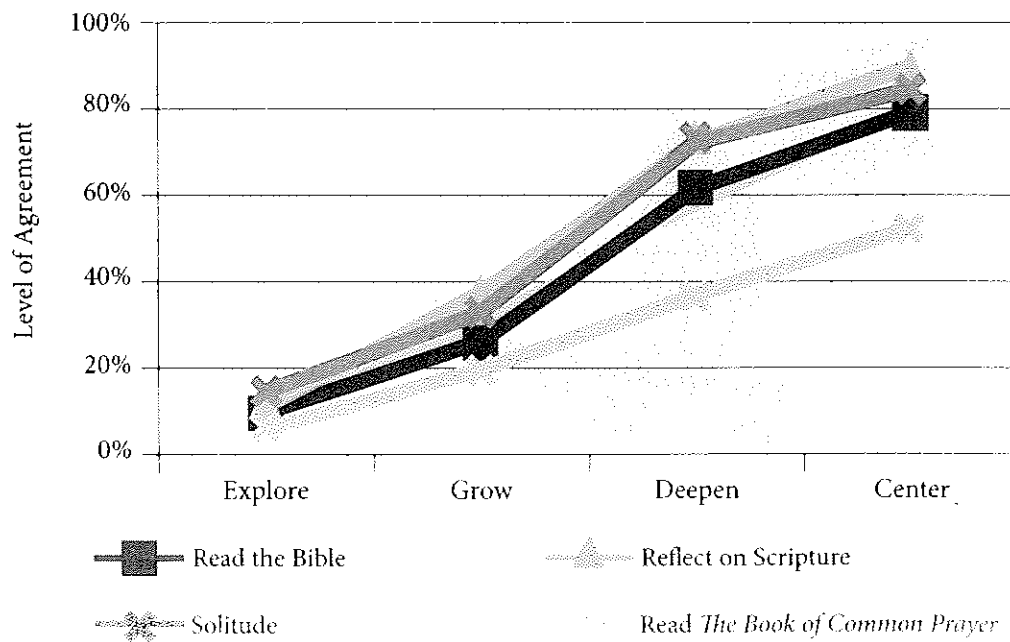
Types of Prayer



Core Christian Beliefs



Spiritual Disciplines



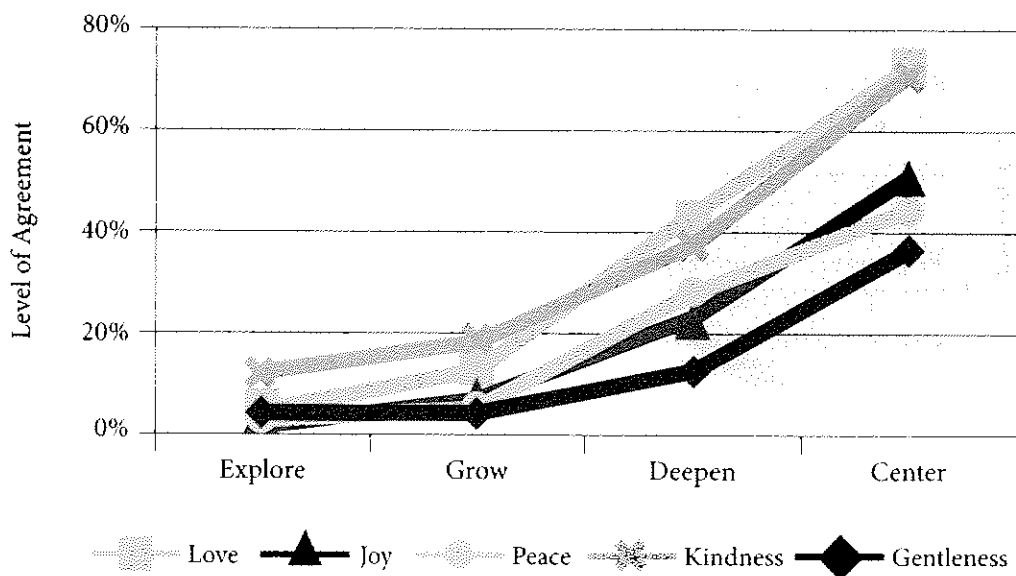
Growing stage are strengthening their beliefs in the Trinity (that God exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), Grace (that nothing we can do will earn us salvation), the Eucharist (that participating in Communion provides strength to persevere spiritually), and a Relational God (that God is actively involved in our lives). As the chart shows, these beliefs continue to increase in those who are in the later stages of growth, but the sharpest increase in beliefs happens in the movement between the first two stages.

A key catalyst for Episcopalians in Movement 1 is prayer. As with core beliefs, prayer increases sharply in the transition from Exploring to Growing. This includes praying for others, giving thanks, expressing love of God, praying for guidance, and confessing sins. Practicing all of these aspects of prayer several times a week or more seems to catalyze growth for those who are just beginning their spiritual journey.

MOVEMENT 2: FROM GROWING A LIFE WITH GOD TO DEEPENING IN LIFE WITH GOD

For Episcopalians who are in the Growing stage, spiritual disciplines like reading and reflecting on the Bible, spending time alone with God, and being reflective are critical to spiritual growth. As the graph below shows, the frequency of practicing these spiritual disciplines increase sharply

Core Virtues



when we compare people in the Growing stage to those in the Deepening stage. In addition to these spiritual disciplines, another important catalyst is growing an attitude of surrendering your life to God's control. This attitude is one of valuing God above all else. Episcopalians who are moving toward the Deepening stage also are becoming increasingly confident in their readiness to talk about the Christian faith with others. Finally, spiritual relationships also are catalytic to growth for Episcopalians who are moving from Growing to Deepening in their relationship with God. The key characteristic that makes these relationships catalytic is that they provide spiritual guidance and accountability.

MOVEMENT 3: FROM DEEPENING IN LIFE WITH GOD TO LIFE WITH GOD IN THE CENTER

In this third movement, growth comes through catalysts that are both inward and outward. The graph at the left shows that the catalysts of growth in this movement are love, joy, peace, kindness, and gentleness. These qualities are also known as the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

These virtues reflect an ability to forgive those who hurt you, to find peace even in difficult times, and to express Christ-like qualities in relationships with others. Related to growth in these virtues, behaviors that involve putting faith into action also are catalytic to spiritual growth in the transition from Deepening to Centering. These behaviors include serving others through the church and on your own, serving in ministry at your church, and initiating meaningful spiritual conversations with those who are not part of a faith community.

TO CONSIDER

1. What do I think about the spiritual continuum? Do I find it to be a helpful way to think about the spiritual journey?
2. Where do I see myself in the continuum?
3. Are there other ways of thinking about spiritual growth and development that have been helpful to me?

NOTES

Chapter 4

Encouraging Spiritual Growth

*Am I ready to take responsibility for my own spiritual growth?
Can I help others take those first footsteps too?*

In discussing catalysts of spiritual growth thus far, the focus has been on what we can do on our own to keep moving forward on the spiritual journey. Taking individual responsibility for our growth is critically important—as one pastor has told his congregation, he can't read their Bibles for them. But there are ways that church leaders can be intentional about supporting parishioners in their spiritual growth to aid them in moving forward.

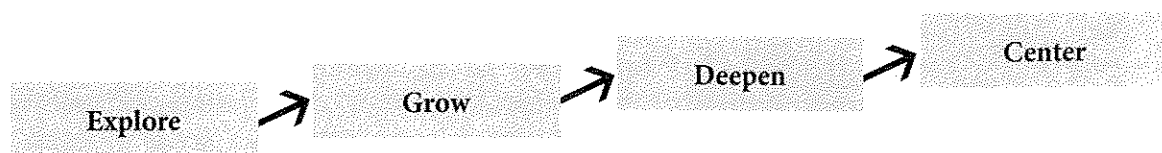
One critical need that Episcopal parishioners expressed was for church leaders to help them understand and develop a relationship with Christ. Parishioners want to grow in knowing Christ at a deep level. Additionally, they expressed the desire for the church to provide a clear pathway to help guide their spiritual growth. The steps in this pathway can be drawn from the information presented about the catalysts of spiritual growth. Help with developing a prayer life and more engagement with scripture as part of church activities were particular needs that parishioners would like the church to meet as well. Parishioners also want their church to set expectations about what it means to belong to the church. Finally, parishioners want to be equipped to talk about their faith as they serve those in need and to have help in using and developing their spiritual gifts. By choosing one or two of these needs to focus on for a season, churches can provide broad support that will help people gain momentum in their spiritual journeys.

In addition, there are needs specific to each stage that help to fuel spiritual growth. The next diagram highlights the top three needs that are especially important to movement between each stage of spiritual growth. In the movement between Exploring and Growing, help in developing a relationship with Christ is the most critical need that the church can meet. For the movement between Growing and Deepening, the church can serve parishioners by making their spiritual growth a priority. In the movement between Deepening and Centering, parishioners will be helped best by church leaders who share their own struggles in following Christ.

BELIEFS, PRACTICES, SERVICE

As we seek to understand those things that contribute to spiritual growth, it's useful to focus on three key elements that contribute to spiritual vitality, and to note in particular how those elements are expressed in The Episcopal Church.

Catalysts for Spiritual Growth



Movement 1

- ✓ Helps me develop a relationship with Christ.
- ✓ Engages me in the sacraments in a way that helps me grow spiritually.
- ✓ Provides training in how to share the gospel while serving those in need.

Movement 2

- ✓ Prioritizes my spiritual growth over my church membership.
- ✓ Helps me develop a prayer life that connects me with God regularly.
- ✓ Provides training in how to share the gospel while serving those in need.

Movement 3

- ✓ Church leaders are authentic about their struggles.
- ✓ Encourages me to take personal responsibility for my own spiritual growth.
- ✓ Consistently challenges me to engage with scripture in new and interesting ways.

Beliefs: A key element to understanding spiritual vitality is the extent to which people embrace core beliefs, like an understanding of God’s reality as expressed in the doctrine of the Trinity. Every denomination finds its own way to express these beliefs. Each has its own culture. For Episcopalians, these beliefs are reflected in the Baptismal Covenant, among other places.

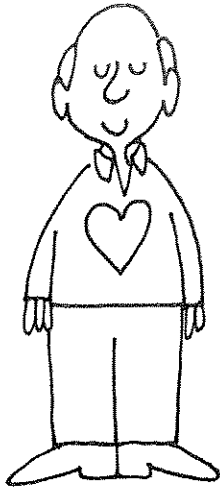
Practices: The discovery of the ways that faith is put to work not only on Sunday but in the daily rhythm of life; we refer to them as personal spiritual practices. Again, Episcopalians have great resources available to them in *The Book of Common Prayer*, resources that help integrate faith with all of life, relationships at home, at work, and with those in need.

Service: Jesus said that he came not to be served but to serve, so his disciples come to know him better when they serve, in the church or outside of the church. We are all ministers.

IT BEGINS WITH BELIEFS

Many people have come to The Episcopal Church because of its hospitality to exploration, its willingness to engage hard questions, and its ability to gather in community with our great differences.

As we gather with the help of *The Book of Common Prayer*, we find expressed some basic beliefs about our relationship with God and neighbor. It is helpful to understand that by “beliefs,” we don’t mean rigid dogma—rules that we better believe or else. Rather, we think of beliefs in terms of the original meaning of the word “creed,” which shares an etymological root with the word for “heart.”



Those things we claim to believe as Episcopalians are really about where we give our hearts.

Perhaps the best place to look for an articulation of those beliefs is in the baptismal service, with the covenant by which a congregation affirms its faith. In true Episcopal spirit, that covenant is expressed in a series of questions, which reflect not only what we believe, but also call us to practice and service, experiencing those elements of our spiritual life as inseparable from what we believe.

Spend some time reflecting on the Baptismal Covenant and note how it includes not only an expression of beliefs about who God is, but also calls us to spiritual practices and to service.

The Baptismal Covenant

Celebrant: Do you believe in God the Father?

People: I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

Celebrant: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

People: I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Celebrant: Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

People: I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Celebrant: Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

People: I will, with God's help.

Celebrant: Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

People: I will, with God's help.

Celebrant: Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

People: I will, with God's help.

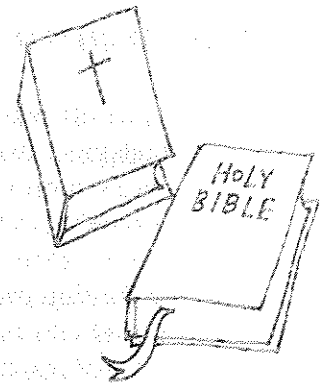
Celebrant: Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

People: I will, with God's help.

Celebrant: Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

People: I will, with God's help.

The Book of Common Prayer, pp. 304-305



THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT AS AN EXPRESSION OF CHRISTIAN BELIEFS

The research indicates that in all kinds of Christian communities, large and small, denominational and non-denominational, certain core beliefs are key. These include an understanding of our absolute dependence on the grace of God, a sense that the Bible has authority in guiding the life of the community, and a commitment to the trinitarian understanding of God. Commitment to these and other basic beliefs seems to be key to the vitality of congregations.

Episcopalians have the opportunity to reflect on these beliefs every time they attend a service of Holy Baptism. The entire congregation renews its commitment to the promises made in baptism, a renewed commitment to the spiritual journey. Basic Christian beliefs are embedded in the Baptismal Covenant. Using language from the earliest days of the church, the Apostles' Creed is broken down into three questions, inviting the congregation to respond by talking about what they believe, or where they give their hearts. Notably, and perhaps as an indication of the power of the Incarnation, the question about what we believe about Jesus has the longest answer.

TO CONSIDER

1. What is the role of beliefs in my spiritual journey?
2. How did I come to embrace the beliefs I now hold?
3. What is the connection between belonging and believing?

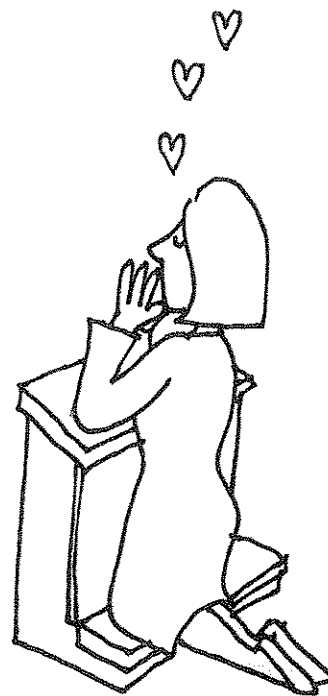
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PERSONAL SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

The second key contributor to spiritual growth has to do with personal spiritual practices—those ways that people put faith to work in their lives not only when they gather for worship, but also when they are not at church. This suggests the sense of ownership that people have for their progress in the journey of faith, their travel along the continuum. While a core Christian belief focuses on the freedom that comes with God’s unconditional grace, there is also a dimension of responsibility that we each have for the ways that our faith will grow. And it will take more than just one hour on Sunday sitting in a pew.

That’s why in the Baptismal Covenant, the first of five promises is key: *Will you continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?* We are called to continue, to make it an ongoing part of our lives. Among Episcopalians, research indicates that participation in the Eucharist is a key determinant for spiritual growth. That reflects not only a core belief that the Christ we follow is present in the bread and wine, but also tells us that our beliefs only matter as they are practiced.

Scripture and prayer are key. As we have noted in the charts on pages 13 and 14, these are the most catalytic of any behaviors. They are the most important for any segment. Research with all churches, including Episcopal congregations, indicates that engagement with scripture is key, not just on Sundays but during the week. And it is a practice that disciples are called to do in community and individually. Similarly, a commitment to prayer moves people along the spiritual continuum in significant ways.



TO CONSIDER

1. In my own journey, which spiritual practices have been most important for me?
2. Have my practices changed over the years? If I began new spiritual practices, how was I introduced to those?
3. Are there any spiritual practices I would like to explore that I am currently not doing?

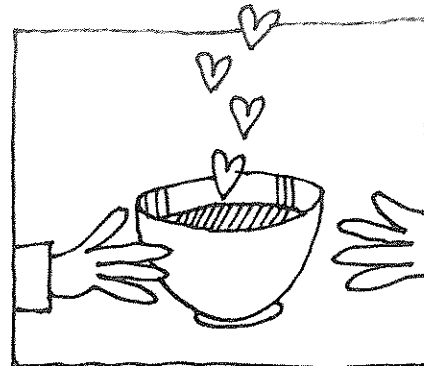
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FAITH IN ACTION

It's all about service. *The Book of Common Prayer* tells us that we are each and all ministers, so that as we seek to grow in loving relationship with God and neighbor, that growth unfolds in intentional acts of service.

That theme is reflected in the Baptismal Covenant. Of the five promises that are included, the last three have an outward focus—a concentration on service, whether proclaiming the Good News of God in Christ in word and deed, seeking and serving all persons, loving neighbor as self, or working for justice and peace, respecting the dignity of every human being. It's very much in keeping with the wisdom of Archbishop William Temple, who in the last century noted that the church is the only organization on earth that exists for the sake of those who are not its members.

A key learning for both clergy and parishioners is this: What you do outside the church is far more important than what happens inside the walls. We gather as a community, fed by the word and by the bread and wine, and then are sent out into the world to do God's work. As we share God's love with the neighbors we meet, we grow in our faith. Perhaps that is why some people consider the dismissal at the end of the Eucharist to be the most important part of the service. One church posted a sign over the exit: "The worship is over. The service begins."



As we seek to grow as disciples, as we seek to follow Jesus more closely, as we move toward a more Christ-centered life, we remember the ways that Jesus served as a role model, telling his disciples in Mark 10 that whoever wished to be great must be a servant, that he came not to be served but to serve. As Jesus gave them parting instructions at the Last Supper, the Gospel of John in chapter 13 tells us Jesus modeled love and servanthood by washing the disciples' feet, something reenacted in the liturgy on Maundy Thursday.

For all disciples, the model of servant leadership is a spirit of humility, and it is key in nurturing spiritual growth.

That service can unfold, of course, within the community of faith, as relationships of love and trust are developed. For many, commitment to small groups and particular ministries provide the occasion for service.

Then service goes outside the walls of the church, as Christ is met in those in greatest need, as we learn from the parable told in Matthew 25, where disciples find, much to their surprise, that they have met Christ in service to the hungry, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned.

TO CONSIDER

1. How has my service in the world been an expression of my faith?
2. How has it helped me to grow?

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SO WHAT GETS PEOPLE MOVING? WHAT HELPS THEM GROW?

These questions were explored in depth through identifying over fifty variables. Very clear patterns emerged, helping us understand the catalysts for movement and spiritual growth. These top five variables include:

1. Reading and reflecting on scripture
2. Embracing core Christian beliefs
3. Engaging in personal spiritual practices
4. Serving those in need
5. Being in a spiritual community

The challenge for our congregations, for leaders, for every member is: How will we move forward together, toward a deeper life with God? How will these variables be put to work among us?

TO CONSIDER

How would I personally answer these questions:

1. How will we move forward together, toward a deeper life with God?
2. How will these variables be put to work among us?

NOTES

Chapter 5

Next Steps

What is God calling our church to do and be?
What is God calling me to do and be?

We believe that what has been learned over the last ten years through this research is key for The Episcopal Church in coming days. Indeed, it represents a call to discipleship of Christ, through a single-minded focus on spiritual growth that will help people deepen their love of God and neighbor, and by doing so, revitalize the church.

There's a lot at stake. Statistics about organized religion and mainline denominations can seem grim. Yet God is faithful, and we are excited about the learnings. We have seen congregations experience new life. The hunger for this deeper spiritual life is real, and The Episcopal Church is uniquely poised to respond because of a strong tradition of beliefs reflected in our Baptismal Covenant, in daily practices clearly set forth in *The Book of Common Prayer*, and through the call to service that is such a strong feature of our denomination.

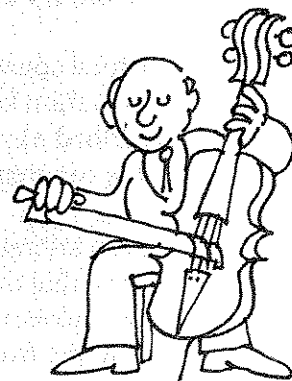
THE CALL: THERE IS MORE

The fact is, no matter where we are in the spiritual journey, there is more. Pablo Casals, the famous cellist, was once asked why he practiced each day even when he was in his nineties. Casals answered: "I practice because I get better."

A woman in her nineties mourned the loss of her husband of more than sixty years. A pastor went to visit her and noted her discomfort. She said; "I'm trying to figure out what God is calling me to do and be in this new chapter of my life." God was not done with her. She knew there was more.

Saint Paul knew this when he wrote to the Corinthian church in that beautiful hymn to love that is often read at weddings but really has to do with faith communities. He wrote: *For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known* (1 Corinthians 13:12).

For each one of us, there is more. Wherever we are, we can go deeper in the life of God, in discipleship of Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. How do we do that? That's a question RenewalWorks is asking. That's what this process is about. And we hope that you, as a member of your congregation, perhaps as a leader of your congregation, are feeling called to help people move forward in faith.



THE CALL: BE A COACH

We've learned a lot by talking to Christians from all kinds of churches, mainline and non-denominational, large and small, urban and rural, liturgical and not so much, conservative and progressive. We want to help all kinds of congregations, their members, and especially their leaders explore what it means to grow spiritually. We want to create that as an expectation for all our communities. That means there is a specific challenge for leaders: Be a coach.



If you are reading this, you may well be serving in some leadership capacity in your parish, either as clergy or lay leader. There are many metaphors for leadership in the church, but as we seek to help people grow in their spiritual lives, one helpful metaphor is that of coach, a popular term in our culture, whether in athletics or health or nutrition or corporate settings, as people wish to work on their physical, financial, professional, or relational health.

The RenewalWorks material is a great resource to help you coach members of your congregation along the spiritual continuum, to help them follow Christ more closely.

THE CALL: GET PEOPLE MOVING

There is a spiritual counterpart to the metaphor of the coach, reflected in the New Testament where the gift of exhortation is highlighted as one of the gifts of the spirit (Romans 12:6). Saint Paul never explicitly described himself as a coach, but as he encouraged and prodded, praised and challenged members of his congregations to grow, he was acting as a spiritual coach.

Chances are, you are called to do the same kind of work in the congregation where you worship and serve. We believe that the RenewalWorks process can help in this process. The spiritual continuum, with particular movement between stages and identifiable catalysts that further that movement, provides ways to get from here to there.

THE CALL: IF YOU COME HERE, YOU WILL GROW

That's how one congregation articulated its vision after going through the survey and workshops. It did so by elevating expectations for every member of the congregation, that each person had both the freedom and responsibility to deepen their love of God and neighbor.

It also established a goal for the congregation as a whole: it would be a place that not only expressed welcome but also called everyone who participated in the life of the church to expect to grow.

AN INVITATION AND A PRAYER

We hope this introduction to the reasoning and research behind the RenewalWorks process has been helpful. We welcome your interest in this process of exploration and discernment. Remember, it is a work in progress. Aren't we all?

It's a process that begins with a spiritual life inventory, a survey intended to provide an opportunity to explore where you are in your own spiritual journey, as an individual and as a congregation. The survey, we hope, will give you a snapshot of where you are right now.

The workshops that follow provide an opportunity to chart specific next steps, as you seek to grow in discipleship of Christ and find your own ways to move along the spiritual continuum.

But it's more than a survey and a few workshops. It's an extended process by which the work of spiritual growth becomes the focus of the life of the local congregation. In many ways, it's a culture shift, only possible with God's help. So with that in mind, we commend the following prayer for discernment:

Almighty and ever living God, source of all wisdom and understanding, be present with us as we consider the renewal and mission of our church. Teach us in all things to seek first your honor and glory. Guide us by your Holy Spirit to perceive what is right, and grant us both the courage to pursue it and the grace to accomplish it, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

About the Author

Jay Sidebotham, director of RenewalWorks, has served as an Episcopal priest for more than twenty years, ministering in parishes in New York, Washington, Chicago, North Carolina, and New England. He has applied the learnings from this research to his congregation, and the work has grown to engage congregations around the country. Jay worked in animation, helping to create cartoons in the *Schoolhouse Rock* series, and then in advertising as an art director before he went to seminary. He has continued his work in illustration and cartooning while he has served in churches. He finds that the church provides plenty of material for sure.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you're interested in learning more, or want to talk about how to embark upon this process in your congregation or diocese, visit www.renewalworks.org or contact Jay Sidebotham at jsidebotham@renewalworks.org or info@renewalworks.org. We welcome you to join other Episcopal congregations around the country in this journey. We know our work will be enriched and strengthened by your participation.

About Forward Movement

Forward Movement is committed to inspiring disciples and empowering evangelists. Our ministry is lived out by creating resources such as books, small-group studies, apps, and conferences. Our daily devotional, *Forward Day by Day*, is also available in Spanish (*Adelante Día a Día*) and Braille, online, as a podcast, and as an app for smartphones or tablets. It is mailed to more than fifty countries, and we donate nearly 30,000 copies each quarter to prisons, hospitals, and nursing homes. We actively seek partners across the church and look for ways to provide resources that inspire and challenge. A ministry of the Episcopal Church for over eighty years, Forward Movement is a nonprofit organization funded by sales of resources and by gifts from generous donors.

To learn more about Forward Movement and our resources, visit www.ForwardMovement.org. We are delighted to be doing this work and invite your prayers and support.



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