

**St. Anne's Episcopal Church**  
**Renewal Works – Workshop Team**

Report to Vestry/St. Anne's Parish

May 12, 2019

At the Vestry Retreat in January of 2018, several ministry areas were selected as areas of special focus. One of these was Adult Formation. With this in mind, Vestry considered and approved St. Anne's participation in the Renewal Works process, a parish-wide spiritual life inventory and four committee workshops to determine where we are and where we might go in terms of encouraging individual spiritual journeys.

### **Workshop I**

The purpose of the first workshop - Where Have We Been – was to explore the ideas of spiritual journey, spiritual life continuum, and spiritual growth catalysts. This exploration will help us better understand areas we might focus on or ways in which we might enrich the spiritual lives of our parishioners.

The first step was to explore our individual spiritual journeys, using milestones in our lives to document where we were in our relationship with God and our church at different points in time. Individually, and as a group, we discussed how those relationships have changed over time and as we each experienced different life events.

We then discussed the concept of a Spiritual Life Continuum and how our faith looks at different points along the way. We discussed how these levels compare to moving beyond being Easter & Christmas people (Exploring), church as a spiritual and not social event (Growing), practicing faith in the church and at home (Deepening) and reaching the point where a God-centered life focuses on God & discipleship and is not dependent on the church or its leaders for their own spirituality.

Practices and catalysts for movement from one area to another include but are not limited to an embracing of core Christian beliefs (Exploring); prayer (Growing); Bible reading and reflection and spending time alone with God (Deepening); and growth in love, joy, peace, kindness and gentleness, known as fruits of the Holy Spirit (Centered).

Our last activity focused on how we as individuals and as a group felt that St. Anne's is doing at supporting and encouraging spiritual growth. How are we at providing spiritual growth catalysts to our parishioners? In other words, how can we help people move further along the continuum? Some things we agreed we do well at St. Anne's are Eucharist, Sunday School/Bible Study-Stories for Grownups, prayer, opportunities for ministry, and big events/services/celebrations. Some areas we felt could use improvement are identifying gifts and ministries, building relationships, and encouragement/participation beyond worship.

### **Workshop II**

With the second workshop – Where Are We Now - we got to discuss the demographic data collected in the Spiritual Life Inventory, and how our congregation demographics compare to the community. With a response rate of 80% (128 parishioners completed a spiritual life survey), we feel confident that the data represent a good number of our members.

#### *Demographic Data*

Parish Trends Data – while the ten-year data seems to indicate reduction in most areas, the four-year trend shows slow growth in youth, membership, and tithing.

Parish compared to community – our parish is more educated and less diverse than the community we live in (something we noted we would like to work on in workshop I – but not necessarily a spiritual growth area).

#### *Current Beliefs*

Strongest beliefs are in Grace and the Trinity

#### *Current Practices*

We excel at tithing and confession (that indicates spiritual growth & maturity)

#### *Current Activities*

We come to church and are satisfied

#### *Key Takeaways*

We are at Episcopal norms – we are an average Episcopal congregation. This means - good news - we have room for improvement!

We need help to grow spiritually. We are happy (stuck) where we are, not sure how to help ourselves and others grow spiritually.

#### *Dot exercise*

As a group, we reviewed the 26 Episcopalian beliefs and practices listed in our workbook, and used pink sticky dots to indicate the ones we cared the most about and green sticky dots to indicate the ones in which we would like to grow. After workshop II, these beliefs and practices were posted in the hallway of the Ministry Center, and all were invited to provide input.

Top three beliefs and practices with the most pink (important to us) dots, as of March 21:

We believe that God is present and active in the whole of creations and that we are called to participate with God through appreciation and care for creation, through the arts, through our daily work, through our relationships with other people, and in our own inner lives. (16)

Every person has freedom and responsibility to discern the truth of God for his or her life through engaging the Bible, in conversation with the historic teachings and liturgy of the church, and human reason. We cherish diverse expressions of belief and practice as people grow into abundant and authentic lives in their time and place. (12)

We participate regularly in the Holy Eucharist, bringing the substance of our lives and the fruits of our labors, offering them to God, and having them incorporated into the Risen Body of Christ. (11)

Top three beliefs and practices with the most green (areas we'd like to grow) dots, as of March 21:

We promise to seek and serve Christ in every person and to love our neighbors as our selves. (18)

We seek spiritual friendship and accountability through individual and group reflection on our spiritual journeys. (12)

We read and meditate on the Bible regularly. (11)

### **Workshop III**

For the third workshop – Where Do We Feel Called to Go – the second half of our spiritual life survey results were used to determine areas of opportunity for spiritual growth. After a quick review of the first two workshops (spiritual continuum, church/community data trends, beliefs & practices exercise) we then reviewed five best practice principles and how our inventory results compared.

*The Heart of the Leader* - how church leadership modeling discipleship and championing spiritual growth can help others focus on transformation rather than numbers.

*Get People Moving* – welcoming and incorporating newcomers, but also emphasizing that spirituality is a journey and challenging others to take the next steps.

*Embed the Bible in Everything* – in addition to our scripture-focused sermons and the way scripture is woven throughout the Book of Common Prayer, expanding culture to embed the Bible in meetings, service projects, ministries and social events. **This area was indicated as our best opportunity for growth.**

*Create Ownership* – instead of a “sit and git” culture where parishioners come only to participate in Eucharist, encourage a culture of personal responsibility and an expectation of engagement with other facets of church life in pursuit of spiritual growth.

*Pastor the Community* – service in the church, and also in the surrounding community. A big part of this is being aware of what is going on in the community, having conversations with others of different faiths, working for justice and peace in the needs of others.

The Heart of the Leader was explored at the March Vestry meeting. Father Lonnie visited with the group and shared about that exercise:

If the Spiritual Life is where the heart of the leader is, there will be the church! Not just the Rector, but also staff, vestry & lay leaders. If not there, it will be hard for church to move forward with spiritual relationships. Some areas have room for growth and the good news is we can grow!

Since Lonnie has been at St. Anne's, the Vestry meetings open with prayer, scripture & reflection. Vestry is like a 3yr. boot camp. It is important the Vestry know they are the spiritual leaders, grounded in discipleship, looking for & finding God.

So, questions for Vestry at last meeting, with a tick-mark scale of 1-10, where 1 = absolutely not, 10 = absolutely yes.

1. Do you feel that your Clergy /Priest makes his/her own spirituality a priority?
  - a. Most marks on the scale indicated that the Vestry felt Fr. Lonnie does make his spirituality a priority.
2. Do you understand that as a Vestry member, you should make your individual spirituality a priority?
  - a. With marks all over the scale, the Vestry graded themselves lower than perhaps we see them - over all they think they can do better.
3. Does the Vestry support the Clergy /Priest (time, opportunities) for spiritual growth?
  - a. Majority of marks were ranked in the middle of the scale.
  - b. Fr. Lonnie thinks the Vestry & Church has always allowed him this opportunity

Most important thing we do is to spend time in formation of discipleship together. Father Lonnie, our most visible leader, feels that he is supported by Vestry and congregation in his endeavors to take time for himself and family and also to spend time in spiritual growth away from the parish. The idea of Vestry members as *spiritual* leaders of the congregation and examples to follow may have been a revelation to some.

In small groups we brainstormed ways, both programmatic and shifts in culture, that the other four best practice principles might be put motion at St. Anne's.

<u>Get People Moving</u>	<u>Embed the Bible</u>	<u>Create Ownership</u>	<u>Pastor the Community</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructed Eucharist</li> <li>• Include scripture reading in newsletter prior to service</li> <li>• Bible Reading Parish-wide Community Event</li> <li>• Reminding ourselves that not everyone is at the same level</li> <li>• Spiritual Gifts – helping people identify and encouraging them to be there</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make parish-wide policy to include scripture reflection in every meeting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasize praying the Daily Office</li> <li>• Direct instruction in how to use Bible and Prayer Book</li> <li>• Small groups/partnerships for prayer &amp; spiritual discussion, accountability, cross-generational</li> <li>• Teaching how to pray – types of prayer, centering, etc...</li> <li>• Use language of expected prayer (similar to tithing pledges)</li> <li>• Include links to Daily Office lectionary readings in newsletter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• it doesn't have to be a HUGE gesture to be living "treat your neighbor as yourself"</li> <li>• remember that all are not at the same place spiritually – teaching and guidance</li> <li>• bring in groups for blessings, healings, and prayers</li> <li>• develop plans to help us remain consistent – instructional Eucharist</li> </ul>

The results of the Renewal Works Spiritual Life Inventory indicated that our greatest area of opportunity was to be found in the practice principle of Embed the Bible. Group members struggled with the potential focus for improvement in the Renewal Works report that "Church leaders provide sound doctrine rooted in scripture." Most of the listed best practices in the workbook are things we feel we are either already doing or have done: reading Bible as a congregation, modeling scripture inclusion at Vestry meetings, Bible Stories for Adults.

From our group work we derived these overall priorities:

- *Consistent, direct instruction on why we do what we do (offered regularly) Examples:*
  - *instructed Eucharist*
  - *Book of Common Prayer use*
  - *teaching how to pray*
  - *etc*
- *Parish-wide exhortation to include scripture & prayer at every gathering*
- *Provide instruction (tools) and language of individual responsibility for personal spiritual practices (help people understand they need to be doing these things on their own too)*

## **Workshop IV**

For Workshop IV, we discussed further the best practice principles and what we might take on as priorities to help members move further along the spiritual life continuum at St. Anne's.

### **☙ Instruction on Why We Do What We Do and How to Do It**

What might this look like?

With the help of Vestry and other church leaders, provide instructed Eucharist twice/several times a year. If this could be planned well in advance, it could be announced/advertised at our high attendance services such as Easter and Christmas.

Instructors/resources to provide a) introduction to the types of prayer and b) how to best practice each of them, to c) increase competence and comfort of congregation with prayer.

Instructors/resources to provide a) Beginner's Guide To Using the Book of Common Prayer and/or b) Practicing Spirituality at Home with BCP and/or c) how different members of our own congregation use BCP as a resource

### **☙ Including Scripture at Every Gathering**

What might this look like?

Encourage committee chairs, ministry leaders, Vestry members, and other groups to start and end meetings and events with scripture and prayer.

Find/develop a resource to help encourage this.

### **☙ Initiate a Culture of Individual Responsibility for Spiritual Growth**

What might this look like?

Establishing a ritual similar to that associated with annual giving pledges, in which parishioners think about how they might take up or broaden a spiritual practice outside Sunday worship service, and commit to it with a note laid on the altar. This may be most effective to do right before Lent.

Include readings or links to readings (daily/Sunday) readings in newsletter, via social media, remind that they are on St. Anne's web pages. Encourage members to read and think about before Sunday service.

A small groups effort (similar to foyer groups?) that focuses on scripture: reading, discussing, going deeper. Send some interested volunteers to training to lead/moderate/facilitate these groups.

## **Workshop V - What's Next?**

The St. Anne's Renewal Works Workshop Team respectfully asks members of the Vestry to consider taking up one of these areas of focus to move forward with over the next three months and see where we are by Rally Sunday.