Spiritual Transformation: The Heart of Adult Faith Formation

Tom Zanzig

For the majority of parishes and congregations today, the renewal or reinvigoration (in some cases, resuscitation) of adult faith formation is considered a high priority. This is so for a painfully simple reason: when it comes to deepening the spiritual life and religious identity of adults, most faith communities are falling short if not failing altogether.

The causes of this deepening pastoral challenge are many and complex, including tectonic and well-documented cultural shifts. No need to rehearse those factors here, much less deny their powerful effects. Yet we can't use socio-cultural realities as cover for our own ineffectiveness. As pastoral leaders, we often exacerbate an already troubling situation by remaining trapped by counterproductive paradigms and mindsets—often at the insistence of ecclesial authorities who fail to recognize how radically the ministerial terrain has shifted.

One of our major adult faith formation mistakes, I believe, is that we focus far more on the transmission of content than on the transformation of persons. More specifically, our adult programming too often *starts* with a given body of content and inevitably moves toward such academic and educational issues as curriculum design, formats and schedules, methodologies, and content delivery systems. At some point, program developers may offer a comment or two, maybe even an essay or book chapter, on adult development, androgogical principles and techniques, and so on. But the common intent of such observations, it seems to me, is to figure out a way to make the already chosen content effective or at least palatable for our adults, many of whom we probably suspect are not all that interested in what we'll be offering.

Because our AFF *starting point* is content and, to a lesser degree, methodology, references or connections to the actual lived experience of the adults we are trying to serve get short shrift or

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lost altogether. Then we wonder why our adults either don't show up for what we offer or, if they do begin a program, often slowly drop out.

Put succinctly, I believe two major factors in the failure of most adult faith formation efforts are 1) our choice of starting points (content over persons), and 2) our preferred methods (education of the head rather than the spiritual formation of the total person). I advocate a radically different adult faith formation approach, one I have come to call, a little clumsily but descriptively, *community-based spiritual transformation*. I suggest that our ministry among adults will succeed only if we *start and stay* with their lived experience of the spiritual journey *and* if we use strategies and techniques that help people name, reflect upon, and share with trusted others their lives as disciples of Jesus.

This essay summarizes the foundational principles and components of my model and answers the common questions posed in many of my workshops and conversations: Assuming for now that I'm right in my basic position, what will that mean in terms of our actual programming? What does a "spiritual transformation model" of adult faith formation look like in the real world? How can we implement the model in a congregation or parish? These are legitimate and important questions. In this essay I try to answer them.

Core Values and Pastoral Principles

Sound planning, according the Stephen Covey, "starts with the end in mind." Below are the values, attitudes, and pastoral principles that I think a parish or congregation must embrace if it is to minister effectively to and with those adults who are ready to grow as disciples. I present them as a covenant between pastoral leaders and the "engaged adults" of the community. As pastoral leaders we will do the following:

- Embrace the gift and responsibility of being a *particular* community of faith, uniquely called and sustained by the Spirit of God at this time and in this place.

- Remember that we nurture and support one another not for our personal growth alone but to fulfill the mission given the church by Jesus—to call forth and form genuine disciples who make real the Reign of God through evangelizing lives and loving service.

- Recognize and respect that each member of our faith community is engaged in a lifelong journey of faith and spiritual formation that is neither limited to nor solely dependent on parish life. The congregation is called to serve, nurture, and minister to the adults' unique journeys according to their needs—which at times may be minimal or even lead them outside the community.

- Challenge and equip our adult members to assume personal responsibility for their own spiritual growth and participation in the church's mission, with the assistance and support as needed of the community. (We adopt the motto of Home Depot: "You can do it, we can help.")

- Focus not on developing new *programs* (which will come and go) but, rather, on developing new *patterns of living* as a community of faith—ways of interacting, dreaming, creating, reconciling, worshipping and working together—as we establish *systems* of shared responsibility.

- Avoid preempting the work of the Spirit by prematurely naming our

goals, expected "outcomes, or "preferred future" (which often reflect a stronger commitment to business models than to the Gospel). We will remain open to the surprises of the Holy Spirit and resist the constant temptations toward power and control.

■ Build on our community's life-giving history and invite members to share their God-given strengths and talent; we will live as if we actually believe the Good News that the Spirit is working in and through *this* community of disciples right *now*!

■ Accept that the primary responsibility of the congregation, and its most essential and effective ministry, is to offer rich and vibrant worship, without which genuine formation is impeded if not impossible. We acknowledge that everything in parish life flows from or builds on good liturgy. We also accept that a rich liturgical life may well satisfy the felt needs of a majority of adult members.

■ Build the faith community "from the inside out," not from the top down. We will listen, discern, dream, plan, and minister *collaboratively*, i.e., as a genuine community of disciples with a shared mission.

■ Provide a warm, welcoming, and evangelizing environment for all members, while focusing our AFF energies and resources on those members who wish to actively pursue their growth as disciples.

■ Call engaged adults to a covenantal relationship with their God, the community, and the world, a covenant they express through carefully discerned personal spiritual practices,

communal connections, and Christian service.

■ Use available and emerging technologies to enhance and unleash the creative energies of the community and of its individual members.

Not a Program But a Pastoral Process

To move toward a spiritual transformation model of adult faith formation, I propose that a congregation engage in a thoughtful, prayerful, and patient three to five year pastoral *process* (which might then be repeated as needed) in which **the process is the program**. We do not commit to interminable planning and meeting and building for some *future* goal. Rather, the way we proceed, the relationships we build, the tools we use, the talents and gifts we uncover and unleash—all are part of the patterns and systems that will anchor and sustain us *whatever emerges from our efforts through the grace of God*. In ministering to the spiritual formation of our adults, we will not prematurely identify our goals and then set out to "achieve" them. Such approaches may work for fundraising and building projects, but not for genuine "soul work." We don't know what our community will look like at the "end" of this process because there is no end. Our task and commitment is to remain faithful and open *now* to what the Spirit *is creating* among and through us.

The pastoral process I advocate utilizes strategies and tools that reflect the core values and pastoral principles described above. Leaders can mix-'n-match and sequence these in ways that fit their community's current situation and needs. I must stress again: What I present here is *not* a "program." Rather, the suggested tools and strategies reflect and *help create* the patterns and systems that are at the heart of my adult faith formation vision. *How* a parish or

congregation chooses to use these strategies and, more importantly, the results of their use will be unique for each congregation, because each community of faith is unique. The intent of this process is to discern, lift up, celebrate, and unleash the creative talents and gifts of *these* members in *this* place and time—all in service to the Reign of God. What emerges from the process may well surprise us.

1. A Model of Spiritual Growth

If the heart of effective adult faith formation is, as I have proposed, spiritual transformation, those engaged in the process must be able to name, reflect on, and comfortably share stories about and lessons learned from their spiritual life. Therefore, undergirding the community-based spiritual transformation model of adult faith formation is a theologically grounded but also accessible understanding of the spiritual life and the dynamics of lifelong spiritual transformation.

For two decades I have been working on a model of transformation that would, I hoped, not only help me make sense of my own journey but also help others understand and embrace their own life experience. Importantly, in an age of increasing secularization and the dramatic increase in the "nones" (not religious affiliated), who are now 20% of the U.S. population, I wanted to find a way to think about and interpret common life experience through the lens of Christian faith but absent the kind of religious presumptions and jargon that increasingly seem foreign. if not off-putting, to many people. What has evolved from that work is a way of understanding spirituality and religion that has been not only personally liberating but also enthusiastically embraced by those I've shared it with in presentations, workshops, and retreats.

Significantly, my model is universal; its basic components and principles connect to persons regardless of their age, culture or ethnicity, or religious persuasion. Even atheists and un-churched people have told me

the model helps them name and reflect more deeply on their lived experience.

Three illustrations provide visual summaries of three core elements of my theory of spiritual formation.

The *Spiritual Growth Cycle* offers an alternative to the common understanding of the spiritual life as a predictable, even programmable, linear process, an understanding that inevitably leads to misconceptions about our spiritual journey, the nature of God, and the meaning of life. Deceptively simple at first glance, the Spiritual Growth Cycle has for years given me a conceptual framework or roadmap for deepening study, personal reflection, and prayer.

The Spiritual Growth Cycle
The Heart of the Matter

Hunger → Search → Awakening → Response → Hunger

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The *Spirituality Wheel* suggests that the cyclic growth process unfolds within multiple dimensions of life and over time leads to our deepening integration as persons. (See next page.)

The *Personal Discernment Tool* provides a method for exploring life experiences within the framework of the Spiritual Growth Cycle. (See next page.)
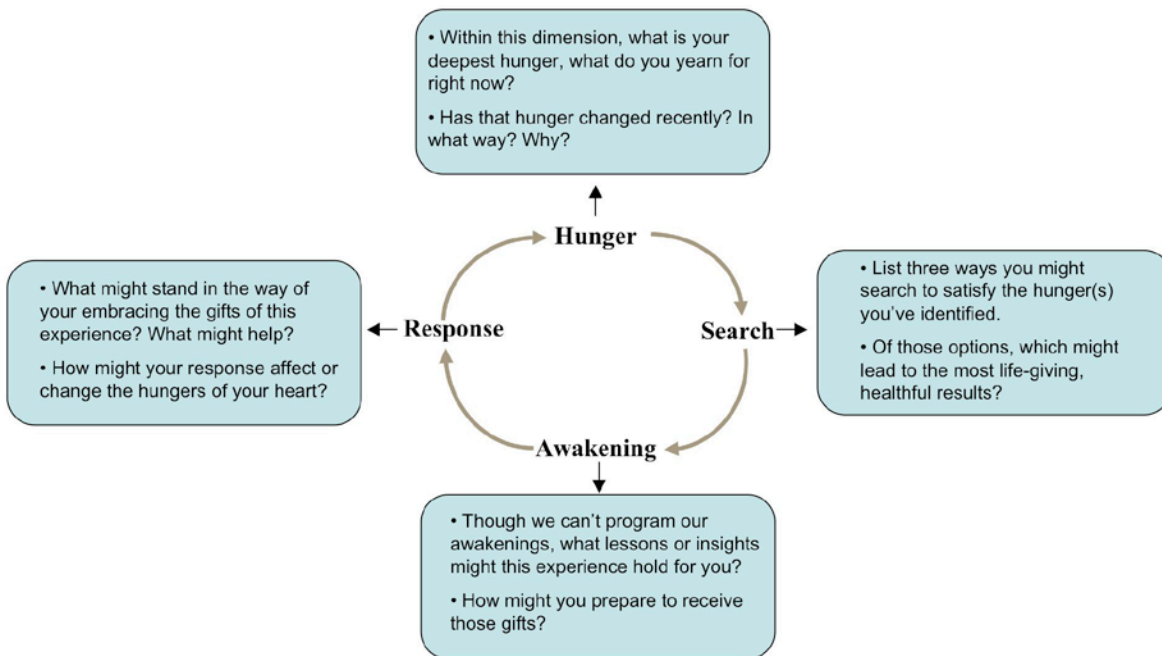
The Spirituality Wheel
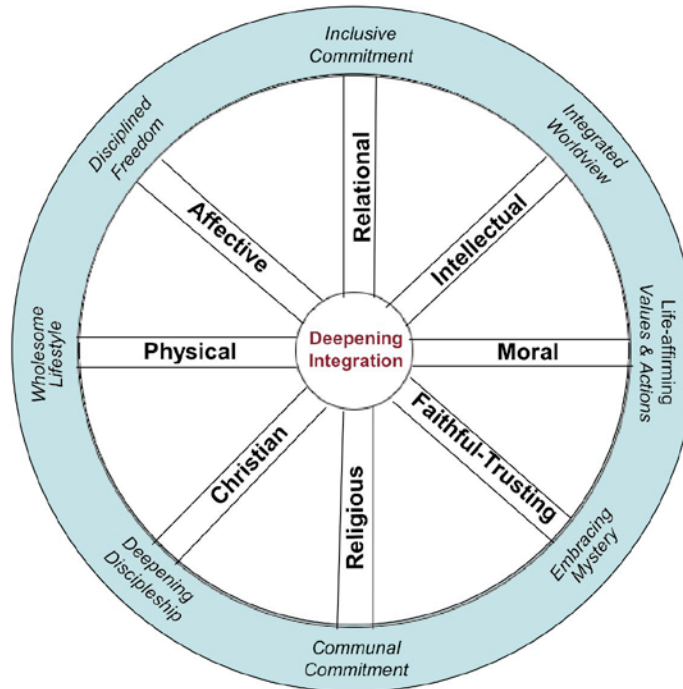
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A Personal Discernment Tool

Note: This is a generic version of a tool that can be adapted for use with each dimension. It can also be used to reflect on and explore any event, situation, or personal issue within the context of spirituality.

• Within this dimension, what is your deepest hunger, what do you yearn for right now?

• Has that hunger changed recently? In what way? Why?

• What might stand in the way of your embracing the gifts of this experience? What might help?

• How might your response affect or change the hungers of your heart?

• List three ways you might search to satisfy the hunger(s) you've identified.

• Of those options, which might lead to the most life-giving, healthful results?

• Though we can't program our awakenings, what lessons or insights might this experience hold for you?

• How might you prepare to receive those gifts?

Hunger
Response
Search
Awakening

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If you'd like more information about my model of spiritual growth, go to an interactive essay "Lifelong Conversion: The Dynamics of the Spiritual Life" on my website: http://www.tomzanzig.com/Site/Conversion_essay.html.

2. Appreciative Inquiry

Dr. Jane Regan of Boston College sums up effective adult learning with this rich and insightful observation: Adults learn best, she states, when they gather in conversation around things that matter. Every phrase of that statement is important. Many of the tools and strategies I advocate have deep conversation as their goal. Other strategies, like the components of my spiritual growth model, help adults reflect on and interpret their life experience so they have something to bring to the table (often literally) when they gather with others.

Appreciative Inquiry is an approach to organizational change that offers powerful techniques for gathering adults in meaningful conversation. Most approaches to organizational change focus on naming problem areas, identifying root causes for the problems, then planning and implementing steps for eliminating or reducing the impact of those root causes. Because of their constant attention to problem areas, however, such approaches often drain energy and suck the life out of organizations and their leaders. By the time the problem is "solved" (it seldom is) no one really cares anymore. Yet most organizations repeat the same ineffective process over and over.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an approach to organizational change that focuses on and builds upon *positive, life-giving* experiences. Through directed interviews and other conversational strategies, AI surfaces activities, attitudes, experiences, and so on that give people hope and fuel a desire for deeper commitment to and engagement in the organization. The organization then seeks ways to enhance, replicate, or expand upon those positive and energizing realties.

A brief introduction to AI is available in *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry* by Sue Annis Hammond. A more thorough but still accessible presentation of AI is *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change* by David L. Cooperrider and Diana Whitney, two pioneers in the management field. You might also look at the wealth of resources available on the Appreciative Inquiry website: http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu.

The structured processes and practical strategies of Appreciative Inquiry can be used in multiple ways in adult faith formation and other programming. One particularly effective AI strategy in helping an organization grow and change quickly is the AI "summit." When used by corporations, universities, and other institutions, the summit can take as many as four days and result in detailed long-range planning. A more realistic and workable approach for congregations is to create one or more AI processes that can be implemented in one day (think "town hall meeting") or in a series of shorter sessions. A summit can focus energy on two key elements of my transformation model of AFF: rich conversation about things that matter by adults who gather together in a supportive and faith-filled community. In such a setting, the Spirit can work wonders!

I advocate using AI strategies to identify and then build on those elements of parish life that have demonstrably and reliably lifted the hearts and sustained the faith of the members. In other words, we don't begin by finding a prepackaged program that we then offer our members. Rather, our starting point is a kind deep listening to and purposeful conversation about things that matter to *these* disciples at *this* time. I would also hope that the operating principles of the AI approach would over time become standard practice for parish leaders, standing committees, and so on.

The Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle

Resources

Hammond, Sue Annis. *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*. Bend: Thin Book Publishing, 1998.

Cooperrider, David L. and Diana Whitney. *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2005.

Paddock, Susan Star. *Appreciative Inquiry in the Catholic Church*. Bend: Thin Book Publishing, 2003.

Whitney, Diana and Amanda Trosten-Bloom. *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practice Guide to Positive Change*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2003.

Appreciative Inquiry Website: *http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu*.

3. Gallup's Strengths-Finder and Engagement Resources

In recent decades, The Gallup Organization has conducted extensive research and developed and thoroughly tested tools for helping individuals identify their personal strengths and then helping organizations and institutions fully utilize and nurture those strengths—for the great benefit of both individuals and institutions. Initially their work focused on the corporate world. In recent years Gallup has applied the fruits of that work to churches and other religious organizations. The connections between the Gallup work and my adult faith formation vision are potentially profound.

Gallup has developed resources in two independent but related areas:

Living Your Strengths (New York: Gallup Press, 2003) and *Strength Finder 2.0* (New York: Gallup Press, 2007): These resources utilize an online, self-guided inventory to help individuals identify their dominant talents and name ways that they can "play to their strengths" in their relationships, career, family life , and now church. Gallup has identified 34 personal themes or potential strengths. The online inventory guides a user to identify his or her top five gifts, God-given potentials that together give one the capacity to not only make a difference in the world but also deepen their sense of personal value, wellbeing, and happiness. Like the AI philosophy, and a major reason I find it so attractive, this tool helps persons focus on the positive and life-giving aspects of their personality and life experience. Simply taking the "test" is a highly affirming and empowering experience.

Growing an Engaged Congregation (New York: Gallup Press, 2006): This book is subtitled "How to Stop 'Doing Church' and Start BEING the Church Again." This is not a program, but an exploration based on solid research of what leads some people to be fully connected and committed to their congregations. Gallup uses the term "engagement" to name that connection. They claim it is possible to accurately measure levels of engagement in a faith community and then implement practical strategies to increase those measures over time, resulting in even dramatic growth in congregational vitality.

Especially when linked to the insights of the *Strength Finder* instrument, I believe the

engaged congregation research offers another practical tool for the "how to" dimension of my adult faith formation work. My major caution with Gallup's engagement resources is the expense involved when contracting with them to lead the processes in a congregation. But simply reading the book and then adapting the material can be fruitful.

Both strengths-based and engagement resources include the two elements I have suggested are central to all effective adult faith formation: personal reflection and conversation (at least when using small groups with the strengths resources). Many parishes and congregations have used strengths-based tools and resources to help members identify their gifts and discern ways to share those with the community. In some cases the strengths approach has transformed approaches to stewardship and led to dramatic increases in volunteer leadership and program participation. For our purposes here, the strengths resources provide effective tools for making the work of spiritual discernment real and concrete.

Leisa Anslinger has become a national leader in the use of strengths and engagement resources within the Catholic community. Check out her website, *The Generous Heart* at http://www.thegenerousheart.com/home.

4. One-Minute Meditation

Over the last decade I have discovered and refined a simple prayer method that has nourished my own spiritual life and been eagerly embraced and practiced by those with whom I've shared it. Grounded in the conviction that our spiritual lives, like all our relationships, unfold and deepen literally one minute at a time, I call the practice "one-minute meditation" and the theological principle behind it "one-minute *metanoia*." I now incorporate both concepts as foundational elements of my adult faith formation vision and practice.

I initially developed one-minute meditation as a personal prayer practice and evolved practical techniques for incorporating it into my daily life. A few years ago I proposed to my pastor that we offer it as a personal and communal Lenten practice. The response was so positive that it has become a recurring feature of parish life. I now commonly incorporate one-minute meditation in my workshops and retreats and many parishes have used it with great success.

A couple years ago I presented a 90-minute workshop on the practice at the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress. The audio of that presentation, along with a link to a handout, is available on my website at: http://www.tomzanzig.com/resources/audio/One Minute Meditation.

5. Self-Directed Small Groups

Parker Palmer has long been one of my personal sources of light and hope. I have been particularly influenced by his wonderful book, *A Hidden Wholeness* (Jossey-Bass, 2004). Subtitled "Welcoming the Soul and Weaving Community in a Wounded World," Palmer combines profound insights into the nature of personal spirituality with a challenging method (what he calls circles of trust) for small groups to follow in nurturing one another's spiritual lives. When I first read the book it deeply connected with my own spiritual hungers and led me to initiate a small "circle" with two friends, which continues to nourish and sustain me.

In the last two decades or so, even moderately effective adult faith formation approaches seem to include some version of small groups. Gallup's research supports that view (see chapter 8 of *Growing an Engaged Congregation*). The *concept* of small groups is clearly on target; they offer a powerful opportunity for nurturing the spiritual companionship identified as one of my core values. But many small group approaches ultimately fail. Why? Because we use (perhaps misuse) the groups as just another venue for delivering our prepackaged content using methods out of touch with the real needs of

those gathered. We haven't changed paradigms, only delivery systems. And good people seeking genuine growth often walk away disappointed.

Both my study and personal experience convince me to include the small group experience in my own vision and practice. But I believe that for the vast majority of congregations, if not for most individuals, such groups have to be self-generated, self-directed, and self-sustained. That is, they cannot require the care and direction of a professional minister—in part, because we simply don't have enough leaders to take on that task and, second, I'm convinced that there can be no "one size fits all" approach to small groups. I am currently developing an approach that is flexible and responsive to the particular needs and interests *of each small group*.

6. Personal and Communal Spiritual Disciplines and Practices

Many older Catholics (I wear the tag proudly) remember a time when their religious identity was virtually defined by personal and communal practices that, for some, became lifelong spiritual disciplines. We could all name our favorite (or, for some, least favorite) personal devotions, family rituals, seasonal celebrations, and so on. In response to a variety of cultural and ecclesial changes and influences, many of those religious identifiers have been diminished or lost altogether—to the relief of some and the consternation of others.

In the last decade or so, however, spiritual disciplines and practices have made a stunning comeback, but in ways that are for the most part more healthy, mature, and more deeply integrated into a balanced understanding of holistic spirituality. Classic books like Richard J. Foster's *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (HarperSanFrancisco), continue to sell, while more recent popular offerings like *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for Searching People*

edited by Dorothy Bass (Jossey-Bass Publishers).

A website that is almost overwhelming in the scope of its resources is *Spirituality & Practice: Resources for Spiritual Journeys* (*http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com*)..

As I use the terms, *disciplines* are universal spiritual capacities, attitudes, "habits of the heart," while *practices* are exercises, routines, and training methods that help us grow, expand, and deepen the disciplines. Practices change and evolve; disciplines grow and deepen.

I encourage faith communities to introduce and integrate spiritual disciplines and practices as a regular and ongoing element of congregational life. I have identified 12 spiritual disciplines: compassion, hospitality, community/companions, gratitude/joy/hope, attention/presence, service/justice, simplicity, discernment, study/inquiry, honor the body, solitude, and wonder/awe. For a description of practices that enhance each discipline go to: *http://www.tomzanzig.com/Site/Handouts_files/Spiritual Disciplines %26 Practices.pdf*.

I have also linked the twelve disciplines to the Spirituality Wheel to show how the disciplines can support growth within each dimension of the spiritual life.
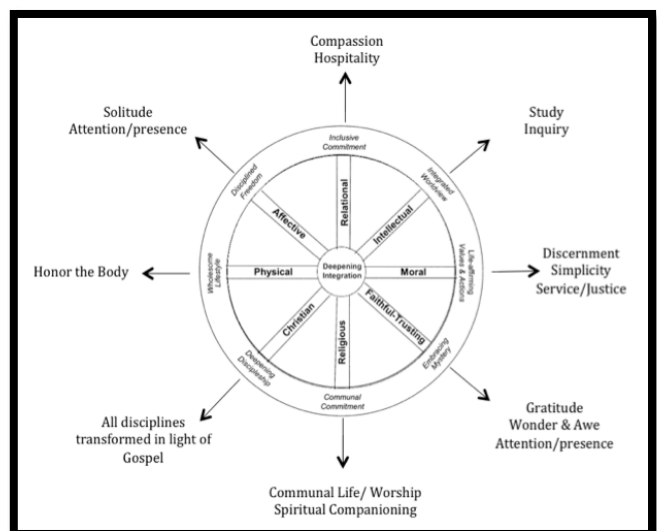
A congregation might introduce, promote, and practice in various settings and through various means one spiritual discipline every few months on a recurring cycle. Over time, some disciplines might emerge as defining characteristics or features of congregational life.

7. Personal Covenant and Annual Examen

In this strategy, engaged members of the congregation are each year invited to create a personal spiritual covenant—i.e. a personal plan for growing spiritually during the coming year. They are asked to make commitments in three areas:

1. a personal spiritual practice (perhaps one-minute meditation)
2. a communal connection (perhaps participation in a "circle")
3. a way of service (within and/or outside the parish)

The covenant might be connected to small group work, would be confidential (though perhaps developed with a trusted companion or spiritual advisor), and could involve a ritual of some kind (e.g. the presentation of the covenant statement as part of a worship experience).

Further, the covenant could be *initiated* on the anniversary of one's baptism as a way to recall and recommit to that seminal event. And one might be invited to mark the *conclusion* of the annual covenant with a formal examen—perhaps with the help of a spiritual advisor or companion, on the anniversary of one's baptism.

8. Web Resources: Current and Future Possibilities

A final ingredient in my adult faith formation "recipe" (final for now, anyway!), is actually a wide-ranging and growing collection of tools and strategies. The last of my core adult faith formation pastoral principles is the conviction that we have to better use available and emerging technologies to serve the purposes of adult faith formation and, indeed, most other ministries in the church. Many Web-based services related to both the communal and individual dimensions of my AFF vision and practice are already available.

Communally, congregations can use web technologies and services to:

- disseminate information about all of the adult faith formation principles and practices described in this essay
- facilitate communication from and among pastoral leaders and community members
- reach out to disengaged members for the purposes of welcoming and evangelization
- deliver program content
- enhance other parish ministries—learning, worship, service, etc.

Personally or individually, web-based services can help each disciple:

- access reliable sources of spiritual and theological information
- develop personal prayer practices and modes of study
- link with people of similar interests and needs
- assess, plan, and track their personal spiritual growth

So rich are the online possibilities for enhancing spiritual growth, and so rapidly are they expanding, that a parish or congregation would be wise to develop a team whose primary task is to search the web for possibilities, evaluate and discern their usefulness for community members, and then disseminate information about those they deem helpful. Seekers today need trusted guides and "content curators" to help navigate

the web, leaders who can help them separate the spiritual wheat from the chaff.

Turning the Dream into Reality

Each congregation will mix-'n-match the above strategies in unique ways. Here is just one way a congregation might implement my model of adult faith formation. As presented, the approach suggests *sequential* steps, but many strategies can overlap, shortening the plan.

Year 1
Prepare the Community

1. Raise awareness of the need for ongoing renewal of the parish, its mission, life, and practices.
2. Create a sense of urgency but also excitement and hope. One tactic: the pastor's call to arms—publicly naming and embracing new challenges.
3. Consider a sabbatical year focused on the spiritual life of the parish; meet with leaders, committees, etc. to assess and plan how that might play out.
4. Emphasize that the primary focus during the sabbatical is the conscientious and intentional celebration of the liturgy and sacraments.
5. Introduce one-minute meditation as a personal and communal practice.

Year 2
Appreciative Inquiry Process

1. Remember: the process *is* the "program"! AI doesn't just *result* in change; the process itself is transformative.
2. Pay close attention to your AI "affirmative topic choice," clearly defining your focus. (Here I presume a focus on nurturing the spiritual life of adults and better equipping them to assume personal responsibility for it.)

3. Consider linking the AI process to the liturgical year, e.g., starting in Advent and scheduling a closing AI summit during Lent.
4. Commit to establishing an "appreciative culture" within the parish.
5. Evaluate your use of the web for communication and leadership purposes.
6. Consider introducing spiritual disciplines and practices on a thoughtful schedule, e.g., focus on a new one every three months through bulletin announcements and essays, pulpit references, integration into parish meetings and events, personal and small group commitments, etc. On that schedule, all twelve disciplines would be treated every three years.

Year 3
Introduce Foundational Elements of the Spiritual Discernment Model

(*The AI process, when used with integrity, should dictate next steps. But for the purposes of this example, I suggest strategies proposed in my model*.)

1. Identify "engaged" members who are willing to consciously enter into the next phase—a serious commitment to learn and employ the tools and practices of personal spiritual discernment.
2. Offer resources, retreats and workshops on my Spiritual Growth Cycle, Spirituality Wheel, and Discernment Tool.
3. Introduce, promote and initiate the strategies of (1) spiritual companions and (2) self-organized and self-directed small groups.
4. Invite adults to try the annual examen as a helpful spiritual practice.
5. Consider training select leaders as spiritual companions.
6. Continue introducing spiritual disciplines and practices.

Year 4
Offer Strengths-Finder Inventory and Related Strategies

1. Introduce and promote the Strengths concept and resources to the entire parish as a way to lift up and celebrate the gift of each member.
2. Invite engaged (and possibly trained) members (see Year 3) to assume particular leadership roles in the parish-wide implementation of Strengths.
3. Consider linking Strengths to other small group opportunities, e.g., the small groups initiated in year 3 might consider using Strengths Finder (or *Living Your Strengths*) for exploring personal gifts and calls to service.
4. Invite the pastoral team and other leaders to use *Strengths-Based Leadership* by Thomas Rath and Barry Conchie (New York: Gallup Press, 2008).
5. Expand and deepen your use of technology, especially web-based services and resources related to spirituality.
6. Continue introducing spiritual disciplines and practices.

Year 5
Conduct Gallup's "Engagement" Assessment Process and Follow-Up

1. It may seem logical to employ this strategy earlier in the plan, allowing congregations to then use engagement concepts and tools to better monitor the effectiveness of all the other strategies. However, the formal and full-blown engagement process involves paying Gallup to conduct and guide the research. Many may find that prohibitive. Delaying the use of this strategy allows interested parishes time to raise the financial resources required.
2. A second reason for delaying use of the engagement resources is to expand the base of already engaged and, perhaps, trained leaders equipped to respond to and build upon what is learned through the assessment process.

3. Continue introducing spiritual disciplines and practices.
4. Evaluate whether to repeat AI process, perhaps in modified form.
5. Continue introducing spiritual disciplines and practices.

Subsequent Years:
Expand and Go Deeper

None of the strategies proposed in this plan are expected to be single use, "one and done" strategies. The goal is to create an *appreciative, spiritual transformation culture* reflecting the characteristics summarized in my proposed covenant. Building on the cyclic image of my Spiritual Growth Cycle, imagine this process as a spiral in which all these strategies combine to lead the parish, as well as its individual members, deeper and deeper into the ongoing process of transformation.

Closing Comments

I have proposed that the adult faith formation process outlined here might unfold slowly over a three- to five-year period and then be repeated as needed. For example, one might plan on repeating the Appreciative Inquiry "town hall meeting" every three years or so as a way to surface the wisdom of new members (or the new wisdom of old members!) and identify changing circumstances that might prompt new pastoral responses.

Some elements of the process would hopefully become routine and ongoing dimensions of parish life. For example, a congregation might invite every new member to use the online Strength Finder inventory to identify their talents before committing to any particular involvement in the parish. The immediate and concrete message to the new member would be, "We know you bring unique gifts to this community. We want you to name those talents first for your own growth and happiness. Then, as the Spirit moves you, we invite you to share them with the rest of us." How do you think a new

member would respond to such affirmation and hospitality?

Or, perhaps, a congregation will choose to make the One-Minute Meditation a common practice for all official parish functions—meetings, religious education classes, special events, and so on.

Finally, I do not mean to suggest that adult faith formation can be accomplished without any formal, structured programs. In fact, a desire for and openness to various kinds of programming might well emerge *from* the process. But programs will be selected and then retained only if they truly serve *these* adults in *this* place and time. Programs will come and go, and we won't expect them to accomplish more than they can. The people, not the programs, are sacred.

Clearly my adult faith formation vision and practice is a work in progress. I have much to learn, test out, and critically evaluate. But I'm convinced that I'm onto something valuable. Thanks for joining me in the adventure!

Resources by Tom Zanzig
Available from: www.Tomzanzig.com