

REPORT OF THE RENEWALWORKS COMMITTEE TO THE VESTRY AND CONGREGATION OF TRINITY

The purpose of RenewalWorks, a program of Forward Movement, is to encourage and assist Episcopal parishes and their membership in growing spiritually. To grow spiritually, according to RenewalWorks, is to love God more fully with all of one's heart, mind, and will, and to love one's neighbor more fully as oneself.

This program has been conducted by several hundred Episcopal churches throughout the country; by a half dozen congregations in our Diocese; and by over a thousand churches in other denominations throughout the country. The participation of those many churches and parishes provided data by which our committee was able to benchmark Trinity's data.

The process began with asking Trinity parishioners to participate in a thorough survey of questions regarding each person's church and spiritual beliefs, practices, and attitudes. We were pleased that 55 persons completed the inventory so that a strong representation of beliefs and practices within Trinity was available to our committee.

RenewalWorks establishes four stages of the spiritual continuum which gives a tool for understanding spiritual growth. Those four stages are: EXPLORING A LIFE WITH GOD IN CHRIST (The people in this group are taking the first small steps in an intentional spiritual journey.), GROWING A LIFE WITH GOD IN CHRIST (The people in this group are committed to their Christian faith, but still there are lots of questions.), DEEPENING A LIFE WITH GOD IN CHRIST (The people in this group have a faith by which they rely on God's presence and power in their daily lives.), and CENTERED IN A LIFE WITH GOD IN CHRIST (For the people in this group, the Christian faith is the most important relationship in their lives.). The inventory revealed that 20% of us were in the EXPLORING stage; 40% of us in the GROWING stage; 36% in the DEEPENING stage; and 4% in the CENTERED stage. The obvious conclusions for the committee were that there is much room for spiritual growth amongst Trinity parishioners and that we have a diversity of engagement along the continuum of spiritual growth. Consequently, the questions for the committee were: (1) What are the motivators and means for us to move from one stage to the next? and (2) What are beliefs and practices most desired as areas for growth for Trinity members?

The Committee met on four separate occasions at two-week intervals. The first meeting focused on understanding more clearly the four stages (above) of the spiritual continuum and each member of the committee discussing his or her own place on the continuum. We followed that discussion with an analysis of the main catalysts for spiritual growth, namely: Bible study or engagement with scripture, participation in the Eucharist and experiencing its power, deepening prayer life, and service. These catalysts address the question of what the motivators for us to move from one stage to the next might be. We also identified what we believe Trinity does well to help people grow spiritually, namely: service and outreach, community, and sense of belonging, focus on the Eucharist and the liturgy, and our parish is welcoming and pastoral. It should be mentioned that at all meetings we began with a biblical reading and discussion, followed by a prayer, and closed each meeting the same way.

The second meeting was a busy and revealing meeting. We began by looking at profile statistics of Meredith and Trinity Church, noting that the demographics of Meredith and the membership and

church attendance at Trinity have remained consistent over the last 10 years. The only new statistic of interest is that the single population (never married and widowed) of Meredith is on a consistent rise.

We then reviewed in detail the results of the 55 Trinity inventories, which included benchmarking our results with the results of 1600 churches of other denominations and several hundred Episcopal churches. For example, we noted that 96% of Trinity members filling out the inventory are 50 plus years of age, compared with 77% of other Episcopal church taking the inventory, and 50% of all the other churches. But more importantly we looked at the data for Trinity concerning current beliefs of church members, current practices of church members, and current activities of our church. Regarding current beliefs of Trinity members, we found that we are in line with the norms of other Episcopal churches and all churches; that there is much room to teach, especially with scripture; that our membership generally embraces Episcopal beliefs; and that the Eucharist does not seem to be as life giving to many Trinity members as it could be. And, importantly, we looked at the data for Trinity concerning current practices of members. We concluded that: we have excellent church attendance; that our membership demonstrates its faith by action; that we could do more regarding sharing our faith with one another which would be a means for growth; and that we could provide more help to individuals towards their spiritual life and growth. We concluded this examination of our Trinity data was to identify three important takeaways: (1) There is much that is working for Trinity. (2) We have much room to grow and that is hopeful and exciting. (3) The renewal process that the committee and parish is going through is a real plus for us all.

Our final exercise of this second meeting of our committee was to look at and review in detail 30 Episcopal beliefs and practices, and to identify the beliefs and practices most important to us as to our belief and to our desire to grow deeper. The five most important to us were: (1) We embrace belief in the Trinity, our understanding of God as one in three persons. (2) 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. (3) We turn to Jesus and accept him as savior, putting our trust in his grace and love, and promising to follow and obey him as Lord. (4) We promise to strive for justice and peace and to respect the dignity of every human being. (5) We believe that God is present and active in the whole of creation 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.

We closed this second, significant session with a reading of scripture and prayers.

Our third session focused on what has been determined through years of work with thousands of churches as “best practice principles” which explain why many churches excel at helping their people grow in their love of God and others. These principles are: (1) Quality of leadership which includes the rector as well as other clergy and lay leaders in the parish. (2) A quality of communication to all members that they are on a spiritual journey and to foster a living, vital dynamic community. (3) The embedding of the Bible in such a way that it is woven into the life of the parish, providing guidance, comfort, and challenge. (4) Members have a sense of personal ownership of their spiritual health and growth, and the parish encourages in all the desire to grow spiritually. (5) Service, both within and outside the parish, is abundant.

Based on the data from Trinity’s 55 completed inventories/questionnaires, we were provided with several indications within each of the best practice principles above of how Trinity is doing, i.e., where are we strong, where do we have lots of room to grow, where should we spend our time and emphasis. While there were suggestions of what we could do within each of the five best practice

principles, it was recommended the area that need the most attention would be embedding scripture in the life of the parish and its members. Overall, it must be said that the parish received excellent evaluation for its health in living out best practice principles in all aspects of our parish life.

It was at this point in the process that we were asked to identify recommendations to make to the vestry and membership on what we could do to improve on best practices and to help individuals and the parish grow spiritually.

We, the Renewal Works Committee, recommend that Trinity Church:

- 1. Concentrate on programs and offerings which will deepen the use, awareness, and spiritual enrichment of embedding scripture in the life of the parish and its members. To that end we suggest:**
 - a. Encourage more awareness of biblical lessons assigned, read, and preached every Sunday which currently exist.**
 - b. There be guides for daily bible reading made available to every parish member, e.g. Forward Day by Day.**
 - c. There be an increased information and awareness on what is already available now for biblical study.**
 - d. That the vestry return to bible study at the beginning of each meeting.**
 - e. That mentoring assistance be available for those who want to study the Bible.**
- 2. Conduct instructed Eucharists more often and increase individual knowledge of the origins, meanings, and power of the Eucharist.**
- 3. Concentrate on creating a climate and culture of spiritual growth within the membership and programs and life of Trinity Church.**
- 4. Enlighten the parish membership on what a “rule of life” is and teach more about personal, daily prayer, how they can be developed for an individual, and how they assist in individual spiritual growth.**

It is important to underline, once again, that the goal of all of this is spiritual growth. Or, in other words, to help everyone in the parish grow in their devotion to, and love of, God and their love of, and service to, our neighbors and those in need. It needs to be noted that our RenewalWorks committee was stimulated and enriched by this process over several months. Many members expressed a desire to continue to meet and share their faith experiences and hopes, and expressed that such a process would enrich all members of Trinity and therefore developing a climate of talking about, and sharing,

Our dominant hope and conclusion were that Trinity would have a parish climate of spiritual growth; that every member would feel encouraged and responsible to grow spiritually. Grow in Love. Join the congregation at Trinity and you will grow in your faith as a daily priority.

To that end, the RenewalWorks Committee recommends to the Trinity Rector, Vestry, and parish membership, based on the input of the congregation through the questionnaires and based on the Committee’s deliberations, the following **Next Steps**.

1. The Rector and Vestry adopt and promote the goal of establishing and supporting spiritual growth throughout the parish and its membership.

The RenewalWorks Committee believes there are a number of options available to help achieve this goal, such as once a month a presentation and conversation at coffee hour; identifying opportunities for parish members to share their faith (and their doubts); assisting individuals to develop a “rule of life” (i.e. personal plan for daily prayer, service, parish involvement, etc.); underlining and “marketing” the current parish practices in promoting bible study and knowledge; making study literature to the parish membership such as “Forward Day by Day”; and promoting study groups similar to the RenewalWorks committee.

2. The Rector, perhaps with a committee comprised of other clergy in the parish, develop a program to teach parish members about various and effective approaches to personal, daily prayer.

The RenewalWorks Committee believes that spiritual growth will be significantly enhanced by effective daily prayer which can and will lead also to increased service and outreach.

3. The Rector and Vestry emphasize, underline, and instruct as to the purpose and power of the central, weekly act of Trinity Church, the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

The input of the parish through the questionnaires, as well as extensive personal testimony from members of the Committee, the Eucharist is not only central to members of Trinity but there is also a desire to know and understand its meaning more deeply. Whether it be through more instructed Eucharists, more personal testimony, or through group study, the Committee believes there is much potential spiritual growth (i.e. to love God and to love neighbor) available.

We now submit our final report to the Vestry and Trinity membership. To implement the **Next Steps**, we recommend the Rector and Vestry appoint an implementation committee to carefully address how this best be done. We are concerned that our recommendations do not unduly add to the Rector’s already busy schedule. We believe there is sufficient experience available within the Trinity membership to adequately address the recommendations of our committee.

We have appreciated the opportunity to serve Trinity as members of the RenewalWorks Committee and welcome comments and questions from the Vestry and membership.

Libby Desfosses

Tuffy Hamlet

Eileen Magnuson

Robin Soller

Mary Helen Stephens

Ron Ummel

Sue Witham

Pete Woodward, Chair/Facilitator