Purposes of the Parish Church Issues & Dynamics

**Select one** of the issues/dynamics below. Do the related reading and make notes as you consider the questions/comments for that issue/dynamic.

**A. Worship and sanctifying presence**

What’s the relationship between worship and sanctifying presence?

You may want to explore it broadly …

or you may decide to look at the dynamic by breaking sanctifying presence out into its two elements and exploring one of them, i.e.,

1) Worship and the presence of the baptized scattered into the arenas of daily life

“The primary sanctifying relationship of any parish is through the presence of the baptized members scattered into the arenas of daily life—family and friends, workplace, and civic life.” *An Energy Not its Own*

2) Worship and some community external to the parish church

“The second most common sanctifying relationship is by the parish as a body with the community of people living in the area of the parish—a city neighborhood, a small town, a sprawling suburban community. There are other relationships with external communities for many parishes. Some churches are “destination parishes” that attract people from all over the region because of their liturgy, preaching, witness, or history. Others have a connection with a vocational community such as the performing arts, the medical practitioners, or the volunteer fire department.” *An Energy Not its Own*

Readings:

1) *An Energy Not its Own* the sections on worship and sanctifying presence in Chapter 1

2) “The Vision of God”, “Selfishness and self-forgetfulness” and “Service and the vision of God” in Chapter 4 *An Energy Not its Own*

3) Evelyn Underhill’s insight on Awe and adoration: “We are surrounded and penetrated by great spiritual forces, of which we hardly know anything. Yet the outward events of our lives cannot be understood, except in their relation to that unseen and intensely living world, the Infinite Charity which penetrates and supports us, the God whom we resist and yet for whom we thirst; who is ever at work, transforming the self-centered desire of the natural creature into the wide-spreading, outpouring love of the citizen of Heaven.”

4) Thornton’s view: “Aquinas got it right: prayer is ‘loving God in act so that the divine life can communicate itself to us and through us to the world.’ Christian action is not action of which Jesus approves but action that he performs through his incorporated, and therefore prayerful, disciples.” Martin Thornton, *Spiritual Direction* and improve our morals, but rather undertake the moral struggle in order to improve our Prayer. However interdependent the two may become, the end of man is not purity of heart but the vision of God. The best way to attain the former is by aiming purposefully at the latter.” *Pastoral Theology: A Reorientation*, and “Moral action only flows from doctrinal truth by grace and faith, that is through prayer.” *The Rock and the River*

OR

**B. The purpose of Formation** - exploring that purpose in relation to the other two purposes. Assume for the purposes of the exercise that in practice formation is largely about equipping people for worship and being a sanctifying presence in daily life and as a parish community.

1) The parish’s facilitation of the Renewal-Apostolate Cycle – training, guidance for accepting informed responsibility for managing your own cycle.

2) The structures, processes and climate of the parish in relationship to the Renewal-Apostolate Cycle

3) What is the possible content and method of such training and guidance?

Readings:

1) Chapter One *Fill All Things*

Special attention to the chart in the primary diagram – “In that cycle:” The column “Which the parish helps by:” How does your parish function in these areas?

Also in Chapter One look at “Identifying Distorting Tendencies” and “Addressing the Distortions.”

Reflect on the extent to which you see some of the distorting tendencies in your parish – which ones are some stronger than others?

2) Sections on “The Vision of God”, “Selfishness and self-forgetfulness” and “Service and the vision of God” in Chapter 4 *An Energy Not its Own*

3) “Renewed in baptismal identity and purpose and living as instruments of God’s love and grace in daily life” - a section in Chapter One, *A Wonderful and Sacred Mystery*

OR

**C. Threefold rule**

The Threefold Rule assumes that each element contributes something unique, a special intensity, that offers more balance and maturity in one’s worship of God. In total it shapes us over the years.

Consider how these three forms of prayer relate to one another in the spiritual life. How have you seen that in your own life? In parish life?

Also consider this from Esther de Waal, “Increasing numbers of lay people like myself are turning to the monastic tradition. Here they find support on their Christian journey which they often fail to find in the institutional church, where parish and diocesan life can be extremely busy, and seemingly lacking in any sort of contemplative focus.”

Readings:

1) In Chapter 2 *Fill All Things*, section on Worship

2) Section “A note on multitudinism, institutionalism, and the conventional” in *A Wonderful and Sacred Mystery*

3) Section on Worship, Chapter One *An Energy Not Its Own*

4) In *Nothing So Contagious as Holiness*, Chapter 5, see the Chart of the Threefold Rule of Prayer. It’s also a PDF HERE

5) Several short articles on the Threefold Rule

[The Threefold Rule Of Prayer](https://www.orderoftheascension.org/storage/Three%20fold%20rule%20of%20prayer.pdf) (also called the Prayer Book Pattern)

[More detailed posting on the Threefold Rule](https://www.orderoftheascension.org/storage/The%20threefold%20rule%20of%20prayer%20-%20Means%20of%20Grace%20Hope%20of%20Glory.pdf)

Variations: [Functions Served](https://www.orderoftheascension.org/storage/Three%20fold%20rule%20of%20prayer%20-%20function.pdf)    [Responsible Thinking](https://www.orderoftheascension.org/storage/Three%20fold%20rule%20-responsible%20thinking.pdf)     [Chart](https://www.orderoftheascension.org/storage/Threefold%20rule%20of%20prayer%20-letter%20size---chart%204-18-05.pdf)    [Explanation and Chart](https://www.orderoftheascension.org/storage/Threefold%20Rule%20of%20Prayer-F.A.T.%20and%20chart.pdf)

5) If you are using the Kindle edition of *A Wonderful and Sacred Mystery* , *Finding God in All Things*, *An Energy Not Its Own*, or *Nothing So Contagious as Holiness* you will find several references to the threefold rule if you do a search. It may be useful to look over some of that material.

6) About “refection” as the most important form of personal devotion – Below we have pasted several sections from your books. They offer a broad view of the role of reflection in the spiritual life of the individual and the parish community. We have highlighted in red insights we think especially useful.

“Provide context about the pattern of practice that is normative in the Episcopal Church: the Eucharist is part of a larger, organic system that includes the Daily Office (daily grounding in baptismal identity and purpose), as well as regular and reliable means of reflection (gaining perspective on our lives and integrating our faith and action).” *A Wonderful and Sacred Mystery*, in section on “The Shape of the Parish” in chapter 3.

“Incarnational religion: babes in Christ yet rooted in Christ We’re beginning with the second level because that’s who makes up the majority of all parish churches. Most lay leaders in most parishes are in this stratum. In our time, they may be at the Eucharist frequently, or they may come once a month, but they have an ascetical discipline that is shaky in other areas—disordered patterns regarding the Daily Prayers of the Church and personal devotions, an uncertain pattern of reflection, and a lack of clarity concerning service in daily living.” *A Wonderful and Sacred Mystery*, in chapter 3, section on Remnant Theory

“Our life in community, our reflection, and our service are nurtured from the soil of Office and Eucharist. The daily connection with scripture and common prayer and the weekly receiving of body and blood orient us to the ways of eternity and feed us for “real life.” We become familiar with the ways of heaven. We choose to place ourselves in the pathways of grace. Personal devotions, especially reflection, can provide a path into adult responsible living. We believe two forms of reflection are essential. The first is some type of self-examination or confession. To live responsibly is to live in humility and a longing for holiness, it is to live thoughtfully as we engage the day-to-day issues of our lives. In addition, we think that spiritual reading is likely to be a help for most of us. Spending time with the writings of de Waal, Underhill and Thornton, Leech and Gatta, Williams and Lewis will aid us in becoming at home in the pathways of grace.”

*An Energy Not its Own*, section on “Improvement process: from Static Maturity to Formation” chapter 2.

“The second aspect is about the apostolate side of their cycle between baptismal renewal and daily life. Spiritual practice is in a relationship with the person’s life with family and friends, in workplace and civic life. For many people there is tension among these elements of life, and they often compete with one another. Many also experience time needed for spiritual renewal as part of that competition. There’s usually no “correct” answer to the tension. But the priest can be a generous listener and assist the person in making decisions about how to best approach the dilemma for now and to accept that with humility rather than guilt or frustration. Finally, the stuff of daily life may invite practices that integrate themselves with the Church’s Rule, such as special intentions at the offertory, intercessions and thanksgivings during the Daily Office, and reflection on how we may serve, evangelize and be stewards among the groups and institutions we are part of.” *An Energy Not its Own*, in section “The formation of the People of God for the sake of the world”, chapter one

“The earlier section on Formation and Renewal, while more general than this section, also connects to how the Apostolate is expressed. And as we said at the beginning of this chapter, simply being aware of the existence of the Renewal—Apostolate Cycle can itself be a way to nurture the individual’s oscillation. The parish can build on that base by providing opportunities for developing greater capacity for reflection and for considering the role of faith in daily life. Where are we instruments of God’s life with family and friends, in day-to-day interaction? How are we salt and light in our workplaces, in civic and political life? The parish can provide resources for considering how we approach the inevitable tension between being unique individuals and also part of numerous communities bigger than we are.” *An Energy Not its Own*, section Formation and Apostolate, Chapter 4.

“Listening, conversation, and reflection are the starting place to address the tension between adaptation and maintaining identity, integrity, and integration. Listen within the congregations of the parish. What are the concerns and hopes of members? What do the “experts” in liturgics and parish development say? Identify a few alternative pathways. Don’t allow yourself to get trapped in some narrow set of choices, such as deferring to the solution to rector is pushing, or a choice between a utopian and catastrophic future, or a solution that involves abandoning the parish’s strength.” *Finding God in All Things*, section on Sustainability over time and under pressure, Chapter 4.

Our participation in the Sunday Eucharist and the Daily Office nurtures our relationship with God and grounds us in the prayers and scriptures of the Church. It offers us a lens through which to see the world and live in it with more wisdom. This discipline of participation in the church’s liturgies is how we share in the mind of Christ. Those two practices are foundational. Personal devotions is a matter of us deciding which practices will most serve us. The norms of spiritual effectiveness and efficiency apply. Some may have several practices, others none—that is none except reflection. Reflection is central to the growth of wisdom within us. That’s the point Warren made above. “Wisdom requires slowness, stillness, focus, patience and withdrawal.”

Reflection is akin to counsel as a gift of the Spirit. It is related to developing a capacity for listening and an inner silence. There are two quotes in the Rule of the Order of the Ascension that may prove useful here. They were made part of the Rule when all the professed members were priests. They remain in the Rule both as guidance to the priest and bishop members and with an understanding that both speak to the practice needed for all who would be apostolic, spiritually mature. One quote is from Kenneth Leech. He was the Order’s retreat leader in 1988 just before we first took the Benedictine Promise. “Any authentic priesthood must derive from an inner core of silence, a life hid with Christ in God … Only those who are at home with silence and darkness will be able to survive in, and minister to, the perplexity and confusion of the modern world. Let us seek that dark silence out of which an authentic ministry and a renewed theology can grow and flourish.” The other is from *Priestly Spiritualty*, an Ascension Press booklet by Mother Eleanor McLaughlin. “The priest is, before all things, a Christian soul given to prayer, that is, to the disciplined practice of the presence of God centered in the Eucharist and grounded in a daily rule of office and silence.” You can find a PDF of Priestly Spirituality in the Shaping the Parish Resources at www.orderoftheascension.org. We need “an inner core of silence.” All of us. The pathway to that is difficult. It requires discipline and often hard conversations with others in our life to make the space for silence and reflection. All too often the parish church provides little support, and many seek help outside their parish. Esther de Waal wrote, “Increasing numbers of lay people like myself are turning to the monastic tradition. Here they find support on their Christian journey which they often fail to find in the institutional church, where parish and diocesan life can be extremely busy, and seemingly lacking in any sort of contemplative focus.” *Finding God in All Things*, section Character, in Chapter 6

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