

## **A LEARNING AGREEMENT: Shaping the Parish**

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Shaping the Parish is about the renewal of parish life. We believe that most parishes will improve their health and faithfulness if leaders, and a critical mass of the congregation, increase their competency in:

- Spiritual practice
- Emotional and social intelligence
- Change theory and methods

We also assume that the primary task of a parish church is formation. The parish is to form people in Christ, to increase the number of proficient Christians, to make disciples.

We seek immediate, tangible improvements while building the habits for long-term health.

To do all that takes leadership gifts and skill. It requires wisdom in managing complex polarities, especially the polarities of change & stability, tradition & adaptation. In our experience, a critical factor in developing these leadership gifts and skills, in developing the wisdom and experience to manage complexity, is the openness of leaders to learning and trying new ways of being and doing.

Accordingly, leaders need to enter into Shaping the Parish with a stance, an attitude, that orients the person in a direction that makes success more likely. This learning agreement identifies some of the elements of that stance.

### **The trainers and facilitators agree:**

The trainers and facilitators agree to provide the program as described on the web site. Our educational method includes:

1. Linking theory and practice.
2. Active adult participation of all involved.
3. Serving as managers, coaches, facilitators, and presenters in the learning process.
4. Shared responsibility for the learning process.
5. Feedback as part of the learning process. This includes feedback on the person's group participation; a critique of developmental initiatives by trainers and facilitators, members of the parish, and other participants; and, as it may arise during the weekends or through the developmental initiatives, feedback concerning the individual's reported leadership behavior in the parish.

6. Creating a learning community of people invested in shaping healthy and faithful parishes.
7. A focus on three themes: spiritual practices, emotional and social intelligence, and change theory and methods.

**The participant agrees:**

1. I understand that the program seeks immediate, tangible improvements while building the habits for long-term health. I agree to complete the six developmental initiatives as scheduled by the training staff.
2. I understand that the program offers me an opportunity to expand my range of leadership behaviors and skills. I'm willing to engage that process. I'll try to use the skills, methods, and interventions "as given." This is to give ideas and methods that may be new to me a "fair chance" before evaluating and modifying them in the future.
3. I will take a stance toward my parish of a "loving critic," as opposed to stances of "uncritical lover" or "unloving critic."
4. I will complete assignments and the developmental initiatives in a timely and thorough way. I am making a commitment to fully participate in the program, including participating in all sessions, the community's worship and social events, completing the required readings, and engaging in designing and implementing six initiatives.
5. I understand that the program requires a full commitment of my time and energy, and I will make the program a priority. This isn't so much about the program itself as it is about developing a long-term habit and recognizing that improving the parish calls for continuous attention. I agree with the expectations around working sessions: no late arrivals, no off-site conference calls or meetings during the training, and no early departures.
6. I have carefully reviewed the program web site. The program appears to address my parish's needs as well as my current learning goals.
7. If I miss sessions due to family emergencies and priorities, illness, etc. I will make up the sessions in a manner approved by the program leaders. I understand that if too many sessions are missed I may need to drop from the program (and begin over again.) If I am the rector or priest in charge I agree to make advance arrangements so that pastoral emergencies will be covered when I am at program sessions. I have read the material on the web site related to this.
8. I will work in a collaborative manner with other leaders in my parish as I apply what I am learning.
9. I understand that the program is emotionally demanding. Exploring new ways of leadership behavior and receiving feedback can be stressful. I've carefully reviewed the page on [T-Groups](#). I believe I am able to engage the work. If I am in therapy I have consulted my therapist about this. I understand that those having a difficult time coping with stress or who are

experiencing significant emotional difficulties should postpone attending the program.

10. In order to effectively participate in and manage the rigors of this program, I agree to attend to my own health and otherwise take care of myself, including attention to such things as regular exercise, a yearly check-up, taking my vacation and weekly time off, and attention to my diet. I also agree to “resource” myself as needed using mentors, spiritual direction, therapy, health professionals, lab training and other resources.
11. If I am coming as the rector or priest-in-charge, or as part of a parish team, I agree to have the parish equip itself for this work by having two good quality easels, newsprint pads, chisel point magic markers, and blue or masking tape. (An alternative to easels is to install pegs in the wall(s) of meeting space(s) to permit newsprint pads to be hung at eye level.) I also agree to have some funds available to purchase related books and educational materials for parish programs that will emerge out of my participation in Shaping the Parish.
12. I will work with others in the program (trainers and participants), and people in my parish, in a respectful, timely and thorough manner. When trainers or participants contact me by e-mail with a message calling for a response, I’ll respond within two days (unless on vacation or ill). The trainers have agreed to do the same.

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Participant Signature

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Date

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Printed Name of Participant

This is to be turned in on the first day of the program