

Parish Development Teams

A useful adjunct to the rector's role in shaping the parish as a healthy and faithful community is a Parish Development Team. Such teams are an extension of the rector's authority and share responsibility for improvement efforts.

All the major parish development training programs make use of parish development teams.

Setting up your parish team

1. We are assuming that the parish will find a way to do parallel track efforts. The parish needs to continue attending to its normal, routine, important and urgent business—the Eucharist celebrated, building repairs made, the sick cared for and so on. At the same time the parish needs to be able to work on developmental, non-urgent matters. The Parish Development Team allows the parish to maintain its developmental efforts. Of course, doing both is essential for health in any organization. But as you know it's easy to not ever get to the developmental work.

2. The team needs to be trained. That will happen as a matter of course if they are part of the Church Development Institute, College for Congregational Development, or Shaping the Parish. Otherwise, you'll want to provide at least six workshop sessions plus three books, with discussion. Give yourself 4 months for training before beginning your work. You may find it useful to encourage, but not pressure, members to become [Associates of the Order of the Ascension](#). Having a person or two who are also associates is likely to enhance the group's efforts.

2. While the team needs to keep the vestry and congregation(s) in the loop the assumption is that the team has the authority to take the initiative around developmental matters. This is an extension of the rector's oversight role and authority in the parish. Obviously, this calls for political wisdom. Too much going to the vestry and congregation, and you'll get dragged down; not consulting others when it's called for will create tensions that also drag the efforts down. Plus, keep in mind the team is an extension of the rector. The rector is the leader of the team.

3. How do you want to work together? How often will you meet? Start with a schedule for a short period of time, see if that's enough. Agree on a way for people to drop from the team if for any reason they find they can't keep up with the work.

4. How will the vestry stay in the loop? How can the vestry focus its energies on the urgent and important business of the parish while the team gives focus to the developmental work? Begin by hearing the vestry's initial thoughts on developmental initiatives.