

**Boston College**  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY CONTINUING EDUCATION  
**Encore Access**

**Transcript of**  
**“Where Two or Three are Gathered:**  
**Transforming the Parish through Communities of Practice”**

**presented on October 27, 2016 by**  
**Dr. Jane E. Regan**

**Dr. Thomas H. Groome:**

Thank you, Jen, thank you, and welcome everybody. We're delighted so many people could join us. It's my privilege to be able to introduce Jane, my dear colleague, this evening for this good event.

About the year 1515, Martin Luther recognized—maybe it's 1518, '19, someplace in there—Martin Luther recognized that if his Protestant reformation was to succeed, then it simply had to take education out of the hands of the Church, out of the hands of the monasteries and the monks, and put it in the hands of the public and the public realm—put it in the hands of the government. He wrote a letter in 1520 to the German nobles urging them to establish a public, government-funded schooling system. Of course they did, and the Prussian education system became, in many ways, a model for the public school system of the Western world.

But in that letter, Luther advised the princes not to allow their schools to run for any more than two hours a day, and preferably just one hour a day, because he was afraid that if the schools took on too much responsibility that, in fact, education would come out of the village, out of the family, and would be located in a school. He literally said in that essay that he didn't want the schooling to interfere with children's education. So it wasn't Mark Twain that came up with that phrase, it actually was Martin Luther in his letter to the German princes of 1520.

Luther was right. In many ways, he was afraid that education would become ensconced simply in schooling. But alas, the Western world indeed moved to that kind of consciousness, and that schooling would be equated with education, even with education in faith. In fact, we have the witness of our American Catholic bishops at the Third Council of Baltimore, 1884, they decreed that every parish must have a school, and must have a school not simply to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic, but to teach the faith that couldn't be taught any other way except by a school. Then, of course, the real premier parishes and the better parishes have succeeded in establishing schools to educate in faith, and the less successful ones had to settle for some kind of a parish program, a CCD program or something. But the assumption was that some form of schooling was essential, and in fact, not just essential but comprehensive, was adequate, was enough to educate people in faith, that it would be done best by schooling.

Now, it's hard to break old institutions like the Catholic Church away from ideas like that, it's hard to wean us off of old ways. But nobody has done more to re-convince the Church that the primary way of educating in faith cannot be a form of schooling. A form of schooling of some kind—parish program, parochial school—indeed is necessary and needed, but that the primary mode of education, in fact, has to be located in the parish and in the family. It's somewhat ironic that as Catholic Christians we have all kinds of rhetoric about this and that, say that beginning with baptism when we tell the parents that you will be the first educators of your children in the ways of faith. But meanwhile we tell them to take the kid to school or to some kind of schooling, forgetting that in fact, the primary locus for faith education and formation is the parish and the home.

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Nobody has done more in our country to try to wean our Church away from those old ways of thinking, in spite of its own rhetoric, by the way, than our beloved colleague, Professor Jane Regan. In a sense, she's absolutely right. Nothing will be more effective by way of education, formation, and faith than the socialization and the modeling of the parish and of the family.

Professor Jane Regan is associate professor of theology and religious education here at Boston College. She's Director of Continuing Education for the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry. She serves as chair of the STM Department of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry, and she is the director of the STM summer school. Then, in her spare time... Jane is overworked, to put it mildly. She holds a Ph.D. in religious education from the Catholic University of America. In addition to her scholarly work, Jane serves as a consultant on the local and national levels to the important project of the effective adult faith formation—which has been one of her great primary themes throughout her whole professional career in ministry—the importance of educating for adult faith, not simply for a childish faith or a childlike faith, perhaps, but that the real purpose is, indeed, toward adult faith formation.

Recently Jane received the Distinguished Service Award from the National Conference of Catechetical Leaders, a very significant recognition of her contributions, over these many years, to religious education.

Jane is the author or co-author of several books including *Toward an Adult Church* of 2002, *Forming a Community of Faith: A Guide to Success in Adult Faith Formation* of 2014, and now, just literally hot off the press, her most recently published book, which is also the title of this evening's lecture, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Transforming the Parish Through Communities of Practice*. As I said, just hot off the press.

On a personal note, in 1991, no, in 1996, we had an opening here in religious education at Boston College. We conducted a national search and had a very strong pool of candidates, and we made a wonderful appointment. Even though I happened to be the chair of the search committee, I will congratulate myself on the fine appointment we made. Jane has turned out to be an excellent teacher, a wonderful scholar, a dear colleague and friend, and we've been tremendously blessed by her presence with us.

However, the aspect of Jane that I admire the most is her parenting—her extraordinary commitment that she's had all across the years as a single adoptive parent to her two children, Catie, and her beloved Natalya, Lord rest her soul. I have been so inspired, and especially when I embarked upon this precarious journey of parenting myself. Jane, in her dedication and commitment, has been my model. I know what she has done as a parent she's now just about to start doing again any day now as a grandparent. Catie is due—well, she'll tell us when—but within days. She's just been inspiring in this regard, and also her commitment to her parish and her engagement with her parish. So she's not just a learned professor of the field of religious education, she is that indeed, but really Jane walks the walk of the talk she talks.

Would you please welcome Dr. Jane Regan.

## **Dr. Jane Regan:**

Thank you. When my older daughter, Natalya, arrived from Russia when she was about four, and after we settled in a little bit, we needed supplies, we needed to go to the grocery store. So we went to the grocery store and she's walking in and she spots, of course, the row of gumball machines, and

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just is like, “Ohhh.” She just takes off for those. I went over to her and put my arm around her shoulder and looked at her kind of sadly and said, “Regans don’t buy gum from gumball machines.”

I had to repeat that a couple of times on a couple of trips that we went, but eventually she walked right by the gumball machines and didn’t even look twice. A year-and-a-half later, her younger sister arrived, also from Russia, she was two. Once again—I think we spend more time at the grocery store than anyplace else—and we went to the grocery store. Natalya takes Catie by the hand and walks her over to the gumball machine and puts her hand on the shoulder and kind of, with a bit of sadness says, “Regans don’t buy gum from gumball machines.”

That is, in fact, situated learning. She came to know what it meant to be a Regan by living as a Regan, by living with the Regans. Now, sometimes it does need direct instruction, like “Regans don’t buy gum from gumball machines,” but much of it, in fact, is rooted in the very life of what it means to be and to live as a Regan.

Now, we’re going to look at that question of: how do we learn who we are and how do we learn what it means to be a Christian? We’re not so much concerned about children as we are about adults. How do we continue to work with adult communities and help them to live out and to give expression to the Christian life in a way that’s powerful and a way that’s evangelizing? I think that the primary way we learn how to be Christians and we form our identity as Christians, our identities as Catholics, is by hanging out with other Christians and by hanging out with other Catholics. That’s really what we’re going to be looking at tonight is: what does that mean and how to enhance that, or further that, within our parish communities?

Let me just get a quick show of hands. How many of you are presently in some way involved in leadership in some way in your parish? You could be in charge of a committee or. . . OK, great. How many of you are parishioners some place? Good, good. That’s good. And how many of you are happy to be here? Good, that’s what we’re looking for, excellent, excellent.

Well, I’m happy to be here, as well. As Tom mentioned in his introduction, one of the things that the Church has said repeatedly, loud and clear, over the past 45 years, for sure, is the centrality of adult formation to the life of the Church. For the Church to be the vital evangelizing agent that we’re called to be, the formation and ongoing education of the adult community is essential. We have, from a document that dates back to the 1970s, all catechesis is oriented to adults because they have the capacity to respond fully to its message. We have a quote from the “Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community” that says that “a fully Christian community can only exist when an effective and well developed catechesis of adults is regarded as a central task in the catechetical enterprise.” It’s a Church document. Church documents are our friends. They say things we like to hear. Or we look at something like “Our Hearts are Burning Within Us,” which has that fundamental notion of the centrality of adult formation.

The point to the importance and necessity of mature adult faith is, in fact, that it connects us to the work of evangelization. Now, when we talk about fostering adult faith, many of us begin by looking at programs and thinking about programs. I’m all for programs, I’ve published some. Certainly we have Bible studies and presentations, all of which are important, but I’m going to say that they’re not sufficient. We know that it isn’t just, or even primarily, knowing about our faith that is of interest to us. Ultimately, we ask the question: how do we become ever more aware of what it means to live as a Christian in the world? How do we continue to grow and mature in our faith? How do we support the people with whom we work, the people in our parishes, in that endeavor?

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The focus over the next bit is this: that we learn to be Christians and live as Christians in the world by participating in communities with other Christian practitioners, that is other Christians, people who are practicing being Christian.

There are three questions I want to be looking at today. The first one is, how do we learn the really important things in life, like the Regans don't eat gum from gumball machines, for example? For that we're going to look at the notion of situated learning a bit, just to get a sense of what that is. Then the second question is, where do adults gather in our parishes and faith communities? When do adults gather? So we're going to look at that in terms of how we think of them as communities of practice. Finally, how do we become people and parishes ever more effective to the work of evangelization, which is our fundamental call as believers? We do that by exploring the potentials of communities of practice within our parishes, etc., as the context for faith formation and parish transformation.

Let me just mention a couple of books, a couple of resources. Etienne Wenger and Jean Lave are the primary authors. Keep in mind – I'll put a quick caution here, the idea of communities of practice comes out of business and education. First, out of the world of business, in which they're asking the question of how do we effectively communicate knowledge and communicate milieu and context to communities of practice within organizations? Then within education, particularly in terms of how do we do the formation of teachers, is often talked about in terms of communities of practice. In the book that Paulist Press has published, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*, I take that understanding of communities of practice and translate it and raise the question of what could that mean for us? How might we use that for our own work?

We want to begin to look at this by talking about situated learning. How many of you know how to cook? How many of you know how to play bridge or Mahjong? How many know the responses at Mass? How many know what to do for Halloween? How many can raise an adolescent? Well, yeah, that's probably a bad example. Never mind.

Basically, the way we learn all of those things is through situated learning. That is learning that is grounded in the action of everyday life. It's grounded in that situation rather than around discrete packages of information that are organized by an instructor. As we learn what it means to be a Christian, not solely or even primarily by getting data or information or content, but really by what it means to live out that life. So knowledge, ultimately in this context of situated learning, is acquired situationally, and it transfers to similar situations. So we learn how to respond to our children out of a Christian context. We learn how to do that, and then we're able to do it again, continue to do that.

Learning is very much within situated learning. Learning is very much problem-driven rather than content driven. So the question isn't what are we going to achieve, what's the curriculum, but what are the questions for living life? How do I manage through this day? How do I deal with this situation? How do I address these things? Ultimately learning is always multi-modal, it involves a full person, and it involves developing skills in a variety of ways. So it's not just intellectual development, but it's in terms of other skills—interpersonal skills, cognitive, affective, etc.

Situated learning, we can think about it in comparison to the classroom learning. Even when, in a classroom context, we make application and we try to help people to see the link between what we're teaching and lived experience, it doesn't have the same genuine experience that actually being in the situation has. For me, the clearest example is math problems. You get these math problems, and first of all you had to figure out—never mind doing the math—you get to figure out what you had to do; do you add, subtract, multiply, divide? I was always baffled by it. I never got it. It was not one of my... that's why I teach theology and not accounting. But if you want me to tell you how much

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paint I need to paint a room, I can figure it out. I can say well, OK, well, I know how to figure out area, so I'm going to need to count the walls, if you've got the area, and that'd help find out what coverages for the paint. It's problem-oriented rather than content-oriented. So even with application, it has to do with genuine practice.

One of the examples of one of the authors that I read, talks about is he talked about his experience as a coach of his daughter's soccer team. They would practice and practice and practice and learn drills and drills, and this move and that move and that play and this play, and they were always creamed. They never won. So he'd go back and practice and practice and practice until finally his daughter said to him, when he said, "You do great in practice, what happened?" She said, "The other team doesn't line up right. Yeah. They don't do what you want them to do. So we need to learn, not through drills, but through scrimmages. We need to learn by being in there and being engaged in it." What we're talking about here, when we're talking about situated learning, we're talking about learning as participation in communities of practice. That's how learning takes place: communities of practice.

We're going to look at St. Odo the Good, just a regular parish, a lot like your parish, or maybe not, but lots of stuff going on at St. Odo the Good. So you think about all the time that adults gather at that parish. The catechists gather, the RCIA team, Eucharistic ministers, pastors, etc., all of these groups of adults gather, at some point in the course of a month or whatever, and all of them have tasks to do. If you were to look at them from the outside, it would look like they were all doing basically the same thing: they're praying, they're talking, gossiping. They're talking about their faith, they're keeping track of decisions that they then change at the next meeting, they accomplish set tasks, they talk about the parish, they remember when, they have coffee. Those are all the things that a group of people do as they're doing the task that they have before them. What I want to argue is that each of these gatherings has the potential of being a community of practice that if we pay attention, can be part of what transforms a parish. If we see these not simply as doing the task that they've been assigned to do, but as being about being Christian and about intentionally reflecting on that, then we have the potential for that kind of transformation of the individual as well as of the parish.

So communities of practice, that's what we're going to talk about now. Here I'm going to give you a definition of communities of practice, then I'm going to take apart for the next few minutes. Here's the definition: a community of practice is a sustained gathering of people whose interactions are marked by mutual engagement, shared enterprise, and common repertoire (I'm going to return to those and talk about each of those for a minute) where the collective learning, which is involved in surviving and thriving as a community, leads to practices that enhance the group identity and further the groups goals.

We engage in communities of practice in order to engage and to address our shared enterprise, but in doing that, we shape our enterprise and we shape ourselves. We come to know who we are in the doing. When we talk about things going on at St. Odo the Good, these are all *potential* communities of practice, they're not *inherently* communities of practice. We're going to talk about that in a minute. But I want to propose that. How do we transform them into communities of practice? How do we recognize them as communities of practice, and develop those elements? So community of practice, three elements: shared enterprise, mutual engagement, common repertoire. I'm just going to talk about these real briefly.

In terms of a shared enterprise, the community itself defines the enterprise, or maybe better, shapes the enterprise. Now the actual task of a group or the actual job or enterprise of a group may be defined from outside. It may be defined by the pastor, it may be defined by you, it may be defined by whomever.

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So, it could be that you're on a religious education board, so the task is to provide guidance to the process of religious education. But the way that's done, the nature and direction of the enterprise only becomes clear in the doing. So that if you say to somebody, "Would you be on this committee, and we're going to do this," and they say, "How are we going to do it? You are totally in place to say, "I don't know." Because, in fact, that's why you're inviting people to be on the committee, because they, in fact, are the ones who are going to decide, how we do this?

If by chance—probably nobody in this group, undoubtedly—but if by chance you know how to do it and you already have it all planned out in your mind, don't bother with a committee. Isn't that helpful? They think they're going to contribute something, but if you already have it all figured out, then they're not. That's frustrating everybody, you and them, so just find something else for them to do.

While it may be named from outside, it comes to expression within the group. Because of that, that leads to a shared commitment and a shared sense of accountability because it's defined by us; it's given shape by us. That's that notion of a shared enterprise, something we do together. What are we doing? So when we talk about a shared enterprise within the Christian context, then we recognize that any group that gathers has a particular task.

For example, you have a pastoral council, and the particular task for that night is a conversation about concerns raised within the parish because of the closing of a factory and people being out of work. So you're trying to figure out, what are we going to do as a parish around that? That's the task for that night. That task is part of the wider enterprise. The enterprise is to provide advice and guidance to the pastoral staff. But that is part of the still wider enterprise which is being and becoming an evangelizing Church. So if the way you do the task isn't evangelizing, then you're missing the enterprise. See what I'm saying? How we do what we do is, in fact, part of what we do. It conveys what we do.

When we think about a parish, we can think about a parish as having a community of practice with enterprise that contributes to the evangelizing parish, but we have several within the parish. What unites them, potentially, is they're all about being an evangelizing parish. This really can work against or help to counteract the effect of a silo thinking where I do youth ministry and don't do anything else. I do adult formation and don't talk to anybody else. I talk to them only to find out if the gym is free or if there's coffee. So this is saying no, if each of the communities of practice aren't connecting with that broader parish enterprise of being and becoming an ever more evangelizing parish, then it's inherently less effective and it's not fulfilling its shared enterprise.

Mutual engagement—we talk about mutual engagement—what we're talking about here is a clear sense of mutuality, that there's a shared sense of commitment to the enterprise and that that mutuality is based on recognition of the gifts and talents of everyone who participates; so everybody brings different gifts and talents, and how do we recognize, affirm, and respect those? That there's a complementarity within a community of practice where different skills are brought to bear and different people bring different skills and different ways of doing things. And that maintaining the group is an important part of the community, so the person who does the members' birthdays and sends cards to people who aren't there—very important part of the community as well. So how do we maintain those communities?

So shared enterprise, mutual engagement, and this common repertoire. In other words, how do we do what we do? What are the patterns, words, rituals, stories, forms, books that shape how we do the enterprise? So we think of an RCIA team, for example, that can be a community of practice, OK.

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They do things like reflect on Scripture, ask questions, experience ritual, maintain the wisdom of the group, establish traditions—all of those things are things that are part of the repertoire of the group. And again, the way they do those, they're called to be in a way that's evangelizing—that whole notion of connecting the evangelization.

Just to get a sense of this, I want you to step back for a minute and think about what are the communities of practice in your life? Don't worry about parish yet. Just step back. I just want to be sure you have a sense of what a community of practice is about. So, it can be related to your interests, it could be your role, it could be about your faith. I have a friend who takes part in a sailing group. I have other friends who are involved in Mahjong; they brought me into that little group that I'm clearly on the periphery of right now as I'm learning it. But you get a sense of what are some of the communities in your own life. Then I would invite you, as we continue, to think a bit about how might these three categories of mutual engagement, shared enterprise, common repertoire help you to understand and to engage more fully with that group.

Let me just give you a really quick example. I had been part of a book club for a number of years, which I enjoy very much, and we read pretty good books and we went from one house to another. Over time, the people who belonged changed. Any time people who belong change, since the people who belong direct the enterprise, the enterprise is at least twitched, tweaked, changed a bit. Well, this group, we had some new people coming in, some past people leaving, and this group shifted from being a book club to being a dessert club, which isn't an evil, obviously. There's something good about that, too. But it really became a competition to see who could have the fanciest desserts and the nicest spread. Great, excellent. But that's not what I wanted. I wanted a book club. So it was my ability to say, what's changed here? To say, OK, the enterprise has changed, I don't want to be part of this. It was a good enterprise, and many people—they got lots of people to join and it was great, but that just wasn't what I wanted.

So I think it's helpful when we look not only at parish situations, but even at our lives and the communities that we belong to that shape our identity to ask the question, how do these three categories help to think about that?

We want to continue with this conversation. I'm just going to give you a couple of more examples to help get that focused. Remember a parish group, a committee, a board, whatever. When we ask the questions when, where, and who, we're asking about mutual engagement. When we ask the question why—why does a group gather—we're talking about enterprise. We ask about the how, we're talking about the fundamental repertoire of the group.

For example, Liturgy of the Word for Children. What's the enterprise? The enterprise is enhancing their own engagement with liturgy and that of the children of the parish. That's the enterprise, that's what they're doing. Now, they might in fact be cutting out things they need for a craft project, but that's the enterprise.

Who meets and how do they meet? Each team meets biweekly, and most come having read the Sunday readings in advance and able to talk about them. That's the mutual engagement aspect of that.

What are some of the common repertoire? Well, they check in, they do a reflection on the Gospel, they discuss last time's session, they talk about possible themes, all of those are things that they do repeatedly, and in that, accomplish the enterprise that they're doing.

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As we're doing that, don't forget to keep in mind the three levels of the enterprise. It's the task, it's the enterprise of the community of practice, and it's the broader enterprise of the evangelizing of the parish.

We've looked at this part of the definition of communities of practice: that sustained gathering of people whose interactions are marked by mutual engagement, shared enterprise, common repertoire. Now I want to touch on the second part of that definition, which is really the part that I find pretty interesting for us. That is, how does learning take place in that context? So where the collective learning involved in surviving and thriving in a community leads to practices that enhance group identity and further group goals.

First of all, in terms of learning as a participant in the community of practice. Practice here means engagement in the shared enterprise. That's what we mean by practice. It's through engagement in the shared enterprise that we become competent, let's say. Example I have here is a third-grade catechist. Third grade catechist, that's the task that that person does. But the enterprise is that they're engaged in the faith formation of the whole parish. While their job might be about working with their graders, their fifth-graders, or seventh-graders, or high school, or college people, their work and their responsibility is the formation of the parish. That person becomes an ever more effective evangelizing Christian.

So we learn on all three levels, so that each of those is part of that process of learning. With that, our identity is formed: who we are and who we are in that community is formed by our participation in that. For example, we take on the identity inherent to the shared enterprise.

Let me give you an example. In a parish that I was in, the lectors met. Now the lectors, as a group, probably isn't a good example of community of practice. It's a big group, they don't really relate to one another, there's not much mutual engagement. But this particular parish had weekly opportunities for the lectors to gather and do a breaking open of the Word before each week, each Saturday morning or Sunday, Sunday or Saturday afternoon. So for them then, they became, eventually their identity was formed as ones who engage with the Word. They engage with the Word at three levels: as a lector—their task, as a parishioner, and ultimately as a person of faith.

So each of the ways in which we're formed within these communities of practice expands beyond the one task that we have. Those then become the way in which we engage in doing the task and engaging in the enterprise, and ultimately in being and becoming a more evangelizing context.

But we still don't know how are these communities of practice going to be faith formative? Because again, probably not in your parishes, but I've been in parishes where the only thing that the lectors do when they gather is they practice how to use the mic. Or when to bow before or after the person who does the Psalm comes, and you meet in the middle and when to do that. And that's all important, but. . . Or, the catechists really focus on how to keep this group of third-graders entertained for the duration of the class. Or whatever. Again, maybe not in your place, but I've known of places where those kinds of things happen.

So how do we make, then, these places not just *potentially* communities of practice, communities of faith practice, but *fully* communities of faith practice. This is where I think the intentionality with which we engage with these communities of practice and the way in which we intentionally use—best sense of the term use—these communities of practice, is key.

So the community of practice, COP, community of practice as context for enhancing faith, I think means being intentional about four things. It means being intentional about embracing the faith



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dimension of each parish group. It means being intentional about recognizing the role of the communities of practice as welcoming and of belonging and contributing to that; intentional about facilitating collaboration across communities, and intentional about providing opportunities for people to discern their gifts.

What I want to do is to spend the next block of time talking about what would that look like? How might you do that? What would be some of the ways in which we could foster that sense of intentionality?

So, the first one is being intentional about articulating and embracing the faith dimension of each of the parish communities of practice. How do we bring those to the fore? Couple of suggestions: the first is that in the places where we describe these boards and committees and groups, etc., we include in there the call to be evangelizers. If you you're going to join the parish council, if you're going to be on the finance committee, if you're going to be a catechist, if you're going to be all these, part of what you're signing up for is to be an evangelizer. Good, you know how to do money, we want you on the finance committee. But more importantly, you are a person of faith who is interested in learning and growing in your faith. So we include that in the call. The role of fostering the faith of the members is one of the tasks of the committee. So when somebody agrees to be on the parish council, they know that part of that experience is about growing in faith themselves. Make that very explicit.

Again, my experience, your mileage may vary, but my experience is we often downplay the commitment we're asking for because we want people to say yes. So we make it sound like this is not going to be much work and it certainly is not going to change your life. You'll want to do this. Well, this is a "no." We need to warn them: "this is about changing how you think about yourself, engage with the world, change your identity." So that's the first one, just to bring to consciousness. If you have a place where all of these committees are described, include that in the description of what the committee does. It fosters the faith of the members. Here's what you're signing up for.

Secondly, the importance of integrating prayer, reflection, faith conversation into the regular work of the community of practice. I often say, when we think about a period of time in which we engage in faith formation with adults, with anyone, we need a certain amount of that time to be about prayer reflection; a certain amount of that time to be about input, a certain bit of that time to socialize, etc. I think the same thing is true of our committees. What happens in many committees or in many groups, in the gathering of catechists or whatever, is you cut to the chase. You say, "OK, we have too much to do tonight to take time for prayer, so let's just do a quick prayer and then jump in." This is saying, "that goes against what we're trying to do as an evangelizing Church." That if we're not in our every gathering—remember that long list of gatherings of adults at St. Odo the Good—that if we're not at every gathering taking time for well thought-through prayer, reflection, conversation, then we're not engaging these communities as well as we could. So how do we do that? How do we have that as part of it?

Third one is how do we connect the communities of practice to the faith life of the parish? How do we have the communities of practice, the variety of them—I hope you have a half dozen you're thinking of in your own mind from your own parish setting—how do we make those more evident to the faith community and more participating in the life of the faith community. How do we have them be responsible for the Friday night during Lent, the soup meal and prayer, so each community of practice can take the responsibility for that. How do we help them to be more connected to the faith life of the community? So they're not off here doing something without experiencing that connection.

Secondly, being intentional about recognizing that communities of practice are the essential resource in welcoming new parish members and renewing established ones. I know you can tell many stories

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that start like this: Yes, I'm going to St. Odo the Good for about a year, but it was only when somebody asked me to be a catechist, my child started the religious education program, somebody invited me to the book club, somebody asked me to be on the parish council, whatever.

We don't belong to parishes. Well, we do. But that sense of identity and belonging is not to a parish, it's to a small group within that parish. We can think of a parish as a community of communities. To think of it as a community is not helpful, I think, for hardly anyone. So we need to be intentional about saying, how do we establish a way for people to connect with the life of the parish? With the practices of what it means to be a Christian by connecting with communities of practice?

It also, I think is really helpful for how we bring people back. Here's just a real quick example. There's a couple of friends of mine. They raised their children, three boys, and they were really involved in the Church, did all this stuff for the Church—religious education, youth ministry, lectors, etc. And then their kids graduated and went off to wherever and got married. Then it's like they didn't know what they were going to do then. They didn't really have an entry point for, and they went to church. They did, yeah, yeah. But there wasn't any place where they felt like they belonged. They loved the parish but then one time, this happened at the time of when Katrina hit in the New Orleans area, the husband, name is Bert, actually Bert had seen an ad, something in the bulletin about going to a meeting about people who wanted to do something about Katrina. Ann was not that excited about it, but they went. Ultimately that became their point of re-entry into the life of the parish. They took on a new identity. They went down to New Orleans, they were part of the trip down to New Orleans. They spoke at liturgy, they became involved in social justice committee, they became active members again.

So that's what I say. It's both new parish members, but renewing established members as well. How do we do that? We recognize that welcoming new members is essential to the health and vitality of a community of practice.

One of my first positions as religious educator was in Fayetteville, North Carolina, the first DRE there for a few years. One of the hard things about it was it was basically military there, which meant everybody left every three years. There was just a turnover. Actually, it was good because you ended up having to find new people and having to mix up the group. Of course, at the time I didn't recognize it, I just whined about it constantly. But in looking back, I recognize that that was why that was such a vital parish. It was because people came in with experience from other places, as well as an energy for being there, and they knew they only had three years to make those commitments and to make those relationships, and so they were in it.

How do we do that? How do we engage people and recognize that that's necessary? We need to be deliberate about how new members are integrated into the group. Quite often what can easily happen is somebody signs up on time and talent and you call them and they come to a meeting, and they're either clueless on what's going on, they're on the periphery, or they get assigned everything. Those seem to be our two responses to new members in groups. So how do we nurture them? How do we support them? How do we establish some kind of system of mentorship between new and established members so somebody in the group is responsible for being sure the person knows what they're talking about, knows what's going on? Whether it's a finance committee or the group of catechists. . . How do we do that? How do we make that connection, and that we cultivate a milieu or a context in which members move in and out of communities of practice?

A parish that I've been in, not the one I'm in now, but a parish that I've been in, had so many lectors that you lectored about once every four months. Kind of forgotten your lines by that time. There were so many that it was like, wow, which is, at some level, great, but on another level it meant that

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we had people who had been lectors forever and ever and never found other ministries they wanted to do.

How do we do that? How do we create a context in which, like the parish council, there is a term limit? Even to our catechists, as a person who's been a DRE, I know how frightening that is to think that you're going to say to some of your catechists, "Thanks, what else do you want to do?" I know, I can see the panic. But I think for the vitality of the group that it's an important thing to think about.

Intentional about facilitating effective collaboration between communities of practice within that constellation of the parish and even beyond. Again, I think one of the important points is, first of all, to reaffirm the shared enterprise in which all the communities of practice within the parish are engaged, so that we be and become, as a parish, more effective agents evangelization.

When planning events that involve more than one community of practice, engage more than just the leadership people. We often say, well, we want the youth ministry kids to be involved with the second graders for first Eucharist, making the connection between confirmation and Eucharist; lovely. But generally, that's just a decision that the two people in charge of those two groups make. What if some of the catechists or youth ministers were involved in that conversation? How would that be different? How would that be different, both in what you did and in their experience of belonging and their experience of being a participant? Recognizing and capitalizing on the role of broker. By broker I mean somebody who's part of two different communities.

Back to that lector story. Robert, a friend of mine, was one of the people who went to the reflection on the Scriptures each week, but he was also a fifth-grade catechist. So he was able to bring some of the ways in which they engage Scripture to his fifth-grade students and the other fifth-grade catechists. So how do we find, how do we nurture those people?

And then finally, plan events that involve multiple communities of practice and overlapping enterprises so we get to know and appreciate what other people are doing.

Then finally, we want to be intentional about incorporating a process of discernment in order to engage people's gifts more effectively. I do think that's something that for the most part many of our parishes are not very good at, and that is helping people to name where their gifts are and aren't. In terms of discerning gifts, how do we recognize that everybody has gifts that are given for the good of the community, and what does that mean? To help people to gain insight into the process of discernment and the way in which they engage in discernment in their lives in order to be clearer on what their gifts are. Provide means and opportunities for all the parish members to become familiar with and to explore a variety of ministry opportunities. Do people even know what some of the communities of practice are that they could be involved in?

Now that was a lot, and I want to finish up. I had a friend who was a pastor of a parish, and I remember being frustrated about something that was going on. It wasn't going the way I wanted it to go and that's always frustrating. I said, "I don't know what to do next." His comment to me was, "If you can't move in the right direction, lean that way." So I'm not thinking that you're going to go home tonight and transform all the communities in your parish into active, vibrant communities of practice that nurture the faith of all the parish members. You could. Oh, you're going to do that? That's great. OK.

But what can we do? So let me just name a couple of things to think about, in terms of how do you lean in that direction? Name the vibrant communities of practice that do already exist and support them. What are some of the vibrant groups in your parish, in your faith community, and how do you

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support them? Think of the groups with which you work. Think of them in terms of making clear to yourself and to them their shared enterprise, what mutual engagement is about, what some of the repertoire is. One of the challenges with common repertoire is that sometimes something we've established as a repertoire can be at odds with the enterprise. So if the enterprise changes, for example, when my book club turned to a dessert club, we all stopped buying books because that was a common repertoire that was part of the book club. Instead we spent time poring over cookbooks and how to make great desserts. Different repertoire of behaviors.

Work at making clear the shared enterprise and common repertoire that united the community within your ministry. Here I was talking about campus ministry. What unites all of the different communities? Fundamentally we want to be intentional about connecting people with vibrant communities of practice because that's how they'll stay connected with the parish community is through that connection.

I'm going to stop there for a minute and just invite you into conversation. As you know, the most important theological question we ever ask is, so what? So just take a few minutes, talk to the person next to you, groups of two or three. Helpful insight, some concerns that need to be considered, and then questions that should be posed. So take about five or six minutes around these questions or any questions you have for yourself, what insight do you get, etc., and then we'll have time for questions and response. OK? Go.

I think one of the things that's really challenging, I think, but also a helpful way to think about is those of you who are engaged in forming collaboratives, or will be or whatever, it's to name that is part of the challenge that different understanding of the enterprise, of a particular group or of the parish in general. So how do you bring two parishes together, two liturgy committees together, two groups of catechists together without having to do the conversation about what are we doing? I think we sometimes, in some places, just merge them together and presume that they're all doing the same thing, and we're not. It's not a bad thing, it's just true. So how do we make those observations.

Yes, Tom, just a second for the mic.

**Dr. Groome:**

Thank you, Jane. We found it very helpful, and in a sense your point, and you repeated many, many times, the word intentionality, that we be intentional about whether it's the leaky roof committee or the bingo committee or whatever it is; we don't have bingo committees much anymore, but they were there for years. But they start with reading a Scripture or a prayer. There's something intentional about the thing.

My question, though, is I'm part of a seminar at the moment, a faculty seminar of the future of priesthood. This has come up a number of times now in the seminar because in a sense, not to fall back into a clerical paradigm, but in a sense so much of what you're proposing depends upon—doesn't depend upon, but you better have a pastor who's willing to mentor this and to encourage this and isn't just simply in charge of everything, but is indeed a minister of holy order—getting people to work well together, the original meaning of hierarchy instead of anarchy.

But how should we be training? I was thinking, where do we find the pastors because we are still so hierarchically ordered, but how should we be training future priests, for example, to facilitate, to enable? Because this presumes a very different understanding of priesthood than the top-down, I'll tell you what to do, where to go, how to get there. So what's your reflection on the kind of priests that this requires?

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**Dr. Regan:**

I think one of the challenges, and I think it's connected in part, again just to return because it's the Archdiocese we're involved in here, is that we're putting parishes together without much imagination, so there's often a case of the pastor, unfortunately for him, all he knows is the parish that he grew up in or the parish where he was pastor where there was just the one pastor for one parish. That's his experience, legitimately. Then he's put in three parishes and then he thinks he has to do the same thing, but now in three parishes. So I think it's the lack of the opportunity to engage in an imagination, because in some ways this model or this potential, I think, is perfect for those parishes where, in fact, that the pastor simply can't do it all. We don't like that to be the reason, in fact, that the pastor invites others into the work, but it often is, in fact, with that recognition that they simply can't do it. So that's one aspect, is how do we create the context in which imagination is possible?

The second is—this is where you lean into it if you can't move in the right direction. It's like, think of where you have influence. Think of where you have influence and do something there. Because I think that when there is a group in a parish that is vibrant and alive, people want to be in that group. I think it spreads like roots spread without anybody noticing until it's too late, and they're too hard to pull up. So I think to some extent, it's about how do we create vibrant groups within our parish where people really are aware of their role as evangelizers, that people see that and say I want what they have? Maybe that sounds too hopeful, but if we're not people of hope then we're dead in the water.

Thanks for the question. Other questions? Yes? Right there.

**Questioner:**

One of the opportunities we have is with an emerging collaborative. We have a new pastor who's wonderful. One of the parishes has very strong commissions that are pretty self-directed and have always been. The other parish is one in which it was a top-down, the previous pastor decided what was going to be done and went on from there.

So I guess my question is, do you have any helpful hints about trying to engage? There's some similarity between the commissions in the two churches. What ideas you might have about trying to combine the parishes and take the gifts of all people?

**Dr. Regan:**

Right, right. No, I don't. But it's a great question. Anybody else have a good question?

Again, I think the challenge is always, how do you invite people into another way of thinking about whatever, the world, hopefully, and their role in it? The thing that's so difficult is in many parishes, in Parish B that you described there, that many times even if the pastor didn't want to be a top-down, he's often put in a situation where he is forced into that. So it's kind of like, "What do you think, Father?" That has been well, don't say we can't teach. We taught people that. So that's part of, I think of the challenge; is it's a shift of a mindset that really has been inculcated into our way of life as Catholics within these communities. I think it does have to be done. I suggest we do it quite slowly. Unfortunately, again, we often want to do it tomorrow. If it wasn't done last week, we'll do it tomorrow. It's hard. I think the only way that people can recognize, can make that shift is if they see, again, the vitality, the energy, the vision that they want for their own lives. I think that is the whole point of evangelization. It isn't about telling people what they need; it's about sharing with them the source of your hope. I think being evangelizing to one another, particularly in those parishes coming together, is essential. Hard to do, but it's essential.

Anybody else? Yes.

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**Questioner:**

I have a question about the invitation, and I appreciate the reminder that we need to go slowly in that invitation. I wonder, too, if you might say something about numbers. I think many of us here are probably familiar with, we've invited the lectors to meet for a reflection about Advent, and out of 40, two show up, and so you never do it again. How do you step out of that cycle and move toward really creating that dynamic energy that becomes attractive, and more people are going to be attending? I know I'm asking an impossible question, but I wonder if you. . .

**Dr. Regan:** Another good question I can say "I don't know" to.

**Questioner:** Yeah, if you can offer any insight into that.

**Dr. Regan:**

First, let me just preface by saying I was a DRE in three different parishes, I know some of the story. You offer something and nobody comes, I get that. I think—two observations. One is, why do we want more people? If that group of two has a really great conversation about whatever you were doing. Now, that involves our shifting the basis by which we evaluate ourselves, and maybe being evaluated by someone else. But to the degree to which we're counting heads, that is absolutely antithetical to evangelization. The degree to which we think that evangelization is about bringing in more people, we're in trouble. Because it's not. That's nice if it happens. I like Catholics. I'd like more of them. But it's like, that's not the point. So I remember thinking—my periodically clear thinking—of recognizing that if I had a group of parents that I was working with in preparation for sacraments, and if in that group, one family was changed by that, I was a rave success.

To some extent we need to shift how we do the counting. Because we have no idea where else that's going. It's like the two people who come go home and they tell their spouses about it, and then they also mention it to a friend they know who's also a lector who lives behind the driveway, and next time it may be three. But if every time we only, we only get two or four or 10, if we then stop doing it, we've really cut off the opportunity to people who are there to continue to grow. It really is, it's a difficult thing, but it involves changing, doing our own kind of conversion in terms of changing what the basis is for evaluating.

And how do we plan things in ways that are simpler? Maybe what we need to plan is not that, but we need to invite three or four people to lunch so we're not expecting 40; in fact, we don't want 40, we want three. Then, doing that in various contexts, in various ways. I think we are so caught up in numbers, I am too. People on my staff know that. Yeah, yeah. But how do we move out of that and see and recognize that the grace is in the relationship? Is that helpful? Boy, I have a friend, psychologist, the first thousand times are the hardest. When you're changing your thinking on something, the first thousand times are the hardest. So it's not going to happen tomorrow. It takes time.

How about one more question? Yeah.

**Questioner:**

Thanks, Jane. This may be a question you can't answer. But maybe someone in the group can, so that would be nice. My question is about moving away from the silos that we sometimes see in these communities of practice, but are sometimes isolated communities of practice in our parishes. What are some suggestions for getting some overlapping to happen without making it be forced? We don't want to do it just because we should overlap. People need to know a reason why we're doing this. Does anyone—yourself or anyone else here—have a practical suggestion on how we can actually create some overlap between maybe two or three of our communities of practice?

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**Dr. Regan:**

Let me make a comment and then open it up to other observations. One is, I think we need to—again, intentional is kind of the key of the day. What surprises me sometimes, and I do the same thing, is that the liturgy committee never talks to the religious educator about liturgy. In fact, the religious educator is very much involved in participating in the formation of people for liturgy. Or the youth minister never talks to the person who does the confirmation program. So I think there are some natural connections, and how do we begin to host conversations? So again it's kind of returning to that last question, we're not going to change everything tomorrow, but how do we host the experience of people talking about how you work with youth? But we work with youth in a variety of settings. How we work with elders. But a variety of people work with elders in the parish. How do we get that group together, both at the leadership level, but at the level of the people who are volunteering, too. So that's one of the things I think about.

**Questioner:** (inaudible).

**Dr. Regan:**

Exactly, and say, how do we group people who, in fact, are doing much the same thing? It reminds me of when you go into a hospital you have a team of people who are all taking care of this person, but all coming from different angles; but if they're not talking to one another, then it's less effective. So how do we do that? Anybody else have a great idea on this? Yes.

**Respondent:** I think the most exciting group I've ever belonged is the South Boston Residents for Peace. There was a group of us in 2006 that formed in South Boston. We were all residents, some of us were Vietnam veterans, and we were able to get the Iraq war on the ballot as an initiative. Balloted initiative in 2006. We went to the cardinal and asked him to support that, and he refused to support that. We were from different parishes in South Boston and we had no support from any of the priests. Zero. Then we formed a peace parade in South Boston because the St. Patrick's Day parade is so militant that we formed a peace parade, and we still had no support from any of the parish priests or even Catholics, because we had Quakers and (inaudible) would come over and help us out. But that's the most shocking thing, because don't we say in the liturgy, peace be to you? And that's really the most shocking thing. Plus, I think about B.C. being a training place for the military and the pope is against the wall. I think about those things. Unfortunately the group collapsed because people moved on. Now I'm with the Pax Christi in Boston, which is a Catholic peace group. There's five of us. So those are group size.

**Dr. Regan:**

Those are great examples of communities of practice that really do a great job of shaping the vision and shaping the identity of not only those who belong, but those who are on the periphery with them as well. Thank you.

I think we need to stop just because time is just about up. But thank you very much. My book is back there.