

For Leadership Transition

Group & Purpose

This circle process was created to support the transition in the leadership and formation team for a women's ministry called "Christ Renews His Parish". Christ Renews His Parish is a program which fosters spiritual growth, community, and renewal among parishioners. Its aim is to reinvigorate parish life through transformative experiences of faith sharing, retreat weekends, and community building. The formation program lasts six months or one year.

This circle process provided an opportunity for the group to reconvene after a weekend retreat that involved both incoming and outgoing groups for fellowship, reflection, and faith sharing. Around 20 people were present (a fairly even mix between incoming and outgoing groups). We met in person in a parish meeting space. There was little prior knowledge or experience with synodal processes.

This circle process can be adapted to suit any transition of leadership from one group to another (for example, a Parish Council, Youth Ministry Team, Finance Committee, Young Adult Ministry Council, Social Justice Commission, etc).

Approach, Preparation & Logistics

There were two hours available for the process, which took place in person, at a parish conference center - the same location as the retreat. The evening took place on a Wednesday after the retreat ended on a Sunday so that experiences were still fresh in participants' minds and hearts.

For talking pieces, we used small wooden crosses that had been held by speakers giving witness on the retreat weekend. These held sentimental value to the outgoing team since they had used them during their talks. In the centerpiece was a Bible, candle, and crucifix from Bible enthronement (see below).

The group did not have prior experience with circle process. I spoke briefly about the purpose of circle process and why I thought it would be beneficial to this group. We planned to have a co-facilitator who was a leader in the outgoing team. She was embedded in that group, and I serve as the staff liaison for the ministry.

This sample circle outline was shared as part of Catholic Mobilizing Network's program, [Conversations in Communion: Parish Dialogues for Connection and Understanding](#). You can learn more at catholicmobilizing.org/conversations.

Circle Outline

Opening

Today we will go through a process together to support our formation and transition as a ministry. I invite you to consider how you might enter into formation (for the incoming team) and what you will take with you as you transition out of formation (for the outgoing team). How can we keep the spirit of this ministry alive in the midst of transition?

Co-facilitators share some personal remarks on why circle process is being brought into this ministry at this time.

Ice Breaker Round

Before formally opening the circle process, we did a round inviting each person to share a fun moment in their life since leaving the weekend retreat and coming back to “real life”.

Ceremony

Bible Enthronement is used as the opening ceremony. This is a rich tradition dating back to the ancient Church which was revived during Vatican II deliberations. The Bible is “enthroned” on a stand, left open, as a reminder of God’s Word being present among us and living in us.

The Bible is carried into the space and processed around those gathered, accompanied by one person carrying a candle and one person carrying a crucifix (which are then placed beside the Bible on the table). A song may be played as the three people process around the room. Members of the outgoing team should perform this.

Check-In

Co-facilitators introduce the talking piece (a small Cross) which signals the speaker. Only the person with the talking piece is speaking. Others listen without need or expectation to respond. Reminded the group that you always have the option to pass.

The guiding prompt for the round was “What is your name? What ministry team are you on? And how are you feeling as you arrive today?”

Values

Co-facilitators directed participants to the paper plate and marker underneath their chairs. On one side of the plate, they invited each person to write a core value that helps you live your best self? On the other side of plate, they asked each participant to write a value to live by in this

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group? Participants were invited to share briefly about the values they wrote and add their plate to the centerpiece.

Guidelines

“In circle, we aim to create and hold a safe space for one another - to share openly, listen well, and to honor these values that we aspire to. What are some guidelines that will help us live out these values in this circle?”

The group generated the following guidelines:

- Respect the talking piece - Listen intentionally and be as fully present as possible
- Pay attention to your needs, emotions, body
- Share responsibility for time
 - *Facilitator Note: This is something that we've received feedback on in the past; we all need to hold each other accountable for time spent at CRHP meetings*
- Confidentiality - Respect the privacy of each person
- Speaking your own truth “I” statements not “we” statements.

The group also included the following core guidelines from CRHP:

- Everyone has an important part to play
- We trust that the Holy Spirit will guide our conversation and we strive to remain open to the Spirit's invitation at all times
- Everything we say stays in the circle

Round One:

Tell us about the object that you brought with you - that is symbolic of a blessing, learning, or memory from formation (for outgoing team) or for your experience of retreat (incoming team).

Facilitator remarks following the round of sharing:

- Storytelling is an important way of connecting with one another and a very significant part of the Christ Renews His Parish process.
- Circle process will help us stay connected, focused, and open us up to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we discern how to move forward as a new team.
- The experience of sharing, and bearing witness to other sharing impacts our whole selves - physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, material. We know this when we feel supported by those we love, and we feel this when we are harmed in one way or another. We bear this in mind as we begin journeying together.

Round Two:

How are you feeling about the upcoming transition between leadership teams?

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Round Three:

What is one way you hope to bring grace to this time of transition, either taking up the mantle of serving on a leadership team or laying it down and saying farewell?

Check Out:

What is a word or phrase about what you're feeling as we leave the circle?

Closing Ceremony:

Before closing the circle, the co-facilitators reminded the group of their next meeting time and purpose. They also welcomed feedback on the experience of using the circle process.

Bible Retirement is used as the closing ceremony. This is essentially the same as enthronement, but is performed by members of the incoming team, signaling their role going forward as leaders of the ministry. The same song or a different song may be played. The Bible is processed around the room flanked by a candle and crucifix, and then is placed back where it belongs.

Participants then offered one another a sign of peace to close.

Follow Up & Reflective Evaluation

The circle process lended itself beautifully to the purposes of making a transition in parish leadership. It was a meaningful way to bring incoming and outgoing teams together. It built goodwill between teams, strengthened relationships, and helped identify any pain points going forward.

This circle successfully formed a bridge between the team transitioning into leadership and the team transitioning out of leadership. Participants shared readily, vulnerably, and joyfully. I believe the process accomplished the purpose of aiding in a smoother transition between teams.

In the future, I would think more critically about how much time people may spend sharing in each round and plan our time better. I had originally planned for two additional rounds of questions that time constraints did not allow for. These were:

- What is something you need from this group in order to grow in renewal, faith, healing?
- What is something you would like to leave this group with who journeyed together for two days, grew in faith, experienced an outpouring of grace, and will be continuing down separate paths from here on out?

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It probably would have taken three or more hours with the size of the group to get through all five rounds in addition to opening and closing ceremonies, and building values and guidelines.

In order to further support the CRHP team in the use of circle process, facilitators plan to share the Conversations in Communion Facilitators Guide, and potentially other complimentary resources on restorative justice and circle process in general.

About the Circle Facilitator:

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