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SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY CONTINUING EDUCATION
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Transcript of
“Making a Contribution Larger than Our Task,” Video Segment 3
Transforming Parishes through Communities of Practice

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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.

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.

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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 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.