



ENCORE
ACCESS

Transforming Parishes Through Communities of Practice

with Jane E. Regan

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BOSTON COLLEGE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY

Transforming Parishes Through Communities of Practice

USING THIS RESOURCE

This resource is a guide to using an STM Online: Encore presentation as a conversation starter with members of a faith community. Each part of the presentation may be used separately, in combinations with each other, or in a sequence over a period of time. For example, a catechetical leader might use each part of the presentation over the course of a year at meetings with catechists. A pastor may choose to use only one segment to encourage discussion on a related agenda item. “Transforming the Parish” has broad application to community life. Consider using one or more segments with a parish pastoral council, or with a hospitality or outreach committee.



OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENTATION

In her presentation “When Two or Three Are Gathered,” Jane E. Regan introduces us to the concepts of situated learning and communities of practice so that each person engaged in parish life can deepen one’s own faith while sharing it with others. Regan asks three questions:

1. How do we learn the really important things in life? As one response to that question, she introduces the notion of situated learning.
2. Where and when do adults gather in our parishes and faith communities? She examines this question by helping us understand communities of practice in our lives. Then she will point out that our faith communities can be viewed as a clusters of inter-related communities of practice.
3. How do we as persons and as parishes become ever more effective to the work of evangelization, which is our fundamental call as believers? We do that by exploring the potential of communities of practice within our parishes.

Jane E. Regan is associate professor of theology and religious education

Part 1: Situated Learning [video 7 minutes]

Part 2: Communities of Practice [video 12 minutes]

Part 3: Making a Contribution Larger than Our Task [video 7:22 minutes]

Part 4: Fostering a Faith Dimension and a Sense of Belonging [video 11 minutes]

Part 5: Collaboration Across Communities of Practice and Discerning Members’ Gifts [video 6 minutes]

Part 1: Situated Learning

OVERVIEW

We learn in many ways. This segment explores situated learning and contrasts it to classroom learning. In the examples Jane Regan provides, you will see how situated learning can be applied to learning a skill like playing soccer or shaping an identity.

► Situated learning...

1. learning is grounded in the actions of everyday situations rather than around discrete packages of information organized by an instructor
2. knowledge is acquired situationally and transfers to similar situations;
3. learning is 'problem' driven rather than content driven, and
4. learning is always multi-modal, involving the full person and developing skills across multiple domains.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. Describe how you learned something by situated learning. Who or what in this situation helped you learn?
2. How did you learn the most important things about faith? Was that situated learning or a classroom context? Who or what in this situation helped you learn?

Part 2: Communities of Practice

OVERVIEW

Jane introduces us to the concept of a “community of practice.” She describes three features of such communities:

1. shared enterprise,
2. mutual engagement, and
3. common repertoire.

Regan invites us to think about the communities of practice in which we are involved and the potential communities of practice in our parish.

Communities of Practice at St. Odo the Good

Catechists
RCIA team
Eucharistic ministers
Pastoral staff
Social Justice Committee
Parish Council
Tuesday AM Bible Study

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. What are the communities of practice in your life—related to your interests, your roles, and your faith?
2. Three key components of communities of practice are mutual engagement, shared enterprise, and common repertoire. In what way might these categories help you understand, access, and enhance the communities of practice in which you participate?
3. How might these be more effective in what and how you learn and see yourself?

Part 3: Making a Contribution Larger than Our Task

OVERVIEW

After a brief review of key categories of a community of practice, Regan responds to two questions:

- How does learning take place in a community of practice in a parish?
- How does the collective learning enhance group identity and further group goals?

Regan concludes this segment by speaking about being intentional in nurturing communities of practice within a parish. She identifies four areas of being intentional:

- embracing the faith dimension of each parish group;
- recognizing the role of the communities of practice as welcoming and of belonging;
- facilitating collaboration across communities; and
- providing opportunities for people to discern their gifts.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. Regan speaks of three levels of the enterprise: the task, the enterprise of the community of practice, and evangelizing the parish. Describe an experience that you have had or that you have observed, where there is learning on these three levels: of the task, in one's participation in the faith formation of the parish, and in becoming a more evangelizing Christian.

2. How has your identity as a Christian been formed by participation in a community of practice in your faith community or parish (e.g., committee, ministry group, etc.)?



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Part 4: Fostering a Faith Dimension and a Sense of Belonging

OVERVIEW

Jane discusses fostering a faith dimension of members of communities of practice. She also addresses creating an atmosphere of welcome and belonging that becomes a portal for attracting new members and renewing the affiliation of longer standing members in the faith community.

FAITH DIMENSION

- *Description of the CoPs charge include the call to be evangelizers and to foster the faith of its members.*
- *Integrate prayer, reflection and faith conversations into the regular work of the CoP.*
- *Connect the CoPs with the faith life of the parish.*

WELCOMING NEW MEMBERS

- *Recognize that welcoming new members is essential to the health and vitality of the CoPs.*
- *Be deliberate about how the new members are integrated into the group.*
- *Establish a system of mentorship between new and established members.*
- *Cultivate milieu in which members move in and out of CoPs in healthy and constructive ways.*

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. How are the (potential) communities of practice in your faith community connected to the faith life of the parish?
2. How do you react/respond to Regan's idea of a context in which members move in and out of communities of practice?



Part 5: Collaboration Across Communities of Practice and Discerning Members' Gifts

OVERVIEW

As the title of this part states, Jane addresses collaboration across communities of practice and intentionally fostering ways that members can discern their gifts so that they can be used effectively as evangelizing leaven in a faith community. She concludes on an encouraging note regarding implementation of the ideas expressed in this presentation.

DISCERNING GIFTS

- *Affirm the scriptural foundation of gifts given for the good of the community.*
- *Help people gain insight into the process of discernment and its application to their lives*
- *Provide means and opportunities for all parish members to become familiar with and explore a variety of ministry opportunities.*

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QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. What are some ways that your parish could foster collaboration across (potential) communities of practice?
2. Describe an example or two of how a faith community has helped you or someone you have observed to identify and develop their gifts.

If you have listened to several parts of this presentation, reflect on the following question:

3. What will stay with you from Regan's presentation about communities of practice transforming parish life? Regan quotes a friend as saying, "If you can't move in the right direction, lean that way." In what direction will you lean?