

Leading with Vitality Council Reflection: Cooperation vs. Credit

How to use the Leading with Vitality Council Reflection: Share this document with the Council members prior to the Council meeting and add 15 minutes to the beginning of the agenda for shared reflection. Prior to the meeting, invite one member of the Council to lead the discussion. Here's a simple outline for how the shared reflection might go.

First, the reflection leader reads the scripture passage aloud. Second, the reflection leader highlights one idea from the reflection that the reflection leader found meaningful or challenging. Third, the reflection leader uses one or more of the reflection questions below to encourage discussion. When the discussion draws to a close, the reflection leader closes the time with the prayer using the prayer below or another prayer they create.

Scripture Reading

1 Corinthians 12:12-27 (NRSV)

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear were to say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you', nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Cooperation vs. Credit

When it comes to sharing ideas, credit, and work, there are several ways it can go.

On one hand, we might think of an author with their name always attached to articles and books with a clear copyright. In this case, protecting the copyright and name of the author is how the author makes a living. Let's call this the "authorship model" — where someone's name is attached to certain ideas. Certainly, the 'authorship model' has its place.

On the opposite pole, is the idea that it is inappropriate or unwise to put your own thoughts forward. Let's call this the "reticence model" — where people are reluctant to share their own thoughts. This reticence, too, can have its place. We have all had the experience, I am sure, of learning that sometimes it's better to say nothing.

In the church, the reticence model might show up as deference to the clergy, or to the council, or to a long-standing ministry committee — and so we say nothing. Or, perhaps we have the authorship model, where people have a strong sense of ownership of certain ideas and ministries and find it hard to see them change.

Still another dynamic is a sense that the rostered leader(s), the paid staff and a few prominent lay leaders are the ones tasked with coming up with ideas. Let's call that third model the "designated few" model. Certainly that

has its place as well: think of medical procedures. A “designated few” is a good idea when it comes to who’s in the operating room.

However, none of the models above — the authorship model, the reticence model, or the “designated few” model — will foster a vibrant community of faith.

One of the key principles of the Lutheran movement is the idea of the priesthood of all believers. In the life of the church, we are not called to defend copyrights or make sure our name is attached. We are not called to keep silent when the Holy Spirit might be nudging us to share our thoughts and we are not called to assume that a few people are the congregation’s designated Christians.

As Christians, we are all ministers. We are all called. We are called to share our ideas and combine our efforts, in our life together for the sake of Jesus, and for the sake of the world that God loves so much. We are called to share our ideas, to listen to the ideas of others, and to see how the Holy Spirit works through the entire community to create something no individual could have thought of alone.

To be sure, working together is harder than working alone, and working together as a whole community is harder than leaving it to a designated few, but Jesus called us all to come together to serve and to contribute our unique perspectives and gifts to this world.

I’d like to share this African proverb with you, which reminds me of the church: “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

May God grant that you go far, and may God bless your work together.

Reflection by Pastor Anna Havron

Questions for Reflection:

1. Describe an experience you’ve had — in any area of life — where you experienced a sense of teamwork, in an inspiring way. What was it like to be in that group? How did people talk together? How did people work together? What inspired you about it?
2. Is there anything you learned from that experience, that your congregation could try out?

Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, come. Blow through our lives and our ministries calling us to look for ways to unite the members of the body of Christ in support of your mission to love, bless, and save the world. Open the doors to cooperation. Help us to recognize opportunities to create partnerships and guide us as we work together. Amen.