



Proposing a “Parish Read”

Outline Prepared by Bill Murphy

The Voice of Renewal/Lay Education National Working Group

What Is a Parish Read?

This model describes the development of a Day of Spiritual Renewal. It was originally designed for two of the VOTF National Working Groups: the Structural Change Working Group (SCWG) and the Voice of Renewal/Lay Education Working Group (VOR/LE). As part of our ongoing effort to provide resources for renewal programs and adult faith education, we provide the model for affiliates and parishes to adapt to their own needs.

— Bill Murphy and Veronica Mitchell, *Voice of Renewal/Lay Education*

— Sharon Laronga and Kathryn Erat, *Structural Change Working Group*

A number of communities in Massachusetts have initiated town-wide reading programs as a way to foster adult conversation and build community ties. These “town reads” call for citizens within the community to all read the same book during the same general time period and then share their reflections about that book in a variety of settings. A “parish read” applies the same concept to the parish community.

Some Goals for a Parish Read

- ❑ Provide an adult education process for those who might otherwise be hard to reach
- ❑ Provide opportunities for people to meet and get to know each other and form a community on a new level
- ❑ Facilitate faith-sharing and respect for a variety of experiences and opinions
- ❑ Exhibit hospitality and a welcoming atmosphere
- ❑ Affirm and empower the faith experiences of adult Catholics

Books to Consider for Use

Jesus Before Christianity by Alfred Nolan

A Faith That Dares to Speak by Donald Cozzens

Common Calling edited by Stephen Pope

Living Vatican II by Gerald O’Collins

The Beginnings of the Church by Frederick Cwiekowski

What Is the Point of Being Christian? By Timothy Radcliffe

Discussion Venues

It is wise to offer a variety of discussion venues during the Parish Read. The variety will maximize both the number of people participating and the depth of the discussions. It also will allow people to participate in settings they find the most comfortable.

Some people will prefer the intimacy of small groups in local homes. Others may prefer small groups in public settings like the church or a library. Still others may prefer a large forum with formal presentations about the book ideas before opening personal discussion.

By offering one or more such settings, or perhaps alternating such settings, we can obtain wider participation. Our program, therefore, should encourage those who participate to organize the discussions in ways they feel comfortable. We must be flexible in our responses to these ideas.

Time Period for the Read

Before starting the program, we must decide how much time may be needed to read the book, how many discussion periods to suggest, and whether we will discuss the entire book at one time or discuss it in sections. The aim is to balance needs: provide enough time to read the book (or the part selected for the next discussion), but not so much time that people “stall out.” Typically the goal is not to give too much time or people will become bored.

For example, in one project we read a small book, about 100 pages long, by Joan Chittister. We allotted six weeks for people to purchase and read the book. We then hosted two discussions of the book, one on a Thursday evening and one after the last liturgy on Sunday. At each discussion, we used trained facilitators with some prepared questions based on the various chapters.

Organizing Issues

These are some of the questions to answer when organizing the Parish Read:

- ❑ Will we provide any training and/or guidance for discussion leaders?
- ❑ Will a leadership team develop discussion questions?
- ❑ What is the process for ongoing feedback and final evaluation?
- ❑ Will we provide any financial help in purchasing the book?
- ❑ How will we get the word out in a way that attracts new people? (PUBLICITY IS KEY!)