

Becoming Connected, Adaptive Leaders/Disciples

Session Three
Regional All Day Gathering



 Rocky Mountain Synod, ELCA

Courageous, resilient, and faithful leaders for the sake of the world



Becoming Connected, Adaptive Leaders/Disciples

Session Three Participant Outcomes:

1. Examine how your vulnerability shield works.
2. Describe the role that the leaders play in development of connectivity in a group.
3. Tune in to your thoughts and internal dialogue.
4. Practice giving and receiving feedback.
5. Develop an adaptive leadership process in your faith community.

Preparation for this Session:

- Begin reading *Daring Greatly* by Brené Brown
- Begin reading Chapter 2 of *Practice of Adaptive Leadership* by Ron Heifetz
- Read this section of the Manual

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Big Picture Snapshot

Loving God, loving others, and loving self are critical spiritual matters. Yet, we often experience a gap or disconnect in our ability to love honestly and authentically. These gaps can be experienced as wounds that need healing. In order to attend to healing, actively working to close the gaps, we must first and foremost immerse ourselves in God and let God show us the steps forward. A different quality of awareness and presence is necessary if we are to address the spiritual disconnects between the points of connection laid out in Jesus' two commandments of love: our self and God, our self and others, our self and the created world, and our self and Self.

Up to this point, we have been exploring ways to heighten our awareness of ourselves by contemplating our own emotional intelligence in the context of our group interaction. Hopefully, we have begun to know ourselves better and use ourselves better in relationship with others and groups by working on our own gap between our self and Self. Spiritual teachers often call this the difference between our False Self and our True Self. Our False Self is the persona we put out there, in the world. Our True Self is the truth of who God is creating us to be, our God image deep within. Our False Self gets caught up other people's expectations of us. The journey of getting to know who we truly are heals the disconnect between self and Self. In Session 3, we will be taking a deeper dive into this disconnect by exploring ways we feed the disconnect without even realizing it. Our need to know ourselves and love ourselves is great and directly influences our capacity to truly love others. Being our truest selves requires both vulnerability and self-differentiation. When we authentically bring our true self into relationships, we are better able to connect with others in loving ways.

Hopefully our earlier work in family systems has increased our awareness of the part we play in the web of complex familial, professional, and congregational relationships. Expanding the quality and capacity of our awareness of others begins to address the gap between our self and the other. In this session, we will attempt to expand our capacity of group awareness and our own leadership in the communities as we explore ways to help a group thrive and adapt in a world of continuous change.

The Courage to Be Who We Are

Ever since we left the womb, we have been confronted with challenges and discomforts in this world. In response to these things, we have learned to cope, protect, avoid, and armor ourselves to remain safe, secure, and happy. These mechanisms, however, also tend to distance ourselves from others and over time, even distance ourselves from who we really are. We have worn our masks so long, we believe them. Brené Brown in her book, *Daring Greatly*, explores the myriad of ways we keep ourselves from being vulnerable and open to love in relationships. Here are some ways to think about common obstacles to connecting with the people in our community:

Roadblocks to Connectivity: (from *Daring Greatly* by Brené Brown)

Culture of Scarcity: We live in a culture of “Never Enough.”

- Never good, thin, powerful, strong, successful, (fill in the blank) . . . enough.
- We live in a culture of comparison and low self-worth.

Vulnerability Myths:

- Vulnerability is weakness – “To believe vulnerability is weakness is to believe that feeling is weakness” (Brené Brown) Jesus lived a life of vulnerability from birth to death and revealed the power of God.
- Vulnerability is not proper – It’s not the “tough guy” thing. Growing up in a Victorian culture, it’s not proper to share your feelings, only care for others.
- Vulnerability is letting it all hang out – Letting it all hang out is a defense mechanism to overwhelm or shock others and actually distance ourselves.
- Vulnerability clashes with our value of rugged individualism.
- You can engineer the risk and discomfort out of vulnerability – then it is fake vulnerability.
- Trust comes before vulnerability – actually vulnerability builds trust.

Shame:

- Shame is guarded deep inside us and has to do with who I am, rather than what I do.
- We all have shame.
- We tend to be afraid to talk about shame.
- When concealed, shame has significant power over us.

Common protective shields that keep us from living in healthy relationships:

- **Foreboding Joy** – When we constantly expect the “other shoe to drop,” we don’t allow ourselves to feel full joy of the present moment.
- **Perfectionism** – When we focus on achieving perfection, we are living out of our need to earn external or outside approval.
- **Numbing** – When we tell ourselves we don’t care, then we shield ourselves from the negative feelings that are harder or more uncomfortable to process. Not caring usually means you are not allowing yourself to feel.
- **Victim** – Playing the victim often means we are not taking responsibility for our own presence in the situation. Playing the victim can mean we throw our hands up in the air and declare it is ‘not my fault.’

“Divine perfection is precisely the ability to include what seems like imperfection.”

Richard Rohr

- **Smash and Grab** – When we over-step people’s boundaries and share too much personal information in order to grab whatever attention and energy, we derail real relationships from forming.

Each protective shield has a possible resiliency practice to counter the negative behavior:

- **Gratitude counterbalances foreboding joy** – Take time at the end of each day to count your blessings and ponder how even difficult situations brought about an opportunity for deeper relationship.
- **Seeing beauty in brokenness counterbalances perfectionism** – Notice how the cracks allow light to shine through. Beauty is not the same as perfection. Perfectionism can keep us on a treadmill that destroys the relationships that God brings into our life.
- **Setting boundaries counterbalances our tendency toward numbing** – When we try to distance ourselves from our emotions because we find them too scary or we aren’t sure what to do with them, we are not allowing ourselves to experience the joy and beauty life has to offer. Boundaries allow us to pay attention to our emotions in ways and at a rate in which we can handle. Give yourself permission to actually feel your feelings. Stay mindful of your numbing behaviors. Lean into the discomfort of hard emotions. Practice sharing yourself appropriately.
- **Redefining success and seeking support counterbalances playing the victim** – How are you defining success in this frustrating situation? Talking with trusted friends who will not just tell you what you want to hear will help you reframe your perspective and help you not feel alone.
- **Knowing your motivations counterbalances a tendency to smash and grab** – Continually asking yourself ‘why am I doing what I’m doing?’ will help you monitor your internal dynamic and help you curb negative impulses that might destroy relationships.

As human beings, we have a basic need to belong. Belonging means we need to be somewhat vulnerable in order to be in relationship with others. Unfortunately, in our world today, belonging to some degree has been kidnapped by ideologies. We belong to groups we agree with, or that look like us. In a polarized society such as ours, the disconnects between groups are growing wider. Having the courage to be vulnerable is no small task AND is sorely needed. Brené Brown, in her book, *Braving the Wilderness*, says “People are hard to hate close up. Move in.”



Adaptive Leadership

What is Adaptive Leadership?

Adaptive leadership is the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive into the future. Adaptive challenges require us to pay attention to three characteristics:

- + Figure out what to conserve from community in order to maintain essential identity.
- + Figure out what practices, behaviors or traditions from the past are no longer life-giving as the community moves into the future.
- + Invent new ways, new practices, new behaviors, new traditions that build from the best of the past and allow the community to flourish into the future.

Adaptive leadership assumes leaders and the congregation know who they are and what their purpose is. Knowing the core values, deep assumptions, and culture of the congregation is essential. This is the “DNA” of what makes this congregation unique. In this world of rapid change, however, congregations need to adapt (preserve what is essential, discard what no longer works, and create values and constructs which do work) to a different environment every few years to stay relevant in embodying and proclaiming the Gospel in their context.

The process of adaptive leadership is to observe what is going on, interpret the data, and then create a plan of action. The first step is to observe what is going on in the congregation and in the local context and wider environment. It is helpful to have some models, lenses, or tools to help gather some data about what is happening inside the faith community and in the surrounding community. This helps leaders stay somewhat objective. Then the data needs to be interpreted. It is helpful to select a group to interpret with a diversity of perspectives for a more accurate assessment. Then leaders can design a plan of action and implement it. Following the action, the cycle begins again by observing what happened, interpreting what happened and taking another step.

The Difference Between Traditional Authority and Adaptive Leadership

- Traditional authority is based on hierarchy, expertise and power structures.
- Adaptive leadership challenges a system to create an environment so that the system can adapt.



Task	Authority	Leadership
Direction	Problem definition and solution	Identify new challenges and reframe key questions
Protection	Protect from external threats	Disclose external threats
Order	Maintain norms, order, roles	Question norms, uncover conflict, redefine roles

As demonstrated in the chart, adaptive leadership takes a different stance than what people normally expect from their leaders.

When do Leaders Need to Think Adaptively?

Concept	Identifying Flag
Persistent gap between aspirations and reality	The language of complaint is used increasingly to describe the current situation (i.e. "No one comes to church anymore.")
Responses within current repertoire inadequate	Previously successful programs, methods, experts, consultants are unable to address the situation.
The usual problem-solving tools no longer work	Traditional problem-solving methods used repeatedly without success. Failures more frequent than usual. Frustration and stress manifest.
The usual stakeholders no longer have answers to ease tension and anxiety	Rounding up the usual suspects to address the issue has not produced progress.
Quick fixes no longer provide adequate relief from the problem	Problem festers or reappears after short term fix is applied.
Disequilibrium raises anxiety within the system	Increasing conflict and frustration generate tension and chaos. Desperation to try something new increases as urgency becomes widespread.
The system is yearning to prepare for the future that is emerging	A critical number of people are asking discerning questions about the future.

Congregational Characteristics That Signal the Need For a Change to Adaptive Leadership:

- **Input and output are not linear.**
Programs and budget decisions produce unintended consequences.
- **Formal authority is insufficient.**
Positional authority of clergy or council is not enough to effect change in the system.
- **Different factions each want different outcomes.**
Proposal works for youth but not for seniors.
- **Previously highly successful protocols seem antiquated.**
Tried and true programs, methods, techniques for formation, newcomers, youth no longer work.

Four Adaptive Challenge Patterns:

1. **Gap between Espoused Values and Behavior:**
Human beings, whether as individuals or in communities often espouse a certain set of values and yet behavior reflects a different set of values.
2. **Competing Commitments:**
When a community is faced with an adaptive challenge, decisions can be difficult to make. Competing commitments can distract the system from facing the real challenge and compromise may not serve any constituency well.
3. **Speaking the Unspeakable:**
Often times we have two conversations going simultaneously – the external conversation happening around the table and the internal dialogue happening in each person's head. Getting people to share what seems unspeakable is essential for moving forward in the face of rapid change.
4. **Work Avoidance:**
Diversion of attention and displacement of responsibility accompany work avoidance. Ask yourself this question: Are we diverting our attention to technical fixes and programmatic fixes instead of dealing with the underlying challenges of being the church in today's world?



Reflecting on and Interpreting Your Situation Adaptively

Reflective Questions:

- How is our external environment in which we do ministry changing?
- What internal challenges are mirroring those external changes?
- What are the gaps between where we are and where we are called to be?
- How will we know that we are being faithful and effective in accomplishing our mission?
- What challenges might be just beyond the horizon?

Questions for Productive Interpretation:

- Is there any part of this situation that is new to us and that therefore might need a different strategy than we usually use?
- Who are the key stakeholders in this situation, and how might they be positively or negatively affected as leaders address the situation? How would they describe the situation and the consequences themselves?
- Within the congregation, how generalized in the congregation is the urgency to do anything about this situation, or do we have to figure out a way to “ripen the issue?”
- What are the adaptive elements of this situation, and what are the technical aspects?
- Are we the only ones in the church facing this situation? How are others responding?

Signs of Unproductive Interpretation:

This kind of comment...	Suggests that people see the problem as...	Encourage a shift by asking questions such as...
If we only had better direction from our pastor...	A deficiency in the leadership, not the vision or mission	What are the pressures for the leadership? What are the expectations?
We'll have this worked out in no time...	Short term – not long term	How could we try to deal with the causes of the situation rather than the symptoms?
This will be an easy fix...	Technical, not adaptive diagnosis	Maybe this situation is more complex than it looks on the surface.
We can't seem to carry out our good ideas.	Worried about capacity and incompetent execution	Maybe we are not connecting the Gospel in relevant ways for our neighbors. How can we listen to them?
This will be a win-win.	No one needs to suffer any pain to solve this problem	What losses are being perceived if we take some steps for resolution?



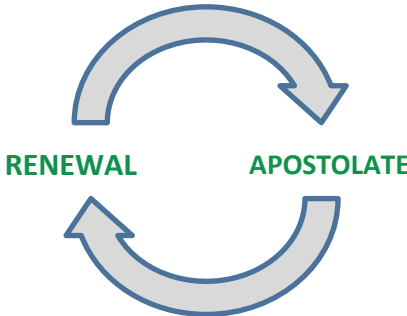
The Renewal – Apostolate Cycle: A Diagram Overview

The Renewal - Apostolate Cycle describes a central dynamic of the Christian life:

To love God and to love the neighbor.

This rhythmic cycle focuses our attention on the faithful movement between being renewed in baptismal identity as a beloved child of God AND living as instruments of God’s love and grace in daily life in the world. The cycle reminds us of both the individual’s growth and movement and how the congregation supports and facilitates that movement and growth.

Renewal in baptismal identity and purpose in worship, study and being equipped for Christian action



Sent out into the world as God’s hands, increasing evangelism and faithful stewardship in all relationships: our family and friends, our workplace, our faith communities, our civic life and our global impact.

A Cycle

The cycle demonstrates the conscious and intentional attention to God, prayer life, our relationships, Christian formation **and** our call to be members of the Body of Christ, in all aspects of lives.

In that Cycle:

We need:	Which is helped by:	Congregation helps by:
To accept dependence on God	Openness to spiritual guidance	Emphasis on worship and spiritual formation
To accept responsibility for our rhythm of spiritual life in terms of renewal and being sent into the world	Attending to both our inward and outward focus of our lives	Offering programs and guidance in creating, experimenting with, and revising spiritual disciplines
To accept interdependence with other church members, family, co-workers, and global community	Life in Christian community and loving service in the world	Becoming courageous, faithful, resilient leaders and communities

For more on the model see Robert Gallagher’s *Fill All Things: The Dynamics of Spirituality in the Parish Church*, Ascension Press.

Feedback

Family of Origin Experience with Feedback

Healthy relationships depend on healthy communication patterns. All communication starts by sending out messages to share with others and receiving responses in return. Even no response is a response. To the person hoping to increase their communication skills, all responses, also known as feedback, can be learning opportunities. Leaders, people whose role is to affect others, must pay attention to all forms of feedback, in order to know your next right step in relationship.

Before we begin thinking about the specific elements of feedback, however, we first need to ponder our own personal experience of feedback in our families of origin. Take some time to think about the following questions?

- How was feedback offered in your family of origin?
- Did you experience hyper-critical people in your life?
- Were you always complimented, no matter of the quality of your work?
- Are you usually able to receive feedback with detached curiosity?
- Do you tend to receive feedback with negative self-talk?
- What is your emotional response to the theoretical task of giving and receiving feedback?
- Growing up, did you hear messages of unconditional love? Were the messages you received, 'you can do better?' Were the messages something in-between, or perhaps competing and/or conflicting messages?

How you experienced feedback as a child will impact your experience in giving and receiving feedback in your current relationships.

As you ponder communication patterns in your faith community, remember effective feedback happens best in the context of relationships built on trust, AND trust is built by feedback given thoughtfully, appropriately, honestly and lovingly.

Formal Feedback

The formal definition of feedback is “communication to a person (or a group) which gives that person (or group) information on how one’s behavior affects others.” In a formal setting feedback helps individuals become more aware of the impact of what they do and say so that they can determine if their behavior is achieving their intent. We do not cause and are not responsible for others’ reactions. People’s responses are based on their perceptions, and perhaps even their projections. If, however, interpersonal effectiveness is our aim, we may very well wish to adjust our behavior in light of the feedback received.

Feedback may have several purposes: a) information that expands a person's information about themselves and the effect they have on others; b) information that expands a person's range of choices; c) information that supports or discourages certain behavior.

Feedback emerges in numerous ways:

- **Conscious, intentional** (nodding assent) and **Unconscious, unintentional** (nodding asleep)
- **Spontaneous** (Thanks a lot) and **Solicited** (Yes, it did help)
- **Verbal** (Saying "no") and **Non-verbal** (leaving the room)
- **Formal** (evaluation forms) and **Informal** (hand-clapping)

Criteria for Constructive Feedback

Avoiding evaluative language reduces the potential for the individual to react defensively. Evaluative statements say more about you and your interpretation. Perhaps you are projecting and not interpreting the situation accurately. Using evaluative language, muddles what is your response-ability and what is the responsibility of the receiver.

When giving feedback, choose language that is:

- **Descriptive** rather than evaluative: With a precise description of what the other person did and said and how you felt in response, you are simply stating your perception and the other is free to use or not use the feedback.
- **Specific** rather than general: With specific reference to actual words and actions, the person gets a clear picture of what you saw, heard and felt.
- **Usable**. Direct feedback toward behavior, something the receiver can change.
- **Requested** rather than imposed: Feedback is most helpful when the receiver has asked for or agreed to a process of giving and receiving feedback.
- **Timely**: Well-timed feedback is given at the earliest opportunity after the given behavior and depends on the person's readiness to hear it and support from others.
- **Clear**: Clarity is essential if the receiver is going to take in and use the information being offered. Be honest, direct and sensitive when offering feedback. Check in with the receiver to make sure that your message came across the way you intended.
- **Accurate**: Feedback can easily say more about the one offering feedback than the one receiving feedback. Feedback should be an exploration of the effect the person's behavior has had on you. The same behavior may not have had the same effect on others. Asking others in the group if the person's impressions were shared by others may be helpful. Avoid exaggeration. Use I-statements rather than generalizing about everyone else in the group.
- **Appropriate**: Give consideration to timeliness and the receiver's capacity to hear it. If a person indicates they have heard enough to work on for the moment, offering additional feedback is inappropriate. It is also inappropriate to confront another person under the guise of simple feedback.

Confrontation may include feedback, but it begins with a declaration of feelings, perception and the problem experienced by the person confronting.

Appropriate and Inappropriate Responses to Feedback:

For the sake of healthy relationship, we need to consider not just how we offer feedback, but also how we respond to feedback. When receiving feedback, it is often important to clarify the message. Ask questions to get a clearer understanding, i.e. “can you give me an example?” If you are still unsure about the information you are receiving, paraphrasing in your own words what you are hearing may be helpful. Explicitly acknowledge valid points. If others are around, invite them to offer their perspective as well. Ask for specific suggestions in order to understand what may have been more helpful. Stay open; don’t get defensive. You may feel it, but don’t act on the defensive emotion. Stay focused on what is being said. Remember to offer gratitude to the person for being vulnerable enough to share their opinions.

Inappropriate responses convey your own barriers to healthy relationship. Work on not countering feedback with ‘yes, but...’ or justifying your behavior with ‘the reason I did it that way is....’ Both of these responses may shut down the other person and imply that you are not open to learning about yourself. Challenging and discounting the other person’s perspective are also not helpful in building trusting relationships. Work on being self-differentiated enough to receive the feedback, and then ponder for yourself what may be helpful to your own growth and what may a reflection of the internal work the other person may need to attend to.

Once one has experienced asking for feedback, has received both positive and negative comments, and survived the experience with a newly formed community, the probability of risking being open to feedback back home is increased significantly.

A Formula for Giving Feedback:

“When you _____,	[note the behavior; describe it as specifically as possible],
I felt _____,	[tell how the behavior affects you; use feeling words i.e. frustrated, angry, pleased, etc.],
because I _____.”	[share why you are affected that way].



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