

# RenewalWorks™

## RENEWALWORKS@WORK:

### Stories from participating congregations

#### ***Saint John's Episcopal Church, Memphis, Tennessee:***

*In anxious times people look for a "quick fix" and the Renewal Works process is not a quick fix! This is not "a one size fits all" boxed program. It is, however, a process for measuring the spiritual vitality of a community and discerning a unique, local way forward. After a year of Renewal Works at Saint John's there are discernible signs of individual growth among us.*

*-The Rev. John Sewell, Rector, Saint John's Episcopal Church, Memphis*

*(Note: Take a look at Saint John's website ([www.stjohnsmemphis.org](http://www.stjohnsmemphis.org)) and see how they have applied RenewalWorks through a program they call SoulWorks. It's a creative and encouraging effort.)*

#### ***St. John's Cathedral, Denver Colorado:***

*In the fall of 2013 the Saint John's Cathedral community began talking about RenewalWorks, and decided to commit ourselves to the process of exploration and transformation through the RenewalWorks Inventory. Over three hundred and fifty parishioners took the inventory and the community hummed with energy. Over a six month period twenty lay leaders formed community and shared their own faith stories, analyzed the data that we received back about our community, and decided how we might move forward in our common ministry to respond to the demonstrated desires and needs to the congregation.*

*Our lay leaders, with support of the Vestry, Chapter, and staff, were empowered to make proposals for programmatic shifts that would bolster the deepening of the spiritual lives of our parishioners. The resulting actions will look different in each community of faith, but RenewalWorks, unlike anything I have encountered previously, gives metrics to the elusive concept of spiritual vitality. RenewalWorks does not proscribe a uniform panacea, but rather engages the parish community to engage spiritual practices with personal accountability.*

*The most important outcome of the work was not discovering our Spiritual Vitality Index or seeing what percentage of our congregation was in which stage of faith development, though both those metrics were helpful. We engaged our community in talking about the longing to go deeper with God and to root ourselves in relationship with Jesus Christ and one another, to study the Holy Scriptures, to cultivate skills to think theologically through action and reflection. We shifted our programmatic offerings to respond to the demonstrated needs and desires of our community as demonstrated through participating in the RenewalWorks inventory.*

*The Rev. Canon Elizabeth Marie Melchionna*

***St. James' Church, Madison Ave., New York City***

*The idea for 40 days of prayer actually came from our Renewal Works team. These are not the clergy's bright ideas and what we have learned is that the group (which does have two of us clergy as part of it) really "read" the survey results well, in large part because those results lined up with their own thoughts and longings.*

*The whole idea of 40 days was to invite people into the life of prayer but not set ourselves up to say this is what we are doing from now on. So, if it turned out that people were interested in daily Morning Prayer or Centering Prayer those things could continue but if they faded over the course of this time, we could discontinue them without anyone feeling like they or we had failed. It also meant people could try things on without feeling they had made an endless commitment.*

*The results (so far) have been spectacular. We've had about 13 people sign up to learn how to and lead morning prayer and attendance has ranged from 7-21 on any given weekday morning. We've had parishioners volunteer the online resources they use for prayer and contribute prayers they love so we have prayers being posted on our website/facebook page. Both centering prayer groups have had between 7 and 14 people come, all of them parishioners though we are now also advertising this on a sign out front and it looks like we'll have lots of attendees at the retreat where, in addition to the guest we'll have parishioners talking about and sharing their prayer practices and we've structured the day to actually try out these practices and not just hear about them. At the forum on prayer that Ryan led, he taught them the basic formula for extemporaneous prayer (1) say hello, 2) say thanks, 3) ask for what you need, 4) say goodbye) and then had them count off by four and each person did a section. By the time they were ten people in, people were actually offering prayers and asking for what they needed--out loud, in front of people they know and people they never met! Ryan was so moved he could barely speak.*

*Anyway, it is going really, really well. More to the point, the conversations that are happening here are actually about faith and discipleship. It's pretty dazzling. Oh and we have about 25 people a week in The Story... -The Rev. Brenda Husson, Rector*

***Trinity Church, Scituate, Rhode Island***

*I am happy to have gotten involved in RenewalWorks in my parish. The Episcopal Spiritual Life Survey made me think about things that I hadn't thought about before and they awakened in me a spark to reawaken my own personal Spiritual Life. The 4 Workshops with the Team were a wonderful experience about Spiritual Renewal in myself and our parish. I highly recommend this program to all parishes and being a Facilitator was a true joy. -Mr. Ray Lapointe, Parishioner at Trinity Church, Scituate, Rhode Island*

***Grace Episcopal Church, Brunswick, Maryland***

*Grace Episcopal in Brunswick is a mission restart in Maryland who had*

*experienced significant growth in attendance and involvement over the first five years of my rectorship. The vestry and I found ourselves at a threshold where we had stopped "fighting fires" and could step back and take some time to reflect and ask where God was leading our parish. We knew we needed some outside eyes to help us, but we wanted to make sure we engaged a process which respected our Episcopal ethos. I learned of RenewalWorks through colleagues who recommended it highly and the time seemed right for us to undertake the process. We were delighted with the energy and commitment our congregation had for this and the RenewalWorks team was incredibly supportive all the way along. The process helped us see where our mission and ministry were in alignment and where the growth opportunities are. We discovered some ways to deepen and broaden our current ministries as well as to stretch with some new initiatives in both the areas of hospitality in worship and engaging our members more deeply with the Bible. RenewalWorks was an excellent investment of our time and treasure and I would encourage every parish, no matter the size, to avail themselves of this valuable resource.*

*- The Rev. Anjel Scarborough, Rector*

### ***St. Andrew's, Valparaiso, Indiana***

*A big gap exists between what we are called to do and be and what we are actually doing and being because we are not engaging in meaningful ways with our people that inspires them to take ownership of their community of faith. We lack energy; we lack passion; we lack urgency. So, it appears where we are headed is to recommend to the Vestry an organizational/operational systems overhaul that sets up 3 distinct areas of responsibility and declares the Rector as the Chief Spiritual Officer with very specific duties which have nothing to do with being "chief cook and bottle washer". While at the moment we have a Priest who likes to do everything, this will not always be the case and is unsustainable. The parish should be able to articulate to any priest how the organization works. In order for this to be successful, we naturally will need buy in from everybody including the Priest. A Spiritual Gifts inventory also will be used so that parishioners can realize their gifts and plug in to ministry areas that best suit them. By clearly defining roles that allow us to do our jobs better, the hope is that the CSO can do his job more effectively and, in the end, we then can address the issues surrounding Worship, Discipleship and Faith in Action. The team does not see these areas being transformed in any substantive way until we have an operational system that works and is respected. We also will recommend an honest and intentional look at everything that goes on in the building and asking "Does this contribute to the spiritual growth of individuals and to the community of faith?" We are Episcopalians; therefore, we are overachievers. So much came out of workshops 3 & 4 that I still see a very large funnel of really great stuff that really needs to happen that we are trying to filter and pass through a narrow tube into something manageable. This is a challenge. Because in reality there are about 50 other things we could be doing. But we remind ourselves, "not more, but better" -- our favorite term is "with excellence".*

*-Patricia Harrington, Facilitator for RenewalWorks process*

### ***The Church of the Good Shepherd, New York City***

*RenewalWorks gave my congregation and me the following:*

- *a focus on "nurturing faith" as our prime directive,*
- *an identification of areas of spiritual life that need our attention,*
- *a set of internally-defined initiatives for learning and outreach*
- *a group of long-time and new leaders who are "owning" the outcomes of our initiatives*

*I could not have achieved this without the RenewalWorks congregational survey, parish team, and structured workshops. RenewalWorks has been a huge blessing to me and my congregation. We have much more work to do but we are launched.*

*-The Rev. Erika Meyer, Rector*

### ***St. John's, Pleasantville, New York***

*The RW process has been extremely beneficial to St. John's in terms of providing us with a snapshot of where we are. It is helping us shape our strategy and actions to reach people and support their spiritual growth.*

*-Ms. Patricia Goubil-Gambrell, Facilitator for that church's workshop*

### ***St. Lawrence Church, Libertyville, Illinois***

*Participation in RenewalWorks has helped me become more intentional about spending time with God, in prayer and through other spiritual practices, and has enhanced my awareness of God in all things. This time with God has made for a deeper and more conscious spiritual life, and has kept me grounded through the challenges present in parish ministry and personal life. RenewalWorks has also helped our congregation get clear about its identity as the body of Christ distinct from, yet in relationship with, other caring entities in the larger community. By engaging in RenewalWorks, we see ourselves more fully as agents reconciling others to God through Christ.*

*-The Rev. Patti Snickenberger, Rector*

### ***St. Giles' Church, Northbrook, Illinois***

*The results of the survey were a wake-up call for me and for our parish. I realized that the congregation needs more and better engagement with our holy scriptures, and that preaching and teaching (mine and that of other leaders) must reflect that. A sizeable number of parishioners have begun using Marek Zabriskie's *The Bible Challenge* to guide us in reading through the entire Bible in a year, an activity inspired by our participation in RenewalWorks. I highly recommend RenewalWorks to others in The Episcopal Church.*

*-The Rev. Cynthia Hallas, Rector, St. Giles' Church, Northbrook, Illinois*

### ***St. Gregory's Church, Deerfield, Illinois***

*St. Gregory's Episcopal Church in Deerfield, Illinois, has benefitted greatly from our experience as participants in the Diocese of Chicago's first pilot program for what is now called Renewal Works. As part of our strategy to "Embed the Bible," we regularly use dialog sermons for which the members of the congregation set the agenda, resulting in three very different dialogs for each of our three services. We*

*also incorporate a minute of silence after every sermon. Spiritual Growth is now a topic at every Vestry meeting, and we have held our first ever Spiritual Growth Parish Retreat. In short, RenewalWorks!*

*-The Rev. Bill Roberts, Rector*

*Our RenewalWorks team (now renamed "Spiritual Life Team") has become a small group ministry in our church and we are putting together our second retreat which will include ways of helping congregation members assess where they are in their spiritual journey. Here are some initial thoughts on how I see RenewalWorks as being vital to congregational development: A church grows in membership (and retains that growth) only if the members are also growing spiritually. Conversely, spiritual growth of congregation members can and should lead to numerical growth, but that doesn't happen automatically. There are far too many congregations with deeply "pious" members who remain focused inward. That is where a program like RenewalWorks can be so important to both aspects of church growth. RenewalWorks not only provides ways in which congregations can assess "where" members are in their spiritual journeys, the program can help congregations put programs and opportunities in place to foster and deepen the spiritual lives of members. Then as more and more members move toward "Christ Centered" lives, they will begin to invite others to join in their parish life and ministries and that will lead to numerical church growth.*

*-The Rev.*

*Meredith Potter, Deacon*

*(Meredith is former Professor of Congregational Development at Seabury Western Theological Seminary)*

### ***The Church of the Holy Spirit, Lake Forest***

*I believe EfM (Education for Ministry) is an amazing curriculum for lay persons; I know from personal experience. EfM dramatically changed my understanding of God, ministry, worship and prayer. And yet, the EfM program at my parish collapsed eight years ago. Then three years ago EfM was reintroduced to our parish. Although we barely made the minimum requirement of 6 students, a group began. What changed? In part I think it was our parish's focus on spiritual growth during this time, and our work on the Spiritual Life Survey. Individually and as a community, we began to look explicitly at our lives in the context of spiritual journeys. In the process of asking difficult questions, in the process of wrestling with deep truths, we invited the Holy Spirit to come closer. This led to an EfM revival because, I think, part of the dynamics of drawing closer to God is wanting to know God better, and needing to spend more time in His/Her presence. This year we experienced an unbelievable change in our registration pattern. Our class is full and we have two mentors. I have witnessed something amazing ... something holy and human is transpiring each Wednesday evening when we meet to focus on our individual and collective lives with God. I am thankful for the Spiritual Life Survey for helping our parish frame new discussions about spiritual journeys; and I am thankful for the EfM community that gathers each week.*

*-Ms. Jean Larson, Parishioner at The Church of the Holy Spirit*

*The survey has me thinking about what service means to us at our church - the spiritual work gave me the tools to think it through and one day I was reading a daily devotional book by Henri Nouwen, and on July 20 there it was. It's entitled "who is my neighbor" and Nouwen talked about the Samaritan who crossed the road to take care of the poor man. The key is crossing the road and now I am thinking about what it means for individuals here at our church to cross the road to meet our neighbor. Service is not a passive thing, you have to walk across the street and meet someone who is suffering and who you might not understand. The focus on spiritual growth helped me do that.*

*-Ms. Kitty Cole, Parishioner at The Church of the Holy Spirit*

Thanks for your interest in RenewalWorks. It makes stories like these possible, as we seek to reinvigorate the life of the Episcopal Church, one congregation, one person at a time.