

Developing a Greater Sense of Community with *DiSC® Classic*

Company

- A small Episcopal church in a rural setting.

Products Used

- *DiSC® Classic 2.0 Profile*

Challenge

Like many churches, this congregation is facing declining membership and economic stresses. Yet, it still serves an important function in the lives of its members and plays a vital role in the community. In pursuit of a sustainable organizational model, this aging congregation is adopting a new form of organization called “Mutual Ministry.” Instead of being clergy-led, members of the church are taking on prominent leadership roles including that of priest. A trained “Ministry Developer” oversees the process.

The congregation found itself experiencing significant challenges in relating to its new lay priest. While sincere and passionate, with an obvious calling, she seemed to be at the center of much trouble and controversy with both the Ministry Developer and the other members of the church.

After trying other solutions including one-on-one meetings, private coaching, and consultations with his supervisor, the Ministry Developer called me in to help the eight-member Ministry Support Team, including the Lay Priest. The Ministry Developer had been part of a DiSC training session and appreciated the insights he received. He asked me to help the Ministry Support Team develop a greater sense of community.

In addition, this program was a pilot for the whole diocese. If it was successful, they would begin using DiSC to support a team model of ministry rather than subject the Lay Priest to a personal evaluation.

Solution

Before meeting with the Ministry Support Team, I conducted extensive interviews with the Ministry Developer and his supervisor. I learned of the ongoing frustrations with the Lay Priest, as well as some of the troublesome dynamics plaguing the congregation.

Two four-hour training sessions on consecutive days were developed, using *DiSC Classic 2.0*. I focused on team effectiveness, covering motivation, conflict, and communication. My purpose was to help each member of the team see themselves and each other from a place of possibility rather than limitation. By acknowledging both the diversity and the similarities that existed on the team, I hoped to help them value each other differently, and shed some light on the barriers to more effective team functioning.

One week after the training, the Ministry Support Team gathered to evaluate the process. They spent an hour reflecting on the experience, and wrote a formal evaluation for the diocesan headquarters.

Results

Initially, the majority of the eight-member team was wary of the training. They showed up late, warmed up slowly, and shared themselves sparingly. There was palpable tension in the room.

Case Study



As we delved into the training, however, the tension lessened and a new spirit of openness prevailed. There were many a-ha moments. The first of these was an understanding that five of the eight team members were high in S and C behavior. The new Lay Priest however, was not. She was high in the "i" dimension of behavior. The behavior her teammates had previously identified as problematic—her tendency to "show-off," and being too quick or needy—were seen in a new light. The training helped them reframe how they viewed her behaviors and see the strengths she brought to the team. In fact, each member of the team began to see how their gifts and talents complemented one another; several teammates rose to new leadership roles in the congregation. Their DiSC profiles gave them permission to fully embody their gifts and skills for the good of all. By the end of the training, laughter, relief, and a new sense of compassion filled the room.

The new Lay Priest was ordained a few weeks later, surrounded by the members of her team. Instead of shunning her, they were there to support her.

Five months later, the Ministry Developer still gives the training glowing reviews. "This was very beneficial for us," he remarked. "In a very real sense, the training lowered their anxiety. They're more gracious in how they treat one another. Plus, they're showing a greater comfort in expressing themselves. They're less alarmed and uncomfortable with conflict. Now, they're more likely to volunteer and take responsibility for things. They're now embracing their leadership styles and in turn becoming less adversarial." With all these positives, St. Thomas Episcopal Church is well on its way to true community.

With such great success at the pilot church, the diocese wants to implement this training across the state. There is great hope that a new spirit of community will prevail among all the newly re-organized churches across the state.