

evaluate your efforts

Evaluation is an essential practice for any faith community seeking to make a difference in their community. We may naturally feel inclined to simply jump into planning the next event or action, but pausing to evaluate can help us identify where we are doing well and where we need to improve. And most importantly, the process of evaluation also creates a space for us to hear where the Holy Spirit might be guiding us. Here is one process you might engage after finishing an event or activity.

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Gather to evaluate. Instead of immediately planning the next event or activity, bring together members of your planning team, or the whole group, for the sole purpose of reflection and evaluation.

Begin with prayer. As people of faith, all of our efforts and activities should be rooted in—and flow back to—our relationship with Christ. Begin your evaluation meeting by reminding participants about the centrality of faith in our efforts and invite them to enter into a space of prayer and reflection.

Consider reading aloud and asking participants to reflect on a Scripture passage which emphasizes the quiet prayer that grounded the life and ministry of Jesus, such as Mark 6:30-33 or Luke 6:12-16. After reading one of these or another passage, invite participants to spend several minutes in silent reflection, and then invite sharing with the group. The group leader may wish to emphasize that for Jesus, who told parables, healed the sick, and performed many miracles, his relationship with the Father was central and he sought out time with the Father, in the quiet, in between all of this “acting” for “being” and reflecting. In the same way, prayer must

nurture all of the work that we do. Pausing to reflect on God's presence in the action we have taken and all we will do in the future is essential to our ministry.

Key questions. Next, invite participants to reflect quietly to themselves on the following questions related to the activity, project, or event which you are evaluating. Provide paper and writing utensils for those who would like to jot down notes or thoughts.

Where was God present? Where was the Holy Spirit at work?

What challenges or obstacles did we face?

What goals did we achieve? Why were we successful?

Where did we fall short? What might have been some of the reasons for this?

What did we learn?

What happened that we did not expect?

What new questions did this experience raise?

What research or data might we need to gather in order to answer those questions?

What skills, abilities, or expertise might we need to develop in order to take the next step?

Who else might we need to consult or invite to join us in order to strengthen our efforts?

How might God be calling us to build on this experience?

Sharing and discussion. Invite participants to share their reflections. Provide ample time and ensure that everyone has an opportunity to share. For larger groups, you may consider breaking into small groups to share responses with report-back from one spokesperson per group. Or, you may consider asking every person to summarize their reflections by sharing a response to these two questions: “What did we do well? What do we need to improve for next time? What surprised you?” Feel free to introduce a time limit for large group responses and use a timekeeper.

Recording. Be sure that someone has been assigned to take good notes during your evaluation so that you can tap into the group’s thoughts, learnings and ideas when the group is reading to plan its next activity, project, event or action.

An ongoing process. Ideally, evaluation should not simply happen after action is completed but should rather be ongoing. Prayer and reflection should ground all of our efforts, and we should regularly ask ourselves: “How are we doing? What are we doing well? What could we do better? What are we learning?”