



Pastoral Excellence Network at Christian Theological Seminary

PASTORAL EXCELLENCE NETWORK RESOURCE

What is a clergy community of practice?

We have often participated in “communities of practice”¹ without even calling it that.

Whenever a group forms to work together on similar concerns, explore new ways of approaching their work, or helping each other cope, we are part of a community of practice. A clergy community of practice is one that is intentionally focused on learning how to do better what we do as we interact and gather wisdom from the perspectives and practices of others in the group.

There are three necessary and interacting dimensions of a community of practice.

- 1. THE FOCUS IS MINISTRY:** A clergy community of practice is identified by its shared interest in and commitment to the ongoing development of competence in ministry (in a variety of settings). There are topics, issues and concerns that form a common domain of interest that creates a bond among participants.
- 2. THE COMMUNITY IS ESSENTIAL:** As clergy engage in discussions, shared activities, help each other, and share relevant information with one another, they build relationships with one another. Over time, trust develops in these relationships and members come to share their deepest questions, their expertise, as well as their uncertainties. Mutual accountability becomes a way of caring for one another.
- 3. KNOWLEDGE IS PRACTICE-BASED:** Knowledge within a community of practice is developed and is tested through actual practice as it is refined into common wisdom. Skill develops within the group as it helps its members to craft practices that members can use to address specific issues or the growing edges of their ministry.

The combination of each of these three dimensions creates a clergy community of practice.

As a clergy community of practice develops, each of these dimensions will require emphasis. A clergy group facilitator or a clergy group can often review which of these dimensions is strong and/or which needs attention. A careful cultivation of each of these brings about the potential of a clergy community of practice to become a valued, trusted resource in the lives of clergy.

For more information go to: pastoralexcellencenetwork.org

¹ To read more about communities of practice, go to www.ewenger.com