Building Faith Communities
in a University Setting

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Abstract: Faith communities are groups of individuals with common ideals that come together to pray, reflect, discern, take action, and celebrate. Faith communities are avenues for personal growth and the deepening of relationships in the community. The building of faith communities program intends to stimulate participants to be part of faith-based activities integrated in the workplace schedule. This program evaluation study looks at the initial effort of the campus ministry in De La Salle University in establishing faith communities. Five academic departments participated in the initial run of the program. Observations and qualitative evaluations have indicated a positive reception to the program.

Key Words: faith communities, workplace spirituality, Catholic universities, basic ecclesial communities, small Christian communities

1. Introduction

Faith communities find inspiration in the early Christians who gathered to break the bread and share their possessions with those in need (Act 20:7). "Small faith communities" and "basic ecclesial communities" are interchangeable terms. These communities are churches on a small scale (Neo, 2003).

Campus ministry looks at DLSU's academic departments and offices as potential faith communities by the very nature of the Lasallian mission and university being a Catholic university.

This program of building faith communities intends to revitalize the basic ecclesial community movement in the 60s (Lee, 2000) that flourished in South America. It is noteworthy to recall that De La Salle's band of brothers was a small faith community that survived the challenges of their time (Salm, 1989).

Faith communities are groups of individuals with common ideals that come together to pray, reflect, discern, take action, and celebrate. Faith communities are avenues for faith development and the enrichment of the academic community. This gathering of like-minded individuals provides an avenue where a small academic community can meet, pray, discern, celebrate, and enjoy the company of community members.

The need to form communities is an urban phenomenon that sprung from the need to connect with others. The ease of travel, the availability of quality education and permanent employment far from home, and the rapid development of megacities have prevented the building of communities via the usual route. In the past, a traditional community is built over a long period. It has to respect the slow process of building relationships. It has to wait for the children to grow up, establish their own families and build their own houses. Nowadays, a community can appear in just a couple of years, thanks to the proliferation of condominiums and low-cost housing. However, such communities' sad reality is the apparent personal distance of the persons in the new community (Thang, n.d.; Chen, 2010). People did not grow up in that place. It is not unusual anymore not to know anything about a neighbor who lives just next door. "Neighbors" are limited to co-workers, relatives, or former classmates. These relationship issues can happen in large communities such as DLSU.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Lumen Gentium

When Vatican II was convened in 1962, it gave much anticipation for changes in Catholic life. The best and brightest clerics gathered in Rome to discuss the Catholic Church's relevance in the modern world. Was the church still meaningful to the people and the society for which it exists? In a gist, this was the vision of Pope John XXIII as the convener of the council. In contrast, the last two councils, Vatican Council I and the Council of Trent, discussed doctrinal and authority issues (Dwyer, 1985). This 1962 gathering produced a document called *Lumen Gentium (LG)*, which gave a renewed understanding of the Church as the people of God (LG 9). In the past, church understanding has often been on individual salvation (Dwyer, 1985). This document reminded Catholics that through Christ, the new covenant, he has made everyone as one people. The emphasis has shifted from the individual to the community (LG 9). In other words, it was not enough to be holy or a good person; one's holiness must have an impact on the community.

2.2 Models of the Church

This novel understanding has reverberated throughout the Catholic world. In 1974, then Fr. Avery Dulles, who eventually became a cardinal, wrote *Models of the Church* to help further Catholics understand what *Lumen Gentium* was saying. He proposed five models of the church: church as (1) institution, (2) mystical communion, (3) sacrament, (4) herald, and (5) servant. Dulles skillfully presented each model's strengths and weaknesses, acknowledging that most Catholics had a minimal understanding of the nature of the Church. The church as Institution primarily refers to leaders' authority while Church as Mystical Communion emphasizes the communitarian nature of the Church. The Church as Sacrament affirms the Church's role as a sign and symbol of God's love while Church as Herald affirms the messenger role of the Church as the bearer of good news. Lastly, the Church as Servant emphasizes the members' role to put their faith into action through acts of service. Dulles concludes by saying that not a single model was the best, including the mystical communion that seemed o the emphasized community; instead, he argues that by integrating each model's strength, one can form a more comprehensive and relevant model of church (Dulles, 1974).

2.3 Basic Ecclesial Communities

In the 1960s, Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) began in South America, and by the late '60s, they found their way in the Philippines. On the one hand, these communities were established because believers wanted to express their faith with intensity and passion in small groups. On the other hand, a few BECs were established in response to the impersonal experience in large parish settings. In Bernard J. Lee's book, *The Catholic Experience of Small Christian Communities*, he observes that these groups gather regularly to read and discuss scriptures, for faith sharing, some catechism, and most importantly, to deepen their friendship and reaffirm their commitment to helping one another (Lee, 2000). In her book, Sr. Julia Neo *Towards a New Way of Being Church Today* (2003) sees the BEC's importance in society because of its social and economic impact on the people. BECs emphasize integral salvation. Thus, in a poor community, employment, sanitation, peace and order, and housing are discussed in the gatherings together with scriptures and catechism (Marins, 1998). Archbishop Luis Antonio Tagle, in his forward on Msgr. Manuel Gabriel's book, *Basic Ecclesial Communities: A New Way of Being Church in the Philippines,* looks at BEC as a way of "doing theology" in contrast to just merely "studying theology" (Gabriel, 2008). Tagle viewed the work among BECs as a practical pastoral approach.

2.4 Supportive Communities of Faith

Evelyn Eaton Whitehead offers another perspective of community life in *Community of Faith.* Whitehead acknowledged that Christianity is a community event and that faith is never personal but always communal. However, Whitehead acknowledges the dichotomy that comes with faith, which begins when what one says does not match what one does. This recognition is where a faith community is challenged to continue to support one another despite all the imperfections (Whitehead, 1982). In this context of a not-so-perfect faith community, Whitehead believes that faith communities are communities on the way to

maturity. She argues that the community will realize its vocation and unique ministry in the larger community at a certain point and will eventually deepen its faith and be a source of inspiration for other communities (Whitehead, 1982). In line with this. Lohfink (1984), in *Jesus and Community*, argues that Jesus came to fulfill God's kingdom by establishing a new social order, an against-the-grain community. Any faith community, for that matter, should have the same characteristic. Lohfink (1984) believes that the Church must ask how it should be today according to the vision of Christ in the New Testament.

2.5 Spirituality in the academe

Catholics and Christians in the academe need to recognize the need to live out their faith in their respective workplaces amidst their workloads. As believers, they realize that an authentic life of faith is not merely a personal agenda but a community journey. For this reason, some faculty and personnel seek like-minded individuals with whom they can share their thoughts and reflections about faith and everyday life. These gatherings, no matter how small, are the beginnings of small faith communities. Alexander Astin believes that spirituality deserves a central place in academic life. He explains that spirituality refers to the inner selves, that part that is subjective and hidden. This deep and personal part affects the quality of our decisions, our logic, and even our very fundamental beliefs on why we exist here on earth. Astin, however, sees that undue attention to what is exterior has been hampering our spirituality. He insists that reflection, self-awareness, and inner development will significantly increase one's ability to empathize and be of service to others (Astin, 2004). Leslie Schwartz affirms Astin's opinion and adds that education leaders must indeed be spiritually grounded. Schwartz even expects educators to reflect on what they value and believe; otherwise, they would be insignificant to students and institutions (Schwartz, 2010). She believes that such habits would enhance one's spiritual intelligence and allow a person to live an integrated life. Hussein Khanifar further argues that there is greater effectiveness in the workplace when one's belief system is fully integrated into one's choice of work. Citing international researches, he sees a connection and direct correlation with belief, commitment, and hard work (Khanifar, 2010).

3. Program Framework

Figure 1 illustrates the relationships of the different concepts about the development of the program. The establishment of faith communities is one of the identified measures as part of the strategic objectives on community building of LSPO. The diagram presents the phases or stages in the development of faith communities. The program intends to stimulate faculty and staff to deepen their faith and promote camaraderie and friendship in the departments and offices.
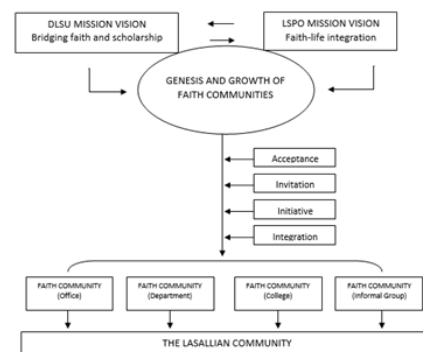

Figure 1. Program Framework

In the first stage, unit/department heads manifest acceptance of the initiative to celebrate the Eucharist in the department or office. LSPO sends out invitations to targeted departments and offices. The bare acceptance is the first indicator of success at this point.

In the second stage, the department is inviting LSPO to help them conduct these various prayer services and spiritual encounters. This second stage assumes a positive and enthusiastic acceptance of the religious activities among department members.

The third stage reflects some level of conviction that the spiritual activities are helpful for the department. The departments might conduct the spiritual encounters on their own or might assign it to a member who manifests passion or predilection for this ministry.

The fourth stage may overlap with the third stage. This last stage reflects a complete integration of the spiritual activities in the department's overall planning and goal setting.

3.1 Program Objectives

The ultimate goal is to establish faith communities in the university that will serve as avenues for community building, faith celebrations, This paper focuses only on the program's initial stage, which tries to measure the *acceptance* of the program among the offices and departments. Thus the objectives are also limited within this range. The objectives, however, are applied to the entire program.

1. To form self-sustaining faith communities in all departments and offices.
2. To expand the opportunities for spiritual growth for all members.
3. To strengthen the bond of communion among the members of faith communities.

4. Methodology

4.1 Method

A qualitative evaluation tool has been utilized for this program. Qualitative questions were formulated to gauge the level of acceptance of the program and the general impressions and comments on the program. These types of questions satisfy the objective of the program's initial phase, which is to measure the program's acceptance.

For qualitative data interpretation, the author followed the Taylor-Powell and Reyner (2003) model. The responses were analyzed according to their groupings. These were then scrutinized for common ideas or patterns in order to summarize them initially. The resulting summary would then be further analyzed for emerging ideas until a final summary would be produced.

The following were the questions formulated:
1. What were your general impressions regarding the activity?
2. Is this a helpful activity in building/nurturing our faith-based community?
3. Did the activity promote a greater sense of community and shared purpose in the department?
4. Other comments or suggestions.

4.2 Participants

A total of 11 participants were selected as respondents. However, only five respondents submitted back the evaluation forms. Three of the respondents were female, and 2 were male. All respondents were aged 40 and above. 80% of the respondents had attained doctoral degrees. 80% of the respondents worked full-time, whereas the remaining respondent was a part-time faculty with a bachelor's degree. Two of the respondents were ranked as Full Professors, one as Associate Professor, assistant professor, and the last one as Lecturer. Two of the respondents were department chairpersons. This survey covered only 3 out of 5 departments visited, with respondents coming from the Department of English and Applied Linguistics (40%), Department of Management and Organization (40%), Physical Education Department (20%).

Question	Responses	Key words /Common Ideas/Thoughts	Emerging Ideas
1. What were your general impressions regarding the activity?	• Very organized and imbued with camaraderie and community spirit. • These different activities gave us a sense of going back to the basics of spirituality. It gave me a feeling that we are really a "Catholic school" because we are conducting activities that manifest our faith as a community. • Helpful in grounding office activities on spiritual identity • It was very interesting and fun. • It was well-planned and well executed	Organized Well-planned Well-executed Camaraderie Interesting Fun Sense of spirituality	Preparations Tangible/immediate impact Long-term/non-tangible impact
Question	Responses	Key words /Common Ideas/Thoughts	Emerging thoughts
2. Is this a helpful activity in building/nurturing our faith-based community?	• Yes, it is! It actually is a very good way of bringing people (whom we seldom meet) in our Department. Likewise, this is a great opportunity to renew our ties with the Lord and the community at large. • Yes they were very helpful but more graduate faculty and students in the evening should be involved in these activities. • Yes. Although needs follow through discussions and reflections. • Yes indeed, I think we need this activity at least twice a year: at the start of the school year and at the end of the term. • It sure is.	Bring people together Renewal of ties with God Twice a year Follow through More faculty participants More student participants	Nature of the program Frequency Points for improvement/what it still needs
Question	Responses	Key words /Common Ideas/Thoughts	Emerging thoughts
3. Did the activity promote a greater sense of community and shared purpose in the department?	• As far as CeLL is concerned, it looks like we were one at that time when the blessing of our office was concerned. There was a noted enthusiasm among the staff and faculty. • Yes and it made us closer to each other and gave us a sense that we are not alone in our Catholic faith as business faculty. • Yes. Built unity and basis for improvement. • Very much. • I think it did, but there were constraints and challenges such as the timing of the activity—it was held when some faculty members were either having a class or attending another activity.	Enthusiasm Closer to each other Built unity	observed impact on the participants
Question	Responses	Key words /Common Ideas/Thoughts	Emerging thoughts
4. Other comments or suggestions.	• Thank you for your openness to respond to our requests and your willingness to go an extra mile to help us renew our faith. • Include more Filipino-based prayers, songs, and para-liturgical activities.	Thank you Filipino based prayers Frequency/suggested dates	Appreciation Ritual improvement

Table 1. Data analysis using Taylor-Powell and Reyner (2003) model.

4.3 Data Analysis

The following is a detailed analysis based on the Taylor-Powell and Reyner (2003) model. The details were culled from the initial analysis found in Table 1.

What were your general impressions regarding the activity?

For the first question, three crucial points emerged from the responses. First, the preparations were given prominence because the activity was seen as organized and well-executed. Second, the program's immediate impact was observed among the participants through manifestations of camaraderie and feelings of interest and fun. Third, a sense of a religious experience came about that was also elicited by the community's joy. In scriptures, Jesus Christ assured his disciples, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in their midst" (Matthew 18:20). The presence of others became the sacrament by which Christ made his presence known (Dulles, 1974)

Is this a helpful activity in building/nurturing our faith-based community?

The second question also brought two essential points. First, the very nature of the program was highlighted. The event, according to the feedback, brought people together and renewed their connection with God. The last point was reflections on what the respondents felt were still needed in the program. Two suggestions came in. First, the program should happen twice a year. This desire may be an indication that the religious event or became a value. Secondly, a point was raised by another respondent by saying that there should be a follow-through. This feedback necessarily meant that the experience was too raw and needed a follow-up or a deepening exercise.

Did the activity promote a greater sense of community and shared purpose in the department?

The responses for the third question were focused on the impact of the celebration on the participants. The respondents highlighted the felt enthusiasm during the event, the feelings of closeness, and the desire to build unity.

Other comments or suggestions.

In the fourth question, appreciation for the program and ritual improvement were highlighted. Two respondents express thanks for the program's availability, while one respondent suggested including more Filipino songs in the repertoire of the Eucharistic celebration.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The overall impression of the program was positive. The tones of the answers indicate gratefulness and joy for the experience. The respondents have affirmed that the activity helps build and nurture the faith community. The evaluation results are very significant because they validated the fundamental objective of the initial phase of the program, i.e., the warm acceptance of the program by the various target departments. This result will now pave the way for the continuation of the first phase, offering the program to the following five departments for the third term.

As argued by Astin (2004), Schwartz (2010), and Khanifar (2010), the development of the inner life of the people in the academe will influence their total personality and their performance. The

program will continue to be an avenue in making this possible for the university's faculty and staff. The desire to integrate faith and life is a daily personal struggle as we all strive to be closer to God and be charitable and loving towards all amidst all our responsibilities. The Lasallian Pastoral Office has developed the program to give all members an avenue to nurture each one's faith.

In running this program, the constant assumption has always been that our offices and departments are potential faith communities. The results of the evaluation affirmed this assumption. The unique experiences of friendship and camaraderie in offices or departments go a long way in ensuring the continuity of programs and projects. The experiences of isolation and distancing experienced by some faculty and staff in a highly competitive and structured environment are minimized through the availability of organized encounters like this (Gabelnick, 1990; Graham, 2010). The program has, at this point, successfully reach its goal of acceptance of the community. What is left now is to proceed to the full implementation of the program.

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