



Application to the church

by Dennis R. Myers

Sherr, Stamey, and Garland's validation of the Christian Faith Practices Scale (CFPS) provides congregational leaders with a trustworthy tool to use in understanding how faith finds its expression when the individual, family, and congregation are involved in community ministry. The authors suggest that the CFPS can be used to better understand the connection between faith practices and community ministry. This insightful observation deserves more elaboration. In another article, Garland and her associates (Garland, Myers, & Wolfer, 2005) document the interplay between faith and community ministry. Application of the CFPS to this relationship offers a unique opportunity for congregational leaders to understand how involvement in the life of service affects how faith is lived out in the lives of congregants and those they serve.

How congregational volunteers respond to the 12 CFPS Christian practices provides an indication of the kind of community ministry activity that will most likely activate and sustain involvement. For example, if the congregant frequently practices "suffering with and for another," a ministry involving a relationship with persons or families in crisis may be an appropriate volunteer opportunity. "Working together to maintain and create social structures that will sustain life in the world" suggests involvement in ministries that call forth more institutional forms of advocacy for persons on the margins in society. Because of this capacity to pinpoint specific faith practices of candidates for community ministry, the

CFPS can be used in their orientation to the service and affirmation of the decision they have made. In effect, living out faith practices with intentionality in the context of service provides a powerful motivator for showing up and staying with the ministry.

Once the congregant is engaged in service, knowledge of the volunteer's pattern of faith practice(s) permits the congregational leader to follow up to see the extent to which the community ministry is actually providing opportunities for rewarding faith-

ful expression. Such a conversation invites reflection on the faith practices/service interaction. Asking congregational volunteers to retake the CFPS after participation in a ministry for a period time may provide an indication of the impact of the service on the congregant's faith practices. This method of evaluating how the service is affecting faith also offers an opportunity to engage in conversations about changes in specific practices as a result

of volunteering. This interaction is one that takes on more significance if this is done in a small group that calls forth conversation about how community ministry relates to practicing one's faith.

Those who are the recipients of community ministry may also be actively engaged in faithful practices. This possibility is one that should not be overlooked. Asking those who are the object of our compassion about their faith practices opens up new avenues for relationship development and helpful responses. If appropriate, the CFPS instrument could be part of a process for getting to know the recipient of care in a more meaningful way. When the person

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offering to serve asks about faith expression, there is an implied acknowledgement of strengths and opportunity to affirm the equality and reciprocity of the relationship. With knowledge of their pattern of practice, the volunteer may be able to facilitate the person's participation in their deepest faithful acts. If praying or confession is significant, the relationship can become the sanctuary for these expressions. Attention to faith practices may mean that the volunteer facilitates the recipient's faithful acts of "carrying out faithful acts of service" or "providing hospitality and care."

God is at work in the sacred transactions between those who serve and those who receive. The ways that faith is being enacted and strengthened often go unnoticed and unexpressed. The CFPS provides a tool that congregational leaders can use to discover more precisely how faith wishes to come alive in the process of giving and receiving compassion. It provides a language for the transaction, a way of acknowledging and sharing what is being affirmed in the exchange and what is being transformed as a result.

ENDNOTES

Garland, D. R., Myers, D., & Wolfer, T. A. (2005). *The impact of volunteering on Christian faith and congregational life: The Service and Faith Project*. Retrieved February 12, 2009, from <http://www.baylor.edu/~CFCM/>

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Center offers resources for congregations

In the 10-year history of Baylor's Center for Family and Community Ministries, it has offered many resources for the church. Some of these are publications and curricula, including *AM/FM – the Audio Magazine for Family Ministry*, offered through 2005, and now the *Walking Alongside* curricula and the *Journal of Family and Community Ministries*.

Other resources the Center has offered are research instruments that pastors and other leaders can use in the life of their congregations for the purposes of strengthening the faith of individuals and families. CFCM's most well-known instrument is the Church Census, a tool that assesses family life and experiences in the life of a congregation.

The Center now is preparing a new tool based on The Christian Faith Practices Scale (CFPS), reported in the previous article. This scale was created as part of a larger instrument within the Service and Faith study that our faculty members Diana Garland, Dennis Myers, and Michael Sherr led a few years ago. The CFPS is a one-page list of questions (see page 36) that now is included the Church Census; Section E and is titled Living Our Faith.

The CFCM currently is working on a stand-alone version of the CFPS to make available to churches for use in small group settings with parents, youth, and other groups within congregations.

If you are interested in the role research can play as you strengthen the ministries of your congregation or if you'd like more information about the other resources listed, please contact us.

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