

Gathering Places – communities of practice – learning from each other

‘Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly...

‘Members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other; they care about their standing with each other... They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice. This takes time and sustained interaction... The domain must be relevant and a priority to members. The value of participation usually needs to be recognized by the organization otherwise members will not bother. Members need to see results of their participation and have a sense that they are getting something out of it...

‘Some communities do self-organize and are very effective. But most communities need some cultivation to be sure that members get high value for their time... If they are totally conflict free, you should be concerned that groupthink may be settling in or voices being silenced. More important, and usually quite difficult to achieve, is that differences are discussable and that they contribute to the learning.’ (wenger-trayner.com)

Communities of Practice (adapted from wenger-trayner.com)	
Typical activities	Typical dialogue 
PROBLEM SOLVING	I’m stuck: can we brainstorm some ideas?
REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION	Where can I find out more about this?
SEEKING EXPERIENCE	Has anyone else been facing this issue?
REUSING ASSETS	I’ve developed/found this resource that you might like to tweak.
COORDINATION & STRATEGY	Could we develop this together?
BUILDING AN ARGUMENT	How have others taken their church councils with them on this?
GROWING CONFIDENCE	Can I just check out this idea with you?
DISCUSSING DEVELOPMENTS	What do you make of these new policies/resources from the wider Church?
DOCUMENTING PROJECTS	Let’s develop some FAQs.
VISITS	Can we visit an example of best practice?
MAPPING KNOWLEDGE & IDENTIFYING GAPS	What don’t we know about this? Who can help us?