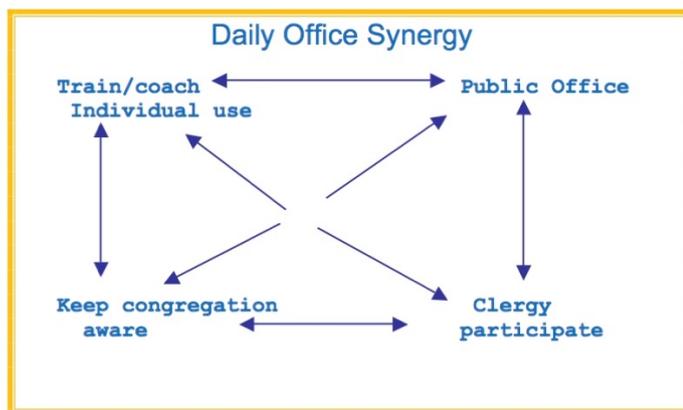


Daily Office: Parish Based Educational and Training Programs

This is to offer a few thoughts about various program formats a parish might use in helping people learn to say the daily office on their own.

Two pieces of background

1. The synergy



There is a synergy among four interdependent elements. They reinforce one another.

- Train and coach parishioners for saying the Office in their own daily life
- Establish in the parish a public offering of the Daily Office on most days of the week
- Keep the saying of the Daily Office in front of the various congregations of the parish
- The clergy of the parish participate in the public office on most days it is offered

2. Establishing a high degree of internal commitment

If you are seeking to develop in people a high degree of internal commitment to the practice of saying the Daily Office it may help to understand the work of Chris Argyris on "intervention theory." Argyris suggests that if you are seeking strong internal commitment from an individual or a group you need to build that upon valid and useful information and free choice.

Internal Commitment <small>(this is what you hope to achieve)</small>	The person has high ownership and feeling of responsibility about saying the Office. It is more motivated by an internal decision than external forces. It is more likely to hold over time and under stress. And because it is rooted in information and choice it is also open to re-examination; the person is more likely to be able to adapt how she says the Office if her circumstances change.
Free Choice	You maximize free choice when: there is an exploration of options; participation is voluntary, not from habit or coercion; the decision is proactive, not reactive
Valid & Useful Information	This is information that can be publicly verified; that can be tested with a broad range of people; that can be openly gathered and discussed. In a training/coaching program this can be achieved by having the person learn and use a method of saying the Office and then reflect on that experience in a disciplined manner.

Three ways of introducing how to say the Office on your own

Here are three programs a parish could use.

Obviously, you can develop more than three such programs. These are offered as a way of understanding certain key issues and dynamics in the learning process.

1. A broad introduction to the Daily Office
2. Coaching on different ways of saying the Office by practitioners of those ways
3. Workshop style training and coaching that seeks to help the participants find a way of saying the Office that fits their temperament and circumstances.

Alignment and Internal Commitment

There are two primary considerations I want to explore in relationship to each program.

- The alignment of the learning objectives and the educational design
- The process that leads to a higher degree of internal commitment

1. A broad introduction to the Daily Office

The audience: A broad group of parishioners with a general interest in adult Christian formation. This could be part of a Thursday evening series on prayer life or the Sunday adult formation session held in some parishes. It could a sole speaker or a panel providing some background on the Office and their own use of the Office.

Learning objective: To increase the knowledge of the participants about the place of the Daily Office in the prayer life of individuals and a parish.

The alignment issue – A broad audience is usually a good fit for an educational offering that is not asking for more than polite listening. In regard to our interest in developing proficiency in saying the Office the program may spark interest in some people. Those people might then attend one of the other two programs that are specifically about proficiency.

The internal commitment issue – the format doesn't require an interest in learning how to say the Office. The psychological contract of such groups is usually that they will be attentive and engaged during the presentation not that they will have to make use of the learning in the near future or that they need to make choices about how to do that.

2. Coaching on different ways of saying the Office by practitioners of those ways

The audience: Self-selected. People who have decided they want to learn how to say the Office.

Learning objective: To learn the way of saying the Daily Office as done by a particular "coach."

Note 1: It would be possible to include in the mix someone taking the workshop approach of #3 below. For example, one "coach" might offer a very defined monastic approach; another "coach" might offer a looser contemplative approach; and a third an approach that

uses the Church of England "Common Worship: Daily Prayer." Alongside those offerings could be the workshop approach of #3 below.

Note 2: The parish could use the structure of #3 in this way: Step 1 - Meet with the "coach" you have selected (alone or with a group). Be introduced to that approach. Step 2 - Use that approach during the week (or more) in between sessions. Step 3 - Meet with the coach again to reflect on your experience.

The alignment issue - The process has good alignment between the learning objective and the educational design if the internal commitment issue is adequately addressed (might be difficult because each "coach" is offering a different way. Also, we frequently see a mismatch when the learner has an idealistic stance or a theological "should" that pushed them to take on an approach that is more than they are able to manage.

The internal commitment issue - The person will have chosen a session with a "coach" offering his or her way of saying the Office. That may well lead to high internal commitment *if* the person has selected a coach that offers an approach that fits his temperament and circumstances. The "free choice" aspect of the process depends a great deal on that initial selection of a coach."

3. Workshop style training and coaching that seeks to help the participants find a way of saying the Office that fits their temperament and circumstances.

The audience: Self-selected. People who have decided they want to learn how to say the Office. That would be in a process along these lines -

First session - participants are introduced to several ways in which they might do the Office - use the BCP, on the web, longer-shorter forms, etc.. Ranging from the full office 2 or 4 times/day to saying the appointed psalms for that day. People make a decision of the way in which they will do the office during the following week.

Participants do the office during the week.

Second session - reflecting on their experience; the stance of the coaches is as supportive guides; there's no tone of judgement. The reflection is an opportunity to learn from their experience and to receive additional coaching.

Learning objective: To learn a way of saying the Daily Office.

The alignment issue - Participants do learn a way of saying the Office.

The internal commitment issue - Because in the first session they have considered several ways of saying the Office before that decide which one to use that week, there is free choice based on more information at an earlier stage. That also seems to make for more resilience if their first way didn't work out for the person.

The third program is the one we have had the most success with in parish consultations of strengthening spiritual life and in our work with Novices in the Order of the Ascension.

Comments exploring the issue –

When our own parish was looking at how to approach this Michelle Heyne, OA offered comments along these lines –

Regarding the possibility of having a panel during the 40 minutes +/- between services she wrote “If we had significantly more time, we could combine the two formats (1 and 3 above), but there really is not time to do both at Community Hour. In terms of educational design, because the two types of classes have different objectives, it’s probably best not to combine them - I think it’s better to let each have its own integrity. I think it also creates a more layered tapestry that allows different opportunities for folks at different places in their spiritual lives.”

Regarding the issue of free choice and its impact – “What we’ve planned (and what’s been advertised) is a two-session opportunity to learn *how* to pray the Office; the two sessions are interconnected and the second builds on the first. The sessions assume people are making a free choice to come and learn how to do this - the free choice part, and the stated outcome are important elements in adult learning. What we’ve planned requires some commitment and some initiative from participants and is quite different from, and has a different learning objective from, a panel presentation. A panel requires less commitment and serves more of a general knowledge objective; it doesn’t assume anyone attending will do anything in particular, so it’s more likely to appeal to larger numbers, but it won’t lead to change in practice strictly as a result of listening to the panel. It’s a way to plant seeds and raise awareness.”

Michelle noted that she understood the idea was to offer a panel and the training, in the parish hall, during the time between services. – “To me that makes more sense for a panel, but not for the planned offering. The venue is related to free choice and commitment. Those attending a class in the chapel (or St. Francis Room, etc.) are making a choice to do that. If we do the planned training/reflection sessions in the parish hall, the actual impact is that we’d be imposing something on people who hadn’t asked for that and it would likely feel a little coercive. They’d have to leave to avoid it, rather than actively include themselves in a chance to learn how to pray the Office. I think it’s really important that people not feel pressured about spiritual practice.”