From In Your Holy Spirit: Shaping the Parish Through Spiritual Practice, Robert A Gallagher, 2011

Trust development [i]

We trust parish communities that exhibit certain characteristics.

- Reliability. We see consistency and dependability

- Responsiveness. There is sensitivity and empathy, an awareness of needs and openness to take action; my feelings are validated if not shared, my ideas will be respectfully responded to with dialogue, agreement and disagreement.

- Reciprocity. There is mutual exchange; I am fed and I feed others.

- Congruence. There's a feeling of harmony and unity; this community is what it claims to be.

The model I've worked with suggests four phases in trust development. My assumption is that the above characteristics become stronger as each phase develops.

1. Inclusion & Acceptance

2. Open Information

3. Shared Direction

4. Internal Commitment, Collaboration, Self-management

A parish that has a high level of commitment, collaboration and self-management can be said to be a parish that has a high trust level. The trust becomes visible in that way.

The parish always has the potential to develop and strengthen these four basic qualities of community life. These qualities "build" on each other in a sort of hierarchy, those near the bottom forming a "foundation" for the "higher" ones.

4. Internal Commitment, Collaboration, Self-management
3. Shared Direction
2. Open Information
1. Inclusion & Acceptance

For the community to become healthier and more trusting certain concerns related to each phase must be adequately resolved. Some of the concerns to be resolved as we build trust include:

4. Internal Commitment, Collaboration, Self-management		The extent to which: 1) the direction and related decisions have internal commitment, a commitment not easily changed under pressure; 2) members are open to mutual influence from one another and see themselves as mutually accountable; 3) increased authority comes from increased competence, commitment, and spiritual and emotional maturity.
3. Shared Direction		The direction of the community is shared, broadly owned. The direction is based on having explored options, is a free choice and not coming from coercion or habit, and is renegotiable if new information arises.
2. Open Information		The extent to which there is an open climate in which people feel free to share their feelings and ideas. That information is shared in a timely, useful, thorough and respectful manner.
1. Inclusion & Acceptance		How much do people in the parish community accept that others in the community belong and bring something to contribute? To what extent do people accept the parish's ways of being and doing, its espoused values and deeper underlying assumptions about God, humanity and the church, e.g., the culture?

As the concerns toward the base begin to be resolved, a foundation is built for resolving the concerns of the next phase. We can picture this as building blocks.
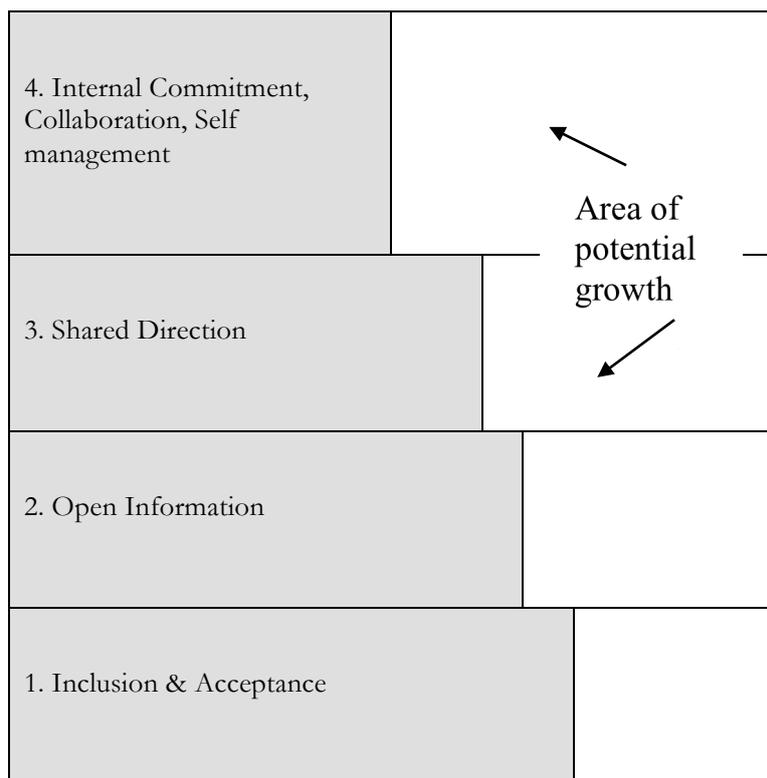

To the extent the inclusion and acceptance concerns have been resolved, members will feel free to be more open in sharing their feelings and thoughts about the community's life and work.

To the extent the community is sharing useful information it will have the base it needs for setting direction and making decisions. This open flow of information will generate the options about the direction and way of life for the community.

The extent to which members experience a sense of choice in exploring these options will determine the degree of internal commitment they have toward the direction and culture of the parish community.

When the community neglects the need for adequate resolution of "prior" concerns before taking on later concerns, an unstable relationship is the likely result. The blocks are likely to topple over! This is why things fall apart when leaders try to produce commitment and collaborative action by pressure, and insisting that we need 100% commitment from everyone.
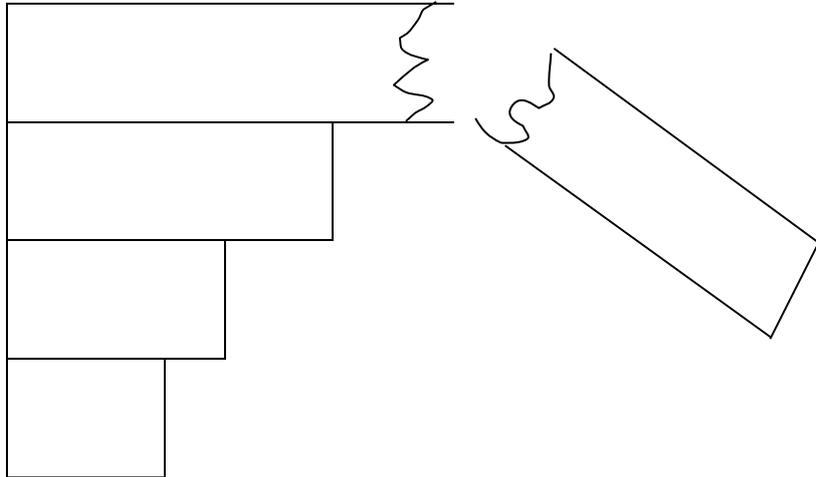
In most parishes, indeed most organizations of any kind, trust is an afterthought. We take note when it's missing. The blocks have tumbled over because we didn't pay attention to building the foundation. The idea that trust is something we can intentionally and successfully create is a new and foreign idea for many people.

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[i] Based on "Trust Development in Organizations," Robert Gallagher, 1995.