

Model for a Day of Renewal

Prepared by

The Voice of Renewal/Lay Education National Working Group

Organizing a Day of Spiritual Renewal

This model describes the development of a Day of Spiritual Renewal. It was originally designed for two of the VOTF National Working Groups: the Structural Change Working Group (SCWG) and the Voice of Renewal/Lay Education Working Group (VOR/LE). As part of our ongoing effort to provide resources for renewal programs and adult faith education, we provide the model for affiliates to adapt to their own needs.

— Bill Murphy and Veronica Mitchell, Voice of Renewal/Lay Education

— Sharon Laronga and Kathryn Erat, Structural Change Working Group

The first step in developing a plan for the renewal day is to discern a need for one.

In a parish setting, such discernment typically is left to the parish or to the parish staff. But you need not wait for such invitations. Your affiliate might develop the program for its own members, based on a need to center all affiliate actions on prayer. Or you might suggest the Renewal Day to your pastor and have the affiliate organize it. Or, if you do not belong to an affiliate, it may provide an opportunity to meet others who share your concerns about Church renewal.

For the model we are presenting, the Renewal Day developed from a suggestion by the SCWG moderator as a way to foster closer relationships among members of two working groups.

The development steps used to organize our Day of Spiritual Renewal are the same ones you might use for your own Day of Renewal:

1. Discerning the need and purpose of the Renewal Day
2. Forming a team and developing the program
3. Choosing the site
4. Preparing for the day... details, details, details
5. The day itself
6. The recap

Step 1: Discerning the Need and Purpose of the Renewal Day

SCWG and VOR/LE frequently work on overlapping projects, but we so often focus on strategies and programs that we seldom have time or opportunity to pray together. Thus, to help us fulfill our mission — namely, to be a prayerful voice — both working groups approved a decision to hold a Day of Spiritual Renewal.

A committee of four people (two from SCWG and two from VOR/LE) met with little more than the commission to “plan a day of renewal” for the two groups. We spent most of the first two meetings getting to know each other and trying to decide what the purpose of our day would be and how we would organize/design it to fulfill that purpose. The **purpose and theme** of the day are crucial, because everything follows from that.

We decided that our goal was to renew each other and ourselves through mutuality, i.e., by sharing and affirming the diverse spiritual gifts and faith experiences which we have acquired on our faith journeys.

Towards that goal, we decided to include a variety of ways that would allow us to share our spiritual journeys and tell our stories, to the degree each of us would be comfortable. We hoped to get to know each other better, to build trust, and ultimately to affirm to one another both where we are and where we are going in the future. Our theme for the day, therefore, was “A Journey of Faith.” It would include periods of private prayer, small group sharing, group meditation, song, a wonderful lunch, and a concluding prayer service, through which we hoped all could feel renewed.

Step 2: Forming a Team and Developing the Program

The discernment process mentioned in Step 1 is also the first step in forming a team and beginning to develop a program. Getting to know each other and working to discern a theme for the day helped us begin to identify the roles needed for the day and the people who might best fill those roles.

Other important elements to consider are these:

- Variety of gifts available on the team
- Resources available for the day
- Communication

Variety of Gifts

Recognize the various gifts of people on the team and how to utilize them. A wide variety of jobs and skills will be needed in the coming program. The more people follow their natural talents and inclinations, the more likely everyone will be fulfilled and successful.

We found it helpful to designate one person to act as coordinator, another to focus on the day's content development, a third to be responsible for the physical space and food, and the fourth to work on publicity and hospitality.

Resources

Availability of resources can cover everything from how much money you have to spend to the personnel resources available.

As a first task in this area, we focused on these questions:

- Should we use experts on facets of spirituality from outside or inside our groups?
- How much of a lecture method should we employ?
- What would be the role of large and small group discussions?

Ultimately, we decided on a mixture of "experts," lecture method, and large and small group discussions, but with a heavy tilt toward small groups because of our goal: getting to know each other and sharing our faith journeys.

Communication

We did a lot of work via email. Nothing is better than face-to-face communication when making major decisions and setting goals and tasks (we had four major meetings in a three-month period, each one lasting about three hours), but we kept in constant contact by email to make adjustments and to update each other.

Step 3: Choosing the Site

Always keep in mind that form follows function. In other words, constantly keep in mind these questions: What are you trying to do? How many people are you doing it with? How much money do you have? Other considerations to keep in mind: How accessible is it to those attending? How much does it cost? How functional is it for your

purposes? For example, in our Day of Renewal we wanted a location with a nice sacred space for about 20 people and other spaces suitable for small group discussions.

We were able to find a place that had a small chapel, a number of rooms and open spaces for small discussions, and a separate area for the whole group to eat.

Step 4: Preparing for the Day ... Details, Details, Details

Having selected a theme and space, the Leadership Team then had to decide the following:

Publicity — how to publicize the Renewal Day

Budget — how much to charge for the day

Our costs included hospitality expenses, copying costs for publicity and for the program, and transportation expenses for one of the presenters. The two presenters were members of our groups, and they did not receive an honorarium for their services. One member of our team arranged for us to use her parish facilities. There was no charge for this site.

Food — how much food to buy; whether to cater it or have pot luck; where to purchase it

Prayer Service — how to present it

Because there are no clergy in either of our groups, there would be no clergy in attendance at the Day of Renewal unless we invited them. But the idea of bringing in someone to celebrate Eucharist at the end of the day, when they did not actually share the day's experience, seemed to contradict the theme of sharing our faith journeys. So we decided on a prayer service rather than Eucharist. Our choice also allowed us to creatively tailor the service to the theme of the day.

Step 5: The Day Itself

Two things are critical on the day of the program: hospitality and the program itself.

Hospitality is the single most important thing — even more important than the program. If everything else goes wrong (and it won't), as long as people feel welcome they will leave the day feeling that it was an important and worthwhile experience.

Elements of hospitality include name tags; greeters to welcome people and introduce them to one another; clear directions not only to the site but also, once there, to the locations of lavatories and other facilities and to what's happening throughout the day. In general, you should try to leave the Leadership Team free to focus on any distress among the participants.

The Program should be available to everyone and should include the schedule for the day and any pertinent information about the theme.

We used this schedule for our Day of Spiritual:

- 9:30 The Gathering (chapel)
- 9:45 Introductions and Expectations
- 10:15 Emmaus Moment Meditation
- 10:45 Break
- 11:00 Reflection/Presentation by Gaile Pohlhaus: Mutuality — Love in Act and in Fact
- 11:45 Our Unfolding Faith Journeys — present, past and future (small group discussions held in various rooms to encourage a sense of intimacy and to keep the noise level down so everyone in the group could hear and participate in discussion)
- 1:15 Lunch
- 2:15 Unfolding Faith Journeys (continued in the chapel)
- 2:35 Prayer Service – Sharing Our Gifts: There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit ... to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good (1Cor. 12: 4, 7).
- 3:15 Farewell

Step 6: The Recap

Evaluation should take two forms:

1. A questionnaire or evaluative tool should be given out to the participants to complete at the end/close of the Renewal Day.
2. The leadership team should meet as soon as possible after the day in order to reflect together on the questionnaire responses and the whole experience. These reflections should be committed to paper for future reference.

In addition, send a thank-you note (even if it's just an email) to everyone who attended and share some of the evaluation responses with them.

Lessons Learned

Some of the lessons we learned from our experience, and which we present here so that your own Day of Renewal may benefit from our:

- ❑ We needed more time in our small groups. We had planned about 30 minutes for each discussion. Everyone had a chance to speak, but usually only once. We needed to lengthen the day to accommodate the discussions.
- ❑ Minimum charge for such a day should be \$25 to \$30 based on an attendance of about 20 people. A higher fee may be necessary if the group must pay for the speaker(s) or for the site.
- ❑ Symbols: take note of the liturgical seasons (Lent/Easter, Advent/Christmas, Ordinary Time, etc.) and try to be consistent with the rituals and symbols used.

We are happy to share this model for developing a Renewal Day with you. For anyone interested in seeing a detailed program from the day itself, *A Journey of Faith: A Day of Spiritual Renewal*, log onto the VOR_VOTF list group web page (if you are a member) or send an email Bill Murphy at jbzmurphy@rcn.com.