

GROUP REALITY

a riddle asks, "What is a camel?"

The answer: "A horse put together by a committee!"

Committees or groups gathered for a specific reason can be a challenge, especially in parish settings. At some time or another in our work in parish ministry, we have all been part of a group meeting — whether a staff meeting, a task force, or a brainstorming session. Some of these meetings have accomplished the desired results, and some have made going to the dentist for a root canal a more desirable experience. Sometimes the success or failure of a group lies with the leader of the group. Sometimes the topic or the makeup of the group has a bearing on how well the group will function. Studying and understanding groups and how they work can be helpful in ensuring that a committee or team will be successful in its efforts and may make meetings flow more smoothly.

First we can ask, what is a group? Three priests sitting at a table in a restaurant discussing parish religious education is as much a group as a diocesan meeting of parish directors of religious education discussing the same. A group is any gathering of two or more individuals who are linked by social ties, employment, or a common issue.

Second, what kind of group is it? Basically, the most common is the planned group. One example of this is a staff meeting. Another would be a group of persons who have volunteered or been assigned to a committee to accomplish a particular task. Another type of group is called an emergent: a group of people coming together spontaneously in reaction to an event and working together to solve a problem or accomplish a task. An example of this would be a group of neighbors coming together to assist a neighbor after a fire.

Third, how do groups relate? Every group's members will have some form of interaction. Some groups have structured interactions; for example, at a staff meeting, all the members know their roles and their relationships with one another. Other groups may be linked by a common task and are coming together solely for that purpose; for example, the heads of different parish organizations might come together to sponsor an annual Back-to-School Fair. This type of group has to define each member's role and the relationship of the members so that they know how they will proceed.

Fourth, and most importantly, what is the purpose of the group? A group in which everyone has a different vision and different agenda will have difficulty succeeding and may result in failure and resentment. Persons can come together if they can share a common cause. As the expression goes, politics make strange bedfellows. For example, pro-life Catholics can work side-by-side with National Abortion Rights League members on a Habitat for Humanity housing project; everybody focuses on the work at hand and avoids the causes of disagreement in favor of completing the agreed-to project.

Most of us, either professionally or in our volunteer ministry efforts, will at some time or another find ourselves in a planned group with an assigned task. Our common goal is building up the church. Our group, though, is made up of human beings who, while sharing the common vision and task, bring to the group their own individual characteristics. The list below will help you discover what characteristics you and others bring to the group meetings. Understanding the traits and characteristics of individuals will help you guide and motivate your work in group meetings. I have given each type of personality a fictitious person's name. As you go through this list, you may recognize people you know and gain a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses.

The Connies

Connies are the people who gather the group together and define the roles and goals. They start the process and then either move to the background or take a leadership role for the rest of the meeting or task.

There are good Connies and bad Connies. Good Connies smoothly coordinate the group's work together. They pull together ideas of individuals for the whole group to work with, so that good ideas don't get lost. Bad Connies are negative, letting the group know they are in charge and then putting down every idea as unsatisfactory. They keep things disorganized so that the task is not accomplished, and they blame it on the group not working together.

The Jonathans

Whatever idea is presented, the Jonathans can find something wrong with it or suggest the opposite. These Jonathans perform an important function: they prevent the group from running ahead with an idea that is not thoroughly thought through.

So there are good Jonathans and bad Jonathans. A good Jonathan, though he finds problems with an idea, is not being mean-spirited or obstinate; rather, he can see what could go wrong and tries to correct it before it happens. A good Jonathan hopes for the best but prepares for the worst. A bad Jonathan will knock the foundation out of a building after it is built. As an idea is forming, he will offer critical suggestions, and when everything comes together, he will pull out the rug. For example, he will remember after the group has planned a fund-raising social that the neighboring parish is having their fair on the same day. The good Jonathan will bring that up in the beginning; the bad Jonathan will wait until the end.

ES:

Working
with diverse
personalities
to accomplish
a common goal



The Ivans

Ivans can be described by the expression, "Still waters run deep." They will sit quietly at the meeting, and you have no idea what they are thinking (and sometimes wonder if they are even awake). They are listening and taking everything in. They don't speak until in their minds all the ducks are in a row or all the pieces of the puzzle fit together.

When Good Ivans finally speak, their ideas are well thought out and incorporate many of the ideas of the group; they are able to organize varied elements of the task in a concise manner. Bad Ivans, after being silent, put ideas together that are no longer related to the topic at hand. Or they do not participate at all because they have already withdrawn mentally from the group. They may be afraid to share their thoughts, may feel excluded, or may not be interested in achieving the goal.

The Ivankas

The Ivankas are just the opposite of the Ivans. Ivankas immediately respond to every suggested thought with another related idea. Sometimes they build on the idea presented or help flesh out the presented thought, but they tend to prevent others from speaking because

they are right there when the first person finishes with his or her thoughts on the subject.

Sometimes the Ivankas' ideas are good, and sometimes they are not. This does not matter to them, as long as their ideas are out there. Good Ivankas, when guided by the group, can build up good ideas into better ones. They brainstorm naturally. A bad Ivanka doesn't really listen but always has to put in her two cents. Her brainstorming is like a lightning storm striking in all different, unrelated directions. Bad Ivankas formulate their thoughts after a speaker's first sentence, totally disregarding anything that follows because they have found how they can add their contribution.

The Jasmynes

Jasmynes are very agreeable and want to help everybody. They will lend their support to an idea, and if they have any "weight" they will lend it to the idea and expect others to follow. Jasmynes accept the ideas of others and serve as audience and helper. They try to get along with everyone without calling attention to self. They go with the flow, whatever the group's mood.

Good Jasmynes will wait until there is a consensus and then throw their weight in support of the group, giving other members confidence in what the group is doing. Bad Jasmynes will jump in early and throw their support behind an idea, which might discourage others from making constructive criticisms or offering new ideas.

The Juans

Like their name, the Juans are similar to the Ivans (both names are forms of "John") in their ability to organize. But Juans ask questions. They may do this to ensure they have not only a part in the decision-making process but also a suitable position in carrying out the task. Or they may do this because they want to make sure everyone understands what is happening.

A good Juan can be helpful in group dynamics because they make sure everyone is on the same page and help prevent misunderstandings that might arise later because someone had a different understanding of what was being said. A good Juan empowers everyone around the table. A bad Juan is self-centered; he makes sure he (and everyone else) understands his role. ▶

The Jaydans

Jaydans do not like disharmony.

They do not like people in a group to disagree, and they especially do not like arguments. They will attempt mediation. In a good mediation, the end result is a win-win. They will listen to both sides and even to a group of opinions and attempt to find a common ground. It is almost crucial that everyone be able to see the Jaydan's contribution to the resolution.

Good Jaydans are a valuable asset because of their ability to synthesize and highlight the best in a position. Bad Jaydans are so caught up in bringing things together that they are constantly jumping in with resolutions that have not yet been thought out.

The Jadas

Jadas come into the group with an idea of what should be the end result of the process. They will take from what everyone else says the elements on which they agree. Jadas are easily recognizable because their agenda is already out front. Any discussion takes too long because they know the right answer already. On the positive side, they will help move the discussion along when others stray from the agenda.

A good Jada will almost work hand-in-hand with a Jaydan. They will keep feeding the Jaydan with their ideas of the result, and the Jaydan will try to make sure that is part of the end result, win-win. A good Jada will eventually drop some ideas as long as her big picture is part of the final decision. A bad Jada has the attitude of "my way or the highway." Bad Jadas will not compromise, nor will they accept any criticism. They take over the discussion, often prolonging it, or they prevent decisions that do not match up with theirs. They are often more interested in promoting themselves than the group's interest.

The Emmetts

This group is named after the very famous clown, Emmett Kelly. There is a time and a place for clowns and jokers — but to the Emmetts in the group, everything is a joke.

A good Emmett (or a facilitator using an Emmett) knows humor can break the ice or help bring calm to a meeting when things are getting out of hand. A bad Emmett is a standup comedian who thinks that the group is his audience and plays the room, all the while derailing the topic.

The Kyles

This group is named after Chris Kyle, the deadliest and probably most notable of the Navy Seal snipers, with 255 confirmed kills, earning him the nickname from the insurgents of Iraq, "The Devil of Ramadi." He is the subject of the book *One Shot, One Kill*. The Kyles come into a group discussion with the sole intention of shooting down others' ideas. Often they do not add anything.

Like a Jonathon, a good Kyle will successfully remove bad ideas from growing and remaining on the table. A bad Kyle does not care about how good or bad an idea is; he is just there to shoot.

The Eves

Since the time of Adam and Eve, everything that has gone wrong is blamed on Adam's significant other. If Eve had not sinned, there would be no disease, no earthquakes, no death. We blame everything on her. She is the theological scapegoat. People in the group blame the Eves for errors or problems; Eves become the butt of group jokes and are usually considered outsiders. Eves, as the victims in the group, may have things to contribute but will not. They are the abused members. There are no good or bad Eves, just victims. Facilitators should prevent the group from creating an Eve.

The Others

- **The Professor** (from *Gilligan's Island*) is a philosopher, the one who will always point out the similarity of the idea or issue from different perspectives. This is good for insight but not good for decisions.
- **The Cheerleader** is friendly and responsive to others. Cheerleaders will accept other's contributions without offering any of their own. They are encouragers.
- **The Timekeeper** keeps the meeting moving by making sure the group stays on schedule.

If you prefer more technical language for the main types of people, here you go:

- Connies are leaders.
- Jonathans are devil's advocates.
- Ivans are listeners.
- Ivankas are brainstormers.
- Jasmines are followers.
- Juans are clarifiers.
- Jaydans are mediators.
- Jadas are decision makers.
- Emmetts are clowns.
- Kyles are snipers.
- Eves are scapegoats.

Remember, good group dynamics usually don't just happen. A good facilitator understands the different roles that members play and effectively manages them to produce positive results. Leadership means taking the good of the above characteristics and letting them flourish while discouraging and downplaying their negative sides. Good facilitators meet the members where they are and are willing to work with them. With effective leadership, all members of a group can thrive, operate cohesively, and accomplish its goals.

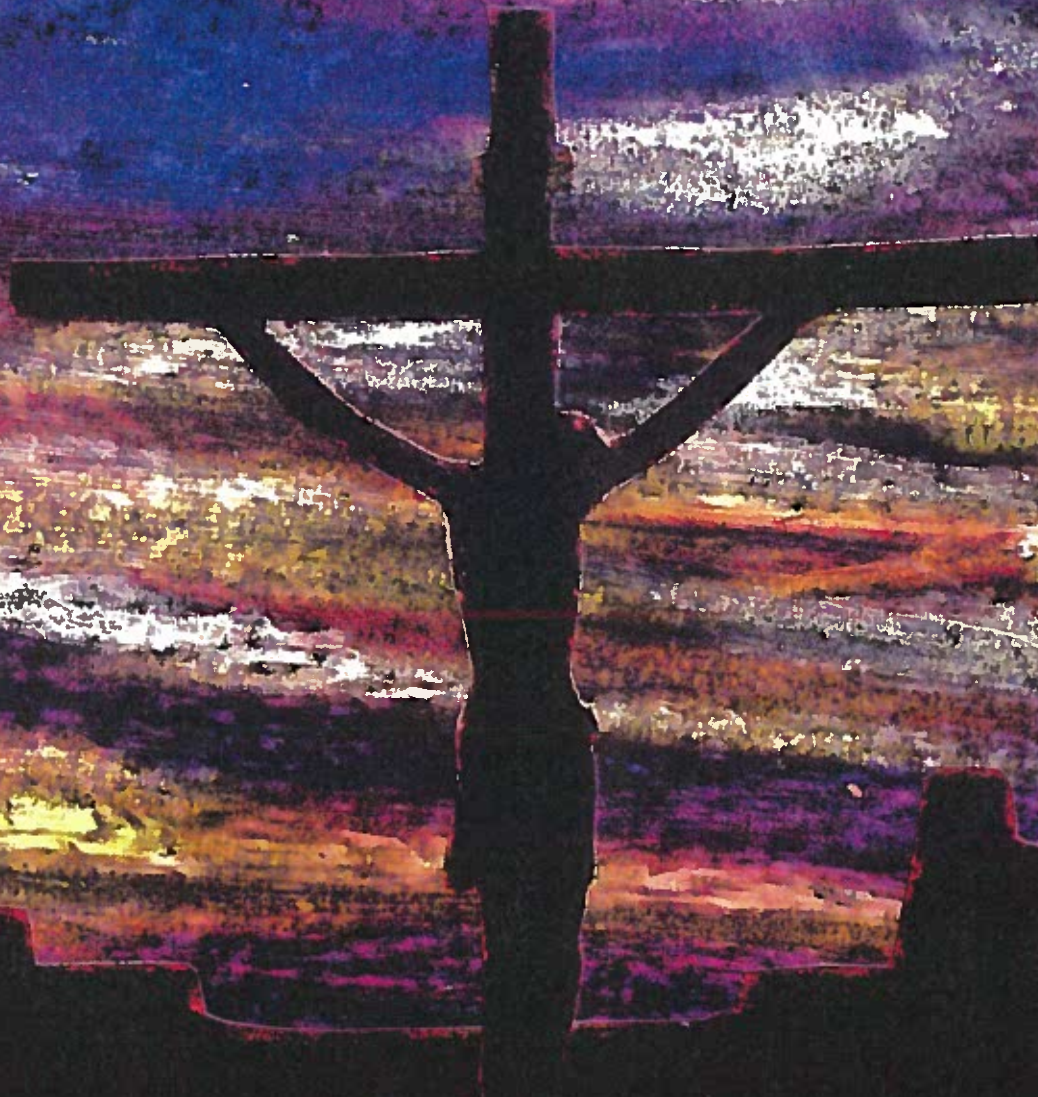
ML

Rev. Jonathan Morse, PhD, is a priest of the Eparchy of St. Nicholas in Chicago (Ukrainian) and serves as a chaplain at the Veterans Administration Hospital at Perry Point, Md., and is a major in the United States Army Reserves.

volume 41 number 10
december 2014 – january 2015 · \$6.00

ministry & liturgy

the comprehensive resource
for integrated ministry



Christian initiation:
Welcoming well

Lenten reflection and renewal

Managing group dynamics

A wish list for the church (part 3)