



EXAMEN(ED) CHURCH THRIVE TEAM MOVING INTO A NEW PHASE

Our church's Thrive Team made up of Scott Symes, Louise Mollinger, Meg Tackes, Gary Tackes, Terry McManus, and Scott McLeod will be moving into a new phase of their discernment work with the help of Marquette University's Examen(ed) Church program. They have been learning practices of personal reflection and developing the team's ability to engage in group reflection together. The next phase is about reflecting on our church's mission and values (who we are, what we believe, what we are trying to do), as well as upon the specific context (place, time, economic factors, etc.) in which we are working to be the church.

In the introduction to the July meeting of the Thrive Team, the Marquette folks wrote the following as they were trying to help the group begin thinking in new ways,

William James, American Philosopher and "Father of American Psychology", said, "My experience is what I agree to. Only those items which I notice shape my mind." Who we are is largely a matter of what we attend to and have attended to over time. If this is true, then we should take very seriously what we are paying attention to. This is true for churches, as much as for individuals. What we pay attention to as a church over time is what we become. What are we paying attention to as a church? What tools or processes do we use to pay attention? Sadly, many churches (and the people in them) do not have reliable tools or practices for reflecting on what they are doing. Their assessment of their church and its ministries is controlled by that which most easily attracts their attention: numbers - "So many (or few) turned out for youth group!", or strong feelings - "That service really stirred my soul!". These assessments can be of limited value in informing the church in how well it is fulfilling its mission and identity.

At our July meeting, the focus turned to several ministries of our congregation, and instead of thinking about the numbers of participants or how it made people feel, the questions to be asked were around "what was the goal or purpose of the ministry?" and "what tools, resources, or materials were necessary for the ministry?" The group also reflected on "what people were involved in running the ministry and who were the people that were served by the ministry?" and finally, "what did the ministry do? What were the activities or practices that made up the ministry?" By paying attention to the answers to these questions the group gained a new perspective. They hope to bring many of these insights to the whole congregation soon. The group travels to Marquette University on Saturday morning, September 23.