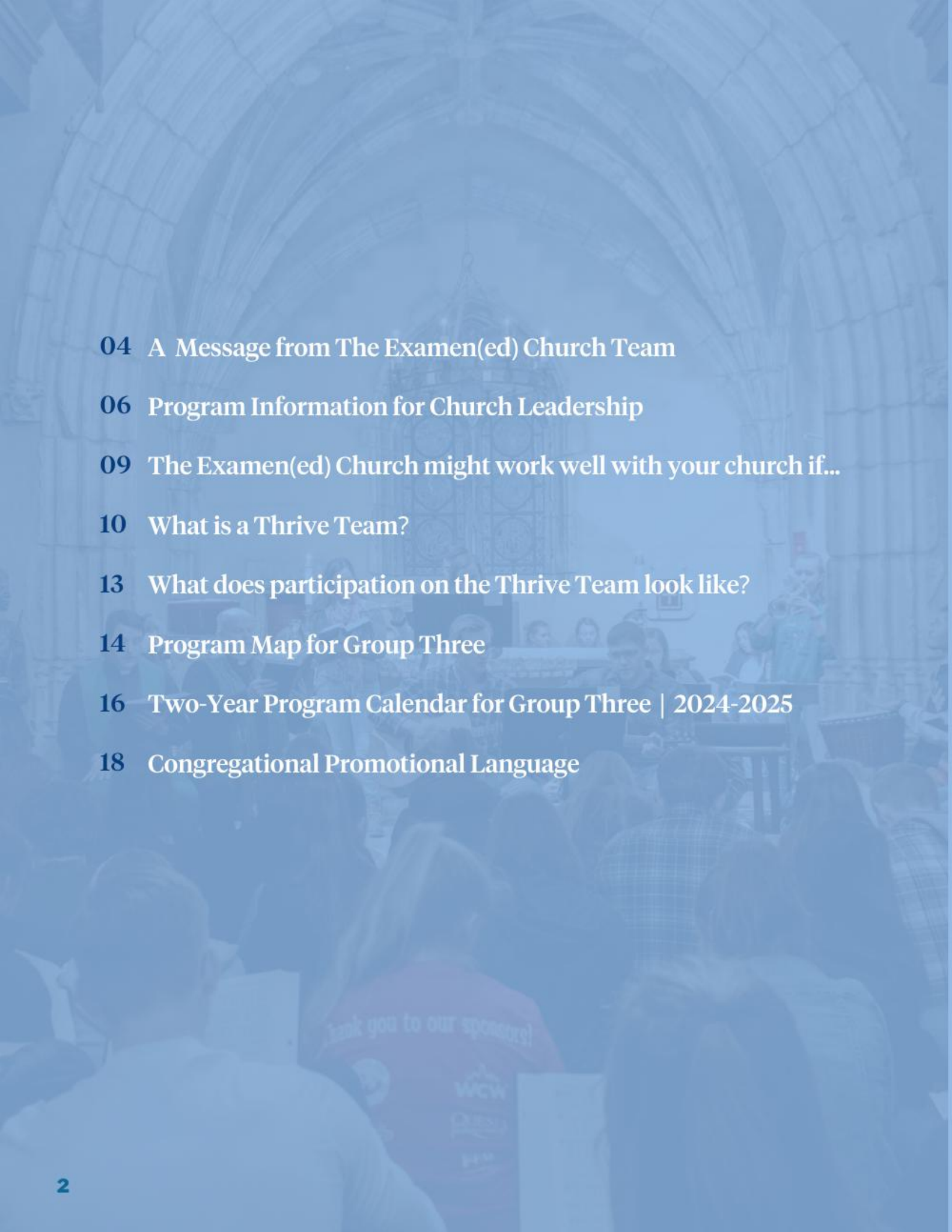




MARQUETTE
UNIVERSITY

The Examen(ed) Church

**Church
Resource
Pack**

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The Examen(ed) Church is a grant-funded initiative based at Marquette University. It is focused on promoting congregational thriving through reflection on three themes: awareness of and adaptation to the changing context, clarifying mission and values, and deepening Christian practice. The process unfolds over a period of 2 years and includes training, guided practices, consultation, and access to a growing library of resources.



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BE THE DIFFERENCE.



A MESSAGE FROM

The Examen(ed) Church Team

As ministries and communities of faith, we are in the midst of an uncertain and unsettling season. Our local communities are affected in many different ways and there are challenges everywhere we look. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the range of voices to which the church has had to respond has been unrelenting: new ministry models, shifting guidelines, diverging parishioner preferences. The unrelenting voices have led to an unrelenting pace at which these voices call for response. Political voices, financial voices, social voices, and dare we say it? – religious voices – all are vying for our attention and response.

The church, and the people that make it up, have been hearing these competing voices and have been reacting as fast and as best as they can. Yet, this season we find ourselves in has only seemed to amplify these voices, both from without and within, that were already calling for the church's response: Numerical decline, financial strain, injustice, racial and political division, dwindling cultural capital. Not only has the church not "kept up," reacting to these voices has all too often come at the cost of hearing and responding to the voice of God.

How can the church resist these exhausting forces and recover a posture of prayerful response to divine movement rather than be driven by winds of circumstance?

An ancient Christian answer to this question may be found in the practice of reflection. This ancient response is at the heart of The Examen(ed) Church at Marquette University.

The Examen(ed) Church is an ecumenical initiative designed...



TO HELP CHURCHES

**(RE)DISCOVER A POSTURE OF PRAYERFUL REFLECTION AND RESPONSE
IN THE MIDST OF AN UNCERTAIN AND UNSETTLING SEASON.**

TO ENCOURAGE CONGREGATIONS TO GROW CLOSER TO CHRIST
**BY LEARNING TO LISTEN FOR THE SIGNAL OF GOD'S VOICE
IN THE NOISE OF LIFE.**

TO EQUIP THE CHURCH FOR INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE
REFLECTION USING THE TIME-TESTED
PRACTICE OF THE EXAMEN OF ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA..



Program Information for Church Leadership



How is participation in the program structured?

1. An application process will communicate the church's interest in participating and provide program staff with profile of the church.
2. The church will be represented in the program by a "Thrive Team" of 6-8 people (plus a clergy person).
3. The Thrive Team will participate program activities as a group and with teams of other churches.
4. Thrive Team will be given resources to share their experience as well as elements of the initiative with the broader congregation.



What is the church's commitment?

In **YEAR ONE** of the process...

- The church will form a "Thrive Team" of 6-8 individuals plus a clergy person who will participate in the program activities.
- The church leadership will receive periodic updates of the Thrive Team's reflection process.
- The church will provide opportunities for the Thrive Team to share their experience with the congregation.

In **YEAR TWO** of the process...

- Church leadership will collaborate with Thrive Team in discernment of some church action as the result of the process of reflection
- Thrive Team, church leadership, and congregation will participate in assessment of the experience and resources

The Examen(ed) Church equips the church with discernment tools rooted in reflective practice for navigating the complexities of the cultural moment.

What benefits are there for participating Churches?

- ✓ Pastor and Thrive Team receive training in reflection and in program themes.
- ✓ Congregation is exposed to the practice of reflection.
- ✓ Pastor and Thrive Team gain access to Program Staff and other Marquette personnel and resources.
- ✓ Churches that complete the process receive a \$2000-4000 stipend.
- ✓ Small grants will be available to encourage congregations in new initiatives executed to during the experience.



How does the process unfold?

The church's "Thrive Team" will participate in several activities in four phases over two years (explained below). Up to 20 churches total will participate fully in the initiative. Some events will provide opportunity for churches to learn together. Many of the month-to-month activities will be guided experiences for your church's Thrive Team to engage together as a group.

What does it cost?

Participation in The Examen(ed) Church comes without financial cost for congregations; all expenses are covered by the grant.

"Though aimed at individuals, examen can be an important part of congregational decision-making. Examen teaches congregants to look for God's ongoing activity in the present, in their own lives, and in the lives of those around them. Examen confronts congregations with the work of the Holy Spirit in concrete human activities. Though examen does not allow congregations to ignore the role they have played in their own situations, it does highlight the places God continues to be alive in the midst of transition or loss. For congregations needing to make a decision and hoping to do so in response to God, examen can help members accept the fullest reality of their situations, providing the clarity necessary for fruitful discernment."

Benjamin Gensic in "Ignatius: A Guide to Congregational Discernment"

The Examen(ed) Church might work well with your church if...

**THE CONGREGATION SEEKS TO GAIN CLARITY OF PURPOSE AND
STRENGTHEN UNITY BY REFLECTING ON THEIR MISSION AND VALUES.**

**THE CONGREGATION IS INTERESTED IN FOSTERING SPIRITUAL
GROWTH AND A STRONGER COMMITMENT TO CHRISTIAN
PRACTICES AMONG ITS MEMBERS.**

**THE CONGREGATION DESIRES TO STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY
BONDS AND COLLABORATION THROUGH COLLECTIVE
REFLECTION AND DISCERNMENT.**

**THE CONGREGATION IS WORKING THROUGH THE REALITIES OF
HAVING A PART-TIME PASTOR AND WISH TO DEVELOP LAY
LEADERSHIP IN A DECENTRALIZED DECISION-MAKING MODEL**

**THE CONGREGATION IS PRIMED FOR A SEASON OF
BRAINSTORMING AND INNOVATION AND IS READY TO TAKE ON
FRESH PERSPECTIVES ON LONGSTANDING ISSUES**

**THE CONGREGATION SEEKS TO DEVELOP ITS COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES IN RESPONSE TO SHIFTING
DEMOGRAPHICS AND EMERGING CHALLENGES IN THE
SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOOD.**

**THE CONGREGATION IS NAVIGATING WHAT COMES WITH SHARING
A PASTOR, AIMING TO DEVELOP LINES OF COMMUNICATION
BETWEEN CONGREGATIONS BEYOND THE SHARED PASTOR**



Thrive Teams

What is a Thrive Team?

The life and health of the church is in its congregation, not just its clergy. The Thrive Team is a group of 6-8 individuals, including a clergyperson, who represent the church in their participation in The Examen(ed) Church initiative.

The Thrive Team represents the church as it participates in The Examen(ed) Church activities. The church is participating in The Examen(ed) Church, not just the Thrive Team. Accordingly, the make-up of the Thrive Team should represent the identity and constituencies of the church.

What does a Thrive Team do?

The role of the Thrive Team is not to make decisions or plans for the church, but rather to serve as those dedicated to reflection on behalf of the church.

Thrive Team members will...

- Participate in the required activities of The Examen(ed) Church—reflection, workshops, and discernment.
- Engage in guided personal and group reflection on their own spiritual journey, the experience of the church, and the needs of the community.
- Share the fruits of reflection with the congregation and church leaders.
- Discern together with church leadership and congregation a specific response to their reflection and learning.

Who should be on the Thrive Team?

The make-up of the Thrive Team should reflect the identity of the church, not just the current leadership of the congregation

A Thrive Team member from a particular church ministry area doesn't need to be a leader in that ministry but must be able to represent the experience of that group in the Thrive Team's reflections.

While there are no specific skills or gifts necessary to be a Thrive Team member, consider church members that might be more inclined toward spiritual reflection and listening rather than problem-solving, planning, or decision-making.

Some questions to ask when forming the Thrive Team:

What are the key constituencies of the church? Age, gender, race, family status, socio-economic frame, time in the congregation, ministry subgroups, affinity groups, etc.

What constituencies are represented (or not) in the current leadership structures of the church?

Are there any subgroups in the congregation where there is particular growth or evidence of divine activity?

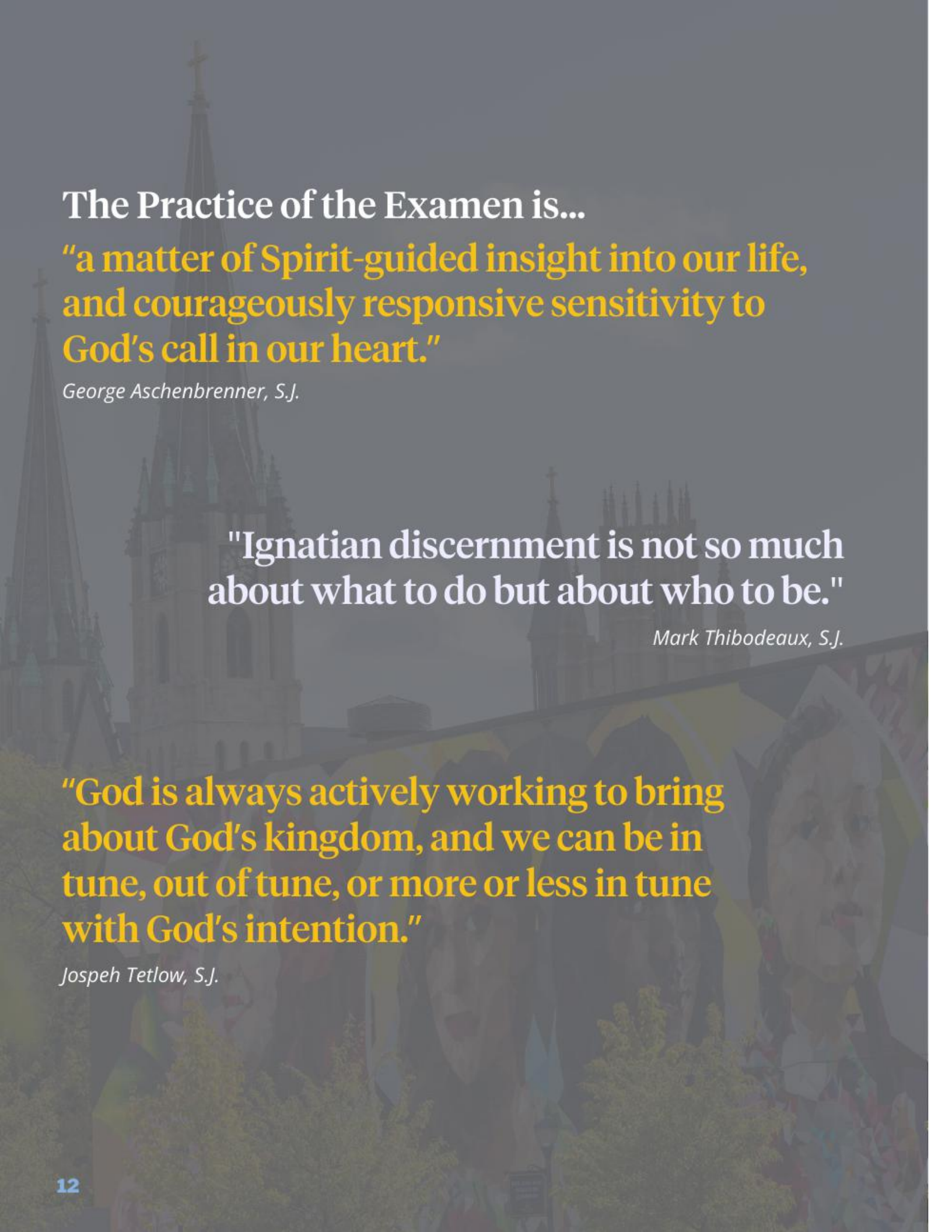
Who is respected or active in each subgroup?

The Thrive Team represents the identity and constituencies of the church.

The Thrive Team represents the church as it participates in program elements. The church is participating in The Examen(ed) Church program, not just the Thrive Team.

The make-up of the Thrive Team should reflect the identity of the congregation, not just the current leadership of the church.

The Thrive Team exists to do more spiritual reflection and listening rather than problem-solving, planning, and decision-making.

The background of the page features a faded image of a large Gothic cathedral with multiple spires and a cross on top. In the foreground, there is a colorful, abstract mural with various faces and patterns. The text is overlaid on this background.

The Practice of the Examen is...

**"a matter of Spirit-guided insight into our life,
and courageously responsive sensitivity to
God's call in our heart."**

George Aschenbrenner, S.J.

**"Ignatian discernment is not so much
about what to do but about who to be."**

Mark Thibodeaux, S.J.

**"God is always actively working to bring
about God's kingdom, and we can be in
tune, out of tune, or more or less in tune
with God's intention."**

Jospeh Tetlow, S.J.

What does participation on the Thrive Team look like?

While there will be a handful of training sessions and workshops over the course of the experience, the majority of your involvement will be in regular meetings (approximately monthly) with fellow Thrive Team members to share the fruits of your own reflection and to reflect together on the life of the church.

Reflect

- Learn to practice the Examen of St. Ignatius of Loyola and meet regularly with the Thrive team to share your experience of reflection.
- Learn how to reflect as a team using resources we provide.
- Start to share the practice of reflection with the broader congregation.

Listen

- Participate in two workshops focusing on themes relevant to church vitality:
 - Mission and values: What drives us as a congregation?
 - Context: What's going on in our community and how might we respond to it?

Discern

- Discern the movement of the Spirit from the reflections of the Thrive Team.
- Respond by creating an action plan.
- Execute this response in collaboration with the congregation.
 - Funds are available for small grants to encourage these initiatives.

Assess

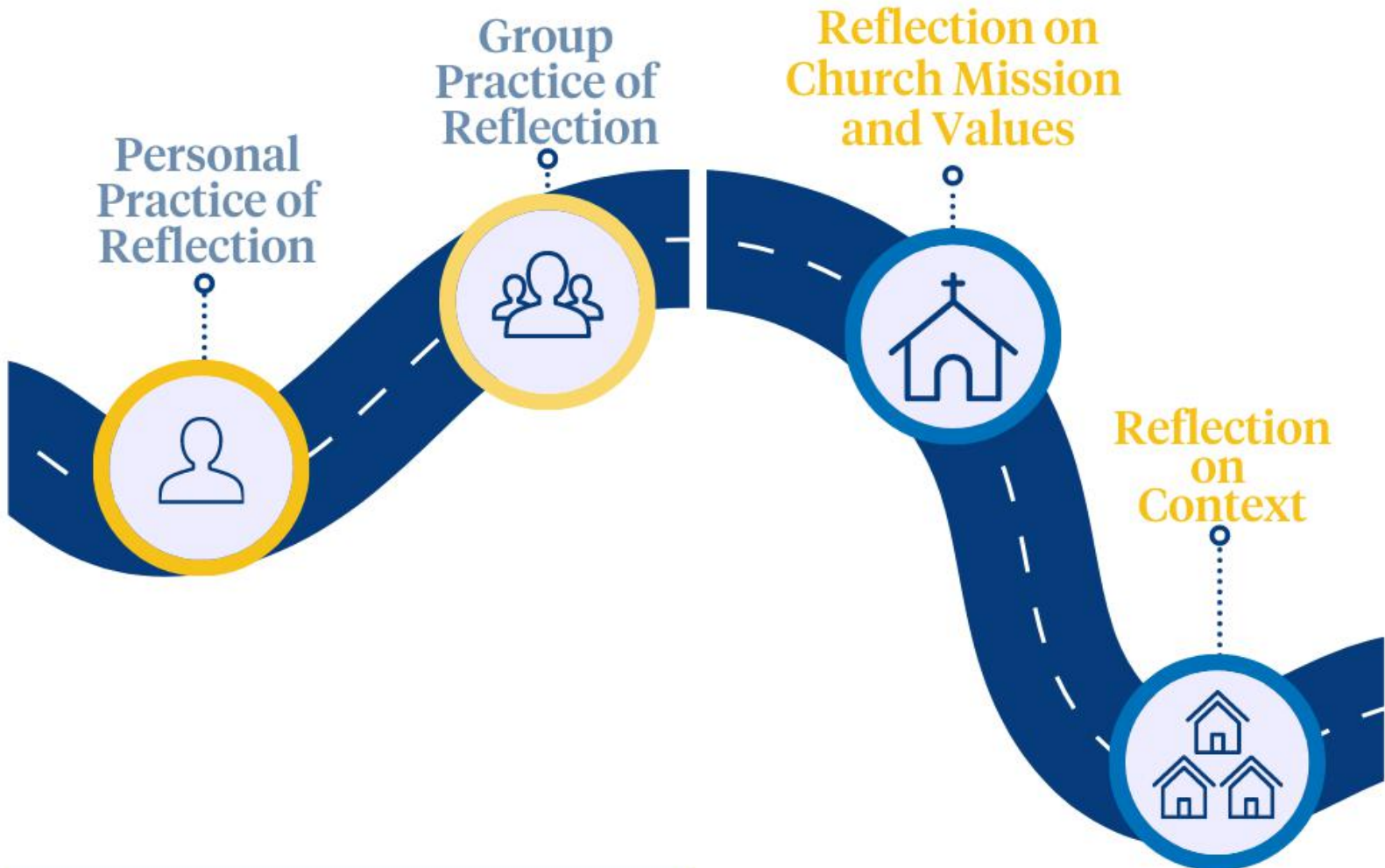
- Reflect on the action taken in step three.
- Reflect on the experience of The Examen(ed) Church.
- Discern ways to sustain the practice of reflection and discernment in the life of the church.

**Throughout the process you will consult with The Examen(ed) Church staff and have access to a growing collection of resources on reflection, church vitality, and the themes addressed in the workshops.*

Program Map for The Examen(ed) Church

Phase 1 Learning Reflection

Phase 2 Applying Reflection



In PHASE 1 Thrive Teams will...

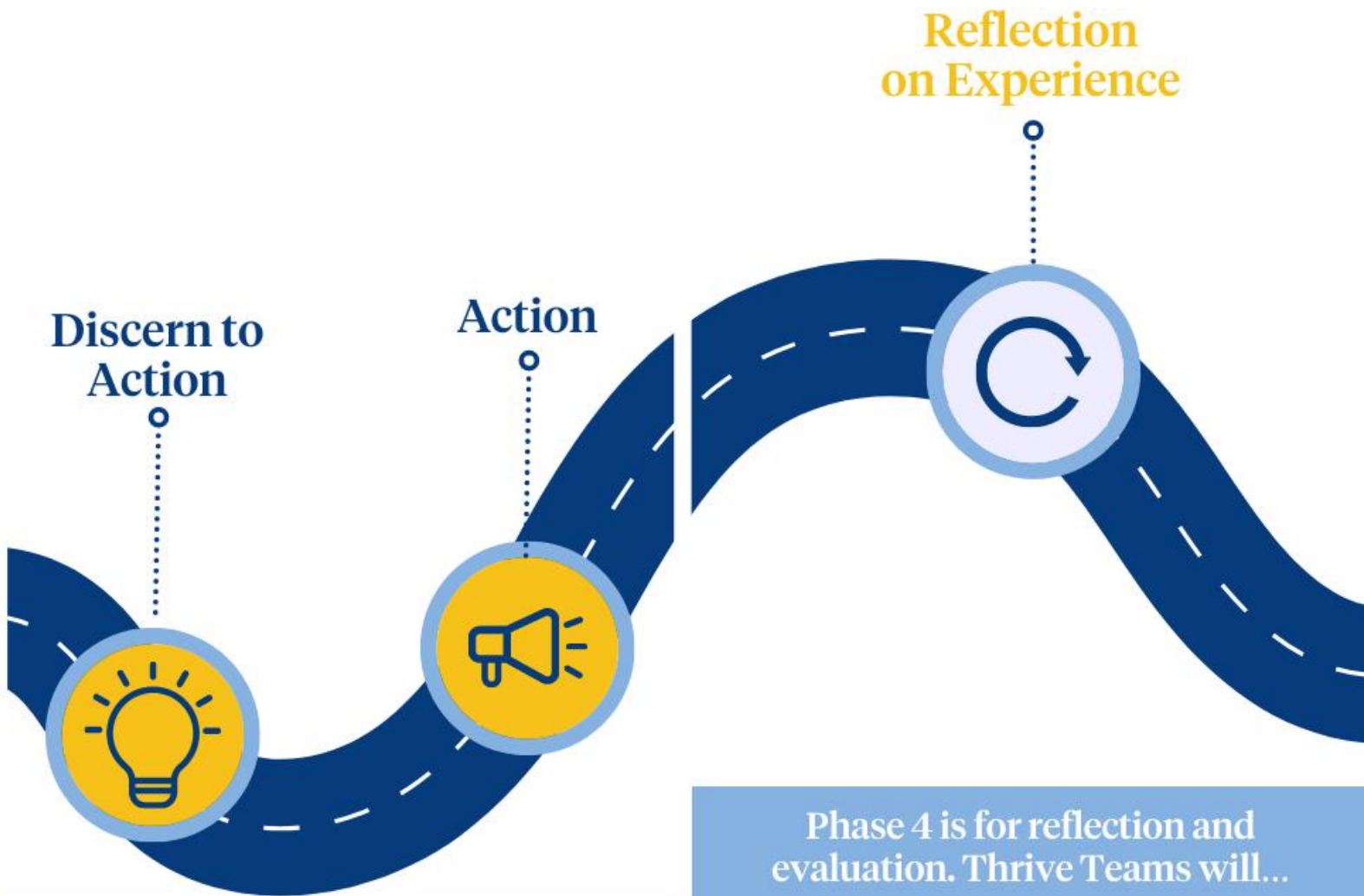
- Learn to practice the Examen of St. Ignatius of Loyola
- Gather regularly to share the experience of reflection
- Learn how to reflect as a team using resources the program provides
- Start to share the practice of reflection with the broader congregation

During Phase 2 Thrive Teams will...

- Participate in two workshops focusing on themes relevant to church vitality:
 - Mission and values: What drives us as a congregation?
 - Context: What's going on in our community and how might we respond to it?

Phase 3 Discerning to Action

Phase 4 Reflection on Experience



In Phase 3 Thrive Teams will focus on...

- Discern the movement of the Spirit from the reflections of the Thrive Team
- Respond by creating an action plan
- Execute this response in collaboration with the congregation

*** During this phase small grants will be available to encourage church initiatives and program funds will support church hosted events.

Phase 4 is for reflection and evaluation. Thrive Teams will...

- Reflect on the action taken in Phase 3
- Reflect on the church's experience of The Examen(ed) Church
- Discern ways to sustain the practice of reflection and discernment in the life of the church

Two Year Program Calendar

Group 3 | 2024-2025

2
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4

Applying

Phase 1: Learning Reflection

Train the members of the church's Thrive Team in the Examen of St. Ignatius of Loyola and equip them to apply the practice of reflection to the church's experience. We will provide Tools to share the practice and fruits of reflection with the broader congregation.

J

Recruiting Thrive Team
Communicate with Congregation
Begin scheduling

F

Training 1: Learning Reflection at MU

Team Gathering: Reflection on Experience of Examen

M

Team Gathering: Reflection on Spiritual Biography

A

Team Gathering: Reflection on Critical Incident

M

Training 2: Group Discernment at MU

J

Team Gathering: Group Reflection
on Church Critical Incident

J

Team Gathering: Group Reflection on Church Vitality

A

Team Gathering: Reflection on Process

**Program Staff Consultation*

S

Workshop 1: Mission & Values at MU

O

Team Gathering: Reflection on Workshop

N

Team Gathering: Reflection on Workshop

D

Team Gathering: Reflection on Workshop

J

Workshop 2: Context at MU

F

Team Gathering: Reflection on Workshop

M

Team Gathering: Reflection on Workshop

A

Team Gathering: Reflection on Workshop

**Program Staff Consultation*

M

Team Gathering: Discern to Action

J

Team Gathering: Discern to Action

J

Team Gathering: Discern to Action

A

**Program Staff Consultation*

S

Implement Action

O

Team Gathering: Reflection on Experience

N

Guide Congregation in Reflection on Experience

D

Final Program Staff Consultation

2
0
2
5

Phase 2: Reflection Applied

The Thrive Team will participate in workshops covering key themes related to church vitality – Adaptation to our Context, Mission and Values, and Christian Practice – and will engage in guided reflection specific to their congregation out of these workshops.

Phase 3: Discern to Action

Thrive Team and Congregation will bring to a point of action the reflection and discernment begun in Phase Two, and host an event with a fellow church to share vision and the fruits of their experience of reflection.

Phase 4: Reflection on Experience

Thrive Team will guide congregation in reflecting both on the experience of the action implemented in Phase 3 as well as on The Examen(ed) Church experience as a whole.

“Nobody in our church has done anything like this. It is thrusting us forward to think about deeper ways to minister within the church and to the community.”

Group Two Pastor

“Throughout this process, I am learning to be more attentive to the presence of the Spirit in my life, walking with me.”

Group Two Participant

“Our Thrive Team has wrestled with what spiritual vitality looks like not just for 60 minutes on a Sunday morning, but 24/7.”

Group One Pastor

“Since beginning this process, our team's conversations have been much more reflective. We aren't trying to win an argument or persuade someone else. We are more aware of the importance of listening, and not talking over people.”

Group Two Participant

“This program has helped us to think about situations differently. We've learned to reflect and pray in any given moment instead of just reacting.”

Group Two Pastor

Congregational Promotional Language

The following information can be used freely to present/promote the church's participation in The Examen(ed) Church initiative to the broader congregation. Feel free to adapt to the various needs of your congregation. Suggestions include use in bulletins, newsletter, announcements, announcement slides.

Short Form

Our church will be participating in a grant-funded initiative from Marquette University called The Examen(ed) Church.

The Examen(ed) Church is designed to foster congregational thriving by equipping churches to discern paths forward during these challenging times.

You will hear more about the process in the coming months.

For more information, please visit:
www.marquette.edu/examen-church

Reflecting Together Thriving Together



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The Examen(ed) Church

Long Form

We all know the disorienting range of voices that call for our attention and reaction: cultural change, social unrest, political division, pandemic uncertainty, economic instability. As a church, even more realities demand response: numerical decline, aging congregations, strained finances. Both personally and corporately, reacting to these voices has exhausted us, and often with little to show for our efforts.

The Examen(ed) Church at Marquette University, is a new initiative designed to help our congregation discern different paths forward during these challenging times. The process will guide us through reflection on the cultural changes impacting our church, clarifying the characteristics that make our church who we are, and deepening the Christian practices that are most important to us.

Our church plans to participate in this initiative. You will hear more about the process in the coming months. For more information, please visit: www.marquette.edu/examen-church



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