

# Habits, Norms and Expectations Resource Section

**Habit is habit and not to be flung out of the window by any man,  
but coaxed downstairs a step at a time.**

Mark Twain

## Purpose

To help participants identify the habits, norms and expectations of their congregations and their sources, as well as to get in touch with the clergy's habits, norms and expectations so that differences can be openly discussed and resolved.

## Theological Understanding

The young Christian community encountered differences of ritual and understanding when it sent missionaries to the Gentiles. God worked through his messengers and prophets to come up with solutions to these potentially divisive differences. The first step was to be able to talk about the differences and why they existed. Any time someone enters a new congregation he/she needs to be able to identify congregational habits, norms and expectations and to negotiate changes if needed. Open communication and prayer can help prevent misunderstandings and hurt feelings.

## Special Instructions

This session has two optional slides and an optional Handout to use with **clergy-only** groups. If you have a mixed **clergy-lay group**, you will need to hide Slides 11 and 12, and you will not need Handout 5. With mixed groups the small group discussions can occur in parish teams. A variation on this module to be used in congregational settings is included in the two versions of "Fresh Start in Your Congregation: A Resource".

## Related Modules

- History-Sharing and Understanding
- Power, Authority and Influence
- Renegotiating Roles and Expectations
- Role Clarity

## **Bibliography**

Ammerman, Nancy T.; Carroll, Jackson W.; Dudley, Carl S.; and McKinney, William, eds. Studying Congregations: A New Handbook. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998 – detailed guide to assessing congregational culture.

Dudley, Carl S. and Ammerman, Nancy T. Congregations in Transition: A Guide for Analyzing, Assessing, and Adapting in Changing Communities. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002 – oriented toward doing a revisioning of mission and ministry, but contains some helpful tips on assessing congregational history.

## General Outline of Session

1. Opening prayer and meditation (suggested reading Acts 15:4-11)
2. Check-in
3. Introduction to habits, norms and expectations (PowerPoint 1 – 4; Talking Points)
4. Identification of habits and norms for liturgy, worship, and music (PowerPoint 5-6; Talking Points; Handout 1) – individual work and small group discussion
5. Large group debrief
6. Identification of habits and norms for programs and structure (PowerPoint 7; Talking Points; Handout 2) – individual work and small group discussion
7. Large group debrief
8. Identification of staff norms and habits (PowerPoint 8; Talking Points; Handout 3) – individual work and small group discussion
9. Large group debrief
10. Identification of expectations (PowerPoint 9; Talking Points; Handout 4) – individual work and small group discussion
11. Large group debrief
12. Note that expectations vary by group and among individuals (PowerPoint 10; Talking Points) – general discussion
13. **Optional for clergy-only groups:** introduce concept of individual habits and norms compared to congregation (PowerPoint 11; Talking Points; Handout 5) – individual work and small group discussion
14. **Optional for clergy-only groups:** Debrief and introduce concept of how to uncover habits, norms and expectations (PowerPoint 12; Talking Points)
15. Identify feedback systems in congregation (PowerPoint 13-14; Talking Points) – large group discussion
16. Wrap up with sharing of best practices for feedback mechanisms and a final prayer



# Habits, Norms and Expectations

## Handout 1

### Liturgy, Worship, and Music

***Think about your congregation. What are its habits, norms and expectations? How have history, etc. influenced the development of each?***

What Rites are used? How formal and how long are the services? Is there diversity of worship or music style among worship services or within a given service?

Are there a lot of body movements or call and response during the service?

How is the space arranged? Does it get adapted for different uses? To what extent does the space reinforce the formality or casualness of the service?

What style of music is used?

How many choirs are there? Who participates in them? What about instruments?

Are congregants casually or more formally dressed? Do people talk before and/or after the service?

How participatory is the worship? Who participates – everyone or just a select few? Are children involved in the service and, if so, how?

Are there special traditions around given feast days (a patron saint's festival, an Easter sunrise service, Christmas pageant) – what are they?

What else do you observe?

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## Handout 2

### Programs and Structure

***Think about your congregation. What are its habits, norms and expectations? How have history, etc. influenced the development of each?***

What kinds of programs for Christian formation, outreach, and social activities seem to have a “life of their own”? How are they organized?

Who participates on the committees?

Who participates in the programs – are there assumptions about participation or membership? Are certain people “always” in charge of some events?

Do assignments to head certain activities or committees rotate or are people there “for life”?

# **Habits, Norms and Expectations**

## **Handout 3**

### **Staff**

What policies are in place regarding staff schedules? What about vacation time and sick leave benefits? Are letters of agreement or contracts current?

How much authority have staff members been given to make decisions on their own? Are the limits of authority stated in writing?

What about the climate of the office – is it formal or informal? How do people address each other? By first name? By title and surname? Is there a dress code? If so, what is it – formal or informal?

What are the expectations for collegial relationships? Are there regular staff meetings or other opportunities for staff members to share what they are doing?

Does the parish have a policy prohibiting members from being part of the paid staff? Is this policy written? Is it widely understood? Is it followed?

## Habits, Norms and Expectations Handout 4

***What expectations does the congregation have about how work gets done?  
Consider expectations for clergy around:***

Their availability

Attendance at non-liturgical functions

Timeliness in response to calls, etc.

Other?

***Thinking about lay leaders, what are the expectations of them? Consider expectations around:***

Their availability

Their participation in parish life

Timeliness in response to requests

Do clergy and lay leaders have similar or different expectations of each other?



# Habits, Norms and Expectations Handout 5 – For Clergy-only Groups

## *Your Habits, Norms & Expectations*

***Think about yourself. What assumptions about how things will be done do you see as inviolate (be as specific as possible) and what is the source of your beliefs?***

Liturgy/Worship (e.g., exclusive use of Rite I)

Music (e.g., classical music tradition)

Programs/Structure (e.g., type and breadth of programs, how committees are formed and members chosen)

Staff (e.g., formal, degree of independence, schedules, collegiality)

***Once you have done a list, go back and compare this list with the one you completed on your congregation. What is the same, what is different?***