

Fire & Formation

in the Episcopal Church in Delaware

MISSION

The Mission of Fire & Formation is to aid and encourage the laity to discover their passion for Christ, deepen their spirituality, and fully live out their baptismal covenant.

FRAMEWORK

The fire of the Holy Spirit at baptism ignites in us a life-long process of being formed in the image of God in order to proclaim the Gospel and live lives marked by a love of God, neighbor, and self.

The Commission on Ministry (COM) offers the people of the Episcopal Church in Delaware the opportunity of the Fire & Formation initiative. The mission of Fire & Formation is to aid and encourage the laity to discover their passion for Christ, deepen their spirituality, and fully live out their baptismal covenant.

Fire & Formation provides a framework of opportunities to enhance the discernment of the vocation of the baptized, such as, website resources of programs within the diocese and beyond (i.e. Virginia Seminary's Building Faith (<https://buildfaith.org/>), retreats, webinars, core books/bibliography with book club possibilities, films/videos, covenant groups, a universe of formation possibilities.

PRACTICE

Covenant Groups

The Commission on Ministry considers the best way to engage life-long formation in the spirit is through the work of small covenant groups. These groups become a forum wherein the faithful examine their life in Christ.

We ask clergy and other leaders to help identify laity who exhibit a desire and willingness to move more deeply into their baptismal promises and invite them into the work of Fire & Formation. Participation in a covenant group is a journey in faith.

Covenant groups form naturally within congregations, network across parishes, arise from Fire & Formation online plenary sessions, and future in-person retreats. There is no one way for a group to form. Groups are connected with a liaison from the COM who will assist in identifying if the group will be self-led, appoint a facilitator from within, or select a facilitator from beyond the group. All groups are provided written guidance on the management and conduct of small groups for formation made available from The Episcopal Church (TEC) and other resources (See diocesan Fire & Formation webpage). Groups are expected to meet regularly for a length of time (6-12 months recommended) that allows for trusted sharing and mutual learning to take place. Individual group meetings are typically one and a half hours long. It is recommended that the size of a group be no less than five and no more than twelve. Once established membership often, but not exclusively, remains the same until a group decides to enter a new phase of formation work together at which time members could leave and new members enter.

Covenant groups may begin by using the Baptismal Covenant (see Addendum A). A group takes time to share how each participant experienced Christ in their lives since the last gathering. Shared prayer is important to the ongoing life of the covenant group. However, Fire & Formation promotes and helps make available, the resource: **Living Waters: Baptism as a Way of Life** by Klara Tammany, published by Church Publishing. The guidance this book provides is intended to renew formation based on our baptismal call to vocation. A COM liaison will maintain contact with the group to assist and to help the group identify new directions for formation. The liaison can also assist at the time of a group's ending. The COM especially wants to learn from a group's experience in order to foster future Fire & Formation work.

Teachings (Virtual Webinars)

Fire & Formation punctuates its initiative with periodic opportunities to hear and respond to knowledgeable and inspiring speakers. At its launch is a focus on who we are as baptized in Christ and includes presentations to set the stage for what is to come. Along the way, online events will serve to enhance the experience of covenant groups.

Retreats (Virtual and in-person)

Opportunities for spiritual refreshment, Sabbath rest, and corporate reflection are led by gifted leaders. Retreats provided by others will be identified and communicated.

Prayer and Worship

Covenant groups are encouraged to strengthen journeying together through prayer using resources from the Fire & Formation webpage or arising from within the group life together. Individuals are also resourced on the webpage. While the Book of Common Prayer is the natural place to turn for prayer and worship, rituals from other sources are identified and shared. Practices such as centering prayer, Anglican rosary, icons, and visio divina, and still other means of prayerful reflection can also be shared.

Webpage for Selected and Suggested Resources

Discover videos, books, and readings. Link to other websites for programs and opportunities to learn more. Spiritual Gifts Inventory. Looking for a spiritual companion, guide? Fire & Formation can assist. And more.

History of Fire & Formation

The origins of Fire & Formation lie in the encouragement of the Commission on Ministry, by the Rt. Rev. Kevin S. Brown soon after becoming Delaware's 11th bishop, to take up its canonical task to "support baptized laypersons for the exercise of their respective ministries." Bishop Brown hoped for the church's enlivening with an effort aligned with his emphasis on evangelism and the diocese's initiative of *Invite Welcome Connect*. Vitally important is every opportunity for the baptized to deepen their journey with Christ.

With this encouragement, members of the COM explored several possible approaches and seized on the vision of Fire & Formation. Fire & Formation is not a program, but rather an initiative with multiple means to the purpose of growing faithful Christians, and the further discovery by the baptized of the call of Christ upon their lives. Fire & Formation is not intended to replace the active engagement of laypersons within their congregations where the spirit leads them together, but rather to supplement and support. Fire & Formation is particularly aimed at supporting laypersons in congregations where clergy are able to serve only very part-time. Fire and Formation is an unfolding initiative that seeks to learn as it goes and finds ever new ways to stir the hope that is within us.

Fire & Formation is an extension of the work of the Commission on Ministry in the Episcopal Church in Delaware. The COM is joined in this effort by persons whose contributions are diverse as mentors, facilitators, content guides, and others.

Addendum A

Sample Covenant Group Process

A Covenant Group starts by engaging the Baptismal Covenant in the following manner.

- Group formation – member getting to know one another, group norms/group agreements, meeting times, selecting a convener and facilitator – in other words, some group “housekeeping”
- Gatherings include brief check-in by members, prayer, Respect Guidelines, * needed housekeeping (i.e., scheduling)

- Guidance for each session (suggestions):

- Sharing an experience of Christ
- Reflecting on commitments – praxis of the faith

Questions for reflection on the baptismal Covenant

- What does this look like in your life? In what ways are you intentionally engaging in this promise/vow? How do you experience others engaging in this? How does the scripture speak to this, to you? How do you understand God’s calling upon you to respond?

- Sessions focus on:

- Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers?

Subset areas can be individual sessions as well

- Teaching?
- Fellowship?
- Breaking of Bread?
- Prayer
- Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?
 - Evil & Sin?
 - Repent & Return?
- Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?
 - Proclaim?

- Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?
 - Serving Christ?
 - Loving neighbor?
 - Loving self?
 - Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?
 - Justice & Peace
 - Respecting dignity?
- Concluding (sample questions):
- What discovery meant the most to you from your learning together?
 - What challenged or challenges you the most?
 - What does it mean for you to “keep” your vows?
 - How has this time together deepened your relationship with God?
 - What are your next steps?
 - Would it be helpful to have others accompany you on your path forward? If so, how will you make this happen?

The group also needs to think about how it ends (or continues or continues with different membership).

More information and guidance are provided by COM Liaisons.