



LifeCycles

Christian Transformation in Community

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Welcome to *LifeCycles: Christian Transformation in Community*. *LifeCycles* is a process of ongoing spiritual formation within a ministering community. It is a way for adults to explore and deepen their faith, discover and use their gifts for ministry and be transformed by Christ. Each session in the initial three cycles is set within a liturgical framework, engages group members' personal experience and explores scripture, prayer forms and spiritual practices.

Congregations and dioceses join the *LifeCycles* community and participate in the use and ongoing development of materials, networks, and resources. Several pilot communities have been selected to use the initial materials in the coming year. Annual memberships in *LifeCycles* will be available to congregations and dioceses beginning in the summer of 2003.

A Brief History

This process of ministry formation has grown out of the experience of the Episcopal Diocese of Northern Michigan. Almost twenty years ago, the diocese began supporting congregations as they identified, called, and formed members of their faith community locally to take full responsibility for their own ministry. The diocese believes that every congregation is endowed by the Spirit with all gifts necessary to flourish. Those called came to form a Mutual Ministry Support Team: collaborating to nurture and develop the ministry of all baptized members of the congregation. After a time of preparation, the entire team was commissioned (and, those called to Orders, ordained) in the context of a Celebration of Baptismal Ministry of the entire congregation.

People from across the country and around the world were drawn to the simplicity, the empowerment of baptized persons, and the renewal of congregations inherent in this process. Responding to many requests, the diocese decided to revise its curriculum. After several years of work within the diocese, developmental partners were invited to join the writing team, bringing a wealth of experience from many quarters. The development of *LifeCycles* became a collaborative effort of the dioceses of Northern Michigan, Nevada, Wyoming, the seven dioceses of New England through the Harvesters Partnership, and LeaderResources as editor and publisher. What began as a way for Northern Michigan to update its ministry development curriculum has itself been transformed into the offering of a Christian formation process for the whole church. *LifeCycles* is formational. It can and should be tailored to meet your needs. It is published and distributed electronically to make this task easier.

LifeCycles generally is used in one of three ways:

- As a foundational program of spiritual formation and education for adults—especially in congregations seeking to deepen their members' faith lives and increase their members' participation and leadership in the life and mission of the church.
- In the context of that process, as a way to prepare and train local ministry support teams, some of

whom will be commissioned to specific roles, some ordained.

- To support the ongoing process whereby such local ministry support teams continue to build skills, gain knowledge, increase understanding, develop spiritually and support one another in the exercise of their mutual ministry.

If *LifeCycles* is to be used in with local ministry support teams, especially if group members will be licensed or ordained under the canons of the church, the congregation will need to confer with their diocesan bishop prior to starting the program. Dioceses that choose to establish local ministry support teams can obtain a diocesan membership and will receive additional materials and support to do that.

The *LifeCycles* Community

LifeCycles is a community of learners, learning and growing together. Individually, they learn from and support each other; but the group as a whole grows in faith, in its ability to work together and live as a community called to “restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ” (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 855). They also participate in a larger, global learning community, since the ongoing life of *LifeCycles* is fostered by groups learning from one other as they share gifts and skills. Groups will vary, responding to the needs of the local congregation or diocese. The assumption is that most groups will be either adult education groups or involved in some form of local mutual ministry process (often including local ordination) initiated by their diocese.

The materials offer *a way* (not *the way*) for the group to gather, and a focus for study. The process is designed to help group members learn information and skills as well as build relationships that support group members in their ministries as they deepen their spiritual lives. The group is a ministering community, and part of a larger ministering community (a congregation, a diocese, etc.). Each group member has a ministry through baptism, and needs to be supported in their ministry and challenged to learn and grow.

While this process is designed to occur locally, it is expected that networks, regional groups and perhaps national conferences will emerge to support the local *LifeCycles* groups. A web page is being developed to support the entire *LifeCycles* learning community. (<http://www.LeaderResources.org/LifeCycles>).

The Structure of *LifeCycles*

LifeCycles is designed to start with the first unit: *Encountering Our Story*. After completing this unit, each group works through the six units in each cycle in any order. Each cycle has six units; each unit, six sessions, for a total of 36 sessions per cycle. Since this process is designed to be ongoing, groups take anywhere from a year to two years or more to complete each cycle.

LifeCycles is **not** a linear “curriculum”—i.e., a course of study that progresses from a set beginning to a set end. Rather, it is a process of learning in community and in the midst of life. The group revisits key themes again and again, each time at a deeper level and/or from a different perspective.

It is helpful to have in mind the image of a spiral when thinking about *LifeCycles*. In a sense, spirals are circles on a journey – they may return to a place, but time and travel and experience transform everything. *LifeCycles* is an ongoing process of ministry formation. It is comprised of units that flow from our foundational statement:

We are a community, gathered and sent forth by the Spirit
to encounter our story,

to be washed and renewed,
to be fed with thanksgiving,
and to celebrate and serve the reign of God.

Each unit centers on a major theme (e.g., Gathered by the Spirit, or Encountering our Story), which group members consider through the lenses of experience, creativity, love, liberty, and justice. Each journey through the *LifeCycles* spiral also brings participants in conversation with the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, as well as the voices of history (that is, the lives of the saints).

The Session Format

Each session is designed to be two to three hours long. It will be difficult to engage the material in less than two hours. If you have a longer time frame you can spend more time in discussion and/or do more than one of the options suggested. The goal of *LifeCycles* is for participants to learn content, process and skills both as individuals and in community. This requires time and the active participation of all group members.

Each session follows a specific format based on the Eucharist. The community gathers, engages the Word, shares table fellowship, reflects on its experience and is sent forth. *LifeCycles* is based on a particular theology and practice that has developed over many years of experience. It is expected that the process will change as others use it. The session format includes:

- **Purpose:** Identifies the content and skills addressed in that session and what materials are needed.
- **Gathering Liturgy:** Each unit offers a suggested way for the gathering to unfold, including a different prayer form and teaching participants how to introduce it to others.
- **Check-in:** The group spends a few minutes checking in with each other, to identify who is missing, decide who will contact them during the week and name anything of significance that has happened—especially anything that impacts the group’s life.
- **Focus Question:** A brief warm-up exercise that invites each group member to connect his or her personal experience to the topic of the session.
- **Content:** Provides activities and information presented at a *basic* level, with a variety of more advanced options offered at the end of the session.
- **Breaking Bread:** A time for snacks, informal conversation and stretching.
- **Reflection:** The other major piece of work. Adults often learn best by doing and then reflecting on what they have done, drawing conclusions and then applying them to the next experience. Communities learn as a group when they share an experience and reflect on it. Therefore, this section is divided into two foci:
 - reflection on how the topic impacts each individual—their self-understanding, their relationship with God, their call and ministry in the church and in the world; and
 - reflection on how the topic impacts the group, their understanding of themselves as a group, their relationship with God, their call and ministry in the church and in the world.This time is also used to connect with the Scripture reading, prayer and reflection on ministry in daily life that participants are doing between sessions.
- **Housekeeping:** The group identifies who will lead the various parts of the next session—the assumption being that leadership roles will most often move around. They also review any preparation that needs to be done for the next session (usually the Background Reading section which is 1-2 pages long) and the daily Scripture and prayer for the next week.
- **Sending Forth:** Each session ends with a time of prayer and dismissal.

A chart outlining the first unit content is included at the end of this overview. The six sessions of the first unit are available as a downloadable file at: <http://www.LeaderResources.org/LifeCycles>. These files are currently in development and will be updated as work progresses.

Modules

Over time, a series of modules will be developed. A module is a design or plan for a half-day, a day or longer workshop, retreat or event that enables a group to explore a topic in-depth or to learn a specific set of skills. For example, a group that is especially intrigued by the creation stories in Genesis might have lunch together after church and invite the congregation to join them in a deeper look into why there are two creation stories, how they differ and what that means to us. Another group, which functions as a ministry support team, might have a Saturday workshop on preaching or a weekend retreat to learn about personality differences, learning styles and ways they can work together more effectively. These intensive learning experiences will be developed by groups and dioceses as needed and shared as templates for others to use in developing comparable modules for their situation.

Role of the Consultant

Each group has a consultant or companion who serves as a coach/mentor/midwife for the group. The consultant does *not* become the group's regular leader but rather helps them get started and then stay on track, reflect on their progress, etc. After the first few units, the consultant moves to the role of occasional attendee, available for consultation between sessions. The consultant also helps the group identify resource materials and people, design modules and share them with the *LifeCycles* community, or process difficulties encountered in the group's life and work.

The consultant is someone with a good understanding of small groups and the principles of learning communities, and who has skills in helping people reflect on and learn from their experiences. The consultant is not a teacher and is not "in charge" of the group. Their role is that of companionship as midwifery—asking questions and raising issues that enable the group to become more fully aware of its own giftedness for the journey.

Consultants are not required to complete any specific training, but opportunities for training will be offered. In addition, it is expected that consultants will join with other consultants in their region to support and learn from each other. Consultants, therefore, need to be self-starters and team players who value ongoing learning in community and have the ability to foster that type of learning in groups.

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LifeCycles

Christian Transformation in Community: Cycle I

UNIT	Encountering Our Story	Gathered by the Spirit	Sent Forth by the Spirit	Washed & Renewed	Fed with Thanksgiving	Celebrate & Serve the Reign of God
<i>Background Scripture</i>	Genesis & John	Joshua/Judges & Synoptic Parables	Exodus & Matthew	Leviticus/Numbers & Mark	Deuteronomy & Acts	1,2 Sam/1,2 Kings & Luke
<i>Prayer Experience</i>	Guided Meditation	Canticles	Collects			
<i>Skill</i>	Communication	Prayer postures	Writing Collects			
<i>Spiritual Practice</i>		Hospitality				
SESSIONS						
#1 - Experience	Telling Our Stories (Ps. 46)	Places where We Gather in Our Lives (Ps. 106)	Our Own Experiences of Being Sent (Ps. 16)	Living and Playing with Water	Telling the Stories of our Meals	Baptismal Ministry
#2 - Creativity in the Hebrew Scriptures	The Community Tells Its Stories of Creation: Genesis (Ps. 36)	Created for Places of Promise (Ps. 147.1-6)	Creating a People: Exodus (Ps. 17)	Created as a People Who Thirst	Created as a People Who Hunger	Apostolic Ministry
#3 - Love in the Christian Scriptures	Stories of Loving in John (Ps. 136)	Gathered to be a Community of Boundless Compassion (Ps. 145.8-13)	Church Built on Forgiving-Love: Matthew (Ps. 89.1-14)	Washed by Waters of Love: Mark	Love Known in Sharing a Meal: Acts	Priestly Ministry
#4 - Liberty in the Saints of History	Being Set Free: Absalom Jones & Dorothy Day (Ps. 146)	Gathered to Be Free in Christ: Paul of Tarsus & Harriet Tubman (Ps. 135)	The Sacred Journey: Brigid & Brendan (Ps. 19.1-6)	Wading into the Waters: Sojourner Truth & Oscar Romero	Free to Eat, Free to Labor: Caesar Chavez & Mary Magdalene	Diaconal Ministry
#5 - Restorative Justice & Community	Creating Our Story of Restorative Justice (Ps. 103)	Gathered as a Sign of Justice (Ps. 82)	Sent to Heal (Ps. 85)	River of Renewal	Caring : Welcoming to the Table	Calling Forth Ministry
#6 - Review & Celebration						