



Focus on the
five Practices
A Congregation-Wide Initiative

Leader Manual

Robert Schnase

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**FOCUS ON THE FIVE PRACTICES:
A CONGREGATION-WIDE INITIATIVE,
LEADER MANUAL**

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From the Author

Dear Friends,

Radical Hospitality. Passionate Worship. Intentional Faith Development.
Risk-Taking Mission and Service. Extravagant Generosity.

Since the publication of *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, hundreds of congregations and thousands of study groups and leadership teams have discovered the power of these edgy, provocative words to clarify the mission of the church, stimulate creative new ministries, and unite the congregation with a common language that stretches us to excellence. These help make the mission of the church—to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world—more understandable, and therefore more achievable. These are practices that congregations repeat and deepen and improve upon constantly, and the most fruitful congregations are those who constantly ask themselves, “Is our hospitality—our inviting and welcoming—not only friendly but also *Radical*—of the highest quality, using our best efforts? Is our worship *Passionate* and alive and connecting and excellent, or is it mediocre and routine? Are our small-group ministries and Bible studies merely acceptable; or are they *Intentional*, purposeful, and effective for all people? Is our mission work helpful and convenient; or is it *Risk-taking*, moving us out of our comfort zones to make a difference in the lives of others for the purposes of Christ? Is our giving safe and obligatory; or is it joyful and *Extravagant*, the way all biblical giving was? The adjectives—Radical, Passionate, Intentional, Risk-taking, and Extravagant push every disciple and every congregation to reconsider how we move toward greater excellence and fruitfulness for the glory of God.

For these practices to shift the culture of a congregation toward greater fruitfulness at all levels, the words and images must move beyond the pastor and lay leadership into the language and self-understanding of every small-group ministry, class, study, choir, and outreach project—and also into the lives and homes of our volunteers and members and guests. There is an unmistakable power to using a common language throughout the congregation to stimulate and empower ministry in Christ’s name.

Focus on the Five Practices: A Congregation-Wide Initiative has been prepared in response to the requests of many pastors and lay leaders who want more tools to help embed the Five Practices into the culture of their congregations. At the heart of the initiative is a five-week congregation-wide intensive focus of learning and practice. Resources are provided to help with a five-week sermon series, a daily devotional book entitled *Cultivating Fruitfulness* is available for use by every household, and five separate *Planning Workbooks* are included for more in-depth and thorough conversations that lead to strategic planning and follow-through for long-term congregational change. These resources are supplemented with DVD video clips about the Five Practices; worship resources; communication and graphics ideas; and a flexible organizational design that helps congregations prepare for, organize, and follow-up the five-week initiative.

The Five Practices are bigger than any book or set of resources, and they have a life of their own. I have been amazed how these simple practices, intensified by strong adjectives, have captured the imaginations of church leaders and have pushed them to higher quality ministry. Swept along by the Spirit of God, these words have leaped from pastor to pastor, layperson to layperson,

congregation to congregation, conference to conference as powerful tools provoking us to more focused, intentional, and creative ministry. Imagine how these practices can shape your congregation as they move deeper into the language and discipleship of your members.

God calls us to greater fruitfulness in our ministries in various and diverse contexts. These practices are relevant for congregations large and small, for rural and urban and suburban churches, for new congregations and those with long histories. The Five Practices are rooted in the formation of the church in the second chapter of Acts and in the reforming of the church in the days of John and Charles Wesley. I pray that this time of focused reflection and learning for your church leaders, staff, volunteers, members, and friends will deeply enrich and empower the ministry of your congregation, and will lead to greater clarity and commitment to the ministry of Christ. Vibrant, growing, fruitful congregations practice Radical Hospitality, Passionate Worship, Intentional Faith Development, Risk-Taking Mission and Service, and Extravagant Generosity. I pray we grow in these practices so that we can fulfill the highest purpose ever entrusted to us: sharing the good news that God has met our highest hopes and deepest needs in Jesus Christ.

Yours in Christ,
Robert Schnase

Overview of Focus on the Five Practices: A Congregation-Wide Initiative

The foundational book *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* introduces and explores the fundamental practices critical to all vibrant, growing, fruitful congregations:

- Radical Hospitality
- Passionate Worship
- Intentional Faith Development
- Risk-Taking Mission and Service
- Extravagant Generosity

Now this accompanying *Leader Manual & Media* resource offers a comprehensive yet flexible plan for making the Five Practices a congregation-wide focus. This in-depth immersion experience involves every member and ministry of the church, engaging the entire congregation in conversation and commitment related to the Five Practices and the specific ways these practices can enable the church to fulfill its purpose and mission: making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

As the Five Practices are embedded into the culture of the congregation, laity, and staff alike will:

- participate in reading and praying about the Five Practices and recommitting to excellence and fruitfulness in ministry;
- grow in their understanding of the “why” of church life, increasing their motivation and passion for ministry;
- gain practical clarity about how the people and programs of the church fit into the mission of the church;
- develop a unifying, common language that stimulates action toward greater Christian discipleship;
- experience a shift in culture and attitude—from maintenance to mission, from inward to outward, from “What’s in it for me?” to “How can I help?”;
- make personal and congregational commitments to new ministry initiatives;
- and gain a reinvigorated sense of purpose and connection to God and the ministry of Jesus Christ.

The initiative is designed to reach the entire congregation through a three-pronged approach:

1) A core Leadership Team oversees planning and implementation, including recruiting additional support teams as needed (e.g., Prayer Team, Communications Team, Children/Youth Team, Events Team, etc.).

2) Five Planning Groups focus intently on the Five Practices. (Planning Groups are assembled to focus on one practice each, using a specific *Planning Workbook* provided for each practice.)

Existing classes and other small groups may be encouraged to study the book *Five Practices of Faithful Congregations* if desired.)

3) The entire congregation participates through worship, at-home devotional readings, and special events.

The core congregational emphasis is Five Weeks, during which the pastor preaches on the Five Practices, the entire congregation reads the corresponding devotional book, *Cultivating Fruitfulness*, and five Planning Groups use individual *Planning Workbooks* to develop ideas and strategies. However, from planning and preparation to follow-through, the initiative involves four phases lasting 11-15 weeks.

Phase 1 is the Planning Phase, which is a time of concentrated reading, talking, praying, and planning for the Leadership Team and other support teams. This phase lasts three weeks and begins about six weeks prior to the core Five Weeks initiative.

Phase 2 is the Communications Phase, which is a time for creating church-wide interest and awareness. This phase takes place after all teams have been recruited and materials have been ordered, beginning about three weeks prior to the Five Weeks.

Phase 3 is the Learning Phase, which is the core Five Weeks period of intensive congregational focus, worship, learning, planning, and practice. During this time, the entire congregation participates as the Five Practices are emphasized in preaching, teaching, Planning Groups, special events, and the daily private devotional reading of *Cultivating Fruitfulness* in every household.

Phase 4 is the Follow-through Phase. In this period the congregation adopts, initiates, and evaluates the new activities, actions, or ideas stimulated by the church-wide initiative. This phase begins at the conclusion of the Five Weeks and may continue as part of church planning for several weeks or months. (See the timeline provided on pp. 23–25.)

This schedule includes time for planning together, thinking about the purpose of the church, inviting the congregation into an exploration of the Five Practices, and creating new possibilities. Depending on the size of your congregation and how much you'd like to accomplish now, your plan may be streamlined or quite detailed, requiring only a few weeks or up to twelve or more weeks of work. The goal is to work and pray together as a community of faith to envision what your congregation can become to the world around you for the purposes of Christ. Only you and your team can put a limit on what you can do from there!