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# Reflecting with God: connecting faith and daily life in small groups

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**Reflecting with God:  
Connecting Faith and Daily Life in Small Groups**

Abigail Johnson

Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004

124 pages, \$18.34 Softcover

In his 1991 book *The Once and Future Church*, Loren Mead identified the need in the church of the 21st century for lay people to be the primary theologians because they are on the missionary frontier: “We need the laity to take authority as the church’s operating theologians, acting on the frontier with confidence in the power of the Spirit, but also searching and reflecting to discern God’s purposes.” *Reflecting with God* provides a practical handbook for helping people learn to reflect theologically on their lives.

Johnson defines a theologian as “someone who intentionally reflects on his or her faith in light of the biblical story and tries to live that faith in daily life.” (15) For Johnson, theological reflection is a spiritual discipline to be learned by practice. Just as it is only by praying that we know how to pray, she encourages us to “jump right in and begin the experience” of theological reflection. (71) She outlines a structured process for thinking theologically by looking at a life situation or event through a series of questions. While this process could be used as a personal discipline, the main thrust of the book is the creation of a theological reflection group where participants can practise by preparing written presentations to the group. The group responds by making additional faith connections and raising questions for further reflection.

Her writing contains the wisdom of someone with experience in leading such groups. She presents a practical, step-by-step guide for group facilitators and participants, and includes a chapter on the “wrinkles in the fabric,” those challenges that can arise in a small group, and some ways to handle them. In this book, you will not find thorough expositions of the theological basis for ministry of the laity or theories of adult education and theological reflection, but drawing on the resources in these fields, Johnson has created a useful process to be used in congregations.

In a chapter titled “Outward Ripples,” the author describes some of the lingering effects that such small groups had on the ongoing life of congregations where she served as pastor. People who participated felt

a greater sense of belonging and a deeper knowing of each other. The pastor became more aware of the kinds of spiritual and theological questions that people carried, and this awareness impacted worship and preaching. Stronger connections were made between people's daily lives and their faith, and they began to see themselves as ministers and theologians. "Theological questions were becoming part of people's vocabulary and consequently part of church structures." (109) In committees, people began to ask, "Where is God in this?"

Through my experience as an adult group facilitator, I know that people want to know how God is with them and at work in their lives. This book will be an important resource for equipping adults to discern God's presence and their calls to ministry in their daily lives. With Abigail Johnson, I encourage you to "jump right in and begin the experience."

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### **Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations**

Gil Rendle and Alice Mann  
Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2003  
288 pages, \$30.57 Softcover

This is a handbook on leadership and strategic planning – a handbook in which the authors, veteran consultants with the Alban Institute, present and explore approaches, tools, resources that they have used in congregational consultations. They are candid in asserting that:

Leaders need to help people find worthy goals. They need to have a plan to structure work and maximize the resources of the congregation. They need to build agreement in the congregation about the plan, so that people are willing to move together toward the goal... We do not believe that planning centers on problem solving. The leader is not responsible for discovering the perfect solution or for creating a perfect planning process to get people to arrive at a perfect plan. Instead, the task of the leader *is to help the people have a purposeful and meaningful conversation about who they are and what they believe is important to do.* (xi-xii, authors' emphasis)