

Preparation for G108 - What Makes a Community Work?

Almost everyone considers him- or herself a member of a community, or several communities at once. Examples include neighborhoods, workplaces, churches, schools, sports teams, art or music groups, political action groups, and many more. Different communities have different purposes, but successful ones have many characteristics in common such as shared goals, the ability to fulfill an important need, and sustaining high levels of member commitment.

Think about communities you belong to, or have belonged to in the past. (Please exclude our church community for now; we'll focus on that another time.) Make a list of them and narrow the choices down to three or four of the most important ones. To make the exercise more balanced, include both good and bad experiences. Then use the following questions, or questions of your own choice, to reflect on what worked or didn't work about these communities.

1. Which communities offered the most positive experiences for you and the other members? Why? Could you articulate the values of these communities? (Think about how the groups were structured, their goals, what they accomplished and how they enriched the lives of the members and/or society.)
2. How have you integrated these groups' values into other areas of your life? (What did you learn from being in these successful communities? How would you think, act, or believe differently if you hadn't been in these communities?)
3. What did you accomplish within these communities that you couldn't have accomplished by yourself? Could you have done these groups' work alone even if you had wanted to? What talents or resources did the groups have that you didn't?
4. What would you change in these successful communities if there is/was room for improvement? (Are there ways this community could keep from stagnating? Should it branch into other areas or serve different types of people?)
5. Have you ever outgrown a good community experience? What was it that changed about you or the group? Do you have any regrets about leaving the group? Are you still in touch with anyone there?
6. Which of your communities would you consider unsuccessful or a negative experience? Why? What did you learn from being in them? Is there anything you could have changed to make them work better? (Perhaps there a problem with the structure, goals, or leadership. Were the efforts under-funded in terms of time commitment or money? Were there conflicts between members? Were the groups incompatible with your values or lifestyle? Did you learn anything from the experience about what groups to avoid in future?)