

Is Your Parish a Witness of Joy?

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Opening Prayer

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful.
Enkindle in us the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created,
And you will renew the face of the earth.
Lord, by the light of the Holy Spirit
You taught the hearts of your faithful,
In the same Spirit, help us to relish what is right
And always rejoice in your consolation.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Let's get to know one another

Roll the dice and answer the question that corresponds to the number:

- ▶ 1. If I won a million dollars, I would ...
- ▶ 2. What is one gift you recognize in yourself?
- ▶ 3. One question I would like to ask God is ...
- ▶ 4. One place in the world I would love to visit is ...
- ▶ 5. If I were President for a day, the law I would pass is ...
- ▶ 6. One of the best gifts I ever received was ...



Focus

- ▶ What is a Small Christian Community?
- ▶ History of Small Christian Communities
- ▶ Faith-sharing Experience
- ▶ Elements of Storytelling
- ▶ Seven Challenges from *The Joy of the Gospel*
- ▶ Seven Lessons - Role of Planning
- ▶ A Practical Approach - *Be My Witness - Formation for the New Evangelization*

What is a Small Christian Community?

“Small communities are a means for Christians to live the mission more fully through communion with other Christians. Support for the value of small communities is found in three principles:

1. the communitarian nature of the church
2. renewed focus on the Word of God
3. greater understanding of the social mission of the church.”

From Small Christian Communities - A Vision of Hope for the 21st Century

History of the Small Christian Communities

- ▶ Small house churches in the New Testament
- ▶ The Church in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s
 - ❖ Latin America
 - ❖ North America
 - ❖ Europe
 - ❖ Africa
 - ❖ Asia and Oceania

From Small Christian Communities Today by Joseph Healey and Jeanne Hinton

Reflecting on Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Questions for Faith Sharing

- ▶ How have I felt God call me to some form of pastoral ministry or social action?
- ▶ Who has touched me most by their carrying out the pastoral and/or social mission of the church?
- ▶ When have I had a personal experience of membership in a community?

Elements of Storytelling

There is value and power in telling our stories and listening to others to interpret the meaning in our lives. Some elements include:

1. the Gospels are narratives - actual stories of Jesus
2. when we share our story, we are telling how God is acting in our lives - it is often in the telling itself, that we experience the Spirit's presence
3. as we hear others talk about their lives, we realize how God is present and active in their lives
4. not only do we hear the narrative of Jesus' life but we start to apply the Word to our own lives
5. as we listen to one another we have a sense of the Spirit acting in the community

Five Elements of Small Christian Communities



Seven Challenges from *The Joy of the Gospel*

- ▶ 1. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of **missionary enthusiasm!** (#80)
- ▶ 2. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of **the joy of evangelization!** (#83)
- ▶ 3. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of **hope!** (#86)
- ▶ 4. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of **community!** (#92)
- ▶ 5. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of **the Gospel!** (#97)
- ▶ 6. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of **the ideal of fraternal love!** (#101)
- ▶ 7. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of **missionary vigor!** (#109)

Seven Lessons - Role of Planning

1. Refocus all ministries on the kingdom of God
2. Simplify and personalize the message these ministries proclaim
3. Build community and hospitality into all ministries
4. Serve with pride, zeal and enthusiasm
5. Emphasize the basics of the faith
6. Put a high priority on lay leadership
7. Foster a deep love for Scripture

From *The Parish Guide to the New Evangelization* by Fr. Robert Hater

Reflecting and Sharing

- ▶ Which of the previous seven challenges/lessons spoke to you? Why?
- ▶ Why are hospitality and community important for a parish's approach to creating a small group ministry?
- ▶ What are ways that a parish can incorporate a "missionary disciple" spirit into its organizational structures?

Be My **WITNESS** Sean mis **TESTIGOS**

Christ-centered formation
Spirit-led action

A Meditation for Sowers

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view. The Kingdom of God is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.

Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection, no pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the Church's mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about: We plant seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and do it very well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are the workers, not master builders, ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future that is not our own.