



Resources for Developing Small Christian Communities

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Building Small Christian Communities

Plan of Action: Guideliness for the Director of Small Christian Communities

Purpose: to evangelize our own parishioners

1. to give them an informal environment (the home) in which to grow in relationships with each other
2. to give them weekly opportunities to study scripture and the doctrines of our Catholic faith
3. to help them become more comfortable in reaching out to and serving one another
4. to encourage them to use this learning experience to reach out to less active parishioners, inactive Catholics and other strangers, and to evangelize others by serving them as living examples of the love of Christ and the compassion of the Church.

How

1. Promote the SCC concept to parishioners
 - a. bulletin announcements
 - b. letter to all parishioners
 - c. pulpit announcements
 - d. mention made in homilies
 - e. witness talk at all the Masses
 - f. signs/posters
2. Where there is an expressed willingness to form an SCC:
 - a. choose who will be group facilitators
 - b. provide instructions on how to moderate the meetings
 - c. provide scripture study materials for each member to use
 - d. set a starting date and begin
3. To encourage more to get involved, hold a Mass in each neighborhood:
 - a. schedule Masses at whatever rate the priests can handle, NOT TOO OFTEN
 - b. find a family willing to host a Mass
 - c. send out invitations to each family in the neighborhood
 - d. celebrate the Mass
 - e. invite those who are at the Mass to return weekly and become an SCC
 - f. serve refreshments after Mass to provide an opportunity for socializing
4. Continue inviting more parishioners to join SCCs
 - a. periodically run bulletin announcements
 - b. invite new parishioners personally
 - c. assign new members to a group
 - d. contact them to invite them



Ideas for Developing Small Christian Communities

To make people aware of the value of joining an SCC, and to stir up within them the desire to make the commitment to attend the weekly meetings, the following plan is recommended:

1. Begin to have on-going bulletin announcements explaining the value of SCCs.
2. Begin to have periodic witnesses given at Masses by people who've experienced SCCs in the past. Have sign-ups after Mass on each occasion.
3. Offer a Bible Study course with the same emphasis as a Parish Mission to increase interest in and to prepare parishioners for discussing the Sunday readings within SCCs.
4. As soon as #2 begins, call upon the people who signed up after the weekend Masses and start holding Neighborhood Masses in their homes. Invite all registered parishioners who live in that neighborhood, expecting that only about 20-30% will attend the Neighborhood Mass. The Masses can be spaced out about one a week, so as not to overburden the priests.
5. Those who attend the Neighborhood Masses are then invited to return weekly for SCC meetings. Expect that only about 10% will join.
6. After people have been meeting in SCCs for a few months, use them as witnesses to repeat #2 and continue building interest in SCCs and continue getting additional neighborhoods to hold Home Masses. The witnessing and starting new groups is an ongoing process.

NEEDED:

- witnesses for speaking at Masses
- volunteers to handle sign-ups at all the Masses when witnesses speak (without this, parishioners would sign up in the Church Office)
- SCC coordinator who:
 1. divides neighborhoods and arranges people in groups
 2. advises hosts of Home Masses how to prepare
 3. trains leaders of SCCs on how to guide the meetings
 4. distributes scripture study materials to SCC leaders
 5. plans twice-a-year retreats where all SCC members come together



Sample Schedule for Starting SCCs

1. **SPRING-TIME:**

- The priests promote the concept of SCCs at every opportunity.
- In the Prayers of the Faithful at every weekend Mass, from now on a prayer should be offered for the development/continuation of SCCs.
- Bulletin announcements.

2. **MID-MAY:** Kick-Off Meeting inviting people who are interested in getting involved.

3. **END OF MAY:** At the end of all the Masses, priest introduces the new parish SCC Director and will speak a few minutes about SCCs; they will ask people to volunteer to train as group facilitators.

4. **JUNE:** Monday evenings 7:30-9:00 Training for Facilitators.

5. **SUMMER MONTHS:** Facilitators will continue to meet with each other using the SCC meeting format.

6. **AUGUST:** Catholic Faith Formation Retreat, to get parishioners interested in studying scripture and in journeying together in small communities.

7. **SEPTEMBER, 1st WEEKEND AFTER LABOR DAY:** Sign-Up Sunday to join SCCs; includes witness speakers to promote sign-ups; includes sign-up cards & pencils in all the seats to be filled out & returned in offering baskets. (Volunteers are needed to replenish cards & pencils before each Mass.)

8. **SEPTEMBER, 2nd SATURDAY:** 9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. (includes lunch provided by church) training for new facilitators and to refresh previously trained facilitators.

9. **SEPTEMBER, 2nd SUNDAY:** Priests give push at Masses for late sign-ups.

10. **SEPTEMBER, 3rd SATURDAY or SUNDAY:** 1:00 - 3:00 p.m. SCC Start-Up Retreat, for all those who signed up to meet, socialize & have a practice meeting.

11. **SEPTEMBER, LAST WEEK:** SCCs begin to meet in homes.

12. **OCTOBER:** Commission Ceremony during a popular Sunday Mass

John 14:12



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Agenda for SCC Kick-Off Meeting

*"The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will instruct you in everything, and remind you of all that I have told you."
(John 14:26)*

1. Participants in the meeting introduce themselves and state why they are here.
2. Introduction of SCC Director by the Pastor
3. Prayer Service (see below)
4. Facilitators: their role, personality type, skills, training, etc.
5. Tentative schedule for starting SCCs in the parish
6. How to get people to join SCCs
7. Who might give the witness talks at Masses?
8. Study materials for SCCs
9. Closing blessing by Pastor

If you believe in Me, you will do the same works I do.

KICK-OFF PRAYER SERVICE

Read Acts 2:1-11

Commentary:

The word "Pentecost" means 50. The Feast of Pentecost was celebrated about 50 days after Passover and was a feast of thanksgiving for the harvest. The first fruits of the crop were offered to God that day. All Jewish men were expected to come to the temple for the feast. The city was usually full to overflowing, and it was fitting that this day was chosen as the day the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles.

Pentecost is, in reality, the birthday of the Church, and the Christian religion was to be a church for the whole world. The old law was given by God to Moses for the Jews only. The new law, given by Christ and confirmed by the power of the Holy Spirit, was for all peoples. That means you, and that means today, right where you are. The very fact that you are interested in getting involved in Small Christian Communities is proof that the power of the Holy Spirit is drawing you near to Him.

Let this be the day that you invite Jesus Christ (once again) to come into your heart and become the Lord of your life. Take a few silent moments and confess to the Lord all that is unworthy within you, and then ask him to let his Holy Spirit fill you with the power and peace that surpasses all understanding. Let the power of the Holy Spirit flow through you, and you will enjoy the same enthusiasm in your faith life as the Apostles did.

Questions for faith sharing:

How can your family or friends identify the Spirit of God's presence in you? What comes forth from your mouth, and what do you need to do so people will be astonished by your words?

Prayer time:

What do you need to get rid of in your life that blocks the Holy Spirit's gifts from flowing through you? Or what do you want to ask the Holy Spirit to give you that will help you become a better witness of the Gospel? At this time, each person offers up to God a prayer for these things; this can be done silently, on paper, or shared aloud.



Start-Up Retreat for SCCs

"Celebrating Our Faith" - A plan for a 4-hour retreat

This retreat can be held on two consecutive nights, on a Saturday, or condensed into one evening. It's based on the Creed that we proclaim at Mass, divided into 4 parts:

1. What does it mean to believe in One Father?
2. How are our lives changed by believing in Jesus the Son?
3. Why do we need the Holy Spirit?
4. How important are we to the one, holy, catholic, apostolic church and the communion of saints?

Speakers may come from the parish, but the planning team might prefer to have a special guest speaker to draw more people to the retreat. In this case, they might want to add a third night to the retreat, and give the whole first night to the guest speaker. Skits can be used in-between talks to help illustrate them. Talks should last no more than 20 minutes each, unless you have brought in a special guest speaker.

Suggested handout: Copy and distribute the Nicene Creed. This can be placed on the back side of each night's program.

SUGGESTED BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENT:

Celebrate Our Faith!

Come join your fellow parishioners in a celebration of our Catholic faith. This retreat will stir up your enthusiasm and inspire new energy for living the faith in everyday life and difficulties. You will have an opportunity to sign up for a small faith-sharing community, but please come even if you're not interested in participating in a Small Christian Community. Refreshments will be served afterward. Mark your calendar for (dates and times inserted here).

Topics include: What does it mean to believe in God the Father? How are our lives changed by Jesus? Why do we need the Holy Spirit? How important are you in the family of church and the communion of saints? We will have Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament on the first night, and we will close with Mass on the second night.

You won't want to miss (insert special guest speaker here and brief bio, if you have one)!

PART ONE

Opening Song: Any using the theme of celebration or evangelization

Leader: Welcome and introductions

Speaker/Couple 1: What does it mean to believe in One God, the Father Almighty?

Fit your own story of faith into these main points:

1. God the Father is sometimes hard for us to feel close to because our human parents were not perfect. Some were even abusive or never around. We tend to think God is the way our parents were.
2. Tell how your relationship with the Father was healed, or how you met the Father.
3. God is the Father of all, but we have prejudices and there are some people we'd like to think are not loved by God as much as we are. What kinds of people do we think are not deserving of His love? Perhaps you could talk about someone (no names please) who is very difficult to get along with, someone who has caused you major problems.
4. We are all brothers and sisters, adopted by God our Father. We are called to love everyone, just as the Father loves everyone. How can we reach out to the brothers and sisters we don't usually spend time with?

Song: The Lord's Prayer ("Our Father")

Speaker/Couple 2: How are our lives changed by believing in Jesus the Son?

Fit your own story of faith into these main points:

1. Describe what your life was like before you gave your whole heart to Jesus? Were you sinful? Were you unhappy? Were you mixed up and confused? How did you damage your life as a sinner?
2. Who was Jesus in-the-flesh for you? How did the witness of the way they lived their lives bring you to conversion?
3. After you realized that Jesus died for you so that your sins would be forgiven, what changes happened in your life, in your attitudes, in your priorities, or in your goals?

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament

(Approx. 5-10 minutes)

Refer to *Order for the Solemn Exposition of the Holy Eucharist (OSEHE)*, published by authority of the U.S. Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy and any Diocesan Guidelines on Eucharistic Adoration, Exposition & Benediction

1. At the start, the priest or deacon may want to invite people to think of what areas of their lives still need conversion and to offer these to Jesus as they pray silently.
2. **Song** at the end: "Jesus is Lord" or some other meditative song about Jesus.

Leader: Invite people to return to Night Two with prayer requests for people they know who are in need of evangelization and conversion.

PART TWO

Opening Song: Any using the theme of celebration or evangelization

MC: Welcome and introductions

Speaker/Couple 3: Why do we need the Holy Spirit?

Fit your own story of faith into these main points:

1. Describe a time when you were asked to get involved in a ministry at church and you felt inadequate. Why did you feel inadequate?
2. Relate this to a Saint or biblical prophet who was an ordinary person asked to do a big work for God, someone who might not have been adequate except for the help God gave them (eg., Moses, Jeremiah, Isaiah, the Virgin Mary)
3. What gifts of the Holy Spirit have helped you do the work of God?
4. How did you develop your relationship with the Holy Spirit? How have you learned to hear His voice and trust in His power?

Song: Any about the Holy Spirit

Speaker/Couple 4: How important are we to the one, holy, catholic, apostolic church and the communion of saints?

Fit your own story of faith into these main points:

1. Parents' faith makes a lasting difference.
2. We all belong to a bigger family, the communion of saints. There are many members of the one, holy, catholic church who don't attend church, or if they do, they don't get involved in community life. But many of these are ready to be evangelized.
3. Tell a story of how you used to be unconnected to the church community. What got you interested in joining RENEW or other small faith-sharing groups?
4. We belong to an apostolic church. The word "apostle" means "one who is sent forth to share the faith." At the end of every Mass, we are all sent forth into the world to share our faith with others. We are a large community during Mass. Small communities are where we learn how to share our faith. It's also where we get the wonderful opportunity to see others grow in their faith. Describe what it means to you personally to be an apostle, a faith-sharer.

End with Mass

Make sure that Mass starts immediately, by going into the processional song right after the last talk, or give the people something to watch or listen to while they wait. Ideas:

1. A soloist sings a meditative song
2. Participants can write the names of people who need conversion, to pray for them during Mass. These names can be dropped into a basket and taken to the altar during the offertory.
3. Participants gather around the altar or move to sit closer together up front.



Training for SCC Facilitators

OPENING PRAYER SERVICE

1. Read Isaiah 6:1-8 "*Here I am, send me!*"
2. Each person takes a turn telling God why you are here.
3. We offer our training to the Father, in the name of Jesus, through the Holy Spirit.

1. As a facilitator, you are fulfilling Christ's command to His disciples:

- A. Mark 16:16
"Go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News to all creation."
- B. EVANGELIZATION = helping others grow closer to God by *sharing*
 1. Share what He means to you
 2. Share what He has done for you
 3. Share honestly your struggles and be vulnerable
 4. Share stories from your *life* more than from your intellectual knowledge
 5. Share Jesus by being genuinely concerned about each member
- C. Concentrate on *sharing*, not discussing
 1. What's the difference between sharing and discussing?
 2. Discuss what your name means
 3. Now share what your name means to you personally
 4. Notice the difference!
- D. Practice by faith-sharing with other facilitators, using "Group Sharing" questions.

2. As a facilitator, you are a servant in the model of Jesus Christ

- A. Read Galatians 5:13 "serve one another in love"
- B. Imitate Jesus' style of leadership
 1. Be closely connected to God, with an active prayer life
 2. Strive always to grow spiritually
 - a. Be teachable and open to constructive critiquing
 - b. admit your struggles and failings
 - c. Communicate your desire to do God's will
 - d. "I must decrease so Christ can increase"
 3. Know that you are called by God to the ministry of facilitating an SCC
 4. Have an intense, unconditional love for everyone
 5. Consider the needs of others to be as important as your own
 - a. Have enough free time to be in caring relationship with each member of your group
 - b. You are not ruled by self-centeredness, laziness, lack of dependability, forgetfulness, control issues, or unhealthy emotional needs
 6. Look for ways to wash the feet of those in your care
 - a. Read John 13:1-5, 12-17
 - b. How will we wash the feet of the members of our SCCs?
 1. Humility (we are not better or superior)
 2. Promoting unity through acceptance (unconditional love)
 3. Forgiveness for those who make things difficult
 4. Generosity by being genuinely interested in each member (their needs are as important as your own)
 7. Be fully committed to this ministry

3. The necessity of commitment

- A. As a facilitator, you are making a commitment to *one year* of service
 - 1. This may be renewed annually
- B. If you cannot fulfill your commitment due to legitimate reasons:
 - 1. Notify your SCC Director as soon as you suspect your term might have to end
 - 2. Share with your group the need for a replacement
 - 3. Have the group pray for a replacement
 - 4. Tell your director whom you recommend as a replacement
 - 5. The replacement must go through formal training as soon as it's available
 - 6. Co-facilitate with the replacement for as long as possible
 - 7. The replacement facilitator takes over when needed
- C. The meetings can take place in your home, or switch to a member's home, or rotate among as many homes as members are willing
- D. Remind members to call you when they have to miss a meeting
 - 1. If you have to miss a meeting, assign a temporary replacement
 - 2. This replacement must be someone you know can handle it
 - 3. The meeting switches to the replacement's home for that meeting
 - 4. If you have to miss meetings often, you need an assistant facilitator who's been formally trained
- E. Remind members that the SCC meetings are top priority for this time slot
 - 1. Only family needs and job responsibilities take higher priority
 - 2. Why is commitment and continuity so important
 - a. To build community
 - b. To build relationship with God
- F. Keep an attendance record
- G. As a facilitator, you have the greatest responsibility to work on your own spiritual development, so that you can:
 - 1. Set an example of commitment
 - 2. Set an example of doing the "homework" to be prepared
 - 3. Set an example of learning from the scriptures
 - 4. Genuinely care about each member and their needs and concerns
 - 5. Personally follow the guidelines in the hand-out "Belonging to a Small Christian Community"
- H. All facilitators must first experience:
 - 1. Being in an SCC as a member for at least 2 months
 - 2. Formal training
 - 3. Periodic, pre-scheduled visits by the Director of SCCs
 - 4. On-going formation in SCC retreats, facilitator renewal workshops, etc.

4. Building community

- A. See "Format of the SCC Meetings"
- B. Contact people who've missed more than 2 meetings in a row
- C. Make sure each person gets an opportunity to share during the meetings
 - 1. At first, you will be doing most of the sharing while inviting others to share
 - 2. After 4 weeks or so, everyone will share freely without your prompting
 - 3. Do not pressure any one person to share, just gently invite
 - 4. Make sure no one monopolizes the time
 - a. clue: They will make comments on everything shared by others or jump in before others get a chance to speak
 - b. Get others involved by asking, "What do you think about that?"
 - 5. Guide the meetings by asking simple, open (not yes/no) questions such as, "How do you think that applies to your experiences?"
- D. Help the group accept each person's opinions with love
 - 1. If you can't approve of someone's opinion, nevertheless affirm the person. God Himself will enlighten that person as his spiritual journey proceeds.
 - 2. If an opinion becomes a complaint about the Church or a person, turn it into an opportunity for healing:
 - a. Ask the rest of the group if someone has once faced a similar situation and learned to handle it like Jesus would

- b. If no one answers, ask the whole group how they think Jesus would handle a similar situation
 - c. OR ask the group what good might come out of this type of situation
 - 3. If an opinion stirs up trouble, defer the topic to your director or priest
 - 4. Prepare yourself by using the "Common Challenges" page.
- E. Attend retreats and other parish functions together
 - 1. Cancel your meeting during the week the other functions are held
 - 2. Spend time greeting community members after Masses
- F. At least twice a year, preferably more often, hold a community party
 - 1. Members take turns hosting the parties
 - 2. It can be a BBQ, pool party, holiday celebration, etc.
 - 3. Everyone helps by bringing food, paper goods, etc.
 - 4. Invite all family members and fallen-away group members
- G. The trust level must grow
 - 1. Trust comes from feeling safe within the group
 - a. If someone wants to remain quiet, don't push him to talk
 - b. Watch for the potential of someone's feelings getting hurt, and gently steer the conversation in another direction
 - c. When someone shares a problem, ask the group if anyone can share how they got through a similar situation
 - d. Watch body language for indications of openness, hurt, fear, discomfort, confusion, etc.
 - e. Empower others to join in with opening and closing prayers
 - 2. The more trust grows,
 - a. the more people will open up and share personally
 - b. the more they will become receptive to new personal growth
 - 3. Review the handout "Belonging to a Small Christian Community" with each new member
- H. Be an inclusive, not exclusive group
 - 1. If non-Catholic spouses or friends want to visit or join the group, they are welcomed warmly
 - 2. No one is ever kicked out. If someone becomes too disruptive, hand the matter over to your director
 - 3. If your group is specialized (eg., women only) and someone wants to visit who does not fit, welcome him. If he wants to join permanently, invite him to speak to your director.
 - 4. The ideal size of a group is 8 to 10 people; 6 = minimum, 12 = maximum. If more than this wants to join, refer them to your director.
- I. As a group, come up with a name for your SCC.
 - 1. Decide a theme: what is important to everyone in your group? (eg., evangelization, love, journeying to holiness, etc.)
 - 2. Pick a name that depicts this theme (eg., a Saint, book of the Bible, fruit of the Spirit, etc.)
 - 3. Plan a time to create a banner that depicts your theme and name
 - 4. The banner should be displayed at all meetings, and will be used in special parish functions

5. Measuring your effectiveness as a facilitator

- A. Prayerfully review the meetings after people leave to discover how you can better serve the community
- B. Do the meetings begin and end on time?
- C. Is refreshment/fellowship-time important to the people?
- D. Do your members invite others to join?
- E. Are your members getting more involved in parish work and events?
- F. Are you aware that their lives are changing, even if only gradually?
- G. Are they glad for opportunities to get together outside of SCC meetings?
- H. Use the "Self-Analysis" questionnaire.

6. What a Small Christian Community is NOT

- A. It is NOT a Bible Study group
 - 1. It is a faith-sharing group
 - 2. The Bible is used as a lamp to shed light on what is happening in our daily lives
- B. It is NOT a time for religious instruction
 - 1. It is a time for personal testimonies
 - 2. It contributes to the learning process.
- C. It is NOT a time for intellectual discussions (eg., worldly wisdom, theological teachings, "safe" and impersonal talk)
 - 1. It is a time for personal sharings
 - 2. The intellect does get stimulated as we listen to others share
- D. It is NOT a social club
 - 1. It is a spiritual experience
 - 2. Fellowshiping enhances the spiritual experience
- E. It is NOT a gossip session
 - 1. All personal sharings are kept confidentially within the group
 - 2. No one, present or absent, is to be spoken of unkindly
- F. It is NOT a counseling session
 - 1. It is an opportunity to receive and give support
 - 2. If someone does need counseling, refer them to other resources

7. Keep the focus and purpose of the meetings on the spiritual level

- A. Prayer is an important part of the SCC meetings
 - 1. Begin each meeting in prayer
 - 2. Encourage members to take turns doing the opening prayer
 - 3. End the meetings with prayer
- B. The Scriptures are the focus of the meetings
 - 1. Watch the time to be sure that all readings are dealt with
 - 2. When conversation leads away from the Scriptures, bring the focus back
 - a. First let the tangent develop if it seems appropriate and helpful
 - b. Listen to the Holy Spirit tell you when it's been enough
 - c. Find a way to tie the sharings back to the assigned Scriptures
 - d. Or gently interrupt and put the focus back on the Scriptures
 - e. To avoid hurt feelings, say something like, "That's excellent. Let's talk about that more during refreshments."
- C. Silence in a meeting is not something to be afraid of
 - 1. Give people time to reflect and pray silently, as they collect their thoughts
 - 2. Don't think that silence means you have to fill in the gap by speaking, but wait for others to speak, so you don't monopolize the time
 - 3. Look for clues that someone wants to speak but is hesitating, and gently invite them to share

8. God chooses the weak so that it is *His* strengths that change the lives of those to whom we minister.

- A. This keeps us humble because we know it's Him, not us, doing the works
- B. In Scripture, we see this happen to the greatest of God's servants
- C. Recognize that your inadequacies are actually your greatest blessings.

CLOSING PRAYER SERVICE

- 1. Read Isaiah 6:1-8 "Here I am, *send me!*"
- 2. Read together: "Prayer to Become God's Instrument"
- 3. Receive an anointing for ministry



Common Challenges a Facilitator Might Face

If you believe in Me, you will do the same works I do.

Use the following questionnaire as an example of a hand-out for the training of Small Christian Community facilitators. This is meant to be a springboard for teaching how to guide the group meetings.

Group members might bring up the following touchy issues.

Give and ask others to give gentle but truthful responses.

What would you say in response to the following challenges?

What do you like and not like about the responses given?

USE THESE 4 KEYS:

1. Use the truth firmly but gently
2. Avoid "pat" cardboard answers
3. Admit your own struggles
4. Rely on God to speak through others

1. "All I ever hear about when I go to church is money, money, money."

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

A. Yes, it does seem that way, but actually it's only mentioned about twice a year at our parish. I feel okay with that. Perhaps it seems like more because of the second collections, but there's really no pressure to contribute to those.

B. I know I need to grow in my own ability to be generous with the Church. Giving to the Church is an expression of our love for God. I've learned that it shows Who or what we place our trust in the most.

C.

2. "My life is so messed up, I doubt that God really cares about me."

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

A. I used to think that, too, but I've discovered that God loves us just the way we are, no matter what we've done.

B. God cares so much about you, Jesus died on the cross for you. Remember how He socialized with the so-called "scum" of society? Mary Magdelene was a messed-up prostitute, and Jesus healed her. She was the first one He appeared to after His resurrection! I think about that when I go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

C.

3. "Years ago, a priest was really cruel."

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

A. (Listen with sympathy before responding.) I once was treated in a similar way. I didn't get over my hurt until I forgave him and asked Jesus to minister to me. Forgiveness doesn't mean that we're okaying what the person did, and we don't have to wait until the person wants forgiveness. Choosing to forgive sets us free from what's been done to us.

B. That person who hurt you does not represent the whole Church. We are the Church. This Small Christian Community exists so that we can care about each other.

C.

4. "I disagree with Church teachings."

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

A. I, too, have struggled with some of the rules of the Church. I have found, though, that if I ask God to help me understand why the Church holds fast to a teaching I don't like, eventually I see it in a new light. For example...

B. Sometimes I find myself absorbing the world's way of looking at morality. The world says we can make up our own minds; if we decide a sin is no longer a sin, then it's not a sin. But I actually prefer knowing for sure what's right and what's wrong. The uncertainty of a changeable morality leaves me feeling insecure. God speaks through the Church, so I've come to rely on the Church to tell me what God's truths really are.

C.

5. "I'm divorced, so I can't receive Sacraments. I've been excommunicated."

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

A. There's a lot of misinterpretation of the word "excommunication." I suggest talking to the pastor about this.

B. If you're not remarried, you probably can receive the Sacraments. Talk to the pastor about it. I have found him easy to talk to.

C. I know people who have gone through the annulment process. They found it very helpful and very healing for their lives today.

D.

6. "I don't like the changes that happened in the Church." OR: "I don't like the changes that are happening in our parish."

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

A. Yes, change is difficult. But I've learned from my experiences that when things change, that is when I grow the most. I get out of my comfort zone and I'm open to new insights and spiritual strength. For example, when

B. I didn't like it when such-and-such got changed, but when I asked God to help me understand it, I was able to accept the change and even to appreciate it.

C.

7. "I believe that God not only works through the Church, but also through astrology (or some other New Age, occult or Eastern religious practice)."

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

A. I have tried that approach, and when I asked the Holy Spirit, Who is the Spirit of Truth, to teach me more about these things, I discovered that scriptures very clearly say they are an "abomination" to God, because they counterfeit what God really offers. They did not bring me closer to God, but in fact brought fear (and what else?) into my life.

B. I read Terry Modica's book on this subject and found it very helpful. (Just a little commercial here -- this is NOT a required response!)

C.



Self-Analysis on Your Qualifications as a Facilitator

For use during Small Christian Community training

If you believe in Me, you will do the same works I do.

Read Colossians 3:12-14.

Give yourself a number from 1 to 10, 1 being very low and 10 being very high.

COMPASSION

I feel deeply for the hurt and pain of others in my neighborhood.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

KINDNESS

I reach out with words and acts of comfort when someone is feeling down.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

HUMILITY

I am supportive of others without calling attention to myself.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

GENTLENESS

I deal with the hurt and pain of others as a parent cares for a child.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

PATIENCE

I turn the mistakes and sins of others into opportunities for understanding.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

HELPFULNESS

I am sensitive to someone who is having a bad day and I find ways to take the pressure off.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

FORGIVENESS

I am able to mend broken relationships without having to win and without trying to defend my position.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

LOVE

I am good at giving myself away for the benefit and growth of others, as Christ gave Himself for me.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Which quality scored the highest? _____

Which quality scored the lowest? _____

In what ways can I improve the lowest quality?



A Prayer to Become God's Instrument

O, my heavenly Father,
I give all of my life to you in the name of Your Son,
my Lord Jesus Christ, and through the power of Your Holy Spirit.
I have heard You calling me,
and I choose to follow where Your Son leads me.
I want to help others find their way into Your kingdom.
I want to serve others so that they can experience Your love.
Use me.
Use the hurts and sufferings I've endured.
Use the talents, the resources, the time, the experiences,
the spiritual growth and everything else
You have given me.
Use me.
Help me to love all people unconditionally
to reveal Jesus to others through me.
Help me to grow in my desire to love all people.
Today, and every day, help me to decrease
so that You may increase in me.
Help me to love purely, humbly, and generously.
Show me how to receive more of Your love
so that I have more love to give.
Heal me of every obstacle that holds me back from serving You.
I give You permission to change me.
Here I am, Lord, I want to do Your will.
Amen.

by Terry A. Modica



Bulletin Announcements

FOR GETTING FACILITATORS:

DO YOU HAVE THE DESIRE TO DO A LITTLE EXTRA AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE WITH GOD'S HELP? WE NEED MORE FACILITATORS FOR NEW SCC GROUPS THAT ARE BEING FORMED! It's easy! It's painless! Training is provided. Qualifications: 1) love God, 2) love the members of your group, 3) say yes! That's all. You don't need to know the Bible, you don't have to have any special skills. Being a facilitator means starting and ending the meetings on time, making each member feel welcome, and serving as liaison with the SCC Director. Call (phone number) for more information.

FOR WEEK 1:

Q: What value might a Small Christian Community have for you?

A: It takes a little sacrifice to attend a meeting in someone else's home week after week, but the new spirituality-based friendships we gain from the meetings help us experience more of God's love. How? God reaches out to us through other people. Through them, He gives us acceptance and companionship for the Christian journey and support for the struggles of everyday life.

Watch the bulletin every week for more answers to common questions about Small Christian Communities. If you'd like to submit a question or find out more about joining or leading an SCC in our parish, call _____.

FOR WEEK 2:

Q: The readings of Mass: Do they make sense for your needs? Do they help you with your everyday struggles?

A: In Small Christian Communities, there's always new insights we receive from the Scriptures, insights that benefit us the rest of our lives. By studying the weekend liturgy's readings with others who have similar needs, we discover that God is speaking to us directly. Then, the Mass itself becomes more meaningful, more alive!

Watch the bulletin for more answers to common questions about Small Christian Communities. If you'd like to submit a question or find out more about joining or leading an SCC in our parish, call _____.

FOR WEEK 3:

Q: What is a Small Christian Community?

A: A group of 8 to 10 people meet weekly in someone's home to study Sunday's scripture readings. Each person discovers, at their own pace, how God has been actively loving them and helping them. In this environment, mutual trust grows, and members share their individual faith stories. The group becomes a small church in the large parish, so that everyone experiences the concern, prayer and emotional support of the Body of Christ.

(Name of Your Church) Parish will soon be forming Small Christian Communities. We are looking for facilitators; training will be provided. To find out more about joining or leading an SCC, call

_____.

FOR WEEK 4:

Q: Why should I join a Small Christian Community?

A: In today's busy world, our lives are in upheaval. Relationships fail. Much seems out of our control. Our consumer society preaches "the good life" but we can't quite feel that good no matter how much we strive for success. As individuals, we don't seem very important. We feel alone, dissatisfied, empty, tired. And yet, as Christians, we search for God's help. In small parish groups, we discover the conversion that leads to true inner peace, caring relationships, spiritual success, the importance of being God's partner, and the fulfillment of our purpose in life.

(Name of Your Church) Parish will soon be forming Small Christian Communities. We are looking for facilitators; training will be provided. To find out more about joining or leading an SCC, call _____.

FOR WEEK 5:

Q: Where is the love?

A: One purpose of a parish is to give people an experience of love. How often do you leave church more aware of being loved? It's difficult to feel loved when attending Mass with several hundred other people. A Small Christian Community is a little church where members get to know each other, care for each other and develop a sense of responsibility for and involvement in each other. In an SCC, you will know beyond all doubt that you are loved by others in your parish. You will be known and respected and admired as an individual person instead of forgotten as a face in the crowd.

(Name of Your Church) Parish is developing Small Christian Communities. We are looking for facilitators; training will be provided. To find out more about joining or leading an SCC, call (name & phone of SCC director).

FOR WEEK 6:

Q: Do you have enough faith?

A: You do have some faith, but you don't trust it, right? You're not alone! We're all in need of letting others join our faith journeys so we can receive caring support as we learn to trust our relationships with Christ. God is such a mystery, but He becomes more understandable when we share our faith--or lack of faith--with those who've had similar experiences. Small Christian Communities provide us with the opportunity to take our spirituality more seriously and to discover Who God really is for our everyday lives.

(Name of Your Church) Parish is developing Small Christian Communities. We are looking for facilitators; training will be provided. To find out more about joining or leading an SCC, call _____.

FOR WEEK 7:

Q: What skills are needed to be a group facilitator?

A. Small Christian Communities need committed facilitators in order to survive and grow and provide spiritual growth and bonds of friendships. The role of a facilitator is fairly easy; it is NOT to teach or control the meetings, nor to provide expertise on the Bible or Church teachings. Facilitators FACILITATE! They serve as God's partners in guiding the meetings to start and stop on time, encourage participation, and create an atmosphere of prayer and friendship. Facilitators will discover how awesome it is to be God's partner in this format!

(Name of Your Church) Parish will be starting Small Christian Communities in the Fall. We are looking for facilitators; training will be provided. To find out more about joining or leading an SCC, call _____.

FOR WEEK 8:

Q: What kind of person makes a good group facilitator?

A: Are you a spiritual person? Do you like people? Do you have a desire to serve God? If you answered yes to these three questions, God might be urging you to get involved! Caring about others is more important than having leadership experience. Commitment is greater than knowledge of scriptures and Church teachings. A willingness to be stretched by God as He serves others THROUGH YOU you is very necessary. A facilitator is God's instrument of love.

(Name of Your Church) Parish will be starting Small Christian Communities in the Fall. We are looking for facilitators; training will be provided. To find out more about joining or leading an SCC, call _____.

FOR WEEK 9:

Q: What if I can't commit to weekly meetings?

A: SCC meetings must take a high priority in order for the experience to make a difference, but being part of a Christian community means your needs are understood and you are cared about. Therefore, if you miss any meetings, you will be accepted, not condemned. Don't say no to joining a Small Christian Community just because you have a busy life or an unpredictable schedule. God is inviting you to take time out to nurture your relationships with Him and other parishioners. Your life will be enriched, and you will find peace in the midst of the busy-ness of the world.

(Name of Your Church) Parish will be starting Small Christian Communities in the Fall. We are looking for facilitators; training will be provided. To find out more about joining or leading an SCC, call _____.

FOR WEEK 10:

Q: Are they Bible Study Groups?

A: No. Although the weekly meetings are built around a guided study of the readings from the weekend's Masses, the focus is on being community. The experience is not so much the study of scripture; rather it is the sharing of insights and experiences THROUGH the scriptures. It is a time of faith growth. It is journeying with people who care about you as you take new strides in your spiritual walk. It is discovering from the insights of friends what God is doing in your life. And it is a time of making a difference in the faith growth of others.

(Name of Your Church) Parish will be starting Small Christian Communities in the Fall. We are looking for facilitators; training will be provided. To find out more about joining or leading an SCC, call _____.

FOR WEEK 11:

Q: How will people be grouped?

A: When joining an SCC, you choose the time of day, day of week, location, and general groupings (young adult, seniors, parents of young children, etc.) and you are encouraged to gather your own friends and neighbors into your group. But Jesus is the head of each group, and He will form bonds between you and the people you least expect for friendships. In the world, personality conflicts often cause division in groups, but in the Christian environment of small church communities, we experience genuine love for and from all kinds of people.

(Name of Your Church) Parish will be starting Small Christian Communities in the Fall. We are looking for facilitators; training will be provided. To find out more about joining or leading an SCC, call _____.

FOR WEEK 12:

Q: What does it mean to be part of a group called "community?"

A: This is more than a bunch of people gathering for a meeting every week. SCCs are people of similar beliefs meeting WITH ("com") UNITY. Oneness does not mean alikeness; rather it means agreeing to join in the journey of uniting ourselves to God and His love. Members feel connected to each other due to sharing their faith week after week, but it is more than that. Groups will occasionally gather outside the meetings for social events such as barbecues and pool parties, with all family members invited. During parish missions or retreats, they often attend together and go out for coffee afterward. Why? Because the love flowing between the members cannot be contained within a mere hour and a half meeting per week.

(Name of Your Church) Parish will be starting Small Christian Communities in the Fall. We are looking for facilitators; training will be provided. To find out more about joining or leading an SCC, call _____.

FOR WEEK 13:

Q: Can non-Catholics join?

A: Yes. Although these are Catholic groups, and members will feel free to share their experiences of growing in faith through the Blessed Mother or the Eucharist (for example), no one who wants to join will be excluded. Non-Catholic spouses or friends are always welcome. The meetings will NOT be times of debate or discussing differences; rather, the meetings WILL be opportunities of accepting the differences and sharing what unites us. The unifying force will be Jesus Christ, and His instrument for implementing unity will be the scriptures from which the faith sharings emerge.

(Name of Your Church) Parish will be starting Small Christian Communities in the Fall. We are looking for facilitators; training will be provided. To find out more about joining or leading an SCC, call _____.



Homily Help to Invite People to Join an SCC

Give this to your priest(s) in preparation for a homily or announcement during Mass and/or other parish events.

1. Small Christian Communities are fellowship — the parish is a large community, but it's easier to feel connected in a small community.
2. Small Christian Community meetings are based on scripture and how it applies to everyday life. You'll get to know more about God and his love for you through the scriptures that will be used in the SCC faith-sharing meetings.
3. Small Christian Communities are about rediscovering God, finding meaningful relationships, strengthening family life, and preparing for the new millennium.

AT THIS POINT, INVITE UP THE LAY WITNESS.

CLOSE WITH THE FOLLOWING INFO:

4. Small Christian Communities will renew our whole parish because its foundation is prayer. For this reason, we are asking everyone to make a decision to pray for our Small Christian Communities. Whether or not you will be joining a faith-sharing group, we need your prayers. The ushers will now pass out a sign-up form. Even if you don't join a group, please take one home and hang it on your refrigerator or somewhere easy to see as a reminder to pray for the people who do join and for the success of Small Christian Communities in our parish. After Mass, look for our Small Christian Communities people if you'd like to find out more information.



Outline for Lay Witness During Mass

5 minute-presentation after Communion

Include the following information in your presentation, in any order that works for you.
Thanks so much for doing this service!

1. Introduce yourself (unless the priest already did!)
2. Tell how long have you belonged to an SCC
3. Tell why you joined an SCC
4. Describe what your life was like before you joined one, and how the SCC enhanced your life
5. Mention how it built your faith and your relationship with God
6. Mention that it built friendships -- How important have these friendships become?
7. The SCCs are now starting at your parish
8. Belonging to other parish groups is not the same as belonging to an SCC, because the SCC's purpose is to share your faith journey with fellow parishioners while centering on the Sunday scriptures. Being a *community* means the people matter to each other, even during the rest of the week outside of meetings.
9. In the bulletin is an insert (hold it up for all to see) with a sign-up form for joining an SCC. It's important that you fill this out and return it to the church office after Mass today or during the week. At the end of the week, the groups will be formed. You will be contacted soon after with information about the group you are assigned to.
10. End with a reminder that this is a special opportunity.

John 14:12



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Sample Invitation to New Parishioners

If you believe in Me, you will do the same works I do.

Dear New Parishioner:

The Parish Family of (name of church) would like to welcome you warmly into our community. To convey this warmth to you, however, can be difficult in a congregation as large as ours is at the Saturday evening and Sunday Masses. It's not unusual for new parishioners to feel lost and ignored in the crowd.

So we offer you many choices for getting to know us and for receiving the friendships available to you here. One of these choices is our Small Christian Community program. These SCCs are small groups of 8 to 12 people who meet informally in someone's home. SCC members gather weekly to fellowship and share the Word. The meetings last an hour and a half, followed by refreshments, and are centered around the Sunday scripture readings. These are not Bible Study groups, the discussions are not theological, and it doesn't matter how familiar you are with scripture. We supply Bible commentary books that provide insights into the readings, and during the meetings, group members share what the week's scriptures mean to them personally, and how they have or want to apply them to their own life situations and struggles.

SCC members are spiritual companions on the journey of life. They give each other understanding, support, prayer, encouragement and hope in the midst of difficulties. They form bonds of friendships that bring God's unconditional love to each one. God's love and the parish's warmth and caring become concretely evident!

If this appeals to you, or if you'd like to find out more about it, give me a call. Choose which time of week fits your schedule.

I pray that your life is greatly enriched by your involvement in (name of church) Parish!

Name of SCC Director
Phone number
Email address



Sample Letter for New SCC Facilitators

If you believe in Me, you will do the same works I do.

Dear ---,

Congratulations on saying yes to being God's servant as a facilitator of a Small Christian Community for (name of church) Parish!

With this letter you'll find the list of members of your group. Note that it includes a place on top for the name of your group. At your first meeting, invite the group to start thinking of a name that depicts what is spiritually important to them, and if they can't agree upon a name at that meeting, ask them to think about it and make a final decision during the second meeting. As soon as your name is chosen, please inform me what it is.

Additionally, have your group begin to plan a banner and choose a time (perhaps your next meeting) to complete the banner. The banners will be needed for the SCC Commissioning Rite at (which) Mass on (what date). At the beginning of that Mass, everyone will process into the church together as a group, with one member carrying the banner. Inform your group of this date at the first meeting, and remind them about it in subsequent meetings.

Also on the list of members is a blank space for birthdates. At the first meeting, find out each person's birthday and write it on the list. Make copies of the list for each of your members. The reason for the birthdates is to encourage members to celebrate each other's birthdays with special refreshments and congratulations during a meeting near the birthday.

During the first meeting, hand out the study materials and show how it is to be used. Before getting into the scriptures, however, ask each member to introduce themselves, explain why they joined, and tell a story about their name. Use this as an opportunity to describe the difference between sharing and discussing.

Hand out the guidelines page called "Belonging to a Small Christian Community" and go over each item. Emphasize the importance of starting the meetings on time.

The day after your first meeting, call me (number here) to tell me how it went. I plan to visit with your group soon to give each member the opportunity to get to know me.

Thanks for all you are doing!

God bless you!
(name), SCC Director



Format of the SCC Meetings

For facilitators to use during their meetings.

Meeting Duration: 1-1/2 hours, plus fellowship time with refreshments

START AND END ON TIME!

1. Welcome everyone and introduce new members
 - a. Be careful not to allow too much time gabbing and getting reacquainted; save that for refreshment time
2. Opening prayer, asking God:
 - a. to be present in the meeting
 - b. to anoint each person's mind and heart for sharing and learning
 - c. to guide the meeting and keep the conversation on track
 - d. to be with those who couldn't make it or are late
 - e. to fill everyone with the Holy Spirit, the teacher of truth
 - f. and end by giving God glory and praise
3. Read 1st scripture and commentary
4. Faith sharing on that scripture; ask the members:
 - a. What part of that related to you and your life?
 - b. How does this help you with your daily life?
 - c. What struck you the most? Why?
 - d. And/or use questions given by the commentary
5. Repeat #4 for 2nd scripture and Gospel reading
6. Life Application just before meeting ends
 - a. What goals do these scriptures give you for this week?
 - b. How would you like these readings to change you?
 - c. What would you say was the theme God gave us in this meeting?
7. Closing prayer
 - a. Summarize the main lessons learned in the meeting and thank God
 - b. Ask God to help make these lessons take root in us and change us
 - c. Open the prayer to petitions made by anyone who wants to offer them
 - d. Offer up all unspoken needs and the needs of those not present
 - e. End with the "Our Father," a "Hail Mary" and a "Glory Be"
8. Announcements
 - a. Share whatever news is pertinent (upcoming retreat, info about a member who is absent, etc.)
 - b. Assign who will bring refreshments next week (use predictable schedule)
9. Fellowship with refreshments, which members take turns supplying



Guidelines for Belonging to an SCC

Community facilitators should give this to all group members and go through it together.

1. Familiarize yourself with the week's study materials before the meeting.
2. Remember that each person is important because the Holy Spirit dwells within us.
3. Listen to everyone with your heart.
4. Share from your heart; *don't* discuss what you know in your intellect, but *do* share what you feel in your heart and what you have learned from experience.
5. Apply the scriptures to your own life and share personal insights and *stories*.
6. Listen with empathy for the innermost feelings of others.
7. Accept everyone for who they are and what they believe.
8. Protect all confidences; personal sharings do not leave the room!
9. No one is made fun of, regardless of viewpoint or lifestyle.
10. Do not talk unkindly about a member who is not present.
11. If someone wants to cry, don't tell him to stop, but do offer comfort.
12. When someone shares a problem, *don't* try to fix or rescue, but *do* share how you got through a similar problem.
13. Don't be judgmental; you don't know the other's intentions, motives, etc.
14. Look for other members after Masses and make a point to converse with them.
15. Now and then, plan to meet other members for Saturday breakfast or invite them to other group events you normally participate in, such as holiday parties.
16. When members are absent from a meeting, give them a call during the week to let them know they were missed and to share how the meeting went.

John 14:12



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Commissioning Rite at Mass for SCCs

to be held annually

SCC Commissioning Rite announcement

Mass this morning is a very important time for the members of the Small Christian Communities of our parish. We now have (how many?) groups meeting in homes, sharing scripture and supporting one another in friendship and spiritual growth. Today, as one large parish community, we will honor our Small Christian Communities. Those who belong to these groups will stand before you and make a commitment to God to continue their spiritual journeys as a community. You will see them processing in at the beginning of Mass, carrying their banners which represent what their community means to each of them.

THEME: UNITY

SCC Commissioning Ceremony After Communion

EXPLANATION

PRIEST: Today our parish focuses on the importance of Small Christian Communities. The Church of (name of your church) Parish is one large community made up of a number of little churches, where pilgrims on the journey of faith are no longer strangers to each other, but true friends bonded in Christ. In this Liturgy, we celebrate the beginning of our Small Christian Communities, and we pray for their continuation and growth. And now, to introduce and call the members of our communities is our director of Small Christian Communities, (name).

SCC DIR: Let those who belong to Small Christian Communities please come forward.

(SCC MEMBERS COME FORWARD AND FACE THE ASSEMBLY.)

COMMITMENT OF THE SCC MEMBERS

PRIEST: I congratulate you on choosing to journey with each other as you seek to learn from the scriptures and grow in your relationship with God. Please show your commitment to this pilgrimage of faith by answering "I will" to the following questions:

Jesus said that whenever two or more are gathered in His name, He is there with us. Will you open yourselves to receive the love of God from the other members of your Small Christian Community?

SCC MEMBERS: I will.

PRIEST: Jesus told His disciples to love one another the way He has loved us. Will you give God's love to one another by caring about each other, serving each other, and listening to each other?

SCC MEMBERS: I will.

PRIEST: Jesus prayed for His disciples to be united as one, just as He and the Father are one, so that the world may be converted by this love. Will you make every effort to journey together in unity with your Small Christian Community, with (name of church) Parish, and with the universal Catholic Church?

SCC MEMBERS: I will.

If you believe in Me, you will do the same works I do.

COMMITMENT OF THE PARISH COMMUNITY

PRIEST: (TO THE CONGREGATION) My brothers and sisters of (name of church) Catholic Community, please respond "I will" to the following question:

Will you pray for and encourage the growth of Small Christian Communities in our parish?

CONGREGATION: I will.

PRIEST: Let us pray now in unity for these people who have said yes to God's call to journey together for growing in faith and in understanding of the scriptures. Please extend your hands in prayer toward these people.

(BRIEF PAUSE)

Lord God,
source of unity, source of love,
bless the members of our Small Christian Communities.
Through Your Holy Spirit, teach them, guide them,
and help them to grow in relationship with each other
and in relationship with You.
Bring in new members to increase the number of communities we have.
Empower them all to reveal Your love in such a way
that others are evangelized by the unity and service they see.
We ask this in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

BLESSING OF THE BANNERS

PRIEST: At this point, I invite one member from each Small Christian Community to present the banners to the Parish Community.

(SCC MEMBERS RETRIEVE THE BANNERS AND HOLD THEM UP BEFORE THE CONGREGATION)

PRIEST: The banners you see here are a witness of the value of belonging to a Small Christian Community. Each one testifies to the meaning and purpose of each group. I will now pray a special blessing upon them.

(WITH HANDS OUTSTRETCHED OVER THE BANNERS)

May God, the Creator of all things,
who never ceases to work His wonders among us
bless these banners
for use in our Small Christian Communities.
May His blessings enlighten our minds,
so that we may know Him more deeply
and strive always to spread His truth and His peace.
And may almighty God bless you all,
in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

PRIEST: (TO THE CONGREGATION) My brothers and sisters, let us now show our support and recognition of these Small Christian Communities by applauding.

(SCC MEMBERS STAY IN PLACE, WAITING TO PROCESS OUT WITH THE PRIEST, LECTORS AND ALTAR SERVERS.)



Become a Dream-Sharing Group

If you believe in Me, you will do the same works I do.

Outreach: Every SCC's mission

Let's look at the role of friendships in ministry. In 2 Tim. 4:9-17, Saint Paul is unhappy about losing some of those with whom he'd been sharing the work of evangelization, and he is looking forward to others joining him. Psalm 145:10-18 reminds us that we do not tell the glory of God's kingship alone: "Your faithful ones (plural) bless You." In Luke 10:1-9, Jesus is sending His disciples into ministry in pairs.

God designed us to need community. We experience Him most fully through others, and the more "others" we have in our lives (i.e., others who share true faith in Christ), the more we receive whatever we need from God. Most of the time, God provides whatever we need *through people*. When was the last time you needed a hug and Jesus appeared to you in the flesh in your living room? Were you ever in need of extra cash to pay some bills and God floated dollar bills down from the sky onto your back yard? I'm still waiting for Him to call me on the phone to listen to me as I sort out how to best deal with my problems.

However, God did not design us to need community solely for our own benefit. He provides whatever others need *through us*. Community is a balanced, two-way experience. We are neither to neglect others in their needs nor reject others in our needs.

Finally, God designed us to need community for the sake of continuing Christ's work in the world, just as we see happening in today's Gospel reading. God hand-picked who would be in your Small Christian Community so that you would fit together as a team who could serve the world's needs. It's no coincidence nor is it any accident or random placement who your community members are. There is a much bigger plan going on than just saying getting together once a week to share your thoughts on the scriptures.

What common interests do you have? What gifts and talents does your community contain? What do you and the others like talking passionately about on how to make the world a better place? Become a "dream-sharing" group! If Jesus joined your meeting to ask you all to get involved in a special project, a mission, or an outreach of some sort, what would each person imagine He might say?

Enjoy the discussion! Anything goes as you toss ideas and dreams around. Nothing is too absurd to verbalize in front of friends. You're not committing to anything, at least not until a few of you jump out of your seats whooping it up with a great big, "Let's do it!"

There IS something for which God has brought you into each other's lives. It could be just a plan for your mutual benefit, but what if He has a bigger idea in mind? What ministry would you share?