Small Christian Communities

According to Pope John Paul II, Small Christian Communities are a tremendous source of bringing more life into a Parish. These communities are born out of the enthusiasm for the faith engendered by the processes mentioned above. Pope John Paul II writes: “One way of renewing parishes, especially urgent for parishes in large cities, might be to consider the parish as a community of communities and movements. It seems timely therefore to form ecclesial communities and groups of a size that allows for true human relationships. This will make it possible to live communion more intensely, ensuring that it is fostered not only “ad intra”, but also with the parish communities to which such groups belong, and with the entire diocesan and universal Church. In such a human context, it will be easier to gather to hear the word of God, to reflect on the range of human problems in the light of this word, and gradually to make responsible decisions inspired by the all-embracing love of Christ. The institution of the parish, thus renewed, “can be the source of great hope. It can gather people in community, assist family life, overcome the sense of anonymity, welcome people and help them to be involved in their neighborhood and in society. In this way, every parish, and especially city parishes, can promote nowadays a more person-centered evangelization and better cooperate with other social, educational and community work.” The Church in America, (Ecclesia In America)

As enthusiasm for the Faith grows, parishioners become aware that their mission as members of the Church is to reach out to share and invite others into the Catholic Faith. As a result, the parish must work hard to put on a welcoming face. Simply putting information in a parish bulletin or announcing items from the pulpit is not sufficient. People need to be personally invited. This is reflected in the second goal proposed by the Bishops. One of the signs that Evangelization is becoming integrated into the life of a parish is it’s growing concern for those Catholics who have fallen away from the practice of their faith. There are processes available to reach out to these Catholics and welcome them back. One process enjoying much success in our diocese is Landings. This program, originated by the Paulist, Father Jac Campbell, is parish based and, like the RCIA process for those who are not Catholic, Landings is mentored by a trained team of the laity under the supervision of the Pastor.

Parish evangelization is ongoing. As people come and go, as young people grow into adults and adults move into their golden years, the parish must continue to assess its needs and change to accommodate them. The work of the Evangelization Committee never ends although its membership should be renewed periodically. It is important that this committee become integrated in some way with the Parish Pastoral Council or its equivalent if it is not already one of its missions.

Finally, Pope John Paul II states, “Moreover, this kind of renewed parish needs as its leader a pastor who has a deep experience of the living Christ, a missionary spirit, a
father's heart, who is capable of fostering spiritual life, preaching the Gospel and promoting cooperation. A renewed parish needs the collaboration of lay people and therefore a director of pastoral activity and a pastor who is able to work with others. Parishes in America should be distinguished by their missionary spirit, which leads them to reach out to those who are faraway”. *The Church in America, (Ecclesia In America)*

According to the third goal of our Bishops, it is not enough just to build enthusiasm and invite others into our faith journey. There has to be outward signs that parishioners are fostering the Gospel values preached by Jesus. The Bishops have stated: “The Catholic Church has developed a strong social doctrine concerning the common good - a tradition based on the proper ordering of society and supporting the inalienable dignity of every person. In the United States, this tradition has been cultivated in the advocacy of religious liberty; the pursuit of social justice, especially for those left out of today’s society; just economic policies; a consistent ethic of human life; and striving for peace in a nuclear world”. Therefore, it is important that parishioners are helped to examine how they live out the teachings of Jesus within their community, whether at work, at recreation or within any other avenue of socialization.