

NAFSCC E-Newsletter

North American Forum on Small Christian Communities

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Happy Easter!

The NAFSCC E-Newsletters sent bi-monthly to members

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1. News and Ideas

Celebrating 20 Years of Small Church Communities in the Archdiocese of Hartford

Robert K. Moriarty, S.M.

Diocese of Hartford

The Archdiocese of Hartford is in the midst of celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the beginnings of small church communities. Hosted by the Pastoral Department for Small Christian Communities, about 350 people gathered this past September 23 for a festive anniversary dinner at St. Thomas Seminary in Bloomfield, CT. The evening began with an outdoor reception on the circle in front of the seminary. At the dinner that followed, Archbishop Henry J. Mansell preceded his prayer before the meal with a call to silence, a reflection question and then the invitation to conversation in threes. His questions: "What is it about your experience of small church community that has been especially meaningful to you?" "And," he continued, "if you are the guest of someone here tonight, but not yourself a member of a small church community, what might draw you to join?"

Following the meal, people gathered in the chapel for a special program. Music and song, personal reflection statements from several people, an anniversary talk by Fr. Art Baranowski of the National Alliance of Parishes Restructuring into Communities and reflections from Bro. Bob Moriarty, S.M. and Archbishop Mansell made up the program.

In his reflections, Phillip Kenney, a senior at Yale and a small church community member at St. Thomas More Chapel at Yale for most of his time at the university had this to say: "I believe that small church communities should be an integral part of every parish....And I hope that after I leave Yale next year, I'll be able to find a church that offers them. They're simply too important a part of my spiritual life to give up."

Speaking about her experience of small church communities, Nancy Babcock of St. Patrick parish in Collinsville, CT reflected in part: "This is not just a group that got together like any other friendship group because it felt good and we all bonded...The basis is that we are a small church community and that came out of our faith and our sharing our lives with one another...We carry on the work of the

faith....”

Fr. Tom Sas, pastor at St. Ann, Avon, CT offered: “From my own perspective, small Christian communities have been nothing but good. Personally and pastorally, they have been energizing, challenging...At the same time, they have provided a vision that is terribly important in our church and parishes today. I am proud to be a part of small Christian communities.”

Fr. Art spoke for about a half-hour. He focused on the contribution of small communities to giving people a sense that they are called to be church, not just go to church. He spoke also to the opportunity the small community experience opens up for people to connect not just to the scriptures of the Sunday, but to the whole of the Catholic tradition. “Given the way we’re living today,” said Baranowski, “the harried pace, the amount of information we have to deal with, the fact that we’re always on the go, always caught up with activity – what the small community does is to it provide a counter culture, a way for church to happen. We live in a culture that is so busy and so noisy that it is almost impossible to hear God. The small communities make it possible to hear God and to make the church possible.

Archbishop Mansell brought the evening to a close with several reflections including the following: “What you have are intentional communities...and intentionality is so much more important these days than it has been. We can’t presume on the culture...we can’t presume on automatic supports and affirmations. There is a need for reflection; there is a need for interaction; there is a need for initiative; there is a need for intentionality.

Small church community calls forth tremendous generosity on your part; generosity in giving of your time certainly, but more, generosity in giving yourselves, in sharing your deepest, innermost sentiments and assisting one another. That’s at the heart of small church community...It’s really at the heart of being church. And for all that, I thank you all so very much.”

In my own remarks earlier in the program that evening I said in part: “Our twentieth anniversary is indeed a cause for celebration. Let it also be an occasion for us to take stock, an occasion to re-invest ourselves in our small church community vocation. What we do in small church communities, we do not just for ourselves individually. We are about a vision for parish, a vision where people regularly make a difference in each others’ lives and faith. If we are to be a church that makes a difference in the world, we must first be a people who make a difference in each others’ lives and faith within the church.”

We continue our anniversary celebration this spring – during this Year of the Eucharist – with a program that will begin with the *Dzieci* (Polish for *Children*) theater group’s performance of their “Fool’s Mass”. The premise of the performance is that a group of medieval *village idiots* discover on Christmas Eve that the priest who has cared for them and taught them to sing has suddenly died. What to do? It is Christmas. They are alone. They have to have Mass. *They don’t know what they are doing; they do know what they are doing.* What unfolds is at once, haunting, unnerving, uplifting, challenging and prayerful. The performance will be followed by a reception and gathering in small circles to reflect on this celebration of the “Fool’s Mass”.

"Toward Mature Faith–Forming an Adult Church in Small Ways")

Michael P. Horan

CHURCH Magazine (Spring 2005)

Review by Sr. Patricia Froning, Diocese of Owensboro

In his brief four page article, "Toward Mature Faith–Forming an Adult Church in Small Ways," Michael P Horan, highlights the significance of adult learning and faith formation in small ways through the experience of engaging one another in conversation and prayer. Noting that mature faith is described (and experienced) as a living, conscious and fruitful faith, he "mines our

successes in the catechumenate and adult faith sharing." He points to the success stories of adult experience possibly best exemplified in the catechumenate and replicated in parish small groups. Briefly, and perhaps somewhat humorously, he identifies four features of small groups that contribute to their success: a) small is beautiful; b) honest is better than pious; 3) faith "Journey" makes sense of life; and 4) no place to hide. He also illustrates through story that "everyone is called to holiness, that everyone bears responsibility for supporting new marriages, for praying for a blessing, for being responsible, supportive members of the church."

We welcome comments and items for inclusion in future E-Newsletters. Please submit items to be considered for inclusion or responses to post questions to: DBQCFL/AF@arch.pvt.k12.ia.us.

2. Upcoming Events

NCCL Convention April 10-14, 2005 at Galt House, Louisville, Kentucky

NAPRC (National Alliance of Parishes Restructuring into Communities) Conference July 28-31, 2005, St. Charles Borromeo Parish, Cinnaminson, New Jersey. Keynote speaker: Ronald Rolheiser OMI, with small group workshops.

Buena Vista Convocation August 4-7, 2005, University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minnesota
Theme: *Creating Communities of Hope: Making a Difference in Our World*. Keynote speakers: Mike Cowan, Felicia Wolf, Jose Marins, followed by small group workshops and workshops in Spanish.

National Pastoral Life Center Annual Parish Convention
Spirituality and the Parish, Keynote: Ron Rolheiser, OMI Conference
November 17-19, 2005, Radisson Hotel, Ft. Worth, Texas

NAICE (North American Institute for Catholic Evangelization) Conference July 12-15, 2006, Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio

3. Share Your Views

A Theology of Small Christian Communities by Dr. William Rademacher

The Roman Catholic Community are a Eucharistic Community. That is, we are a Word and Bread-breaking community. That is our identity as Christians. We break the bread to share it with our fellow disciples. So gathering together in small communities is an action that flows from our very identity as a sharing community. Sharing the Bread is a rich symbol for sharing our faith, our Word, our prayer life and the peaks and valleys of our earthly journey. We never travel alone. We are descendants of the Lord's first community of disciples who "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers...they were together and had all things in common" (Acts 2:42-44).

But building community runs into two powerful obstacles in our US culture: individualism and the privatization of religion. The private interpretation of Scripture is a religious basis for individualism. An affluent society is a secular basis: I have my own car, my own TV, my own radio and my own cell phone. The poor need each other for survival. They are of necessity interdependent. The affluent can afford independence. Secular individualism chants the refrain: "My rights! My rights!" But rarely a word about the responsibilities that go with those rights! This individualism infects the Christians who breathe in the pathologies of their culture.

Our cultural privatization of religion is another obstacle to forming small communities. A person's religion rarely becomes the topic of cocktail conversations. Religion comes under the title of "Let everyone mind his or her own business." Our culture wants to keep religion strictly private.

Thus small Christian communities have a prophetic dimension. They can be a welcome counter-cultural influence. They are a public witness that faith, prayer and the Word are not to be confined to the closet. Our Lord Himself tells us: "Let your light so shine before all that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt 5:16).

Dr. William Rademacher is a retired professor of Systematic Theology. He has taught theology at Gonzaga University, Spokane, WA, at St. John Provincial Seminary, Plymouth, MI and at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA. At Duquesne he also served as Director of a Masters Program in Pastoral Ministry. In 1979 he was awarded The Flannery Chair of Roman Catholic Theology by Gonzaga University. He is the author of six books, including *The New Practical Guide for Parish Councils* and the award winning *Lay Ministry*.

Presently he lives in Las Cruces, NM where he teaches Ecclesiology and Christian Anthropology. Dr. Rademacher is also an advisor to the Pastoral Ministry Formation Program of the Diocese of Las Cruces.

Una Teología de las Pequeñas Comunidades Cristianas by Dr. William Rademacher

Los católicos romanos somos una comunidad Eucarística. Es decir, somos una comunidad que practica la Palabra y se sustenta con el Pan. Esa es nuestra identidad como cristianos. Partimos el pan para compartirlo con nuestros compañeros discípulos. Congregarse en pequeñas comunidades es una acción que fluye de nuestra misma identidad de una comunidad que comparte. Compartir el pan es un símbolo rico para compartir nuestra fe, nuestra Palabra, nuestra vida de oración y las cimas y los valles que cruzamos en nuestro viaje terrenal. Nunca viajamos solos. Somos descendientes de la primera comunidad de los discípulos de nuestro Señor que "acudían asiduamente a la enseñanza de los apóstoles, a la convivencia, a la fracción del pan y a las oraciones. Todos los creyentes vivían unidos y compartían todo cuanto tenían"(Hechos de los Apóstoles 2:42-44).

En la cultura de los Estados Unidos el edificar comunidad enfrenta dos obstáculos poderosos: el individualismo y la privatización de la religión. La interpretación privada de las Escrituras es la base religiosa para el individualismo. Una sociedad afluyente es una base secular: Tengo mi propio coche, mi propia TV, mi propio radio y mi propio teléfono celular. Los pobres necesitan unos de otros para sobrevivir. Por necesidad son interdependientes. El afluyente puede permitirse la independencia. El individualismo secular canta en coro: "¡Mis derecho! ¡Mis derechos!". ¡Pero raramente incluye una palabra sobre las responsabilidades que van con esos derechos! Este

individualismo infecta a los cristianos que respiran las patologías de su cultura.

Nuestra privatización cultural de la religión es otro obstáculo para formar pequeñas comunidades. La religión de la persona muy raramente será el tópico de conversaciones en las fiestas de cóctel. La religión cae bajo el título de “No te metas en los que no te importa”. Durante la campaña política la religión queda reducida a “valores” intencionalmente vagos. Nuestra cultura desea mantener la religión estrictamente como un asunto privado.

Por lo tanto las pequeñas comunidades cristianas tienen una dimensión profética. Ellas son una influencia contra-cultural recibida con beneplácito. Ellas tienen el potencial para ser una influencia poderosa en la parroquia, la Iglesia y la sociedad. Son un testimonio público de que la fe, la oración y la Palabra no deben ser confinadas al armario. El mismo Nuestro Señor nos dice: "Así, pues, debe brillar su luz ante los hombres, para que vean sus buenas obras y glorifiquen al Padre de ustedes que está en los Cielos" (Mt 5:16).

El Dr. William Rademacher es profesor jubilado de teología sistemática. Ha enseñado teología en *Gonzaga University*, Spokane, WA, en *St John Provincial Seminary*, Plymouth, MI y en *Duquesne University*, Pittsburgh, PA, donde fue director del programa de maestría en Ministerio Pastoral. El Dr. Rademacher es el autor de seis libros, incluyendo *The New Practical Guide for Parish Councils* y el premiado *Lay Ministry*. Él vive actualmente en Las Cruces, NM, donde enseña eclesiología y antropología cristiana, y continúa escribiendo. El Dr. Rademacher es también asesor del Programa de Formación del Ministerio Cristiano para Laicos de la Diócesis de Las Cruces.

4. Resources

Living Like Francis Today, by Marci Blum OSF, contains six faith-sharing sessions based on the Gospel values to: Live Simply, Live Humbly, Live Prayerfully, Live Lovingly, Care for Creation and Live in Peace. Barbara Darling, member of Buena Vista, says, “Much like Francis himself, readers of *Living Like Francis Today* will find themselves focusing attention on God as they examine their own lifestyles. What a joy to find this simple yet powerful book designed with faith-sharing groups in mind.” 5x8 paperback. Cost: \$4.95. Order from Good Ground Press, St. Paul, MN. Website: www.goodgroundpress.com. Phone: 1-800-232-5533.

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We hope you enjoyed reading this.
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please email Marci Blum OSF at DBQCFL/AF@arch.pvt.k12.ia.us