

NAFSCC E-Newsletter

North American Forum on Small Christian Communities

Volume 1, Issue 5

May 15, 2005

Spring Showers Bring May Flowers

The NAFSCC E-Newsletters sent bi-monthly to members

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1. News and Ideas

Dear NAFSCC Members,

The following letter and statement will be sent to representatives of an alliance for SCC development which represents many SCC organizations in the United States. We are planning to have a Joint Convocation in 2007, the date and time to be determined by a coordinating committee. We suggested that Brother Bob Moriarty from the Archdiocese of Hartford be the chair of the committee. Bob agreed and will get started as soon as this is officially announced. We are looking forward to the challenge, the collaboration, and the solidarity of being together.

□

In the Lord,

Donna L. Ciangio, OP

NAFSCC Board Chair

Dear Participants in the North American SCC Movement,

Donna Ciangio, (NAFSCC), Art Baranowski (NAPRC), and myself (Buena Vista) have been talking, (via conference calls and emails) and with the boards that we each represent. We have been discussing how to proceed with a SCC Convocation in 2007 that could be sponsored by SCC organizations in North America.

Attached is a statement that all three organizations have agreed to, and we are hoping that you will agree to participate in this undertaking with us. We want to begin to work together in a broader and more inclusive way than has been done in the past. Perhaps it is not perfect, but it is a serious attempt to work in a collaborative way to help make SCCs become a more powerful force in our Church and our world.

Please take some time with your organization to consider this proposal. We do hope that most of you will participate with us in creating an exciting and meaningful Convocation for 2007.

We will be in touch,
Peace,
Peter Eichten, Buena Vista
Donna Ciangio, NAFSCC
Art Baranowski, NAPRC

Joint Statement by: □ National Alliance of Parishes Restructuring into Communities (NAPRC), North American Forum for Small Christian Communities (NAFSCC), and Buena Vista.

NAPRC, NAFSCC, and Buena Vista would like to invite all of the organizations that are currently working together to create a stronger SCC presence in North America to join us in putting on a 2007 national SCC convocation.

We feel a strong need to explore the present reality of SCCs in North America, especially parish-based small communities, in order to discover how to renew, revive, and inspire communities to be powerful leaven in the Church and in the world.

We are proposing that 5 (possibly 6) organizations take on the responsibility to plan this convocation. Those 6 are: NAPRC, NAFSCC, Buena Vista, Renew, MACC, and possibly the Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs of the U.S. Catholic Bishops. All collaborating SCC organizations will have opportunities for input during the planning process, but only the six sponsoring groups would have delegates that would meet regularly to plan the convocation.

Each of the six sponsoring organizations would be asked to contribute \$1,000 up front as seed money. Each would share equally in any money made from the Convocation.

We need to begin the planning process in the very near future. Bob Moriarty has agreed to facilitate this group, and he will be the convener for the first planning meeting. We are asking that each of the six organizations will have two representatives involved in the planning.

We feel that by working together perhaps we can make the SCC movement in North America become a significant factor in transforming our church and our world.

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.

Welcome to NAFSCC Board

Carlette Chordas from the Diocese of Youngstown is rejoining the Board. She will have charge of the website.

2. Upcoming Events

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

NCCL Convention April 30-May 4, 2006 at the O'Hare Hyatt Regency, Chicago, Illinois

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

3. Share Your Views

Current Concerns About Parish-Based Small Christian Communities

Part One: **Initiating Interest In SCCs**

Donna L. Ciangio, OP
Director of Pastoral Services
and NAFSCC Chair and Secretary of the Board

Small Christian Communities are alive and well – or are they? As I travel about this country and even in a few other countries, I hear mixed reviews about small faith communities from pastors, parish life directors, other parish leadership, as well as those who have been members of parish groups. Now, don't take this as negative, but as an opportunity for reflection that leads to growth. We might say that “we have no problems here—instead, all we have are opportunities for virtuous actions!”

(Mark Mogilka, Diocese of Green Bay)

Working with parish-based small communities gives us advantages – we have access to a large number of people and we have various structures which can potentially support communities. We can take advantage of parish structures to create new and innovative ways to develop ongoing faith formation, build community, and foster a deeper understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus today by using what we have learned from Small Christian Communities over the past twenty years.

Three “opportunities for virtuous actions” that need to be addressed honestly as we work to develop SCCs:

- Initiating Interest in SCCs
- Maintaining and Sustaining Interest in SCCs
- Moving Members Into Action

For the purpose of this edition of our NAFSCC E-Newsletter, we will attempt to address the first one.

1. Initiating Interest In SCCs

Over the last 20 years, we have seen that programs can be a big help in initiating interest in SCCs for several reasons: *One:* If there is an organized program with lots of publicity, it attracts people. *Two:* Better yet, if the pastor and staff stand behind it and talk it up, even more interest is generated and people get involved. *Three:* And better still, if there is a diocesan team to support the parish's efforts, it is even stronger. The second reason is a lesson for us - to really gain interest in SCCs, you need the pastor and staff to promote it. There is no mystery there!

For parishioners it means talking to the pastor and other key parish leaders such as the parish pastoral council. To begin with, parishioners need an organized plan. They need to let the pastor know what they would like to do, what the goals are, how they will organize the SCCs and what his role will be. Also, they need to think about all of the other ministries in the parish. Are there ways that they can initiate community building and prayer and faith reflection that will expand the understanding of small faith communities from program to whole parish process?

The parish pastoral council can develop a pastoral direction that would encourage all types of small communities for the parish: seasonal groups, special Lenten groups, family groups, ministry groups and ongoing Small Christian Communities. It is important to articulate the primary purpose of the communities (and the parish!) which is to develop strong disciples of Jesus Christ in order to bring about transformation of the world through the Good News. A tall order!

This can be accomplished by development of the six key elements of prayer, support, reflection, learning, participation and mission (action) in every group and in the overall direction of the parish.

Another way to look at the small communities is to see them as opportunities for adult formation. The USCCB document, "Our Hearts Were Burning," and the General Directory of Catechesis (USCCB 1998) promotes a small community "style" for adult formation. The document states:

For continuing education in the faith, the ministry of the word uses many forms of catechesis. Among these the following may be highlighted:

- The study and exploration of Sacred Scripture...
- A Christian reading of events, which is required of the missionary vocation of the Christian community...
- Liturgical catechesis, prepares for the sacraments by promoting a deeper understanding and experience of the liturgy...
- Occasional catechesis which seeks to interpret determined circumstances of personal, family, ecclesial or social life and to help them live in the prospect of faith.
- Initiatives of spiritual formation which seek to reinforce conviction, open new perspectives and encourage perseverance in prayer and the duties of following Christ.
- A systematic deepening of the Christian message by means of theological instruction so as to truly educate in faith, encourage growth in understanding of it and to equip the Christian for giving the reason for his/her hope in the present world.

General Directory for Catechesis - USCCB, 1998 Paragraph 71

More on this in a later newsletter.

For diocesan staff and core team, you may want to meet with pastors over lunch individually or at a deanery or vicariate meeting. I find that if pastors understand the “Big Picture of SCCs,” (a presentation I do often) they are more likely to initiate SCCs – as long as they have organized help to do it. You might help them brainstorm what they would like to see in happen in the parish, what is needed, particularly around adult formation, and help design an individual plan. Offer to meet with them and their core team.

The core team is essential to initiating SCCs. Along with the pastor, you need a driving group or team (can I dare say “managing” group?) that makes a plan and keeps it going. You want organized and creative people on the core team– people who are not afraid of a challenge or a new idea and can carry it through and attract others!

It is important to consider your age groups and generations in the parish. What works for one will not work for the other. Older and middle-aged parishioners may be easier to invite and get a response from en masse. Young adults who are parents are very busy and need more enticement and help to get to an SCC. You might want to call them by another name, like “Parenting in a Busy World” or some other catchy title. Otherwise, as one young adult said to me, “Like, Scripture groups sound super boring!”

You want to find out what your young adults are thinking about the parish and the church. Gather a few groups for dinner or dessert to see what their issues are and how the Church can support them. You might ask them about what they think it means to be a Catholic, what they want to learn about the faith, and why they feel they will or will not fully participate. This will be an eye-opening experience!

It also would be good to take a simple survey of all parishioners to see what they would like to know about in terms of their faith. Ask parishioners to suggest topics, ways to discuss topics, and what kind of publicity efforts might attract others. Just have them fill out a few suggestions on index cards right at Mass and have the ushers collect them before the actual collection.

Another thing you might want to think about: Lent is a great time to attract people to join a group. You may want to put a major effort into inviting parishioners for Lent. Many, who may not want to be part of a reflection group during the year, will join for the Lenten season. It is a way to do something for Lent, learn about the faith and deepen spirituality.

The best thing to do is ask around and see what your community suggests about the best ways to attract and invite people. They may come up with very creative ideas!

Please feel free to write to me with other suggestions or things that you are trying to support the parishes. Also, if your parishes have tried something that really makes a difference, please feel free to email me and we might have enough to start an E-Forum! Send to dciangio@nplc.org

4. Resources

Living Like Francis Today

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.

Stories Converse: A Journey of Discipleship

In an effort to raise awareness of *Stories Converse: A Journey of Discipleship* as a lectionary-based reflection resource that explores the justice tradition of the Scriptures and Catholic Social teachings, Deborah Stollery and I are offering COMPLIMENTARY six-month subscriptions to those who would like to try this resource. If you would like a trial subscription, please print the attached order form, fill it in and mail it to Debbie. We will start your subscription as soon as your order is received.

If you know someone, friend, family, colleague, student, or acquaintance, you think would be interested in exploring the justice tradition of the scriptures and our church's tradition, please do one of the things listed below.

1. Forward to them this email with the attached order form for complimentary copies and your personal note explaining why you think they might be interested. If they would like to receive *Stories Converse*, they should complete and return the order form to Debbie.
2. Emails us a listing of those people, along with their contact information, you believe might be interested. We will contact them, using your name as an introduction.

Privacy Statement: Stories Converse does not share ANY contact information.

<p>Stories Converse: A Journey of Discipleship by Alice I. Langley and Deborah W. Stollery _ I would like a COMPLIMENTARY six-month subscription to Stories Converse: A Journey of Discipleship Name of Recipient: _____</p>	
<p>_____ Address:</p>	
<p>City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ Phone (_____)</p>	
<p>_____ Email (please print): _____</p>	
<p>_____ I can receive email files _ I need my subscription mailed to me via US Postal Service This material will be used for (Please Circle): Small Christian Community, Post-JustFaith Group, Justice & Pe</p>	
<p>_____ ace Committee, Initiation Team, Bible Study Group, Individual reflection, Homily preparation or Catechetical preparation, Other (Please list.)</p>	
<p>_____ Please send this completed form to: Deborah Sto</p>	
<p>_____ lery 1805 Endicott Drive Virginia Beach, VA 23464</p>	
<p><small>Stories Converse: A Journey of Discipleship</small></p>	
<p>For your information:</p>	
<p>Our Regular Subscription Rates are: Six (6) months = One year = \$10.00 per person \$19.00 person</p>	
<p>We send the WORD files or one hardcopy to the facilitator of the group. This file or document is your master copy from which you will make copies for the number of subscribers for which you have paid.</p>	
<p>For questions: email or call Alice Langley at fieldsofffaith@cox.net, 757-547-7051 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Eastern Time Zone.</p>	

Stories Converse: A Journey of Discipleship
 has been recognized by leaders in the Small Christian Community
 and Social Justice fields.

“Scripture does many things, among the most important is the communication of God's intentions for the world to the world. Jesus' metaphor for this is the Reign of God. And God's expectations are that we do something about it! The biblical texts come from a social setting once upon a time and speak to us in our contemporary social setting. The point is for these Stories to Converse and evoke strategies and accountability. The materials from *Stories Converse* facilitate exactly that kind of dynamic in small Christian communities. They are a first class resource.”

Bernard J. Lee, S.M. is the author of *The Catholic Experience of Small Christian Communities*, a report upon extensive empirical research on small communities. He is co-author with Michael Cowan of *Dangerous Memories: House Churches and Our American Story*; *Conversation, Risk and Conversion: The Inner and Public Life of Small Christian Communities*; and *Gathered and Sent: The Mission of Small Church Communities*.

“At last, a lectionary-based resource to sustain a small faith community committed to justice! Alice Langley and Debbie Stollery have crafted a wonderful weekly process of formation for those committed to the Gospel call to be about the compassionate work of Jesus in the world. It is lively, well researched, grounded in the liturgical season and readings, and full of significant theological and historical insight. I am excited to see it used.”

Jack Jezreel, director of Catholic Charities USA's Office of *JustFaith*, holds a master's degree in divinity from the University of Notre Dame and has worked in parish ministry for more than 20 years, during which he developed the *JustFaith* program. Jack received the Peace & Justice Award from the Archdiocese of Louisville in 1995. He currently serves on the National Advisory Committee on Adult Religious Education for the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops.

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We hope you enjoyed reading this.
For additions, comments and address changes, to the
NAFSCC E-Newsletter
please email Marci Blum OSF at DBQCFL/AF@arch.pvt.k12.ia.us